

Drawn from the Life:

Literary Techniques and the Representation of

Complex Characters in Suetonius' *De vita Caesarum*

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Abstract

This thesis explores the ways in which Suetonius' *De vita Caesarum* represents complex characters beyond simple ciphers of virtue and vice. The first chapter maps out three dimensions of characterization demonstrated in ancient writing (baseline, dissonant, and realistic). The second chapter applies this tripartite perspective to the emperor Claudius, in an isolated case study, as a means of reading his complex character construction.

The nature of biography only achieves a complete portrait of a person through selective topics and as such the third chapter examines how external descriptions (i.e. physical appearance, dress, and names) create complex characterization. Speech is often the mirror of a man and the fourth chapter observes the ways in which Suetonius makes use of oratory, epigrams, and humour. The fifth chapter looks at how the sexual episodes and escapades of the Caesars provide intimate insights into their personalities beyond being emblems of virtue and vice. All three of these chapters reveal how characters are reinforced, subverted, or imbued with realism in line with the three dimensions initially outlined.

Finally, this thesis shows how the very structure of Suetonius' collection aids his characterizations. The sixth chapter shows how two stock elements of biographical writing, ancestry and death, act to confirm, develop, or complicate the personalities of his Caesars. The seventh chapter treats the collection as a macro-text to show how characterization is informed by appearances across the *Lives* and how Suetonius creates characters, such as Germanicus and Livia, through extended cameos.

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Editions and Abbreviations

The abbreviations of Greek and Latin sources follow those of the fourth edition of *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, edited by Simon Hornblower, Antony Spawforth, and Esther Eidinow, or otherwise standard practice. The preferred editions and translations are that of the Loeb unless otherwise stated.

References to Suetonius' *De vita Caesarum* follow the Teubner: M. Ihm (Ed.), *C. Suetoni Tranquilli Opera Volumen I De Vita Caesarum Libri VIII* (Leipzig, 1908). The preferred translation is Rolfe's Loeb.

De vita Caesarum references are made using only the title and are as follows:

- | | |
|-----------------|----------------|
| - <i>Jul.</i> | - <i>Galb.</i> |
| - <i>Aug.</i> | - <i>Oth.</i> |
| - <i>Tib.</i> | - <i>Vit.</i> |
| - <i>Calig.</i> | - <i>Vesp.</i> |
| - <i>Claud.</i> | - <i>Tit.</i> |
| - <i>Ner.</i> | - <i>Dom.</i> |

Miscellanea: The commentary on Terence by the Late Antique author Aelius Donatus, the short essay within attributed to Evanthius, and the *Rhethorica ad Herennium* are referenced thus:

- Donatus ad Ter.
- Evanth. *Ex. De Com.*
- [Cic.] *Rhet. Her.*

For modern works with a possibly misleading discrepancy between the date of the edition I have cited and the date of first publication, both are initially cited, where necessary, in the following way: Wallace-Hadrill 1995 [1983]. Thereafter, I simply cite the edition used.

Introduction

Part 1

The Fox and His Fur

According to Suetonius ‘the fox changes his fur, but not his nature’.¹ This epigram, attributed to an old herdsman, comes from an anecdote in the *Vespasian* and relates how even though said emperor rose to the purple he still possessed the trait of greed. It does, however, carry a greater significance. This passing witticism may offer us an insight into how character and characterization can be viewed in Suetonius’ *Lives*. On the one hand, a superficial reading of the phrase would suggest that all character is inherent and ingrained with anything else being a mere pretence. On the other hand, a more imaginative reading might suggest that individuals, including Caesars, have an established baseline characterization; but that they also have dissonant moments of characterization which add complexity to their portraits. After all, the fox *does* change his fur. We may use this as a starting point to suggest, not that Suetonius’ work expresses any dogmatic view of character creation, but rather that his collection, *De vita Caesarum*, builds, from the structural foundation of basic virtue and vice, distinctly nuanced personalities. As we shall see, the Roman biographer par excellence employs various methods to create his Caesars, with the result that his characters are frequently and surprisingly complex.

It is of course necessary for Suetonius’ *Lives* to first establish the Caesars as recognizable figures. After doing so, they can perhaps be subverted. This is easily seen in the *Titus*. The eponymous emperor is presented overall in a manner akin to panegyric, best summed up in the opening lines which style him as ‘the delight and darling of human

¹ ‘*uulpem pilum mutare, non mores*’ (*Vesp.* 16.3.4-5, trans. Rolfe).

kind'.² The chiaroscuro structure of virtue and vice attempts to subvert this idealized figure with salacious gossip, especially regarding an affair with Berenice. However, while Suetonius is ready to acknowledge such rumour and innuendo, he dismisses it just as quickly in a move which further strengthens the previously established depiction.³ The complication does not hold, but the gesture towards complexity neatly illustrates a technique which is put to more useful ends elsewhere.

For the most part, the Caesars have simpler baselines. Hence, Suetonius points to Domitian's early abuse of power as being indicative of the man he will become.⁴ Similarly, Caligula is most familiar as an unrepentant monster throughout his life.⁵ These are only baselines, though, and Suetonius will provide a broader palette of personality for most if not all his Caesars. Claudius for instance is easily identified as a fool but there is more than meets the eye even with him.⁶ These foxes may, as the quote says, have their natures but they can be dressed by the author in different furs.

Suetonius uses the rhetorical technique of *divisio* to compose his biographies '*per species*', which is to say by categories, rather than by strict chronology.⁷ His Caesars are thus open to shifting character perspectives. Suetonius draws a firm line between public deeds and private habits; when differentiating between aspects of Augustus' character and life, he states:

Quoniam qualis in imperis ac magistratibus regendaque per terrarum orbem pace belloque re p. fuerit, exposui, referam nunc interiorem ac familiarem eius uitam quibusque moribus atque fortuna domi et inter suos egerit a iuuenta usque ad supremum uitae diem.

² '*amor ac deliciae generis humani*' (*Tit.* 1.1.1-2, trans. Rolfe).

³ *Tit.* 7.1.1-11.

⁴ '*ceterum omnem uim dominationis tam licenter exercuit, ut iam tum qualis futurus esset ostenderet.*' (*Dom.* 1.3.5-7).

⁵ For his innate cruelty, see *Calig.* 11.1.1-2; 27.1.1; 32.1.1-2.

⁶ *Claud.* 38.3.

⁷ '*Proposita uitae eius uelut summa parte<s> singillatim neque per tempora sed per species exequar, quo distinctius demonstrari cognoscique possint.*' (*Aug.* 9.1.1-3). On *divisio*, see Townend 1967: 85-87; Power 2008: 130-155. On structure see Wallace-Hadrill 1995 [1983]: 10-15. On chronological features see O'Gorman 2011: 309f.

Now that I have shown how he conducted himself in civil and military positions, and in ruling the State in all parts of the world in peace and in war, I shall next give an account of his private and domestic life, describing his character and his fortune at home and in his household from his youth until the last day of his life.⁸

Although in Augustus' case the established depiction of a man who carefully cultivates his image is seen both publicly and privately, the fact that Suetonius acknowledges the distinction suggests that character in both contexts need not align. Discordant behaviour and the possibility of change is discussed when he shows Tiberius completely giving way to grotesque debauchery once he is firmly ensconced on the island of Capri and out of the public eye.⁹ The potential for duplicity is also acknowledged, in the case of Domitian who played on other people's perceptions of him based on his moderate appearance.¹⁰ Here, baseline characteristics are juxtaposed with dissonant aspects regardless of whether they are simple deceptions or genuine contradictions. Thus, Suetonius differentiates between public and private behaviour, and between early and late behaviour, and even between different aspects contained within the same *persona*.

He also differentiates between his characters possessing different facets from birth and throughout their lives. The view of character is broadened when we can see change occur across family lines with Nero reproducing all the vices of his ancestors and seemingly none of the virtues.¹¹ His family heritage is presented by Suetonius as a mixed but gradually degenerating line of human nature. Personal characteristics too can also be intensified or inverted; hence Suetonius mentions that vice grew stronger in Nero,¹² and,

⁸ *Aug.* 61.1.1-5, trans. Rolfe. Cf. 'de qua prius quam dicam, ea quae ad formam et habitum et cultum et mores, nec minus quae ad ciuilia et bellica eius studia pertineant, non alienum erit summatim exponere.' (*Jul.* 44.4.2-5). On the public-private division, see Hurley 2001: 18; Power 2008: 151-155.

⁹ 'ceterum secreti licentiam nactus et quasi ciuitatis oculis remotis, cuncta simul uitia male diu dissimulata tandem profudit' (*Tib.* 42.1.1-3).

¹⁰ *Dom.* 18.1.1-2.4. On concealing vice see *Ner.* 29.1.8-13.

¹¹ 'pluris e familia cognosci referre arbitror, quo facilius appareat ita degenerasse a suorum uirtutibus Nero, ut tamen uitia cuiusque quasi tradita et ingenita retulerit.' (*Ner.* 1.2.10-2.1.1. Cf. *Ner.* 1-5).

¹² 'paulatim uero inualescentibus uitiiis iocularia et latebras omisit nullaue dissimulandi cura ad maiora palam erupit.' (*Ner.* 27.1.1-3).

despite his having an even mix, Domitian's virtues turned to vice.¹³ Caesars could also be somewhere between monsters and men; Caligula's deeds are divided between both while Claudius is perceived as some half-baked creation on the part of mother nature.¹⁴ Even a minor emperor such as Otho, for example, dies in a way that is contradictory to his established character.¹⁵ Suetonius shows us emperors from different perspectives, and they do not all show us exactly the same image. He does not necessarily perceive character as simple or static. In fact, it can have mutable aspects as well as established qualities.

Luke Pitcher observes that '[c]haracter, then, rarely manifests as a monolithic fixity in the ancient historians.'¹⁶ The same can be said for ancient biography. Suetonius' topical construction of the *Lives* allows us to see other dimensions to his Caesars. Topics of discussion move beyond simple deeds and public achievements to include intricate physical depictions, speech, literary interests, sexual episodes, ancestry, death narratives, and interactions with other prominent figures. These topics become repositories for curiosities, minutiae, and realistic detail. In other words, the emperors and other characters in Suetonius are seen going about their daily lives, as real people and not as abstractions. This was an aspect also noticed by Momigliano, who following his discussion of Suetonius commented that it 'is pleasant to conclude by noting that Roman biography contributed to keeping emperors within the bounds of mortality.'¹⁷

In ancient literature, there is a wide range of different views about character and personality. On a basic level, Theophrastus' *Characters* offers up a variety of neatly

¹³ 'Circa administrationem autem imperii aliquamdiu se uarium praestitit, mixtura quoque aequabili uitiorum atque uirtutum, donec uirtutes quoque in uitia deflexit: quantum coniectare licet, super ingenii naturam inopia rapax, metu saeuus.' (*Dom.* 3.2.1-5). Cf. Garrett 2013: 170-171 fn. 834.

¹⁴ *Calig.* 22.1.1-2; *Claud.* 3.2.1-9.

¹⁵ *Oth.* 12.

¹⁶ Pitcher 2007: 117.

¹⁷ Momigliano 1993 [1971]: 100.

delineated stock figures, some which go on to be echoed in Roman Comedy.¹⁸ These basic characters are focused on specific recurring traits and are easily understood sketches. This works perfectly well on the stage (or in satire) but does not follow any kind of complexity. Away from the stage, a rough-and-ready understanding of character could be presented in terms of widely-held social norms like the *aurea mediocritas*.¹⁹ Hence Sallust's portrayal of Catiline describes him as having a pale colour, hideous eyes, and a walk that varied between fast and slow, *'igitur colos exanguis, foedi oculi, citus modo, modo tardus incessus: prorsus in facie voltuque vecordia inerat'*.²⁰ As Fowler noted 'Roman men were required not to walk too fast, or get out of breath: but equally they should not walk too slowly. A failure to hit that mean was a mark of Catiline'.²¹ Sallust therefore characterizes his villain (or anti-hero) in terms of his distance from appropriate lines of behaviour. But again, departure from an ideal character offers limited opportunities for complex characterization.

While concepts as straightforward as these exist, there are also vastly more complicated theories. In *De Officiis* for instance, Cicero, while discussing *decorum*, presents the four-*personae* theory, ostensibly a doctrine of the Stoic philosopher, Panaetius.²² To briefly outline the theory, the first *persona* is common to all men and is that from which morality and propriety are derived, while the second *persona* is specific

¹⁸ For example: a flatterer (Theophr. *Char.* 2); a chatterbox (Theophr. *Char.* 3); a bumpkin (Theophr. *Char.* 4); and a boastful man (Theophr. *Char.* 23). The preferred edition of Theophrastus is Diggle (2004).

¹⁹ For a discussion of *aurea mediocritas* see Fowler 2007: 11-14.

²⁰ Sall. *Cat.* 15.5.1-3. Cf. Cic. *Off.* 1.131.1-7.

²¹ Fowler 2007: 11.

²² Cic. *Off.* 1.93-151 (on *decorum*); Cic. *Off.* 1.107-121 (on the four-*personae*). For the best discussion on the four-*personae* theory see Gill (1988). On Panaetian influence: 'There is nothing in this Stoic background that identifies Panaetius as the author of the Ciceronian fourfold scheme. The only reason for assigning it to him remains Cicero's statement that he was following Panaetius in *De Officiis* I and II.' (De Lacy 1977: 169), Cicero openly admits to following the works of Panaetius, but he is by no means translating the philosopher word for word *'ut et hic ipse Panaetius, quem multum in his libris secutus sum non interpretatus...'* (Cic. *Off.* 2.60.7-9). Cf. Cic. *Off.* 3.7.1-3. On the theory being Panaetian, specifically regarding the idea that the 3rd and 4th *personae* are Ciceronian additions, see De Lacy 1977: 166-170; Gill 1988: 174ff.

to us as individuals. The third *persona* relates to a change of situation and the social position inhabited. The fourth and last *persona* is concerned with one's own choice, in their career and the person they wish to become.²³ Christopher Gill notes that it is not a theoretical framework for understanding the person, but rather sets out 'key normative reference-points' for making moral choices and choosing one's way of life.²⁴ Nevertheless, it has to be considered how these points of reference might allow a person to be characterized in ways both basic and complex.

It is necessary to theorize a way to view character across Suetonius' various *Lives*. One starting point is Gill's own distinction between 'character' and 'personality' viewpoints. In this system, 'character' is defined as being evaluative with an element of moral judgement, whereas 'personality' is defined as being empathetic and non-evaluative.²⁵ These definitions, however, are difficult to apply in any extensive or systematic way to Suetonius' biographies. Indeed, almost every Caesar might be seen in terms of Gill's concept of 'character', since virtually everything a Caesar does can be morally judged in terms of virtue or vice. In the same way, his definition of 'personality' as being non-evaluative raises the question of how to judge when an element is evaluative or not. However, this idea of 'personality' can be enhanced for our purposes by noting a kinship it shares with Roland Barthes' theory of the 'Reality Effect'. Barthes proposes that realism is achieved by means of inclusion of extraneous, surplus details which are stripped of any strict narrative function.²⁶ Hence elements of Suetonius' descriptions of his emperors which are not obviously moralistic and appear to have no narrative function

²³ 1st and 2nd *Personae* (Cic. *Off.* 1.107.1-108.1); 3rd and 4th *Personae* (Cic. *Off.* 1.115.1-9).

²⁴ Gill 1988: 176. Cf. 'The purpose of the doctrine of four *personae* was to provide a formula for discovering for any given person in any given situation the appropriate act, *quid deceat*.' (De Lacy 1977: 170).

²⁵ Gill 1983: 470-471; Gill 1990: 2. It should be noted that this thesis will use 'character' and 'personality' interchangeably at times except when explicitly stressing Gill's distinction.

²⁶ Barthes 1989: 142. Cf. Gill's further association of 'personality' with a 'real' or 'authentic' self (Gill 1990: 2).

can be considered empathetic, revealing a more complex dimension of characterization constituted of realistic details.

This then informs the perspective adopted by this thesis, Gill's definition of 'character' is largely in line with our approach to baseline characterizations, which are generally moralizing or evaluative, and to dissonant features that complicate them: Titus is generally good, and Domitian is generally cruel, but this is not always the case. His definition of 'personality' as empathetic and non-evaluative is then coupled with Barthes' theory of the 'Reality Effect' to help us understand the occasional move towards a kind of 'realism' in the text. Finally, this thesis will make use of a term coined in Gavin Townend's essay 'Suetonius and his Influence', which can help solidify our approach and underpin our three-dimensional perspective.

Townend states that Suetonius 'allows us to construct our own figures from his materials, and we feel that the results are real.'²⁷ This leads us to Townend's 'Law of Biographical Relevance' which states that the concern of biography and indeed of Suetonius 'is deliberately withdrawn from topics other than the character and career of the central figure'.²⁸ Townend's point is that a biography includes only that information which helps us to understand the main character: it does not have to explain all the other facets of any situation. This implies that everything in a biography contributes to our understanding of the subject; and therefore, that where apparently superfluous details are found, they should be considered as not just included for the sake of accuracy or completeness but as making the main character more real.

Ultimately, of course, it is for the reader, and their experience with the text, to discern whether details in the text are 'integral' (i.e. integral to either the baseline

²⁷ Townend 1967: 93.

²⁸ Townend 1967: 84.

characterization or the creation of dissonance) or ‘extraneous’ (i.e. demonstrating a technique of excessive, non-evaluative detail which results in realism). While Suetonius is often capable of guiding a reader’s interpretation, especially by delineating good and bad features, sometimes a reader has to make up their own mind.²⁹ For instance, Suetonius opens the *Vitellius* by acknowledging the different accounts of the emperor’s family background; one being ‘*ueterem et nobilem*’ and the other ‘*nouam et obscuram*’ and even ‘*sordidam*’.³⁰ After providing accounts of both, Suetonius explicitly leaves the matter unresolved, ‘*sed quod discrepat, sit in medio.*’³¹ Here, we have an illustrative example of an identifiable technique that presents contradictory elements. However, Suetonius makes no attempt to resolve it, thus leaving the reader to come to their own conclusion. Complexity is, therefore, an emergent quality in the characterization of Suetonius’ Caesars

Indeed, the *Lives* can perhaps be understood as demanding that readers fit a superfluity of detail into their comprehension of character. Suetonius is after all writing biography, which is a more capacious genre than history or poetry, and his chosen approach is so inclusive and conscientious that he is prepared to include contradictory material and hints that suggest at other possible readings, and superfluous details that makes his characters more than the usual stereotypes. This thesis studies how Suetonius’ inclusive practice and literary techniques, without necessarily being the result of any specific intention on the biographer’s part, lead to a text that is open to being read in a way that allows his readers to interpret the Caesars as complex characters.

²⁹ For example, when guiding the narrative Suetonius explicitly differentiates, in his own voice, between more laudable aspects of Nero and shameful ones: ‘*Haec partim nulla reprehensione, partim etiam non mediocri laude digna in unum contuli, ut secernerem a probris ac sceleribus eius, de quibus dehinc dicam.*’ (*Ner.* 19.3.1-3).

³⁰ *Vit.* 1.1.2-1.3. Suetonius mentions that this discrepancy could have been the result of the emperor’s flatterers and detractors, but the difference seemingly goes back to an earlier date (*Vit.* 1). Cf. Tac. *Hist.* 1; Shotter 1993: 159 ad 1.

³¹ *Vit.* 2.1.6-2.1.

Thus; this thesis sets out to examine Suetonius' characterizations of the Caesars through a tripartite perspective. The first dimension is concerned with an established, baseline characterization. It relates to a basic and easily understood depiction of a person, usually built around a singular image. The second dimension of characterization relies on moments of dissonance in a portrait, whereby contradictory elements challenge or subvert the basic perception. The third dimension of characterization can be understood as emerging from the inclusion of extraneous details removed from any narrative purpose as well as details with no obvious relevance to the evaluation of character, but tending instead to inspire empathy for an individual – thus creating a sense of realism.

The primary benefit of this three-dimensional perspective on characterization in Suetonius is that it allows us conceptual room to move. It accommodates issues related to the ideas of fixed-consistent character as well as changeable-inconsistent character, which are often present in ancient writing, without the need for taking sides.³² The tripartite perspective, therefore, offers a stabilized way to view Suetonius' techniques of characterization.

³² These two distinctions as related to ancient historiography are discussed in Pitcher 2007: 102-117.

Overview

Chapter One maps out three dimensions of characterization demonstrated in ancient writing. The first dimension offers up an established baseline character. Such depictions can be found in the traditions of ancient theatre, specifically with costumes acting as signifiers of character. Physical appearance denoting character qualities also manifests in the cultural concept of physiognomy. Theophrastus' *The Characters* acts as a spotter's guide for different character types often built around basic and singular traits. The least complicated of Suetonius' *Caesars*, Titus, serves as a useful example of one-dimensional characterization. The second dimension subverts, and challenges, said character through examples of dissonance. Light and shadow convey depth to portraits. A practical example of this, in *De vita Caesarum*, is the hypocrisy shown by Augustus in relation to his marriage laws and general moral stances in public while privately indulging in affairs and dealing with Julia's scandals. The third dimension examines the ways through which characterization can move towards realism. Roland Barthes' theory of the 'Reality Effect', whereby extraneous details without strict narrative function convey realism, can be used to read such features of ancient literature; this approach can further be complemented by Christopher Gill's definition of 'personality'. Petronius' discussion of Trimalchio's water-clock demonstrates this reading quite nicely. Finally, we return to Suetonius' *Titus* to show that it can illustrate all three dimensions.

Chapter Two applies this tripartite perspective to the emperor Claudius, as an isolated case study, to read his complex character construction. Claudius has an expansive one-dimensional characterization given that he is best recognized as 'Claudius the Fool'. This is elaborated on initially through discussions of his physical and mental maladies, and his external appearance. It even fits into a broader tradition of his characterization,

notably demonstrated by Seneca's *Apocolocyntosis*. It is stressed by the freak circumstances through which he comes to power, the influence exerted over him by both his wives and freedmen, and ultimately the literal jokes made of the man. His two-dimensional characterization emerges, however, in distinct contrast to his reputation as a stereotypical fool. The issue is raised when Claudius claims this image was merely feigned for his own survival. As an emperor, he demonstrates a keen attitude towards his responsibilities, especially in carrying out the duties of his consulship and censorship in hearing cases. Claudius shows an intelligent and discerning disposition, albeit an incredibly idiosyncratic one, in a series of eccentric but wise decisions.

The three-dimensional interpretation expands his character beyond that of a stereotypical figure. Claudius' zeal for writing histories, itself an attempt to take part in society in a functional way, is strikingly discordant with the image of him as an incapable dullard. However, it is the inclusion of a vast catalogue of his historical and literary works that most clearly represents the kind of extraneous detail that suggests realism, especially when viewed through the 'Reality Effect'. Furthermore, in a series of letters sent from Augustus to Livia, quoted by Suetonius at length, and in later examples of Claudius' own self-consciousness, the groundwork is laid for a more empathetic reading of his depiction, which helps to establish him as (in Christopher Gill's terms) a 'personality' more than a 'character'. The reader is thus provided with an opportunity to understand Claudius rather than judge him.

Chapter Three examines how external descriptions in the form of physical appearance (*Species Caesarum*) and names (*Nomina Caesarum*) create complex characterization. The tripartite perspective is useful for seeing how characters are established, subverted, and transcended. Suetonius engages with the basic ideas of physiognomy, at least to the extent of an average individual's familiarity with it, to

legitimize his portraits. Physical features establish and reinforce one-dimensional character portraits, for example in the *Augustus*, *Caligula*, and *Vespasian*. Moments of dissonant, two-dimensional characterization can be seen in the *Tiberius*, *Nero*, *Caligula*, and *Domitian*. Appearance can even push a character towards three dimensions with notable examples found in the *Julius* and *Augustus*. In a similar fashion, but in microcosm, instances of all three dimensions can be observed in the discussion of hair. Dress too can highlight the interactions between one and two-dimensional features which assert or subvert a Caesar's overall presentation, especially in the *Caligula*, *Julius*, and *Augustus*.

Just as costume in drama can convey specific meanings, names too can convey character as an aspect of external appearance. Both Aelius Donatus and Cicero mention this manner of characterization and a subject of Plutarch's demonstrates it in biography. Names can play to established characteristics as in the *Tiberius* and *Augustus*. Moreover, a kind of realism emerges from the open discussion of conflicting interpretations and the absence of explicit moralizing implications, which leaves only empathetic insight and superfluous detail. This is demonstrated in the passage about Augustus' childhood nickname, 'Thurinus', and in the detailed etymology of Galba's name.

Chapter Four shows that speech is often the mirror of a man and observes the ways in which Suetonius makes use of oratory, epigrams, and humour. Julius and Augustus act as standard-bearers in the realm of speech and oratory, representing innate talent and meticulous cultivation respectively. These features are consistent with their baseline characterizations. Other Caesars miss the mark entirely in curious ways that either play to their overall depictions or underscore them with some nuance; examples are Tiberius, Caligula, Domitian, and Nero.

Whether an epigram is attributed to a Caesar themselves or to another person referring to a Caesar, the tripartite perspective highlights nuances in their portraits.

Epigrams can easily strengthen baseline characterizations; the epigram attributed to Vibius Crispus about Domitian's torturing of flies, underlines the emperor's petty and sadistic streak, while Titus himself feels the need to pass comment about not granting a favour embellishing his generosity. Although there are exceptions, external epigrams (those from other people) are especially effective at casting a negative light and internal epigrams (those from the subjects themselves) make for a more positive showing.

Epigrams, as in the case of Suetonius' *Julius*, can both adhere to a Caesar's baseline and challenge it. Where they begin to approach three dimensions is in moments of empathetic, internal insight. The utterances of Augustus neatly fulfil all three dimensions of characterization; he maintains his social and moral position as emperor, challenges it by letting slip a dismissive attitude to the Ptolemies more reminiscent of his predecessor, and has a unique fondness for folksy sayings. Caligula cultivates his own tyrannical image through his speech and epigrams. Tiberius is a distinct example where external epigrams about him are emphatically damning but his own offer complicated, sympathetic insight. Even a stray comment by Claudius can achieve genuine pathos.

Branching out from epigrams to jokes, humour relies on basic characterization to explicitly reinforce a Caesar. Julius, Caligula, and Nero all appear as recognizable versions of themselves. The *Vespasian* shows jokes and humour being used by Suetonius, in contrast, to expand the emperor's baseline. Both vulgar and clever witticisms show a more intricate use of humour and help to emphasize other aspects. The fact that Vespasian uses humour to offset accusations of greed provides the slightest hint of complexity. However, it will be argued that jokes only function properly when they relate to a recognizable one-dimensional characterization.

Chapter Five looks at how a Caesar's sexual episodes and escapades provide intimate insights into their depictions beyond being emblems of virtue and vice. From the

outset, Suetonius provides two clear-cut examples which fulfil the requirement of realism associated with the third dimension: Claudius and Galba. However, given that sex as a characterizing topic is at its most effective using moralizing features, the first and second dimensions are of key concern.

Julius demonstrates a *chiaroscuro* sexual characterization whereby accounts of womanizing embellish his established portrait only for the rumour and innuendo of homosexual encounters to subvert that characterization. There is even the possibility of a genuine relationship, which may hint at three-dimensionality. On the other hand, Augustus' sexual baseline is presented as modest and chaste in line with his moralizing public image. This is challenged in two ways. First, he is an inveterate womanizer which those around him try to rationalize as politically necessary. Second, he is also the subject of accusations of homosexual acts for advancement. Finally, his relationship with Livia facilitates his basic and dissonant features while also suggesting a genuine, empathetic level of intimacy.

These patterns are echoed in other Caesars but are also transgressed by way of taboo. Caligula plays to the tradition of womanizing, especially womanizing for political gain as demonstrated by Augustus, and is a sexual tyrant towards males and females alike. His relationship with Drusilla though would be an ideal expression of marriage if it were not for the fact that they were siblings. Likewise, Nero's debauched exploitation of men and women is unsurprising and the accusations of incest with his mother, Agrippina, further expand upon his sexual tyranny. However, his warping of gender and social norms with Sporus and Doryphorus portray him with some complexity. When it comes to Domitian, he is a watered-down version of previous sexual characterizations. Both explicit womanizing and sexual encounters with men are presented, but so too is the accusation of incest with his own niece.

Finally, this chapter takes Tiberius as a case study. The grotesquery of his sexual exploits on Capri play in one-dimensional terms. His divorce from Vipsania Agrippina to marry Julia subverts this presentation, allowing us to see not only the fulfilment of his imperial ambition but the destruction of a genuine and empathetic relationship.

Chapter Six shows how ancestry and death act to confirm, develop, or complicate the characters of Suetonius' Caesars. Tiberius' ancestry sets out the discordance in his family heritage and indeed his own character. Various deeds and misdeeds telegraph not only the duality of his nature, but the internal conflict brought about by such dissonance. Nero's ancestry paints him as the endpoint of a mixed but ever worsening family line. Caligula and Claudius are further characterized when juxtaposed with their respective fathers, Germanicus and Drusus. Even though unique ancestries are provided for the triptychs of the *Galba*, *Otho*, and *Vitellius*, and the Flavian *Lives*, Suetonius goes about establishing their ties to the Julio-Claudian family, no matter how tenuous or degraded, in order to legitimize their reigns. This strengthens the cohesiveness of the collective narrative and embellishes their character portraits by association.

At the opposite end of a *Life*, death scenes and their aftermath are significant characterizing moments. The *Augustus* and *Vespasian* relate similar death accounts which communicate carefully constructed and cultivated images on the part of their characters. Death too can completely challenge an established portrait, as in Suetonius' *Otho*. The reactions from various groups of people can also further complicate a Caesar. In this way, Tiberius is ultimately reduced to a one-dimensional tyrant in the court of public opinion. Domitian on the other hand grows in complexity given the diverse reactions to his demise across social classes. Nero's elaborate death sequence highlights the three dimensions of characterization, moving from his basic character, subverting it, and even using realistic details.

Chapter Seven concludes by treating the collection as a macro-text, showing how characterization is informed by appearances across the *Lives* and how Suetonius creates characters through extended cameos. A Caesar's depiction can be reinforced or complicated when he is juxtaposed with another Caesar. How Julius and Augustus behave at public games is dramatically opposed but reveals their individual dispositions. Vespasian's run-ins with both Caligula and Nero reaffirm his overall portrait but also subtly challenge it. Various interactions between Augustus and Tiberius, across both of their biographies, reaffirm their baselines as very different figures but also develop their characters.

Suetonius' depiction of Germanicus is a point of curiosity. Not only does he receive a mini-biography at the beginning of the *Caligula*, but he also makes informative appearances elsewhere. His role is a counterpoint not only to his son but also to Tiberius, who loses complexity when next to Germanicus and is forced into an outright tyrannical role. Finally, across the collection, Suetonius creates character sketches of imperial women (Julia Augusti, Julia Titi, Caesonia, and Julia Drusilla) whose main function is to accentuate the portraits of their respective Caesar. However, they are at least basic characterizations as in the case of Claudius' wives, Messalina and Agrippina. Finally, Livia's is the most in-depth female characterization, crafted across several *Lives*. She is a complex figure that binds large narratives within Suetonius' collection.

In assessing how Suetonius goes about crafting his intricate representations of the Caesars, it is perhaps useful here to set out what I consider to be the chief characteristics assigned to each emperor. It may be noted that these characteristics, not infrequently, give a rather contradictory impression: this in itself suggests the complexity of character that will be examined more closely in the thesis.

- **Julius:** Authoritarian, general and leader, forceful, self-interested, a charming and carnal conqueror.
- **Augustus:** Statesman with a bloody past, self-characterizing, self-conscious and image-obsessed, controlled, deliberate, enjoys power.
- **Tiberius:** Dualistic, conflicted, disgruntled, self-indulgent, cruel but also powerful, stubborn, charismatic, and unpretentious (even if pedantic at times).
- **Caligula:** Charismatic, cruel, capricious, interested in the image he creates but unstable, and even childish (sharply contrasted as endearing when an actual child).
- **Claudius:** Unimpressive, malleable, prone to enthusiasms, practical, oblivious to his image at times and at other times aware, historian, and an over promoted citizen. Is he a fool?
- **Nero:** Wannabe artist, performer, decadent, sadistic, monstrous, mother killer, cruel, and indulgent.
- **Galba:** Bland, rebellious, cruel and greedy, disliked by the army, gluttonous, decadent and luxurious.
- **Otho:** Birds of a feather with Nero, ambitious, disgruntled, superstitious, courageous at the end (in contrast with his dress and general life).
- **Vitellius:** Notorious for vice (the Julio-Claudians even admired specific vices), unreliable and sometimes dishonest as an official, gluttony, and cruelty.
- **Vespasian:** Funny, penny-pinching, soldier/leader, sexually frank, modesty and restraint, clemency, greed and liberality.
- **Titus:** Perfect to the point of being worthy of panegyric, hints of vice but only hints, a scandal with Berenice, restraint, generosity, benevolence and clemency.
- **Domitian:** Cruel, duplicitous, greedy, arrogant, oversexed, and envious of Titus.

Part 2

Scholarship

The work of Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus has always drawn the attention of scholars but only in phases and never with the consistency that his *De vita Caesarum* deserves.³³ The established text for the *Lives* of the Caesars has long been Maximilian Ihm's Teubner with the only Oxford Classical Text, by Robert A. Kaster, emerging in recent years.³⁴ Alcide Macé's *Essai sur Suétone* was for a long time the most notable study on Suetonius. Although it has been surpassed by most contemporary scholarship, it mainly dealt with historical matters related to Suetonius' career, work, and the author himself through his relationships with Pliny and Hadrian.³⁵ It was Wolf Steidle's *Sueton und die antike Biographie* which began a rehabilitation of Suetonius as more than a chronicler of scandals.³⁶ Eugen Cizek's *Structures et idéologie dans 'Les Vies des douze césars' de Suétone*, devotes considerable space to the traits of the Caesars.³⁷

The first three major monographs on the Roman biographer, in the English language, appeared in the 1980's. Barry Baldwin's *Suetonius* deals primarily with issues of genre, chronology, and sources but also turns his attention to the *Lives*, offering some consideration of their style and language.³⁸ Richard C. Lounsbury's *The Arts of Suetonius: An Introduction* explores the matter of style and also the afterlife of the text.

³³ For a discussion of Suetonius' life and work see the appendix (p. 339). For the most useful survey on Suetonian scholarship see Benediktson 1993: 377-447. On the neglect and rediscovery of the topic see Bradley 1985b: 254-265. The mainstream attention which his *Lives* of the Caesars attract are evident in Robert Graves' use of the material for his novels *I, Claudius* and *Claudius the God* (Graves 2006a; 2006b [1934]) as well as the supreme BBC adaptation of those novels (Pulman, Wise, and Lisemore 1976).

³⁴ Ihm (1908); Kaster (2016). Kaster's edition is accompanied by his previous text for *De Grammaticis et Rhetoribus Librum*. Although I have taken account of Kaster's new edition, both old and new scholarship typically utilizes Ihm's text. This thesis began by using Ihm and in the interest of efficiency and consistency adheres to his edition to better engage with established scholarship.

³⁵ Macé 1900: 29-110.

³⁶ Steidle (1963 [1951]).

³⁷ Cizek 1977: 65-106; 134-156; 199-247.

³⁸ Baldwin 1983:467-518.

Its shortcoming is that he only focuses on the *Lives* in the last two chapters, especially with a study on the death of Nero.³⁹ Nevertheless, this has allowed for a helpful consideration of Nero's death sequence and its implications for complex characterization (chapter six). Andrew Wallace-Hadrill's *Suetonius: The Scholar and his Caesars* remains a standard-bearer. Its significant contribution is in understanding Suetonius in the context of his social and cultural environment. The second half does consider thematic features, with a particularly useful chapter on virtues and vices.⁴⁰ It is this area of its study that provides a useful grounding so as to approach Suetonius' *Lives* with an explicit focus on characterization.

These are all foundational works of scholarship that initiated and promoted Suetonian studies. While they by no means ignore literary features, they strongly favour understanding *De vita Caesarum* within historiographical and historical contexts. It is the aim of this thesis to move forward from such areas of study by eschewing a focus on strict boundaries of genre and embracing the fluid and miscellaneous quality of biography, in order to better understand and assess Suetonius' *Lives* as a literary endeavour and the techniques within that produce complex characterizations of the Caesars. As a result, this thesis engages with, and is informed by, various approaches demonstrated across scholarship related not just to Suetonius' work but also to ancient biography in general, characterization studies as it relates to ancient literature, and topics pertinent to the *Lives* such as physiognomy and sex.

In Suetonian studies, the avenues of approach demonstrated by several more recent theses have proven to be especially insightful. Tristan Power's thesis, 'Suetonius: The Hidden Persuader', is an excellent and extensive literary analysis that makes a

³⁹ Lounsbury (1987). On Nero see Chapter 4 (pp. 63-89).

⁴⁰ Wallace-Hadrill (1995 [1983]). On virtues and vices see Chapter 7 (pp. 142-174).

staunch defence of Suetonius as a sophisticated writer. However, my thesis is at odds with his in that he is distinctly unsympathetic to ideas of complexity and realism, favouring a rather rigid view of fixed character in order to identify a moralizing purpose for Suetonius.⁴¹ Nevertheless, he does concede that ‘some multidimensionality and depth to Suetonius’ portraits’ is not incompatible with his interpretation, even saying that ‘Suetonius’ emperors are not stereotypes, but there are stereotypes underlying the portraits’.⁴² My thesis offers a very different lens through which to view Suetonius’ characterization of the Caesars.

A recent thesis by Phoebe Garrett gives an excellent examination of Suetonius’ use of ancestry: how it functions as a status marker; its uses for characterization via lineage, including a detailed case study of Tiberius; and even how it raises the question of nature versus nurture in his work.⁴³ This offers valuable insights into an approach of literary characterization via a Caesar’s ancestry and helps inform my thesis’ assessment of how ancestral accounts (as well as death narratives) help to form complex characterizations (chapter six). Furthermore, Molly Pryzwansky, in her doctoral thesis, looks at feminine imperial ideals in Suetonius’ collection,⁴⁴ which I have found beneficial for my thesis’ focus on the often-overlooked area of female character constructions, especially regarding Livia (chapter seven).

The most impressive and recent contribution to Suetonian studies is the collection edited by Tristan Power and Roy K. Gibson, *Suetonius the Biographer: Studies in Roman Lives*. The first section of this volume examines structural aspects of the biographies, the second section looks at individual case studies, and the third focuses on Suetonius’ minor

⁴¹ Power (2008). See Chapter 4 (pp. 192-311) for his take on moralism and character portrayal and for the opposing view on realism (pp. 222-230).

⁴² Power 2008: 308.

⁴³ Garrett (2013).

⁴⁴ Pryzwansky (2008).

works.⁴⁵ It contains a variety of excellent entries related to thematic and compositional topics. Rebecca Langlands demonstrates Augustus' inability to control the exemplarity he tried to set or foresee its legacy. Cynthia Damon makes a study of the quotations attributed to the Caesars. W. Jeffrey Tatum pays much-needed attention to the *Titus*. Finally, Tristan Power focuses on the endings of Suetonius' *Caesars* to explore narrative closure.⁴⁶ The collection serves not only as a reminder that Suetonius is a complicated and fascinating writer but that the subject offers so many unexplored areas of interest. Furthermore, it encourages a reading of the *Lives* as a collective piece of (historiographical) literature, while providing detailed studies and intricate observations not just on key biographies, like *Augustus* or *Titus*, but also structural, thematic, and literary techniques.

Ancient biography more generally has always been something of an overlooked genre, but as of late it has been attracting more scholarly attention. The study was initiated by Friedrich Leo's work, *Die griechisch-römische Biographie nach ihrer litterarischen Form*, who proposed that the literary antecedent of biography came from a scholarly tradition.⁴⁷ Although by now dated, its core ideas are important to the field.⁴⁸ Leo set out two types of biography, one exemplified by Plutarch which was chronological, developed by early Peripatetics, and the other exemplified by Suetonius which was effectively a systematic account of traits, developed from the Alexandrian school.⁴⁹ Leo argued that Suetonius is the only intact example of this latter school: 'das einzige klassische Beispiel gibt für uns Sueton'.⁵⁰ This was later challenged by Duane Reed Stuart in *Epochs of Greek and Roman Biography*, who argued for a more Roman origin to biography rooted in

⁴⁵ Power and Gibson (2014).

⁴⁶ Langlands 2014: 111-129; Damon 2014: 38-57; Tatum 2014: 159-177; Power 2014a: 58-77.

⁴⁷ Leo (1901).

⁴⁸ On the criticism of Leo's work see Momigliano 1993 [1971]: 18-22.

⁴⁹ Leo 1901. Cf. Momigliano 1993: 18-19.

⁵⁰ Leo 1901: 135.

encomium.⁵¹ Even this is quite a restrictive view. Hence Arnaldo Momigliano's critique of Friedrich Leo's work was that 'Leo was more interested in techniques of organizing the biographical material (narration in chronological order versus systematic characterization of individual traits) than in its implications for the understanding of the person.'⁵² This thesis attempts to combine these perspectives by suggesting that the very techniques of organizing the material identified by Leo can be understood as contributing to the creation of character, as such techniques (including the order in which information is presented) influence the reader's narrative experience and comprehension of character. Thus, chapter six of this thesis considers how the material contained within ancestry and death accounts shape and influence our understanding of a Caesar's characterization. Indeed, by treating *De vita Caesarum* as a collective text, as chapter seven does, a reader's understanding of character and characterization can be informed across all the *Lives*.

Ancient biography has since become a burgeoning and vibrant field of study. Its growth in popularity can be seen across a variety of works. Edwards and Swain's *Portraits: Biographical Representation in the Greek and Latin Literature of the Roman Empire* is an example of growth in the field.⁵³ Its most important contribution is an explicit theorizing of 'biography and the biographic', and therefore its widening of the focus beyond items allocated to the genre of biography. Simon Swain, in his introduction, lays out the distinction between biography and the biographic and provides an overview of literature as it relates to the former.⁵⁴ However, his collaborator, Mark Edwards,

⁵¹ Stuart 1967 [1928]: 60-91; 189-255. On the literary antecedents of Suetonius see Lewis 1991: 3623-3674.

⁵² Momigliano 1985: 84. Cf. Leo (1901). Also, Momigliano's own *The Development of Greek Biography* has stood the test of time by examining the origins of the genre from the fourth century BC (Momigliano 1993 [1971]).

⁵³ Edwards and Swain (1997). Christopher Pelling's entry in this collection, positing the idea of 'biostructuring' (Pelling 1997a: 117-145), has also proven beneficial for considering how interactions with and the influence of other narrative figures act as a technique of characterization, especially for our purposes of reading Claudius in chapter two of this thesis.

⁵⁴ Swain 1997: 1-3; 22-37.

provides the most succinct definition in that the ‘biographic element is that which lies outside the formal genre of biography, the cuckoo which refuses to adopt a single nest’.⁵⁵

Tomas Hägg and Philip Rousseau’s collection, *Greek Biography and Panegyric in Late Antiquity*, explores both biography and panegyric and in the process emphasizes the links and commonalities between them.⁵⁶ Brian McGing and Judith Mossman’s *The Limits of Ancient Biography*, as the title suggests explores the boundaries and frontiers of what can be considered biography.⁵⁷ Michael Stuart Williams’ *Authorised Lives in Early Christian Biography: Between Eusebius and Augustine* puts an emphasis on ‘biographical discourse’ ahead of biography as a distinctive genre.⁵⁸ Recent scholarship has thus tended to move away from debate about how to define and situate biography as a genre, and to treat it instead as a focus or a discourse that could exist within and across a variety of different literary forms. This trend in scholarship is especially helpful in enabling some consideration of how biography’s interaction with other (no doubt equally fluid) genres, such as history, poetry, comedy, satire, and rhetoric, help to inform or influence the reader’s experience with the text and their comprehension of the characters found within. Hence this thesis considers Suetonius’ work alongside the approaches taken in the works of other authors (such as Tacitus, Seneca the Younger, Pliny the Younger, Plutarch, Cicero, and Quintilian) to portraying characters, and to the Caesars in particular.

Notable individual studies on ancient biography include Timothy E. Duff’s *Plutarch: Exploring Virtue and Vice*,⁵⁹ which looks at characterization in terms of morality. A broad but comprehensive study of ancient biography, carefully choosing case studies, is Tomas Hägg’s *The Art of Biography in Antiquity*.⁶⁰ There is also a very recent

⁵⁵ Edwards 1997: 233.

⁵⁶ Hägg and Rousseau (2000).

⁵⁷ McGing and Mossman (2006).

⁵⁸ Williams 2008: 8.

⁵⁹ Duff (1999).

⁶⁰ Hägg (2012).

collection under the title *Writing Biography in Greece and Rome: Narrative Technique and Fictionalization* edited by Koen De Temmerman and Kristoffel Demoen.⁶¹ Both Hägg's study and the *Writing Biography* collection examine biography in the narratological terms once reserved for prose fiction and (in the latter case) even look specifically at biography in terms of its fictionality. The fluidity of biography as a genre has therefore allowed scholarship on the subject to interact with the techniques and features of explicitly fictional texts, giving greater scope to the study of complex characterization.

Studies devoted to characterization are for most the part dominated by a focus on Greek literature and the ancient novel. An influential collection is *Characterization and Individuality in Greek Literature*, edited by Christopher Pelling.⁶² Koen De Temmerman has made impressive contributions across many books and collections: especially *Crafting Character: Heroes and Heroines in the Ancient Greek Novel*,⁶³ and *Characterization in Ancient Greek Literature: Studies in Ancient Greek Narrative, Volume Four* (edited with Evert van Emde Boas).⁶⁴ This thesis is informed and influenced by the approach such works of scholarship on Greek texts (fictional or historiographical) take toward literary and characterizing techniques. The same techniques, given their roots in ancient thought more generally, can be just as easily be used to read and assess Latin historiographical works like Suetonius' biographies and how he goes about creating character. De Temmerman's *Crafting Character* even outlines general areas of thought through which we can view character and characterization: name giving, direct

⁶¹ De Temmerman and Demoen (2016). Ash's entry explores the intersection of fictionality in the assassination sequences of Julius, Caligula, and Domitian, even picking out techniques which add to verisimilitude (Ash 2016: 200-219; 205-209).

⁶² Pelling (1990a). Christopher Gill's contribution on his distinction between 'character' and 'personality' (Gill 1990: 1-32) further elaborates on his previously discussed article on the same topic (Gill 1983: 469-487), which provides the conceptual underpinning of this thesis.

⁶³ De Temmerman (2014).

⁶⁴ De Temmerman and Van Emde Boas (2017).

characterization, indirect characterization (which includes but is not limited to comparison and paradigm, emotions, actions, speech, appearance, and setting).⁶⁵ While scholars like De Temmerman use these to think about Greek novels, Suetonius' topical construction of the *Lives* practically encourages that the reader thinks in such terms.

Offering a much broader perspective on a range on Greek and Latin texts is *Fame and Infamy: Essays for Christopher Pelling on Characterization in Greek and Roman Biography and Historiography*.⁶⁶ This includes a chapter by Toher on characterizing Augustus, especially useful for its survey of historiographical portrayals of Augustus and the perception towards him.⁶⁷ Moreover, the approach that he takes further prompts this thesis' consideration of how a Caesar's portrayal elsewhere, in literature and historiography, can inform a reading of Suetonius' *Lives*.

Additionally, Luke Pitcher's chapter 'Characterization in Ancient Historiography', in *A Companion to Greek and Roman Historiography*, is especially useful for its concise discussion of basic character concepts including the possibility of change, direct and indirect characterization, and how speech and structure can contribute to a portrayal.⁶⁸ Furthermore, it offers a salient insight by prompting the issue of how point of view (POV) can be used as a technique of characterization. Pitcher states: 'Individuals may be characterized as much by what they say or do as by overt commentary on their personalities from others, whether the narrator or others in the text.'⁶⁹ Suetonius' *Lives* contain various points of view that can influence characterization: the author himself (both directly stated as narrator and occasionally in his own first person voice),

⁶⁵ De Temmerman 2014: 41; 26-45. His discussions of idealized and realistic characterization, as related to the Greek novel, and static and dynamic characters are especially insightful (pp. 15-26).

⁶⁶ Ash, Mossman, and Titchener (2015). See also Zadorojnyi's chapter on colour schemes and their relations to political dominance in Suetonius (Zadorojnyi 2015: 285-298).

⁶⁷ Toher 2015: 225-237.

⁶⁸ Pitcher 2007: 102-117.

⁶⁹ Pitcher 2007: 111. Cf. this narratological concern with characterization (De Temmerman 2014: 42).

the Caesar himself, key supporting figures in the narrative, the general public (sometimes related through epigrams and verse), and even attribution to conventional wisdom. In thinking about where the characterizing point of view is coming from in the *Lives*, a reader can more carefully discern the intricate techniques that Suetonius uses to portray his Caesars and the complexity that can emerge as a result.

It is necessary to offer an overview of scholarship on two topics that are relevant beyond the individual chapters of this thesis that directly discuss them: physiognomy and sex. Firstly, Elizabeth Evans' work provides the foundation for the study of physiognomy. It covers the ancient world in general, but those contributions focused specifically on imperial biography are of most relevance to this thesis.⁷⁰ Studies in the field have advanced considerably. Simon Swain's collection *Seeing the Face, Seeing the Soul: Polemon's Physiognomy from Classical Antiquity to Medieval Islam* is a relatively recent volume taking a broad view of the subject.⁷¹ Elsewhere, Vidén and Rohrbacher each offer a useful essay. Vidén does the much-needed work of gathering the passages in Suetonius' *Caesars* specifically related to physical appearance and offers level-headed and necessary observations.⁷² Rohrbacher is focused on physiognomy in imperial biography, especially Suetonius, but his strength is unpacking some of the complex ideas in the field.⁷³ These works can better help to comprehend the ways in which Suetonius' *Lives* exploit physiognomy and its language, in a very general way, to embellish the characterizations of the Caesars.

Sex and sexuality then are key issues for Suetonius' characterization of the Caesars. They pervade all areas of biography both ancient and modern. As Blanshard perceptively commented, 'In order to have a sex life, one needs to have a life. In many

⁷⁰ Evans (1969); (1935); (1941); (1945); (1948); (1950).

⁷¹ Swain (2007).

⁷² Vidén (2018).

⁷³ Rohrbacher (2010).

ways, sexuality is a form of biography, a way of putting acts into a personal narrative.’⁷⁴ The best place to start on the matter is the work of Michel Foucault, especially *The History of Sexuality Volume III: The Care of the Self*.⁷⁵ However, the responses provoked by his controversial work from classical circles are many and varied. Kirk Ormand offers a concise overview of these arguments.⁷⁶ In relation to Roman sexuality, Rebecca Langlands’ *Sexual Morality in Ancient Rome*, Craig A. Williams’ *Roman Homosexuality*, and Amy Richlin’s *The Garden of Priapus: Sexuality and Aggression in Roman Humor* are especially excellent at navigating and explaining complex ideas that always require tact.⁷⁷ Essays that deal specifically with sex in Suetonius are by J. H. K. O Chong-Gossard and Caroline Vout.⁷⁸ These two examples take as their underpinning that sex is strictly evaluative in relation to characterizing a Caesar. However, this thesis will move away from this to show that sexual characterization offers a multifaceted view of Suetonius’ figures.

There are two irksome distractions when it comes to the study of ancient biography, especially the work of Suetonius. The first is an attempt to seek some grand clarifying definition of biography. The second over-exerts itself in wondering whether Suetonius was a stylist or not. Let us dispense with these as swiftly as possible. In respect of the former, Momigliano states that an ‘account of the life of a man from birth to death is what I call biography. This is not a very profound definition, but it has the advantage of excluding any discussion of how biographies should be written’.⁷⁹ This neat definition is useful in a general sense, but above all it makes clear the fact that the genre has a

⁷⁴ Blanshard 2010: 65, as cited in Vout 2014: 453.

⁷⁵ Foucault (1986).

⁷⁶ Ormand (2014).

⁷⁷ Langlands (2006); Williams (2010); Richlin (1992 [1983]).

⁷⁸ Chong-Gossard (2010); Vout (2014).

⁷⁹ Momigliano 1993: 11. Likewise, Swain and Edwards have already shown convincingly that biography can be discussed without the need for a strict and formal definition (Swain 1997: 1-3; 22-37; Edwards 1997: 233). Regarding Suetonius’ work, Wallace-Hadrill favoured the term ‘not-history’, which at least defies strict definition if only by negation (Wallace-Hadrill 1995: 10).

variable form. For our purposes, it is a literary construction that simply seeks to create a lifelike characterization of a person. As for the latter, it is perfectly reasonable to at least view Suetonius as a writer of some style and poise.⁸⁰ This thesis takes it as implicitly understood for the sake of moving the discussion forward.

Suetonius' Caesars are, to an extent, what the reader makes of them. Townend has the opinion that 'Suetonius avoids generalizations, preferring a list of disconnected items which the reader must add up for himself.'⁸¹ Furthermore, he thinks that Suetonius was not concerned with assessing the validity of stories or 'even to aim at consistent character; but rather to repeat succinctly what the authorities alleged, and to leave it to the reader to draw his own conclusions.'⁸² If Suetonius did indeed want to us to come to our own conclusions about his characters, then the three-dimensional perspective that this thesis proposes is way to do just that.

The opportunities offered by Roman biography, and especially Suetonius, are yet to be fully capitalized on. This study will hopefully inspire further scholarly attention, especially in approaches to literary and character studies. Suetonius' *De vita Caesarum* works its Caesars from the ground up through established characteristics only to contrast and contradict this baseline all the while embellishing them with realistic details. It is almost as if they are drawn from the life.

⁸⁰ The issue of style most prominently comes up in Wallace-Hadrill (1995), Baldwin (1983), and Lounsbury (1987). The former two de-emphasize the biographer's style, with Wallace-Hadrill dubbing it 'the businesslike style of the ancient scholar' (Wallace-Hadrill 1995: 19). The latter is an advocate for Suetonius' style. The exchanges between Lounsbury (1986-1987: 159-162) and Baldwin (1989: 367-368) in subsequent reviews of the three works elaborate on the matter. However, the outcome of Power's thesis (2008) - a meticulous and exhaustive literary study showing Suetonius' sophistication and talent - hopefully allows us to draw a line under such disputes and do more with the *Lives*.

⁸¹ Townend 1967: 83.

⁸² Townend 1967: 92, contra the view that Suetonius predetermines his characters and consciously guides the reader to that conclusion (Wardle 1994: 87). Cf. Garrett's argument that Suetonius uses structure to persuade the reader of a more evaluative view (Garrett 2018: 197-215). However, the tripartite perspective of this thesis can accommodate such a view as informing the baseline characterization.

SECTION
I

CHAPTER ONE

Shadow and Substance:

Three Dimensions of Characterization in Ancient Writing

Never fear, therefore, that History or Biography can be too lifelike; your difficulty will be to find means through the art of literature to produce an adequate simulation of lifelikeness.

(William Roscoe Thayer, *The Art of Biography*, 1920: 51)

1.1 Introduction

Character writing depends on vividness through detail. The act itself suggests an attempt to capture the depth of personality with a degree of realism. In understanding the intricacies of portraying a person it is necessary to make several observations regarding their underpinning within ancient writing. This chapter maps out and examines three dimensions of characterization necessary to represent complex figures.

The first dimension establishes a baseline characterization. It offers an easily accessible insight into a person through descriptions of physical appearance and behaviour. A variety of stock associations exist, for example in the form of dress, to convey an overt and immediate interpretation of a character. Widespread cultural concepts in the ancient world can also inform their construction and reading. Physiognomy, the theory of external appearance indicating personality traits, can be appropriated and exploited by an author to refine his portraits. Although in a less systematic way, physical portraits in ancient literature offer a basic equivalency between morality and beauty.

Basic characters are further illustrated by specific types of mannerisms. Theophrastus' *Characters* sets out a kind of spotter's guide for stock characters and their behaviour which allow for the comprehension and creation of basic portrayals, typified

by the likes of ‘The Flatterer’. In Suetonius’ *De vita Caesarum*, all three dimensions of characterization can be seen at various points. However, his *Titus*, more than any of his other biographies, presents a relatively uncomplicated character which is ideal for showing highlighting the first dimension.

The second dimension of characterization creates a complex portrayal through dissonant or discordant aspects. Theophrastus’ sketch of the ‘Dissembler’, for instance, demonstrates duplicity in behaviour and a degree of character discordance. Such duplicity, and potential dissonance, stress the point that appearances can be deceiving thus allowing characters to be created and interpreted as complex. Sallust’s depiction of Catiline is an example, from ancient writing in general, which shows a marked instance of discord between physical appearance and behaviour. In Suetonius’ work an illustrative case can be found in the *Augustus*, wherein the emperor demonstrates moments of hypocrisy when it comes to public duties and private interests. Portraits such as these provide light and shade to characterization.

The third and final dimension allows for characterizations to transcend baseline and dissonant portrayals and approach something akin to ‘realism’. Roland Barthes’ theory of the ‘Reality Effect’ (complemented by Gill’s definition of ‘personality’) allows for reading realism in a text through extraneous details and can inform literary personalities. In relation to character writing, this can imbue a sense of distinct verisimilitude to the subject. The character of Trimalchio, from Petronius’ *Satyrica*, is an intriguing case in which extraneous details add to the ‘realism’ of an already complicated character. Again, even though Suetonius’ *Titus* is the least complicated of his Caesars, examples can be seen of all three means of depiction interacting in one passage. These three dimensions of characterization can inform and guide a further assessment of the literary representation of complex characters in Suetonius’ collection.

1.2 One-Dimensional Characterization

1.2.1 Reading and Writing Character

The three dimensions of characterization (basic, dissonant, and realistic) are quite naturally concerned with the good, the bad, and the weird that constitutes a person. However, the creation of complex characters requires not only an appraisal of virtue and vice but a unique literary portrayal beyond such things. A guiding idea in examining the representation of ‘character’ and ‘personality’ is the distinction placed between the terms by Christopher Gill. To summarise, character-viewpoint contains an evaluative element where a person is judged as the possessor of good or bad traits that require praise or blame; the personality viewpoint on the other hand does not aim to judge but rather understand ‘in an ethically neutral way’.⁸³ He then more succinctly connects the term personality ‘with a response to people that is empathetic rather than moral’.⁸⁴ Gill’s definitions of character and personality are perhaps too rigid for assessing the literary nuances of portraying a person. Nevertheless, they give a clear point of reference for analysing characterizing moments. Indeed, the first two dimensions presented (basic and discordant characters) mostly trade in positive and negative depiction. The final dimension (realistic characters) is complemented by a neutral and empathetic representation.

One-dimensional depictions use fundamental techniques to establish a baseline characterization for a figure. The building blocks for a basic, almost stereotyped, character are physical appearance and behaviour. Such elements offer a characterization that can be immediately grasped and easily understood. When it comes to appearance, cultural and literary signs and signifiers are at any author’s disposal to represent a person through visual shorthand. The stage conventions of Roman Comedy possessed a system

⁸³ Gill 1983: 470-471.

⁸⁴ Gill 1990: 2.

of visual signifiers based on appropriateness with the express purpose of conveying stock characters and their dispositions. In a short essay attributed to Evanthius, in the commentary on Terence by the Late Antique author Donatus, costumes indicate who a character is, and the nature associated with them.

*Comicis senibus candidus uestitus inducitur, quod is antiquissimus fuisse memoratur, adolescentibus discolor attribuitur. Serui comici amictu exiguo teguntur paupertatis antiquae gratia uel quo expeditiores agant. Parasiti cum intortis palliis ueniunt. Laeto uestitus candidus, aerumnoso obsoletus, purpureus diuiti, pauperi phoenicius datur. Militi chlamys purpurea, puellae habitus peregrinus inducitur. Leno pallio colore uario utitur, meretrici ob auaritiam luteum datur.*⁸⁵

According to the text, old men wear white as it is the oldest style and young men wear clothes which contrast in colour. Slaves wear a short cloak which is suggestive of poverty. Parasites wear wrapped *pallia*. It is noted that white clothing can also signify a happy character, a man who wears raggedy clothes is distressed, the colour purple is meant to indicate a rich character, and red is equated with a poor character. A soldier wears a purple cloak and girls dress in a foreign style. A pimp wears a *pallium* of various shades and the *meretrix* wears a yellow mantle which is intended to signify avarice. These examples of dress associated with the stock characters provide several different layers of significance.

Costumes indicate status and social roles (i.e. an old man, a young man, a slave, and a person who is rich or poor) along with specific stock characters integral to the drama (i.e. the soldier, *meretrix*, pimp, and *puella*). A sense of dress is also indicative of personal traits (i.e. the colour white pointing to a cheerful disposition, and greedy and covetous qualities typically associated with the parasite and the prostitute). Given that the colour white communicates both old age and cheerfulness to an audience, other explanations are clearly on offer. The meanings, associated with costumes and colour, have a degree of malleability. Costumes give a clear impression but can be modified with other indications

⁸⁵ Evanth. *Ex. De Com.* 8.6 (Wessner, Vol. III, 1908: 29-30). Cf. Leigh (2011).

of character. It is often used as a short-cut to character although, as chapter three will show, it does not have to be so simple. In addition to dress and costume, physical appearance could be understood as communicating a specific type of character. In the ancient world, this was widely understood through a belief in physiognomy.

Physiognomy proposed that physical appearance could be used to interpret someone's personality.⁸⁶ It was formally codified in the main handbooks: the pseudo-Aristotelian *Physiognomonica*, Polemo Rhetor of Laodicea's *de Physiognomonica*, the *Physiognomonica* of Adamantius and an anonymous Latin handbook, *de Physiognomonica*.⁸⁷ The theory attained a certain vogue in Greece and Rome and it is clear how this cultural concept influences character writing. Ancient writers do not adhere to the formal tenets of physiognomy, but are nevertheless familiar with the tradition and, as Evans puts it, they have a 'physiognomic consciousness'.⁸⁸ Authors can use the fundamental conceit to their advantage, without obeying the formalities. Presumably not everyone was familiar with the handbooks or the details of every physiognomical type, but the ideas were widespread enough that an average person could consistently link a certain type of appearance to a certain character. Across ancient literature, physical portraiture lets an author shape a character on their own terms. Given that physiognomy was a part of the cultural zeitgeist, a writer could use it without having to be systematic, knowing that a reader would be familiar with at least the stock associations.

Plutarch's *Life of Sulla* shows the biographer focusing on the gaze from Sulla's eyes, along with distinguishing facial features. The description of his face and the meaning in it for his character are stated by the author and embellished by the notion of physiognomy. The stare in Sulla's sharp and powerful grey eyes were made all the more

⁸⁶ For studies of physiognomy in the ancient world, see Evans (1969); (1935); (1941); (1945); (1948); (1950); Canter (1928); Helmbold (1950); Rohrbacher (2010); Wardman (1967); Swain (2007).

⁸⁷ Evans 1969: 5.

⁸⁸ Evans 1969: 6.

fearful (*φοβερωτέραν*) by his face, which was covered in red and white blotches. Plutarch's text then nimbly segues into a joke verse which refers to Sulla's face being like a mulberry with oatmeal on it (*σुकάμινόν έσθ' ό Σύλλας άλφίτω πεπασμένον*).⁸⁹ Evans discusses the description of Sulla's physical appearance and points out that to proponents of physiognomy sharp and piercing eyes are a sign of courage, although the grey eye may indicate the need for humanity and a rigid nature, and the white complexion with the red blotches are an indicator of daring and fierce anger.⁹⁰ The physical description of Sulla by Plutarch is playing on stock associations by equating piercing eyes with courageousness and blotchy skin with anger.

It is worth noting that when the narrative shifts into a discussion about Sulla's fondness for buffoonery and a dissolute kind of life this offers a contrast with the above and Stadter acknowledges this paradox as creating some complexity.⁹¹ Later discussion will show that baseline characterization can be used for more complicated and dissonant purposes. For now, Plutarch demonstrates the use an author can make of physical descriptions, corresponding to physiognomy in a general way to illustrate the character of his main subject. While a reader's interpretation of the figure may benefit from an extra layer derived from what physiognomic features suggest, the aspects presented are ultimately a construct of the biographer.

Physical appearance and idiosyncratic behaviour are intrinsically linked as literary techniques which help to create vivid characters. The *Rhetorica ad Herennium* discusses the person in rhetorical and constructive expressions such as these, and the following passage neatly elaborates on their practicality by stating:

⁸⁹ Plut. *Sull.* 2.1

⁹⁰ Evans 1969: 57. For the interpretation of these physical features she cites Pseud.-Arist. 812b, Pol. 246, Pol. 244 respectively. Evans also goes on to highlight passages which demonstrate these qualities *Sull.* 6; 8; 30.4-31.1; *Lys.* and *Sull.* Passim.

⁹¹ Plut. *Sull.* 2.2. Cf. Stadter 2014: 259-260.

Effictio est, cum exprimitur atque effingitur verbis corporis cuiuspiam forma, quoad satis sit ad intellegendum, hoc modo: 'Hunc, iudices, dico, rubrum, brevem, incurvum, canum, subcrispum, caesium, cui sane magna est in mento cicatrix, si quo modo potest vobis in memoriam redire.' Habet haec exornatio cum utilitatem, si quem veils demonstrare, tum venustatem, si breviter et dilucide facta est. Notatio est, cum alicuius natura certis describitur signis, quae, sicuti notae quae naturae sunt adtributa...

Portrayal consists in representing and depicting in words clearly enough for recognition the bodily form of some person, as follows: "I mean him, men of the jury, the ruddy, short, bent man, with white and rather curly hair, blue-grey eyes, and a huge scar on his chin, if perhaps you can recall him to memory." This figure is not only serviceable, if you should wish to designate some person, but also graceful, if fashioned with brevity and clarity.

Character Delineation consists in describing a person's character by the definite signs which, like distinctive marks, are attributes of that character...⁹²

The person can be represented through their physical appearance ('*effictio*') and character delineation ('*notatio*'). Intricate portrayal involves shaping the recognizable bodily form of a person in words. A vivid picture is achieved through details of the man being red, short, crooked, with curly white hair, blue-grey eyes, and a great scar on his chin. Describing someone in these ways presents them clearly to a listening audience and communicates a certain character for the person described.

Character delineation is made up of describing a person's nature by way of signs which indicate said nature. The text goes on to give an elaborate example of a boastful man; also a broadly recognizable figure.⁹³ The purpose is to show the qualities appropriate to each man's nature and present the whole character of the likes of a boastful man, an envious or pompous man, a greedy man, an ambitious man, an amorous man, an extravagant man, a thief, and a public informer, and such outlines show someone's ruling passion.⁹⁴ Necessary for an author's evocative portrait are detailed descriptions of

⁹² [Cic.] *Rhet. Her.* 4.63.1-13, trans. Caplan.

⁹³ [Cic.] *Rhet. Her.* 4.63.13ff. Cf. the character sketch of the 'Boastful Man' (Theophr. *Char.* 23).

⁹⁴ '*Huiusmodi notationes, quae describunt, quod consentaneum sit unius cuiusque naturae, vehementer habent magnam delectationem: totam enim naturam cuiuspiam ponunt ante oculos, aut gloriosi, ut nos exempli causa coeperamus, aut invidi aut tumidi aut avari, ambitiosi, amatoris, luxuriosi, furis, quadruplatoris; denique cuiusvis studium protrahi potest in medium tali notatione.*' ([Cic.] *Rhet. Her.* 4.65.1-8).

physical features, distinctive enough to achieve a lifelike quality (i.e. the colour of one's face, height, hair, eye colour, and idiosyncratic details like a scar). These are placed with accounts of mannerisms and behaviour which describe individual characteristics. The external and internal self is acknowledged and linked. An author can then take advantage of them for their characters.

The question of whether physical features are a trustworthy indicator of positive or negative characteristics, especially for literary purposes, needs to be considered. If signs are not always dependable for interpreting characters, then certainly their meaning is malleable in the hands of an author. Pliny the Younger's *Epistulae* and the pen portraits they contain serve to demonstrate these signs in character writing. Eleanor Winsor Leach has noted that in Pliny's work physical appearance is not necessarily a reliable indicator of character. Although beauty is often coupled with praise of virtue, good looks are only one indication of character signs and even though beauty is appropriate to show the promise of a young man, it has no significance to an older man's considerable achievements.⁹⁵ The recognition that the physical appearance (beauty) of a person was only one indication of their character is raised in some of the letters.

In Pliny's letter to Corellia Hispulla, he seemingly recognizes that appearance can be misleading and might not adequately communicate character. The letter is mainly concerned with finding an appropriate teacher for the recipient's son. Pliny notes that in addition to nature and fortune, the young man has physical beauty (*'Adest enim adulescenti nostro cum ceteris naturae fortunaeque dotibus eximia corporis pulchritudo'*) but nevertheless stresses the importance of finding a guardian and guide for him at this critical point of his life (*'cui in hoc lubrico aetatis non praeceptor modo sed custos etiam*

⁹⁵ Leach 1990: 21.

rectorque quaerendus est').⁹⁶ This acknowledges a basic equivalency between beauty and a good nature, but the necessity of an appropriate guardian to cultivate the person suggests this equivalency is not always steadfast. This view is also seen in another letter of interest.

Pliny presents the physical description of Euphrates, the philosopher, as being tall and handsome (*'Ad hoc proceritas corporis, decora facies'*), with hair hanging down and an enormous white beard (*'demissus capillus, ingens et cana barba'*) although put forward as of no consequence reinforces his qualities and induces the greatest respect (*'quae licet fortuita et inania putentur, illi tamen plurimum uenerationis adquirunt'*).⁹⁷ Pliny acknowledges that Euphrates' appearance may be perceived as inconsequential, showing that appearance and character are not always tied together. Nevertheless, in this instance, Pliny uses the sketch to fall back to the idea that they are linked. These tools were available for an author to use, even if they were not always reliable. The association between appearance and character is always a temptation, and all writers work with these stock associations. On stage we may not get beyond them, but a prose author often shows an awareness that they can be misleading and tries to move towards complexity.

1.2.2 Character Sketches

Concepts of character which correspond to stereotyped behaviour are found in a variety of ancient writings. It is not surprising to find a marked precedent for character writing in philosophical works, most notably that of Aristotle.⁹⁸ However, it was a student of Aristotle who would produce a key text for understanding basic conceits of

⁹⁶ Plin. *Ep.* 3.3.4.1-5.1.

⁹⁷ Plin. *Ep.* 1.10.6.

⁹⁸ Diog. Laert. 5.1.35; Arist. *Eth. Nic.* 1107a33-1108b7; 1112a2-1113; 1115a6-1128b33; *Eth. Eud.* 2.1220b21-1221b3; 3.1228a23; *Rh.* 2.12-14; Cf. Pl. *Rep.* 8, esp. 548d; 553a; 558d; 9, esp. 571a. See also Ussher 1966: 64-78 and Rusten, 'Introduction', 2002: 5-39.

characterization. Theophrastus' *Characters* offers character sketches of thirty moral types, mainly for the negative.⁹⁹ This work allows us to see basic, one-dimensional characters. Theophrastus demonstrates the stereotyped categories through which a person can be perceived. The identifying traits of these character types include, but are not limited to, dissembling, flattery, loquacity, buffoonery, rusticity, tactlessness, penny-pinching, superstitiousness, overzealousness, distrustfulness, boastfulness, arrogance, and cowardice.¹⁰⁰ These stock characters are, for the most part, built on singular qualities and can be thought of as thumbnail sketches. However, an approach like this immediately gives a powerful impression of their nature. Furthermore, the sheer number of categories and their specificity provide access to a greater variety of possible characters.

Theophrastus' sketches are quick and convenient ways to create and understand characters. Their consistent behaviour is demonstrated in the likes of 'The Country Bumpkin'. An intrinsically crude yet humorous character, he notices no difference between the smell of garlic and the scent of perfume, discusses business with his slaves rather than his friends or family, exposes himself by wearing his garments too high, pays attention to only animals like donkeys or goats when in the street and drinks his wine neat - to give but a few illustrative mannerisms.¹⁰¹ Another stock character built around a distinct recurring trait is that of 'The Penny-Pincher'. This is the type of person who when presented with a bill after a communal dinner will gripe about how expensive things are no matter the price, who reduces his slaves rations should they break a pot, who will chase anyone in his debt and charge interest, and who refuses to let his wife lend modest items like a lamp wick or barley meal or sacrificial grain because such things accumulate during

⁹⁹ The preface, a seemingly spurious later addition, purports to offer positive and negative characters for young men to emulate but the text only goes on to give negative portrayals ('*Προοίμιον*', 2-3; 4-5; Diggle 2004: 18; 161). Cf. Diog. Laert. 5.2.42-51.

¹⁰⁰ Theophr. *Char.* 1-30.

¹⁰¹ Theophr. *Char.* 4.

a year.¹⁰² Again, these selected examples demonstrate an established, baseline nature with a colourful and convincing sketch centred on one identifiable quality.

The ‘Tactless Man’ typifies a person whose behaviour is at odds with social norms. This man tries to have a conversation with someone when they are busy, becomes amorous with a woman when she is sick, tries to give evidence when the case is closed, presents a bill to people who have already been to heavy expense, and when wanting to dance will take a sober partner.¹⁰³ This figure is peculiar in that he behaves in a way consistently at odds social norms but is very easily understood. Another example is that of the ‘Overzealous Man’. This person promises more than he can deliver, thinks that he has a fair case only to pursue it and lose, has his slave pour more wine than people can drink, he takes people on a short cut only to get lost, and when swearing an oath boasts about being experienced at swearing oaths.¹⁰⁴ This character is akin to standard braggarts, but the nuance is in the gap between the estimation of their abilities and the outcome.

‘The Flatterer’, is another rudimentary stock character that is instantly identifiable. As the name suggests, the person has a sycophantic attitude towards others. This straightforward figure is summed up as someone who says or does anything that can gain them favour.¹⁰⁵ Examples of behaviour include commenting on admiring looks aimed at the object of flattery, or on the esteem in which they are held, picking the fluff off their cloaks, laughing at their insipid jokes, bringing presents and giving attention to their children, giving advance notice of their impending visits to a friend, praising them as hosts, asking if they are cold and wrapping them in a blanket, and complimenting their

¹⁰² Theophr. *Char.* 10.

¹⁰³ Theophr. *Char.* 12.

¹⁰⁴ Theophr. *Char.* 13.

¹⁰⁵ ‘καὶ τὸ κεφάλαιον τὸν κόλακα ἔστι θεάσασθαι πάντα καὶ λέγοντα καὶ πράττοντα, ᾧ χαριεῖσθαι ὑπολαμβάνει.’ (Theophr. *Char.* 2.13).

house, their farm, and their portrait.¹⁰⁶ The sketch creates an immediate impression of a basic figure and establishes characterization through illustrations of recurring behaviour.

These types of pen portraits, and their instant impression of characters, provide a common approach to crafting a person for all writers, whether they are dramatists or biographers or anything in between. The exercise of character sketching, especially types like those in Theophrastus' work, found its way into rhetorical training, education, and other forms of Roman literature, especially Comedy.¹⁰⁷ These basic characterizations can convey the kind of formed personality useful for the stage. There is a wealth of stock characters in Roman Comedy. The most prominent of which are the *adulescens*, *senex*, *seruus*, *parasitus*, *leno*, *virgo*, *matron*, *ancilla*, *cocus*, *meretrix*, and the *miles gloriosus*.¹⁰⁸ Plautus' *Miles Gloriosus* fills the key character types with Palaestrio (the clever slave), Sceledrus (the dim slave), Philocomasium (effectively the *virgo*), Pleusicles (the *adulescens*), Arcoteleutium (the *meretrix*), Artotrogus (the *parasitus*), and Pyrgopolynices (the title character).¹⁰⁹ These stock characters are not unlike Theophrastus' sketches, especially in relation to categories like buffoonery, pretentiousness, and flattery.¹¹⁰ Their simplified natures allow for a character to be grasped with no difficulty and reflective of everyday, commonplace figures.

¹⁰⁶ Theophr. *Char.* 2.1-13.

¹⁰⁷ Cic. *Top.* 83; [Cic.] *Rhet. Her.* 4.50-51; 4.64 ff; Quint. *Inst.* 1.9.3; 6.2.17; Suet. *Gramm.* 4; Plut. *Mor.* (esp. *De garr.*, *Quomodo adulator ab amico internoscatur*, *De superst.*, *De curiositate*, *De cupiditate divitiarum*, *De Laude Ipsius*); Hor. *Sat.* 1.9; Mart. 3.63. Cf. Diggle 2004: 5-12. On transmission to Rome see Ussher 1966: 67ff. On the historical background see Lane Fox 1996: 127-170. On the Theophrastan sketch see Smeed (1985). Menander provides the connection between Theophrastus and Roman Comedy. Theophrastus deals with the character type of the Flatterer in his work while Menander's *Kolax* ('The Flatterer') is a play built around the same recognizable type (Theophr. *Char.* 2; Men. *Kolax*). A further connection between philosopher and playwright can be established through the claim, in Diogenes Laertius, that Theophrastus taught Menander, the latter of whom provides a major source of material for the Roman plays (Diog. Laer. 5.2.36-7). For the influence of Menander on Roman Comedy consider Terence's *Eunuch* (Ter. *Eun.* 1-45). See also Barsby 1999: 13-19; Barsby 2001: 230-250 (on adaptation).

¹⁰⁸ For a comprehensive overview of stock characters see Duckworth 1994: 236-272.

¹⁰⁹ Plaut. *Mil.* 1-1437. Cf. *Personae* in Hammond, Mack, and Moskalew 1997: 73.

¹¹⁰ Theophr. *Char.* 11; 23; 2.

These stereotypes, however, come with elements which add to a kind of realism. Little notes that Plautus paints with ‘Hogarthian realism the life of grasping courtesans, the lewdness of debased slaves, the weak profligacy of young men.’¹¹¹ Gods and kings seemingly have no place amongst this rabble.¹¹² His characters are drawn from the ordinary rather than the extraordinary. What Little seemingly has in mind is not the kind of realism that results from complexity of character, but realism in the sense that the characters are situated in everyday life and familiar situations, rather than being gods or heroes. This is what makes it ‘Hogarthian’: however, the characters remain stereotypes. Indeed, the gods and heroes of tragedy are often more complex even if they are unreal in this sense. The realism here is based on settings and stereotypes of everyday life rather than complexity or minutiae. The easier it is to recognize a character, the easier it is to understand them.

1.2.3 Titus

An appreciation of the form and function of these one-dimensional characters can be used to interpret Suetonius’ Caesars. All three dimensions can be found in the biographies, but Titus is the clearest example of an established baseline in a relatively uncomplicated character. The opening tag that presents Titus as universally beloved ‘serves as a sort of *leitmotif* of the biography’.¹¹³ It starts as it means to go on and, in this way, serves to calibrate the reader’s judgement in preparation for the biography that follows. His appearance and behaviour are aligned; Titus is exactly the person he appears to be:

¹¹¹ Little 1938: 208.

¹¹² An exception is the use of Jove and Mercury in Plautus’ *Amphitryon* (Plaut. *Amph.* 1-1145).

¹¹³ Murphy 1991: 3786. Cf. ‘*amor ac deliciae generis humani*’ (*Tit.* 1.1.1-2).

in puero statim corporis animique dotes explenduerunt, magisque ac magis deinceps per aetatis gradus: forma egregia et cui non minus auctoritatis inesset quam gratiae, praecipuum robur, quanquam neque procera statura et uentre paulo proiectiore; memoria[e] singularis, docilitas ad omnis fere tum belli tum pacis artes.

Even in boyhood his bodily and mental gifts were conspicuous and they became more and more so as he advanced in years. He had a handsome person, in which there was no less dignity than grace, and was uncommonly strong, although he was not tall of stature and had a rather protruding belly. His memory was extraordinary and he had an aptitude for almost all the arts, both of war and of peace.¹¹⁴

Suetonius stresses that Titus is almost physically and mentally perfect with the skills to match, and only very minor physical imperfections. This passage does not have to rely heavily on a system of physiognomy. Titus is unassuming and virtuous, and this allows Suetonius to present him with the most basic techniques of plain comments about appearance and behaviour. His use of physiognomy is not always so straightforward, however, and the idea can be used to reinforce Titus' baseline in a complicated way.

Thus, Tatum notes that Suetonius, in his awareness of physiognomy, realizes 'biology is not destiny'.¹¹⁵ When discussing Titus' gut, Tatum points out that he shares this with Nero, Vitellius, and Domitian and as such keeps 'dangerous physiognomic company'; while a physiognomic reading based on those handbooks offer a more positive spin overall, Tatum concludes that a reading of such aspects is difficult.¹¹⁶ Having Titus be associated with such bad company due to a physical detail fits with the section of his *Life* about people suspecting him of all kinds of cruelty and vice, but it is almost immediately contradicted when stating that he had only the greatest of virtues.¹¹⁷ Suetonius departs from physiognomic ideas by giving a (positive) gut to his bad characters; but he then subverts expectations by making one of these turn out to be good

¹¹⁴ *Tit.* 3.1.1-2.1, trans. Rolfe.

¹¹⁵ Tatum 2014: 171.

¹¹⁶ Tatum 2014: 171. Cf. *Tit.* 3.1; *Ner.* 51; *Vit.* 17.2; *Dom.* 18.1.

¹¹⁷ *Tit.* 7.

after all. The meaning bestowed on the physical portrait is subject to the author's intention and the meaning he prescribes.

Suetonius uses physiognomy in the *Titus*, and makes the intention behind it clear when the concept is appropriated for the specific literary purpose in the following:

educatus in aula cum Britannico simul ac paribus disciplinis et apud eosdem magistros institutus. quo quidem tempore aiunt metoposcopum a Narcisso Claudii liberto adhibitum, ut Britannicum inspiceret, constantissime affirmasse illum quidem nullo modo, ceterum Titum, qui tunc prope astabat, utique imperaturum.

He was brought up at court in company with Britannicus and taught the same subjects by the same masters. At that time, so they say, a physiognomist was brought in by Narcissus, the freedman of Claudius, to examine Britannicus and declared most positively that he would never become emperor; but that Titus, who was standing near by at the time, would surely rule.¹¹⁸

Without ever delving into the difference in their appearances, the mere mention of the pseudo-science of physiognomy is repurposed in literary terms to legitimize Titus becoming emperor, and this is further underlined by attributing it to gossip and thus some degree of public belief ('*aiunt*'). Furthermore, Suetonius does not rely on any physiognomic description or knowledge on the part of the reader, but succinctly makes the point that Titus looked like an emperor even as a boy. Again, Titus is exactly what he appears to be.

Point of view (POV) is an integral technique of characterization and Suetonius' *Titus* provides the reader with an opportunity to consider how other figures can build up a portrait. Pitcher states: 'Individuals may be characterized as much by what they say or do as by overt commentary on their personalities from others, whether the narrator or others in the text.'¹¹⁹ The intricacies of Suetonius' techniques can be seen when we consider the characterizing points of view of the biographer, Titus himself, and other figures in the narrative. The baseline characterization of Titus is so idealized that it

¹¹⁸ *Tit.* 2.1.1-7, trans. Rolfe.

¹¹⁹ Pitcher 2007: 111. On indirect characterization see Pitcher 2007: 107-110.

borders on panegyric and Wallace-Hadrill identifies it as being ‘closer to romance or panegyric than biography.’¹²⁰ A matter-of-fact character statement is that he was most benevolent (*‘Natura autem beniuolentissimus’*).¹²¹ An anecdote follows through on this when Titus remembered at dinner once he had granted no favours that particular day, so he made the memorable and laudable comment ‘Friends, I’ve lost a day’.¹²² This generosity of spirit is reaffirmed when contextualized with his father’s avarice, Wardle notes that Titus’ approach was a direct contrast to Vespasian’s often criticized frugality.¹²³ Suetonius, the biographer as narrator, states Titus’ benevolence and provides an example by way of anecdote. This in turn provides the subject with a chance to demonstrate his own character. Just as in Theophrastus, his behaviour is shown to be entirely in line with a singular stated identity.

Suetonius’ *Life* also takes a moment to deliberately remind the reader that appearances can be deceiving. Fortunately rumours of Titus’ bad side seem to be greatly exaggerated. The biographer gives an account of Titus’ apparently hedonistic youth and states:

Praeter saeuitiam suspecta in eo etiam luxuria erat, quod ad mediam noctem comisationes cum profusissimo quoque familiarium extenderet; nec minus libido propter exoletorum et spadonum greges propterque insignem reginae Berenices amorem, cui etiam nuptias pollicitus ferebatur; suspecta rapacitas, quod constabat in conationibus patris nundinari praemiarique solitum; denique propalam alium Neronem et opinabantur et praedicabant. at illi ea fama pro bono cessit conuersaque est in maximas laudes neque uitio ullo reperto et contra uirtutibus summis.

¹²⁰ Wallace-Hadrill 1995: 62. Furthermore, Titus’ generosity is ‘a contrast to his father as commonly perceived and as portrayed by Suetonius’ (Murphy 1991: 3786).

¹²¹ *Tit.* 8.1.1.

¹²² ‘*atque etiam recordatus quondam super cenam, quod nihil cuiquam toto die praestitisset, memorabilem illam meritoque laudatam uocem edidit: ‘amici, diem perdidit.’* (*Tit.* 8.1.10-13, trans. Rolfe).

¹²³ Wardle 2001: 68. Cf. *Vesp.* 16.

Besides cruelty, he was also suspected of riotous living, since he protracted his revels until the middle of the night with the most prodigal of his friends; likewise of unchastity because of his troops of male prostitutes and eunuchs, and his notorious passion for queen Berenice, to whom it was even said that he promised marriage. He was suspected of greed as well; for it was well known that in cases which came before his father he put a price on his influence and accepted bribes. In short, people not only thought, but openly declared, that he would be a second Nero. But this reputation turned out to his advantage and gave place to the highest praise, when no fault was discovered in him, but on the contrary the highest virtues.¹²⁴

Suetonius seems to be setting the reader up for a bad emperor. Admittedly he distances himself from each accusation by shifting the characterizing point of view, but we are told that he was suspected of luxury and excessive sexual activity (not on unreasonable grounds), as well as greed, apparently also on good grounds (*'constabat'*); and the public consensus (*'opinabantur'* and *'praedicabant'*) was that he would be a new Nero. This is an extremely negative picture painted by indirect characterization; and although it twice uses *'suspecta'* to distance Suetonius himself from the charges, it does not seem as though we are supposed to disagree with it. After all, he gives good reasons for the accusations of luxury and greed, and his affair with Berenice is a fact (and the specifying of boys and eunuchs makes it all very vivid).

However, we are seemingly supposed to disregard all that as mere gossip and believe instead the unsupported statement that it all turned out well in the end and he was completely free from vices. Suetonius presents a strong opposition between vices (*'uitio'*) and virtues (*'uirtutibus'*), with the emphasis on the passage being on the transformation (*'conuersaque est'*) of his reputation. The technique strengthens the panegyric image of Titus by listing unflattering opposites only to negate them. Nevertheless, the generic praise at the end does not entirely cancel out the vivid image of his vices that the rest of the paragraph provides, and it cannot be entirely dismissed from the mind. Surely a reader

¹²⁴ *Tit.* 7.1.1-11, trans. Rolfe. In a similar attempt at characterization, Seneca dreamed that Nero was Caligula, *'ferunt Senecam proxima nocte uisum sibi per quietem C. Caesari praecipere, et fidem somnio Nero breui fecit prodita immanitate naturae quibus primum potuit experimentis.'* (*Ner.* 7.1.5-8).

cannot help but have some doubts about Titus, given all of this.¹²⁵ In the end, it is not clear whether Suetonius indeed expects his readers to put all this vivid gossip out of their minds, or is suggesting that Titus actually did have a dark side, or is possibly drawing attention to the unreliability of gossip about emperors and their dissipation, and as such it must remain a matter of speculation.

Ultimately, the passage is an extreme case of an identifiable technique throughout the Caesars, where Suetonius gives both sides of every story. Even when he sums up by telling us what to think *ex cathedra* (as here), a reader still has enough contrary information to come up with a different and more complex idea of the emperor in question. Here we have an emperor who, Suetonius explicitly tells us, was whiter than white. But the way he is introduced here cannot help but give him some complexity: at the very least he is more interesting because he has an alternative shadow life, a road not taken, in which he turned out as another Nero. And we are certainly given enough material to prompt some doubt that Titus was always the paragon he is presented as (not least by himself) in the rest of the *Life*.

Braund points out that key vices presented after *saevitia* are *luxuria*, *libido*, and *rapacitas*, and it is in this order that Suetonius counters the three accusations after establishing Titus' virtue.¹²⁶ Titus' banquets were pleasant, he sent Berenice away from Rome despite their desires, and respected other peoples' property.¹²⁷ This is the start of a move away from stereotypes and stock characters and towards two-dimensional characterization. Obviously, Suetonius had this available to him in all his *Lives*, but it

¹²⁵ Immediately prior to the above passage there is an account of Titus having Aulus Caecina killed, but even there Suetonius stresses the danger posed by him and concludes on the necessity of the act while acknowledging the bad reputation Titus incurred as a result: '*quibus rebus sicut in posterum securitati satis cauit, ita ad praesens plurimum contraxit inuidiae, ut non temere quis tam aduerso rumore magisque inuitis omnibus transierit ad principatum.*' (Tit. 6.2.5-9).

¹²⁶ Braund 1984: 120.

¹²⁷ Tit. 7.2-3. On the political context of Titus and Berenice's relationship see Crook 1951: 162-175.

emerges sparingly in the case of Titus. He is ultimately a straightforward figure, and Suetonius generally presents him by the most simple and familiar tropes. But even here Suetonius hints at both other means at his disposal and at the more complex characters that can be created elsewhere. It is these two things that we will now go on to explore.

1.3 Two-Dimensional Characterization

Complexity in characterization begins in the middle ground between light and shadow. In his *Epistulae*, Pliny observes that the life of a person has hidden depths and great shadows (*'uita hominum altos recessus magnasque latebras habet'*).¹²⁸ Aspects of a person can be discordant and diverse. The matter at hand becomes how to convey surface, depth, light, and shade. In regards to writing an obituary for the son of a correspondent, Pliny makes a further comparison to a sculptor or painter in what features should be formed or amended when aiming to create a likeness that is not fragile or frail but immortal and will last longer the more real, better, and absolute it is (*'quae hoc diuturnior erit, quo uerior melior absolutior fuerit'*).¹²⁹ The ideal representation strikes a balance between strengths and flaws. Vividness and realism, through the complexities and contradictions in human nature, are central to a convincing portrayal.

In his *De Oratore*, Cicero discusses the use of both light and shade in rhetoric, so that the part which has the light shone on it seems stronger and more prominent when used in conjunction with obscurity. When it comes to admiration and the highest praise in speaking there should be some shade and obscurity so that the part with more light on it seems to stand out and be prominent (*'sed habeat tamen illa in dicendo admiratio ac*

¹²⁸ Plin. *Ep.* 3.3.6.3-4.

¹²⁹ Plin. *Ep.* 3.10.6.6-7.

summa laus umbram aliquam et recessum, quo magis id, quod erit inluminatum, exstare atque eminere videatur').¹³⁰ Likewise with characterization such a use of contrasting features can yield a richer character portrayal. Pliny again picks up on the same point about chiaroscuro with the importance of light and shadow in painting much in the same way as speaking must lower and rise (*Nam ut in pictura lumen non alia res magis quam umbra commendat, ita orationem tam summittere quam attollere decet*').¹³¹ This technique can help us think about how characterization moves beyond one note depictions in an attempt to portray a person in a diverse and often conflicting manner.

Complex characters begin with diversities, dichotomies, and multifaceted aspects in the person, especially in biography. As set out in the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, the type of narrative which is set on the person ought to have an animated manner and diversity of character (*Illud genus narrationis quod in personis positum est debet habere sermonis festivitatem, animorum dissimilitudinem*). It should have diversities and dichotomies such as strictness and gentleness (*gravitatem lenitatem*), hope and fear (*spem metum*), suspicion and desire (*suspicionem desiderium*), duplicity and compassion (*dissimulationem misericordiam*), the variety of things (*rerum varietates*) such as reversals of fortune, unexpected disaster, sudden joy, and happy endings (*fortuna commutationem, insperatum in commodum, subitam laetitiam, iucundum exitum rerum*').¹³² These traits can go hand in hand or oppose one another but diversity helps to construct complex characters. A person does not need to adhere to their one-dimensional baseline and authors are free to explore all kinds of personal contradictions for them.

This is not to say that stock figures are without their own intricacies. While Theophrastus' work is an excellent catalogue of very basic characterizations, they contain

¹³⁰ Cic. *De Or.* 3.101.3-102.1.

¹³¹ Plin. *Ep.* 3.13.5.1.

¹³² [Cic.] *Rhet. Her.* 1.13.11-17.

some degree of subtlety. Rusten suggests that they are distinctive as literary portraiture and are ‘never generalizations, but catalogues of vivid detail (some indeed so that they are difficult to interpret.)’¹³³ While the characters never demonstrate outright complexity, some sketches, do however, contain diversity and characters can display intentional dissonance in their words and behaviour.

In this way, Theophrastus’ ‘Dissembler’ demonstrates a measure of dissonance through duplicity. At the start of the passage, dissembling is defined as pretending in both words and deeds and all for the worse with the text ultimately concluding that a person should be more wary of a disingenuous person than a viper.¹³⁴ The examples of duplicity used are of a man who disparages people behind their back but commends them to their faces, when people seek an immediate meeting he tells them to come again because he has more pressing matters, he feigns ignorance especially in relation to matters of loans, and uses phrases which express constant disbelief.¹³⁵ This character sketch shows the intentionally duplicitous nature of a person.

This presentation of the ‘Dissembler’ stands in contrast with what we have seen in Suetonius’ *Titus*. There Titus was a basic character, but the *Life* used a more complex method to bring that out: suggesting hidden evils that turned out not to be there. The ‘Dissembler’, on the other hand, is a slightly complex character portrayed using Theophrastus’ simple method of the stereotype: this character is always dissembling, and at every opportunity. The complexity here is not in the portrait by Theophrastus, which is as simple as any other (this man does this, all the time); rather, the complexity is in the

¹³³ Rusten, ‘Introduction’, 2002: 9. Cf. Edmonds suggests that they give the impression of moving from ‘anyone’ to ‘someone’ as they progress from the early sketches to the later sketches (Edmonds, ‘Introduction’, 1929: 4).

¹³⁴ ‘ἡ μὲν οὖν εἰρωνεία δόξειεν ἂν εἶναι, ὡς τύπω λαβεῖν, προσποιήσις ἐπὶ χειρὸν πράξεων καὶ λόγων... τὰ δὲ τῶν ἠθῶν μὴ ἀπλᾶ, ἀλλ’ ἐπίβουλα, φυλάττεσθαι μᾶλλον δεῖ ἢ τοὺς ἔχεις.’ (Theophr. *Char.* 1.1-7).

¹³⁵ Theophr. *Char.* 1.1-7.

character himself: what he does all the time is act in a (mildly) complex fashion. This is not an outright complex character but rather approaches complexity.

Sallust's Catiline, in the *Bellum Catilinae*, is a firm example of a dissonant two-dimensional character. He has the remarkable dichotomy between external appearance, and qualities, and internal dispositions. Physical appearance does not have to align with character. It can, and does, contradict the characterization to create complexity.

L. Catilina, nobili genere natus, fuit magna vi et animi et corporis, sed ingenio malo pravoque. huic ab adulescentia bella intestina caedes rapinae discordia civilis grata fuere, ibique iuventutem suam exercuit. corpus patiens inediae algoris vigiliae, supra quam quoiquam credibile est. animus audax subdolos varius, quouis rei lubet simulator ac dissimulator, alieni adpetens, sui profusus, ardens in cupiditatibus; satis eloquentiae, sapientiae parum. vastus animus immoderata incredibilia nimis alta semper cupiebat.

Lucius Catiline, born of a noble family, had great vigor of both mind and body, but an evil and depraved nature. From an early age he delighted in civil wars, bloodshed, pillage, and political dissension, and amid these he spent his early manhood. His body could endure hunger, cold and want of sleep to an incredible degree. His mind was reckless, cunning, adaptable, capable of any form of pretense or concealment; covetous of others' possessions, he was prodigal of his own; he was intense in his passions; he possessed adequate eloquence, but too little discretion. His insatiable mind always craved the excessive, the incredible, the impossible.¹³⁶

Pitcher sees Catiline as an example of the Roman traditions' 'developing fascination with paradoxical characters, individuals in whom great virtues and great vices coexist, or in whom evil is accompanied with remarkable mental or physical abilities.'¹³⁷ Catiline's mind and body are shown positively when linked with the nobility of his family, but then undercut with the acknowledgement of his wicked nature and his youth revelling in carnage. His ability to endure hunger, cold, and sleeplessness shows his physical superiority despite it not fitting with his recklessness and treachery. His capability at pretence and dissimulation characterizes him as duplicitous and subtle; contrasting traits such as eloquence and lack of discretion all together show Catiline's complexity. The

¹³⁶ Sall. *Cat.* 5.1.1-6.1, trans. Rolfe.

¹³⁷ Pitcher 2007: 106.

issue is that Catiline has what appears to be positive qualities on the surface but misuses them because of his internal and hidden disposition. He has a noble family and a powerful mind and body, but the wrong kind of mindset. He has great physical gifts; but an entirely corrupted attitude. He is even a good speaker, like a proper Roman gentleman, but he misuses this gift too by his lack of wisdom.¹³⁸ Thus, as we suspected earlier, physical features are not always a reliable indicator of character.

External signs are significant for understanding the internal person in ancient literature, especially biography; as Momigliano notes, the modern style of describing a person is derived from the classical tradition and accepts its presupposition about not only requiring evidence but also ‘the techniques of transition from external signs to internal qualities’.¹³⁹ The notion of a public self and a private self is familiar to modern sensibilities. A situational circumstance allows for a perspective shift to demonstrate some dissonance within a character. By way of preamble, a brief example of dissonance can be seen in a mention of Vitellius when he governed in Africa. In his province he demonstrated considerable integrity, acting as legate to his brother, but in relation to his city offices he stole ornaments from the temples and swapped gold and silver for tin and brass.¹⁴⁰ In the context of fulfilling one’s duty Vitellius shows dissonant behaviour that suggests a disconnect between internal thought and external action. It also shows how Vitellius was either duplicitous or hypocritical under his brother’s gaze.

Of Augustus it has been said that ‘Suetonius presents us with a man who puts an enormous effort into shaping his own life, the behaviour of other people, and the

¹³⁸ In contrast to the ideal of a Roman orator attributed to Cato, ‘*Sit ergo nobis orator quem constituimus is qui a M. Catone finitur uir bonus dicendi peritus*’ (Quint. *Inst.* 12.1.1.1-2). Cf. Sen. *Controv.* 1.pr.1.10.

¹³⁹ Momigliano 1985: 89.

¹⁴⁰ ‘*in prouincia singularem innocentiam praestitit biennio continuato, cum succedenti fratri legatus substitisset; at in urbano officio dona atque ornamenta templorum subripuisse et commutasse quaedam ferebatur proque auro et argento stagnum et aurichalcum supposuisse.*’ (Vit. 5.1.5-10).

future'.¹⁴¹ This informs his self-cultivating baseline characterization but there is a dissonant portrait too. Suetonius' *Augustus* shows discordance between the public and the private person. The stark contrast between his marriage laws and his private sexual escapades reveal not only the emperor's hypocrisy but character dissonance. According to Suetonius, he changed some of the pre-existing laws and brought in new ones relating to extravagance, adultery, chastity, bribery, and promoting marriage between the orders (*'Leges retractavit et quasdam ex integro sanxit, ut sumptuariam et de adulteriis et de pudicitia, de ambitu, de maritandis ordinibus.'*)¹⁴² The emperor insists on setting standards to hold others to but the outcomes are typically the opposite of what he intends. Langlands shows that such moral reforms 'subsequently turn out in a variety of ways to be ineffectual, misguided, or counterproductive.'¹⁴³ This irony serves to underscore Augustus' own personal hypocrisy, but for the moment here he is constructing his public self in conjunction with and through a strict moralizing agenda.

When faced with public demands for repeals from *equites*, Augustus sent for Germanicus' children in order to show them off in his lap and their father's lap, suggesting by looks and gestures that they should follow the young man as an example (*'sic quoque abolitionem eius publico spectaculo pertinaciter postulante equite, accitos Germanici liberos receptosque partim ad se partim in patris gremium ostentavit, manu uultuque significans ne grauarentur imitari iuuenis exemplum.'*)¹⁴⁴ He even uses his family as a constructed image of exemplarity. Using Germanicus and his family as an example though highlights 'Augustus' inability to foresee the tragic and terrible fates that await the family he is offering as a model.'¹⁴⁵ Again, grim irony underlines the hypocrisy

¹⁴¹ Langlands 2014: 112-113.

¹⁴² *Aug.* 34.1.1-3.

¹⁴³ Langlands 2014: 117. *Aug.* 34 is used as a set piece to demonstrate Augustus' inability to control his legacy (pp. 117-120).

¹⁴⁴ *Aug.* 34.2.1-5.

¹⁴⁵ Langlands 2014: 120. Cf. *Calig.* 3-4; *Calig.* 7; *Tib.* 54.2; *Calig.* 22; *Ner.* 34.1-4.

and dissonance ultimately seen in Augustus himself. It goes on to state that when Augustus found out the sense of the law was being circumvented by engagement to immature girls and changing wives, he shortened the period of engagement and put a limit on divorce (*'cumque etiam in maturitate sponsarum et matrimoniorum crebra mutatione uim legis eludi sentiret, tempus sponsas habendi coartauit, diuortiis modum imposuit.'*)¹⁴⁶ This deliberate effort to influence public moral and social conduct might seem laudable, but his own private and personal behaviour was exactly the opposite.

Augustus' moral and sexual hypocrisy is made clear when even friends could not deny his penchant for adultery but reasoned that it was not out of lust but rather for political reasons: namely to gain insights about the plans of his adversaries through their wives (*'adulteria quidem exercuisse ne amici quidem negant, excusantes sane non libidine, sed ratione commissa, quo facilius consilia aduersariorum per cuiusque mulieres exquiret.'*)¹⁴⁷ Regardless of this rationalization, the fact remains that he has dissonant character elements, and his public hypocrisy is embellished when his private indulgences provide more evidence of adultery, against the spirit of his legislation.

Thus, Augustus was also criticised for other moral and sexual failings. Suetonius states that Mark Antony accused Augustus of a rushed marriage to Livia, and with taking another man's wife from a dining room in front of her husband only to return with her hair dishevelled and ears glowing (*'M. Antonius super festinatas Liuiæ nuptias obiecit et feminam consularem e triclinio uiri coram in cubiculum abductam, rursus in conuiuium rubentibus auriculis incomptiore capillo reductam'*). Furthermore, Scribonia was divorced because she complained about the influence a rival had on him, presumably Livia (*'dimissam Scriboniam, quia liberius doluisset nimiam potentiam paelicis'*). His

¹⁴⁶ Aug. 34.2.5-8, contra Aug. 71.1.6-9.

¹⁴⁷ Aug. 69.1.1-4.

friends arranged his pleasures, stripping matrons and adult virgins akin to a slave deal (*'condiciones quaesitas per amicos, qui matres familias et adultas aetate uirgines denudarent atque perspicerent, tamquam Toranio mangone uendente.'*)¹⁴⁸ Antony also writes to Augustus making scathing comments about his sexual appetites and accusing him of sleeping with a variety of women like Tertulla, Terentilla, Rufilla, or Salvia Titisenia individually, or with all of them.¹⁴⁹ The discordance between Augustus' public life and private life in respect of marriage and adultery shows his hypocrisy and the dissonance provides a moment of complexity. Here, evaluative elements of virtue and vice aid in distinguishing baseline characterization and challenges to it through dissonance. It is possible though to transcend such dimensions to a more realistic presentation.

1.4 Three-Dimensional Characterization

Ultimately, a reader has to decide whether features are integral to the characterization, i.e. informing the basic depiction or being discordant with it, or extraneous to the characterization, i.e. with a possible empathetic interpretation rather than being evaluative, or with details superfluous to the narrative or the strict depiction of character. Biography is a more capacious and miscellaneous genre than history but as a result has the potential for different interpretations. Other genres are far stricter in terms of intent and content. In terms of rhetoric, Cicero, for instance, is concerned with speechmaking in court; and even if he recommends amplitude of detail, he is still interested in efficiency towards a persuasive goal. Furthermore, formal poetry, such as

¹⁴⁸ *Aug.* 69.1.4-11.

¹⁴⁹ *Aug.* 69.2.1-8.

Latin love elegy, can be argued to be a very efficient genre with no room for superfluities: the need to be concise and to maintain a strict form means that superfluous material has to be cut out.

However, genres like biography, and even the ancient novel, deal more regularly in this kind of superfluous detail. These genres allow for and even encourage a technique of excess, involving the inclusion of additional detail, whether for verification of the details, vividness, or a sense of character. Suetonius' inclusive approach to his *Lives* cannot avoid leaving open opportunities that suggest other possible readings, and needless detail that makes his characters more than the usual stereotypes. His *Lives* tend to tell the reader as much as possible about these emperors; and the result is that the contents spill over and transform a simplistic moral reading into a much richer set of characterizations that allows for the emergence of complexity and realism.

The third dimension of characterization moves beyond basic and dissonant depictions. It strives for a kind of 'realism'. The task of the historian, according to Lucian is to arrange events and elucidate them as vividly as possible, to the point that a man who hears it thinks that he is actually seeing what is being described.¹⁵⁰ This approach to is especially true for the biographer, whose job is to expressly create a lifelike literary portrait. As it happens, a comparison to painting is quite common.

Plutarch in the well-known opening to his *Alexander* says that painters achieve a likeness by focusing on the face and eyes where character reveals itself and as such he himself must attend to the signs of men's souls in order to depict the life.¹⁵¹ This reinforces the biographer's point that more can be learned about character from a phrase or joke than from battles.¹⁵² In his *Cimon*, Plutarch continues the painter's comparison in

¹⁵⁰ Luc. *Hist. Conscr.* 51.

¹⁵¹ Plut. *Alex.* 1.3.

¹⁵² Plut. *Alex.* 1.2.

regards to depicting a person and makes the finer point that imperfections should neither be ignored nor emphasized, because one makes it ugly and the other makes it not representative of the likeness, and overall notes that human nature makes no character which is entirely good.¹⁵³ Character writing seemingly should show any and all aspects of a person, both good and bad, but literary techniques can push their representation and interpretation beyond the simple binary of good and evil into more realistic territory.

A sense of ‘realism’ can be interpreted by considering two modern concepts: Roland Barthes’ theory of the ‘Reality Effect’ and Christopher Gill’s distinction between ‘character’ and ‘personality’ viewpoints. Both, as it happens, neatly complement one another. Barthes’ idea of the reality effect is derived from the use of extraneous details, essentially detached from narrative purpose.¹⁵⁴ His theory may be usefully considered with texts from many different genres and periods. Barthes illustrates the reality effect through the seemingly irrelevant details in scenes described in the work of Flaubert and Jules Michelet and concludes his essay in saying that:

Flaubert’s barometer, Michelet’s little door finally say nothing but this: *we are the real*; it is the category of “the real” (and not its contingent contents) which is the signified; in other words, the very absence of the signified, to the advantage of the referent alone, becomes the signifier of realism: the *reality effect* is produced, the basis of that unavowed verisimilitude which forms the aesthetic of all the standard works of modernity.¹⁵⁵

The extra, perhaps gratuitous, details identified by Barthes can also create a reality effect in the characterization of an individual. As outlined in the beginning of this chapter, Gill’s definition of the ‘personality’ viewpoint does not aim to judge but rather understand ‘in an ethically neutral way’¹⁵⁶, or ‘with a response to people that is empathetic rather than

¹⁵³ Plut. *Cim.* 2.4-5.

¹⁵⁴ Barthes 1989: 141-142.

¹⁵⁵ Barthes 1989: 148. For the discussion of Flaubert and Michelet’s text see p. 141.

¹⁵⁶ Gill 1983: 470-471.

moral'.¹⁵⁷ Thus, our kind of 'realism' is derived from extraneous details stripped of structural and evaluative intent.

Ankersmit provides a necessary elaboration on Barthes theory for our purposes. He discusses a distinction in Barthes' work between *notations* and the *predictive*. Both have a relevancy when it comes to our understanding of characterization in literature, distinguishing extraneous detail from narrative purpose. In the following he states:

The reality of the past is an *effect* caused by a tension in and between historical texts. Barthes shows how in one of his novels Flaubert describes the room of his main character and mentions a pyramid of boxes and cases standing under a barometer. These kinds of details are called *notations* by Barthes; he contrasts them with the main outline of the story, which he labels *predictive*, probably because on this level we can make certain predictions about the development of the story... Barthes points out that a similar tension between prediction and notation can be demonstrated in the writing of history.¹⁵⁸

Barthes' *predictive* is associated with a larger framework of narrative and thematic significance in a similar way to Gill's 'character' definition being concerned with a person being judged evaluatively, 'as the possessor of good or bad qualities that merit praise or blame'.¹⁵⁹ Our primary interest though is in the synthesis of Barthes *notations* and Gill's 'personality'. As it relates to biography and Suetonius, Townend's 'Law of Biographical Relevance' is that a biography only includes information which helps us to understand the main character: it does not have to explain all the other facets of any situation.¹⁶⁰ This implies that everything in a biography contributes to our understanding of the subject. Therefore, that where apparently superfluous details are found, they should be considered as not just included for the sake of accuracy or completeness but as making the main character more real. Townend's point underpins the synthesis of Gill and Barthes. The first and second dimensions of characterization are for the most part concerned with

¹⁵⁷ Gill 1990: 2.

¹⁵⁸ Ankersmit 1994: 139-140. On *predictive* (Barthes 1989: 141-142) and on *notations* (Barthes 1989: 142).

¹⁵⁹ Gill 1983: 470-471.

¹⁶⁰ Townend 1967: 84.

evaluative aspects. The third dimension of characterization can thus achieve realism (of a sort) through empathetic, non-evaluative intent and especially, extraneous detail.

Details that can be understood as extraneous to characterization and thus conveying a sense of realism can be seen in Plutarch's *Alexander*. Whereas the biographer's usual purpose is devoted to understanding moral aspects of the character, here specific details relating to Alexander's movement and body have no specific moralizing aspect and serve purely to add realism to the figure. Alexander, we are told, was best represented in the statues by Lysippus and Alexander approved of him only. He accurately captured aspects unique to Alexander, namely the way he held his head and the glance of his eyes. The accuracy is further emphasized given that Plutarch makes the point that Apelles did not capture Alexander's complexion making it too dark whereas he was of a fair colour. In stressing accuracy, there is no focus on any moralizing aspects but rather verisimilitude. Adding to this, Plutarch goes on to mention a bodily aspect that is peculiar and specific to Alexander. It is said that a pleasant scent came off his skin, was around his mouth and body and filled his clothes. He even cites a reference in *Memoirs of Aristoxenus* to further the level of realism.¹⁶¹ Both how Alexander held himself and the smell of his body are the types of extraneous details that can be understood through the 'Reality Effect', as showing us a moment of characterization rooted in realism.

One of the most memorable and fascinating characters in ancient literature is Trimalchio. This high camp curiosity found in Petronius' *Satyrical* will prove himself useful for our purposes of delineating specifically realistic details. Trimalchio is generally

¹⁶¹ 'Τὴν μὲν οὖν ἰδέαν τοῦ σώματος οἱ Λυσίππειοι μάλιστα τῶν ἀνδριάντων ἐμφαίνουσιν, ὅφ' οὗ μόνου καὶ αὐτὸς ἠξίου πλάττεσθαι. καὶ γὰρ μάλιστα ἅ πολλοὶ τῶν διαδόχων ὕστερον καὶ τῶν φίλων ἀπεμιμοῦντο, τὴν τε ἀνάτασιν τοῦ ἀγένορος εἰς εὐόνημον ἠσυχὴν κεκλιμένου καὶ τὴν ὑγρότητα τῶν ὀμμάτων, διατετήρηκεν ἀκριβῶς ὁ τεχνίτης. Ἀπελλῆς δὲ γράφων τὸν κεραυνοφόρον οὐκ ἐμμύησατο τὴν χροῶν, ἀλλὰ φαιότερον καὶ πεπινωμένον ἐποίησεν. ἦν δὲ λευκός, ὡς φασι· ἡ δὲ λευκότης ἐπεφοίνισεν αὐτοῦ περὶ τὸ στήθος μάλιστα καὶ τὸ πρόσωπον. ὅτι δὲ τοῦ χρωτὸς ἠδιστον ἀπέπνει καὶ τὸ στόμα κατεῖχεν εὐωδία καὶ τὴν σάρκα πᾶσαν, ὥστε πληροῦσθαι τοὺς χιτωνίσκους, ἀνέγνωμεν ἐν ὑπομνήμασιν Ἀριστοξενείοις.' (Plut. *Alex.* 4.1-2).

set up as an irredeemably vulgar figure of fun. He is a curious blend of stereotypes some of which are recognizable from Theophrastus' *Characters* and observations of contemporary freedmen, or as Walsh puts it; 'Trimalchio is a combination of the literary and the observed.'¹⁶² However, there are some odd moments which seem not to reinforce this image exactly. These are things that suddenly make Trimalchio a more complex character: more sympathetic, and more real. These are the kinds of gratuitous detail that Barthes' theory draws our attention to.

The vulgar extravagance of Trimalchio is often complicated through the presence of motifs associated with superstition and death. For instance, the novel dish with the twelve signs of the Zodiac accompanied by appropriate morsels highlights not only Trimalchio's nouveau riche indulgence but also his interest in astrology, which ties in with his superstitious nature.¹⁶³ The dinner plays to the comedic element of the character, as it has been noted that it provides 'a framework for the derisive portrait of the host.'¹⁶⁴ It also stresses his personal fascination with astrology, which he displays later with his belief in the signs and the types of people who correspond to them.¹⁶⁵ However, this is morally freighted with superstition and echoes an established superstitious stereotype.¹⁶⁶ Trimalchio believes in his superstitions which were generally deprecated by the educated, among whom we should reckon the readers of Petronius, and so is still established as low brow by it rather than as sympathetic.

It is through the character's fixation with superstition and death, however, that we can see a clear example of a realistic detail in Barthes' terms. Trimalchio also has a water-

¹⁶² Walsh 1970: 133. Similarities with 'The Man of Petty Ambition' (Theophr. *Char.* 21) and even 'The Country Bumpkin' (Theophr. *Char.* 4) seem clear enough. See also the depiction of the freedman, Calvisius Sabinus (Sen. *Ep.* 27.5ff.). For a discussion of the comparisons between Petronius and Theophrastus, Seneca and Suetonius see Walsh 1970: 111-140.

¹⁶³ Petron. *Sat.* 35.1.1-5.1.

¹⁶⁴ Walsh 1970: 113.

¹⁶⁵ Petron. *Sat.* 39.6.1-13.2. Cf. Schmeling 2011: 127 ad 35.1-2.

¹⁶⁶ On the stereotype of the superstitious man see Theophr. *Char.* 16.

clock in his dining room and a trumpeter to let him know how long he has left to live ('*horologium in triclinio et bucinatorem habet subornatum, ut subinde sciat quantum de vita perdiderit*').¹⁶⁷ Schmeling quite rightly points out that the water-clock foreshadows three basic themes in the *Cena Trimalchionis*: *lautitiae*, time, and death.¹⁶⁸ However, thematic intent is not narrative purpose. Even though *lautitiae* has an evaluative element, it is not morally freighted in the same way as the excess and indulgence of the zodiac dinner. His obsession with death is bizarre but it is difficult to class as vulgar; and the water-clock and trumpeter are more disquieting than anything else. They appear without a moralizing character purpose, unlike the dinner with the zodiac signs. The water-clock and the trumpeter provide an empathetic view through superfluous detail adding realism to the portrayal and further complicates an already complicated character.

All three dimensions of characterization emerge throughout Suetonius' *De vita Caesarum*. Although his representation of Titus is ideal for illustrating a baseline characterization, one passage also demonstrates the interaction of all three dimensions.

armorum et equitandi peritissimus, Latine Graeceque uel in orando uel in fingendis poematibus promptus et facilis ad extemporalitatem usque; sed ne musicae quidem rudis, ut qui cantaret et psalleret iucunde scienterque. e pluribus comperi, notis quoque excipere uelocissime solitum, cum amanuensibus suis per ludum iocumque certantem, imitarique chirographa quaecumque uidisset, ac saepe profiteri maximum falsarium esse potuisse.

Skilful in arms and horsemanship, he made speeches and wrote verses in Latin and Greek with ease and readiness, and even off-hand. He was besides not unacquainted with music, but sang and played the harp agreeably and skilfully. I have heard from many sources that he used also to write shorthand with great speed and would amuse himself by playful contests with his secretaries; also that he could imitate any handwriting that he had ever seen and often declared that he might have been the prince of forgers.¹⁶⁹

The first dimension of straightforward characterization presents Titus in a positive light given that he excels both physically, with weapons and horse riding, and intellectually,

¹⁶⁷ Petron. *Sat.* 26.9.2-10.1.

¹⁶⁸ Schmeling 2011: 85 ad 26.9.

¹⁶⁹ *Tit.* 3.2.1-9, trans. Rolfe

with the natural ease in which he spoke and wrote in Greek and Latin. This is further embellished by his proficiency with more leisurely activities like singing and musicianship. The second dimension of character dissonance is at least acknowledged in the possibility that his imitation of handwriting could have led him to become a great forger.¹⁷⁰ It has been noted that ‘Titus’ copying ability is an odd detail to bring out’.¹⁷¹ Suetonius makes clear the evaluative element in its criminal connotation both here and elsewhere in the collection.¹⁷² Of course, given that it is positioned as a hypothetical, this is not explicit character dissonance. Nevertheless, it is line with Suetonius’ specific method of teasing such things in the *Titus*; as with his bad reputation (leading to people thinking he would be another Nero), it proves to be meritless. Although there is no manifest chiaroscuro to Titus’ character, Suetonius’ method shows in blueprint how such discordance works in his other biographies. The third dimension of ‘realism’ is shown in the mention that he engaged in contests with his secretaries. Like with Trimalchio: it is a bizarre detail with no apparent purpose, and yet a memorable one. Its verisimilitude is perhaps even embellished by Suetonius himself vouching for the sources (*‘e pluribus comperi’*). Although this emphasizes his unique skill and speed at shorthand, the detail itself carries a certain quiddity and comes with so little explicit evaluative meaning that it can be understood as extraneous and thus providing a sense of realism to Titus’ character.

¹⁷⁰ Jones and Milns speculated that this skill would have come in useful for Titus at three points in the Flavian *Lives*: Otho’s letter, a suspected forgery, to Vespasian to save Rome (*Vesp.* 6); dealing with imperial administration on his father’s behalf and a disloyal speech used as grounds to kill Aulus Caecina (*Tit.* 6); Domitian’s suspicion that Vespasian’s will was tampered with (*Dom.* 2) (Jones and Milns 2002: 95 ad 3).

¹⁷¹ Murphy 1991: 3786.

¹⁷² Fitting though it may have been, Claudius all too susceptibly considered the extreme suggestion that a man found guilty of forgery should have his hands cut off (*Claud.* 15.2). Suetonius also accounts for various methods of preventing forgeries (*Ner.* 17).

1.5 We Need to Talk About Claudius

The three dimensions of characterization mapped out in this chapter are contextualized by both broad selections from ancient literature and illustrative passages from Suetonius' *De vita Caesarum*. It has shown how techniques of ancient character writing can establish baseline characterizations through an emphasis on appearance (i.e. dress or physical features) and behaviour (i.e. recurring patterns of conduct which become emblematic). Established character can then be challenged and subverted by way of dissonant moments and qualities. Discordance can manifest between the external and internal person or in the difference between their public and private life. Finally, characterization can transcend both these dimensions and approach a lifelike aspect when considered in conjunction with Barthes' idea of the 'Reality Effect' and Gill's definition of 'personality'. Extraneous details which serve no explicit narrative purpose and have no overt moralizing intent can be used to understand this sense of realism.

The next step of this thesis is to use the three dimensions of characterization as lenses through which to view an individual Caesar. The most suitable case study is that of Suetonius' *Claudius*. Branded as a fool, made emperor through circumstance, and innately an historian; Claudius is proof that Suetonius does indeed create complex characters.

CHAPTER TWO

A Not-So-Obsolete Man:

The Complex Characterization of Claudius

*Sigh then, or frown, but leave (as in despair)
Motive and end and moral in the air;
Nice contradiction between fact and fact
Will make the whole read human and exact.*

(Robert Graves, 'The Devil's Advice to Story-Tellers', *The Complete Poems*, 2003: 354)

2.1 Introduction

Suetonius' *Claudius* demonstrates that the Roman biographer was capable of creating a complex character. The emperor Claudius can be treated as a case study, that uses the three dimensions of characterization set out in the previous chapter, to examine the techniques used by Suetonius that allow for the emergence of complexity. The first dimension of Claudius' appearance and behaviour offers up an initial impression of baseline characteristics which emphasize his physical and mental infirmities. He is presented as a dull-witted man, with uncouth mannerisms, limited physical capabilities, and vulgar dispositions. Such a portrait is consistent with the representation of him elsewhere in literature, namely Seneca's *Apocolocyntosis*. 'Claudius the fool' is a character sketch centred on his idiocy and inadequacies and neatly punctuated by the anecdote of his rise to imperial rule. This portrayal is elaborated on through the way in which he was so easily manipulated, specifically by his wives and freedmen, and how he was often the butt of jokes. However, this is a basic character foundation. Greater nuance and complexity emerge in the biography when this is subverted.

The second dimension of characterization can be seen in the *Claudius* during dissonant character moments. Claudius' claim that he feigned stupidity as a survival tactic raises the issue that he might not be entirely what he seems on the surface, and Suetonius'

inclusion of this aspect has the effect that the reader is no longer able to reconcile the earlier picture with the later one. The *Life* does in fact offer significant examples that oppose and subvert Claudius' reputation as a fool. His seeming physical and mental limitations strike a very discordant note when viewed in conjunction with his areas of competency as emperor and when fulfilling other roles. As emperor it is mentioned that he showed great care in dealing with the state. It is also during his consulship and censorship that we are presented with specific examples that challenge and refute his dim-witted depiction. Eccentric though he may be in executing those duties, he is often shrewd, wise, and abides by his own internal logic and sense of fair-mindedness.

The third dimension of characterization relates to a realistic portrayal of Claudius which reveals greater complexity. His personal and repeatedly emphasized interest in history writing is an intellectual endeavour, and an attempt to enter public life, which undermines the initial foolish interpretation. However, Claudius' interest in history writing produces realistic details through the sheer extent of the catalogue of works mentioned by Suetonius, and these serve as the kind of extraneous details that can be read with Barthes' theory of the 'Reality Effect'. Finally, the case for Claudius as a complex character will be made by Augustus himself. Letters from Augustus to Livia, quoted early in the biography, clearly delineate the first and second dimensions as they contribute to his complex characterization. However, Claudius' self-awareness and attempts at self-management, while dealing with evaluative traits, provide moments of interior insight that can be read more empathetically (and closer to Gill's definition of 'personality'); the reader has an opportunity to understand, rather than strictly judge, Claudius. Arguably, in quoting the letters, Suetonius is making explicit at the start of this *Life* the complexity of the main character: a hint that we need to look beyond his reputation as a fool, but also an admission that the real Claudius is elusive.

2.2 That Fool Claudius

2.2.1 Unfinished by Nature

When Claudius is deemed to be every class of fool, he is a stock character in the most fundamental way. His image is built around a singular conceit and elaborated on through a variety of examples. For instance, his disabilities are stated from the outset of his youth and follow him through to manhood, giving rise to the question of whether he can conduct himself properly. These aspects are integral to shaping Claudius' one-dimensional (baseline) characterization for the reader.

infans autem relictus a patre ac per omne fere pueritiae atque adulescentiae tempus uariis et tenacibus morbis conflictatus est, adeo ut animo simul et corpore hebetato ne progressa quidem aetate ulli publico priuatoque muneri habilis existimaretur. diu atque etiam post tutelam receptam alieni arbitrii et sub paedagogo fuit; quem barbarum et olim superiumentarium ex industria sibi appositum, ut se quibuscumque de causis quam saeuissime coaceret, ipse quodam libello conqueritur... et togae uirilil die circa mediam noctem sine sollemni officio lectica in Capitolium latus est.

He lost his father when he was still an infant, and throughout almost the whole course of his childhood and youth he suffered so severely from various obstinate disorders that the vigour of both his mind and his body was dulled, and even when he reached the proper age he was not thought capable of any public or private business. For a long time, even after he reached the age of independence, he was in a state of pupillage and under a guardian, of whom he himself makes complaint in a book of his, saying that he was a barbarian and a former chief of muleteers, put in charge of him for the express purpose of punishing him with all possible severity for any cause whatever... and on the day when he assumed the gown of manhood he was taken in a litter to the Capitol about midnight without the usual escort.¹⁷³

Claudius' baseline depiction, as established here in his youth, is especially negative and thus couched in terms and imagery that are firmly evaluative, per Gill's use of 'character'.¹⁷⁴ The consequence of such physical and mental disabilities was that others saw him as incapable of conducting public or private business and as such could not

¹⁷³ *Claud.* 2.1.5-2.9, trans. Rolfe. In contrast to this account of bad health, Suetonius notes that Claudius had excellent health when emperor, save for heartburn that drove him to suicidal thoughts (*Claud.* 31).

¹⁷⁴ Gill 1983: 470.

function as a normal person. The idealized portrait of Drusus (*Claud.* 1), which prefaces this section, suggests that his development was hindered by the lack of paternal exemplar.

Claudius needing to be supervised even after reaching the age of independence shows that he lacks competence, personal autonomy, and is perhaps not a fully realized person. His tutor being a barbarian and a former chief of muleteers (*superiumentarius*) is suggestive of the imperial family's general disregard for Claudius.¹⁷⁵ It also suggests a slyly satirical picture of the future emperor as a beast of burden on the rough end of a whipping, given that his tutor 'had controlled menial workers or animals and so by analogy' Claudius is just like them.¹⁷⁶ While this is consistent with the biography's basic presentation of Claudius, and with other satirical accounts of the emperor (e.g. in Seneca), it is striking that the characterizing point of view is momentarily shifted to the main subject of the *Life*. Here, it is Claudius himself ('*ipse quodam libello conqueritur*')¹⁷⁷ who includes the detail that his tutor was a former muleteer, presumably to show that he was unfairly mistreated. Claudius' complaint is that he should not have been treated as a dumb animal but as a human being. Even as this theme of Claudius as subhuman is being established, therefore, the careful reader can observe hints that challenge this view – and must decide whether to side with Claudius' complaint or with conventional wisdom.

This conventional wisdom is reinforced by the claim that Claudius had to assume the gown of manhood under the cover of darkness and without an escort. This contradicts the normal practice of it taking place publicly, in the morning, and accompanied by

¹⁷⁵ Given that tutors were normally Greek, *barbarum* suggests that Claudius' was not (Hurley 2001: 69 ad 2.2). This is perhaps indicative of Claudius' own lower status in his family. The term *superiumentarius* is a superintendent of cart-drivers and might be most idiomatically translated as 'slave-driver'. Most likely Claudius was using it metaphorically but the implication that he himself is a beast cannot be avoided. It seems this is the only use of the term in literature. On the term see Letta 2012: 71ff. Hurley interprets it as 'one in charge of mule drivers' and she provides another possible reading in 'Spare [additional] muleteer', which is even socially lower (Hurley 2001: 69 ad 2.2). Cf. *OLD* s.v. 'superiumentarius'.

¹⁷⁶ Hurley 2001: 69-70 ad 2.2.

¹⁷⁷ It is most likely that *libello* refers to Claudius' autobiography (Hurley 2001: 70 ad 2.2), although there is the curious suggestion that it could refer to a book of poetry (Letta 2012: 71-78).

friends and families to the Forum; even the litter was reserved for invalids or the elderly which suggest Claudius' difficulty walking or an attempt to hide it.¹⁷⁸ It is bitterly ironic that taking the toga is supposed to mark Claudius' entry into public life and to be a public event, especially for a member of Augustus' family. And yet here he is doing it in a litter under cover of darkness. A public event becomes a clandestine operation. This asserts the theme of Claudius' desire to enter public life and his supposed unsuitability for it. All of these elements are integral to forming his baseline character for the reader as it wanders from him being an incapable fool to being something almost unnatural.

The *Life* is not wholly constructed in such basic terms nor is it built on nearly so straightforward concepts of virtue and vice. As Andrew Wallace-Hadrill notes, the 'emphasis is on what an odd sort of man he was'.¹⁷⁹ Suetonius' account stresses, rather intensely, just what an oddity Claudius was:

Mater Antonia portentum eum hominis dictitabat, nec absolutum a natura, sed tantum incohatum; ac si quem socordiae argueret, stultiorem aiebat filio suo Claudio. avia Augusta pro despectissimo semper habuit, non affari nisi rarissime, non monere nisi acerbo et breui scripto aut per internuntios solita. soror Livilla cum audisset quandoque imperaturum, tam iniquam et tam indignam sortem p. R. palam et clare detestata est.

His mother Antonia often called him "a monster of a man, not finished but merely begun by Dame Nature"; and if she accused anyone of dullness, she used to say that he was "a bigger fool than her son Claudius." His grandmother Augusta always treated him with the utmost contempt, very rarely speaking to him; and when she admonished him, she did so in short, harsh letters, or through messengers. When his sister Livilla heard that he would one day be emperor, she openly and loudly prayed that the Roman people might be spared so cruel and undeserved a fortune.¹⁸⁰

This basic image of him, as something unnatural, is further embellished when Suetonius shifts the characterizing points of view. Here he is indirectly portrayed by his mother, grandmother, and sister. The sentences begin *mater*, *avia*, *soror*: Suetonius himself is

¹⁷⁸ Hurley 2001: 70-71 ad 2.2.

¹⁷⁹ Wallace-Hadrill 1995: 150.

¹⁸⁰ *Claud.* 3.2.1-9, trans. Rolfe.

emphasizing all these female relations and not just the names but the roles.¹⁸¹ The Livia sentence is quite extreme given the use of two superlatives (*'despectissimo'* and *'rarissime'*) and that she only communicates with him by letter or by messenger: she clearly cannot bear to be around him. As the most respectable member of the family, she seems the most offended. Furthermore, this sets up her role in the letter exchange with Augustus, which is discussed at the end of this chapter. The negative depiction is further intensified given that *'detestata est'*, while expressing abhorrence, is also to call down a solemn curse: Livilla execrates him before the heavens.¹⁸² These women describe Claudius in a vituperative fashion, but none of this is directly stated by Suetonius himself.

In fact, there is a movement here which becomes increasingly negative. Although she at least acknowledges Claudius, his mother sees him in monstrous terms and as nothing more than the lazy handiwork of nature. Not only is he missing his father's exemplarity, but he is openly rejected by his mother (and he is indirectly the exact opposite of his brother, Germanicus). The sharp epigram attributed to his mother, that anyone being a dullard was a bigger fool than Claudius, allows Suetonius to encapsulate Claudius' stereotyped image in a simple turn of phrase. His grandmother then does not acknowledge Claudius as a person or relative at all. Evidently, in not having to contend with matriarchal influence, like the kind Livia exerts over Tiberius and Agrippina over Nero, he is deemed to have no potential at all.¹⁸³ She is refusing to acknowledge that he is even a person of any kind. Finally, Livilla openly declares him an abomination and closes out the passage with a piece of narrative irony given that his sister laments the cruel fate of Rome should Claudius become emperor.

¹⁸¹ Indeed, the technique of starting each sentence with the family member's name conveys the rest of the family seeing him as a 'problem' (Hurley 2001: 71 ad 3.2).

¹⁸² Cf. *OLD* s.v. 'detestor'.

¹⁸³ *Tib.* 50; *Ner.* 9.

Claudius is shown from the outset to be considered as something even less than human. Regarding Antonia's comment, Hurley notes that, like, '*monstrum, portentum* can refer to a creature not wholly human, a man with bestial elements.'¹⁸⁴ The issue of inhumanity in a character is not entirely isolated in *De vita Caesarum*. The *Caligula* raises it in a transitional sentence where the focus shifts from the subject being emperor to monster, '*Hactenus quasi de principe, reliqua ut de monstro narranda sunt.*'¹⁸⁵ This comparison though is a structural technique that emphasizes the negative portrait of Caligula. For Claudius the point is to set up his physical and mental deficits. The image of Claudius being borderline inhuman, as we will see, extends into the satirical tradition of Seneca's *Apocolocyntosis*. Suetonius' underlying characterizations are to a degree in tune with it.

The earliest passages of the *Life* are especially firm in establishing his baseline characterization; the fool. However, Suetonius find ways to extend and elaborate on this depiction. Physical appearance and mannerisms are loaded with characterizing details integral to underpinning the first dimension but also hinting at the possibility of dissonance in the second dimension. Claudius' physical portrait is especially vivid:

Auctoritas dignitasque formae non defuit et ueterum stanti uel sedenti ac praecipue quiescenti, nam et prolixo nec exili corpore erat et specie canitieque pulchra, opimis ceruicibus; ceterum et ingredientem destituebant poplites minus firmi, et remisse quid uel serio agentem multa dehonestabant: risus indecens, ira turpior spumante rictu, umentibus naribus, praeterea linguae titubantia caputque cum semper tum in quantulocumque actu uel maxime tremulum.

He possessed majesty and dignity of appearance, but only when he was standing still or sitting, and especially when he was lying down; for he was tall but not slender, with an attractive face, becoming white hair, and a full neck. But when he walked, his weak knees gave way under him and he had many disagreeable traits both in his lighter moments and when he was engaged in business; his laughter was unseemly and his anger still more disgusting, for he would foam at

¹⁸⁴ Hurley 2001: 72 ad 3.2. Cf. '*Saeuum et sanguinarium natura fuisse, magnis minimisque apparuit rebus.*' (*Claud.* 34.1.1-2). Claudius' bloodthirstiness might also be read in line with this bestial suggestion rather than the more overt tyrannical connotations.

¹⁸⁵ *Calig.* 22.1.1-2.

the mouth and trickle at the nose; he stammered besides and his head was very shaky at all times, but especially when he made the least exertion.¹⁸⁶

Here the characterizing point of view is with Suetonius and the passage aims to paint Claudius in unflattering terms, using an initial hint of dissonance between appearance and manner to further reinforce his inadequacies. *Auctoritas* as authority, rather than majesty, is a quality appropriate to public figures and politicians. This is further embellished by *dignitas* and no doubt aided by positive descriptions of his pleasant (*'pulchra'*) face and white hair, similar to what we have seen in chapter one. However, he could only look the part by remaining statuesque. When Claudius moves, he gives the game away immediately and the list of unpleasant traits which follow re-establish the link between appearance and character. The use of the verb *dehonestabant*, more specifically meaning to dishonour,¹⁸⁷ is very pointed in a potentially public figure, especially one who wants to follow the *cursus honorum*. This is not a truly dissonant moment given that it firmly underscores Claudius' one-dimensional portrayal, but it does briefly challenge the reader's perception of him. There is no formal use of physiognomy here, but it does betray the widespread assumption that people should be what they appear to be.

As Hurley noted, Suetonius follows the concept of physiognomy 'only so far as the assumption that a man fit to be emperor should display the *auctoritas* and *dignitas* of one' and beyond these examples 'the uncouth details that follow overwhelm this generalized positive sense'.¹⁸⁸ The fact that this sense of authority and dignity was achieved by neither speaking nor moving directly undercuts such qualities. As Fowler says in his paper on the idea of the *aurea mediocritas*, to 'be – or try to be – Roman meant

¹⁸⁶ *Claud.* 30.1.1-31.1.1, trans. Rolfe. Cf. '*idem Claudium uidisse se dicet iter facientem 'non passibus aequis'*.' (Sen. *Apoc.* 1.2.4-5) and '*et ille quidem animam ebulliit, et ex eo desiit uiuere uideri.*' (Sen. *Apoc.* 4.2.5).

¹⁸⁷ Cf. *OLD* s.v. 'dehonesto'.

¹⁸⁸ Hurley 2001: 200 ad 30.

in a sense to become like a statue: a monument of *gravitas*, *constantia*, and *auctoritas*'.¹⁸⁹ Claudius resembles such a monument in the opening line and the subsequent mannerisms undercut this ideal of a person. Whereas Titus (in chapter one), for example, looked and carried himself like an emperor from a young age, Claudius looks like anything but. There is a subtle point that Claudius actually *does* look like an emperor, as long as he is standing still. The problem is that he instantly destroys the effect when he moves; and he cannot stop moving. Indeed, the use of '*maxime tremulum*' (referring to his head) perhaps neatly underlines that the positive features are indeed 'shaky' at best, given that it suggests instability through a sense of continual motion. Whereas the portrait of Catiline (see chapter one) achieves some complexity because on the surface Catiline is a true Roman gentleman, but not underneath, Claudius can only seem to be an emperor in statue form. He immediately reveals his flaws as soon as he is in front of you. It is not his mind that undermines his appearance, but his body and behaviour.

A distinct lack of physical control and composure is shown with his knees giving way, having an unflattering laugh, frothing at the mouth, and running at the nose when angry along with a stammer and shaking his head.¹⁹⁰ These mannerisms generally align with other depictions, showing Claudius as a recognizable type.¹⁹¹ Suetonius crafts Claudius' appearance and mannerisms with idiosyncratic details while stating explicitly that they are to be interpreted as inappropriate, unpleasant, and disgusting. If Claudius could only have stood still, he might have passed for a proper Roman. But *everything*

¹⁸⁹ Fowler 2007: 7.

¹⁹⁰ Also, the mention of anger is to show its specific effect on his appearance, and difficulty with secretion is a trait associated with victims of cerebral palsy (Hurley 2001: 201 ad 30).

¹⁹¹ *Claud.* 30.1.1-31.1.1. Cf. '*idem Claudium uidisse se dicet iter facientem 'non passibus aequis'.*' (Sen. *Apoc.* 1.2.4-5); '*et ille quidem animam ebullit, et ex eo desiit uiuere uideri.*' (Sen. *Apoc.* 4.2.5); '*minus ergo nocens erit Agrippinae / boletus, siquidem unius praecordia pressit / ille senis tremulumque caput descendere iussit / in caelum et longa manantia labra saliuu*' (Juv. 6. 620-624).

betrays his incompetence and lack of self-control. It is no surprise to learn of his supposed mental deficiencies because they are entirely of a piece with his physical failings.

This image evidently fits in with a familiar portrayal of the emperor in contemporary Rome. Saller notes that ‘anecdotes portraying Claudius as a buffoon seem to have been more a product of a stereotype which circulated in the Roman aristocracy than an accurate assessment of his character.’¹⁹² Seneca’s *Apocolocyntosis* presents Claudius as unformed, albeit with a heavy satirical bent. Again, Claudius’ reputation as a fool precedes him with the proverb of being born a fool or a king, brought into play: ‘*ego scio me liberum factum, ex quo suum diem obiit ille, qui uerum prouerbum fecerat, aut regem aut fatuum nasci oportere.*’¹⁹³ What moves the characterization towards his being unformed is the reference to the belief that astrologers thought he would never be born, ‘*et tamen non est mirum si errant et horam eius nemo nouit: nemo enim unquam illum natum putauit.*’¹⁹⁴ This reinforces the portrayal of Claudius as something less than human.

His arrival in heaven prompts more derogatory depictions which emphasize a lack of humanity emblematic in the odd physical behaviour a reader of this text would expect:

What happened in heaven you shall hear: for proof please apply to my informant. Word comes to Jupiter that a stranger had arrived, a man well set up, pretty grey (*bene canum*); he seemed to be threatening something, for he wagged his head ceaselessly (*assidue enim caput mouere*); he dragged the right foot (*pedem dextrum trahere*). They asked him what nation he was of; he answered something in a confused mumbling voice (*perturbato sono et uoce confusa*): his language they did not understand. He was no Greek and no Roman, nor of any known race (*nec ullius gentis notae*). On this Jupiter bids Hercules go and find out what country he comes from; you see Hercules had travelled over the whole world, and might be expected to know all the nations in it. Then Hercules, the first glimpse he got, was really much taken aback, being aware that he hadn’t yet even by then seen all the monsters in the world that he might be afraid of; when he saw this new kind of object, with its extraordinary gait (*insolitum incessum*), and the voice of no terrestrial beast (*uocem nullius terrestris animalis*), but such as you might hear in the leviathans of the deep, hoarse and inarticulate, he thought his thirteenth labour had come upon him.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹² Saller 1980: 79. Cf. Momigliano 1961: 78-79.

¹⁹³ Sen. *Apoc.* 1.1.5-6.

¹⁹⁴ Sen. *Apoc.* 3.2.3-5.

¹⁹⁵ Sen. *Apoc.* 5.1.4-4.1, trans. Rouse.

Claudius clearly cuts a recognizable figure given that Seneca's depiction is in line with Suetonius in various ways. Even his appealing attributes of respectable size and white hair are consistent. The shaking of his head, the dragging of his foot, and his unintelligible speech are all recognizable traits. While Seneca's satirical intent needs to be acknowledged, the portrait is still focused on a distinctly inhuman presence. Presenting him as not belonging to the Greeks, Romans, or a race of any kind is particularly demeaning. Claudius is defined wholly by his monstrous physicality and inhuman behaviour, and it is punctuated by Hercules thinking the emperor is a monster worthy of a thirteenth labour. Despite the admittedly funny exaggeration, this was meant to be recognizably Claudius. He is less than functional and less than human.

Claudius' presentation, in *De vita Caesarum*, as a fool is perhaps ideally related in the anecdote about his accession as emperor. This moment allows the reader to consider the intricate presentation of Claudius in basic and established character traits. In the following, Suetonius stresses the role of fortune and freak circumstance in elevating Claudius while playing to his baseline characterization of a fool:

Per haec ac talia maxima aetatis parte transacta quinquagesimo anno imperium cepit quantumuis mirabili casu. exclusus inter ceteros ab insidiatoribus Gai, cum quasi secretum eo desiderante turbam submouerent, in diaetam, cui nomen est Hermaeum, recesserat; neque multo post rumore caedis exterritus prorepsit ad solarium proximum interque praetenta foribus uela se abdidit. latentem discurrens forte gregarius miles, animaduersis pedibus, [e] studio sciscitandi quisnam esset, ad[co]gnouit extractumque et prae metu ad genua sibi addidentem imperatorem salutauit.

Having spent the greater part of his life under these and like circumstances, he became emperor in his fiftieth year by a remarkable freak of fortune. When the assassins of Gaius shut out the crowd under pretence that the emperor wished to be alone, Claudius was ousted with the rest and withdrew to an apartment called the Hermaeum; and a little later, in great terror at the news of the murder, he stole away to a balcony hard by and hid among the curtains which hung before the door. As he cowered there, a common soldier, who was prowling about at random, saw his feet, intending to ask who he was, pulled him out and recognized him; and when Claudius fell at his feet in terror, he hailed him as emperor.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁶ *Claud.* 10.1.1-2.5, trans. Rolfe. Curiously, the emperor Vitellius was discovered in a similar fashion but fate only had capture, abuse, mockery, and ultimately death in store (*Vit.* 17-18).

Claudius becoming the emperor is presented as a freak act of chance. The emphasis is on the miraculous circumstances of his accession (*'mirabili casu'*) and not his intentions.¹⁹⁷ Donna Hurley points out 'the notion that a member of the guard just 'happened to be running past' (*'discurrens forte'*) is central to the idea that C[laudius]. 's elevation was a fortuitous accident.'¹⁹⁸ She goes on to say that anyone hoping to claim the principate in this situation would need to appear somewhat reluctant but ironically the image of a reluctant emperor 'played directly into the portrayal of him as passive, fearful, and undignified.'¹⁹⁹ This all adds to Suetonius' depiction of Claudius as a haphazard character, emphasizing his role as a fool. Whereas other emperors get their power from their own will, Claudius gets his wholly by accident and by a ludicrous chain of circumstances in which his own stupidity and lack of foresight features heavily. If how one conducts themselves in specific situations is indicative of character, then there is a purpose in Claudius' accession being marked by having to be pulled from behind a curtain not just by a soldier but by pure good fortune. This forms a consistent thread of characterization integral to the reader seeing him as an inferior figure who has no control over his circumstances.

2.2.2 Freedmen & Wives

The stock presentation of Claudius as a fool is shown through more intricate techniques that work in conjunction with appearance and mannerisms. The influence exerted over Claudius by others points to how easily he can be manipulated. In relation

¹⁹⁷ 'S.'s own assessment of the events that brought C. power. With Augustus and Tiberius, the emphasis was on wills (4.7, 6.2) ...' (Hurley 2001: 95 ad 10.1).

¹⁹⁸ Hurley 2001: 96-97 ad 10.2.

¹⁹⁹ Hurley 2001: 94 ad 10.

to the biographical elements which supplement traditional historical narratives, Christopher Pelling posits the idea of ‘bio-structuring’, namely that ‘sometimes powerful subordinates become important to the narrative strategy, so that it is reasonable to talk of a Germanicus-phase, then a Sejanus-phase of Tiberius, a Messalina-phase of Tiberius, a Seneca-phase of Nero, and so on. This is what I mean by the unpleasing word ‘biostructure’.’²⁰⁰ When applied to biography it may take the emphasis away from the subject. In the *Claudius*, it highlights an emphasis on the influence of freedmen and wives. These figures having Claudius’ ear naturally reflects on him in unflattering terms. He has tiered favourites with each group receiving increasing and more personal contact. Posides, the eunuch, receives the headless spear from Claudius’ British triumph and Felix receives commands and the province of Judaea along with the associated benefits. Harpocras was given the privilege of using a litter and putting on public entertainments.²⁰¹ Riding in a litter, if one was healthy, could be interpreted as effeminate but also as a mark of distinction.²⁰² That a freedman has it plays to both for negative effect.

Claudius offering questionable rewards to social inferiors reinforce his own foolish *persona*. Polybius, as his literary adviser, extends the freedman’s influence even further into Claudius’ life and reminds us why he was initially viewed as not being capable of conducting business like a normal person. Finally, it is capped by the indulgent benefits bestowed on Narcissus and Pallas, especially the insignia of praetor and quaestor, and his allowing them to amass, and embezzle, wealth. After Claudius bemoaned low state funds, it prompts the joke that he would have enough money and more if these two freedmen were his partners.²⁰³ Claudius lacks any awareness of the extent to which his money is (supposedly) being siphoned off by his freedmen. There is a distinct impression

²⁰⁰ Pelling 1997a: 118.

²⁰¹ *Claud.* 28.1.1-1.5.

²⁰² Hurley 2001: 193 ad 28.

²⁰³ *Claud.* 28.1.5-14.

that these honours were cheapened in Claudius' giving and their receiving. The stock portrait of women and freedmen as social climbers with undue influence is in part aimed at them, as undesirable figures in politics; but it also serves to characterize Claudius.

Claudius is depicted as somewhat weak-willed but more obviously easy to manipulate. The status of freedmen, in this instance, is a curious thing. Whereas slaves did not have a *persona* in any legal sense, freedman (*libertus*) was a legal status which acted as a buffer between master and slave.²⁰⁴ These passages indicate and reinforce the stereotype of freedmen as social climbers. Although a less than flattering depiction of freedmen may well represent social and cultural stereotyping, in terms of playing roles Claudius is depicted not as an emperor but as a slave to his freedmen (and also his wives).

his, ut dixi, uxoribusque addictus, non principem [se], sed ministrum egit, compendio cuiusque horum uel etiam studio aut libidine honores exercitus impunitates supplicia largitus est, et quidem insciens plerumque et ignarus.

Wholly under the control of these and of his wives, as I have said, he played the part, not a prince, but of a servant, lavishing honours, the command of armies, pardons or punishments, according to the interests of each of them, or even their wish or whim; and that too for the most part in ignorance and blindly.²⁰⁵

Claudius' inferiority is shown not only in playing the servant rather than the master when passing out all manner of honours and offices as to please the wishes of the recipient but in being ignorant while doing so. The most telling example of being blindly influenced is when Claudius signed a dowry at the marriage of his wife Messalina to her lover Silius, thinking the marriage to be a put on to get around bad omens that threatened the emperor himself.²⁰⁶ This offers a broader perspective on how Claudius' one-dimensional portrayal is set out.

²⁰⁴ Mouritsen 2011: 284. On the *Persona* see Mauss (1985) and on freedmen in general see Mouritsen (2011).

²⁰⁵ *Claud.* 29.1-5, trans. Rolfe. As Hurley points out the 'his' refers to the freedmen (Hurley 2001: 195 ad 29.1). For further points of favour towards freedmen see *Claud.* 29, which includes the influence of his wives, and also *Claud.* 24.1.4-2.1.

²⁰⁶ 'nam illud omnem fidem excesserit quod nuptiis, quas Messalina cum adultero Silio fecerat, tabellas dotis et ipse consignauerit, inductus, quasi de industria simularentur ad auertendum transferendumque periculum, quod imminere ipsi per quaedam ostenta portenderetur.' (*Claud.* 29.3.1-6).

The characterizing point of view here is explicitly Suetonius (*‘ut dixi’*) and the biographer is specifically using the excessive influence that other figures in the narrative have over Claudius to embellish his baseline. This refers back to an earlier passage where after listing positive, statesmanlike aspects of his reign, Suetonius directly states that almost everything Claudius did was due to the influence of his wives and freedmen.²⁰⁷ These two instances demonstrate that Suetonius is speaking in his own voice on this point and making his own position on Claudius clear. Therefore, it is integral to Claudius’ baseline depiction of someone who is unformed and unfit for everyday business and lacking in personal autonomy. However, as this chapter will go on to show, Claudius’ characterization is not just limited to Suetonius’ stance and the biographer provides more than enough material for greater complexity to emerge for the reader.

Both freedman and wife also use dreams and omens to carry out their machinations, in the process revealing a loss of personality and autonomy for Claudius. Dreams are a frequent topic of Suetonius’ collection, with their use and interpretation in ancient literature having a wider fascination.²⁰⁸ However, it is the lack thereof in the *Claudius* that draws our attention. In an offhand comment, Momigliano pointed to the curiosity that Suetonius’ Claudius does not dream.²⁰⁹ The passage in question relates anecdotes to show Claudius as being quick to take precautions and vengeance. One man took the emperor aside claiming to have had a dream of him being assassinated only to later point out his opponent with the result being the latter man’s prompt execution.²¹⁰

²⁰⁷ *‘sed et haec et cetera totumque adeo ex parte magna principatum non tam suo quam uxorum libertorumque arbitrio administravit, talis ubique plerumque, qualem esse eum aut expediret illis aut liberet’* (*Claud.* 25.5.8-12). Although this would seemingly deny Claudius credit for competent features of his rule, the cumulative narrative force of *Claud.* 20-25 nevertheless shows him in a positive light and allows the reader to have an alternative interpretation.

²⁰⁸ For example: predicting victory (*Jul.* 7.2.1-5), reliability of his dreams and others (*Aug.* 91.1.1-2.8), predicting death (*Tib.* 74.1.1-4; *Ner.* 46.1.1-2.2; *Dom.* 15.3.1-3), role of Fortune (*Galb.* 4.3.1-8; 18.2.1-11); On dreams, see Harris (2009); Price (1986); Pelling (1997b); Bowersock 1994: 77-98.

²⁰⁹ Momigliano 1987: 169.

²¹⁰ *Claud.* 37.1.3-2.1.

Suetonius follows up with an account of Narcissus and Messalina plotting the downfall of Appius Silanus.

quem cum Messalina et Narcissus conspirassent perdere, diuisis partibus alter ante lucem similis attonito patroni cubiculum inrupit, affirmans somniasse se uim ei ab Appio inlatam; altera in admirationem formata sibi quoque eandem speciem aliquot iam noctibus obuersari rettulit; nec multo post ex composito inrumpere Appius nuntiat, cui pridie ad id temporis ut adesset praeceptum erat, quasi plane repraesentaretur somnii fides, arcessi statim ac mori iussus est.

When Messalina and Narcissus had put their heads together to destroy him, they agreed on their parts and the latter rushed into his patron's bed-chamber before daybreak in pretended consternation, declaring that he had dreamed that Appius had made an attack on the emperor. Then Messalina, with assumed surprise, declared that she had had the same dream for several successive nights. A little later, as had been arranged, Appius, who had received orders the day before to come at that time, was reported to be forcing his way in, and as if were proof positive of the truth of the dream, his immediate accusation and death were ordered.²¹¹

That Claudius does not dream himself strips him of an internal life and interior mindset. He is not only reduced to an almost sub-stereotype character but is manipulated so easily as to reinforce the idea of him as being an incomplete person and lacking any autonomy. It is also worth noting the use of the passive in the final line above ('*arcessi statim ac mori iussus est*'): it is not even stated that Claudius gives the order (and he is not even named in this passage): the Latin strips him entirely of agency in this story too.

The characterization of Claudius as a slave to his wives and freedmen is consistent image and reiterated elsewhere in the collection.²¹² Claudius, however, is not the only Caesar shown to be susceptible to the influence of others; Galba and Vitellius are controlled by their inferiors too.²¹³ All three emperors being so easily manipulated reduces their presentation to an easily understood stock character. Claudius' subservience

²¹¹ *Claud.* 37.2.2-11, trans. Rolfe.

²¹² Cf. '*Claudium uxoribus libertisque addictum ne qua non arte demeretur, proximo munere a Messalina petit ut sibi pedes praeberet exalciandos*' (*Vit.* 2.5.4-7).

²¹³ Power notes Claudius, Galba, and Vitellius being ruled by those beneath them as a point of *synkrisis* (Power 2008: 290-291). Vitellius is influenced by lowly figures such as actors, chariot drivers, and his freedman, Asciticus (*Vit.* 12.1.1-3). Galba was under the control of three men, referred to as his 'tutors' because they never left his side: Titus Vinius, Cornelius Laco, and the freedman, Icelus. Due to their influence, Galba's behaviour became erratic veering from being stingy to extravagant (*Galb.* 14.2.1-12).

is also reinforced through examples elsewhere. It appears to be a common enough portrait given a similar reference from Seneca, *'putares omnes illius esse libertos: adeo illum nemo curabat.'*²¹⁴ It is part of the standard picture of Claudius, as picked up again by Seneca in his *Apocolocyntosis*. Rather than being an emperor, he is presented as a figure that would not be at all out of place on the comic stage. The overall portrait not only plays on standard stereotypes of over-mighty freedmen, slaves, and wives, but arguably builds specifically on the stock figures of Roman comedy: Claudius is the typical weak-willed master, the fool and academic who is manipulated by his wives and slaves/freedmen without realizing it. He is in fact very like the (academic) main figure in the *Life of Aesop*; or many a similar character from Roman Comedy.²¹⁵ The key point is that it is another stereotype used to make Claudius a simple and recognizable figure.

2.2.3 A Hopeless Joke

Claudius' characterization as a fool and as something barely human is embellished by other negative traits, namely vulgar pursuits such as drunkenness and gambling. His private habits reveal a general preference for indolence. He insists on hanging around with the lowest types of people. When the idea of Claudius being emperor was the only joke bigger than the man himself, Suetonius shows him giving up hope.

tunc demum abiecta spe dignitatis ad otium concessit, modo in hortis et suburbana domo, modo in Campaniae secessu delitescens, atque ex contubernio sordidissimorum hominum super ueterem segnitiae notam ebrietatis quoque et aleae infamiam subiit, cum interim, quanquam hoc modo agenti, numquam aut officium hominum aut reuerentia publice defuit.

²¹⁴ Sen. *Apoc.* 6.2.5.

²¹⁵ See *Aesopica*, Perry (1952). On the *Life of Aesop* reflecting a master's concerns about slaves see Hopkins 1993: 3-27. On stock characters in Comedy see Duckworth 1994: 236- 271.

Then at last Claudius abandoned all hope of advancement and gave himself up to idleness, living in obscurity now in his house and gardens in the suburbs, and sometimes at a villa in Campania; moreover from his intimacy with the lowest of men he incurred the reproach of drunkenness and gambling, in addition to his former reputation for dullness. Yet all this time, despite his conduct, he never lacked attention from individuals or respect from the public.²¹⁶

If we (and the reader in general) discern the various characterizing points of view in this passage, there are features that are integral to both baseline and dissonant presentation. Claudius' hopes and aspirations for himself (i.e. keyed to his own point of view) are certainly positive in intention ('*dignitatis*') and the reader perhaps feels a degree of pathos in light of Suetonius stressing that Claudius gave into negative traits ('*otium*' in the sense that it is the opposite of *negotium*; also '*segnitiae*' and '*ebrietatis*') and the worst kinds of people ('*sordidissimorum*'). Here '*infamiam*' points to a bad reputation, not specifically in the biographer's judgement, and it is a report of his reputation among certain people; but it is immediately contrasted with '*officium hominum*' and the respect of the public. Suetonius may disapprove of this, and possibly of the people giving him such attention, but he does not say so explicitly: he does, however, explicitly mark the dissonance ('*cum interim, quamquam*') and leave the reader to resolve it as they see fit. Suetonius then allows the reader to consider the degree to which Claudius may in fact be more than he seems by pivoting the characterizing point of view from the biographer's overt portrayal and the subject's personal hope. The high regard Claudius is held in by some people ('*reverentia*') indirectly characterizes him in a positive manner and suggests a dissonant view. The passage closes by acknowledging the respect he had in some quarters, reminding us that he is a nuanced figure struggling to break with his stereotype.

Unsurprisingly, Claudius is often portrayed as the butt of other people's jokes. He was subjected to constant insults, with his awkwardness in social situations delineating him. Suetonius provides an emblematic illustration of Claudius the fool:

²¹⁶ *Claud.* 5.1.4-11, trans. Rolfe. Cf. Augustus' own penchant for gambling (*Aug.*71).

nec eo minus contumeliis obnoxius uixit. nam et si paulo serius ad praedictam cenae horam occurrisset, non nisi aegre et circuito demum triclinio recipiebatur, et quotiens post cibum addormisceret, quod ei fere accidebat, olearum aut palmularum ossibus incessebatur, interdum ferula flagroue uelut per ludum excitabatur a copreis. solebant et manibus stertentis socci induci, ut repente expergefactus faciem sibimet confricaret.

But all this did not save him from constant insults; for if he came to dinner a little after the appointed time, he took his place with difficulty and only after making the round of the dining-room. Whenever he went to sleep after dinner, which was a habit of his, he was pelted with the stones of olives and dates, and sometimes he was awakened by the jesters with a whip or cane, in pretended sport. They used also to put slippers on his hands as he lay snoring, so that when he was suddenly aroused he might rub his face with them.²¹⁷

This humorous anecdotal passage reinforces the integral baseline characterization of Claudius both directly and indirectly via Suetonius' portrayal and the mocking and cavalier treatment he receives from other people in the narrative. He is the centre of derision being pelted with food while asleep. The image of jesters rousing him with a whip complements that of him being punished by the former chief muleteer. Placing slippers on his hands not only mocks his apparent stupidity but his physical limitations as well. Again, Claudius is made the subject of ridicule with an emphasis on him as being somehow incomplete.

This kind of portrayal is then augmented in a situation where Claudius does try to make a joke and proves to have a lame wit. In addressing the crowd at games, when the crowd called for the gladiator called Palumbus, he replied that they should have him if he could be caught.²¹⁸ Not only is he the butt of jokes but he is not adept at making them either. Beard notes that observing proper norms of laughter was the mark of someone fully in control of themselves and that it 'was one diagnostic of the faults of the emperor Claudius that he found it difficult to master his mirth.'²¹⁹ This establishes Claudius'

²¹⁷ *Claud.* 8.1.1-9, trans. Rolfe.

²¹⁸ '*ac saepe hortando rogandoque ad hilaritatem homines prouocaret, dominos identidem appellans, immixtis interdum frigidis et arcessitis iocis; qualis est ut cum Palumbum postulantibus daturum se promisit, si captus esset.*' (*Claud.* 21.5.4-8).

²¹⁹ Beard 2014: 130.

baseline as an incompetent fool both in appearance and behaviour. However, it will be shown that Suetonius' *Life* complicates this representation through dissonant character moments.

2.3 Emperor Claudius

The second dimension of characterization, associated with dissonance and challenging an established character, shows how complexity is revealed in the *Claudius*. Moreover, Suetonius' inclusion of dissonant and contradictory material allows the reader to see complexity. The biography directly presents the prospect of duplicity on Claudius' part, as Suetonius reports that Claudius claimed he was playing dumb all along.

Ac ne stultitiam quidem suam reticuit simulatamque a se ex industria sub Gaio, quod aliter euasurus peruenturusque ad susceptam stationem non fuerit, quibusdam oratiunculis testatus est; nec tamen persuasit, cum intra breue tempus liber editus sit, cui index erat μωρῶν ἐπανάστασις, argumentum autem stultitiam neminem fingere.

He did not even keep quiet about his own stupidity, but in certain brief speeches he declared that he had purposely feigned it under Gaius, because otherwise he could not have escaped alive and attained his present station. But he convinced no one, and within a short time a book was published, the title of which was "The Elevation of Fools" and its thesis, that no one feigned folly.²²⁰

This makes sense in the context of Caligula's reign, although arguably Claudius' low position in the imperial family would have saved him from its machinations; indeed, Hurley argues that feigning stupidity was not necessarily strategic, given his evident desire to take part in public life.²²¹ Still, this does not preclude some self-awareness. If Claudius is taken at his word, a reader can see that not only is Claudius fully aware of his own individual physical and mental disposition but chooses to emphasize certain aspects

²²⁰ *Claud.* 38.3.1-7, trans. Rolfe. Cf. Dio. 59.23.5; 60.2.4. For the rhetorical tactic of downplaying one's capabilities or eloquence see Quint. *Inst.* 4.1.9.

²²¹ Hurley 2001: 220 ad 38.3. Cf. *Claud.* 5-9.

of it for his own ends as misdirection. As a result, an evaluative reading, per Gill's definition of 'character', that is more positive can begin to take shape for the reader.

Claudius is evidently trying to reframe the narrative about himself, which by itself suggests a certain intelligence. Suetonius claims that he convinced no one but the only evidence is a book from an obviously highly aristocratic milieu (i.e. a literate one, as shown by the writing or even just the titling of the book in Greek) which rebuts him. If it was such obvious nonsense presumably a rebuttal would not be required. In any case, the view of other people about Claudius was not straightforward given that some held him in regard as we have already seen. Claudius' claim allows for an alternative reading of his character, even if it is one that Suetonius does not actively promote; and arguably, the very fact that Claudius was clever enough to think of this defence backs it up. Suetonius may not be consciously trying to undermine the conventional view, but in including this hint of Claudius' own framing he gives the reader the chance to reconsider his overall stance that Claudius was a fool.

Some of Claudius' behaviour seems to undermine his portrayal as a fool by showing him being remarkably competent: and, most importantly, is acknowledged as such by Suetonius. As Osgood observes, 'Suetonius himself supplies evidence that undercuts his own characterization of a feeble man, even as he tries to adhere to it.'²²² In fact, complexity emerges from Suetonius' capacious practice as a biographer: occasionally he states his own point of view, but he does not insist on it as strictly as Tacitus might,²²³ and he is willing to include information that contradicts it without taking great steps to resolve it. So, regardless of intention, his approach to biography results in a much more complex characterization. Suetonius is a writer whose *Lives* allow character

²²² Osgood 2011: 15.

²²³ Cf. '*Exequi sententias haud institui nisi insignis per honestum aut notabili dedecore, quod praecipuum munus annalium reor ne virtutes sileantur utque pravis dictis factisque ex posteritate et infamia metus sit.*' (Tac. Ann. 3.65).

to emerge, rather than one like Tacitus who insists on maintaining a strict moral point of view throughout.

Competent public behaviour was not beyond Claudius' capabilities and neither was competency and efficiency in respect of his responsibilities. Although perhaps not the most adept, it is clear he made every effort to carry out his duties. He gave careful attention to the care of the city and the grain supply, his public works were great and necessary rather than plentiful, he gave largesse to the people along with customary shows, new shows, and ones revived from ancient times.²²⁴ Claudius even showed some ambition in going about finishing projects left incomplete by Caligula, Julius, and Augustus.²²⁵ Examples of good governance, on Claudius' part, are not too difficult to find.²²⁶ However, when discussing the changing scholarly reputation of Claudius taking into account various sources, Carney makes a key point. He notes that the administration was not necessarily a result of Claudius' involvement and to 'argue from the nature of Claudius' administration to conclusions about his personality is not legitimate; and, though Claudius may have been the organizer of his ministries, this does not mean that he directed their development in detail.'²²⁷ For our purposes the fact remains that Suetonius' inclusion of this material allows us to see Claudius in a different light and complexity can emerge for a reader. He goes on to provide detailed accounts of Claudius

²²⁴ *'Vrbis annonaeque curam sollicitissime semper egit.'* (Claud. 18.1.1); *'Opera magna potius et necessaria quam multa perfecit...'* (Claud. 20.1.1-2); *'Congiaria populo saepius distribuit. spectacula quoque complura et magnifica edidit, non usitata modo ac solitis locis, sed et commenticia et ex antiquitate repetita, et ubi praeterea nemo ante eum.'* (Claud. 21.1.1-4). Bradley sees Suetonius taking a 'non-committal' view of Claudius' attention to the *annona* compared to a favourable one of Augustus (Bradley 1976: 248). But surely such competency in Claudius' case is emphatically positive.

²²⁵ Claud. 20.1.2-7. Osgood regards building activities as one of Suetonius' criteria for judging an emperor and that 'in tackling projects left undone by Caesar and Augustus, Claudius was trying to show that he could not just equal but even surpass his imperial predecessors' (Osgood 2011: 172). On public works: *Jul.* 44; *Aug.* 29-30; *Tib.* 47; *Calig.* 21; *Ner.* 16.1; *Vesp.* 9; *Dom.* 5.

²²⁶ Care for the city (Claud. 18-19); building projects (Claud. 20); public policy (Claud. 22-23); treatment of people and classes (Claud. 24-25). Again, the attempt to attribute positive features of his reign to the influence of the others (Claud. 25.5.8-12), cannot dismiss them entirely and in the very least their extensive discussion provides the reader with enough material to hold a better opinion of Claudius.

²²⁷ Carney 1960: 101.

carrying out official duties, namely judging cases, and these let us see a dissonant characterization at odds with his baseline image.

Claudius' judicial decisions, as presented by Suetonius, are overtly outrageous and certainly would have been regarded so by respectable Romans. Indeed, it can be read as criticism and was most likely intended as such by Suetonius. All the same, his account includes so much information that it leaves more than enough room for a more sympathetic reading. Court cases provide Suetonius an opportunity to shine a light on Claudius' characterization within enclosed imperial circumstances and it is even significant to the narrative construction.²²⁸ The accounts of Claudius' conduct in an official capacity during his consulship and even his censorship offers a reader an overview of similar situational circumstances but with potential for different interpretations. His overseeing of legal cases provides a presentation to his public character where the same or similar event is viewed with differing interpretations. Claudius is far from the dullard that the basic character strand of the first dimension will have a reader believe.

ius et consul et extra honorem laboriosissime dixit, etiam suis suorumque diebus sollemnibus, nonnumquam festis quoque antiquitus et religiosis. nec semper praescripta legum secutus duritiam lenitatemue multarum ex bono et aequo, perinde ut adficeretur, moderatus est; nam et iis, qui apud priuatos iudices plus petendo formula excidissent, restituit actiones et in maiore fraude conuictos legitimam poenam supergressus ad bestias condemnauit.

He administered justice most conscientiously both as consul and when out of office, even on his own anniversaries and those of his family, and sometimes even on festivals of ancient date and days of ill-omen. He did not always follow the letter of the laws, but modified their severity or lenity in many cases according to his own notions of equity and justice; for he allowed a new trial to those who had lost their cases before private judges by demanding more than the law prescribed, while, overstepping the lawful penalty, he condemned to the wild beasts those who were convicted of especially heinous crimes.²²⁹

²²⁸ In the final lines of the *Life*, Claudius is sitting on a tribunal declaring the end of his mortal career (*Claud.* 46.1.11-14). Hurley notes that putting him in court for this last anecdote is a return to the theme of 14-15 (Hurley 2001: 243 ad 46). Power sees this as providing narrative closure through contrast with the general portrait although he accepts too easily the superficial image of Claudius as a fool in court (Power 2014a: 71-72). Cf. *Sen. Apoc.* 14-15.

²²⁹ *Claud.* 14.1.5-13, trans. Rolfe.

In terms of evaluative characterization, Claudius' conduct in dealing with cases initially paints an unimpressive picture and yet there is enough material to allow a reader to form a very different impression. Suetonius could be read here as saying that Claudius did not understand the proper conventions. He was not supposed to be so conscientious, so here he is getting it wrong in yet another way. But it would be too simplistic to insist only on this uncharitable reading: at the very least he is his own man here, and '*laboriosissime*' contradicts the laziness; and it is difficult to ignore that there is a positive element to his actions. He treated his duties seriously in avoiding taking time off and using his own personal judgement. Claudius is diligent and effective in executing his responsibility. That he would officiate even on anniversaries, festivals, or days of ill-omen seems a far cry from the laziness of his one-dimensional presentation. Administering justice on these inappropriate days is still getting it wrong to a degree but the emphasis is on his dedication and work ethic. The suggestion that there is another side to Claudius is evident in how he goes beyond the boundaries of the law; he keeps to 'not the letter but the spirit' of the law.²³⁰

The fact that Claudius is portrayed as in any way competent, as in the above examples, *in itself* complicates his characterization (because it conflicts with the outward impression of him as a fool). But the key point in the above quotation is that he is sometimes wise – and indeed, more so than Suetonius seems to lead us to expect. This can be read conventionally as just another string of things Claudius gets wrong. If you go into this passage thinking Claudius is a fool, you will see his excessive officiating and eccentric decisions as foolish. However, it does not have to read that way, and here too, Suetonius gives us enough to judge Claudius quite differently. Certainly, a more sympathetic reading could perhaps be the result of a modern attitude. A modern reader is

²³⁰ Hurley 2001: 119 ad 14.

more likely to appreciate independence of mind and action than a conventional Roman. However, the point is that Suetonius could have just given his view instead of backing it up with all this circumstantial detail. The inclusion of this material made it possible then, and makes it hard to resist now, for a reader to give Claudius at least some credit for originality in his jurisprudence; and as such, it allows him to emerge as a more complex character than, perhaps, even Suetonius intended to present. Ultimately, the reader is being provided with an opportunity to judge the judge.

Other examples of Claudius in a judicial role, which further complicate his characterization and subvert the image of him as a fool, can be seen when the biographer presents him thus:

in cognoscendo autem ac decernendo mira uarietate animi fuit, modo circumspectus et sagax, interdum inconsultus ac praeceps, nonnumquam friuolus amentique similis. cum decurias rerum actu expungeret, eum, qui dissimulata uacatione quam beneficio liberorum habebat responderat, ut cupidum iudicandi dimisit... feminam non agnoscentem filium suum dubia utrimque argumentorum fide ad confessionem compulit indicto matrimonio iuuenis. absentibus secundum praesentes facillime dabat, nullo dilectu culpane quis an aliqua necessitate cessasset.

But in hearing and deciding cases he showed strange inconsistency of temper, for he was now careful and shrewd, sometimes hasty and inconsiderate, occasionally silly and like a crazy man. In revising the lists of the divisions of jurors he disqualified a man who had presented himself without mentioning that he was immune because of the number of his children, on the ground that he had a passion for jury-duty... When a woman refused to recognise her son, and the evidence on both sides was conflicting, he forced her to admit the truth by ordering her to marry the young man. Whenever one party to a suit was absent, he was prone to decide in favour of the one who was present, without considering whether his opponent had failed to appear through his own fault or from a necessary cause.²³¹

Although he is stated as being inconsistent in temper what he is actually presented as is incredibly diverse in terms of mood, opinion, and disposition. Diversity of moods and opinions are, admittedly, not normally qualities desired in a judge. Claudius does not judge in a sober and predictable manner but as the mood takes him, which undermines

²³¹ *Claud.* 15.1.1-2.6, trans. Rolfe.

the legal system, but it does not require him to be foolish, stupid, or incapable. Claudius is presented as shrewd and considerate, hasty and inconsiderate, and even silly and crazed. These are diverse traits which paint a much more nuanced picture of the man; but the anecdotes themselves portray someone who is most certainly no fool and far from incompetent. Claudius is rather competent and even at times clever. His rationale for dismissing someone suspiciously keen on jury duty, presenting themselves when not required, is rather sound given that they could be open for bribes.²³² Also, ‘*cupidum iudicandi*’ seemingly registers with Claudius as a moral failing in itself. Claudius’ solution to the case involving the woman who would not acknowledge her son is Solomon-like in its approach. And although it is harsh and very idiosyncratic to decide to favour those who turn up for court, a court date is a court date after all.

Some of his decisions in court might look silly or whimsical on the surface but if considered carefully we see a shrewder arbitrator of justice who has little time for minutiae and instead adheres to his own idiosyncratic impulses for fairness.

peregrinitatis reum orta inter aduocatos leui contentione, togatumne an palliatum dicere causam oporteret, quasi aequitatem integram ostentans, mutare habitum saepius et prout accusaretur defendereturue, iussit. de quodam etiam negotio ita ex tabella pronuntiasse creditur, secundum eos se sentire, qui uera proposuissent. propter quae usque eo euiluit, ut passim ac propalam contemptui esset.

In a case involving citizenship a fruitless dispute arose among the advocates as to whether the defendant ought to make his appearance in the toga or in a Greek mantle, and the emperor, with the idea of showing absolute impartiality, made him change his garb several times, according as he was accused or defended. In one case he is credited with having rendered the following decision, which he had actually written out beforehand: “I decide in favour of those who have told the truth.” By such acts as these he so discredited himself that he was held in general and open contempt.²³³

On the surface the first example is ridiculous, but it is surely a pointed comment on the ridiculous arguments of the lawyers over this minor procedural issue (a thing Claudius

²³² Hurley 2001: 120 ad 15.1.

²³³ *Claud.* 15.2.8-3.5, trans. Rolfe.

evidently had little patience for). Rather than let the lawyers argue over this purely procedural point of appropriate dress, Claudius makes a show of having them both win and gets on with the actual case.²³⁴ As for the second example, this is the only advance decision that could possibly be fair and is a warning that he will not be sticking to legal procedures but to the truthfulness of the testimony. In other words, this is the policy of his court. This is made more emphatic with the statement coming directly from Claudius and his point of view. Even Suetonius allows that this was only gossip about Claudius (*pronuntiasse creditur*): he does not confirm it himself. The impression given is that Claudius was impatient with legal convention (and with lawyers exploiting loopholes or not getting to the point) rather than that he was a madman doing whatever he felt like. General opinion (*passim*) may well have scorned such behaviour, and Suetonius may well have shared that view; but by giving the judgement only in the passive and not specifying whose opinion this is, he nevertheless leaves room for doubt. Could such decisions, which a modern reader can find some sympathy for and which seem distinctly populist in their approach, have had supporters and sympathizers in Claudius' day? Certainly, the details Suetonius provides are enough to suggest a more complex picture than appears on the surface.

Claudius is a man prone to his whims, easily misled, openly insulted, and at times utterly indifferent. He can make important decisions for arbitrary or distinctly odd reasons. He is idiosyncratic and impatient in his judgements, and it is clear lawyers did not like his unorthodox approach. But despite Suetonius, inconsistency does not seem to be the key mark of his judgements. He is quite consistent in wanting to decide each case

²³⁴ Hurley admits the solution clever but sees '*quasi aequitatem integram ostentans*' as negating a show and the awkwardness as silly (Hurley 2001: 124 ad. 15.2). This does not preclude Claudius from making a point about arguing trivialities in his own idiosyncratic way. The decision itself is show enough.

on its merits as they appeared to him, rather than relying on convention, precedent, or legal dogma.

equitem quidem Romanum obscaenitatis in feminas reum, sed falso et ab impotentibus inimicis conficto crimine, satis constat, cum scorta meritoria citari aduersus se et audiri pro testimonio uideret, graphium et libellos, quos tenebat in manu, ita cum magna stultitiae et saeuitiae exprobratione iecisse in faciem eius, ut genam non leuiter perstrinxerit.

All the world knows that a Roman knight who was tried for improper conduct towards women, but on a false charge trumped up by unscrupulous enemies, seeing common prostitutes called as witnesses against him and their testimony admitted, hurled the stylus and tablets which he held in his hand into the emperor's face with such force as to cut his cheek badly, at the same time loudly reviling his cruelty and stupidity.²³⁵

There is a question as to how the charge could be proven any other way, which is of course why the defendant and his lawyer were annoyed that Claudius went against convention in allowing prostitutes to give evidence in a court.²³⁶ That is, the defence here was trying to work the system. Again, the point is not his inconsistency, but that he seems to follow his own logic. We have already seen that Claudius has his own sense of fairness and does not play within the boundaries of the law. Perhaps Suetonius means us to see his logic as foolish, and it is certainly unconventional. But it is hard to read this and see Claudius as nothing but incompetent, as even Suetonius admits in his introduction to these anecdotes. Even if Suetonius' comments reinforce his stereotype as a fool, he also gives us all the material needed to form a different judgement. In other words, Suetonius' *literary characterization* of Claudius (i.e. in the anecdotes themselves) is complex even if his framing of these anecdotes initially leads us to expect a simple stereotype. There is a real desire for justice on show here: he is an unconventional emperor, but not an idiot.

²³⁵ *Claud.* 15.4.3-10, trans. Rolfe.

²³⁶ Hurley believes Claudius let them testify because he thought they had social status (Hurley 2001: 126 ad 15.4) but this does not address the recurring motif throughout these examples of Claudius having unconventional solutions to problems.

Suetonius' account of Claudius as a judge can thus be understood as challenging the reader's perception of Claudius with a complex characterization.

As a censor, Claudius' behaviour was just as inconsistent, yet all his decisions demonstrate a considerate and lenient disposition to cases. Even though they are unusual and eccentric at times, they at least adhere to his specific internal logic. Suetonius goes on to say that:

Gessit et censuram intermissam diu post Plancum Paulumque censores, sed hanc quoque inaequaliter uarioque et animo et euentu. recognitione equitum iuuenem probri plenum, sed quem pater probatissimum sibi affirmabat, sine ignominia dimisit, habere dicens censorem suum; alium corruptelis adulteriisque famosum nihil amplius quam monuit, ut aut parcius aetatulae indulgeret aut certe cautius; addiditque: 'quare enim ego scio, quam amicam habeas?' et cum orantibus familiaribus dempsisset cuidam appositam notam: 'litura tamen,' inquit, 'extet.'

He also assumed the censorship, which had long been discontinued, ever since the term of Plancus and Paulus, but in this office too he was variable, and both his theory and his practice were inconsistent. In his review of the knights he left off a young man of evil character, whose father said that he was perfectly satisfied with him, without any public censure, saying "He has a censor of his own." Another who was notorious for corruption and adultery he merely admonished to be more restrained in his indulgence, or at any rate more circumspect, adding, "For why should I know what mistress you keep?" When he had removed the mark of censure affixed to one man's name, yielding to the entreaties of the latter's friends, he said: "But let the erasure be seen."²³⁷

Again, the point is seemingly that he did not rely on the conventions. His unpredictability is a consistent trait: but the shrewdness with which he makes these decisions seems (even if the framing suggests otherwise) to go against his image as a fool. The first seems a reasonable and sensitive decision, with a quick reminder to the father that he is now responsible for keeping the young man in line. The second suggests a lenient attitude to adultery and a warning not to rub it in people's faces (so to speak), but hardly a crazy decision. Perhaps his own proclivity for women made him sympathetic.²³⁸ The third is

²³⁷ *Claud.* 16.1.1-2.1, trans. Rolfe.

²³⁸ Hurley 2001: 130 ad 16.1. Cf. *Claud.* 33.2.

perhaps the shrewdest of them all. Even though he reluctantly removes a mark of censure he allows the erasure to be evident so that even a clean slate can be damning.²³⁹

Suetonius goes on to give more examples which on the surface may seem to be erratic, if not outright asinine. However, upon consideration they fit within the context of shrewd and stern decisions. It is said that:

splendidum uirum Graeciaeque prouinciae principem, uerum Latini sermonis ignarum, non modo albo iudicum erasit, sed in peregrinitatem redegit. nec quemquam nisi sua uoce, utcumque quis posset, ac sine patrono rationem uitae passus est reddere.

He not only struck from the list of jurors a man of high birth, a leading citizen of the province of Greece, because he did not know Latin, but even deprived him of the rights of citizenship; and he would not allow anyone to render an account of his life save in his own words, as well as he could, without the help of an advocate.²⁴⁰

Firstly, this is a legitimate issue since court proceedings were in Latin.²⁴¹ Secondly, surely it is not unreasonable that a non-Latin speaker should not be allowed to be a senator. This is about enforcing the proper purpose of the senate. Claudius was also evidently unimpressed by lawyers who did all the speaking for their clients.

The illustrations which Suetonius provides do include something which approximates an attempt at showing his foolishness, but this is not quite the case:

plures notare conatus, magna inquisitorum negligentia sed suo maiore dedecore, innoxios fere repperit, quibuscumque caelibatum aut orbitatem aut egestatem obiceret, maritos, patres, opulentos se probantibus; eo quidem, qui sibimet uim ferro intulisse arguebatur, inlaesum corpus ueste deposita ostentante.

When he attempted to degrade still more, he found them in most cases blameless; for owing to the great carelessness of his agents, but to his own greater shame, those whom he accused of celibacy, childlessness, or lack of means proved that they were married, or fathers, or well-to-do. In fact, one man, who was charged with having stabbed himself, stripped off his clothing and showed a body without a scar.²⁴²

²³⁹ Cf. the practice of *damnatio memoriae* (OCD s.v. ‘*damnatio memoriae*’). See also *Dom.* 23.1.9-2.1.

²⁴⁰ *Claud.* 16.2.1-6, trans. Rolfe.

²⁴¹ Hurley 2001: 130 ad 16.2.

²⁴² *Claud.* 16.3.1-6, trans. Rolfe.

It is worth pointing out that some examples which on the surface would ridicule him and deem him incompetent do not entirely achieve this aim. When those accused of being celibate, childless, or wealthy are proven exactly the opposite, and when the man said to have stabbed himself has no scar at all, the blame is really on Claudius' investigators. He is guilty of excessive haste and impatience and although this is embarrassing, it is not due to incompetence on his part. It is reasonable to read this passage with a measure of sympathy given that delegation is not necessarily a bad thing; certainly, in this case it is pragmatic to use agents for such jobs. Previously, Suetonius comments that Claudius could not be credited for certain good deeds due to the influence of others.²⁴³ In this instance, although Claudius can be criticized for what ultimately amounts to his responsibility, he cannot be entirely blamed for his bad decisions. The point is straightforwardly that Claudius' reliance on agents led him into rash decisions, which was very unfortunate on his part. It is the quality of his agents, or lack thereof (*'magna inquisitorum neglegentia'*) that causes the incident and thus leads to his shame (*'sed suo maiore dedecore'*). This is an occasion when the implicit judgement is indeed backed up by the evidence provided and even in this instance, Suetonius does not just tell us what Claudius was like but gives us the incident and a reader can decide for themselves about the degree of his culpability.

The point is that he was *not always* a fool, and that Suetonius openly admits that his conduct of cases was sometimes 'judicious and wise'. More than that, Suetonius' examples suggest, to a modern reader, that Claudius was not a fool but just idiosyncratic in his judgements. Hence the woman obliged to marry her supposed son is simple and clever; his solution to the toga/pallium problem is clever, if unnecessary; and in general, he seems to show impatience (particularly with lawyers) and not foolishness or stupidity.

²⁴³ *Claud.* 25.5; 29.1-5.

Ultimately, what Suetonius presents is evidence of an unwillingness to follow court convention, and evidence that lawyers disliked him, rather than any incompetence. This may be at odds with Suetonius' explicit commentary and framing, but it provides his reader with a potentially complex characterization of Claudius all the same.

This also applies to his conduct as censor: the stories Suetonius tells tend to give the sense of a Claudius who trusted his own idea of justice and morality rather than Roman tradition. This hardly makes him a fool: in fact, a reader could be forgiven for thinking him quite reasonable in his attitude. Again, it is not clear whether Suetonius thinks so: but it can be argued that it is presented without comment, and that in combination with the explicit statement at the start that he was sometimes notably wise in his judgements, makes Claudius a more complex character than his appearance of foolishness might have led us to believe. Claudius' characterization remains complex regardless of Suetonius' editorializing. The public and other specific individuals are integral to showing him as a baseline fool. However, Suetonius provides enough material to the contrary that the reader is afforded the opportunity to judge for themselves.

2.4 I, Claudius

Firstly, in this section, we will see the image of Claudius as an historian, which gives an impression that contrasts very strongly with characterization of Claudius elsewhere as a hopeless fool. Moreover, the details provided by Suetonius do more than simply allow an alternative or dissonant perspective: for example, in providing a full list of Claudius' works, Suetonius offers a mass of extraneous detail (at least for an imperial biography) which rounds out the picture of the emperor and makes him seem a more three-dimensional character. The list of works does not provide an evaluative judgement,

but rather simply embellishes what kind of a person Claudius was by way of superfluity: in other words, it makes his characterization more realistic.

Secondly, the letters from Augustus to Livia not only dramatize the dissonance between Claudius' established reputation as a fool and the possibility that he is something more, but they also help us go beyond these ethical judgements to suggest a more complex individual. The letters show us the basic and dissonant portrayals: is he hopelessly unsuitable or does he have some merit? But what pushes the account of Claudius in these letters towards a three-dimensional portrayal is the suggestion that he is aware of his flaws and is trying to manage them. A case can at least be made that Claudius' awareness of his own flaws and efforts to manage them are, in Christopher Gill's terms, not straightforwardly evaluative in the sense of character but relate more to personality, i.e. to view the person so as 'to understand him, or explain him, psychologically, in an ethically neutral way'²⁴⁴ or further articulated as 'a response to people that is empathetic rather than moral: that is, with the desire to identify oneself with another person'.²⁴⁵ Thus, such an attitude does not in itself make him either a better or worse emperor, especially as his efforts are largely in vain. Instead they establish him as a particular type of person. Essentially, they tell us little or nothing about what sort of emperor he was, but rather about what sort of man he was. The reader is presented with a moment of interior insight, and with an opportunity to understand Claudius rather than to judge him.

Claudius was an emperor by circumstance and an historian by choice. Ingrained from youth and evidently persistent; he had considerable skill at writing histories given that he built up quite a back catalogue. The intellectual endeavour is indeed dissonant with the perception of him as a fool.

²⁴⁴ Gill 1983: 470-471.

²⁴⁵ Gill 1990: 2.

Disciplinis tamen liberalibus ab aetate prima non mediocrem operam dedit ac saepe experimenta cuiusque etiam publicavit. uerum ne sic quidem quicquam dignitatis assequi aut spem de se commodiorem in posterum facere potuit.

Yet he gave no slight attention to liberal studies from his earliest youth, and even published frequent specimens of his attainments in each line. But even so he could not attain any public position or inspire more favourable hope of his future.²⁴⁶

Claudius' writing is presented as a sincere and genuine interest, emerging early in his life – and, we might remember, despite the lack of culture of his 'barbarian' tutor, as Claudius himself reported. Claudius started to write history at a young age and was encouraged by Titus Livius and helped by Sulpicius Flavius.²⁴⁷ Thus he receives encouragement in his efforts, and in this area at least, guidance from a proper exemplar. Here is an area in which Claudius could hope to achieve some modicum of respectability.

However, even if his intellectual interests and pursuits suggest that he was more than merely a fool, any hope of respectability is immediately taken away by Suetonius. History-writing is here presented as another attempt by Claudius to gain the *dignitas* and the participation in public life appropriate to his family background, and the reader is immediately informed that Claudius failed here too. As when he was taken under cover of darkness to receive his *toga uirilis*, or like his administration of justice, Claudius does the right thing in the wrong way. This passage therefore reinforces the two pictures of Claudius that establish his baseline portrayal and that create dissonance with it: someone who is incapable of fitting into public life (baseline), even though he shows some evidence of intelligence in trying to do so (dissonance). The result is similar to his claim to have been feigning being a fool during the reign of Caligula: we see an attempt by Claudius to revise the general opinion of him, but one that immediately fails.

²⁴⁶ *Claud.* 3.1.1-5, trans. Rolfe. On Claudius as an historian see Momigliano 1961: 6-19.

²⁴⁷ '*Historiam in adulescentia hortante T. Liuio, Sulpicio uero Flauo etiam adiuuante, scribere adgressus est.*' (*Claud.* 41.1.1-3).

A sense of realism then emerges with a technique of excess that follows in the list of Claudius' works. Suetonius does recount the literary achievements and interests of most the Caesars as one of his topical divisions.²⁴⁸ Claudius' literary efforts, though, are certainly more pronounced than those of his predecessors, especially in his penchant for history:

initium autem sumpsit historiae post caedem Caesaris dictatoris, sed et transiit ad inferiora tempora coepitque a pace ciuili, cum sentiret neque libere neque uere sibi de superioribus tradendi potestatem relictam, correptus saepe et a matre et ab auia. prioris materiae duo uolumina, posterioris unum et quadraginta reliquit. composuit et 'de uita sua' octo uolumina, magis inepte quam ineleganter; item 'Ciceronis defensionem aduersus Asini Galli libros' satis eruditam. nouas etiam commentus est litteras tres ac numero ueterum quasi maxime necessarias addidit; de quarum ratione cum priuatus adhuc uolumen edidisset, mox princeps non difficulter optinuit ut in usu quoque promiscuo essent. extat talis scriptura in plerisque libris ac diurnis titulisque operum.

He began his history with the death of the dictator Caesar, but passed to a later period and took a fresh start at the end of the civil war, realising that he was not allowed to give a frank or true account of the earlier times, since he was often taken to task both by his mother and his grandmother. He left two books of the earlier history, but forty-one of the later. He also composed an autobiography in eight books, lacking rather in good taste than in style, as well as a defence of Cicero against the writings of Asinius Gallus, a work of no little learning. Besides this he invented three new letters and added them to the alphabet, maintaining that they were greatly needed; he published a book on their theory when he was still in private life, and when he became emperor had no difficulty in bringing about their general use. These characters may still be seen in numerous books, in the daily gazette, and in inscriptions on public buildings.²⁴⁹

The overview of his catalogue, which Suetonius provides, shows that Claudius' work had tremendous scope. He shows good sense in choosing the periods of his history given the hindrance and backlash he would face from his own family. This self-awareness is further stressed in his composition of eight books of an autobiography. His foolish image is also punctured by the degree of intellectual rigour required for engaging with the works of Cicero (admitted by Suetonius, even if somewhat begrudgingly, to be '*satis eruditam*'),

²⁴⁸ On literary achievements and interests, see *Jul.* 55-56; *Aug.* 84-89; *Tib.* 70-71; *Calig.* 53; *Ner.* 52; *Dom.* 2 and 18. In relation to intellectual endeavours, Vitellius demonstrates a hostility to lampoon writers and astrologers in contrast to others (*Vit.* 14).

²⁴⁹ *Claud.* 41.2.3-3.10, trans. Rolfe.

as well as by his interest and achievements in linguistics and theory. Suetonius also presents Claudius as someone who held the Greek language in high regard and goes on to state that he even wrote histories in Greek: twenty books of Etruscan history and eight of Carthaginian.²⁵⁰ The depth and breadth of Claudius' literary endeavours, as presented by Suetonius, hence subvert the idea of the emperor being a fool.

But the portrayal of Claudius as an historian is only two-dimensional, in being no more than dissonant with his more conventional portrayal as a fool, the excessive details provided in the list of his writings is a non-evaluative/non-narrative example of realism. Indeed, it can be argued to fit neatly with Barthes' 'Reality Effect' with its use of extraneous detail removed from strict narrative function.²⁵¹ The mere fact that Claudius wrote history is enough to complicate his usual portrayal as a fool, and allows a measure of two-dimensional complexity, but providing a catalogue of his works does nothing to support an ethical judgement of Claudius the emperor. What it does instead is create a sense of realism and makes Claudius a more three-dimensional figure. Suetonius does not suggest that Claudius is a better man or a better emperor for these achievements: they are simply superfluous details illustrative of his personality.

Indeed, in this way Claudius jumps between categorical types, flitting between emperor and historian. Momigliano notes that 'it gives us something to think about that Hellenistic and Roman biographers often wrote series of biographies of men of the same type – generals, philosophers, demagogues – and therefore seem to have cared for the type rather than for the individual.'²⁵² It is worth noting that Suetonius also wrote biographies of intellectuals, and that Claudius would perhaps be regarded very differently if he had ended up in that volume. Furthermore, such a list of works would have been

²⁵⁰ *Claud.* 42.2.1-6.

²⁵¹ Barthes 1989: 141-142.

²⁵² Momigliano 1993: 13.

entirely appropriate in biographies of grammarians – but in a biography of an emperor it seems wholly superfluous. His reputation as an historian is also acknowledged in Seneca’s scathing sketch of the emperor in his *Apocolocyntosis*. Seneca makes a jibe about historian’s veracity, ‘*quis umquam ab historico iuratores exegit?*’²⁵³ Claudius’ reverence for historians is neatly demonstrated in his joy at seeing a place for them and his hope there would be a place for his own histories, ‘*Claudius gaudet esse illic philologos homines: sperat futurum aliquem historiis suis locum.*’²⁵⁴ In Suetonius’ *Claudius*, the emperor’s interest in history is a two-dimensional concern with the vast catalogue of history writing then suggesting a three-dimensional characterization given that such an interest has no explicit narrative or evaluative function and lends itself to the realism described by Barthes’ theory.

Early in the *Life*, Suetonius suggests that Claudius is more than he appears to be by citing letters that Augustus sent to Livia. The passages not only demonstrate the interaction of Claudius’ baseline and dissonant characterization but also set up the possibility of a more empathetic interpretation by the reader. Wallace-Hadrill notes their significance in that ‘[q]uoted at length, they give a penetrating account of the boy’s mixture of talent and gaucherie, and at the same time a fascinating insight into Augustus’ manipulation of his family.’²⁵⁵ Such a comment rightly points to Augustus as a characterizing force, not only of himself but everyone, across the entire collection, and even perhaps understates the greater nuance it offers to the portrait of Claudius.

nam auunculus maior Augustus quid de eo in utramque partem opinatus sit, quo certius cognoscatur, capita ex ipsius epistulis posui.

'Collocutus sum cum Tiberio, ut mandasti mea Liuia, quid nepoti tuo Tiberio faciendum esset ludis Martialibus. consentit autem uterque nostrum, semel nobis esse statuendum, quod consilium in illo sequamur. nam si est artius, ut ita dicam, holocleros, quid est quod dubitemus, quin per eosdem articulos et gradus producendus sit, per quos ater eius productus sit? sin autem ἡλαττωσθαι sentimus

²⁵³ Sen. *Apoc.* 1.2.2.

²⁵⁴ Sen. *Apoc.* 5.4.5-6.

²⁵⁵ Wallace-Hadrill 1995: 91.

eum et βεβλάφθαι καὶ εἰς τὴν τοῦ σώματος καὶ εἰς τὴν τῆς ψ<υ>χῆς ἀρτιότητα, praebenda materia deridendi et illum et nos non est hominibus τὰ τοιαῦτα σκώπτειν καὶ μυκτηρίζειν εἰωθόσιν.

Finally to make it clearer what opinions, favourable and otherwise, his great uncle Augustus had of him, I have appended extracts from his own letters:

“I have talked with Tiberius, my dear Livia, as you requested, with regard to what is to be done with your grandson Tiberius at the games of Mars. Now we are both agreed that we must decide once for all what plan we are to adopt in his case. For if he be sound and so to say complete, what reason have we for doubting that he ought to be advanced through the same grades and steps through which his brother has been advanced? But if we realize that he is wanting and defective in soundness of body and mind, we must not furnish the means of ridiculing both him and us to a public which is wont to scoff at and deride such things.”²⁵⁶

Townend commented that Suetonius ‘makes particularly effective use of extracts from letters of Augustus, sometimes of considerable length, to illustrate questions which arouse his particular interest.’²⁵⁷ The basic characterization is outlined through Claudius’ having limited capabilities and the resulting ridicule. There is an evaluative concern with ‘*deridendi*’. They are concerned with Claudius being mocked but more specifically (and more importantly) they are worried about being mocked themselves (‘*illum et nos*’). However, these letters are about discerning whether he is in fact capable or incapable taking part in society. As a result, we are presented with a more complex character.

Augustus perceives Claudius’ potential clearly enough and Suetonius offers an image in contrast to what we have already seen to create a two-dimensional depiction.

‘Tiberium adolescentem ego uero, dum tu aberis, cotidie inuitabo ad cenam, ne solus cenet cum suo Sulpicio et Athenodoro. qui uellem diligentius et minus μετεώρως deligeret sibi aliquem, cuius motum et habitum et incessum imitaretur. misellus ἀτυχεῖ· nam ἐν τοῖς σπουδαίοις, ubi non aberrauit eius animus, satis apparet ἡ τῆς ψυχῆς αὐτοῦ εὐγένεια.’ item tertiis litteris:

‘Tiberium nepotem tuum placere mihi declamantem potuisse, peream nisi, mea Liuia, admiror. nam qui tam ἀσαφῶς loquatur, qui possit cum declamat σαφῶς dicere quae dicenda sunt, non uideo.’

²⁵⁶ *Claud.* 3.2.9-4.2.5, trans. Rolfe. Cf. Hurley 2001: 75 ad 4.1.

²⁵⁷ Townend 1967: 87. He further speculates that Suetonius’ use of Augustus’ letters discussing Claudius’ character (*Claud.* 4) were inspired by something in Tacitus’ coverage of Claudius in his *Annals* (p. 89).

“I certainly shall invite the young Tiberius to dinner every day during your absence, to keep him from dining alone with his friends Sulpicius and Athenodorus. I do wish that he would choose more carefully and in a less scatter-brained fashion someone to imitate in his movements, bearing, and gait. The poor fellow is unlucky; for in important matters, where his mind does not wander, the nobility of his character is apparent enough.” Also in a third letter:

“Confound me, dear Livia, if I am not surprised that your grandson Tiberius could please me with his declaiming. How in the world anyone who is so unclear in his conversation can speak with clearness and propriety when he declaims, is more than I can see.”²⁵⁸

Part of Claudius’ problem comes down to following faulty exemplars, like Sulpicius and Athenodorus,²⁵⁹ which Augustus tries to circumvent. In addition, the need to simply concentrate on his own composure and comportment is evident given the positive results when his mind does not wander. Yet Augustus states that Claudius is unlucky (*‘misellus ἀτυχεῖ’*) thus suggesting chance is to blame for the faults rather than the man. He sees positive attributes in Claudius which offer a contrast to the simple depiction of him being an inferior person. Indeed, the fact that Augustus suggests that by following better exemplars Claudius might improve himself suggests the second dimension of characterization. Furthermore, Augustus complimenting Claudius’ public speaking suggests the latter’s self-awareness through efforts to compensate thus marking him as a complex character. Again, this shows that there is more to him than meets the eye, and that his character is not restricted to the initial impression he makes. He is no stock figure and achieves at least two dimensions of characterization.

Given that Claudius’ inner nobility was evident to Augustus, he wishes him to correct any defects through proper examples. As in an earlier section dealing with the issue of Claudius taking charge of a banquet he wishes that Claudius allow himself to be advised by the son of Silvanus so as not to do anything conspicuous or laughable (*‘si est*

²⁵⁸ *Claud.* 4.5.1-6.5, trans. Rolfe. On Claudius’ stammering speech see *Claud.* 30.1.1-31.1.1. Cf. *Sen. Apoc.* 5.2; 5.3; 6.2; 7.2; Dio 60.2.2.

²⁵⁹ Their exact identities are unknown although the previously mentioned Sulpicius Flavius is a possibility for the former and the latter being a freedman (based on his name) fits into a pattern of such influence. (Hurley 2001: 79 ad 4.5).

passurus se ab Siluani filio homine sibi affini admoneri, ne quid faciat quod conspici et derideri possit).²⁶⁰ Augustus' letters thus convey the clear idea of Claudius as an incapable fool and then contrast it with their being impressed at his ability to speak and his inner nobility: to the extent that coming up to scratch may just require an exemplar and a commitment to self-improvement. Self-awareness of one's own positives and negative attributes and capabilities is an acknowledged idea in ancient writing, for instance by Seneca.²⁶¹ Claudius seems to be perfectly aware of his own faults and aims to manage them, as evidenced by the variation in his speaking at *Claud.* 4.5-6.

Claudius is, at this point, self-aware in other areas, such as when giving a reading. The following is not strictly about his own physical limitations but also his lack of self-control in corpsing at a humorous incident.

et cum primum frequenti auditorio commisisset, aegre perlegit refrigeratus saepe a semet ipso. nam cum initio recitationis defractis compluribus subsellis obesitate cuiusdam risus exortus esset, ne sedato quidem tumultu temperare potuit, quin ex interuallo subinde facti reminisceretur cachinnosque reuocaret. in principatu quoque et scripsit plurimum et assidue recitauit per lectorem.

But when he gave his first reading to a large audience, he had difficulty in finishing, since he more than once threw cold water on his own performance. For at the beginning of the reading the breaking down of several benches by a fat man raised a laugh, and even after the disturbance was quieted, Claudius could not keep from recalling the incident and renewing his guffaws. Even while he was emperor he wrote a good deal and gave constant recitals through a professional reader.²⁶²

As much as he tries to adhere to some modicum of composure and proficiency, he lacks the ability to stay the course as a reader and loses whatever poise he might have managed because of the distraction. Not unlike Augustus in using a herald,²⁶³ his solution of using

²⁶⁰ *Claud.* 4.3.1-6.

²⁶¹ *'Suum quisque igitur noscat ingenium acremque se et bonorum et vitiorum suorum iudicem praebeat...'* (Cic. *Off.* 1.114.1-3). Cf. *'Ante omnia necesse est se ipsum aestimare, quia fere plus nobis uidemur posse quam possumus...'* (Sen. *Tranq.* 9.6.2.1ff.).

²⁶² *Claud.* 41.1.3-2.3, trans. Rolfe.

²⁶³ *Aug.* 84.2.7-9.

a professional reader, can be viewed as Claudius asserting control over public performance, and compensating for his own shortcomings due to his physical limitations.

Much later Claudius also shows this kind of self-awareness and the reader is presented with an opportunity to understand Claudius rather than just strictly judge him. He is demonstrably conscious of minor flaws in temperament; namely being prone to anger.

irae atque iracundiae conscius sibi, utramque excusavit edicto distinxitque, pollicitus alteram quidem breuem et innoxiam, alteram non iniustam fore. Ostiensibus, quia sibi subeunti Tiberim scaphas obuiam non miserint, grauius correptis eaque cum inuidia, ut in ordinem se coactum conscriberet, repente tantum non satis facientis modo ueniam dedit.

He was conscious of his tendency to wrath and resentment and excused both in an edict; he also drew a distinction between them, promising that the former would be short and harmless and the latter not without cause. After sharply rebuking the people of Ostia, because they had sent no boats to meet him when he entered the Tiber, and in such bitter terms that he wrote that they had reduced him to the rank of a commoner, he suddenly forgave them and all but apologised.²⁶⁴

Claudius struggles but aims to manage and bring into line his qualities, however imperfectly. This is noticeably different to examples of dissonance wherein opposing traits co-exist or are in open conflict. In this instance, Claudius is aware of his penchant for petty anger and goes out of his way to address the issue should he give in to such tendencies. Even though such emotions and temperament are moralistic to a degree, they are insignificant in comparison to the grand virtues and vices on offer elsewhere in Suetonius' collection. This passage is perhaps open to a more empathetic reading given his self-management towards more functional behaviour.

The passage offers the reader an opportunity to see Claudius in more empathetic terms when they see how he handles specific instances of emotions. In the above passage discussing Claudius' own self-awareness of his traits, the characterizing point of view is from Claudius himself. The use of '*irae*' and '*iracundiae*' are unambiguously evaluative

²⁶⁴ *Claud.* 38.1.1–2.1, trans. Rolfe.

and negative but are very minor compared to grand litany of monstrous behaviour previously seen in Caligula and Tiberius. Furthermore, Claudius tries to reduce and rationalize them by defining the former as '*breuem*' and '*innoxiam*' and the latter as '*non iniustam*'. All this points to functional self-management and is arguably open to an empathetic interpretation given that we are allowed to see these actions from Claudius' own point of view. This example is not strictly integral to creating his baseline or dissonant portrayal. This is not the same as the grand vices of Caligula or later of Nero,²⁶⁵ where there are conscious decisions to be all kinds of awful. So, this arguably leans more closely to an empathetic reading because it is so much smaller in evaluative stakes. Overt evaluation is clearly seen in the 'fool' depiction and its opposite in his judgements and even intellectual endeavours (which have their own excessive elements).

In this passage, Claudius is arguably neither wilfully indulging in these negative traits nor actively attempting any kind of self-correction. It certainly does not make him any better or worse. He makes no promises not to go forward behaving like this or even work toward that goal. Claudius merely defines the boundaries of these traits (expressly minimizing the evaluative quality) and apologizes for his conduct. In these small details, the emperor is simply managing himself in a moment of self-awareness. Suetonius' account arguably provides the reader with a moment that allows them to understand rather than judge Claudius.

This Claudius is not just a stereotypical fool. He is not even only a person who appears to be a fool but is secretly more intelligent. Claudius is a person who reflects on this dichotomy and tries to overcome it. His claim to have feigned stupidity not only raises doubts about his mental incapacity but specifically draws attention to Claudius'

²⁶⁵ The sheer scope of Caligula's vices includes, but is not limited to, arrogance, disloyalty, cruelty, envy, sexual excess, extravagance, and greed (*Calig.* 22-49). Likewise, Nero's includes insolence, self-indulgence, sexual excess, extravagance, greed, and cruelty (*Ner.* 26-38).

awareness of his own reputation. Likewise, his promise to moderate his anger, or at least his irascibility, shows a person who is self-conscious about his own image. This may have moral weight in line with Seneca's view of the value of knowing yourself. But it is not really a matter of whether Claudius was a good emperor or not. What it does is give us a sense of Claudius as a man. It is an extra, even a gratuitous detail, which puts him across to the reader no more as a stereotype or a mask, but as a real and complex character.

2.5 *Partem Pro Toto*

The tripartite perspective shows an expansive view of Claudius' baseline characterization. Claudius' image as a fool is comprehensively presented through depictions of him as physically incapable, dim-witted, and distinctly vulgar. His rise to power is attributed to a freak occurrence, he is easily swayed by his wives and freedmen, and is regarded by others as an object of ridicule. However, dissonant characterization subverts this and allows him to be seen in a different light. Even though the suggestion that Claudius feigned stupidity as a survival tactic is treated dubiously there is evidence of considerable intellect elsewhere. As an emperor, he was conscious of his duties and diligent in handling the state. When presiding over cases as both consul and censor, Claudius was unusual and idiosyncratic but, in most instances, displays keen understanding and sly wisdom. Finally, Claudius' interest in history writing is integral to the image of him as a more intelligent figure in contrast to his foolish baseline. However, the reader can further interpret the full catalogue of works that follows as extraneous details which create a sense of realism. In addition, Augustus' letters to Livia, quoted early in the *Life*, give glimpses of all three dimensions and suggest that Claudius is more

than he seems. Later instances of self-management on Claudius' part offer the reader an empathetic opportunity to understand rather than judge.

The next section will build on these two chapters. The tripartite perspective of character writing will show how Suetonius' uses of literary techniques further construct complexity in his Caesars throughout *De vita Caesarum*. He does this across topics including physical appearance, names, speech, humour, and sex and sexuality via their anecdotal foundations. Chapter three will demonstrate how complex characters are created in part to convey the whole, through the external descriptions of physical features and names.

**SECTION
II**

CHAPTER THREE

All the Pieces Matter:

Describing Complex Characters in *De vita Caesarum*

But this seems to be the paradoxical character of biography: it must always give partem pro toto; it must always achieve completeness by selectiveness...

(Arnaldo Momigliano, *The Development of Greek Biography*, 1993: 11)

3.1 Introduction

All the pieces matter when creating complex characters. This chapter shows how Suetonius' use of external descriptions, comprised of appearance and names, can reinforce, challenge, or transcend stereotyped, baseline characterization. Physical appearance reveals subtleties delineating Suetonius' Caesars. Even though appearance can be associated with a specific meaning, it depends entirely on the type of characterization the biographer wishes to present. One-dimensional baseline depictions are easily identified. It should come as no surprise that Augustus was handsome and graceful throughout his life. Caligula's unpleasant appearance fits his character accordingly. Even Vespasian's physical features can be used to stress his prominent trait; humour. Two-dimensional depictions are evident in the discordant image of Tiberius with an outbreak of pimples on his good-looking face. Nero's debauched lifestyle and excellent health are curiously dissonant. The link between the body and mind, in the case of Caligula, can illuminate internal dichotomies. Domitian being aware of his modest appearance exploits this factor to manipulate others highlighting his duplicity.

Three-dimensional depictions can also be parsed. Epilepsy, as a physical quality, can be used to indicate strict realism without any evaluative meaning (as with Julius) or embellish a moralistic baseline (as with Caligula). Extraneous and idiosyncratic details

are open to interpretation or can even defy it. In the case of Augustus' birthmarks, there is a superficial suggestion of divinity although Suetonius makes no effort to directly provide any meaning. The emperor's attempt to correct physical deficiencies like a limp or an enfeebled forefinger certainly contributes to his baseline by showing him to be an inveterate self-improver. However, one is hard-pressed to see features such as his gallstones as anything other than non-evaluative realism. Whether it is the complexion of a Caesar or his hair, eyes or walk, such recurring traits can be used to understand their outlook and catch glimpses of their interior life.

Appearance as an expression of the person extends beyond the body to a Caesar's sense of dress. Caligula's dress shows him to be at odds with established cultural norms but in a manner strictly in line with his established character. In a similar fashion Nero's dress complements the brazenness of his basic portrait. Julius' dress sense is curiously dandified due to his meticulous care and his loose belt, which seems at odds with the stereotyped ideal of an authority figure associated with him. Augustus' modest and humble dress serves to reinforce his carefully cultivated image. External descriptions, consisting of physical appearance and dress, reveal characterizing details and overtly convey a person in the same way as a name

Names inherited from family often highlight character traits and foreshadow the nature of the person to come; as in the case of Tiberius. Names that are assigned can show how a Caesar is seen, often in a humorous light, with Tiberius referred to as 'Biberius Caldius Mero'. Names that are adopted show how a Caesar wishes to be seen, with a notable example being Augustus sidestepping the name of Romulus. Augustus' childhood name of 'Thurinus' allows for interplay between all three dimensions. Some names, and their origins, as in the case of Galba, provide a sense of ambiguity and authenticity that pushes his depiction towards realism.

Viewing these subjects through the lens of the tripartite perspective reveals the intricacies of Suetonius' *Lives*. Interplay between these dimensions can emphasize the basic elements of a Caesar's portrait in line with their general presentation and challenge that depiction with discordant moments and push towards realism using a subject's heightened self-consciousness along with excessive details stripped of evaluative meaning. All these pieces matter to a biographer.

3.2 *Species Caesarum*

3.2.1 One-Dimensional Depictions

The appearance of a Caesar ranges from physical description to personal grooming and dress sense. Suetonius' use of these topics creates a vivid picture of his subject and reveals layers of characterization. Detailed physical portraiture in ancient biography provides an author not only with a means of displaying a clear image of the person but also an opportunity to play with the suggestion and interpretation of their character. Physiognomy, i.e. the notion that the physical appearance of a person could offer an insight into their personality, was a prevalent ideological concept in the ancient world.²⁶⁶ This idea lends itself harmoniously to the modern composition of literature and historiography, as Momigliano stressed that 'the biographer has the additional task of inferring from external details the mental state of the individual about whom he is writing.'²⁶⁷ However, a writer does not need to adhere to a strict system of signs.

²⁶⁶ For physiognomy in relation to biography, see Evans (1935); Evans 1969: 46-58; Wardman (1967). For Suetonius' Caesars specifically see Vidén (2018) and Rohrbacher (2010).

²⁶⁷ Momigliano 1985: 88.

In the case of Suetonius, the biographer plays to a reader's familiarity with physiognomy to attach a sense of legitimacy to his portraits, all the while suggesting his own meanings. A biographer can use a concept like physiognomy to craft their characters without having to obey its formal tenets and as Vidén points out, 'Suetonius is writing within a sphere of knowledge about physiognomic theory in general, but this is combined with ideas and beliefs common to his time.'²⁶⁸ It is necessary therefore to examine the physical descriptions in Suetonius' *Lives* with a focus on the meaning as stated or suggested. In line with the tripartite perspective of characterization, the appearance of Suetonius' Caesars can show their character's basic presentation along with discordant and realistic features.

The physical features of Augustus, as presented by Suetonius, offer a baseline characterization of the emperor that is ideal in every respect. Ever the exemplar, Augustus is described as handsome and graceful throughout his entire life with a disregard for adornment ('*Forma fuit eximia et per omnes aetatis gradus uenustissima, quamquam et omnis lenocinii neglegens*').²⁶⁹ Suetonius makes his meaning clear enough but as the first chapter addressed, physiognomical readings are available to us should we desire them. Other physical features reaffirm the basic elements of his portrayal all the same but are done so beneath the surface meaning. According to Evans' reading by way of physiognomy, that his eyebrows meet ('*supercilia coniuncta*') is generally interpreted as a sign of beauty while moderate sized ears are associated with vigilance in the performance of duty ('*mediocres aures*').²⁷⁰ Not only is the emperor's almost panegyric

²⁶⁸ Vidén 2018: 38. Baldwin dismisses any conscious adherence to physiognomy (Baldwin 1983: 499). For an excellent overview of various schools of thought on physiognomy and how they do or do not reconcile with Suetonius' use of a Caesar's physical appearance see Rohrbacher 2010: 95-99. Rohrbacher does stress that we must see that Suetonius has 'an eclectic understanding of the various positions on the relationship between body and character and, sometimes, the willingness to leave the chore of interpretation to the reader of his work.' (Rohrbacher 2010: 94).

²⁶⁹ *Aug.* 79.1.1-2.

²⁷⁰ *Aug.* 79.2.7. Cf. Evans 1935: 66.

depiction created overtly but there are signs available for interpretation should a clever scholar wish.

Another example of overt meaning and available interpretation is when Suetonius states that Augustus' complexion was between light and dark (*'colorem inter aquilum candidumque'*).²⁷¹ The emperor's colour is thus a curious physical representation of the efforts he exerts elsewhere to find a happy medium. Furthermore, this feature has a positive connotation, as Evans locates it in physiognomic terms as a sign of strong character.²⁷² The biographer stresses his positive intentions openly but also allows for further observances.

Even though Augustus is said to be short (*'staturam breuem'*), Suetonius stresses that his ideal proportions compensated for his lack of height (*'sed quae commoditate et aequitate membrorum occuleretur'*) and that it was only noticeable if someone taller was next to him (*'ut non nisi ex comparatione astantis alicuius procerioris intellegi posset'*).²⁷³ In discussing such physical features and their interpretation, Vidén notes that Augustus is presented in terms that make clear he is fully well-proportioned; as a result, Augustus is in line with the simple idea found in physiognomical handbooks that the 'ill-proportioned are scoundrels, and that the well-proportioned ought thus to be just and brave.'²⁷⁴ Augustus' stature reaffirms a positive baseline and it is easily observed in a way that plays to physiognomy without requiring an intricate understanding.

Augustus' one-dimensional baseline characterization is strengthened through Suetonius' description of the emperor's expression and mannerisms coupled with an anecdote bordering on panegyric praise.

²⁷¹ *Aug.* 79.2.9.

²⁷² Evans 1935: 66.

²⁷³ *Aug.* 79.2.9-14.

²⁷⁴ Vidén 2018: 41.

uultu erat uel in sermone uel tacitus adeo tranquillo serenoque, ut quidam e primoribus Galliarum confessus sit inter suos, eo se inhibitum ac remollitum, quo minus, ut destinarat, in transitu Alpium per simulationem conloquii propius admissus in praecipitium propelleret.

His expression, whether in conversation or when he was silent, was so calm and mild, that one of the leading men of the Gallic provinces admitted to his countrymen that it had softened his heart, and kept him from carrying out his design of pushing the emperor over a cliff, when he had been allowed to approach him under the pretence of a conference, as he was crossing the Alps.²⁷⁵

Augustus is exemplary in his composure, with his expression being consistently calm and mild. In his face and manner, he finds an ideal middle ground. That Suetonius portrays such an appearance as being able to dissuade a man from carrying out his murderous subterfuge intensifies not only his glowing portrait but the divine attributes he seemingly possessed.²⁷⁶

Likewise, physical descriptions just as easily illuminate negative characters. Caligula's appearance, being somewhat weird, disproportionate, and hairy, reinforces his one-dimensional baseline characterization. Suetonius describes him thus:

Statura fuit eminenti, colore expallido, corpore enormi, gracilitate maxima ceruicis et crurum, oculis et temporibus concauis, fronte lata et torua, capillo raro at circa uerticem nullo, hirsutus cetera. quare transeunte eo prospicere ex superiore parte aut omnino quacumque de causa capram nominare, crimosum et exitiale habebatur.

He was very tall and extremely pale, with an un-shapely body, but very thin neck and legs. His eyes and temples were hollow, his forehead broad and grim, his hair thin and entirely gone on the top of his head, though his body was hairy. Because of this to look upon him from a higher place as he passed by, or for any reason whatever to mention a goat, was treated as a capital offence.²⁷⁷

His uneven features and hairy unpleasant aesthetic make sense given his character.

Rohrbacher notes that the imbalance between Caligula's tall stature and thin neck and legs 'allows his moral grotesqueness to be mirrored by his physical grotesqueness' and

²⁷⁵ *Aug.* 79.1.6-10, trans Rolfe.

²⁷⁶ Wardle views this as suggesting that Augustus 'was more than human, sharing the impassivity of the gods, but without any indisputable attribution of divinity' (Wardle 2014: 472 ad 79.1). On Augustus and self-association with Apollo see Galinsky 1996: 215-218.

²⁷⁷ *Calig.* 50.1.1-7, trans. Rolfe.

in referring to this as ‘folk physiognomy’ we are allowed ‘to escape the problems that interpretation by the manuals had presented.’²⁷⁸ Again, Caligula’s appearance is easily perceived as repulsive and thus strengthens his baseline characterization. However, more intricate readings are available should the surface not suffice.

His physical appearance is generally unpleasant with specific aspects being linked directly to negative qualities. In relation to physiognomy, his paleness has been identified as a sign of cowardice while his broad, grim forehead can indicate stupidity and foolishness.²⁷⁹ His ill-proportioned body also neatly emphasizes his vicious and cruel nature.²⁸⁰ Caligula’s explicit appearance aligns neatly with his negative one-dimensional baseline characterization and is complemented by these implicit interpretations. Furthermore, Caligula’s lack of hair provides a clear example of his disagreeable appearance highlighting his brutal qualities. Seeing that he was bald or comparing him to a goat result in rather extreme punishments signifying his personal insecurity and intensely vicious quality in his over-reaction. Hurley states that the ‘hair that should have been on his head was inappropriately abundant elsewhere’.²⁸¹ The comparison to a goat, in physiognomical terms, can suggest lechery and insanity.²⁸² On one level, Caligula’s unpleasant appearance suggests the same of his character but on another level, physiognomy allows for a more embellished reading.

Individual character traits associated with Caesars can also be identified and strengthened by their physical appearance. The mention of Vespasian’s facial expressions

²⁷⁸ Rohrbacher 2010: 98. ‘Folk Physiognomy’ is used by Rohrbacher to explain a point offered by Gascou ‘in which the details of the portraits are considered holistically and abnormalities or overall impressions can color our understanding of the emperor’s portraits, without demanding the one-to-one correlation between physical feature and character which the manuals presuppose.’ (Rohrbacher 2010: 96. Cf. Gascou 1984: 602-606).

²⁷⁹ Evans 1935: 68.

²⁸⁰ Evans 1935: 64.

²⁸¹ Hurley 1993: 179 ad 50.1.

²⁸² Couissin 1953: 251. Caligula shares the disagreeable features of both the panther and the goat (Evans 1935: 67; 48-51; 64-68).

is an opportunity for crude humour, a quality identified with him throughout his biography. His expression was that of someone straining during a bowel movement (*'uultu ueluti nitentis'*).²⁸³ It goes even further than this comment with Vespasian asking a witty man to make a joke about him to which the man said he would once Vespasian was done relieving his bowels (*'dicam,' inquit, 'cum uentrem exonerare desieris.'*)²⁸⁴ Suetonius describes Vespasian's features through a joke but also shows that he does not take himself too seriously. Vespasian is self-deprecating enough to happily have a joke made at his expense. However, his awareness is completely in line with the basic trait and portrait of his humour serving to heighten and not contradict his characterization in anyway. The story does not exactly say that Vespasian was happy to hear this joke. It is reasonable to say that there is at least the implication that he tolerated such a comment. After all, this is exactly the kind of toilet humour that Vespasian himself tended to indulge in.²⁸⁵ Even when it is attributed to someone else it reinforces the atmosphere of his court as down-to-earth and the emperor as willing to be a figure of fun.

Physical appearance can reaffirm established baseline characterizations, but this does not mean they are without nuance. They can in fact be intricate in their craft and intention. When Suetonius describes Augustus' eyes, there is an emphasis on divine qualities.

oculos habuit claros ac nitidos, quibus etiam existimari uolebat inesse quiddam diuini uigoris, gaudebatque, si qui sibi acrius contuenti quasi ad fulgorem solis uultum summitteret...

He had clear, bright eyes, in which he liked to have it thought that there was a kind of divine power, and it greatly pleased him, whenever he looked keenly at anyone, if he let his face fall as if before the radiance of the sun...²⁸⁶

²⁸³ *Vesp.* 20.1.2.

²⁸⁴ *Vesp.* 20.1.4.

²⁸⁵ Vespasian's quip when Titus criticizes a tax on public latrines is quite literally an example of toilet humour (*Vesp.* 22.3ff.).

²⁸⁶ *Aug.* 79.2.1-5, trans. Rolfe.

The focus on eyes to suggest personal qualities was previously seen in Sulla's gaze (in chapter one) and in this instance a comparison between the eyes of Augustus and Alexander is implicit yet clear.²⁸⁷ But Suetonius does not describe Augustus' eyes; he explicitly presents Augustus' awareness of how he looks and how other people will perceive him. He wishes others to see him this way because this is how he sees himself.

Clear bright eyes are associated with the idea of a strong and powerful leader and Suetonius exploits this without accepting it. The characterization comes from Augustus' awareness of this physiognomical commonplace and his desire to exploit it. Physiognomy alone does not provide the characterization (although he still has the bright eyes); Suetonius embellishes the characterization by giving him self-awareness. Vidén stresses that divinity in Augustus' eyes are hardly indicative of his soul 'since this is an effect that Augustus himself wanted to have on people, not necessarily one that existed on its own account.'²⁸⁸ But this is exactly the point; the characterization of Augustus is that he is aware of and happy to play to the perception of divinity. The cultivation of his image is a recurring trait that will define Augustus' baseline throughout Suetonius' collection.

The recurring portrait of Augustus as a man who carefully cultivates himself is evidently a familiar one; when discussing the emperor's image in Dio, Pelling observes that something 'may also be owed to Augustus' own manipulation of his public image: much of the idealization was his own work, and the human personality receded at an early stage.'²⁸⁹ Mark Toher furthers this point in looking at the characterization of Augustus across a variety of sources. He says that even though Suetonius and the other sources

²⁸⁷ 'καὶ γὰρ μάλιστα ἃ πολλοὶ τῶν διαδόχων ὕστερον καὶ τῶν φίλων ἀπεμιμοῦντο, τὴν τε ἀνάτασιν τοῦ ἀχένοῦ εἰς εὐώνυμον ἡσυχῇ κεκλιμένον καὶ τὴν ὑγρότητα τῶν ὀμμάτων, διατετήρηκεν ἀκριβῶς ὁ τεχνίτης.' 'For those peculiarities which many of his successors and friends afterwards tried to imitate, namely, the poise of the neck, which was bent slightly to the left, and the melting glance of his eyes, this artist has accurately observed.' (Plut. *Alex.* 4.1, trans. Perrin). Cf. Edwards 2000: 315.

²⁸⁸ Vidén 2018: 45.

²⁸⁹ Pelling 1997a: 136.

provides a good impression of Augustus' meticulously constructed *persona* the use of 'anecdotes and scurrilous stories demonstrates that his audience was aware of the construct'.²⁹⁰ Our focus though is not on the real man himself, but the version crafted by Suetonius. The *Life* leans into this image to form Augustus' baseline character and shows how he cultivates such an image, making for an intricate and compelling figure.

Thus, physiognomy solidifies his one-dimensional depiction, but his awareness suggests a level of depth and complexity too by allowing him to emphasize his natural looks. Indeed, how Suetonius characterizes a Caesar and how they characterize themselves are recurring techniques in his biographies. Augustus is not just good-looking: he knows it and cultivates it. This in fact remains one-dimensional because it fits with his baseline characterization: not just as a good emperor, that is, but as an emperor who is constantly constructing his own image. And remarkably the same can be said of Caligula: he does not just look unpleasant, he practices looking unpleasant. Just as Augustus is portrayed as cultivating a positive image, Caligula is seen cultivating his negative image.

Facial features specifically can be used by the biographer to illustrate momentary glimpses of a Caesar's interior life, which intensify their basic character. The face gives meaning to the person and in the case of Caligula it shows not only his nature but the impression he wishes to convey. Suetonius notes that although Caligula's face was naturally horrid and hideous, he went out of his way to embellish it by practicing frightful and terrifying grimaces in front of the mirror (*'uultum uero natura horridum ac taetrum etiam ex industria efferabat componens ad speculum in omnem terrorem ac formidinem.'*)²⁹¹ Caligula's repulsive physical features go hand in hand with his personal

²⁹⁰ Toher 2015: 236.

²⁹¹ *Calig.* 50.1.7-9. On Caligula using his face as an instrument of torture: *'Torserat per omnia quae in rerum natura tristissima sunt, fidiculis, talaribus, eculeo, igne uultu suo.'* (Sen. *De Ira* 3.19.1).

ugliness. However, his desire to practice even more terrifying expressions in the mirror reveals how he wishes to be perceived and strengthens his repellent depiction.

Caligula's self-awareness in this example allows him to intensify his unpleasant physical appearance. The cultivation of his image also demonstrates an instance of self-characterization which hints towards complexity without contradicting Caligula's general character. Caligula's facial expressions and physical traits embellish recurring elements of his characterization. The free-floating element of self-awareness of Augustus strengthens his basic characterization as someone who knows how others perceive him and as a self-characterizing force who cultivates his image. Likewise, Caligula's self-awareness allows him to intensify his unappealing features through self-characterization. These baseline characterizations are more complex than the simplest stereotypes of Theophrastus, but they work in the same way as his 'Dissembler': the behaviour is complex but unswerving, and their appearance backs it up. It remains, that is, one-dimensional. The description of Augustus' appearance reinforces his characterization; that of Caligula too. Two-dimensional characterization requires dissonance even in the description, as we shall see.

3.2.2 Two-Dimensional Depictions

The second dimension of characterization challenges the basic presentation of a person through discordant elements. Suetonius' use of physical portraiture allows for dissonant details to contradict and complicate his Caesars. The representation of Tiberius' character is built on the co-existence of both virtue and vice and his physical appearance offers up a testament to his duality.

Corpore fuit amplo atque robusto, statura quae iustam excederet; latus ab umeris et pectore, ceteris quoque membris usque ad imos pedes aequalis et congruens; sinistra manu agiliore ac ualidiore, articulis ita firmis, ut recens et integrum malum digito terebraret, caput pueri uel etiam adulescentis talitro uulneraret. colore erat candido, capillo pone occipitium summissiore ut ceruicem etiam obtegeret, quod gentile in illo uidebatur; facie honesta, in qua tamen crebri et subiti tumores, cum praegrandibus oculis et qui, quod mirum esset, noctu etiam et in tenebris uiderent, sed ad breue et cum primum e somno patuissent; deinde rursus hebescebant.

He was large and strong of frame, and of a stature above the average; broad of shoulders and chest; well proportioned and symmetrical from head to foot. His left hand was the more nimble and stronger, and its joints were so powerful that he could bore through a fresh, sound apple with his finger, and break the head of a boy, or even a young man, with a snap of it. He was of fair complexion and wore his hair rather long at the back, so much so as even to cover the nape of his neck; which was apparently a family trait. His face was handsome, but would break out on a sudden with many pimples. His eyes were unusually large and, strange to say, had the power of seeing even at night and in the dark, but only for a short time when first opened after sleep; presently they grew dim-sighted again.²⁹²

The emphasis on Tiberius' frame, stature, and especially that he was well proportioned are markedly positive traits.²⁹³ Evans goes further in stating that his physical strengths and weaknesses physiognomically correspond to the virtue and vices of the character.²⁹⁴ When it comes to the description of his face, given his negative and positive qualities, there is a striking metaphorical image. Discordance in Tiberius is summed up in the image of a handsome face breaking out in pimples. It is certainly consistent with the notion of his bad qualities being suppressed and eventually erupting. Moreover, the expression on his face, being described as stern, provides the reader directly with an expression of a personal quality. Tiberius' face aligns with his general depiction as a man of authority who becomes an authoritarian. The latter aspect is strictly one-dimensional, but the former is not. Authority and strength, though, can be positive or negative in connotation.

The meaning of Tiberius' physical qualities can be either suggested or directly imposed by Suetonius. A striking and obtrusive image is that of Tiberius' left hand being

²⁹² *Tib.* 68.1.1-2.6, trans. Rolfe. Cf. *Plut. Sull.* 2.

²⁹³ Evans 1935: 63-64.

²⁹⁴ Evans 1935: 68-69.

strong with joints so powerful that he could bore through an apple with his finger or break the head of a boy or young man.²⁹⁵ Here, the benign and natural image of the apple is combined with an explicitly violent action to convey a negative portrait of Tiberius and hints towards his vicious and brutal behaviour elsewhere in the *Life*, for example the sections devoted to Capri.

Suetonius goes on to describe Tiberius' gait and mannerisms which reveal further features of two-dimensional discordance. He states that:

incedebat ceruice rigida et obstipa, adducto fere uultu, plerumque tacitus, nullo aut rarissimo etiam cum proximis sermone eoque tardissimo, nec sine molli quadam digitorum gesticulatione. quae omnia ingrata atque arrogantiae plena et animaduertit Augustus in eo et excusare temptauit saepe apud senatum ac populum professus naturae uitia esse, non animi.

He strode along with his neck stiff and bent forward, usually with a stern countenance and for the most part in silence, never or very rarely conversing with his companions, and then speaking with great deliberation and with a kind of supple movement of his fingers. All of these mannerisms of his, which were disagreeable and signs of arrogance, were remarked by Augustus, who often tried to excuse them to the senate and people by declaring that they were natural failings, and not intentional.²⁹⁶

In stating that Tiberius does not make a conscious effort with these unlikeable traits and mannerisms, it clarifies that there is a genuine complexity in his characterization through dissonance. Unlike Caligula making his faces, Tiberius does not mean to do such things. Suetonius seems to suggest that it breaks through anyway, much like the pimples on his face. He is not a deliberate monster like Caligula, but he is incapable of (and uninterested in, unlike Augustus) suppressing his worse traits. Tiberius is admittedly an awkward case given his rather dualistic baseline characterization. However, what makes it two-dimensional is that he manifests these contradictory qualities.

²⁹⁵ On his appearance conveying explicitly negative traits see Lindsay 1995: 176-177 and especially in relation to perversion and homosexuality see Maranon 1956: 50-51.

²⁹⁶ *Tib.* 68.3.1-4.4, trans. Rolfe.

In considering Suetonius' presentation of Tiberius, it is perhaps useful to consult Tacitus' depiction of the enigmatic emperor. Broadly speaking there are superficial similarities between the two depictions, as Syme notes: 'There is no clear sign that Suetonius used Tacitus. Yet the biographer, though casual and incoherent, reflects the same diagnosis of Tiberius – duplicity, with hidden vices (especially cruelty) gradually breaking out.'²⁹⁷ However, this thesis will show that there are significant differences between the portraits drawn by Suetonius and Tacitus, which chapter six will discuss in further detail.²⁹⁸ For now, the characterization provided by the historian can inform our reading of the biographer's portrayal. More importantly, we can begin to think about how Suetonius' presentation of Tiberius can challenge a reader's perception of the emperor.

In his own description of Tiberius at *Annals* 1.4, Tacitus focuses on the moral meaning and not the physical description:

Tiberium Neronem maturum annis, spectatum bello, sed vetere atque insita Claudiae familiae superbia; multaque indicia saevitiae, quamquam premantur, erumpere.

Tiberius Nero was mature in years and tried in war, but had the old, inbred arrogance of the Claudian family, and hints of cruelty, strive as he would to repress them, kept breaking out.²⁹⁹

He also later reports that Tiberius had a face full of pimples ('*ulcerosa facies*'), although this is mentioned as a possible reason for the emperor's hiding away on Capri.³⁰⁰ In the above, Tacitus notes that Tiberius' arrogance is ingrained ('*insita*') and uses '*indicia saevitiae, quamquam premantur, erumpere*' to demonstrate his own point of view and guide the reader to the same – it is pure dissimulation. On the other hand, while communicating the same idea, Suetonius' comment about pimples breaking out on Tiberius' handsome face presents it plainly as a fact and lets the reader decide for

²⁹⁷ Syme 1958: 421. On the unlikelihood of Suetonius' engagement with Tacitus see Power 2014b: 205-225.

²⁹⁸ See chapter six of this thesis, pp. 234-244, especially pp. 237-240.

²⁹⁹ Tac. *Ann.* 1.4, trans. Jackson.

³⁰⁰ Tac. *Ann.* 4.57.

themselves that it is a metaphor. In other words, Tacitus points the reader to an interpretation, whereas Suetonius seems only to register the facts and, although he does intervene at times with his own opinion, makes it easier nevertheless for the reader to come to another opinion.

Suetonius does not make it clear that these were innate flaws but reports that Augustus tried to excuse them by saying that they were: this does not make it seem as though Suetonius is convinced, and it is not necessarily a convincing case made to the reader. The difference is that Tacitus has a (historian's) point of view: he notes the dissonance but his account of it always stresses that the bad nature is the true one and the good nature a fake. Suetonius gives us both but with less of a clear take: as a result, he allows the reader to accept that the good parts of Tiberius might also be real, and to see a genuine conflict rather than a mere dissembler.

Tacitus sees Tiberius as inherently cruel and only pretending to be good to make a historiographical point: as noted, this is that Tacitus is an historian with a marked point of view; whereas Suetonius takes advantage of the biographer's right to be miscellaneous in what he reports by reporting both good and bad without (much) explicit comment, and certainly without taking a strong stance. The result is that Tacitus pushes the reader hard to one way of thinking; but although Syme is right that Suetonius' picture is compatible with this, the presentation is of a character who contains both good and bad – and neither is firmly presented as the 'real' Tiberius. Even where Suetonius seems to present his vices as innate, that opinion is assigned to Augustus, and none too convincingly (*'excusare temptavit'*: he tried to excuse it). Admittedly Tacitus also provides his description in *Annals* 1.4 indirectly, as an example of what people at the time thought; but the reader is given no alternative opinion, and it seems fairly clear that the general opinion is also the one that Tacitus thinks is right: Tacitean irony, indeed. Tiberius is not the only Caesar, in

De vita Caesarum, to be two-dimensional or to possess contradictory traits. But he is the one who most obviously displays them in his physical person.

Suetonius' Nero is also another example where two-dimensional dissonance can emerge through the emperor's physical portraiture. Nero's looks and lifestyle reaffirm the negative elements of his portrayal. He was said to be of average height ('*Statura fuit prope iusta*'), his body was spotty and foul smelling ('*corpore maculoso et fetido*'), his hair was light blond ('*subflauo capillo*'), his face was pleasant rather than attractive ('*uultu pulchro magis quam uenusto*'), his eyes blue and weak ('*oculis caesis et hebetioribus*'), his neck thick, his belly stuck out, and his legs slender ('*ceruice obesa, uentre proiecto, gracillimis cruribus*') and he was in good health ('*ualitudine prospera*'). This good health stands in stark contrast to his physical unfitness. Indeed, Suetonius makes the point that it might seem surprising: For someone who indulged in every kind of excess ('*nam qui luxuriae immoderatissimae esset*'), Nero was only sick three times during his fourteen years and even then it was not serious enough to cause him to abstain from drinking wine or any of his other habits ('*ter omnino per quattuordecim annos languit, atque ita ut neque uino neque consuetudine reliqua abstineret*').³⁰¹ Like all Suetonius' Caesars, Nero has mixture of good and bad.

Barton reads aspects like Nero's stature and light hair as physiognomical positives. However, his mottled body, weak eyes and neck, belly, and legs are all indicative of character flaws.³⁰² The general sense of his positive features hardly inspire confidence given that he was almost (*prope*) a good height and his face is pretty (*pulchro*) more than handsome. These weak points are undercut by his outright unpleasant aspects. The complexity emerges in that Nero's unimpressive physical appearance does not reflect

³⁰¹ *Ner.* 51.1.1-7.

³⁰² Barton 1994: 57.

his inner state, which seems remarkably sound. Contrasted with Tiberius' unappealing aspects breaking out, Nero's underlying good health cannot help but break through too.

This is not to say that the dissonance indicative of two-dimensional characterization is strictly focused on the divide between appearance and mannerisms. The link between body and mind can point to more subtle discordance in a character. When it comes to Caligula the one-dimensional baseline idea of his being an anarchical tyrant is bolstered by his mental instability. Suetonius discusses the body and the mind of Caligula and links them by their instability (*'Valitudo ei neque corporis neque animi constitit'*).³⁰³ He also acknowledges the idea that the body can reflect the mind and directly links the two to explain internal character. However, the body and the mind can point to two-dimensional characterization in the disposition of Caligula when individual character traits are blatantly at odds with one another.

Thus, after laying out the physical and mental maladies of Caligula, he demonstrates a moment of complex characterization in the emperor through two distinctly opposite traits. Suetonius attributes Caligula's mental infirmity to his possession of two contradictory traits: on the one hand the utmost confidence and on the other excessive fear (*'Non inmerito mentis ualitudini attribuerim diuersissima in eodem uitia, summam confidentiam et contra nimium metum'*). For all of his contempt of the gods, Caligula would cover his head and hide under his bed at the mere hint of thunder and lightning (*'nam qui deos tanto opere contemneret, ad minima tonitrua et fulgura coniuere, caput obuoluere, at uero maiore proripere se e strato sub lectumque condere solebat.'*)³⁰⁴

While Caligula's overall portrait is defined by lunacy and tyranny, the former is used to

³⁰³ *Calig.* 50.2.1. Cf. 'Significantly Suetonius treats the mental state of his subject as closely related to his physical condition' (Lindsay 1993: 154 ad 50.2). On Caligula's mental illness, see Wardle 1994: 330 ad 50.2; Lindsay 1993: 154-155 ad 50.2; Hurley 1993: 180-181 ad 50.2. Of note: Katz argued for 'hyperthyroidism' (Katz 1972: 223-225; 1977: 451) but was dismissed by Morgan (Morgan 1973: 327-329; 1977: 452-453). Benediktson proposed interictal temporal lobe epilepsy (Benediktson 1989: 370-375).

³⁰⁴ *Calig.* 51.1.1-6.

highlight complexity through the juxtaposition of confidence and fear which aligns with the second dimension of characterization. There can be a dissonance in a character that does not depend on body and mind being opposed to one another, but to either of them being conflicted within themselves. Suetonius' Caligula is defined by instability in body and mind. However, his mind is also said to be divided between contradictory attitudes.

Physical portraiture can begin to approach a realistic quality by bridging the second and third dimension. The kind of self-awareness clearly seen with Augustus and briefly in Caligula can have a complex result. Even though self-awareness is not indicative of realism on its own, and can appear in one-dimensional or two-dimensional contexts, it can be used to approach a three-dimensional character. Domitian, for example, initially seems modest. He is said to have cultivated this impression: hence is immodest, and this therefore belies his physical appearance (dissonance). But this self-awareness introduces a whole new level of complexity: it is not just that his appearance and behaviour do not match (like Tiberius or Claudius), but that he actively sets out to create a certain basic image of himself through his physicality. This may not be a realistic feature exactly; but it is complex characterization all the same.

Statura fuit procera, uultu modesto ruborisque pleno, grandibus oculis, uerum acie hebetiore; praeterea pulcher ac decens, maxime in iuuenta, et quidem toto corpore exceptis pedibus, quorum digitos restrictiores habebat...commendari se uerecundia oris adeo sentiebat, ut apud senatum sic quondam iactauerit: 'usque adhoc certe et animum meum probastis et uultum.'

He was tall of stature, with a modest expression and a high colour [i.e. blushing]. His eyes were large, but his sight was somewhat dim. He was handsome and graceful too, especially when a young man, and indeed in his whole body with the exception of his feet, the toes of which were somewhat cramped...He was so conscious that the modesty of his expression was in his favour, that he once made this boast in the senate: "So far, at any rate, you have approved my heart and my countenance."³⁰⁵

³⁰⁵ *Dom.* 18.1.1-2.4, trans. Rolfe. Cf. Domitian's red complexion (*Tac. Agr.* 45). For concealing his character consider '*fronte laetus, pectore anxius*' (*Tac. Agr.* 39.1.2). On blushing see Mooney 1979 [1930]: 593-594.

Suetonius describes Domitian as being tall with a modest expression and given to blushing while also handsome and graceful. Helmbold makes an argument that the juxtaposition of these two descriptions shows that the biographer ‘interprets, then, the color of his face to indicate pleasant qualities rather than the reverse’ and regardless of Suetonius’ familiarity with physiognomy his choice is still significant.³⁰⁶ Vidén stresses that ‘Domitian’s *rubor* of the face should be read in the light of his face also being *modestus*.’³⁰⁷ Zadorojnyi’s point about the use of colour, specifically Domitian’s redness, is useful. One of the reasons colours are used is to reflect ‘the overt or submerged Roman concerns about social and moral norms, identities, and perversions (e.g. Domitian’s *rubor*)’.³⁰⁸ Although this interpretation aligns with the first dimension, complexity arises when Domitian subverts the contemporary perceptions of his appearance.

It is stated that Domitian was aware that the modesty in his expression worked in his favour, as exemplified by his making a boast that the senate approved his heart and his countenance. There is therefore a dissonance between his countenance and his nature which points to a complex character. Domitian becomes a manipulator, playing on assumptions about physical appearances. However, what is more revealing is the increased sense of self-consciousness. Although realism is focused on features that serve no strict narrative function (i.e. Barthes) and coupled with a non-evaluative, empathetic definition of personality (i.e. Gill), here the reader can have an alternative strategy for understanding a sense of realism. When a character demonstrates not only awareness of how they appear and how others perceive them but act in a manner that is discordant with said perception then their awareness has them approach realism from another angle. The trait Domitian is trying to project is modesty, which is one trait which is entirely

³⁰⁶ Helmbold 1950: 389. It has also been noted that the use of colours in physiognomy, identified by Polemon, often seem counter-intuitive to modern colour perception (Elsner 2007: 219).

³⁰⁷ Vidén 2018: 46. Cf. Blush of modesty (Sen. *Ep.* 11.3).

³⁰⁸ Zadorojnyi 2015: 294.

incompatible with this sort of self-consciousness. This is different to the previous cases of self-awareness of Augustus and Caligula. Arguably Augustus trying to look like a good emperor makes him more of a good emperor (or at least a diligent one); and Caligula trying to be bad reveals him as worse than we thought. But Domitian is consciously pretending to be something he is not.

Domitian knew he was modest looking, relied on it, and even cultivated it. What might have been a one-dimensional portrait (modest Domitian) thus becomes a two-dimensional one (modest-looking but crafty) and arguably three dimensional: that is, with physical traits that are not just accidental and either true or false to his character, but which are deliberately cultivated to create a certain impression.

3.2.3 Three-Dimensional Depictions

Three-dimensional depictions of the Caesars can also be understood through the use of physical appearance. The realism associated with three-dimensional portraits can be made clear through extraneous details which also contain no explicit evaluative meaning. When Suetonius discusses Julius Caesar's basic physical features, they all overtly portray a positive element indicative of the first dimension. Julius is said to have been tall (*'Fuisse traditur excelsa statura'*), with a clear complexion (*'colore candido'*), well rounded limbs (*'teretibus membris'*), a full face (*'ore paulo pleniore'*), black and keen eyes (*'nigris uegetisque oculis'*), good health except near the end of his life when he was accustomed to unexpected fainting spells and nightmares (*'ualitudine prospera, nisi quod tempore extremo repente animo linqui atque etiam per somnum exterreri solebat'*). He fell victim to epilepsy twice during campaigns (*'comitali quoque morbo*

bis inter res agendas correptus est').³⁰⁹ His health towards the end of his life is discordant with his perfect health prior to that. His features are consistent with his baseline in being both ideal in form, keen in expression and healthy. All the traits discussed could fit with a basic expression of Julius, but the epilepsy does not; and yet nothing is really made of it. It is just a superfluous detail: it creates a kind of reality effect.

A point of both comparison and contrast with Julius' epilepsy is how Suetonius uses the same malady for the characterization of Caligula. Whereas Julius' epilepsy exemplifies three-dimensional realism, in that it involves an extraneous physical feature without any explicit evaluative (or narrative) purpose, Suetonius' use of the same illness is integral to the baseline characterization of Caligula's mental instability. It is said that as a boy he was plagued by epilepsy (*puer comitali morbo uexatus*'), and while he was in his youth he had endurance but because of the fainting he was not able to walk, stand up, collect his thoughts, or support his head (*in adolescentia ita patiens laborum erat, ut tamen nonnumquam subita defectione ingredi, stare, colligere semet ac sufferre uix posset*'). He recognized his mental weakness and thought about going into seclusion to purify his brain (*mentis ualitudinem et ipse senserat ac subinde de secessu deque purgando cerebro cogitauit*').³¹⁰ Unlike with Julius, Caligula's epilepsy seems like it has an evaluative purpose, essentially establishing him as an mentally unsound character from the beginning. Caligula's epilepsy is therefore not just a detail to be passed over, as with Julius, but a key to his mental state and so to his bizarre character. That he is presented as struggling with it might hint at momentary dissonance. However, his failure to effectively deal with the illness negates the complexity. The recurring element of

³⁰⁹ *Jul.* 45.1.1-5. Given the origins of epilepsy as an omen breaking up public assemblies (Butler and Cary 1982: 107 ad 45.1; Hurley 1993: 180 ad 50.2), a negative connotation is possible but Suetonius' matter-of-fact statement stresses none and its positioning among positive features does not favour it.

³¹⁰ *Calig.* 50.2.1-6. In relation to lack of physical control and cogent thought, Hurley speculates a possible cause as temporal lobe epilepsy (Hurley 1993: 180 ad 5.2).

Caligula's mental instability is reaffirmed in relation to his one-dimensional characterization.

All of this is not to say that the physical appearances of the Caesars do not offer more realism in the extraneous, non-evaluative manner initially set out. Detailed physical discussion is by its very definition intent on creating a realistic and vivid portrait of the character. Interpreting physical appearance through the lens of extraneous and non-evaluative features can be used to see such realistic characterization. For example, Suetonius describes how Augustus' body was covered in spots and he had birthmarks around his breast and belly in the form, order, and number of Ursa Major ('*Corpore traditur maculoso dispersis per pectus atque aluum genetiuis notis in modum et ordinem ac numerum stellarum caelestis ursae*').³¹¹ The use of Ursa Major certainly seems to be open to an evaluative interpretation with the suggestion of divinity being the most obvious. Gladhill, in his article on *corporeal ecphrasis*, notes that 'From a semiotic point of view his celestial moles are signifiers of his divine status.'³¹² He discusses Augustus' body in cosmological terms and a variety of interpretations including the idea Suetonius' description of the eyes, face, and body as restraining his divine spirit.³¹³ All this seems perfectly reasonable. However, the fact remains that Suetonius makes no discernible effort to provide a significant interpretation or interpretations for these physical features, and he is by no means averse to elaborate explanation or interpretation as demonstrated elsewhere.³¹⁴ Furthermore, it is noteworthy that these aspects serve as a lead in to

³¹¹ *Aug.* 80.1.1-3.

³¹² Gladhill 2012: 335. On the ambiguities of Suetonius' intention see Wardle 2012: 318.

³¹³ Gladhill 2012: 335.

³¹⁴ For instance, an anecdote about lightning melting the first initial of his name from a statue inscription is used by Suetonius as an omen predicting Augustus' death and deification. It was interpreted as meaning that he would have one hundred days to live and be registered among the gods given the numerical value of 'C' and '*aesar*' seemingly meaning god in Etruscan (*Aug.* 97).

increasingly neutral details. Together such specific and idiosyncratic bodily features can move the character of Augustus into more realistic territory.

Some physical aspects, oddly specific as they are, can be read as one-dimensional; reinforcing Augustus' baseline trait of self-cultivation. Others are less susceptible to evaluative interpretation. Suetonius describes how Augustus had rough patches like ringworm from constant itching and overuse of a scraper (*'sed et callis quibusdam ex prurigine corporis adsiduoque et uehementi strigilis usu plurifariam concretis ad impetiginis formam'*). It is also stated that Augustus was not strong in the left hip bone, thigh, and leg, and often limped, but he remedied this by firming them with sand and reed (*'coxendice et femore et crure sinistro non perinde ualebat, ut saepe etiam inlaudicaret; sed remedio harenarum atque harundinum confirmabatur'*). He noticed that the forefinger of his right hand was feeble, made numb and shrunken with the cold, and he could not use it to write even with a brace (*'dextrae quoque manus digitum salutarem tam imbecillum interdum sentiebat, ut torpentem contractumque frigore uix cornei circuli supplemento scripturae admoueret'*).³¹⁵ Although the odd specificity of these details give an impression of three-dimensional realism, they do indeed contribute to his baseline characterization and show him as an inveterate self-improver. That he has ringworm has no stressed interpretation and is effectively non-evaluative (although it is a result of Augustus perhaps overdoing his personal care). However, trying to correct his limp and atrophied finger show his conscious effort to compensate for his physical limitations. This is arguably only a side-effect: the sheer extravagance of the examples also has a three-dimensional effect. Instances such as these are up for debate. However, some instances are not.

³¹⁵ Aug. 80.1.3-11.

One final example can be understood as creating a three-dimensional, realistic characterization. Suetonius states that Augustus moaned about his bladder and only found relief after passing stones (*'questus est et de uesica, cuius dolore calculis demum per urinam eiectis leuabatur'*).³¹⁶ Any reader, or for that matter scholar, would be hard pressed to see any evaluative quality of virtue and vice in passing gall stones. In this example, Suetonius presents some of Augustus' physical limitations without providing or suggesting an interpretation. Some elements of Augustus' physical features are one-dimensional; other elements of the descriptions are given something of a moral; but the gallstones, like the ringworm and the birthmarks and like Caesar's epilepsy, seem to give a vivid picture of the real person divorced of any comments about their (in Gill's terms) character.

Suetonius' description of Augustus' physical appearance also goes some way in allowing the reader to deconstruct the imperial image. The 'cosmic birthmarks' lend themselves to an idealized portrait of Augustus, one that is easily recognizable for the reader (and which is integral to emphasizing his baseline). Segueing into details like Augustus needing to correct his gnarled finger with a brace provide a reader with opportunity to parse the emperor's imperial image (or at least their perception of it). The images become decreasingly evaluative and increasingly realistic, especially when we find out about his gallstones. Suetonius' technique of excessive details, which convey no overt evaluative purpose, allows the reader to contextualize them with the result that they make the character more realistic.

³¹⁶ *Aug.* 80.1.12-13.

3.3 Hair Today Gone Tomorrow

This three-dimensional reading of characterization can even be applied to a specific subset of physical features. Hair can be used to show the basic recurring elements of a characterization regarding the first dimension and whether they are positive or negative in intent. Hair and baldness as a recurring sub-category of physical appearance demonstrates a contrast, with other Caesars and their insecurities, when it comes to Augustus. Suetonius portrays Augustus as not being fussy about how his hair was styled and the same goes for his personal grooming when he notes that Augustus' beard was sometimes clipped or shaved while he was reading or writing.³¹⁷ The lack of excessive attention to his appearance illustrates Augustus' lack of vanity. However, this certainly suggests Augustus' efforts to cultivate his appearance and convey modesty, which is crucial for interpreting his later concentrated self-characterization.

Layers such as these can give a greater depth of understanding to characterization too. Although physical appearances and their implied qualities could be understood through conventional associations, examples can be found where the author places specific meanings on their appearances. As Vidén helpfully points out: 'Baldness is a source of anxiety for the emperors.'³¹⁸ Julius' baldness, as a disfigurement, troubled him because it was an object of ridicule by his detractors, '*caluitii uero deformitatem iniquissime ferret saepe obtreptorum iocis obnoxiam expertus.*'³¹⁹ This gives an insight into his character by showing Julius' personal insecurities. His vanity is further revealed in that he combed his hair forward and made use of the honour of wearing the laurel

³¹⁷ *'in capite comendo tam incuriosus, ut raptim compluribus simul tonsoribus operam daret ac modo tonderet modo raderet barbam eoque ipso tempore aut legeret aliquid aut etiam scriberet.'* (Aug.79.1.2-6).

³¹⁸ Vidén 2018: 42.

³¹⁹ *Jul.* 45.2.3-5.

wreath at all time.³²⁰ Beyond such portraits, Julius was charged with being overly meticulous in the care of his person, with his hair carefully trimmed and shaved and even having superfluous hair plucked (*'circa corporis curam morosior, ut non solum tonderetur diligenter ac raderetur, sed uelleretur etiam, ut quidam exprobrauerunt...'*).³²¹ The extremity to which his care extended comes with a subtle negative implication. Whereas physical descriptions frequently reaffirm a Caesar's general depiction, this is an example that challenges a figure's fundamental characterization. There is a degree of dissonance between the governing image of Julius as a reasonable authority figure and this level of private insecurity. Julius' attitude to his hair loss gives him at least a second dimension. Hair and baldness are indeed one of Suetonius' recurring motifs and very often they can be used to understand a Caesar's outlook.

Physical appearances can also push a characterization into realism through instances of specificity devoid of any ethical observation. Unlike Julius' baldness creating complexity in his character, the same quality in Domitian provides a fundamentally negative image but exaggerates it in the direction of realism. An obsession with hair once again demonstrates the emperor's insecurity and vanity but to an absurd extent: thus we are told that in later life he was disfigured by baldness and that his sensitivity about it was such that he took it as an insult if someone made a joke about it (revealing a nature not unlike Caligula); but Domitian's response was to write a book 'On the Care of the Hair' where he mourns the loss of his looks and locks.³²² This is 'an unusual topic for someone

³²⁰ *'Ideoque et deficientem capillum reuocare a uertice adsueuerat et ex omnibus decretis sibi a senatu populoque honoribus non aliud aut recepit aut usurpauit libentius quam ius laureae coronae perpetuo gestandae.'* (Jul. 45.2.5-9).

³²¹ Jul. 45.2.1-3.

³²² *'caluitio ita offendebatur, ut in contumeliam suam traheret, si cui alii ioco uel iurgio obiectaretur; quamuis libello, quem de cura capillorum ad amicum edidit, haec etiam, simul illum seque consolans, inseruerit: 'οὐχ ὀρά<α>ς, οἷός κἀγὼ καλός τε μέγας τε; eadem me tamen manent capillorum fata, et forti animo fero comam in adulescentia senescentem. scias nec gratius quicquam decore nec breuius.'* (Dom. 18.2.4-12, trans. Rolfe).

so worried about his baldness'.³²³ The oddity of this feature is to embellish his basic portrait with an incongruous, realistic detail. Suetonius' use of the subtle topic of hair touches upon and demonstrates layers to Domitian's personality. Although the initial sensitivity to his baldness acknowledges a negative aspect, the fact that he wrote a book about hair care is a specific detail which resists the evaluative framework and can also be viewed as an extraneous feature. In the very least it can be said that Domitian's touchiness about his hair, a baseline feature, produces a specifically realistic detail in the book.

It is significant that Suetonius does not use any one specific interpretation for a character's baldness. He points out that Galba was bald headed (*'capite praecaluo'*),³²⁴ and had no issue with it at all. This is not the case with Otho who is very self-conscious about being bald and prone to vanity. The hair on his body was plucked and because he had thin hair, he wore a wig so well-crafted that no one was able to tell (*'uulso corpore, galericulo capiti propter raritatem capillorum adaptato et adnexo, ut nemo dinosceret'*).³²⁵ Such a relatively small detail can offer an insight to a person's character and Suetonius capitalizes on this. Otho, like other Caesars, is revealed as not only insecure but deceptive in his appearance. Galba, whose attitude may be just a personality note or may reinforce his overall characterization as practical to a fault. As an extension of physical appearance, dress sense is important to creating a Caesar.

³²³ Jones and Milns 2002: 164 ad 18.

³²⁴ *Galb.* 21.1.1.

³²⁵ *Oth.* 12.1.4-6.

3.4 Dress

In chapter one, costume was noted as a characterizing technique in drama and based on the previous section it is neatly applicable to other genres of writing. Dress, bearing, and even the maintenance of one's appearance offer the biographer an opportunity to provide a deeper insight into a Caesar for his reader. Examples of dress and appearance come with constructed cultural meanings directly expressed in the text as we will see in Suetonius' account of Caligula's dress sense. For now, it serves as an integral aspect that reinforces his baseline, one-dimensional characterization.

Vestitu calciatuque et cetero habitu neque patrio neque ciuili, ac ne uirili quidem ac denique humano semper usus est. saepe depictas gemmatasque indutus paenulas, manuleatus et armillatus in publicum processit; aliquando sericatus et cycladatus; ac modo in crepidis uel coturnis, modo in speculatoria caliga, nonnumquam socco muliebri; plerumque uero aurea barba, fulmen tenens aut fuscinam aut caduceum deorum insignia, atque etiam Veneris cultu conspectus est.

In his clothing, his shoes, and the rest of his attire he did not follow the usage of his country and his fellow-citizens; not always even that of his sex; or in fact, that of an ordinary mortal. He often appeared in public in embroidered cloaks covered with precious stones, with a long-sleeved tunic and bracelets; sometimes in silk and in a woman's robe; now in slippers or buskins, again in boots, such as the emperor's body-guard wear, and at times in the low shoes which are used by females. But oftentimes he exhibited himself with a golden beard, holding in his hand a thunderbolt, a trident, or a caduceus, emblems of the gods, and even in the garb of Venus.³²⁶

The crazed and transgressive connotations associated with the baseline characterization of Caligula are exemplified and expanded in this passage of his dress. The masculine image and indeed the image of the mere mortal are deconstructed through this visual representation of the emperor. His dress explicitly challenges cultural norms and points to a broader one-dimensional portrait given how it warps convention. Hurley states that his clothes were 'Eastern, regal, and effeminate' and 'the sort of apparel in which

³²⁶ *Calig.* 52.1.1-9, trans. Rolfe. See also Rolfe, Vol. I, 2001: 494 fn. 99 and 100. Cf. 'ne vestis serica viros foedaret' (Tac. *Ann.* 2.33.4). Not without similar precedent, even Augustus is made up to look like Apollo at the dinner of the 'twelve gods' (*Aug.* 70).

invective traditionally clothed political enemies'.³²⁷ His not sticking to the dress of a normal mortal signifies Caligula's delusions of grandeur and the desire to transcend mortal realms. His outrageous dress, which makes him hard to place and has him cultivating feminine and divine characteristics, fits with his overall characterization as a boundary-breaker. Also, given that style is a choice, we can arguably see him consciously playing the monster not unlike how he made horrible faces in the mirror.

Likewise, Nero's dress complements the brazenness of his basic characterization. Extravagance, and overly ornate appearance, is the root of this matter. In looking at the account of Nero's sense of dress, the passage conveys an expressly negative connotation due its excessive qualities while also immediately linking it to the personal quality of shamelessness. He was shameless in the care of his person and his sense of dress, with his hair in tiered curls, letting it grow long and hang down while visiting Greece, and also appearing in public in a dining robe with a handkerchief on his neck and un-girt and unshod.³²⁸ In a similar fashion to Caligula, Nero's dress reinforces a negative one-dimensional image rooted in shamelessness.

Julius' style of dress prompts comment within the text. His dress was notable in that he wore a senator's tunic with fringed sleeves to the wrist over which he wore a loose girdle, this in turn drawing Sulla's warning about the boy in such loose clothes.³²⁹ These contribute to an image of Julius as somewhat dandified and borderline effeminate and suggest a transgressive quality. It has even been suggested that such an appearance, with sexualized elements, was part of an effort to craft a political image that would appeal to

³²⁷ Hurley 1993: 186-187 ad 52. On transvestism being perceived as contrary to nature: '*Non videntur tibi contra naturam vivere qui commutant cum feminis vestem?*' (Sen. Ep. 122.7.1-2).

³²⁸ '*circa cultum habitumque adeo pudendus, ut comam semper in gradus formatam peregrinatione Achaica etiam pone uerticem summiserit ac plerumque synthesinam indutus ligato circum collum sudario prodierit in publicum sine cinctu et discalciatus.*' (Ner. 51.1.7-12).

³²⁹ '*Etiam cultu notabilem ferunt: usum enim lato clauo ad manus fimbriato nec umquam aliter quam <ut> super eum cingeretur, et quidem fluxiore cinctura; unde emanasse Sullae dictum optimates saepius admonentis, ut male praecinctum puerum cauerent.*' (Jul. 45.3.1-5).

the people; albeit, naturally drawing the ire of the elite.³³⁰ His style can contribute to his one-dimensional baseline portrayal. It does fit with the image of Julius as a man at odds with tradition and as a figure with his own agenda, who does not care for social niceties.

While it may have a kinship with the idea of a man who seizes power and upends social order, this depiction is dissonant with the baseline characterization of him being an authority figure. Julius has variety of traits key to his presentation as a military leader with hyper-masculine resolve. His transgressive dress is certainly discordant with the idea of a man who is a skilled swordsman and horseman; a man who often marched at the head of his army on foot and could endure the sun and the rain.³³¹ Any connotations of extravagance in Julius' style of dress are easily challenged by his reputation of abstaining from wine. Suetonius even attributes a joke to Marcus Cato that Julius was the only sober man to try to seize the Republic.³³² Julius' somewhat flamboyant dress may appeal to part of his one-dimensional baseline character, but ultimately it strikes a discordant two-dimensional note within his broader portrayal.

His successor on the other hand is very image conscious. Augustus strives for a happy medium in his appearance and it is integral to his own self-characterization. A sense of modesty, derived from the lack of excess, is presented by Augustus' humble dress. Unless it was a special occasion, he wore common clothes at home which were made by his sister, wife, daughter or granddaughters (*'ueste non temere alia quam domestica usus est, ab sorore et uxore et filia neptibusque confecta'*).³³³ Furthermore, it should be noted that his togas were neither close nor full and the purple stripe neither narrow nor broad (*'togis neque restrictis neque fuis, clauo nec lato nec angusto'*).³³⁴

³³⁰ Corbeill 2004: 136-137, as cited in Langlands 2006: 349 fn.73.

³³¹ *Jul.* 57.

³³² *'Marci Catonis est: unum ex omnibus Caesarem ad euertendam rem publicam sobrium accessisse.'* (*Jul.* 53.1.2-4).

³³³ *Aug.* 73.1.5-6.

³³⁴ *Aug.* 73.1.6-7.

Fowler's outline of the golden means concept or *aureas mediocritas*, the course of behaviour between two extremes,³³⁵ is suitable for this example of Augustus' style of dress it avoids extremities. The concept is useful for this chapter's purpose to see Suetonius' technique of character construction in action, and although his wider and scathingly critical historical assessment of Augustus, the real man and emperor, is not especially pertinent here, it is nevertheless hilarious.³³⁶ In examining his dress, a reader can focus on yet another example of Augustus' self-consciousness towards his public presentation.

He wore shoes with a high sole to make himself seem taller than he actually was and moreover he always kept ready shoes and clothes to wear in public should there be an impromptu occasion ('...*calciamentis altiusculis, ut procerior quam erat uideretur. et forensia autem et calceos numquam non intra cubiculum habuit ad subitos repentinosque casus parata.*').³³⁷ The reader is provided with a glimpse of Augustus' own internal concerns with appearance and presentation and this conveys a complex portrait of him as self-characterizing force. All of this remains consistent with his one-dimensional characterization of a statesman obsessed with his cultivated image, but it is this same self-consciousness which adds two-dimensional complexity. Augustus, whose care for his dress aligns with his usual portrait as self-conscious and self-aware, but (as with Domitian) perhaps undermines his modesty by revealing that it is deliberate; dissonant, and perhaps even achieving real complexity. Keeping the tripartite perspective in mind allows a reader to view such intricacies in Suetonius' character writing across the board with physical appearance, personal grooming, and dress. In extending the idea of external descriptions, names function in a similar way.

³³⁵ Fowler 2007:11-14.

³³⁶ 'To be precise, Augustus looks a right prat, and he establishes for his successors a style of prattishness which fully justifies the disgust of our young person in the museum.' (Fowler 2007: 10).

³³⁷ *Aug.* 73.1.7-10.

3.5 *Nomina Caesarum*

A name can be worn just like any garment. Just as costume can have meaning for a character in Roman Comedy, so too can a name have a similar purpose. The later commentator on Terence, Aelius Donatus noted that the name of a person in a comic play must have a meaning and etymology, '*Nomina personarum, in comoediis dumtaxat, habere debent rationem et etymologiam*'.³³⁸ This meaning and its origin can be utilized to characterize a subject. The conceptual importance of a name when representing a person is also acknowledged by Cicero. In his *De Inventione*, the various components of the person are listed, in itself showing character writing as a constructive act. It includes all manner of pieces such as name ('*nomen*'), nature ('*naturam*'), mode of living ('*victum*'), fortune ('*fortunam*'), habit ('*habitum*'), disposition ('*affectionem*'), zeal ('*studia*'), intention ('*consilia*'), deeds ('*facta*'), misfortune ('*casus*'), and speeches ('*orationes*'). He prominently lists the name and defines it as that which is given to each person so that they are called by their own proper and fixed title ('*nomen est, quod uni cuique personae datur, quo suo quaeque proprio et certo vocabulo appellatur*').³³⁹ Names can be telling of character and as such can be exploited by any biographer worth their salt. An author's use of names is explicitly intended to persuade the reader on a point they wish to make.

The importance of names in literary practice can often be seen in conjunction with anecdotes to suggest some feature of the person. A neat example is that of the Roman hero Quintus Fabius Maximus Verrucosus (Cunctator). According to Plutarch, the name 'Verrucosus' came about as a result of Fabius having a wart on his upper lip and 'Ovicula' as a result of his gentleness and seriousness as a child; in discussing his slowness in

³³⁸ Donatus ad Ter. *Ad.* 1 (Wessner, Vol. II, 1905: 12f.).

³³⁹ Cic. *Inv. Rhet.* 1.34.12-16. Cf. 1.34.12-35.1.

several aspects of his life, moreover, he alludes to the meaning of ‘Cunctator’.³⁴⁰ Names can thus be seen as pure denominations (‘Quintus’), as tokens of family history (‘Fabius Maximus’), as communicating traits or achievements (‘Cunctator’ and ‘Ovicula’, which suggests a stable personality to an extent) and names applied with a degree of satire which may be rejected (‘Verrucosus’ and ‘Ovicula’, which suggest an element of contested personality). Names have overtones and undertones, but family names can communicate facets unique to the person which the biographer seeks to capture, as can nicknames when explicated. Naturally enough, Plutarch writing for a Greek audience, elaborates on the etymology of names like ‘Verrucosus’ and hints at ‘Cunctator’, but each is emphasized to give clarity to characterization.

As a Caesar’s appearance and dress provide depth to their characterization so to can their names. Names can be distinguished in various useful ways in Suetonius’ *De vita Caesarum*. Inherited names emphasize familial and personal traits. Nicknames which are adopted show how a Caesar wishes to be perceived while nicknames which are assigned show how other people perceive them. Finally, some names can be stripped of overt evaluative meaning and remain ambiguous in interpretation, which defies the conventions of a comic play and instead lends an element of realism.

Names presented as tokens of family lineage provide an insight into the construction of a person. In the opening of the *Tiberius*, the author discusses the enigmatic emperor’s ancestry. This discussion carries out an important biographical function as it indicates some belief on Suetonius’ part in heredity as a factor in character; in particular, the mixture of good and bad from the Claudian stock is of relevance for interpreting Tiberius.³⁴¹ It is noted that the family chose to discard a certain *praenomen* and also add

³⁴⁰ Plut. *Fab.* 1.3. Fabius’ apparent slowness – which turns out to be steadfastness – is a primary theme of the *Life* and is made explicit at *Fab.* 19.3-4; although the name is not explicitly mentioned there either. Cf. his name ‘Cunctator’ (Livy 30.26.9.1-10.1).

³⁴¹ Lindsay 1995: 53.

a *cognomen*. The family discarded the forename Lucius (*‘Luci praenomen consensu repudiauit’*), clearly because of the stigma associated with it given that two members of the family by that name were guilty of robbery and murder respectively (*‘postquam e duobus gentilibus praeditis eo alter latrocinii, caedis alter conuictus est’*). Conversely, the family assumed the name Nero (*‘inter cognomina autem et Neronis assumpsit’*), apparently because it meant strong and valiant in the Sabine language (*‘quo[d] significatur lingua Sabina fortis ac strenuus’*).³⁴² Names are discarded and taken up based on their interpretation, all for the better of course. The use of names in relation to Tiberius sets up the duality that will come to define the entire representation of his character throughout Suetonius’ work.

The meanings and suggestions conveyed by names in a familial context can be seen in a connection between Caligula and Julius. The final lines of the *Caligula* reports that men observed that Caesars with the name Gaius died by the sword.³⁴³ This has been shown, unsurprisingly, not to be completely true with exceptions being Julius’ father and Augustus (adoption notwithstanding); Suetonius evidently was considering Julius, Gaius, who was Augustus’ grandson, and Julius Caesar Strabo. Nevertheless, the purpose was evidently to show Caligula following in the footsteps of the divine Julius.³⁴⁴ This is a deliberate attempt to use a name for characterization and to highlight not only the violence of their lives but the violence that ends their lives. Names then are used here in an evaluative sense to convey some semblance of the person.

³⁴² *Tib.* 1.2.3-9.

³⁴³ *‘obseruatum autem notatumque est in primis Caesares omnes, quibus Gai praenomen fuerit, ferro perisse, iam inde ab eo, qui Cinnanis temporibus sit occisus.’* (*Calig.* 60.1.10-13) On their assassinations, see *Calig.* 58 and *Jul.* 82. Power points out strong textual echoes between *Calig.* 60 and *Jul.* 89 as an expression of narrative closure (Power 2014a: 64).

³⁴⁴ Hurley 1993: 217 ad 60. Cf. Wardle 1994: 372; Hurley 2014: 156-157. Hurley states that when Suetonius ‘described the end of Gaius, he had in mind his own earlier account of the Caesar assassination story’ (Hurley 2014: 157). Thus, the name ‘Gaius’ lets us retroactively read a narrative function not unlike Barthes’ *predictive* (Barthes 1989: 141-142).

Nicknames, whether they are taken or given, are also a mark constructing the person. These names provide the reader with a significant step towards further understanding these people. Names which are accepted or adopted to convey specific qualities are frequently on show in the biographies. For instance, the variety of names which Augustus proceeds through provide a cohesive sense of his lineage and shows how he moves forward to create his own unique public image. The assumption of the name Gaius Caesar by the will of his great uncle reinforces his ties with Julius and to a certain extent allows the *persona* of power to be assumed through the taking of the name.³⁴⁵ This example reinforces a very basic and simplified attempt to legitimize his power and his person, although cognizance of such things reinforces Augustus' baseline portrayal as someone interested in cultivating his own image.

Suetonius' use of names stresses Augustus' self-awareness and the careful and deliberate construction of his own imperial self. It is stated that:

*postea Gai Caesaris et deinde Augusti cognomen assumpsit, alterum testamento maioris auunculi, alterum Munati Planci sententia, cum quibusdam censentibus Romulum appellari oportere quasi et ipsum conditorem urbis, praeualuisset, ut Augustus potius uocaretur, non tantum nouo sed etiam ampliore cognomine, quod loca quoque religiosa et in quibus augurato quid consecratur augusta dicantur, ab auctu uel ab auium gestu gustuue, sicut etiam Ennius docet scribens:
Augusto augurio postquam incluta condita Roma est.*

Later he took the name of Gaius Caesar and then the surname Augustus, the former by the will of his great-uncle, the latter on the motion of Munatius Plancus. For when some expressed the opinion that he ought to be called Romulus as a second founder of the city, Plancus carried the proposal that he should rather be named Augustus, on the ground that this was not merely a new title but a more honourable one, inasmuch as sacred places too, and those in which anything is consecrated by augural rites are called "august" (*augusta*), from the increase (*auctus*) in dignity, or front movements or feeding of the birds (*avium gestus gustuue*), as Ennius also shows when he writes:

"After by augury august illustrious Rome had been founded."³⁴⁶

³⁴⁵ *Aug.* 7.2.1-3.

³⁴⁶ *Aug.* 7.2.1-12, trans. Rolfe.

The name of Romulus was floated to suggest a second founder. However, Munatius Plancus suggested the new and more honourable name of Augustus. Suetonius then explains the connotations of the name with it having a link to sacred places, augural rites, and birds, capping it off with a suitable quote from Ennius. Augustus is here constructing himself with the use of names and transitioning from the shade of Julius into his own imperial self. Although it goes unsaid, avoiding the name Romulus does neatly sidestep any negative connotations via the rape of the Sabine women and indeed the connotation of being a king. Wardle states that ‘Augustus was more subtle than Romulus in that it avoided all notions of tyranny’.³⁴⁷ The mere fact that Augustus considered ‘Romulus’ hints at a road not taken, in which he became a king; and so, Rome had a lucky escape. There is thus an insight into Augustus’ self-aware depiction as the use of the name shows him as a self-characterizing force which cultivates a new and revered self through this name.

Names also carry an element of characterization purely by association. Claudius’ name is elsewhere given a negative connotation in the biographies as demonstrated in a passage of the *Nero*. When Caligula was asked by his sister to give Nero any name he wanted, he jokingly said Claudius and Agrippina admonished him for this suggestion since Claudius was a laughing stock.³⁴⁸ Barrett argues that the name would not have been an insult and would have been a distinguished name at the time; the gens was hardly associated with Caligula’s uncle alone.³⁴⁹ However, this is frankly far too literal. The story, or at least the interpretation placed on the name, is presumably anachronistic. But,

³⁴⁷ Wardle 2014: 108 ad 7.2.

³⁴⁸ ‘*eiusdem futurae infelicitatis signum euidens die lustrico extitit; nam C. Caesar, rogante sorore ut infanti quod uellet nomen daret, intuens Claudium patrum suum, a quo mox principe Nero adoptatus est, eius se dixit dare, neque ipse serio sed per iocum et aspernante Agrippina, quod tum Claudius inter ludibria aulae erat.*’ (*Ner.* 6.2.1-7).

³⁴⁹ Barrett 1996: 65.

Suetonius' anecdote about the name is making a point about characterization by mere association with Claudius.

Of course, the joke is somewhat at Caligula's expense given that Claudius will be his successor, and that Nero would be adopted by him and ultimately take his name: there then the renaming (albeit rejected) serves as foreshadowing. Nero's name held up no better given the explicitly wicked connotations conjured up by it. It is mentioned that due to Titus' excessive lifestyle, before his positive qualities became obvious, people for a time not only thought but openly declared him to be another Nero.³⁵⁰ Such uses of names are ultimately quite simplistic in terms of characterization, but nevertheless they offer insight into the perceived character of the person.

Proper names are telling enough but those which are picked up, and especially those that the subject would wish to reject, given they point to their nature, are also significant for nuanced characterization. As De Temmerman notes the rhetorical technique of *antonomasia*, where a name is substituted for a word or epithet, 'can be equally relevant to characterization'.³⁵¹ An anecdotal passage which highlights, in a humorous fashion, that Tiberius was fond of wine makes vivid his portrayal. Although the passage itself follows Suetonius' declaration of giving an account of Tiberius' vices,³⁵² the name concerned in the account may be interpreted in a personality sense while the rest of the passage is more forceful in terms of evaluation. The nickname in question is 'Biberius Caldius Mero', which playfully mocks his own name and emphasizes his own personal taste.³⁵³ The name is modelled on Tiberius Claudius Nero from *bibo* (drink), *calidus* (hot) and *merum* (unmixed wine).³⁵⁴ It is something which is

³⁵⁰ *'denique propalam alium Neronem et opinabantur et praedicabant.'* (Tit.7.1.8-9).

³⁵¹ De Temmerman 2010: 30.

³⁵² Tib. 42.1.1-4.

³⁵³ *'in castris tiro etiam tum propter nimiam uini auiditatem pro Tiberio 'Biberius,' pro Claudio 'Caldius,' pro Nerone 'Mero' uocabatur.'* (Tib.42.1.4-6).

³⁵⁴ See index s.v. 'Biberius', Rolfe, Vol. II, 2001: 494.

attached to him as an individual not to mention the fact that it is in direct contrast to the abstemious and moderate inclinations towards wine of the Caesars which precede him in the collection (Julius and Augustus).³⁵⁵

The use of names, at times in Suetonius' *Lives*, can perhaps be understood by the reader as presenting moments less susceptible to overt evaluation, and thus suggestive of personality. Tiberius was jokingly referred to as 'Callippides' (after a comic actor who imitated a marathon but never moved from his spot: the name itself was proverbial among the Greeks for getting ahead of oneself). This was because after making numerous arrangements for journeys which eventually came to nothing, he finally allowed vows to be taken for a safe journey.³⁵⁶ Although a humorous name, and one implying at least a hint of criticism, it does nevertheless portray a reasonably harmless aspect of Tiberius' personality. It is a trait distinct to him, and not one which obviously represents him as a bad emperor.

Very often names come with meanings or have meanings bestowed on them. For instance, a nickname for Vespasian prevalent among the Alexandrians reinforces one of his main qualities portrayed in the biography. Vespasian could not shake his reputation for covetousness with results that the Alexandrians referred to him as Cybiosactes, after one of their kings also known for his stinginess (*'et tamen ne sic quidem pristina cupiditatis infamia caruit. Alexandrini Cybiosacten eum uocare perseuerauerunt, cognomine unius e regibus suis turpissimarum sordium.'*)³⁵⁷ While the name paints the

³⁵⁵ *Jul.* 53.1.1-4; *Aug.* 77.1.1-9.

³⁵⁶ *'ad extremum uota proitu et reditu suo suscipi passus, ut uulgo iam per iocum 'Callip<p>ides' uocaretur, quem cursitare ac ne cubiti quidem mensuram progredi prouerbio Graeco notatum est.'* (*Tib.* 38.1.8-11). Callippides was 'apparently a comic actor, who simulated a marathon runner, but never advanced from the same spot. This proverbial example is also found in *Cic. Ad Att.* 13.12.3' (Lindsay 1995: 134).

³⁵⁷ *Vesp.* 19.1.9-2.3. Additionally, Jones and Milns point to the name being derived from 'cybium' meaning 'chopped and salted pieces of young tunny fish' so that Cybiosactes can refer to the traditionally despised job of a 'dealer in salt-fish' (Jones and Milns 2002: 81-82 ad 19). Cf. *OLD* s.v. 'cybium'; s.v. 'Cybiosactes'.

emperor in less than a positive light, Suetonius' use of it conveys a quality keyed to the emperor and further strengthens his characterization as an individual.

Suetonius uses a detailed anecdotal construction around the name Thurinus, from Augustus' earlier life. When this example is viewed through the lens of the tripartite perspective, it demonstrates all three dimensions of characterization. It provides a straightforward point of characterization then contradicts and challenges it before finally establishing a point of verisimilitude for the character. The name Thurinus is bound to Augustus' ancestry, which is established in renowned terms in the opening of the biography. In speaking about Augustus' father, Suetonius makes a direct positive statement, '*Gentem Octauiam Velitris praecipuam olim fuisse multa declarant*'.³⁵⁸ Despite his ancestry having a mostly innocuous nature, other figures in the narrative appropriate the ancestry for derogatory purposes.

ipse Augustus nihil amplius quam equestri familia ortum se scribit uetere ac locuplete, et in qua primus senator pater suus fuerit. M. Antonius libertinum ei proauum exprobrat, restionem e pago Thurino, auum argentarium. nec quicquam ultra de paternis Augusti maioribus repperi.

Augustus himself merely writes that he came of an old and wealthy equestrian family, in which his own father was the first to become a senator. Marcus Antonius taunts him with his great-grandfather, saying that he was a freedman and a rope-maker from the country about Thurii, while his grandfather was a money-changer. This is all that I have been able to learn about the paternal ancestors of Augustus.³⁵⁹

In the first passage it is noted that Augustus says nothing more than that he came from an old and wealthy family, from which his father was the first senator. This sets a baseline for the first dimension of characterization by portraying Augustus' origins in a positive light. His ancestry although not excessively lauded is fairly illustrative of the humility Augustus strove for in other areas. The second dimension allows the reader to see complications with this depiction when they arise from slurs. Mark Antony insults

³⁵⁸ *Aug.* 1.1.1-2.

³⁵⁹ *Aug.* 2.3.1-6, trans. Rolfe.

Augustus by saying that his great-grandfather was a rope-maker from the district of Thurii and that his grandfather was a moneylender.³⁶⁰ Such insults not only create conflicted evaluative meanings but also add a derogatory interpretation to the name Thurinus by association.

Infanti cognomen Thurino inditum est, in memoriam maiorum originis, uel quod regione Thurina recens eo nato pater Octavius aduersus fugitios rem prospere gesserat. Thurinum cognominatum satis certa probatione tradiderim nactus puerilem imagunculam eius aeream ueterem ferreis et paene iam exolescentibus litteris hoc nomine inscriptam, quae dono a me principi data inter cubicu Lares colitur. sed et a M. Antonio in epistulis per contumeliam saepe Thurinus appellatur et ipse nihil amplius quam mirari se rescribit pro obprobrio sibi prius nomen obici.

In his infancy he was given the surname Thurinus in memory of the home of his ancestors, or else because it was near Thurii that his father Octavius, shortly after the birth of his son, had gained his victory over the runaway slaves. That he was surnamed Thurinus I may assert on very trustworthy evidence, since I once obtained a bronze statuette, representing him as a boy and inscribed with that name in letters of iron almost illegible from age. This I presented to the emperor, who cherishes it among the Lares of his bed-chamber. Furthermore, he is often called Thurinus in Mark Antony's letters by way of insult; to which Augustus merely replied that he was surprised that his former name was thrown in his face as a reproach.³⁶¹

Mark Antony continued his insult by referring to Augustus by the name in letters. Augustus was surprised that his former name was used in a derogatory manner. In doing this, Augustus neutralizes the insulting interpretation. It shows how Augustus was always conscious of the image he cultivated. Whether or not he was aware of the derogatory meaning is not important in and of itself but rather the fact that he does not let it stick.

The third dimension of realistic representation emerges when Suetonius adds a detail which attempts to vouch for its veracity. It is discovered that Augustus, in his infancy, was given the surname Thurinus to honour the home of his family, or because shortly after his birth, his father Octavius was victorious against runaway slaves near

³⁶⁰ Wardle notes invective's tradition of giving 'banausic trades' to an enemy's parents and Antony's 'use of the Greek name Thurii adds the further suggestion of non-Roman ancestry' (Wardle 2014: 86 ad 2.3).

³⁶¹ *Aug.* 7.1.1-10, trans. Rolfe.

Thurii. Suetonius testifies that the evidence is reliable because he personally saw a statuette of Augustus as a boy with the name inscribed and that he presented it to Hadrian, who cherished the item. This example of the statuette is ideally suited to be viewed through Barthes' 'Reality Effect' given that it is literally a superfluous detail. It has no overt narrative or structural purpose, but rather it is intent on adding verisimilitude, which is made explicit by Suetonius' intrusion to speak in his own voice ('*Thurinum cognominatum satis certa probatione tradiderim*'). This is not specifically intent on characterizing Augustus in an evaluative way. Instead, it can be viewed as an extraneous detail that provides a more realistic characterization. Furthermore, it also does complement, to some extent, Augustus' attempts to neutralize the use of his name as an insult.

Names can provide a basic and simplified element of characterization consistent with the first dimension or can offer a certain amount of (two-dimensional) complexity when they reveal how a Caesar perceived themselves or how they were perceived by others. Examples of realistic characterization may also come when ambiguity in meaning and etymology complicate or resist any evaluative element, thus negating strict moralistic interpretation and even enhancing the superfluity of the detail. An example is provided by the *Galba*. The origin of Galba's name is tied up with ancestral accounts, in a similar manner to the Tiberius, but in such a way as to offer contradictory meanings. Suetonius basically offers three anecdotal accounts with the last being specifically concerned with description and appearance.

Imagines et elogia uniuersi generis exequi longum est, familiae breuiter attingam. qui primus Sulpiciorum cognomen Galbae tulit cur aut unde traxerit, ambigitur. quidam putant, quod oppidum Hispaniae frustra diu oppugnatum inlitis demum galbano facibus succenderit; alii, quod in diuturna ualitudine galbeo, id est remediis lana inuolutis, assidue uteretur; nonnulli, quod praepinguis fuerit uisus, quem galbam Galli uocent; uel contra, quod tam exilis, quam sunt animalia quae in aesculis nascuntur appellanturque galbae.

It would be a long story to give in detail his illustrious ancestors and the honorary inscriptions of the entire race, but I shall give a brief account of his immediate family. It is uncertain why the first of the Sulpicii who bore the surname Galba assumed the name, and whence it was derived. Some think that it was because after having for a long time unsuccessfully besieged a town in Spain, he at last set fire to it by torches smeared with *galbanum*; others because during a long illness he made constant use of *galbeum*, that is to say of remedies wrapped in wool; still others, because he was a very fat man, such as the Gauls term *galba*, or because he was, on the contrary, as slender as the insects called *galbae*, which breed in oak trees.³⁶²

These seemingly superfluous details aid the verisimilitude and set up the final anecdote providing a vivid choice of physical imagery. In the third example some say it was because the ancestor was fat, derived from the Gaul's terms *galba* or because he was the opposite being thin as an insect called *galbae*.³⁶³ Although this physical description refers to Galba's ancestor, its placement within the discussion of ancestry allows for the reader to associate both options of physical appearance with Galba himself.

Suetonius does not explicitly comment on the subject's weight when later describing physical aspects and does not need to as this programmatic suggestion through the name makes either acceptable. It does, however, appear that the former of the two is more likely,³⁶⁴ even more so since Suetonius describes Galba's gout along with him being a heavy eater in the winter along with eating before daylight and abundantly at dinner, during the biographer's customary physical description.³⁶⁵ These aspects should fit in with the ancient world's popular concept of physiognomy, whereby physical appearance can offer an insight into the person's nature. The link between physical description and name ordinarily helps to provide a more vivid and well-rounded depiction of the person.

³⁶² *Galb.* 3.1.1-2.1, trans. Rolfe.

³⁶³ *Galb.* 3.1.1-2.1.

³⁶⁴ Mooney 1979: 194.

³⁶⁵ '*...manibus pedibusque articulari morbo distortissimis, ut neque calceum perpeti neque libellos euoluere aut tenere omnino ualeret...Cibi plurimi traditur, quem tempore hiberno etiam ante lucem capere consuemat, inter cenam uero usque eo abundanti<s>, ut congestas super manus reliquias circumferri iuberet spargique ad pedes stantibus.*' (*Galb.* 21.1.1-22.1.4). Certainly, in discussing there being a possible ring composition in the *Galba*, Benediktson acknowledges this thematic link between chapters 3 and 22 (Benediktson 1996-1997: 170; cf. 169).

And yet these two alternatives cannot both be true, and the uncertainty does not get clarified. Galba must have been either fat or thin (or neither), and so (at least) one of the possible etymologies must have no relevance to him. Thus, the name does not have any explicit capacity to foreshadow; or rather, Suetonius does not try to give it any. It even agrees with Barthes' 'Reality Effect' by actively resisting its counterpart, *predictive*.³⁶⁶ The idea that a name's etymology should reveal the character of its bearer, as Aelius Donatus suggested, is here definitively rejected. The origins of Galba's name become a fact of merely academic interest. It is treated as being completely irrelevant to Galba himself.

3.6 If it's in a Word

Physical appearance can simply strengthen established one-dimensional depictions as with Augustus, Caligula, and Vespasian. A two-dimensional perspective can then be seen with bodily contrasts in Tiberius, and dichotomies between appearance and disposition in Nero, Caligula, and Domitian. Characters approach a three-dimensional quality when for instance Julius' epilepsy is a realistic detail devoid of moralizing intent (whereas the same in Caligula reasserts his madness). Furthermore, parallels between Augustus' body and cosmic imagery suggests the divine but make no effort to stress it, only to segue into realistic bodily weaknesses that have no discernible evaluative significance. The tripartite perspective allows for similar views in microcosm across hair and dress to underline basic and dissonant features and occasionally a realistic detail.

³⁶⁶ Barthes 1989: 141-142. Cf. Ankersmit 1994: 139-140.

Names are also telling of how a Caesar is perceived or intended to be perceived. Names with clear lines of characterization can be seen in relation to Tiberius, Caligula, Nero, and Claudius. Octavian's heightened self-awareness in avoiding 'Romulus' before settling on 'Augustus' shows the emperor in line with his basic portrayal and as self-characterizing figure. Furthermore, his old name of 'Thurinus' shows the interplay of all three perspectives with an attempted meaning and a repudiation that leads to a neutralization of the meaning. Finally, the origins of Galba's name provide many etymologies each as ambiguous as the other. Galba has a name in the way real people have names: it does not determine or even have any necessary connection to his character. Removed from evaluation, these ambiguities are suggestive of realism in a manner akin to Barthes' theory.

This chapter has demonstrated how Suetonius' *Lives* represent complex characters through the external descriptions of various degrees of appearance and names by using the tripartite perspective of characterization. Speech too qualifies as an external aspect of characterization which can illuminate internal thought processes and personality. By extending the perspective which the three dimensions of characterization offer it will be seen that Suetonius creates complicated and realistic characters through the topics of oratory and speechmaking, epigrams, and jokes. In terms of character writing, it is important to listen not only to what Caesar says but how he says it.

CHAPTER FOUR

Caesar Says:

Speech and Characterization of the Caesars

Sermocinatio est, cum alicui personae sermo adtribuitur et is exponitur cum ratione dignitatis

([Cicero], *Rhetorica Ad Herennium*, 4.65.9-10)

4.1 Introduction

When a Caesar speaks, he reveals his character. Speech is an integral literary technique for Suetonius' representation of characters in *De vita Caesarum*. Oratory and speechmaking are prominent aspects of character writing that can establish basic dispositions but also show contrasting complexities of self-characterization. Most Caesars have been influenced in their style of oratory, but a point of curiosity is whether they can move past such influences; either crafting their own style, consistent with their general image, or failing to navigate oratorical norms. Julius is a naturally gifted speaker whereas Augustus is meticulous in finding a golden mean in his speech to carefully manage his image. Both speak in character; that is in a way consistent with their basic presentation as reasonable authority figures. Other Caesars are over-influenced and fail to find a balance. Tiberius is too studious and Caligula too spontaneous, while other Caesars, like Domitian and Nero, miss the mark for curious and telling reasons.

Two other sub-categories of speech are epigrams and jokes which illustrate intricacies within Suetonius' character construction. Epigrams can intensify, contradict, or fully realize a Caesar. External expressions are when another character speaks about the main subject while internal reflections are when the main character offers up their own thoughts. External epigrams are more useful for stressing negative baseline

depictions: Domitian's sadistic impulses, conveyed in an anecdote about torturing flies, are encapsulated by a witticism attributed to Vibius Crispus. Internal epigrams, on the other hand, are more helpful in highlighting positive portrayals: Titus' memorable remark about wasting a day is emblematic of his generosity.

That there was 'many a Marius' in Julius Caesar plays up to his established character as a dangerous authoritarian. However, Julius' surprise at being betrayed by Brutus, prompting his most famous utterance (*kai su teknon*), shows a subtle moment of interior insight opening up a two-dimensional interpretation. In some respects, it conforms to his image as he is unable to see beyond his own ruthless agenda. In others, it may at least acknowledge genuine sentiment for his friends. The use of epigrams in the *Augustus* illustrates not only the first and second dimension of characterization but also the third when we consider the emperor's verbal idiosyncrasies. Caligula is a curious figure given that the internal epigrams related to him are much better suited to crafting the tyrannical image he seeks to cultivate than to providing even a glimmer of sympathy. Epigrams about Tiberius reduce his characterization to a despotic baseline whereas his own utterances speak to his complexity

Jokes are at their most effective as a technique of characterization when relying on an understanding of a Caesar's basic depiction. The public makes jokes at Julius' expense which strengthen his general portrayal, while Caligula and Nero are more than capable of revealing their own pernicious sense of humour. The Caesar most prominently identified with jokes is Vespasian, and his jocular nature is a part of an expanded baseline portrayal. He is prone to low and vulgar jokes but is more than capable of making educated, clever witticisms and at times he even combines both. Speech and the variety of categories related to it do a lot more than simply verify an assumed character appropriate to the person. When a Caesar speaks, we would do well to listen.

4.2 Oratory and Speechmaking

Suetonius frequently explores the Caesars' oratorical influences and innate talents. Speech, however, is not only a mirror that reflects the person. It can highlight established character traits or discordant notes struck within speechmaking norms. Furthermore, speech and oratory reveal the degree to which a Caesar practices self-characterization. In the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, a discussion of the constructive elements of characterization notes that personification consists in forming a person who is not present as if they are present ('*Conformatio est, cum aliqua, quae non adest, persona confingitur quasi adsit*') or making a mute or unformed thing eloquent ('*aut cum res muta aut informis fit eloquens*') and attributing to it form and speech or behaviour appropriate to character ('*et forma ei et oratio adtribuitur ad dignitatem adcommodata, aut actio quaedam*').³⁶⁷ Additionally, Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria* observes that a man's personality and the secrets of his heart are revealed in the way he speaks, observing a Greek saying which posits that a man speaks as he lives ('*Profert enim mores plerumque oratio et animi secreta detegit: nec sine causa Graeci prodiderunt ut uiuat quemque etiam dicere.*').³⁶⁸ All of these statements underline the conceptual relevance speech has when it comes to constructing a character; but this is not to say that speech always has to align with character. It can certainly be indicative of a basic characterization, but in the hands of a biographer speech can open complexities and even realism.

Rhetorical influence is addressed by Suetonius in the *Lives* and it offers insights into his techniques of characterization. Andrew Wallace-Hadrill marked down as one of Suetonius' strengths his seeing his Caesars as 'as men of culture, not simply men of power.'³⁶⁹ Julius and Augustus are both standard-bearers when it comes to speechmaking

³⁶⁷ [Cic.] *Rhet Her.* 4.66.1-5.

³⁶⁸ Quint. *Inst.* 11.1.30.1-2. Cf. Sen. *Ep.* 114.1; [Cic] *Rhet. Her.* 4.65.9-10.

³⁶⁹ Wallace-Hadrill 1995: 202-203; 83-86.

although for different reasons. Suetonius acknowledges Julius Caesar's influences only to underscore his innate talents. In his youth, Julius is said to have imitated Caesar Strabo, from whose speech he took some passages verbatim for a trial address of his own.³⁷⁰ However, Julius is effectively described in circumstances which separate him not only from direct influences but also from those renowned for eloquence. He transcends the inspiration of his youth. In terms of eloquence (and warfare), Julius either equalled or surpassed the glory of the most distinguished (*'Eloquentia militarique re aut aequavit praestantissimorum gloriam aut excessit.'*)³⁷¹ After his prosecution of Dolabella he was numbered among the leading advocates (*'Post accusationem Dolabellae haud dubie principibus patronis adnumeratus est'*).³⁷² Julius is thus made more distinctive by highlighting his influences, only to further demonstrate that not only has he surpassed them but that few, if any, are his equal.

Julius' oratorical presentation has praise heaped upon it by none other than Cicero. This indirect technique, using the most renowned Roman orator, furthers Caesar's idealized portrait. Julius is seemingly without peers, and Cicero would know after all.

certe Cicero ad Brutum oratores enumerans negat se uidere, cui debeat Caesar cedere, atque eum elegantem, splendidam quoque atque etiam magnificam et generosam quodam modo rationem dicendi tenere; et ad Cornelium Nepotem de eodem ita scripsit: 'quid? oratorem quem huic antepones eorum, qui nihil aliud egerunt? quis sententiis aut acutior aut crebrior? quis uerbis aut ornatior aut elegantior?'

At all events when Cicero reviews the orators in his *Brutus*, he says that he does not see to whom Caesar ought to yield the palm, declaring that his style is elegant as well as transparent, even grand and in a sense noble. Again in a letter to Cornelius Nepos he writes thus of Caesar: "Come now, what orator would you rank above him of those who have devoted themselves to nothing else? Who has cleverer or more frequent epigrams? Who is either more picturesque or more choice in diction?"³⁷³

³⁷⁰ *'genus eloquentiae dum taxat adulescens adhuc Strabonis Caesaris secutus uidetur, cuius etiam ex oratione, quae inscribitur 'pro Sardis,' ad uerbum nonnulla transtulit in diuinationem suam.'* (Jul. 55.2.4-8).

³⁷¹ Jul. 55.1.1-2.

³⁷² Jul. 55.1.2-4.

³⁷³ Jul. 55.1.4-2.4, trans. Rolfe. Cf. Cic. *Brut.* 261. On Suetonius' use of Cicero see McDermott 1971: 213-214.

Suetonius' praise of Julius here presents him as nothing short of an oratorical exemplar. Indeed, that Cicero sees him as having no superior in the art makes it all the more impressive and stresses Julius' baseline as capable and authoritative leader. The use of the *Brutus*, on a literary level, helps to establish and assess Julius' character given that 'Suetonius' decision to cite it in his *Divus Iulius* shows that it became a standard by which to judge later emperors.'³⁷⁴ Overtly using Cicero to discuss Julius' public speaking abilities is a way to further intensify the praise by simple association.

His intelligence and elegance are consistently emphasized, whether in his choice of epigram or his diction, suggesting a natural ease and innate talent. The way in which Julius delivered his speeches, and his mannerisms, are also further elucidated. He is said to have had a high-pitched voice with passionate action and gestures not without grace.³⁷⁵ By way of litotes, Julius' gestures avoid extremes and so can at least be considered praiseworthy. His high voice and passion though are more ambiguous. These are superfluous details perhaps indicative of the third dimension. The implicit moral judgement in his gestures contrast with the seeming lack thereof in his voice and passion thus giving us a sense of his 'personality' in Gill's terms. These descriptions provide vivid details of Julius' physical mannerisms and also how he presents his oratorical public self.

Oratorical and rhetorical idiosyncrasies can further establish a Caesar's characterization. Suetonius provides a detailed passage to demonstrate Augustus' meticulous nature. His desire to maintain consistent quality control over himself in both words and mannerisms is shown in his attempt to construct his public self. Augustus is thus established as a self-characterizing force and this is a feature which recurs throughout his *Life*.

³⁷⁴ Osgood 2007: 337.

³⁷⁵ 'pronuntiasse autem dicitur uoce acuta, ardenti motu gestuque, non sine uenustate. orationes aliquas reliquit, inter quas temere quaedam feruntur.' (*Jul.* 55.2.8-3.3).

Eloquentiam studiaque liberalia ab aetate prima et cupide et laboriosissime exercuit. Mutinensi bello in tanta mole rerum et legisse et scripsisse et declamasse cotidie traditur. nam deinceps neque in senatu neque apud populum neque apud milites locutus est unquam nisi meditata et composita oratione, quamuis non deficeretur ad subita extemporali facultate. ac ne periculum memoriae adiret aut in ediscendo tempus absumeret, instituit recitare omnia. sermones quoque cum singulis atque etiam cum Liuia sua grauiore non nisi scriptos et e libello habebat, ne plus minusue loqueretur ex tempore. pronuntiabat dulci et proprio quodam oris sono dabatque assidue phonasco operam; sed nonnumquam infirmatis faucibus praeconis uoce ad populum contionatus est.

From early youth he devoted himself eagerly and with utmost diligence to oratory and liberal studies. During the war at Mutina, amid such a press of affairs, he is said to have read, written and declaimed every day. In fact he never afterwards spoke in the senate, or to the people or the soldiers, except in a studied and written address, although he did not lack the gift of speaking offhand without preparation. Moreover, to avoid the danger of forgetting what he was to say, or wasting time in committing it to memory, he adopted the practice of reading everything from a manuscript. Even his conversations with individuals and the more important of those with his own wife Livia, he always wrote out and read from a note-book, for fear of saying too much or too little if he spoke offhand. He had an agreeable and rather characteristic enunciation, and he practised constantly with a teacher of elocution; but sometimes because of weakness of the throat he addressed the people through a herald.³⁷⁶

Augustus' devotion and diligence to speech and study at such an early age marks, as a fundamental trait, his fascination with self-presentation. Maintaining his routines, even during wartime, highlights their absolute necessity and his intense personal commitment to cultivating his image. Pitcher helpfully comments that a characterization 'can also be expressed not only in what is said or done, but *how* it is said or done.'³⁷⁷ Although Augustus was capable of extemporaneous speech, he rejects it. Instead, he prepares every word in an address carefully and even remains mindful of the type of person to whom he is speaking. This presumably allows for the maintenance of his image, but also allows him to adapt the impression he makes according to whether he is speaking to a senator or a soldier. By simply reading from a text so he does not have to learn anything by heart, Augustus can more carefully control the circumstance and his image.

³⁷⁶ *Aug.* 84.1.1-2.9, trans. Rolfe.

³⁷⁷ Pitcher 2007: 111.

The fascinating aspect of this characterization is that, while all of this is for public performance, his practices carry over into the private sphere. In presenting Augustus as writing down in a notebook whatever he wanted to say, even to his wife, so as not to say too much or too little, Suetonius gives Augustus an intense level of self-awareness and cultivation. His reluctance to let a public presentation be less than perfect is also amply demonstrated in his use of a herald to address the people whenever his throat was weak. It stands to reason, as shown in chapter two, that Claudius has good cause for using a herald. In hindsight, Augustus' reason seems excessive. Of course, this stands in striking contrast to Julius' effortless and natural skills. Augustus' baseline characterization is far more nuanced, stressing constant self-awareness and artifice.

Augustus' specific style of speaking stresses simplicity and clarity, avoiding the impression of artificiality, but perhaps therefore making the effort more explicit.

Genus eloquendi secutus est elegans et temperatum uitatis sententiarum ineptiis atque concinnitate et 'reconditorum uerborum,' ut ipse dicit, 'fetoribus'; praecipuamque curam duxit sensum animi quam apertissime exprimere.

He cultivated a style of speaking that was chaste and elegant, avoiding the vanity of attempts at epigram and an artificial order, and as he himself expresses it, "the noisomeness of far-fetched words," making it his chief aim to express his thought as clearly as possible.³⁷⁸

The description of Augustus' style is sometimes 'treated as a proxy for a programmatic statement about Suetonius' own style' – as when Damon concisely observes that 'Suetonius advocates breadth of appeal over narrowness' – but we must be cautious about such assertions.³⁷⁹ This approach is in line with Augustus' constant attempt to keep his speech as grounded as possible. It is also curious that epigrams are seen here as hinting at vanity, for two reasons. Firstly, it stands in contrast to Cicero's compliment of Julius'

³⁷⁸ *Aug.* 86.1.1-5, trans. Rolfe. Cf. the elegant simplicity of Augustus' letters (*Gell. NA.* 15.7.3). On the appropriate use of epigrams see *Quint. Inst.* 8.5.25-34.

³⁷⁹ Damon 2014: 41. Cf. Macé 1900: 56-57, contra Baldwin 1983: 364-367; Wardle 1998: 435-436. On Suetonius' view on style see *Suet. Gramm.* 4.5 and 4.6. See also Wardle 2014: 486 ad 86.

use of epigrams; secondly, we will later see a variety of epigrams attributed by Suetonius to Augustus to further characterize him.

Augustus' views on speech and oratory characterize his own idiosyncratic opinions and shows his judgements of others. Suetonius sets out those view below:

cacozelos et antiquarios, ut diuerso genere uitiosos, pari fastidio spreuit exagitabatque nonnumquam; in primis Maecenatem suum, cuius 'myrobrechis,' ut ait, 'cincinnos' usque quaque persequitur et imitando per iocum irridet. sed nec Tiberio parcit et exoletas interdum et reconditas uoces aucupanti. M. quidem Antonium ut insanum increpat, quasi ea scribentem, quae mirentur potius homines quam intellegant... et quadam epistula Agrippinae neptis ingenium conlaudans: 'sed opus est,' inquit, 'dare te operam, ne moleste scribas et loquaris.'

He looked on innovators and archaizers with equal contempt, as faulty in opposite directions, and he sometimes had a fling at them, in particular his friend Maecenas, whose “unguent-dripping curls,” as he calls them, he loses no opportunity of belabouring and pokes fun at them by parody. He did not spare even Tiberius, who sometimes hunted up obsolete and pedantic expressions; and as for Mark Antony, he calls him a madman, for writing rather to be admired than to be understood... And in a letter praising the talent of his granddaughter Agrippina he writes: “But you must take great care not to write and talk affectedly.”³⁸⁰

Innovative and archaic speech are held up as opposite extremes which are not appropriate.³⁸¹ Augustus is wary of both extremes and seeks to find a golden mean between them.³⁸² Maecenas' speech is far too indulgent, Tiberius' is far too old fashioned, and Mark Antony's approach serves nothing but the man's own vanity. The way these styles of speech characterize their exponents will also bleed through into other *Lives*. Augustus holds himself to the philosophy of not writing and speaking with affectation and, given his advice to Agrippina, he evidently holds others to it too. It is also ironic that the next time we meet her she is being chastised by Tiberius: not heeding Augustus' advice could prove dangerous.³⁸³ Augustus' objection is obviously not to preparation or

³⁸⁰ *Aug.* 86.2.1-3.9, trans. Rolfe.

³⁸¹ For *cacozelos* see Quint. *Inst.* 8.3.56. Wardle argues that it is ‘also a word for virtues carried to excess’ (Wardle 2014: 487 ad 86.2).

³⁸² Don Fowler outlines the concept although he is explicitly critical of Augustus in historical terms (Fowler 2007: 11-14; 10).

³⁸³ Damon 2014: 55-56. Cf. *Tib.* 53.1.

artifice as such, since he puts in so much effort himself, but to a style that revels in artifice. Effort to produce a clear result is good; effort to produce a laboured result is bad. Ultimately, Julius is a naturally gifted speaker, whereas Augustus is able to achieve an equally effective style through careful thought and cultivation. However, other Caesars fail to match Julius and Augustus in this respect.

Tiberius is presented as a decidedly bad speaker: he is overly influenced by others and would ultimately validate Augustus' criticism of him. We are told that when he was young Tiberius followed Corvinus Messala in Latin oratory.³⁸⁴ The result was evidently a strongly archaic and abstruse style. Syme clarifies that this orator 'paid exact attention to questions of spelling and of grammar' and it 'is in this matter, rather than for that known grace and elegance of style, that Messalla found a follower in' Tiberius.³⁸⁵ Hence, Suetonius explicitly reports that Tiberius' style was obscured by too much affectation and pedantry, to the extent that it was thought he spoke better offhand than when he was prepared.³⁸⁶ This is a rather neat contrast given Augustus' emphasis on prepared speech and shows that Tiberius, in practicing artifice, went too far to one extreme. Tiberius' fusty style reinforces the unpleasant features of his characterization elsewhere in the *Life*. A demonstration of this is that he spoke Greek fluently yet would avoid using it, particularly in the senate when he asked to be pardoned for using the word '*monopolium*' and, when the word '*ἐμβλημα*' was used, he suggested that a native word or several words be used in its place; in addition, on one occasion, although a soldier was permitted to be asked for

³⁸⁴ '*Artes liberales utriusque generis studiosissime coluit. in oratione Latina secutus est Coruinum Messalam, quem senem adulescens obseruarat.*' (Tib. 70.1.1-3).

³⁸⁵ Syme 1986: 355 For the style of M. Valerius Messalla Corvinus, and also his influence on Tiberius, see Syme 1986: 215-160; 355. He was known for his precision with language and grammatical interests (Sen. *Controv.* 2.4.8; Quint. *Inst.* 1.7.35). Cicero praised him for his eloquence and skill (Cic. *Ad Brut.* 1.15). For all his eloquence though others were critical (Quint. *Inst.* 10.1.113; 4.1.8; Tac. *Dial.* 20.1). He was also a patron for poets (Syme 1986: 359; Davies 1973: 25-35).

³⁸⁶ '*sed adfectatione et morositate nimia obscurabat stilum, ut aliquanto ex tempore quam a cura praestantior haberetur.*' (Tib. 70.1.3-5).

his testimony in Greek, he was allowed to answer only in Latin.³⁸⁷ The pedantry seems petty and creates a picture of Tiberius as cultivating an unattractive scholarly style. He has none of the common touch of Julius and Augustus (or even the latter's knack for appropriate artifice).

Oratory and speechmaking also help delineate specific aspects of Caligula's character, who goes to the opposite extreme. Although he has some innate talent for speaking, Caligula openly scorns style and artifice and proves to be too spontaneous.

Ex disciplinis liberalibus minimum eruditioni, eloquentiae plurimum attendit, quantumuis facundus et promptus, utique si perorandum in aliquem esset. Irato et uerba et sententiae suppetebant, pronuntiatio quoque et uox, ut neque eodem loci prae ardore consisteret et exaudiretur a procul stantibus. peroraturus stricturum se lucubrationis suae telum minabatur, lenius comptiusque scribendi genus adeo contemnens, ut Senecam tum maxime placentem 'commissiones meras' componere et 'harenam esse sine calce' diceret.

As regards liberal studies, he gave little attention to literature but a great deal to oratory, and he was as ready of speech and eloquent as you please, especially if he had occasion to make a charge against anyone. For when he was angry, he had an abundant flow of words and thoughts, and his voice and delivery were such that for very excitement he could not stand still and he was clearly heard by those at a distance. When about to begin an harangue, he threatened to draw the sword of his nightly labours, and he had such scorn of a polished and elegant style that he used to say that Seneca, who was very popular just then, composed "mere school exercises," and that he was "sand without lime."³⁸⁸

It is incredibly fitting that Caligula's innate talent should flourish at the prospect of verbally abusing someone, thus reinforcing his one-dimensional negative characterization typical of his *Life*. The detailed description of Caligula when he spoke makes for a remarkably clear picture of his oratorical self; thus, when he was angry, he had words and thoughts at hand and appears excited in both voice delivery as well as being loud. The lack of composure and preparation causes him to fail at being a speaker through sheer instability. His established portrait as a vicious, impulsive, and crazed man is even

³⁸⁷ *Tib.* 71.1.1-11. In relation to the use of the word 'ἔμβλημα', Cicero twice uses the transliteration *emblema* (*Cic. In Verr.* 2.4.49) Cf. Rolfe, Vol. I, 2001:410 fn. 121.

³⁸⁸ *Calig.* 53.1.1-2.5, trans. Rolfe. Cf. His degradation of great literary works and writers (*Calig.* 34.2).

stressed by the presentation of speeches in violent terms, with the reference to the ‘sword of his nightly labours’ being a telling one. Hurley views Caligula ‘as an agitated speaker’ and points out that many of his *sententiae* ‘introduced by verbs of exclaiming, threatening and shouting’.³⁸⁹ In his approach to style, not unlike Augustus, he scorned polished and elegant types of writing. However, Caligula practices no discernible artifice and his own natural inclinations leave him wanting. His approach to speech is far too impulsive to compare with exemplars like Julius and Augustus.

Caesars can have their own distinctive styles of speech and oratory. Julius transcends his early influences with an innate talent and natural ease. Augustus rejects ostentatious styles and meticulously crafts his own stripped-down style. Developing one’s own style can be a mark of maturity; Julius and Augustus are examples of this and surprisingly, so is Caligula. Even though he explicitly rejects craft, he has his own impetuous style albeit it remains untrained and underdeveloped. Tiberius makes efforts, like Augustus, to cultivate his own style, only to produce bad results and end up with an archaic and pedantic reputation. Other Caesars can choose poor influences and never transcend them; or try and fail to escape an overpowering influence. In these cases, their speech points to an immaturity and can reflect other aspects of their character: sometimes in an overt way, but sometimes with elements of complexity.

The emperor Domitian is said to have read nothing except the commentaries and transactions of Tiberius, and for his letters, speeches, and proclamations he relied on the talent of others.³⁹⁰ A certain style is required even for non-literary compositions like edicts or letters and Domitian’s fixation on Tiberius is indicative of him having ‘failed to develop the appropriate one’.³⁹¹ At the very least this is a dubious choice of literary and

³⁸⁹ Hurley 1993: 189 ad. 53.1. Cf. *Calig.* 22.

³⁹⁰ *praeter commentarios et acta Tiberi Caesaris nihil lectitabat; epistulas orationesque et edicta alieno formabat ingenio.* (*Dom.* 20.1.6-8).

³⁹¹ Damon 2014: 40.

imperial inspiration. It has the evaluative effect of linking him with the toxic memory of Tiberius; whereas relying on other's talents for speeches is a sign of immaturity and the opposite of the self-constructed public and oratorical self. Although his speech was not inelegant, Domitian is provided by Suetonius with only a few meagre examples of epigrammatic witticisms; for instance, saying that the reddish-greyish hair of a man was 'snow on which mead had been poured'.³⁹² Style and its rejection tell us about a person, and Domitian's lack of interest in history and poetry or even in acquiring a good style stands in contrast to the sheer emphasis placed on it in previous biographies.³⁹³ Domitian is thus over-influenced and has no distinct voice of his own.

He never achieves his own style of public speaking and is thus marked by a kind of oratorical immaturity. In this respect he is like Nero (as we will see in a moment), but notably unlike Caligula. As a result, there emerges an unexpected view of Caligula as being somewhat mature, in this respect at least, but still very much malign. As we have already seen, he is presented in general as having cultivated his image as a monster. The issue with Caligula is therefore not that he was not fully realized, but that he actively tries to be a tyrant. Domitian on the other hand, seems to have become a tyrant largely through laziness. For the most part this all fits with their baseline characterizations; nevertheless, the equally tyrannical Nero at least struggles to assert himself.

Nero's oratorical upbringing is remarkably conflicted. As much as he was drawn to liberal studies and philosophy, Agrippina pushed him away from subjects not deemed useful to an emperor.

³⁹² *'sermonis tamen nec inelegantis, dictorum interdum etiam notabilium...et cuiusdam caput uarietate capilli subrutulum et incanum perfusam niuem mulso dixit.'* (*Dom.* 20.1.9-12, trans. Rolfe).

³⁹³ *'numquam tamen aut historiae carminibusue noscendis operam ullam aut stilo uel necessario dedit.'* (*Dom.* 20.1.4-6). Despite his rejection of studies, Domitian sought copies to replace lost works after a library fire (*Dom.* 20.1.1-4).

Liberalis disciplinas omnis fere puer attigit. sed a philosophia eum mater auertit monens imperaturo contrariam esse; a cognitione ueterum oratorum Seneca praeceptor, quo diutius in admiratione sui detineret. itaque ad poeticam pronus carmina libenter ac sine labore composuit nec, ut quidam putant, aliena pro suis edidit. uenere in manus meas pugillares libellique cum quibusdam notissimis uersibus ipsius chirographo scriptis, ut facile appareret non tralatos aut dictante aliquo exceptos, sed plane quasi a cogitante atque generante exaratos; ita multa et deleta et inducta et superscripta inerant.

When a boy he took up almost all the liberal arts; but his mother turned him from philosophy, warning him that it was a drawback to one who was going to rule, while Seneca kept him from reading the early orators, to make his admiration for his teacher endure the longer. Turning therefore to poetry, he wrote verses with eagerness and without labour, and did not, as some think, publish the work of others as his own. I have had in my possession note-books and papers with some well-known verses of his, written with his own hand and in such wise that it was perfectly evident that they were not copied or taken down from dictation, but worked out exactly as one writes when thinking and creating; so many instances were there of words erased or struck through and written above the lines.³⁹⁴

His unsuitability as an emperor is suggested precisely by his interest in such subjects. The practice of a student choosing to follow an exemplar is shown to have been corrupted for the tutor's own egotistical reasons, revealing Seneca's efforts to exert influence over Nero. Admittedly, this says more about Seneca's character than it does about Nero, but in regard to the emperor it suggests that his awareness of other orators may have been underdeveloped, and thus his knowledge about the subject overall. He can never be fully formed as a speaker because he was overprotected by Seneca and can never really transcend this influence.

However, Nero, following his artistic tendencies, breaks with this enforced influence and reasserts his own established character by writing effortless verse. Suetonius even inserts himself into the narrative to add a moment of verisimilitude, in claiming that he has personally seen the manuscripts in Nero's hand, and that they do indeed seem to be the emperor's own work. It is not a superfluous detail but one which rebuts the stereotype of Nero as relying on borrowed erudition:³⁹⁵ he was at least sincere

³⁹⁴ *Ner.* 52.1.1-11, trans. Rolfe.

³⁹⁵ Cf. *Tac. Ann.* 14.16.

in trying to write his own poetry. This complicates Nero somewhat, as he attempts to find a means for expression and elegance which fits uncomfortably with a tyrannical disposition. It is ultimately tragic that Nero was never allowed to realize his potential as a speaker or writer; or escape his tutor's influence. This informs his 'artistic' baseline, but it does strike a sympathetic moment of discord. Domitian is clearly over-influenced. Nero has that in a different way with Seneca – he is not self-constructed rather constructed by his tutor. Whereas Domitian makes no effort to assert himself, Nero at least tries to be an individual – thus complicating his usual comic and ineffectual portrayal in the *Life*.

4.3 Epigrams

The tripartite perspective is again beneficial in showing how epigrams can strengthen certain character elements, contradict others, and in some instances push characterization towards realism. As an extension of oratory, epigrams act as a distinct sub-category which can be utilized to further develop a character. Epigrams and epigrammatic moments may appear in two forms. External expression is a form of indirect characterization whereby another character in the narrative makes an emblematic comment about the main subject. Internal reflections are when the main character offers up a comment which shows a glimpse of their interior life. The worst emperors are more easily characterized from the outside while better emperors tend to speak for themselves. Domitian and Titus are clear illustrations of this point in a one-dimensional way. It can also be extended, however, to two-dimensional moments for Julius and even three-dimensional moments for Augustus. There are exceptions of course; Caligula needs little help vilifying himself, thus inverting the principle. However, the *Tiberius* shows clearly

what may be achieved in character portraits through external and internal expression. Finally, even an all too easily passed over comment in the *Claudius* conveys pathos.

Domitian and Titus have emblematic instances of epigrams that tell a reader all that they need to know about them, or at least about their baseline characterizations. A simple epigram about Domitian conveys an unsettling character moment.

Inter initia principatus cotidie secretum sibi horarum sumere solebat nec quicquam amplius quam muscas captare ac stilo praeacuto configere, ut cuidam interroganti, essetne quis intus cum Caesare, non absurde responsum sit a Vibio Crispo, ne muscam quidem.

At the beginning of his reign he used to spend hours in seclusion every day, doing nothing but catch flies and stab them with a keenly-sharpened stylus. Consequently when someone once asked whether anyone was in there with Caesar, Vibius Crispus made the witty reply: “Not even a fly.”³⁹⁶

This passage illustrates the simplest form of indirect characterization, whereby another character in the narrative comments on the main figure, and shows how epigrams can be useful for ‘building a sense of individual character’.³⁹⁷ The epigram makes plain enough Domitian’s cruelty.³⁹⁸ This eccentric behaviour establishes his baseline, presenting him in terms of a tyrant: thus ‘Domitian’s isolation is a defining tyrannical trait in Suetonius’ text’.³⁹⁹

On the other hand, Titus gets to present himself in a positive light. As previously mentioned in chapter one, Suetonius has Titus directly state his generosity; upon realizing that he had not granted any favours, the emperor utters the memorable line ‘*amici, diem perdidit*’.⁴⁰⁰ Pitcher makes a simple and effective point when noting that figures can be characterized just as much by their own words and deed as by explicit comments from the narrator or other figures in the work.⁴⁰¹ This quotation attributed to Titus neatly

³⁹⁶ *Dom.* 3.1.1-5, trans. Rolfe.

³⁹⁷ Pitcher 2007: 110; 107.

³⁹⁸ Murphy 1991: 3790.

³⁹⁹ Hulls 2014: 183. Domitian is also neatly contextualized as a solitary tyrant by means of a key comparison to Tiberius’ withdrawal to Capri (*Tib.* 42.1; Hulls 2014: 180-184).

⁴⁰⁰ *Tit.* 8.1.13.

⁴⁰¹ Pitcher 2007: 111.

epitomizes Suetonius' discussion of the emperor's generosity and embellishes his glowing (one-dimensional) depiction.⁴⁰² Domitian and Titus show respectively how external epigrams can be used more effectively to stress negative baselines, whereas internal epigrams play better to positive depictions.

Epigrams in the biography of Julius Caesar can be seen to provide both external and internal epigrams which highlight the first dimension of basic characterization. External epigrams illustrative of the first dimension reaffirm baseline features of Julius' depiction. Firstly, his depiction as a man driven purely by ambition and the lust for power, is underpinned using epigrammatic moments. From the very beginning of the *Life*, a comment attributed to Sulla predicts the blow Caesar will deliver to the established order by way of comparison with Marius ('*nam Caesari multos Marios inesse*')⁴⁰³ and provides indirect characterization of the man even before we are presented with the full events of his adult life.

Suetonius later discusses Caesar's love of power, which had been with him since he was young,⁴⁰⁴ and further elaborates on this aspect of his characterization through specific quotations. He states that Cicero wrote about Caesar having on his lips some words of Euripides ('*semper Caesarem in ore habuisse...Euripidis uersus*') which meditate on the idea of taking power, and he adds a version of his own ('*nam si uiolandum est ius, <regnandi> gratia/uiolandum est: aliis rebus pietatem colas*').⁴⁰⁵ This reinforces his baseline just like Titus' own words with the key difference being that the point is made not by his own phrase but by borrowing the words of someone else. Although in this case

⁴⁰² Damon uses Titus' quotation here to demonstrate a punctuating scheme whereby these 'quotations provide a kind of QED affirmation in topical rubric' and can encapsulate the particular virtue or vice being discussed (Damon 2014: 53). This depiction aligns with Titus' image as the darling of humankind (*Tit.* 1.1). Cf. Baldwin, speaking more generally, about such aspects that leave 'potent and affecting impressions' (Baldwin 1983: 516).

⁴⁰³ *Jul.* 1.3.8-9.

⁴⁰⁴ '*quidam putant captum imperii consuetudine pensitatisque suis et inimicorum uiribus usum occasione rapiendae dominationis, quam aetate prima concupisset.*' (*Jul.* 30.5.1-4).

⁴⁰⁵ *Jul.* 30.5.5-10.

the baseline element of Caesar's portrait is reinforced, epigrams can also allow for moments of reflection for the subject thereby giving a moment of insight into his interior self.

Epigrammatic comments, and more specifically quotations, are often used to evoke certain emotions and reactions. Following the death of Caesar, the words of Pacuvius are said to be used to rouse pity:

Inter ludos cantata sunt quaedam ad miserationem et inuidiam caedis eius accommodata, ex Pacuui Armorum iudicio: men seruasse, ut essent qui me perderent?

At the funeral games, to rouse pity and indignation at his death, these words from the "Contest for the Arms" of Pacuvius were sung: - "Saved I these men that they might murder me?"⁴⁰⁶

Here a quotation is used as if Julius were saying it and although this comment is presented as directed towards the emotions of the historical audience, it also serves to draw the sympathy of the reader in highlighting the aspect of clemency in his character. In Suetonius' collection, such phrases allow for more vivid characterization of his subjects; and thus, whether they are in the form of direct or indirect speech, quotations can have both evaluative and empathetic qualities. External quotations can reinforce both the overall characterization and strengthen specific character traits.

For the most part, however, it is fair to say that the Caesars themselves 'get all the good lines.'⁴⁰⁷ As such, we need to consider the effect this has on characterization. Thus, internal epigrams, providing Julius' own observations, can reinforce his baseline in a direct manner:

Pontico triumpho inter pompae fercula trium uerborum praetulit titulum VENI · VIDI · VICI non acta belli significantem sicut ceteris, sed celeriter confecti notam.

⁴⁰⁶ *Jul.* 84.2.1-5, trans. Rolfe. Cf. Julius' clemency (*Jul.* 73-75).

⁴⁰⁷ Damon 2014: 39.

In his Pontic triumph he displayed among the show-pieces of the procession an inscription of but three words, “I came, I saw, I conquered,” not indicating the events of the war, as the others did, but the speed with which it was finished.⁴⁰⁸

The way things are said can also fit a character. Pitcher notes that ‘through the selection of telling words or deeds and the style in which they were executed’ could characterize a person in ancient historiography.⁴⁰⁹ The terse, brevity of the epigram stressing Julius’ military strength and prowess as a leader, fits his character and intensifies the portrayal of ambition and drive for power. The moment in which he crosses the Rubicon provides a psychological insight as Caesar pauses and notes that even then they could turn back but that once they cross the little bridge it is a matter for arms.⁴¹⁰ This momentary insight gives more character depth as does the epigram of the ‘die is cast’ epitomizes the ultimate decision taken and his power-hungry character.⁴¹¹ He is depicted clearly as a risk-taker and as someone intent on following his own agenda over the interests of the Republic and thus fully in line with his baseline portrayal.

Minor dissonance implying a second dimension emerges in other epigrams used by Julius. These challenge his basic presentation while also exposing his own cognizance of himself and others. Thus, one notable epigram offers a rebuttal to his tyrannical portrait in the claim that ‘I am Caesar and no King’.⁴¹² This acknowledges the prospect of danger, but it is dressed up as a witty negation. The joke (referring to the cognomen Rex) allows him to deny any desire to be king and even to pretend that it does not cross his mind. But Suetonius does not present this as real ignorance of the reason he is being hailed as king. He is surely meant to be aware that his ambitions and actions are tyrannical, and he is just

⁴⁰⁸ *Jul.* 37.2.5-7, trans. Rolfe.

⁴⁰⁹ Pitcher 2007: 112.

⁴¹⁰ ‘*consecutusque cohortis ad Rubiconem flumen, qui prouinciae eius finis erat, paulum constitit, ac reputans quantum moliretur, conuersus ad proximos: ‘etiam nunc,’ inquit, ‘regredi possumus; quod si ponticulum transierimus, omnia armis agenda erunt.’* (*Jul.* 31.2.5-32.1.1).

⁴¹¹ ‘*tunc Caesar: ‘eatur,’ inquit, ‘quo deorum ostenta et inimicorum iniquitas uocat. iacta alea est,’ inquit.’* (*Jul.* 32.1.8-33.1.1, trans. Rolfe).

⁴¹² ‘*neque ex eo infamiam affectati etiam regii nominis discutere ualuit, quanquam et plebei regem se salutanti Caesarem se, non regem esse responderit...*’ (*Jul.* 79.2.1-5, trans. Rolfe).

trying to play them down. At most this establishes him as clever in trying to disguise his ambitions; it does not suggest that he did not retain them.

Empathetic insights are offered during his assassination through Caesar's words to Brutus, 'καὶ σὸ τέκνον'.⁴¹³ This is seemingly a moment of genuine surprise for Julius, that others (and Brutus in particular) could place the Republic ahead of their apparent self-interest and personal ties. The image of Caesar as ruthless in pursuit of his own interests holds – so much so that he cannot imagine anyone else thinking differently. That furthers the one-dimensional image. Indeed, in general Julius is a straightforward case: Suetonius explicitly marks his sayings as reinforcing his ruthless image (in *Jul.* 77), even if this was sometimes belied by his clemency in his actions (i.e. in *Jul.* 74-75). There is not much complexity in his epigrams; at best *kai su teknon* seems to suggest some genuine sentiment for his friends.

Similarly, the epigrams in the *Augustus* underscore his self-conscious effort to cultivate a specific image. This is evident in that he himself had written a work entitled 'Epigrams'.⁴¹⁴ The earlier mention of Augustus viewing epigrams as indicative of vanity strikes a noticeably discordant note with this, of course. Presumably, Augustus knew how to use such techniques properly and effectively, unlike others, and sought to make this clear through his views on the subject. Augustus has little need of other people commenting on him when he is more than capable of doing it himself. He made the effort to characterize himself before anyone else had an opportunity to do so. The *Res Gestae* after all is a very real literary and physical testament to his efforts at cultivating his own image.⁴¹⁵ One-dimensional epigrams attributed to Augustus himself are therefore used by Suetonius to greater impact than any form of indirect characterization. His services to

⁴¹³ *Jul.* 82.3.1.

⁴¹⁴ *Aug.* 85.2.4-5, trans. Rolfe.

⁴¹⁵ *Res Gestae divi Augusti.* 1-35.

Rome become emblematic, so that he could say he found it in brick and left it in marble.⁴¹⁶

Augustus' aiming at the golden mean is also emphasized. In terms of leadership he takes haste to task as being unbecoming, a safe commander being better than a bold one, and a thing being done quickly enough when it is done well ('*sat celeriter fieri quidquid fiat satis bene*').⁴¹⁷ Again, this shows Augustus' fixation on behaviour which avoids extremes and on epigrams which have the express purpose of characterizing himself, defining his image as a leader and an authority figure.

Internal epigrams also provide the reader with a way into the character's interiority. Augustus' moral stance is demonstrated, along with his internal anger in relation to his daughter's fall, when he is reported to have said he would rather have been the father of Phoebe ('*maluisse se ait Phoebes patrem fuisse*'),⁴¹⁸ a confidante of Julia's who hanged herself around the same time. In expressing his own emotions regarding the failures of Agrippa and the Julias, an epigram in Greek conveys it in the notion that it would have been better if he had died without offspring ('*αἴθ' ὄφελον ἄγαμός τ' εἶμεναι ἄγονός τ' ἀπολέσθαι*').⁴¹⁹ The first dimension of characterization thus reinforces Augustus' commitment to his moral stances, regardless of his hypocritical actions elsewhere.

Two-dimensional epigrams in the *Augustus* reveal aspects of his character contrary to the image that he generally seeks to cultivate. In one notable moment, Augustus' portrayal as a great leader is bolstered purely by association and witty denigration. Augustus viewed and showed respect for the corpse of Alexander the Great,

⁴¹⁶ '*Vrbem neque pro maiestate imperii ornatam et inundationibus incendiisque obnoxiam excoluit adeo, ut iure sit gloriatus marmoream se relinquere, quam latericiam accepisset.*' (Aug. 28.3.1-4).

⁴¹⁷ '*nihil autem minus [in]perfecto duci quam festinationem temeritatemque conuenire arbitrabatur. crebro itaque illa iactabat: σπεῦδε βραδέως· ἀσφαλῆς γάρ ἐστ' ἀμείνων ἢ θρασὺς στρατηλάτης et: 'sat celeriter fieri quidquid fiat satis bene.'*' (Aug. 25.4.1-6).

⁴¹⁸ Aug. 65.2.7.

⁴¹⁹ Aug. 65.4.8.

but when asked if he wished to see the Ptolemies, said that he wished to see a king not a corpse.⁴²⁰ This, however, lacks all of Augustus' normal diplomacy, and is arguably more in line with Julius – thus challenging his overall presentation. This intriguing moment allows the reader to speculate as to whether Suetonius has Augustus here let slip his mask for a moment, and that perhaps he was more like his predecessor than he cared to admit.

Speech though can provide three-dimensional and realistic examples. Augustus' penchant for folksy sayings is characteristic of him alone and is a quirk stripped of any moralistic meaning. These sayings therefore can create that element of realism achieved only through specificity and lack of deliberate purpose.

Cotidiano sermone quaedam frequentius et notabiliter usurpasse eum, litterae ipsius autographae ostentant, in quibus identidem, cum aliquos numquam soluturos significare uult, 'ad K(a)l(endas) Graecas soluturos' ait; et cum hortatur ferenda esse praesentia, qualiacumque sint: 'contenti simus hoc Catone'; et ad exprimendam festinatae rei uelocitatem: 'celerius quam asparagi cocuntur.'

That in his everyday conversation he used certain favourite and peculiar expressions appears from letters in his own hand, in which he says every now and then, when he wished to indicate that certain men will never pay, that “they will pay on the Greek Kalends.” Urging his correspondent to put up with present circumstances, such as they were, he says: “Let's be satisfied with the Cato we have;” and to express the speed of a hasty action, “Quicker than you can cook asparagus.”⁴²¹

To further elaborate on the sense of realism in the portrayal of Augustus, Suetonius goes on to give a detailed list of specific variations of words that the emperor used.⁴²² His fondness for folksy sayings can perhaps be understood as an extraneous detail with no specific narrative purpose and it also defies explicit interpretation as either good or bad. It simply establishes a realistic feature of his characterization.

⁴²⁰ *'per idem tempus conditorium et corpus Magni Alexandri, cum prolatum e penetrali subiecisset oculis, corona aurea imposita ac floribus aspersis ueneratus est consultusque, num et Ptolemaeum inspicere uellet, regem se uoluisse ait uidere, non mortuos.'* (Aug. 18.1.1-2.1).

⁴²¹ Aug. 87.1.1-2.1, trans. Rolfe.

⁴²² *'ponit assidue et pro stulto 'baceolum apud pullum pulleiaceum' et pro cerrito 'uacerrosum' et 'uapide' se habere pro male et 'betizare' pro languere, quod uulgo 'lathanizare' dicitur; item 'simus' pro sumus et 'domos' genetiui casu singulari pro domuos. nec umquam aliter haec duo, ne quis mendam magis quam consuetudinem putet.'* (Aug. 87.2.1-7).

Caligula's use of language has an intensely vituperative quality and sits well with his crazed and tyrannical presentation. This inverts our principle that internal epigrams favour positive depictions. Caligula's tyrannical baseline is strengthened when he quotes a tragic poet to say that the people could hate him so long as they feared him (*'oderint, dum metuant'*).⁴²³ When Caligula thought his brother, Tiberius Gemellus, had taken an antidote in the event that he would try to poison him, he quipped that there is no antidote to Caesar (*'antidotum,' inquit, 'aduersus Caesarem?'*).⁴²⁴ The implication that he can do what he wants to anyone expresses tyrannical qualities through familiar language while establishing a vicious levity all of Caligula's own. The brutality of his nature is shown through his coarse phrases. Suetonius presents this when it is said Caligula added to his most monstrous deeds with the hideousness of his words (*'immanissima facta augebat atrocitate uerborum'*). He said that there was nothing in his own nature that he admired more than his shamelessness (*'nihil magis in natura sua laudare se ac probare dicebat quam, ut ipsius uerbo utar, ἀδιατρεψίαν, hoc est inuerecundiam'*). When his grandmother Antonia offered advice (*'monenti Antoniae auiae tamquam parum esset non oboedire'*), he replied that he was allowed to do anything to anyone (*'memento,' ait, 'omnia mihi et <in> omnis licere.'*).⁴²⁵ His abusive language reflects the same character in the man.

In contrast, Tiberius' tyrannical image is underlined by external epigrams, most obviously by the damning cry from the people to throw him in the Tiber (*'Tiberium in Tiberim!'*).⁴²⁶ This epigram tries to pin down such a notoriously ambiguous and ironic character. A more complicated observation is made by his rhetoric teacher, a close enough figure to provide a believable comment about Tiberius' nature:

⁴²³ *Calig.* 30.1.7. Cf. *'oderint, dum probent.'* (*Tib.* 59.2.9-10).

⁴²⁴ *Calig.* 29.1.8-9.

⁴²⁵ *Calig.* 29.1.1-7.

⁴²⁶ *Tib.* 75.1.2.

Saeua ac lenta natura ne in puero quidem latuit; quam Theodorus Gadareus rhetoricae praeceptor et perspexisse primus sagaciter et assimilasse aptissime uisus est, subinde in obiurgando appellans eum πηλὸν αἵματι πεφυραμένον, id est lutum a sanguine maceratum. sed aliquanto magis in principe eluxit, etiam inter initia cum adhuc fauorem hominum moderationis simulatione captaret.

His cruel and cold-blooded character was not completely hidden even in boyhood. His teacher of rhetoric, Theodorus of Gadara, seems first to have had the insight to detect, and to have characterized it very aptly, since in taking him to task he would now and then call him πηλὸν αἵματι πεφυραμένον, that is to say, “mud kneaded with blood.” But it grew still more noticeable after he became emperor, even at the beginning, when he was still courting popularity by a show of moderation.⁴²⁷

The reference to Tiberius as mud mixed with blood reinforces his depiction as cruel and the overall negative aspects of his characterization. However, it reveals a point of curiosity in Tiberius’ representation. Duality is the prominent feature of Tiberius’ portrait, with both good and bad co-existing and even struggling against one another in the emperor. However, in this account he has a more straightforward and consistent presentation.⁴²⁸ There is an assumed duplicity whereby his negative character was always hidden and that it grew to be more obvious. It might look like complexity but could be argued for as a case of simplicity with one dominant nature. His cruel disposition can feed into the presentation of duality, given that one nature might overtake the other.

As chapter three initiated a consideration of Tiberius’ characterization and chapter six will discuss it further, we would benefit from keeping this passage in mind. Curiously, Suetonius, despite his overall portrayal of Tiberius as a dualistic and complicated figure, presents him here as Tacitus does, as innately cruel (*natura*), with a perspective reinforced by Augustus excusing his innate flaws elsewhere in the *Life*.⁴²⁹ Furthermore, it seemingly did need a perceptive viewer given that it did not escape notice (*ne ... quidem*

⁴²⁷ Suet. *Tib.* 57.1, trans. Rolfe. Cf. *Suda* s.v. ‘Ἀλέξανδρος Αἰγαῖος’ (alpha, 1128) which recounts that Nero was referred to as blood mixed with clay. Also consider Ov. *Met.* 1.154-162.

⁴²⁸ On Suetonius’ use of childhood as foreshadowing or flashback to character traits, especially the Tiberius passage, see Garrett 2019: 382. Note, however, that she favours a model of consistent character (pp. 378-383). On the use of childhood by Plutarch as related to Gill’s definition on ‘personality’, see Pelling 1990b: 213-244.

⁴²⁹ *Tib.* 68.

latuit'). This epigram and its anecdote show the collapse of his overall presentation of duality into a simpler, Tacitean view of Tiberius as innately cruel. It characterizes him directly and indirectly: first in Suetonius stating it and then backed up by an observation from another figure in the narrative – there is no contradiction here.

This can perhaps be understood as a signpost to the biographer's attempt to reduce Tiberius to a more easily understood tyrannical type. It comes at something of a turning point, at which the complex view of Tiberius turns into a simpler portrait of cruelty: interestingly, frequently now communicated with the views of others (Theodorus here, the satirical verses of people at *Tib.* 59). The turning point might even be marked by the incident at *Tib.* 58 (right between these two sections) in which he is asked about *maiestas* and changes his earlier opinion on the matter at *Tib.* 28. Up to now, the reader may have thought that there was good and bad in Tiberius, but this is suggestive of him being bad all along, and as much could be seen even in his childhood. The biography seems to move away here from presenting both the good and the bad and toward a Tacitean presentation of Tiberius.

Hence in narrative terms, it is striking that a childhood anecdote has consciously (we assume) been withheld until later. Putting it earlier would have given us a 'Tacitean' view of Tiberius earlier; instead we are invited to suspend judgement, until suddenly at *Tib.* 57 we are provided with a more overt interpretation in the epigram. This fits into a scheme that can be read via the tripartite perspective, that chapter six will go on to demonstrate: Tiberius is a dualistic figure, composed of both good and bad but unpredictable as to which it would be, who then becomes a complex character with the emergence of genuine internal conflict only for his depiction to revert to that of a traditional tyrant at the end. This passage marks a moment in Suetonius' *Life* which can be understood as beginning to resolve Tiberius into a more basic character.

In the *Tiberius*, too, a particularly long anonymous satirical verse – essentially an epigram – written against Tiberius serves to reinforce an evaluative picture of him for the worse, emphasizing his tyrannical qualities. Beginning, ‘*Asper et immitis, breuiter uis omnia dicam?*’, it asks whether his mother was able to love him (‘*dispeream, si te mater amare potest.*’), accuses him of drinking blood more than he drank undiluted wine (‘*Fastidit uinum, quia iam sitit iste cruorem:/ tam bibit hunc auide, quam bibit ante merum.*’), provides guilt by association mentioning him within the same breath as Sulla, Marius, and Antony and closes with a point about rulers who have come from exile reigning with great bloodshed (‘*Roma perit! regnauit sanguine multo,/ ad regnum quisquis uenit ab exilio.*’).⁴³⁰ When characterized from the outside like this, Tiberius is reduced to a despotic paradigm.

However, when Tiberius speaks for himself complexities begin to emerge. His calculated delay in accepting imperial authority prompts one figure in the narrative to lose patience, saying ‘let him take it or leave’ (‘*aut agat aut desistat!*’) implying that he was stalling for time.⁴³¹ But Tiberius’ own words, as reported by Suetonius, offer a more sympathetic depiction suggesting a reluctance to take up the burden and looking forward to the day when they may grant an old man repose (‘*ipsius uerba sunt: ‘dum ueniam ad id tempus, quo uobis aequum possit uideri dare uos aliquam senectuti meae requiem.’*’).⁴³² This self-characterization is not allowed to stand by Suetonius however: it is presented instead as nothing but lip service and duplicity with Tiberius accepting the empire as if under compulsion (‘*quasi coactus*’), and describing it in terms of a burden and slavery (‘*et querens miseram et onerosam iniungi sibi seruitutem*’).⁴³³ Nevertheless,

⁴³⁰ *Tib.* 59.1.6-2.6. On lampoons, see also *Tib.* 28; *Aug.* 55.

⁴³¹ *Tib.* 24.1.9, trans. Rolfe.

⁴³² *Tib.* 24.2.4-6.

⁴³³ *Tib.* 24.2.1-2.

Suetonius does provide the emperor's own words, and they can be interpreted in a way that underscores the greater nuance in his character.

This pattern is similar to that in Tiberius' 'wolf by the ears' comment (*'Cunctandi causa erat metus undique imminentium discriminum, ut saepe lupum se auribus tenere diceret.'*) and should be placed together with it.⁴³⁴ Both suggest a side to Tiberius which is sincere about not wishing to govern, and which implicitly contradicts Suetonius' impression that he is only pretending to be reluctant in order to make senators uncomfortable. Even if guided away from it by Suetonius, the reader is provided with a moment of interiority for Tiberius which creates some sympathy for him and makes him less of the cruel and cunning type he is otherwise made out to be. The fact that Suetonius rules out the more sympathetic interpretation of these comments itself shows that they open up a second dimension to the emperor's established character.

Finally, an epigram uttered by Claudius offers a fascinating perspective on his overall characterization. Towards the end of his life, Claudius seemingly regretted his adoption of Nero and looked to Britannicus to rectify his decision.

cumque impubi teneroque adhuc, quando statura permetteret, togam dare destinasset, adiecit: 'ut tandem populus R. uerum Caesarem habeat.'

When he expressed his intention of giving Britannicus the gown of manhood, since his stature justified it though he was still young and immature, he added: "That the Roman people may at last have a genuine Caesar."⁴³⁵

This is primarily about Britannicus being a legitimate heir to the throne and presumably being worthy to rule.⁴³⁶ There is a feeling of pathos in Claudius' high hopes for Britannicus given that, like Germanicus, he was never to be emperor. However, there is also an element to the passage in which we can see Claudius acknowledging that he

⁴³⁴ *Tib.* 25.1.1-3.

⁴³⁵ *Claud.* 43.1.10-12, trans. Rolfe.

⁴³⁶ Hurley 2001: 234-235 ad 43. On the issue of succession, Hurley also notes that even though Nero was a direct descendant of Augustus, he was at the same time an interloper being adopted. Hence his gripe about being called Domitius and Ahenobarbus (Hurley 2001: 235 ad 43; *Ner.* 41.1).

himself is an incomplete person and, as such, an unsuitable Caesar. The epigram appears to refer to the young heir, but Claudius (or Suetonius) uses it also to characterize Claudius himself, and to show that he was not always the fool his one-dimensional portrayal would suggest.

4.4 Jokes

Jokes and humour can certainly tell a reader a lot about an emperor's character and our biographer exploits this topic to do just that. Suetonius' use of epigrammatic lines also contains jokes and humour. They provide levity and a unique sense of person for the Caesars, further illustrating their characters. As Plutarch has neatly pointed out, a phrase or joke can reveal more of a character than a battle.⁴³⁷ Indeed, it might be argued that for a joke to be funny, or even comprehensible, they require a sound understanding of a Caesar's basic character. A joke about a Caesar which did not reflect the basic understanding of his character would miss its mark; and a joke made by a Caesar not to play to his character would not be recognized as a joke. Jokes and humour are at their most effective either stressing or expanding upon one-dimensional characterizations.

Caesars are not always the purveyor of jokes but sometimes rather the subject of ridicule. Barbed epigrams, often attributed to other figures (or the public), paint the biographical subject in an evaluative context. While a prominent amount of these types of humorous epigrams are reserved for sexual matters (explored further in the next chapter), there is a neat example of wit contributing to the depiction of Caesar as an authoritarian, like the report that some people were sealing documents with '*Iulio et Caesare consulibus actum*' ('Done in the consulship of Julius and Caesar') rather than

⁴³⁷ Plut. *Alex.*1.2.

‘Bibulus and Caesar’ and the verse on ‘everyone’s lips’ was ‘*non Bibulo quiddam nuper sed Caesare factum est:/nam Bibulo fieri consule nil memini*’ (‘In Caesar’s year, not Bibulus’, an act took place of late;| For naught do I remember done in Bibulus’ consulate’).⁴³⁸ Jokes thus play a role in this kind of indirect characterization. This example shows the ambitious and tyrannical character traits of Julius through pointing out that Bibulus has effectively become a subordinate. Also, it reinforces for the reader that this ruthlessness is his fundamental characteristic: the joke makes that point much more memorably than any number of Caesar’s own actions or statements.

Even though jokes can underline the perception of a Caesar and therefore strengthen their established character, they more naturally provide an opportunity for Suetonius to have his Caesars reveal their own characters. In the case of Caligula, a series of examples show his sadistic sense of humour in situations of leisure, and Lindsay notes that in ‘each case it is infringement of the traditions of hospitality which is used to exemplify tyrannical characteristics’.⁴³⁹ Thus, one such example demonstrates Caligula’s ingrained malicious nature in line with his one-dimensional, tyrannical image.

lautiore conuiuio effusus subito in cachinnos consulibus, qui iuxta cubabant, quidnam rideret blande quaerentibus: 'quid,' inquit, 'nisi uno meo nutu iugulari utrumque uestrum statim posse?'

At one of his more sumptuous banquets he suddenly burst into a fit of laughter, and when the consuls, who were reclining next him, politely inquired at what he was laughing, he replied; “What do you suppose, except that at a single nod of mine both of you could have your throats cut on the spot?”⁴⁴⁰

Beard points to laughter and jokes as being revealing of ‘bad’ emperors because their discussion ‘repeatedly use laughter, and the transgression of its codes and conventions, to define and calibrate different forms of cruelty and excess’ sometimes indicated by

⁴³⁸ *Jul.* 20.2.1-8, trans. Rolfe.

⁴³⁹ Lindsay 1993: 124 ad 32.1.

⁴⁴⁰ *Calig.* 32.3.2-5, trans Rolfe.

‘making particularly sadistic (or just bad) jokes.’⁴⁴¹ Thus, Caligula’s transgression of normal bounds of humour reinforces his baseline characterization; sadistic, unbalanced, and capable of transforming normal discourse into dangerous situations.

Typically, bad emperors or tyrants can be identified as ‘using laughter and joking as weapons against their enemies.’⁴⁴² Caligula’s sense of humour is further shown to be perversely malicious, using it in violent terms his subject and his wife:

inter uarios iocos, cum assistens simulacro Iouis Apellen tragoedum consulisset uter illi maior uideretur, cunctantem flagellis discidit conlaudans subinde uocem deprecantis quasi etiam in gemitu praedulcem. quotiens uxoris uel amicalae collum exoscularetur, addebat: 'tam bona ceruix simul ac iussero demetur.' quin et subinde iactabat exquisitum se uel fidiculis de Caesonia sua, cur eam tanto opere diligeret.

As a sample of his humour, he took his place beside a statue of Jupiter, and asked the tragic actor Apelles which of the two seemed to him the greater, and when he hesitated, Caligula had him flayed with whips, extolling his voice from time to time, when the wretch begged for mercy, as passing sweet even in his groans. Whenever he kissed the neck of his wife or sweetheart, he would say: “Off comes this beautiful head whenever I give the word.” He even used to threaten now and then that he would resort to torture if necessary, to find out from his dear Caesonia why he loved her so passionately.⁴⁴³

Caligula’s verbal wit is expressly vicious given that he flays the skin from Apelles, whose name can be taken to mean ‘skinless’.⁴⁴⁴ Extolling an actor’s voice as being sweet even while Caligula is having him whipped on a whim, along with the threat of violence towards his wife being played off in a joking manner, further develop the unhinged quality of Caligula’s characterization. Furthermore, it has been noted that Caligula is more generally presented as having a marked ‘tyrannical manipulation of laughter’.⁴⁴⁵ In the above passage, humour not only adheres to Caligula’s sadistic baseline character, but it allows Caligula (and Suetonius) to cultivate this tyrannical image.

⁴⁴¹ Beard 2014: 132.

⁴⁴² Beard 2014: 130.

⁴⁴³ *Calig.* 33.1.1-9, trans. Rolfe.

⁴⁴⁴ ‘The verbal wit is the pun on the name Apelles that mixes Greek and Latin: *pellis* and the alpha privative prefix = “skinless;” Gaius tore his skin off with whipping’ (Hurley 1993: 129 ad 33). Cf. Barrett 1989: 217.

⁴⁴⁵ Beard 2014: 135.

Nero demonstrates his snide and spiteful traits through his role in or at least knowledge of Claudius' death. Suetonius attempts to present Nero as being responsible for Claudius' death and uses especially morbid humour to punctuate it:

Parricidia et caedes a Claudio exorsus est; cuius necis etsi non auctor, at conscius fuit, neque dissimulanter, ut qui boletos, in quo cibi genere uenenum is acceperat, quasi deorum cibum posthac prouerbio Graeco conlaudare sit solitus. certe omnibus rerum uerborumque contumeliis mortuum insectatus est, modo stultitiae modo saeuitiae arguens; nam et morari eum desisse inter homines producta prima syllaba iocabatur multaue decreta et constituta, ut insipientis atque deliri, pro irritis habuit

He began his career of parricide and murder with Claudius, for even if he was not the instigator of the emperor's death, he was at least privy to it, as he openly admitted; for he used afterwards to laud mushrooms, the vehicle in which the poison was administered to Claudius, as "the food of the gods," as the Greek proverb has it. At any rate, after Claudius' death he vented on him every kind of insult, in act and word, charging him now with folly and now with cruelty; for it was a favourite joke of his to say that Claudius had ceased "to play the fool" among mortals, lengthening the first syllable of the word *morari*, and he disregarded many of his decrees and acts as the work of a madman and a dotard.⁴⁴⁶

Suetonius chooses to portray Nero's possible complicity in Claudius' death, even though literary traditions emphatically place responsibility with Agrippina, with Nero perhaps finding out afterward.⁴⁴⁷ Thus, Suetonius uses this grim but humorous anecdote as a literary means to embellish Nero's character. Nero making a joke about mushrooms, the means through which Claudius was poisoned, being 'the food of the gods' humorously reflects his spite, cruelty, and murderous inclinations. Picking on a dead man fits neatly with his baseline too. That a favourite joke of his involves morbid word play about Claudius no longer playing the fool does the same. Jokes are often a tool to highlight innate negative qualities of the biographical subjects purely for an evaluative purpose.

⁴⁴⁶ *Ner.* 33.1.1-10, trans. Rolfe.

⁴⁴⁷ Bradley 1978: 195-196 ad 33.1. Previously, Suetonius himself acknowledges the general belief that Claudius was poisoned and a dispute over who poisoned him. The biographer notes the suspicions that it was either the taster, Halotus, or Agrippina serving him a dish of poisoned mushrooms (*Ner.* 34.2).

Beard has argued that ‘good and wise rulers made jokes in a benevolent way, never used laughter to humiliate, and tolerated wisecracks at their own expense.’⁴⁴⁸ Suetonius’ *Augustus* certainly contains an instance which bears this point out. An example of humour attributed to Augustus demonstrates not only how the emperor was perceived but also his awareness of that very image. At a morning reception, Augustus quipped that one man hesitantly presenting his request was behaving as though he was giving a penny to an elephant (*‘quasi elephanto stipem’*).⁴⁴⁹ Damon comments ‘we see Augustus acknowledging that he really is the elephant in the room of imperial society.’⁴⁵⁰ This joke adheres to not only the image Augustus cultivated but shows his own self-aware baseline. Being able to make good-natured jokes and take them just as well is generally indicative of a good emperor and the *Vespasian* offers the most expansive view of a Caesar’s characterization through humour.

Vespasian is a somewhat rusticated character whose identifiable traits of humour and penny-pinching were patently familiar so that a recognizable version of the emperor informs his baseline.⁴⁵¹ Murphy’s discussion of quotations from Vespasian and from others about him shows to a degree that the former emphasizes his natural humour while the latter stress his one major flaw of greed.⁴⁵² There are of course exceptions that demonstrate both. At his funeral, a mime named Favor impersonated Vespasian. When told that his funeral cost ten million sesterces, the mime said, ‘Give me a hundred thousand and fling me even into the Tiber’.⁴⁵³ Damon observes that ‘Suetonius

⁴⁴⁸ Beard 2014: 130.

⁴⁴⁹ *Aug.* 53.2; 53.2.8.

⁴⁵⁰ Damon 2014: 54.

⁴⁵¹ Cf. Theophrastus’ sketches of a bumpkin and penny-pincher (*Theophr. Char.* 4; 10).

⁴⁵² Murphy 1991: 3781-3786.

⁴⁵³ *‘centum sibi sestertia darent ac se uel in Tiberim proicerent.’* (*Vesp.* 19.2.7-9; 19.2, trans. Rolfe). In contrast see Vespasian’s generosity (*Vesp.* 17-19). In addition to the theatricality here, there are also echoes of personification in rhetorical terms, especially appropriate speech, i.e. *prosopopoeia* (*Quint. Inst.* 3.8.49.1-51.2; 9.2.29.5-32.3; 6.2.25.6-27.1).

incriminates the Caesars with their own words.’⁴⁵⁴ Like the joke about Julius and Caesar’s consulship, the mime reflects the public’s perception of Vespasian. The biographer uses the mime’s performance as the deceased emperor, essentially personification, to strengthen Vespasian’s baseline through a joke about his greed, achieving a curious mix of indirect and direct characterization.

In Cicero’s comments on jokes in his *De Officiis*, he delineates two kinds of jokes which can be indicative of the person in a general manner and helps a reader understand them in evaluative terms. Even when matters relate to jokes we are urged to find the golden mean, in that they should avoid extravagance and being immoderate instead being elegant.⁴⁵⁵ The elegant kind of joke, if well timed, is suitable for a dignified person; but if it is indecent with obscene words it is unfit for a gentleman.⁴⁵⁶ Suetonius makes extensive use of witty and vulgar jokes to better define his characterization of Vespasian – who was evidently therefore no gentleman! His joke about a man’s oversized genitals by way of apt of quotations shows his fondness for lowbrow comedy: ‘Striding along and waving a lance that casts a long shadow’.⁴⁵⁷ Crude as the spear joke may be, he makes it with a witty Greek allusion. Vespasian is clearly cultured and able to apply his learning.

Humour can be used to underscore specific qualities in a person, or it can be a defining characteristic onto itself. Vespasian’s most recognizable attribute is his humorous disposition, and this idiosyncrasy allows us to see how Suetonius constructs Vespasian’s character. Most of the examples characterize him as able and willing to take and make a joke about himself. His fundamental character is crude, unpretentious, and

⁴⁵⁴ Damon 2014: 52.

⁴⁵⁵ ‘*ipsumque genus iocandi non profusum nec immodestum, sed ingenuum et facetum esse debet...*’ (Cic. *Off.* 1.103.11-12).

⁴⁵⁶ ‘*Facilis igitur est distinctio ingenui et inliberalis ioci. alter est, si tempore fit, ut si remisso animo, <vel severissimo> homine dignus, alter ne libero quidem, si rerum turpitude adhibetur et verborum obscenitas.*’ (Cic. *Off.* 1.104.9-12).

⁴⁵⁷ ‘μακρὰ βιβάζ, κραδάων δολιχόσκιον ἔγχος,’ (*Vesp.* 22.1.3, trans. Rolfe). Cf. Hom. *Il.* 7.213.

unembarrassed by his lack of sophistication. The first dimension of characterization, which establishes a basic and recurring character thread, can be identified easily enough:

Et super cenam autem et semper alias comissimus multa ioco transigebat; erat enim dicacitatis plurimae, etsi scurrilis et sordidae, ut ne praetextatis quidem uerbis abstineret. et tamen nonnulla eius facetissima extant, in quibus et haec. Mestrium Florum consularem, admonitus ab eo 'plaustra' potius quam 'plostra' dicenda, postero die 'Flaurum' salutauit. expugnatus autem a quadam, quasi amore suo deperiret, cum perductae pro concubitu sestertia quadringenta donasset, admonente dispensatore, quem ad modum summam rationibus uellet inferri: 'Vespasiano,' inquit, 'adamato.'

Not only at dinner but on all other occasions he was most affable, and he turned off many matters with a jest; for he was very ready with sharp sayings, albeit of a low and buffoonish kind, so that he did not even refrain from obscene expressions. Yet many of his remarks are still remembered which are full of fine wit, and among them the following. When an ex-consul called Mestrius Florus called his attention to the fact that the proper pronunciation was *plaustra* rather than *plostra*, he greeted him next day as “Flaurus.” When he was importuned by a woman, who said that she was dying for love for him, he took her to his bed and gave her four hundred thousand sesterces for her favours. Being asked by his steward how he would have the sum entered in his accounts, he replied: “To a passion for Vespasian.”⁴⁵⁸

Vespasian’s established characterization, namely humour, is elaborated on through various degrees. Suetonius’ point is that ‘Vespasian would try to take the sting out of some unpleasant piece of business by joking about it’.⁴⁵⁹ As a result, Vespasian is both naturally funny and self-aware in how he uses his humour. Although he has no two-dimensional contrasts when it comes to humour, Vespasian does have an expanded one-dimensional depiction. On a basic level, Vespasian demonstrates a sort of buffoonery and a crude low wit; but more than that, he is capable of matching wits with the likes of Florus. He is characterized with a cheerful lack of concern for polite niceties. This is perhaps combined with a confidence in his own authority – the opposite of insecurity – which allows him to brush off and turn around jokes originally at his expense. Vespasian is not

⁴⁵⁸ *Vesp.* 22.1.1-11, trans. Rolfe.

⁴⁵⁹ Jones and Milns 2002: 84 ad 22.

just an emperor with a sense of humour, Suetonius shows him not to be afraid of jokes at his own expense and as being clever enough to turn the same weapon against its wielders.

His remark about chalking an expense up to a passion for him demonstrates not only wit but also his lowbrow inclinations.⁴⁶⁰ He could even tackle rustic perceptions with clever jokes. In the case of *plaustra*, Vespasian was being admonished for his rustic pronunciation.⁴⁶¹ Despite Florus trying to mock the emperor, Vespasian turns it around by hypercorrecting his name too. His humour, while lowbrow, was also refined thus lending credence to Jones and Milns view that Vespasian's ribald sense of humour as being indicative of 'a carefully cultivated image'.⁴⁶² Vespasian was by no means unintelligent or unable to handle himself at court. His ability to turn the joke around does not add another, contradictory element to his character; but it accentuates an element already established but easily overlooked, namely his easy and confident grasp of power.

Luke picks out a redemptive quality and states that 'Vespasianic humor serves as a pointed contrast with the cruel humor of the Julio-Claudians, especially Caligula, which was designed to humiliate the victim.'⁴⁶³ Vespasian's humour is generally good natured and self-aware, with his baseline embellished by the combination of vulgarity and a sharp intelligence, as he uses a crude sense of humour to make intelligent points about politics.

maxime tamen dicacitatem adfectabat in deformibus lucris, ut invidiam aliqua cauillatione dilueret transferretque ad sales.

Quendam e caris ministris dispensationem cuidam quasi fratri petentem cum distulisset, ipsum candidatum ad se uocauit; exactaque pecunia, quantam is cum suffragatore suo pepigerat, sine mora ordinauit; interpellanti mox ministro: 'alium tibi,' ait, 'quaere fratrem; hic, quem tuum putas, meus est.'... reprehendenti filio Tito, quod etiam urinae uectigal commentus esset, pecuniam ex prima pensione admouit ad nares, sciscitans num odore offenderetur; et illo negante: 'atquin,' inquit, 'e lotio est.'

⁴⁶⁰ For the suggestion of an implied Greek pun in this joke see Zinn 1951: 10.

⁴⁶¹ Edwards 2000: 351.

⁴⁶² Jones and Milns 2002: 84 ad 22. Furthermore, Vespasian's vulgar humour is not to be interpreted as being from low birth given that his father was wealthy and he himself was a presence in the courts of Caligula, Claudius, Nero, along with Titus being educated with Britannicus (pp. 84-85 ad 22).

⁴⁶³ Luke 2010: 525.

But he particularly resorted to witticisms about his unseemly means of gain, seeking to diminish their odium by some jocose saying and to turn them into a jest. Having put off one of his favourite attendants, who asked for a stewardship for a pretended brother, he summoned the candidate himself, and after compelling him to pay him as much money as he had agreed to give his advocate, appointed him to the position without delay. On his attendant's taking up the matter again, he said: "Find yourself another brother; the man that you thought was yours is mine."...When Titus found fault with him for contriving a tax upon public latrines, he held a piece of money from the first payment to his son's nose, asking whether its odour was offensive to him. When Titus said "No," he replied, "Yet it comes from urine."⁴⁶⁴

These jokes, however, also apply to his other recognizable trait. Vespasian's greed is summed up by punchline epigrams, whether he is fleecing those looking for any kind of advancement or taxing public toilets. The emperor's interaction with his attendant fits with Beard's point that humorous anecdotes act as 'the interface between the emperor and his nonelite subjects'⁴⁶⁵ Vespasian thus uses his humour to subtly assert his authority. Even his quip to Titus about toilet taxes is a sly reminder that their conversation was not between partners but master and apprentice, especially in financial matters.⁴⁶⁶

Hence, Vespasian is also represented as self-aware when he deliberately uses jokes to offset the unseemly nature of his greed. As Murphy notes, 'Suetonius asserts that Vespasian used his ready wit to gloss over the unpleasantness and shamefulness of his taxes.'⁴⁶⁷ Arguably there is a slight discordance between the image of Vespasian as rustic bumbler and as urbane emperor, but it is his specifically lowbrow inclinations that join both. The purpose of his humour is something other than being funny, but any dissonance is minor. All the jokes regarding Vespasian depend on his character being unembarrassed and unsophisticated with a practical, down-to-earth attitude. Inevitably, jokes depend on the reader's knowledge of an established character. They are most effective when they

⁴⁶⁴ *Vesp.* 23.1.10-3.5, trans. Rolfe.

⁴⁶⁵ Beard 2014: 135. She places such humorous interactions as typically occurring outside of court, in public spaces (p. 135), unlike the above example. However, the effect is essentially the same.

⁴⁶⁶ Jones and Milns 2002: 86 ad 23.

⁴⁶⁷ Murphy 1991: 3782.

reinforce it. They simply do not work if they depend on someone having to rethink it, or if they seem to have no relevance to an established character at all.

4.5 Skinning Caesar

Suetonius imbues the subjects of oratory, epigrams, and jokes with all manner of characterizing details. Julius and Augustus are ideal oratorical presences, in line with their established depictions, with the former being naturally gifted and the latter meticulously cultivated. However, other Caesars deviate from acceptable styles. Some are too abstruse (Tiberius), too spontaneous (Caligula), or are unable to escape their influences (Domitian and Nero). Developing one's own distinct style of speech is a mark of maturity and while some manage this, for better or worse, others are hindered by being unable to do so. In these cases, too, their public speaking reflected other aspects of their character: sometimes in a basic fashion, but sometimes allowing glimpses of complexity to sneak in.

External expressions are more useful to basic negative characters as with Domitian, while internal reflections are better suited to positive baseline depictions as with Titus. Epigrams in the *Julius* reaffirm Caesar's established character but also show subtle dissonances. The *Augustus* even illustrates all three dimensions with epigrams. Caligula's own epigrams fit perfectly with his tyrannical baseline character. Tiberius, however, is complicated through epigrams. The things said about him show a basic despotic character, whereas his own sayings stress his contradictory and discordant nature. Claudius' hope of giving Rome a 'genuine Caesar' in Britannicus, which would never come to pass, is a moment of tragic irony that yields genuine pathos.

Jokes and humour rely on basic one-dimensional characterization to be truly effective. Public jokes at the expense of Julius acknowledge and embellish his basic

character of a power-hungry authority figure. Both Caligula and Nero reveal their own particularly malign senses of humour. However, Vespasian's crude and clever jokes allow for an expanded baseline portrayal. Speech is often the mirror of a man and as a Caesar speaks so too does he live.

The first chapter of this section explored the characterizing details of external descriptions and likewise this second chapter explores the layers of character construction within all manner of speech. Another key topic that is integral to characterization is sex and sexuality. The next chapter in this section shows how Suetonius' accounts of a Caesar's sexual activity and escapades can demonstrate complicated and realistic characters through the most intimate of subjects.

CHAPTER FIVE

Imperial Bedrooms:

Sex Lives of Suetonius' Caesars

Actually, there is no such thing as a homosexual person, any more than there is such a thing as a heterosexual person. The words are adjectives describing sexual acts, not people. The sexual acts are entirely normal; if they were not, no one would perform them.

(Gore Vidal, 'Sex Is Politics', *Sexually Speaking: Collected Sex Writings*, 1999: 110)

5.1 Introduction

Suetonius uses sex to flesh out his Caesars. Sexual activities offer the most intimate of insights into the life of a person and the biographer utilizes them to convey depth and complexity in his subjects. He acknowledges that sexual preference is not necessarily indicative of a character being good or bad. It can even be useless for a moralizing purpose. Claudius had a marked preference for women and was dismissive of men. Galba on the other hand explicitly preferred sexual relationships with men. Both are spoken of in way that can be understood as ethically neutral and in a very matter-of-fact manner. Such examples express empathy and realism for their Caesars in line with the third dimension of characterization. However, Suetonius' work is not lacking in sex employed as a part of a framework of virtue and vice.

Julius and Augustus serve as useful case studies for reading sexual characterization through the tripartite perspective. The basic, one-dimensional, sexual depiction of Julius is that of an uncontrollable conqueror of women. This representation is complicated by accusations of passivity and effeminacy with Nicomedes, suggesting a measure of (two-dimensional) complexity. As for three-dimensional characterization, his portrait mixes complexity with hints of realism in the portrait of his relationship with Servilia as a real attachment. Augustus tries to cultivate a baseline reputation for chastity

and respectability, which he is quick to hold others to rather than himself. This is complicated by his depiction as a controlled dominator of women and his extensive infidelities. He too is subject to rumours of passivity, with Julius no less. Augustus' relationship with Livia informs both his basic and dissonant characterization and further hints at empathetic realism.

In the cases of Caligula and Nero, sexual acts with both women and men reinforce their baselines as sexual tyrants, rather than create dissonance. They achieve discordance – and a second dimension – through the transgression of personal relationships and social roles. Caligula's relationship with Drusilla would be an almost exemplary depiction of marriage, except for the fact that they were committing incest. Nero subverts traditional social roles and gender images in the accounts involving Sporus and Doryphorus. Subsequently, Domitian's sexual characterization goes on to show elements of previous patterns. He suffers from the familiar rumours of having had a submissive background – in this case with his eventual successor, Nerva. He also steals wives and even tips over into incest with his niece.

The final case study offers perspectives on a monster. While Suetonius' literary construction of Tiberius' obscenities on Capri is rooted in the tradition of invective, it paints an irredeemable portrait. However, his earlier relationships complicate Tiberius. He demonstrates sincere emotional conflict when divorcing Agrippina and his marriage to Julia is indifferent if occasionally antagonistic. Such tensions and conflicts provide a dissonant, and perhaps even realistic, element in the portrayal of his character. In the privacy of the imperial bedroom, a Caesar's character can be exposed.

5.2 Claudius and Galba

A Caesar's sex life allows Suetonius to explore their characterizations in the most intimate of terms. The peccadillos of the emperors are many and varied without the need to be rigidly consistent across the collection.⁴⁶⁸ However, the subject is far more useful than a simple litmus test of virtue and vice. There is, however, a tendency in Suetonian scholarship to assume that all sexual matters are ethically loaded. Andrew Wallace-Hadrill states the position quite firmly on a Caesar's assessment; 'Was he virtuous or vicious? ... Continent, or self-indulgent, luxurious and lustful? These are the polarities in terms of which emperor after emperor is judged.'⁴⁶⁹ Likewise, Chong-Gossard considers that 'sex is discussed as a facet of the emperor's 'character', and his sexual tastes are evidenced by the people he sleeps with.'⁴⁷⁰ Caroline Vout even takes this view as the premise of her piece on sexuality and biography when discussing Suetonius' *Caesars*. She states that: 'Rather than pinpointing the uniqueness of personality, sexual preference and activity were part of a palette of generic virtues and vices that illustrated a person's capacity to control his or her passions.'⁴⁷¹ Naturally, the sexual activity of Suetonius' emperors provides an easy point of entry into the ethical evaluation of a person. However, Suetonius does not always use sexual description in a way that invites judgements on character and morality: sometimes it can be understood as just an extra detail. His sexual characterizations of Claudius and Galba neatly make this case.

Sex is not just stereotype and in terms of personal sexual depictions, then, the *Claudius* and the *Galba* are significant. Both emperors have a specific sexual preference, the former for women and the latter for men, which nevertheless avoid the stigma of

⁴⁶⁸ For a useful overview of Suetonius' sexual characterizations of the Caesars see Richlin 1992: 88-91.

⁴⁶⁹ Wallace-Hadrill 1995: 142. The point being that such features allow Suetonius to reach an 'ethical dimension to his portrayal of a Caesar in his public capacity' (p. 142).

⁴⁷⁰ Chong-Gossard 2010: 297.

⁴⁷¹ Vout 2014: 453.

excessive lechery or accusations of effeminacy. Suetonius' *Claudius* has an intriguing sexual characterization where explicit evaluation might otherwise be expected. Claudius' sexual preference was for women and he was not interested in men: '*Libidinis in feminas profusissimae, marum omnino expers.*'⁴⁷² This is not strictly an anecdote but rather a direct statement. Furthermore, it comes as just one entry in a list, preceded by his dining and sleeping habits and followed by his interest in gaming.⁴⁷³ As Williams observes, it provides the 'matter-of-fact description' of Claudius' sexual preferences.⁴⁷⁴ He goes on to further stress that the statement about Claudius does not offer any kind of association with 'heterosexual' or 'homosexual' identifiers by modern standards but are more an equivalent of a man 'liking blondes, but not brunettes'.⁴⁷⁵ This neutral statement avoids making a judgement, and we can understand the subject, in accordance with Gill's definition of the personality viewpoint, 'in an ethically neutral way'.⁴⁷⁶ There is no elaborate attempt to characterize Claudius here: this is just another fact that makes him an individual. His preference for women is presented in an extraneous way, that can be understood through the 'Reality Effect', while it also steers away from overt evaluative interpretation.

Claudius is not an isolated example: Suetonius uses the same technique in his *Galba*. Galba is the opposite of Claudius in his sexual interests as he preferred men, '*libidinis in mares pronior et eos non nisi praeduros exoletosque*'.⁴⁷⁷ More specifically his sexual penchant was for strong and mature men. This at least negates any evaluative

⁴⁷² *Claud.* 33.2.5.

⁴⁷³ *Claud.* 33.

⁴⁷⁴ Williams 2010: 88-89. He also cites a similar matter-of-fact statement on sexuality being Virgil's preference for boys, '*libidinis in pueros pronioris*' (Suet. *Vit. Verg.* 9).

⁴⁷⁵ Williams 2010: 190. On the inaccurate and inappropriate use of the terms 'homosexual' and 'heterosexual'; Ormand stresses that Suetonius is noting sexual preferences and behaviour and not sexual identities, in opposition to Richlin's use of those modern terms as related to Claudius and Galba (Ormand 2014: 66, contra Richlin 1993: 532).

⁴⁷⁶ Gill 1983:471.

⁴⁷⁷ *Galb.* 22.1.4-6. Furthermore, Bradley notes that Suetonius takes care to mention, that Galba, unusually, stayed a widower and avoided Agrippina's advances (Bradley 1985a: 82. Cf. *Galb.* 5.1).

element which may come from an interest in an effeminate sexual partner.⁴⁷⁸ Certainly, such a sexual preference seemingly did not provoke much in the way of contemporary criticism. Williams has suggested that Galba's preference for mature men 'seems to have caused no eyebrows to rise' because he maintained the dominant role and confined his interest to his slaves and prostitutes.⁴⁷⁹ This frank statement of sexual preference is given an illustrative anecdote in Galba's somewhat impetuous taking of Icelus, '*ferebant in Hispania Icelum e ueteribus concubinis de Neronis exitu nuntiantem non modo artissimis osculis palam exceptum ab eo, sed ut sine mora uelleretur oratum atque seductum.*'⁴⁸⁰ Although Galba's behaviour on the death of Nero – publicly kissing and then retiring with his concubine Icelus – is reported with 'an implied tone of reproach', Williams argues that the issue is the public nature of the display rather than Galba's choice of partner.⁴⁸¹

Just as Claudius' preference for women is given in a standalone statement, Galba's preference is stated but then illustrated with only a brief anecdote. Sexual matters in both the *Claudius* and the *Galba* are thus dealt with in as matter-of-factly a manner as possible. They therefore add a level of verisimilitude to the depictions of these characters, aligned with the third dimension of characterization. Nevertheless, for the most part, sex as a topic is indeed used to raise evaluative moments for the reader. This is not to say that

⁴⁷⁸ For the view that feminine dress is contrary to nature as is staving off maturity consider, '*Non videntur tibi contra naturam vivere qui commutant cum feminis vestem? Non vivunt contra naturam qui spectant ut pueritia splendeat tempore alieno? Quid fieri crudelius vel miserius potest? numquam vir erit, ut diu virum pati possit? et cum illum contumeliae sexus eripuisse debuerat, non ne aetas quidem eripiet?*' (Sen. *Ep.* 122.7.1-8.1). Cf. Edwards 1993: 68-70.

⁴⁷⁹ Williams 2010: 88, contra Carney, whose view that the worst emperors are marked by homosexuality, is overgeneralized (Carney 1968: 12). Garrett is reluctant to accept Williams' view given the passage's proximity to an account of gluttony, which seems like a criticism (Garrett 2013: 100, fn. 504). Curiously, Chong-Gossard considers Galba's specific interest in mature men as the unusual feature and suggestive of deviance (Chong-Gossard 2010: 298, fn. 5). Ultimately, the statement is distinctly neutral and the subsequent anecdote, as discussed above, shows criticism being about etiquette.

⁴⁸⁰ *Galb.* 22.1.6-9.

⁴⁸¹ Williams 2010: 88. He also takes the opportunity to note the contrast between 'Galba's unsullied masculine image' (p. 88) and the negative tone of Otho's effeminacy (*Oth.* 12).

topic is oversimplified in binary terms of good or bad. In fact, sex in these biographies has its own intricacies which contribute to complex characterization.

5.3 Julius

The imperial linchpins of Suetonius' collection, Julius and Augustus, exemplify complicated sexual characterizations in which different layers can be seen to establish a baseline character, challenge it, and perhaps attempt realistic portraits. The first dimension allows us to see the basic sexual characterization of Julius; a man with many notches on that low-slung belt. He is an unrepentant womanizer. In bringing up the general opinion about Julius' extravagance, Suetonius proceeds to list the illustrious women seduced by Caesar.

prorum et sumptuosum in libidines fuisse constans opinio est, plurimasque et illustres feminas corrupisse, in quibus Postumiam Serui Sulpici[i], Lolliam Auli Gabini, Tertullam Marci Crassi, etiam Cn. Pompei Muciam.

That he was unbridled and extravagant in his intrigues is the general opinion, and that he seduced many illustrious women, among them Postumia, wife of Servius Sulpicius, Lollia, wife of Aulus Gabinius, Tertulla, wife of Marcus Crassus, and even Gnaeus Pompey's wife Mucia.⁴⁸²

These sexual conquests are in line with his one-dimensional portrait. As vices go, sexual excess with women is generic enough to establish his baseline, especially in Suetonius' *Lives*. Moreover, it is perfectly aligned with the recurring image of Julius as a conqueror.

Suetonius' fondness for gossipy verse is used to strengthen such a picture of Julius with indirect characterization. The lines attributed to soldiers in his Gallic triumph emphasize his womanizing and provide a counterpart to other lyrics which will complicate matters later.

⁴⁸² *Jul.* 50.1.1-5, trans. Rolfe.

ne prouincialibus quidem matrimoniis abstinuisse uel hoc disticho apparet iactato aequae a militibus per Gallicum triumphum:
urbani, seruate uxores: moechum caluom adducimus.
aurum in Gallia effutuisti, hic sumpsisti mutuum.
dilexit et reginas, inter quas Eunoen Mauram Bogudis uxorem, cui maritoque eius plurima et immensa tribuit, ut Naso scripsit; sed maxime Cleopatram...

That he did not refrain from intrigues in the provinces is shown in particular by this couplet, which was also shouted by the soldiers in his Gallic triumph:

“Men of Rome, protect your wives; we are bringing in the bald adulterer.

You fucked away in Gaul the gold which you borrowed here in Rome.”

He had love affairs with queens too, including Eunoë the Moor, wife of Bogudes, on whom, as well as on her husband, he bestowed many splendid presents, as Naso writes; but above all with Cleopatra...⁴⁸³

Julius’ affairs branch out to include queens and this time the sexual relationships are thus immediately loaded with a political context. A large proportion of *Jul.* 52 is taken up by accounting for Julius’ relationship with Cleopatra and the rumoured result of that relationship, Caesarion.⁴⁸⁴ His womanizing is uncontrollable in that it is not restricted just to Roman women and his overall presentation is made clear in that more than nations were made for conquering by Julius’ standards.

In the unlikely event that the association of sexual uncontrollability and conquest is not clear, Suetonius uses an anecdote to make his point emphatically. The biographer recounts Julius’ troubling dream:

etiam confusum eum somnio proximae noctis—nam uisus erat per quietem stuprum matri intulisse—coniectores ad amplissimam spem incitauerunt arbitrium terrarum orbis portendi interpretantes, quando mater, quam subiectam sibi uidisset, non alia esset quam terra, quae omnium parens haberetur.

Furthermore, when he was dismayed by a dream the following night (for he thought that he had raped his mother) the soothsayers inspired him with high hopes by their interpretation, which was: that he was destined to rule the world, since the mother whom he had seen in his power was none other than the earth, which is regarded as the common parent of all mankind.⁴⁸⁵

⁴⁸³ *Jul.* 51.1.1-52.1.3, trans. Rolfe.

⁴⁸⁴ *Jul.* 52.1.3-2.7.

⁴⁸⁵ *Jul.* 7.2.1-5, trans. Rolfe. Cf. Plut. *Caes.* 32; Pelling 1997b: 200-201; 212 fn. 22.

The passage quickly moves beyond the superficial interpretation of incest, which evidently perturbed Julius (something which cannot be said about later Caesars). Meaning is once again malleable as Suetonius has the soothsayers declare the mother figure to be the earth and to represent mankind.⁴⁸⁶ The connection between sexual and military conquest thus strengthens Julius' one-dimensional characterization.

Suetonius' *Life*, however, subverts and complicates the established representation of Julius Caesar by introducing the rumour and innuendo of sexual liaisons with men. For instance, rumours spread about Julius having prostituted himself to Nicomedes: an accusation given more credence by his subsequent actions.

a quo ad accersendam classem in Bithyniam missus desedit apud Nicomedem, non sine rumore prostratae regi pudicitiae; quem rumorem auxit intra paucos rursus dies repetita Bithynia per causam exigendae pecuniae, quae deberetur cuidam libertino clienti suo.

Being sent by Thermus to Bithynia, to fetch a fleet, he dawdled so long at the court of Nicomedes that it was suspected that his chastity was prostituted to the king; and he lent colour to this scandal by going back to Bithynia a few days after his return, with the alleged purpose of collecting a debt for a freedman, one of his dependents.⁴⁸⁷

A possible interpretation is that Caesar as the passive sexual partner is the real issue. Thus, Williams, when discussing, adultery and sexual passivity, notes that while 'the former could be conceived as a fault deriving from an excess of masculinity, the latter invited being interpreted as the abandonment of masculine identity'.⁴⁸⁸ However, such a view of passivity as being problematic has been disputed.⁴⁸⁹ Nevertheless, the conflation of sex and conquest also makes the metaphor for capitulation to a foreign ruler just as critical. When discussing this passage and others like it, Langlands takes care to point out that

⁴⁸⁶ On incestuous dreams, see Price 1986: 20-22; Bowersock 1994: 83-85.

⁴⁸⁷ *Jul.* 2.1.2-7, trans. Rolfe.

⁴⁸⁸ Williams 2010: 183.

⁴⁸⁹ For a comprehensive overview and analysis of the passive-active discussion, and especially Davidson's critiques of Foucault (1986), see Ormand 2014: 66-68. Davidson stresses a discussion on love rather than sex, opposing the models of other scholars (Davidson 2007: 101-166; 198).

comments about sexual morality are derived from secondary accusations from individuals in the text with their own political agendas; she further reminds us that since ‘the frame of political invective is explicitly set up in the cases of Julius Caesar and Augustus, Suetonius is requiring the reader to read them not as innocent descriptions of the men, but as pointed elements of political games.’⁴⁹⁰ For our purpose, such an anecdote uses sex to actively subvert the baseline characterization of Julius; the conqueror becomes the conquered.

This piece of gossip is then revisited later in the *Life* helping to re-emphasize the point. The statement that there was no stain on his reputation other than this intimacy with Nicomedes only further reinforces that this is an instance of a negative and weak portrayal, quite in contrast to Julius’ sexual reputation elsewhere in the *Life*: ‘*Pudicitiae eius famam nihil quidem praeter Nicomedis contubernium laesit, graui tamen et perenni obprobrio et ad omnium conuicia exposito.*’ The tone of gossip given by the attribution of humorous lines to Licinius Calvus gives an illusion of sourced credence to the text and indeed the portrayal, ‘*Bithynia quicquid | et p[r]edicator Caesaris umquam habuit.*’⁴⁹¹ Thus; his sexual characterization includes dissonant features, creating at least two-dimensional complexity. The image of an indomitable leader and authority figure is undermined through talk of passivity.

Most of the accusations in this section highlight the effeminacy which provides such a contrast to his established reputation. Dolabella’s accusation focuses on effeminacy (‘*paelicem reginae, spondam interiorem regiae lecticae*’)⁴⁹² and Curio mentions brothels (‘*stabulum Nicomedis et Bithynicum fornicem*’).⁴⁹³ Suetonius also

⁴⁹⁰ Langlands 2006: 349.

⁴⁹¹ *Jul.* 49.1.5-6. Cf. Suetonius’ references to Cicero’s mocking accusations of a sexual relationship between Julius and Nicomedes (*Jul.* 40.3.1ff.).

⁴⁹² *Jul.* 49.1.8-9.

⁴⁹³ *Jul.* 49.1.8-2.1.

brings up Bibulus' edicts, which again uses the queen reference, '*proscripsit collegam suam Bithynicam reginam*'.⁴⁹⁴ Then comes a humorous anecdote attributed to Marcus

Brutus:

quo tempore, ut Marcus Brutus refert, Octavius etiam quidam ualitudine mentis liberius dicax conuentu maximo, cum Pompeium regem appellasset, ipsum reginam salutauit.

At this same time, so Marcus Brutus declares, one Octavius, a man whose disordered mind made him somewhat free with his tongue, after saluting Pompey as "king" in a crowded assembly, greeted Caesar as "queen."⁴⁹⁵

Pompey being the king here reinforces the way in which these accusations of weakness and effeminacy could undermine Julius' preferred image as a powerful conqueror. Williams notes that the 'gendered insults, and no doubt especially the contrast with his rival Pompey, must have galled in a way that the accusations of adultery did not'.⁴⁹⁶ Effeminacy and passivity are used as an explicit reproach but for the reader, if the charges are believed, they add some complexity to his characterization, hinting that he was something more than merely an incorrigible womanizer .

Indirect characterization comes through a line from Curio that presents a clear evaluative reading of sexual portrayal.

at ne cui dubium omnino sit et impudicitiae et adulteriorum flagrasse infamia, Curio pater quadam eum oratione omnium mulierum uirum et omnium uirorum mulierem appellat.

But to remove all doubt that he had an evil reputation both for shameless vice and for adultery, I have only to add that the elder Curio in one of his speeches calls him "every woman's man and every man's woman."⁴⁹⁷

The suggestion of effeminacy remains here to stain Julius' characterization. However, his depiction is given depth simply by contrasting his alleged affairs with women ('*omnium mulierum uirum*') and men ('*omnium uirorum mulierem*'). Curio's remark bolsters Julius'

⁴⁹⁴ *Jul.* 49.2.2-3.

⁴⁹⁵ *Jul.* 49.2.4-7, trans. Rolfe.

⁴⁹⁶ Williams 2010: 182.

⁴⁹⁷ *Jul.* 52.3.4-8, trans. Rolfe.

presentation as both penetrator and penetrated.⁴⁹⁸ These words perhaps sum up Julius' sexual characterization: as Edwards points out a figure's political uncontrollability was further emphasized by accounts of their sexual uncontrollability.⁴⁹⁹ A song said to have come from his soldiers during his Gallic campaigns again refers to Julius' effeminacy through passivity and brings out the dissonance of the famous conqueror being conquered by Nicomedes.

*Gallias Caesar subegit, Nicomedes Caesarem:
ecce Caesar nunc triumphat qui subegit Gallias,
Nicomedes non triumphat qui subegit Caesarem.*

The Gallic lands did Caesar master; Nicomedes
mastered Caesar.
Look! now Caesar rides in triumph, the one who
Mastered Gallic lands.
Nicomedes does not triumph, the one who mastered
Caesar.⁵⁰⁰

The extraordinary feature of the soldiers' song is that it ostensibly answers the allegations, but in taking them for granted as true it allows even his troops to acknowledge the contradictions in Julius' sexual characterization.

The third dimension of characterization is also hinted at in the *Julius* through the possibility of his having – if only once – formed a legitimate attachment. Suetonius thus acknowledges Caesar's love for Servilia and provides an anecdote that she received property at an auction from him at a lower price – prompting Cicero to make a remark implying that she was prostituting her daughter Tertia to Julius.

sed ante alias dilexit Marci Bruti matrem Seruiliam, cui et proximo suo consulatu sexagens sestertium margaritam mercatus est et bello ciuili super alias donationes amplissima praedia ex auctionibus hastae minimo addixit; cum quidem plerisque uilitatem mirantibus facetissime Cicero: 'quo melius,' inquit, 'emptum sciatis, tertia deducta'; existimabatur enim Seruilia etiam filiam suam Tertiam Caesari conciliare.

⁴⁹⁸ Richlin 1993: 532.

⁴⁹⁹ Edwards 1993: 91.

⁵⁰⁰ *Jul.* 49.4.5-7, trans. Rolfe.

But beyond all others Caesar loved Servilia, the mother of Marcus Brutus, for whom in his first consulship he bought a pearl costing six million sesterces. During the civil war, too, besides other presents, he knocked down some fine estates to her in a public auction at a nominal price, and when some expressed their surprise at the low figure, Cicero wittily remarked: “It’s a better bargain than you think, for there is a third off [*tertia*].” And in fact it was thought that Servilia was prostituting her own daughter Tertia to Caesar.⁵⁰¹

Here is a basic, one-dimensional character moment with Tertia being used to satisfy Julius’ lust.⁵⁰² The presence of Tertia allows Cicero, and Suetonius, to explain Julius’ attachment to Servilia in familiar one-dimensional terms. This, of course, underlines the issue that his relationship with Servilia does not fit his usual image. Suetonius’ account seems to be resisting the complication of Julius’ character, while nevertheless allowing the reader to glimpse it and draw a different conclusion. There is a possibility of a legitimate attachment with Servilia. This does not fit the neat definition of the ‘Reality Effect’ in terms of excessive details but it is perhaps empathetic in raising the prospect of genuine intimacy. The tripartite perspective shows the biography’s intricate construction of Julius’ sexual character. His libidinous behaviour towards women acts to reinforce his baseline. This is then complicated by accusations of sexual encounters with men and there is even a hint of empathetic realism in the possibility of a legitimate attachment.

5.4 Augustus

The sexual characterization of Augustus offers a variation on the pattern in the *Julius*, as the tripartite perspective reading will demonstrate. The emperor’s sexual characterization aligns with his one-dimensional baseline in that he makes self-aware efforts to cultivate public morals in conjunction with his own image. Two-dimensional

⁵⁰¹ *Jul.* 50.2.1-51.1.1, trans. Rolfe.

⁵⁰² Butler and Cary emphasize the double entendre as ‘Since there is a third knocked off’ (Butler and Cary 1982: 110 ad 50.2).

dissonance begins to break out with examples of his extensive womanizing. As discussed in chapter one, Augustus' hypocrisy is made clear in the clash between his public image and private behaviour. This discordant feature is then further expanded through accusations of sex with men. Finally, there are hints of a genuine relationship with Livia which approach our kind of three-dimensional realism. Yet, we ought to consider how much of this is in fact better suited to Augustus' baseline and dissonant sexual character.

Suetonius' sexual characterization of Augustus is informed by the emperor's baseline portrait, in that he goes about consciously constructing a public image of modesty, chastity, and devotion to the idealized family. As previously mentioned, this is adequately demonstrated in the laws that Augustus revised to deal with extravagance and adultery, promote chastity, and encourage marriage, closing off loopholes like shortening the duration of engagement, and putting a limit on divorces. He even used Germanicus and his children as a public display for his vision of the family.⁵⁰³ Augustus' enforcement of these ideals upon his own family is especially telling. In another example, we are presented with his attempts at intensively controlling his daughter and granddaughters.

Suetonius states that:

filiam et neptes ita instituit, ut etiam lanificio assuefaceret uetaretque loqui aut agere quicquam nisi propalam et quod in di[ut]urnos commentarios referretur; extraneorum quidem coetu adeo prohibuit, ut L. Vinicio, claro decoroque iuueni, scripserit quondam parum modeste fecisse eum, quod filiam suam Baias salutatum uenisset.

In bringing up his daughter and his granddaughters he even had them taught spinning and weaving, and he forbade them to say or do anything except openly and such as might be recorded in the household diary. He was most strict in keeping them from meeting strangers, once writing to Lucius Vinicius, a young man of good position and character: "You have acted presumptuously in coming to Baiae to call on my daughter."⁵⁰⁴

⁵⁰³ Aug. 34.

⁵⁰⁴ Aug. 64.2.1-7, trans. Rolfe.

He attempts to control and record the behaviour of the female members of the family to ensure that they adhere to his own notions. The fact that he is seen chastising an innocuous attempt at courtship of one of his daughters by a boy of good standing shows Augustus imposing onto others the characterization he crafts for himself. There is also a more extreme example of this baseline. After one of his favourite freedmen, Polus, is found to have committed adultery with Roman matrons, Augustus orders him to take his own life.⁵⁰⁵ This sets up a double standard in light of the accusations of Augustus' adultery and womanizing that follow.

Suetonius quotes Antony directly to characterize Augustus through his sexual relationships with women in an accusatory and derogatory manner.

'tu deinde solam Drusillam inis? ita ualeas, uti tu, hanc epistulam cum leges, non inieris Tertullam aut Terentillam aut Rufillam aut Saluiam Titiseniam aut omnes. an refert, ubi et in qua arrigas?'

“What then of you — do you hump only Drusilla? Good luck to you if when you read this letter you have not been with Tertulla or Terentilla or Rufilla or Salvia Titisenia, or all of them. Does it matter where or in whom you have your stiff prick?”⁵⁰⁶

The supposition that Augustus would have sex with Tertulla, Terentilla, Rufilla, or Salvia Titisenia, or all of them closes this section on his adultery (complementing an earlier dinner party scene) and makes clear that womanizing is a two-dimensional aspect of Augustus' sexual characterization. This specific charge, in a private letter, is a particularly extreme instance of the kind that Antony makes regularly against Augustus, and which appears to fatally undermine his reputation for chastity.⁵⁰⁷

As such, his extensive womanizing informs an expanded two-dimensional portrait. Indeed, Suetonius seems to acknowledge this. Augustus' adultery is plainly

⁵⁰⁵ *idem Polum ex acceptissimis libertis mori coegit compertum adulterare matronas* (Aug. 67.2.1-2).

⁵⁰⁶ Aug. 69.2.4-9, trans. Rolfe.

⁵⁰⁷ Wardle notes that while public accusations from enemies could be discounted, Suetonius' use of a private letter here displaying 'irritation rather than outright hostility provides the clinching evidence' of Augustus' adultery (Wardle 2014: 440 ad 69).

stated, but its motivation is explained as not being from his desire but rather his political interests.

adulteria quidem exercuisse ne amici quidem negant, excusantes sane non libidine, sed ratione commissa, quo facilius consilia aduersariorum per cuiusque mulieres exquireret.

That he was given to adultery not even his friends deny, although it is true that they excuse it as committed not from passion but from policy, the more readily to get track of his adversaries' designs through the women of their households.⁵⁰⁸

This is a cold politicized calculation on Augustus' part to manipulate women for his own gain. However, Edwards picks up on the curious attempt by his friends to excuse Augustus' adultery. They evidently 'felt it reflected better on him to be thought to have committed adultery from calculation, *ratione*, than from lust, *libidine*. Augustus was not impelled by unrestrained instincts to shameful indiscretions.'⁵⁰⁹ Alternatively this can be viewed as Suetonius trying to downplay and minimize Augustus' impropriety.⁵¹⁰ Either way, the excuse of political reasons brings this dangerously uncontrolled behaviour back into the saner realm of politics and restores Augustus to his baseline character as a sober and calculating figure. The intriguing aspect about the claim of political interests is not that we should believe this excuse but that it was offered at all: there was evidently discomfort with Augustus' apparent lack of restraint, and it was excused by putting it back into line with his established character.

More indirect characterization along these lines is attributed to Antony. He criticizes in passing the hurried marriage to Livia before then relating a blatant act of adultery. The passage as related by Suetonius serves to reinforce Augustus' discordant character depiction thus:

⁵⁰⁸ *Aug.* 69.1.1-4, trans. Rolfe.

⁵⁰⁹ Edwards 1993: 48.

⁵¹⁰ Bradley 1985a: 80-81.

M. Antonius super festinatas Liiviae nuptias obiecit et feminam consularem e triclinio uiri coram in cubiculum abductam, rursus in conuiuium rubentibus auriculis incomptiore capillo reductam

Mark Antony charged him, besides his hasty marriage with Livia, with taking the wife of an ex-consul from her husband's dining-room before his very eyes into a bed-chamber, and bringing her back to the table with her hair in disorder and her ears glowing⁵¹¹

This anecdote of Augustus taking away the wife of an ex-consul and returning her dishevelled has the sexual episode occur off-page so to speak. Augustus at least tries to be discreet in keeping his sexual escapades private here, which is a point of distinction with Julius. It is also aligned with Augustus' baseline characterization in trying to control his public image. Although, he hardly succeeds in his efforts given that Antony publicly chided him about it. It is essentially presented as an open secret and does not bolster any prestigious political image of himself that he wished to promote.

Augustus is then associated with the acts of his friends who inspected matrons and fully-grown girls as if they were slaves, '*condiciones quaesitas per amicos, qui matres familias et adultas aetate uirgines denudarent atque perspicerent, tamquam Toranio mangone uendente.*'⁵¹² As secretive as he might try to be, Augustus is still sharing his sexually exploitative tastes with friends and even recruiting his wife. This leads us to a complex and distinctive portrayal, albeit still a two-dimensional one. Augustus is a moralist who is secretly corrupt and a hypocrite who is stern with his family but has his wife as an accomplice. His efforts to control his public image are genuine but, in this respect, half-hearted and ineffective. This is not quite the familiar controlled and confident Augustus we are shown elsewhere in the *Life*; it is recognizably the same man but shown in a different light.

⁵¹¹ *Aug.* 69.1.4-7, trans. Rolfe.

⁵¹² *Aug.* 69.1.9-2.1.

However, in line with his earlier sexual characterization Augustus is said to have deflowered virgins who were brought to him by Livia.

Circa libidines haesit, postea quoque, ut ferunt, ad uitandas uirgines promptior, quae sibi undique etiam ab uxore conquirerentur.

He could not dispose of the charge of lustfulness and they say that even in his later years he was fond of deflowering maidens, who were brought together for him from all quarters, even by his own wife.⁵¹³

This is a singular point as the picture of Livia being involved with and orchestrating sexual affairs highlights the pervasive role which she played in the emperor's life but also the imperial couple sharing every aspect of their lives. The image of the great moralist Augustus and Livia indulging in the emperor's tastes behind closed doors is extraordinary. It takes a basic presentation and subverts it in a straightforward fashion. This at least gives Augustus a two-dimensional complexity which he struggles to achieve elsewhere in his political life.

Augustus' sexual characterization becomes dissonant with the hypocrisy between his public stance on sexual morality and his own private behaviour. Vout notes that for all the examples of Augustus' womanizing, it seemingly goes 'without impinging on his positive reputation or his emphasis on family values.'⁵¹⁴ Suetonius' presentation of Augustus' womanizing while subverting his baseline characterization as a moralist, can simultaneously reinforce it as a man constantly trying to cultivate a proper *persona*. Instead of sex itself, his efforts to control his womanizing and keep it private - and often his failure to do so - are key aspects. Uncontrolled womanizing threatens his cultivated image; as we might expect, he tries to keep it within strict boundaries; but, as we would not expect from his other political actions, he does not entirely succeed. His sexual misbehaviour has to be excused by Suetonius. For readers of Suetonius, at least, it is

⁵¹³ *Aug.* 71.1.6-9, trans. Rolfe.

⁵¹⁴ Vout 2014: 458-459.

impossible to continue seeing Augustus as straightforwardly the moral paragon he pretends to be. Vout is correct to the extent that it does not expunge his reputation for family values, however his womanizing openly challenges and contradicts it without any resolution. Moreover, he is comfortable holding others to a standard that he is not bothered to hold himself to, the exile of his daughter and granddaughter being a pertinent example.⁵¹⁵ Despite the hypocritical contrast between his first and second dimensions, there is an image of a controlling dominator of women.

Augustus' two-dimensional portrayal is expanded with the accusations of sex with men for advancement. Repeating the construction of Julius' sex life, Augustus too is accused of homosexual acts, and this offers a stark counterpoint to the first dimension and thus complicates his sexual characterization.

Prima iuuenta uariorum dedecorum infamiam subiit. Sextus Pompeius ut effeminatum insectatus est; M. Antonius adoptionem auunculi stupro meritum; item L. Marci frater, quasi pudicitiam delibatam a Caesare Aulo etiam Hirtio in Hispania trecentis milibus nummum substrauerit solitusque sit crura suburere nuce ardenti, quo mollior pilus surgeret. sed et populus quondam uniuersus ludorum die et accepit in contumeliam eius et adsensu maximo conprobauit uersum in scaena pronuntiatum de gallo Matris deum tympanizante: uidesne, ut cinaedus orbem digito temperat?

In early youth he incurred the reproach of sundry shameless acts. Sextus Pompey taunted him with effeminacy; Mark Antony with having earned adoption by having sexual relations with his great uncle; and Lucius, brother of Mark Antony, that after sacrificing his honour to Caesar he had given himself to Aulus Hirtius in Spain for three hundred thousand sesterces, and that he used to singe his legs with red-hot nutshells, to make the hair grow softer. What is more, one day when there were plays in the theatre, all the people took as directed against him and loudly applauded the following line, spoken on the stage and referring to a priest of the Mother of the Gods, as he beat his timbrel:

“Do you see how an effeminate finger controls the world?”⁵¹⁶

Again, the material arises in the context of political mudslinging. The more explicit accusation of effeminacy immediately shades Augustus' sexual characterization. The

⁵¹⁵ Aug. 65.

⁵¹⁶ Aug. 68.1.1-12, trans. Rolfe.

possibility that Augustus had at one point performed sexual favours for Julius to gain adoption and even submitted to Aulus Hirtius subverts the moralistic image of Augustus and expands on his adultery. The effeminate image is then punctuated on a literary level through personal details like using hot nut shells to get his leg hair to grow softer and the use of an anecdotal epigram. His baseline is stressed when Suetonius states that Augustus' chastity then and in his later life refuted accusations of prostituting himself to other men and of extravagance.⁵¹⁷ Suetonius' admission that these charges need to be refuted confirm them as being dissonant with Augustus' baseline character.

Finally, Augustus' relationship with Livia can be viewed through the tripartite perspective. Although Livia is a unique character in her own right, her relationship with Augustus has a characterizing purpose for him. In one-dimensional terms, their marriage is a key component to the imperial image Augustus actively cultivates. His dying words to Livia are to remember their marriage and Wardle argues that she 'is to remember neither their love nor him, but their marriage, the institution which the moral laws that bore his name had been designed to protect.'⁵¹⁸ Their marriage thus informs Augustus' basic characterization. In two-dimensional terms, Livia allegedly facilitates her husband's deflowering of virgins, showing that she is involved in Augustus' affairs in every sense of the word.⁵¹⁹ Their relationship accommodates his adultery and so helps in complicating his character. Finally, in some respects, it seems to be a genuinely empathetic relationship indicative of the third dimension. Even though he stole Livia from Tiberius Nero – typically 'cast as the stereotypical behaviour of a tyrant' – while she was pregnant, Suetonius seemingly stresses a genuine love affair in saying that Augustus loved her

⁵¹⁷ *'ex quibus siue criminibus siue maledictis infamiam impudicitiae facillime refutauit et praesentis et posteræ uitæ castitate'* (Aug. 71.1.1-3).

⁵¹⁸ Wardle 2007: 458. Cf. *'Liuia, nostri coniugii memor uiue, ac uale!'* (Aug. 99.1.10-11).

⁵¹⁹ Aug. 71.1.6-9.

above all others.⁵²⁰ Bradley acknowledges Augustus and Livia as a rare example of sentiment in a Roman marriage, especially since the institution itself offered little chance for romantic love.⁵²¹ Certainly he involved her in most aspects of his life. Chapter two has already discussed the series of letters exchanged between Augustus and Livia about what to do with Claudius.⁵²² Their marriage is ethically loaded but these glimpses of a real domestic partnership and a seemingly genuine love affair at least hint at three-dimensionality.

5.5 Caligula, Nero, and Domitian

The sexual behaviour of Julius and Augustus can serve as a paradigm for other emperors, especially in politicized circumstances. Womanizing could even be justified as an established tradition. Caligula is perhaps the most illustrative example of the carry-over of this one-dimensional point of characterization. He is sexually uncontrollable in a manner akin to Julius. His behaviour, however, seems more inspired by Augustus. An anecdote relates how Caligula invited women to dinner with their husbands and inspected them like slaves, lifting the face of anyone who looked down in modesty (*‘etiam faciem manu adleuans, si quae pudore submitterent’*) and leaving the room he would send for anyone that pleased him only to return showing signs of passion (*‘lasciuiiae notis’*) and critiqued his partner’s performance enumerating all the good points and bad (*‘laudabat palam uel uituperabat, singula enumerans bona malaue corporis atque concubitus’*).⁵²³

Acknowledging the similarity to Augustus, Langlands notes that Caligula treats the

⁵²⁰ Langlands 2014: 114. Cf. Suetonius, *‘ac statim Liuiam Drusillam matrimonio Tiberi Neronis et quidem praegnantem abduxit dilexitque et probauit unice ac perseueranter.’* (*Aug.* 62.2.5-7).

⁵²¹ Bradley 1985a: 90.

⁵²² *Claud.* 3-4.

⁵²³ *Calig.* 36.2.1-9. Cf. *Aug.* 69.

matronae as if they were slaves and ‘not only does he subject them to sexual intercourse, but he then compounds this by forcing the woman and her husband to undergo a public description of the event and a catalogue of the woman’s physical attributes.’⁵²⁴ The image that Augustus carefully cultivated for himself is undermined by his sexual indiscretions, which gives Caligula the excuse to explore his sexual tyranny. What Augustus is ostensibly ashamed of, Caligula is proud to declare in public.

The use of power to prey on women is thus familiar from the *Lives* of Julius and Augustus, but with Caligula it becomes openly a sign of his tyranny. It was said that upon being invited to a wedding Caligula sent a note to Piso who was sitting across from him (*‘alii tradunt adhibitum cenae nuptiali mandasse ad Pisonem contra accumbentem’*). It said that Piso should not have sex with his ‘wife’; instead, Caligula immediately carried her away, saying that he had taken a wife in the manner of Romulus and Augustus (*‘noli uxorem meam premere,’ statimque e conuiuio abduxisse secum ac proximo die edixisse: matrimonium sibi repertum exemplo Romuli et Augusti.’*)⁵²⁵ Caligula justifies his sexual proclivities, in a facetious manner, by invoking Augustus (and the Sabine women) as an example. Langlands puts this forward as part of a convincing argument for Augustus’ failure to control his own legacy, reading his marriage to Livia with mordant irony when compared to later Caesars. They remember his theft of Livia ‘above all of Augustus’ achievements, and model their own behaviour upon it.’⁵²⁶

The *Caligula* also recalls the *Augustus* in featuring sexual anecdotes being used in a politicized context. As for Augustus, sex for Caligula is presented as a means to his political ambitions. Thus, Caligula seduced Macro’s wife, to make a useful connection to Macro himself, opening the way to poisoning Tiberius.

⁵²⁴ Langlands 2006: 355.

⁵²⁵ *Calig.* 25.1.5-2.1.

⁵²⁶ Langlands 2014: 112. On Augustus and Livia (*Aug.* 62.2.5-7; *Aug.* 99.1.1-11). Domitian also echoes this with stealing Domitia Longina (*Dom.* 3.1. Cf. *Aug.* 69.1;101.2).

quam quo magis confirmaret, amissa Iunia ex partu Enniam Naeuiam, Macronis uxorem, qui tum praetorianis cohortibus praeerat, sollicitauit ad stuprum, pollicitus et matrimonium suum, si potitus imperio fuisset; deque ea re et iure iurando et chirographo cauit. per hanc insinuatus Macroni ueneno Tiberium adgressus est, ut quidam opinantur...

To have a better chance of realising this, after losing Junia in childbirth, he seduced Ennia Naevia, wife of Macro, who at that time commanded the praetorian guard, even promising to marry her if he became emperor, and guaranteeing this promise by an oath and a written contract. Having through her wormed himself into Macro's favour, he poisoned Tiberius, as some think...⁵²⁷

Sex is a political weapon in these *Lives*. Indeed, this is a solid example of something that is offered only as an excuse in the *Augustus*. It might be argued that the rationale around Augustus' sexual antics as political machinations seems forced, spilling more water than it holds. But Suetonius shows Caligula openly pursuing political goals through his affairs.

In the case of Caligula, his established sexual characterization is informed by sex with both men and women. Therefore, the presence of both aspects reinforces, rather than contradicts, his baseline sexual portrayal. For Caligula, sexual activity appears to be indiscriminate. It is less about personal preference and more about exercising power in various ways.

Pudicitiae <neque suae> neque alienae pepercit. M. Lepidum, Mnesterem pantomimum, quosdam obsides dilexisse fertur commercio mutui stupri. Valerius Catullus, consulari familia iuuenis, stupratum a se ac latera sibi contubernio eius defessa etiam uociferatus est. super sororum incesta et notissimum prostitutae Pyrallidis amorem non temere ulla inlustriore femina abstinuit.

He respected neither his own chastity nor that of anyone else. He is said to have exchanged sexual favours with Marcus Lepidus, the pantomimic actor Mnester, and certain hostages. Valerius Catullus, a young man of a consular family, bragged that he had penetrated the emperor and worn himself out in intercourse with him. To say nothing of his incest with his sisters and his notorious passion for the concubine Pyrallis, there was scarcely any woman of rank from whom he kept approach.⁵²⁸

All kinds of sexual proclivities are presented in this passage and associated with one another under his general disregard for his body and sexual character. Caligula seems to

⁵²⁷ *Calig.* 12.2.1-7, trans. Rolfe.

⁵²⁸ *Calig.* 36.1.1-7, trans. Rolfe.

be wholly indiscriminate and uncontrolled: even more so than Julius, who at least appeared to be satisfying desires. Arguably this is the mark of a tyrant: it is evident in Tiberius too as the last section of this chapter will show.

Caligula's sexual antics with Marcus Lepidus, Mnester, and Valerius Catullus, incest with his sisters, and passion for a concubine all serve to reinforce a one-dimensional negative portrayal. This is specifically emphasized with the accusations of passivity with Valerius Catullus. Langlands comments on the *mutui stupri* as being especially shameful: there 'is no doubt that the vociferous boasting of Catullus is designed to seem particularly humiliating to the emperor, whose lack of shame, however, means that he is insensitive to this humiliation.'⁵²⁹ It also signposts a recurring feature of imperial sex lives in Suetonius' collection. Langlands states that the imperial character shown by Suetonius is not just about the frequency of sexual misconduct 'but the way that there is no longer any attempt to make *stuprum* covert: it is no longer nocturnal, or secretive, or hidden away from the coercive powers of state and family or shrouded in a sense of shame.'⁵³⁰

How Caligula achieves complexity with dissonance involves both convention and taboo. Caligula almost has an appropriate relationship, except for the fact the relationship in question was an incestuous one with his sister, Drusilla. A heavy evaluative emphasis is placed on the accounts of Caligula's incest with his sisters, as the opening rubric to the section which deals with it states: 'He lived in habitual incest with all his sisters, and at a large banquet he placed each of them in turn below him, while his wife reclined above'.⁵³¹ The placing of his sisters at banquets here suggests the subversion of normal order. The

⁵²⁹ Langlands 2006: 355.

⁵³⁰ Langlands 2006: 355.

⁵³¹ '*Cum omnibus sororibus suis consuetudinem stupri fecit plenoque conuiuio singulas infra se uicissim conlocabat uxore supra cubante.*' (*Calig.* 24.1.1-3, trans. Rolfe). Cf. Caligula's accusations of incest between Augustus and Julia with the result of denigrating Augustus' name, '*praedicabat autem matrem suam ex incesto, quod Augustus cum Iulia filia admisisset, procreatam; ac non contentus hac Augusti insectatione...*' (*Calig.* 23.1.4-6).

primary subject in relation to the incest committed by Caligula is his sister Drusilla. Caligula's sexual relationship with his sister began by tainting her virginity while he was a minor, as seen in the anecdote that they were caught together by Antonia: '*ex iis Drusillam uitiasse uirginem praetextatus adhuc creditur atque etiam in concubitu eius quondam deprehensus ab Antonia auia, apud quam simul educabantur*'.⁵³² However, Caligula's and Drusilla's relationship is portrayed as being far more complicated than just a sexual violation. Here is Caligula with his Livia: except this apparently smooth relationship is even more dysfunctional by its very nature. He is a version of Augustus, but Caligula puts on display everything that Augustus would rather have hidden.

Caligula and Drusilla have an intimate relationship which is a warped version of any conventional standard. Another passage states that he took Drusilla from her legal husband and treated her as his own lawful wife, even making her his heir: '*mox Lucio Cassio Longino consulari conlocatam abduxit et in modum iustae uxoris propalam habuit; heredem quoque bonorum atque imperii aeger instituit*'.⁵³³ Aside from the obvious negative sexual characterization that comes with their relationship, this also comes with stigma from social and even possibly political disorder. Momentarily leaving aside the issue of incest, Hurley sees Drusilla 'as willing to co-operate in helping stabilize his dynastic position'.⁵³⁴ In imperial terms, a warped version of Augustus and Livia is starting to emerge. Beyond such straightforward lines of criticism, their relationship has more distinctive features.

The intimacy of Caligula's relationship with Drusilla, and his own emotions due to her death, is made plainly evident in his announcing a period of mourning.

⁵³² *Calig.* 24.1.3-6.

⁵³³ *Calig.* 24.1.6-2.1.

⁵³⁴ Hurley 1993: 97 ad 24.1.

eadem defuncta iustitium indixit, in quo risisse lauuisse cenasse cum parentibus aut coniuge liberisue capital fuit. ac maeroris impatiens, cum repente noctu profugisset ab urbe transcucurrissetque Campaniam, Syracusas petit, rursusque inde prope rediit barba capilloque promisso; nec umquam postea quantiscumque de rebus, ne pro contione quidem populi aut apud milites, nisi per numen Drusillae deierauit.

When she died, he appointed a season of public mourning, during which it was a capital offence to laugh, bathe, or dine in company with one's parents, wife, or children. He was so beside himself with grief that suddenly fleeing the city by night and traversing Campania, he went to Syracuse and hurriedly returned from there without cutting his hair or shaving his beard. And he never afterwards took oath about matters of the highest moment, even before the assembly of the people or in the presence of the soldiers, except by the godhead of Drusilla.⁵³⁵

The treatment of Drusilla is then contrasted with the treatment of his other sisters, whom he neither loved nor respected and who were prostituted and incriminated at his whim.⁵³⁶

Caligula's relationship with Drusilla is almost an exemplar of an idealized marriage, especially the observation of his grief. Pryzwansky argues that 'Suetonius portrays Caligula's grief as deep, genuine, and perhaps even excessive, which is in line with his losing a beloved partner.'⁵³⁷ However, the fact that it is open and blatant incest intensifies the taboo and the violation of social norms. In characterizing terms, incest is a fundamentally debased depiction of sexual uncontrollability in one-dimensional terms. The perversity of Caligula and Drusilla's incestuous relationship is here complicated by its depiction, as in other respects, a model of marital bliss.

Nero's sexual proclivities with both men and women, much like Caligula, are presented in such a way as to reinforce his one-dimensional characterization. In terms of an emperor's sexual behaviour, Vout makes a fair observation in that they are measured by 'how far each is and is not Augustus, and indeed the extent to which each is also typical of his dynasty. It is no accident that the last of the Julio-Claudians, Nero, is the most

⁵³⁵ *Calig.* 24.2.1-8, trans. Rolfe.

⁵³⁶, '*reliquas sorores nec cupiditate tanta nec dignatione dilexit, ut quas saepe exoletis suis prostrauerit; quo facilius eas in causa Aemili Lepidi condemnauit quasi adulteras et insidiarum aduersus se conscias*' (*Calig.* 24.3.1-5).

⁵³⁷ Pryzwansky 2008: 188.

extreme, as, in attempting to outdo the excesses of his predecessors, he self-destructs in a rush of sadism.⁵³⁸ In this instance, however, Nero transgresses sexual and social standards in a way that allows him to achieve some complexity. Nero's baseline characterization is decadent and degenerate, but even so he finds unconventional ways of behaving that allow him to be seen in a more two-dimensional manner. Instead of being discordant simply with himself and with normal social ideas, he warps social and gendered standards around himself.

The emphasis on heterosexual and homosexual acts here are not intended to create dissonance but rather underpin Nero's baseline sexual characterization.

Super ingenuorum paedagogia et nuptiarum concubinatus Vestali uirgini Rubriae uim intulit. Acten libertam paulum afuit quin iusto sibi matrimonio coniungeret, summissis consularibus uiris qui regio genere ortam peierarent.

Besides abusing freeborn boys and seducing married women, he debauched the vestal virgin Rubria. The freedwoman Acte he all but made his lawful wife, after bribing some ex-consuls to perjure themselves by swearing that she was of royal birth.⁵³⁹

It should not be surprising to find that Nero's baseline sexual characterization involves exploiting males and females alike, given that the section 'begins with the splendidly blasé phrase' about his seduction of freeborn boys and married women.⁵⁴⁰ It is further intensified by defiling a vestal virgin and transgressing class boundaries. On 'this firm foundation, Nero will build his edifice of depravity, going on to desecrate a religious figure and throw the very institution of marriage into confusion with the behaviour that Suetonius goes on to describe'.⁵⁴¹ Suetonius presents Nero engaging in comprehensively debauched behaviour.

⁵³⁸ Vout 2014: 459.

⁵³⁹ *Ner.* 28.1.1-4, trans. Rolfe.

⁵⁴⁰ Langlands 2006: 356.

⁵⁴¹ Langlands 2006: 356.

Nero's sexual characterization also has overtly bestial elements and his personal sexual degradation then spreads outward with external expressions. Suetonius explicitly elaborates on Nero's disregard for his own chastity and body; the emperor is depicted as covering himself in the skin of a wild animal and attacking the genitals of men and women who were tied to stakes.⁵⁴² Nero is a sexually voracious tyrant and in being personified as an animal his internal sexual nature is portrayed in a quite literal manner. Furthermore, Langlands reiterates that 'as in the case of Caligula, openness about sexual crime is encouraged and valued in direct opposition to the concepts of discretion and modesty cherished in Roman tradition.'⁵⁴³ Nero's violent sexual depravity is unabashed and exposed thus underlining his tyrannical baseline sexual portrait.

Nero's depiction as a sexual tyrant is expanded upon through the accusations of incest with his mother. The paradigms of an emperor's wife and an emperor's mother exerting influence are crossed as Suetonius states:

nam matris concubitus appetisse et <ab> obrectatoribus eius, ne ferox atque impotens mulier et hoc genere gratiae praevaleret, deterritum nemo dubitavit, utique postquam meretricem, quam fama erat Agrippinae simillimam, inter concubinas recepit. olim etiam quotiens lectica cum matre ueheretur, libidinum incestu ac maculis uestis proditum affirmant.

That he even desired a sexual relationship with his own mother, and was kept from it by her enemies, who feared that such a relationship might give the reckless and insolent woman too great influence, was notorious, especially after he added to his concubines a courtesan who was said to look very like Agrippina. Even before that, so they say, whenever he rode in a litter with his mother, he had incestuous relations with her, which were betrayed by the stains on his clothing.⁵⁴⁴

The opening of this passage stresses only the desire for an incestuous relationship with his mother and pointing to it being stopped for fear Agrippina have too much influence. This desire is then sublimated into having a concubine who looked like her. Of course, these sexual complexities are ground back down with rumours of actual incest with the

⁵⁴² *Ner.* 29.1.1-6.

⁵⁴³ Langlands 2006: 357.

⁵⁴⁴ *Ner.* 28.2.4-10, trans. Rolfe.

specific detail of semen on his clothes after being with her in a litter. Nero differs from Caligula in that Caligula seems to calculate his affairs and enjoys transgressing boundaries; whereas Nero does not seem to recognize that the boundaries even exist.

Achieving two-dimensional sexual dissonance requires something rather special and like Caligula, Nero manages it through the mixture of convention and taboo.

puerum Sporum exectis testibus etiam in muliebrem naturam transfigurare conatus cum dote et flammeo per sollempni<a> nuptiarum celeberrimo officio deductum ad se pro uxore habuit; extatque cuiusdam non inscitus iocus bene agi potuisse cum rebus humanis, si Domitius pater talem habuisset uxorem. hunc Sporum, Augustarum ornamentis excultum lecticaque uectum, et circa conuentus mercatusque Graeciae ac mox Romae circa Sigillaria comitatus est identidem exosculans.

He castrated the boy Sporus and actually tried to make a woman of him; and he married him with all the usual ceremonies, including a dowry and a bridal veil, took him to his house attended by a great throng, and treated him as his wife. And the witty jest that someone made is still current, that it would have been well for the world if Nero's father Domitius had had that kind of wife. This Sporus, decked out with the finery of the empresses and riding in a litter, he took with him to the assizes and marts of Greece, and later at Rome through the Street of the Images, fondly kissing him from time to time.⁵⁴⁵

Nero's having Sporus castrated along with their 'marriage' and trying to make a woman out of him may have interpretation of the main subject engaging in authorial gender construction. The pomp and circumstance of the ceremonies point to subversive corruption of standard social rituals. This ultimately reflects on Nero himself and the situation shows him as a degenerate. Nero is a grand transgressor of sexual identity albeit not necessarily his own. Much in the way that Caligula subverts the conventional notion of marriage with an idealized relationship with his sister, Nero subverts gender norms. Nero was engaged in a similarly transgressive relationship elsewhere. Suetonius says that Nero was 'married' to Doryphorus in the same way as Sporus, and even plays up the female role too, by imitating the cries of a girl losing her virginity.⁵⁴⁶ This is another

⁵⁴⁵ *Ner.* 28.1.5-2.4, trans. Rolfe.

⁵⁴⁶ *Ner.* 29.1.6-8.

example of the subversion of gender roles which seems unique to Nero and presents a two-dimensional complexity to sexual character.

Suetonius' presentation of Domitian's sexual character echoes aspects from Julius and Augustus' patterns and Caligula and Nero's. As with earlier emperors, Domitian is charged with womanizing while being accused of one homosexual act related to imperial succession. However, his portrait, like later Julio-Claudian tyrants, pushes into debauchery and even incest. Thus, adhering to similar behaviour in the earlier biographies, Domitian carried on with the wives of many men before marrying Domitia Longina, who was the wife of Aelius Lamia, '*ne exequar singula, contractatis multorum uxoribus Domitiam Longinam Aelio Lamiae nuptam etiam in matrimonium abduxit*'.⁵⁴⁷ He is possessed by a sexual uncontrollability, which Suetonius underlines by devoting a chapter explicitly to it:

Libidinis nimiae, assiduitatem concubitus uelut exercitationis genus clinopalen uocabat; eratque fama, quasi concubinas ipse deuelleret nataretque inter uulgatissimas meretrices.

He was excessively lustful. His constant sexual intercourse he called bed-wrestling, as if it were a kind of exercise. It was reported that he depilated his concubines with his own hand and swam with common prostitutes.⁵⁴⁸

His sexual excess is defined by the licentious witticism of 'bed-wrestling', which in its bluntness surely 'to be expected in a son of Vespasian' – which aligns him with his father's generally positively-presented vigour.⁵⁴⁹ The baseline of heterosexual enthusiasm is intensified by Domitian exerting minute control over his concubine's bodies in removing their hair, and includes a bawdy element in his cavorting with common prostitutes, who contrast distinctly with the previously mentioned upper-class wives.

⁵⁴⁷ *Dom.* 1.3.7-9.

⁵⁴⁸ *Dom.* 22.1.1-4, trans. Rolfe.

⁵⁴⁹ Jones and Milns 2002: 167 ad 22. Cf. *Vesp.* 22.1.11.

Domitian's sexual characterization does, however, display at least one dissonant moment. In the opening of the biography, it is recorded that many people declared that Domitian was debauched by Nerva, '*nec defuerunt qui affirmarent, corruptum Domitianum et a Nerua successore mox suo.*'⁵⁵⁰ Chong-Gossard makes the point that in assuming that Domitian was the submissive partner to Nerva it brings the narrative full circle given similar accusations of Augustus submitting to Julius.⁵⁵¹ Chong-Gossard goes on to point out that in 'Suetonius' retelling, sex between a ruler and his predecessor is taken for granted (Otho and Nero, Vitellius and Tiberius, Domitian and Nerva); whether one is 'on top' or engaged in mutual *stuprum*, sex with the emperor prepares one, as it were, to be an emperor oneself.⁵⁵² However, this accusation is an inversion of the successor or subsequent emperor being the one to submit, i.e. Vitellius and Tiberius or even Augustus to Julius. In this instance it is the successor who has corrupted Domitian, whose legitimacy needs to be bolstered through the grace of his successor Nerva. Domitian is Suetonius' last emperor of the collection and as such cannot 'initiate' Nerva therefore he needs to be 'initiated' by his successor.

The issue of incestuous relationships is also raised in the *Domitian*. He seduces his own niece, emphasizing the predatory sexual behaviour typical of a tyrant.

fratris filiam adhuc uirginem oblatam in matrimonium sibi cum deuinctus Domitiae nuptiis pertinacissime recusasset, non multo post alii conlocatam corrumpit ultro et quidem uiuo etiam tum Tito; mox patre ac uiro orbatam ardentissime palamque dilexit, ut etiam causa mortis extiterit coactae conceptum a se abigere.

After persistently refusing his niece, who was offered him in marriage when she was still a maid, because he was entangled in an intrigue with Domitia, he seduced her shortly afterwards when she became the wife of another, and that too during the lifetime of Titus. Later, when she was bereft of father and husband, he loved her ardently and without disguise, and even became the cause of her death by compelling her to get rid of a child of his by abortion.⁵⁵³

⁵⁵⁰ *Dom.* 1.1.10-2.1.

⁵⁵¹ Chong-Gossard 2010: 303.

⁵⁵² Chong Gossard 2010: 303.

⁵⁵³ *Dom.* 22.1.4-10, trans. Rolfe.

His being offered his niece in marriage echoes Claudius and Agrippina, although his refusing this and later seducing her once she became the wife of another man brings us back to the theme of adultery demonstrated in the earlier biographies. After the death of her father and husband, Domitian did not hide his love, recalling the open conduct of Caligula with Drusilla. His complicity in her death, however, places the emphasis on an explicitly tyrannical portrayal of Domitian.⁵⁵⁴ Domitian is a distillation of the first patterns seen in the *Julius* and *Augustus* and the second pattern in the *Caligula* and *Nero*.

Domitian is a return to a more respectable and less outlandish emperor: he takes another man's wife just as Augustus and Caligula did; he is promiscuous and willing to degrade himself in bed (as the depilation makes clear); and like Augustus, he is accused of homosexual acts with another, senior figure, albeit this time with a twist. This is relatively tame, though, and it climaxes by discussing the fallout of incest with his niece, which still hardly compares with the openness of Caligula or the excesses of Nero. If anything, he seems forced into this mould. Domitian appears as a milder and more ineffective kind of tyrant than the others: a pale imitation at best, a tyrant by the numbers.

5.6 Tiberius – Perspectives on a Monster

Tiberius is a beneficial case study because sex and sexual relationships are extensively used in characterizing him, and because they not only reinforce and subvert his established character but at times seem to add superfluous detail, and thus allowing him to achieve some degree of real complexity. Tiberius' sexual characterization is signposted by Suetonius in the emperor's ancestry. His ancestor Claudius Regillianus is recorded as trying to satisfy his lust for a young freeborn woman, '*contra Claudius*

⁵⁵⁴ Another perspective on Julia Titi will be offered later in this thesis, see p. 300.

*Regillianus, decemuir legibus scribendis, uirginem ingenuam per uim libidinis gratia in seruitutem asserere conatus causa plebi fuit secedendi rursus a patribus.*⁵⁵⁵ Garrett notes that the ‘story has all the crucial qualities of *libido*, conflict between the orders, and tyrannical conduct.’⁵⁵⁶ The reader is presented with the abuse of power for sexual gratification in a programmatic manner. The sexual behaviour of his ancestors thus foreshadows Tiberius tyrannical qualities in the same area.

Various elements at play in the *Julius* and the *Augustus* emerge in the *Tiberius* including political mudslinging with an evaluative purpose, especially in the use of lyrics which capture the mood of gossip and the notion of culturally disseminated material. Anecdotes come with dubious veracity and when dealing with them it should be noted that they are ‘fossilized’ versions of political invective.⁵⁵⁷ This is certainly true in relation to sexual anecdotes. Catharine Edwards argues that ‘We cannot use these texts, these fragments of a vanished and largely alien world, to reconstruct the behaviour of particular individuals or to explore personal idiosyncrasies. Yet neither can we see them as entirely independent of the material world which produced them.’⁵⁵⁸ However, such anecdotes and the world that created them can be used by the reader to interpret and understand the literary constructions, idiosyncrasies, and characters that Suetonius crafts for his Caesars.

A distinctive variation in sexual characterization emerges in the *Tiberius* relating to sexual acts with both men and women. Tyrants are willing and able to do and take whatever they want and Tiberius (like Caligula and Nero) is a particular variation on the tyrant. The violent and predatory elements of Tiberius’ nature are placed to the forefront

⁵⁵⁵ *Tib.* 2.2.1-4.

⁵⁵⁶ Garrett 2013: 120. Cf. On Tiberius’ family history, Langlands notes that ‘Suetonius conjures up a catalogue of old stories conveying the values of the Republican era and their Republican threats. The Republic, defined by Suetonius’ day against the imperial regime that has replaced it, is given a new significance in this passage as it feeds into the new regime of autocracy and unbalancing of moral forces’ (Langlands 2006: 353).

⁵⁵⁷ Richlin 1992: 86. Cf. Edwards 1993:11 and on the frequency of anecdotes Saller 1980: 69-83.

⁵⁵⁸ Edwards 1993: 11.

during Tiberius' time on Capri: here, as Langlands states that 'we will see Tiberius succumb to unpleasant sexual desires and voyeurism – like all good tyrants using his political power in order to aid his gratification and seeking new ways to excite his jaded sexual appetites. He also displays the tyrant's desire to appropriate and despoil what belongs to other people'.⁵⁵⁹ The accounts of sexual depravity on Capri intensify the unpleasant side of Tiberius' baseline characterization while aiding in the reduction of his complexity to ultimately die an outright tyrant.

This is illustrated in the following two anecdotes. In the first story, Tiberius' uncontrollable lust leads to rape and acts of violence.

fertur etiam in sacrificando quondam captus facie ministri acerram praeferentis nequissime abstinere, quin paene uixdum re diuina peracta ibidem statim seductum constupraret simulque fratrem eius tibicinem; atque utrique mox, quod mutuo flagitium exprobrarant, crura fregisse.

The story is also told that once at a sacrifice, attracted by the incense bearer's beauty, he lost control of himself and, hardly waiting for the ceremony to end, rushed him off and raped him and his brother, the flute-player, too; and subsequently, when they both complained of the assault, he had their legs broken.⁵⁶⁰

feminarum quoque, et quidem illustrium, capitibus quanto opere solitus sit inludere, euidentissime apparuit Malloniae cuiusdam exitu, quam perductam nec quicquam amplius pati constantissime recusantem delatoribus obiecit ac ne ream quidem interpellare desiit, 'ecquid paeniteret'; donec ea relicto iudicio domum se abripuit ferroque transegit, obscaenitate[m] oris hirsuto atque olido seni clare exprobrata. unde mora in Atellanico exhodio proximis ludis adsensu maximo excepta percrebruit, 'hircum uetulum capreis naturam ligurare.'

How much he was in the habit of giving himself pleasure at the heads of women as well, even those of high birth, is very clearly shown by the death of a certain Mallonia. When she was brought to his bed and refused most vigorously to submit to anything more, he turned her over to the informers, and even when she was on trial he did not cease to call out and ask her "whether she was sorry"; so that finally she left the court and went home, where she stabbed herself, openly upbraiding the hairy and smelly old man for the obscenity of his mouth. Hence a stigma put upon him at the next plays in an Atellan farce was received with great applause and became current, that "the old goat was licking the does."⁵⁶¹

⁵⁵⁹ Langlands 2006: 353.

⁵⁶⁰ *Tib.* 44.2.5-10, trans. Rolfe.

⁵⁶¹ *Tib.* 45.1.1-11, trans. Rolfe.

Counting Mallonia's suicide, both stories end with violence as a result of the emperor's treatment of the victims. Chong-Gossard notes that for 'the ancient reader, the social importance of Tiberius' violation of boundaries was quite clear. Not only can Tiberius inflict pain (physical violence or public disgrace) on those who resist his desires, but the taboos he breaks (violating participants in a sacred ritual and defiling a matron) are distinctly 'Roman'.⁵⁶² His lusts evidently knew no bounds since Tiberius' predatory sexual nature was indiscriminate regarding people's status. Whereas Julius and Augustus were subject to mudslinging accusations, Tiberius' openly sadistic treatment of both men and women is consistent and it is this which is meant to be viewed as abhorrent. Tiberius' baseline sexual characterization becomes emblematic of imperial sexual tyranny.⁵⁶³

The sexual episodes in Suetonius' *Tiberius* are both graphic and grotesque. They paint an explicitly negative picture of the emperor; but, building on the complications already set out, let us examine the construction of these episodes and their contribution to sexual characterization. From the outset of the first prominent section to deal with these episodes, Tiberius is engaged in sexual deviancy with male and female prostitutes and reveals a marked predatory aspect. The very mention of Capri should immediately point to seclusion and the explicitly private circumstances.

secessu uero Caprensi etiam sellaria excogitauit, sedem arcanarum libidinum, in quam undique conquisiti puellarum et exoletorum greges monstrosique concubitus repertores, quos spintrias appellabat, triplici serie conexi, in uicem incestarent coram ipso, ut aspectu deficientis libidines excitaret.

On retiring to Capri he devised "holey places" as a site for his secret orgies; there select teams of girls and male prostitutes, inventors of deviant intercourse and dubbed analists, copulated before him in triple unions to excite his flagging passions.⁵⁶⁴

⁵⁶² Chong-Gossard 2010: 299.

⁵⁶³ The Republican rhetoric around sexual transgression, as illustrated by Suetonius, involves accusations by people with obvious political motivations, but the accounts about Tiberius move us towards 'direct, authorially voiced charges of new and inventive kinds of depravity characteristic of the imperial regime. As imperial rule becomes established, there is a move away from the inhibition of traditional sexual morality, towards a perverted exhibition and openness.' (Langlands 2006: 353).

⁵⁶⁴ *Tib.* 43.1.1-2.1, trans. Rolfe. Wallace-Hadrill merely picks up the plausible aspects of the account namely in its use of Hellenism (Wallace-Hadrill 1995: 183-184). It is also often speculated that coins from

It must be made immediately clear that this account of sexual behaviour and all those which follow bear the hallmark of gossip and as such may be treated as a literary construct.⁵⁶⁵ Lindsay points out that the charges against Tiberius' behaviour 'on Capri are a classic in the history of rhetorical *uituperatio*.'⁵⁶⁶ The accounts are certainly marked with an invective quality. Albeit in passing, Lindsay also hits on a salient point which may allow us to re-establish this invective material within a politicized context. He notes that the 'process of ignoring traditional political processes caused annoyance in Senatorial circles, and some of the hostility may have been a product of the breakdown of the patronage network, and the difficulty of access to the emperor.'⁵⁶⁷ The sexual characterization of Tiberius may then be a construct of rhetorical invective, arising from political dissatisfaction. However, for the most part sex is less politicized in this biography than the *Julius* or the *Augustus*, with only Tiberius' divorce from Agrippina and marriage to Julia serving that function.

A point of interest in terms of literary construction may be observed in the passage which reports boys and girls dressing up as Pans and nymphs in wooded areas, '*in siluis quoque ac nemoribus passim Venerios locos commentus est prost[r]antisque per antra et causa rupes ex utriusque sexus pube Paniscorum et Nympharum habitu, quae palam iam et uulgo nomine insulae abutentes 'Caprineum' dictitabant*.'⁵⁶⁸ Vout makes the perceptive observation that in the creation of a mythological space, where disturbing acts of Graeco-Roman culture can act as inspiration, 'Suetonius' Tiberius is not just a pervert for transgressing social norms. He is a pervert for attempting to reenact mythology.'⁵⁶⁹

during the period of Tiberius with erotic images may have caused this speculation about the emperor. (Lindsay 1995: 141. Cf. Buttrey 1973: 52-63; Murison 1987: 97-99). On the *Spintriae*, see *Tib.* 44.1.1-2.1; *Calig.* 16.1; *Vit.* 3.

⁵⁶⁵ Champlin makes a compelling argument, pointing to inconsistencies and unlikelihood, that the Mallonia story is fictitious (Champlin 2015: 220-230).

⁵⁶⁶ Lindsay 1995: 137.

⁵⁶⁷ Lindsay 1995:137. Cf. Tac. *Ann.* 6.1.

⁵⁶⁸ *Tib.* 43.2.5-9.

⁵⁶⁹ Vout 2014: 458.

Having people refer to it as ‘the old goat’s island’ reinforces the tone of gossip in these accounts and encapsulates the depravity in the same way as epigrammatic lines or lyrics, do elsewhere in the *Lives*, for the purpose of sexual characterization. Tiberius’ baseline sexual character is expanded here as his depravity begins to shape the world around him.

The painting of Atalanta and Meleager engaged in fellatio, perhaps with an ekphrastic tone given its immediate context, provides a broader depiction of Tiberius’ sexual characterization through his artistic and literary taste.

quare Parrasi quoque tabulam, in qua Meleagro Atalanta ore morigeratur, legatam sibi sub condicione, ut si argumento offenderetur decies pro ea sestertium acciperet, non modo praetulit, sed et in cubiculo dedicauit.

And so when he was left a painting of Parrhasius’ depicting Atalanta gratifying Meleager with her mouth on condition that if the theme displeased him he was to have a million sesterces instead, he chose to keep it and actually hung it in his bedroom.⁵⁷⁰

Lindsay acknowledges that the emperor’s choice of this painting over a million sesterces is intended to discredit him, but also suggests that, ‘it may well be that Tiberius’ interest in erotic art of one sort or another in conjunction with speculation over his activities on Capri combined to create the hostile tradition representing him as a sexual pervert.’⁵⁷¹ This seems a wilfully naive reading; however, the emperor’s preoccupation with sex is communicated elsewhere in the *Life*, with reference to lascivious paintings and sculptures as well as the books of Elephantis, ‘*cubicula plurifariam disposita tabellis ac sigillis lasciuissimarum picturarum et figurarum adornauit librisque Elephantidis instruxit, ne cui in opera edenda exemplar impe[t]ratae schemae deesset.*’⁵⁷² As Vout states that this ‘is pornography, not history—an aged emperor, sexually aroused by images and performances, which in turn excite and repel the reader. There is even a manual in the form of the sexually explicit works by Greek poetess Elephantis—as the reader, too, is

⁵⁷⁰ *Tib.* 44.2.1-5. trans. Rolfe.

⁵⁷¹ Lindsay 1995: 142.

⁵⁷² *Tib.* 43.2.1-5.

invited to learn by example.⁵⁷³ Tiberius' reported sexual interests are not just those of a tyrant but go far beyond what is necessary to establish him as a violent pervert. Indeed, by exaggerating them into an artistic and literary taste which is particular to Tiberius, they become distinctive to him – and perhaps begin to establish him as a more complex character than the mere run-of-the-mill tyrant might seem.

There is elsewhere at least a hint of subversion of the one-dimensional sexual grotesquery on Capri, in the discussion of how Tiberius came to divorce his first wife, Agrippina, and marry his second wife, Julia. Tiberius' meekness and acquiescence to the situation is particularly revealing. Here, there are intricate moments of characterization. Both exist within an expanded two-dimensional context. Tiberius was pushed into marrying Julia to fulfil his imperial ambitions, and their relationship is presented as antagonistic and marked by contempt. His remorse and emotional conflict at divorcing Agrippina are credited to a genuine, realistic affection.

Agrippinam, Marco Agrippa genitam, neptem Caecili Attici equitis R., ad quem sunt Ciceronis epistulae, duxit uxorem; sublatoque ex ea filio Druso, quanquam bene conuenientem rursusque grauidam dimittere ac Iuliam Augusti filiam confestim coactus est ducere non sine magno angore animi, cum et Agrippinae consuetudine teneretur et Iuliae mores improbaret, ut quam sensisset sui quoque sub priore marito appetentem, quod sane etiam uulgo existimabatur.

He married Agrippina, daughter of Marcus Agrippa, and granddaughter of Caecilius Atticus, a Roman knight, to whom Cicero's letters are addressed; but after he had acknowledged a son from her, Drusus, although she was thoroughly congenial and was a second time with child, he was forced to divorce her and to contract a hurried marriage with Julia, daughter of Augustus. This caused him no little distress of mind, for he was living happily with Agrippina, and disapproved of Julia's character, having perceived that she had a passion for him even during the lifetime of her former husband, as was in fact the general opinion.⁵⁷⁴

Tiberius, far from being the tyrant of his later years, is browbeaten by the demands of sexual politics. He is forced out of a happy marriage because the daughter of the emperor

⁵⁷³ Vout 2014: 457.

⁵⁷⁴ *Tib.* 7.2.1-3.1, trans. Rolfe. On Tiberius' anxiety of mind see also *Tib.* 66.

desired it. And there is no hint that his relationship with Agrippina was anything other than mutually satisfactory.

Moreover, Suetonius portrays Tiberius as behaving properly even under these circumstances:

cum Iulia primo concorditer et amore mutuo uixit, mox discedit et aliquanto grauius, ut etiam perpetuo secubaret, intercepto communis filii pignore, qui Aquileiae natus infans extinctus est.

With Julia he lived in harmony at first, and returned her love; but he soon grew cold, and went so far as to cease to sleep with her at all, after the severing of the tie formed by a child which was born to them, but died at Aquileia in infancy.⁵⁷⁵

Even though Tiberius' relationship with Julia ultimately deteriorates into antipathy, Suetonius provides a sympathetic reason in the untimely death of their child. Here too Tiberius behaves respectfully, withdrawing to Rhodes rather than accusing Julia or living with her.⁵⁷⁶ When she is exiled by Augustus, Tiberius is likewise shown to be considerate and dutiful, and attempts to reconcile the two of them.⁵⁷⁷ A Tiberius who suffers like this and accepts it is very different from the one we see on Capri. Introducing that Capri phase of his life, Suetonius states that Tiberius' vices had been poorly concealed for a long time: here, much like Tacitus he implies that Tiberius was always the pervert and just hiding it.⁵⁷⁸ But this does not seem enough to explain what we have seen of him up to now. His apparently sincere disapproval of Julia, and his anguish at the separation from Agrippina, seem to be presented as more than just pretence or self-control. They seem to presuppose

⁵⁷⁵ *Tib.* 7.3.5-9, trans. Rolfe.

⁵⁷⁶ *'tot prosperis confluentibus integra aetate ac ualitudine statuit repente secedere seque e medio quam longissime amouere: dubium uxorisne taedio, quam neque criminari aut dimittere auderet neque ultra perferre posset'*. (*Tib.* 10.1.1-5).

⁵⁷⁷ *Tib.* 11.4.1-6.

⁵⁷⁸ *'ceterum secreti licentiam nactus et quasi ciuitatis oculis remotis, cuncta simul uitia male diu dissimulata tandem profudit'* (*Tib.* 42.1.1-4). Cf. Tac. *Ann.* 6.51.11-19, of which Syme notes 'change in observed behaviour was therefore not a change in essence, but only a manifestation of what was there all the time' (Syme 1958: 421). Collingwood argues that for Tacitus and Roman historians a 'good man cannot become bad. A man who shows himself bad when old must have been equally bad when young, and his vices concealed by hypocrisy' (Collingwood 1994: 44).

a genuinely complex Tiberius, who was (at least at one time) sincere and not just affecting good qualities or hiding his wicked nature.

With no real choice in the matter, his life would become regulated so that he never saw his ex-wife again. The conflict between his duties and his desires, in having to divorce Agrippina, is telling of Tiberius' internal personality. The following passage makes this clear in stating:

sed Agrippinam et abegisse post diuortium doluit et semel omnino ex occursu uisam adeo contentis et [t]umentibus oculis prosecutus est, ut custoditum sit ne umquam in conspectum ei posthac ueniret.

But even after the divorce he regretted his separation from Agrippina, and the only time that he chanced to see her, he followed her with such an intent and tearful gaze that care was taken that she should never again come before his eyes.⁵⁷⁹

The conflict between Tiberius' public ambitions and his private love can be viewed as creating his complex personality. It moves beyond simple shades of good and evil. Suetonius does not use this moment for moral judgement, as we might expect from a more traditional understanding of Roman biographical writing.⁵⁸⁰ Instead, we see something resembling personality, in Gill's terms allowing for a response 'that is empathetic rather than moral'.⁵⁸¹ It is perhaps an indication that personality in Roman terms is not always to be understood as ingrained. Gavin Townend stated that Suetonius did not recognize 'that there could be a change for the worse as the result of circumstances'.⁵⁸² Tiberius' divorce from Agrippina and its results indicate otherwise.

The contrast between his sexual tyranny on Capri and his submission to sexual politics in his marriage to Julia allows readers of Suetonius to recognize some complexity in Tiberius. The anecdote of his love for Agrippina might all the same be interpreted as

⁵⁷⁹ *Tib.* 7.3.1-5, trans. Rolfe.

⁵⁸⁰ Hence Collingwood states that in Roman historiography, 'characters are seen not from inside, with understanding and sympathy, but from outside, as mere spectacles of vice or virtue' (Collingwood 1994: 39).

⁵⁸¹ Gill 1990: 2.

⁵⁸² Townend 1967: 92-93.

evaluative, albeit positive. As such, it subverts the image of Tiberius as a tyrant, and allows him a second dimension of characterization. But, arguably, the level of detail, especially the details of his attitude to Agrippina and his pathetic attachment to her even after their divorce, seemingly allows us an insight into him as a person. They are not strictly relevant to the political situation, have no narrative pay-off and do not carry any obvious ethical value. This is to say that they are personality details: they make him more than just contradictory in characterization and go some way towards making him 'real'.

When a reader perceives Tiberius' sexual characterization in narrative order, they can track a logical progression whereby his subservience to his own ambition, and Augustus' will, forces him to end a seemingly genuine and loving marriage only to take up one of convenience to facilitate his rise to power; his submissive depiction then in this earlier part of the *Life* is starkly contrasted with a sadistic fixation on dominating others on Capri. However, when considered in the reverse order, the events on Capri paint an overwhelming baseline picture of a tyrant, which is then dissonant with his image as a dutiful husband to Julia, only to then allow us an empathetic insight into his relationship with Agrippina. Much depends here on the narrative ordering of the text; the *Life* is not merely a collection of anecdotes but does indeed take the reader on a journey.

5.7 To End is to Begin

Suetonius achieves further depth of characterization through the sexual exploits of his Caesars. Not only does the tripartite perspective help in reading these examples but it also explores deviations within the biographer's constructed sexual patterns. Even though the topic of sex is rooted in the first and second dimensional aspects of virtue and vice, there are two clearly defined examples of three-dimensional realism. Claudius'

preference for women and Galba's preference for men are presented in a strictly empathetic (non-evaluative) way, and as almost extraneous details, achieves a measure of realism. However, when looking at sexuality through all three dimensions, typical patterns of behaviour and deviations are evident.

Julius' sexual characterization establishes him as a libidinous womanizer, but it is subverted through accusations of homosexual passivity and even approaches empathetic realism in hints of a genuine relationship with Servilia. In a variation of this pattern, Augustus' baseline follows his cultivated moralistic image only to be subverted on two fronts. Dissonance emerges in the accounts of his own excessive womanizing, much like his predecessor. His image as a moral paragon is undermined by his misbehaviour; but his depiction as an image-conscious control freak is both reinforced and nuanced by the same behaviour. He is shown trying to maintain control but is, uncharacteristically, half-hearted about it and even failing to maintain the control he wants. This give us an unexpected look at his weaknesses. This is further complicated by accusations of submitting to other men for his own advancement. Finally, inasmuch as his relationship with Livia comes across as genuine and empathetic, the couple's image reinforces Augustus' idealized baseline and his dissonant adultery.

Caligula and Nero's baselines are stressed through their sexual exploits with both men and women. Complexity emerges as Caligula parodies conventional intimate relationships through incest with Drusilla and Nero warps gender conventions with Sporus and Doryphorus. Domitian has a marked reputation for womanizing but was also supposedly sodomized by his eventual successor, Nerva. He also follows in the tradition of incest, in this case with his niece, which seems to place him somewhere between Claudius (for his marriage to Agrippina) and the perversities of Caligula and Nero. Ultimately, heterosexual and homosexual behaviour can challenge one another or can be

entirely indicative of a baseline nature. A strange complexity is achieved through dissonance which subverts social and personal relationship norms.

Finally, the most intricate sexual characterization is that of Tiberius. The grotesque sexual behaviour attributed to him on Capri elaborates an especially potent one-dimensional baseline. Its very extremity, however, threatens to allow him to transcend the status of a stock tyrant and acquire a sexual personality all of his own. More obviously, however, his sexual behaviour as an old man stands in stark contrast to his behaviour as a young man in his marriages to Agrippina and Julia. Divorcing Agrippina to marry Julia shows Tiberius meekly acquiescing to demands that will lead to him being emperor. His feelings for Agrippina are represented as genuine and we are given an empathetic insight into his emotional turmoil after divorcing her.

Section three will show how the very structure of Suetonius' collection aids his characterizations. The sixth chapter sets out how ancestry and death act to confirm, develop, or complicate his Caesars. The seventh chapter will then treat the collection as macro-text, in order to show how characterization is informed by appearances across the *Lives* and how Suetonius creates characters, such as Germanicus and Livia, through extended cameos.

SECTION

III

CHAPTER SIX

In My End Is My Beginning:

Ancestry and Death in Suetonius' *Caesars*

Stemmata quid faciunt?

(Juvenal, *Satires*, 8.1)

Extrema semper de ante factis iudicant.

(Publilius Syrus, *Sententiae*, 190)

6.1 Introduction

The makings of a Caesar's character are in his beginnings and his end. This chapter maps out how Suetonius' organization of individual *Lives* helps to create complex characters through programmatic readings. By introducing a Caesar's ancestors, an immediate point of comparison is set up to foreshadow what is to come or offer a stark contrast. Tiberius' ancestry is composed of good and bad examples setting up the duality in his own character. Nero is the degenerate end to a mixed but declining family line. Caligula and Claudius receive intensified characterization, as both stand in radical contrast to their respective fathers, Germanicus and Drusus. Even though the *Lives* of Galba, Otho, and Vitellius, and the Flavians have their own ancestries, Suetonius continually emphasizes their ties to the Julio-Claudians. Their biographies characterize them as Caesars by association.

On the opposite end of ancestry, the moment of death offers a profound insight into a Caesar. Suetonius frequently takes the opportunity here to embellish their characters. Augustus and Vespasian die in character, both effectively maintaining control of a cultivated or established image. The nobility and bravery of Otho's death forces a major reconsideration of his character. Reactions to the death of an emperor, as reported by Suetonius, also contribute to their characterization. The widespread scorn and contempt Tiberius' memory receives after his death reduces, to a degree, the complexity

granted to him in the *Life* by boiling him down to a tyrannical stereotype. In contrast to this, the wildly dissimilar reactions to Domitian's death allow him to gain complexity. Nero's death is far from being a simple confirmation of his debauched and tyrannical representation, as his characterization approaches the three dimensions. In these ways, accounts of ancestry and death are points that can manage and inform characterization.

6.2 Ancestry

6.2.1 Two Sides to the Same Caesar

Ancestry establishes Tiberius' distinct strands of good and bad in a basic, one-dimensional manner only for it to be complicated later with conflict between them in a two-dimensional way. A recurring feature is that Suetonius' *Life* is trying to work through Tiberius' complexity to establish a more easily understood figure. Tiberius' ancestry and the internal struggle that follows highlight the first and second dimensions of his characterization; any attempt at resolving these aspects on the biographer's part is only clear upon Tiberius' death, as discussed in the final part of this chapter. The ancestral accounts of Tiberius allow for an implicit programmatic reading of his character.

Ancestry itself figures into the tradition of encomium and other ancient authors use it as a paradigmatic feature. Death and ancestry, as parts of a social genre, are used by Suetonius to characterize his Caesars. Stuart states that 'laudation prescribed that praise of ancestors be coupled with praise of the recently deceased'.⁵⁸³ Duff notes that ancestry was a feature of *enkomion* as well as biography and that 'for Plutarch, such material is deployed for clear literary ends. Thus, he often uses a figure mentioned in the

⁵⁸³ Stuart 1967: 211. For the rhetorical use of ancestry to praise or criticize a person, see [Cic.] *Rhet. Her.* 3.13. and Quint. *Inst.* 3.7.10.

opening lines of the *Life*, particularly an ancestor, to provide a paradigm or a contrast to the subject, or to alert the reader to a theme which will become important as the *Life* progresses’;⁵⁸⁴ Suetonius is no different. At the outset of the *Tiberius*, two sides to the Claudian coin are presented:

Multa multorum Claudiorum egregia merita, multa etiam sequius admissa in rem p. extant... Claudius Caudex primus freto classe traiecto Poenos Sicilia expulit. Tiberius Nero aduenientem ex Hispania cum ingentibus copiis Hasdrubalem, prius quam Hannibali fratri coniungeretur, oppressit. Contra Claudius Regillianus, decemuir legibus scribendis, uirginem ingenuam per uim libidinis gratia in seruitutem asserere conatus causa plebi fuit secedendi rursus a patribus.

There are on record many distinguished services of the Claudii to their country, as well as many deeds of the opposite character... Claudius Caudex was the first to cross the straits with a fleet, and drove the Carthaginians from Sicily. Tiberius Nero crushed Hasdrubal, on his arrival from Spain with a vast army, before he could unite with his brother Hannibal. On the other hand, Claudius Regillianus, decemvir for codifying the laws, through his lawless attempt to enslave a young freeborn woman, to gratify his passion for her, was the cause of the second secession of the plebeians from the patricians.⁵⁸⁵

Suetonius’ use of ancestry to characterize Tiberius is unique in several respects, the most prominent being the evaluative duality of good (‘*egregia merita*’) and bad (‘*sequius admissa*’) in his ancestors.⁵⁸⁶ So, before a reader meets Tiberius, they know that he will be capable of great services and disservices to Rome. This makes clear that Tiberius ‘is seen as an amalgam of these diverging strands of the family’⁵⁸⁷ This dichotomy is also found in the women he is descended from, ‘*Extant et feminarum exempla diuersa aequae*’.⁵⁸⁸ Suetonius emphasizes at the start that this is the stock from which he comes, ‘*Ex hac stirpe Tiberius Caesar genus trahit*’.⁵⁸⁹ Tiberius is composed of both the good

⁵⁸⁴ Duff 1999: 310; 310-311.

⁵⁸⁵ *Tib.* 2.1.1-2.4, trans. Rolfe.

⁵⁸⁶ For a detailed analysis of how Suetonius uses ancestry to shape Tiberius see Garrett 2013: 115-142. She identifies several unique features: the good-bad arrangement of ancestors instead of chronological, the presence of family members other than just direct ancestors, the specific traits of women, and the use of the maternal and adoptive lines (Garrett 2013: 129).

⁵⁸⁷ Lindsay 1995: 56 ad 2.1.

⁵⁸⁸ *Tib.* 2.3.1.

⁵⁸⁹ *Tib.* 3.1.1.

and the bad and to an extent both co-exist. This duality is reinforced throughout his *Life* in various ways, but it is established, here, in what amounts to one-dimensional terms.

The structure and organization of biographical writing in general can be very useful in elucidating a character. It is worth remembering Momigliano's critique of Friedrich Leo's work in that 'Leo was more interested in techniques of organizing the biographical material (narration in chronological order versus systematic characterization of individual traits) than in its implications for the understanding of the person.'⁵⁹⁰ These features are not just to be enumerated or placed in a structure but should be examined for their contribution to our understanding of the biography's subject. The use of ancestry to characterize Tiberius neatly demonstrates Momigliano's point. These ancestral Claudians are figures related purely in terms of virtue and vice, fitting with Gill's evaluative view of 'character'.⁵⁹¹ They serve their purpose in intensifying the same in Tiberius.

His ancestry focuses on these two points of characterization: precocity and lawlessness. The former is shown in Tiberius himself being rewarded with triumphs and advancing through political offices before he was old enough to qualify.⁵⁹² The latter is noted when Suetonius says it would take too long to compile a full list of Tiberius disservices and settles for sketching some out with examples including executions on sacred days, encouragement of informers, and persecution of authors along with generally terrorizing the populace.⁵⁹³ The introductory biographical material of the subject's family then serves a literary end in constructing a clearly defined duality, which persists through the biography and which is as much a stereotype as Theophrastus' 'Dissembler'. This baseline characterization can perhaps be more helpfully refined as unpredictability, a trait

⁵⁹⁰ Momigliano 1985: 84. Cf. Leo (1901).

⁵⁹¹ Gill 1983: 470-471.

⁵⁹² *Tib.* 9.1-3.

⁵⁹³ *Tib.* 61; 61.2.

which is more often associated with tyrants.⁵⁹⁴ However, complexity can also arise from this duality, as in some instances presented by Suetonius in which Tiberius reveals his own internal struggle.

Suetonius' use of Tiberius' ancestry foreshadows and establishes the consistent good-bad dichotomy in his characterization of the man. His Tiberius is therefore both good and bad from the start, indeed from before he was born. This can be contrasted with the very different impression given in other accounts of Tiberius' life, in which that life falls into two distinct halves: a reasonably noble early life and a cruel, tyrannical later life.⁵⁹⁵ A comparative digression to consider Tiberius' representation by Tacitus can help inform our reading of Suetonius' portrait. The widespread perception in the ancient world that character was fixed and ingrained from birth underlies the traditional view of Tiberius' characterization in Tacitus' *Annals*⁵⁹⁶ – that Tiberius was cruel and tyrannical all along, with anything else being a duplicitous and disingenuous pretence.

As previously discussed in chapter three, *Annals* 1.4 demonstrates the view that Tiberius was simply bad all along and any signs of goodness were a mere pretence. Tacitus marks out arrogance ('*superbia*') as an ingrained ('*insita*') trait of the Claudian family. He goes on to state that despite Tiberius' efforts at repression ('*premantur*'), signs of cruelty ('*saevitiae*') kept breaking out ('*erumpere*').⁵⁹⁷ Firstly, there is a very different impression given of his Claudian ancestry here: Tacitus does not imply that there were any positive Claudian traits to be taken into account. Secondly, it is a strictly negative

⁵⁹⁴ On tyranny: 'the tyrant is contingency personified' (Gildenhard 2006: 200; cf. 200-201). Cf. O'Gorman, who cites Suetonius noting Tiberius' inconsistency early on but placing it directly in the context of his revealing himself as a *princeps*, i.e. an absolute ruler (O'Gorman 2011: 311; cf. *Tib.* 33).

⁵⁹⁵ Tiberius' modicum of self-control in his early principate is acknowledged at Plin. *HN.* 34.62, as is the cruelty of his old age at Plin. *HN.* 14.144. For Augustus and the early years of Tiberius as models to copy see (Sen. *Clem.* 1.6). For the positive and negative phases of Tiberius' life see Tac. *Ann.* 6.51 and for his becoming a tyrant or a source of power for Sejanus as tyrant see Tac. *Ann.* 4.1.1. See also *Tib.* 26, contra *Tib.* 61.

⁵⁹⁶ Syme 1958: 421; Collingwood 1994: 44.

⁵⁹⁷ Tac. *Ann.* 1.4. Cf. '*mox in omne genus crudelitatis erupit*' (*Tib.* 61.1.1). However, this is positioned after *Tib.* 57, for which see chapter four of this thesis, pp. 174-176.

portrayal with the only struggle here being to hide what is a true characteristic; duplicity to be sure but not duality. Gill's discussion of Tacitus' Tiberius then develops a more sophisticated view from here.

Gill modifies the ingrained and fixed aspect by highlighting the relevance of character formation in the ancient world, especially by pointing out acknowledgements of such a view in Tacitus' works⁵⁹⁸ – while specific traits may be ingrained, various other aspects and circumstances are at play. Even in Tacitus' *Annals*, he ascribes to Lucius Arruntius the view that power was able to change and transform Tiberius: '*cum Tiberius post tantam rerum experientiam vi dominationis convulsus et mutatus sit*'.⁵⁹⁹ Admittedly, the historian does not make any attempt to pursue this view further and the kind of change envisaged by Gill here is limited to the role of circumstances in revealing one's true character to a greater or lesser extent. Hence Gill ascribes to both Tacitus and Suetonius the view that the removal of Tiberius' rivals contributes to his moral decline, not because any change took place, but because their removal allowed him to reveal the character already there.⁶⁰⁰ Despite the key point here being about transformation, it can be read in the more traditional mode. Collingwood views Tacitus' depiction of Tiberius' break down from imperial rule not as change in character 'but as the revelation of features in it which had hitherto been hypocritically concealed' and concludes by saying: 'Power does not alter a man's character; it only shows what kind of a man he already was.'⁶⁰¹

⁵⁹⁸ Gill 1983: 482ff. Two examples of interest are even in Tacitus: Some men could dash the hopes or dispel the fears about them by rising to the occasion or degenerating, '*multos in provinciis contra quam spes aut metus de illis fuerit egisse: excitari quosdam ad meliora magnitudine rerum, hebescere alios.*' (Tac. *Ann.* 3.69). Vespasian is even said to have changed for the better, unlike all of those who came before him, '*et ambigua de Vespasiano fama, solusque omnium ante se principum in melius mutatus est.*' (Tac. *Hist.* 1.50). Dio acknowledges the ingrained view and a view of degeneration and decline too (Dio. 57.13.6).

⁵⁹⁹ Tac. *Ann.* 6.48.

⁶⁰⁰ Gill 1983: 482. Dio, in discussing, how Tiberius' behaviour changed after the death of Germanicus, posits the view that he was this way all along, only pretending to be otherwise while his rival was still alive. He also considers the idea that Tiberius had an excellent character, but this declined as a result of Germanicus' death (Dio. 57.13.6).

⁶⁰¹ Collingwood 1994: 44.

Certainly, this can be seen in the various phases of Tiberius' life as set out by Tacitus, which, in line with Pelling's notion of 'bio-structuring'⁶⁰² correspond to the influence of Augustus, Drusus and Germanicus, Livia, and Sejanus:

Morum quoque tempora illi diversa: egregium vita famaue, quoad privatus vel in imperiis sub Augusto fuit; occultum ac subdolum fingendis virtutibus, donec Germanicus ac Drusus superfuere; idem inter bona malaque mixtus incolumi matre; instabilis saevitia, sed obtectis libidinibus, dum Seianum dilexit timuitve: postremo in scelera simul ac dedecora prorupit, postquam remoto pudore et metu suo tantum ingenio utebatur.

His character, again, has its separate epochs. There was a noble season in his life and fame while he lived a private citizen or a great official under Augustus; an inscrutable and disingenuous period of hypocritical virtues while Germanicus and Drusus remained: with his mother alive, he was still an amalgam of good and evil; so long as he loved, or feared, Sejanus, he was loathed for his cruelty, but his lust was veiled; finally, when the restraints of shame and fear were gone, and nothing remained but to follow his own bent, he plunged impartially into crime and into ignominy.⁶⁰³

The use of '*egregium vita famaue*' seems straightforwardly positive, but arguably it is compromised by '*sub Augusto*': he is a good character while he is kept in line by his superior. '*occultum ac subdolum fingendis virtutibus*' is a striking phrase that emphasizes subterfuge on Tiberius' part, bad all along and just hiding it, and O'Gorman's translation brings this out more clearly as 'hidden and deceitful with feigned virtues'.⁶⁰⁴ Initially '*inter bona malaque mixtus*' looks as though it aligns with Suetonius' binary presentation of Tiberius; but the use of *idem*, combined with the feigning in the previous sentence, perhaps suggests that the bad is there and the good is merely a pretence: in other words, not a real mixture, but a less successful hiding of the bad qualities than before. Finally, '*suo tantum ingenio utebatur*' surely stresses that Tiberius could indulge his own nature.⁶⁰⁵ So, the development is just the removal of restraints, mostly from outside.

⁶⁰² Pelling 1997a: 118.

⁶⁰³ Tac. *Ann.* 6.51, trans. Jackson.

⁶⁰⁴ O'Gorman 2000: 79.

⁶⁰⁵ Woodman views the passage in relation to earlier experiences and his association with other figures during his rule but translates the final sentence as 'had only himself to rely on' and unconvincingly views *ingenium* as having 'nothing to do with character at all' (Woodman 1989: 200; 197-205). However, Pelling makes clear that with the preceding lines of the passage it 'suggests that increasing self-revelation is in

Tiberius' own character does not change; he just loses authority figures who might keep him in line, or people he feared to offend. Arguably he is not even doing much to repress it himself: the constraints are all external. Suetonius' characterization is rather different. For Suetonius it is an internal struggle between good and bad, and not just a matter of keeping up appearances.

Suetonius' characterization of Tiberius starts out by acknowledging complexity via dualistic ancestry signposting his good deeds and disservices. This, though, can be more neatly refined in terms of baselines by viewing it as unpredictability, a trait more commonly associated with tyrants (thus a complicated way of presenting a basic character). Tiberius, as we will see, then becomes fully complicated with the presentation of his own internal conflict and genuine uncertainty (he literally does not know what he wants to do). Suetonius as author tends to comment on Tiberius' cruelty, but many of the stories he includes and some of the views he reports give glimpses of a more dissonant figure – the good and bad identified in his ancestry continue to resound in his later life. Ultimately the bad outweighs the good, and even the good does little more than make Tiberius unpredictable – a key characteristic of a tyrant. Nevertheless, the picture with all its dissonances remains at least two-dimensional, and it is certainly possible to see Tiberius less as a cunning dissembler than as authentically conflicted.

There is a conundrum as to how exactly complexity can emerge from a character whose baseline is already made up of dissonant features. In following through on what ancestry sets up, Tiberius is complicated by internal conflict. The two sides to his character are established in one-dimensional terms. Tiberius then becomes two-dimensional through his self-aware, inner struggle between tyrannical inclinations and

point, not just the final isolation' (Pelling 1997a: 122 fn. 25). See also O'Gorman's discussion of the passage, especially the more literal reading of 'made use' for *utebatur*: 'he made use only of his own nature' (O'Gorman 2000: 79f.). On this obituary passage see also Gill 1983: 485-487.

more noble impulses. He shows what might be considered two-dimensional moments of discord and interior insight in the following, for example:

Vrebant insuper anxiam mentem uaria undique conuicia, nullo non damnatorum omne probri genus coram uel per libellos in orchestra positos ingerente. quibus quidem diuersissime adficiabatur, modo ut prae pudore ignota et celata cuncta cuperet, nonnumquam eadem contemneret et proferret ultro atque uulgaret.

His anxiety of mind became torture because of reproaches of all kinds from every quarter, since every single one of those who were condemned to death heaped all kinds of abuse upon him, either to his face or by notes placed in the orchestra. By these, however, he was most diversely affected, now through a sense of shame desiring that they all be concealed and kept secret, sometimes scorning them and producing them of his own accord and giving them publicity.⁶⁰⁶

Tiberius' contradictory reactions to criticism and condemnation are not indicative of a firm and established character but rather an oscillating one. Indeed, wavering between opposites illustrates this point as a basic kind of characterization shows that he wants to hide such things as notes of abuse out of shame (*'modo ut prae pudore ignota et celata cuncta cuperet'*) only for his dissonant characterization to lead him to bite the bullet and expose them (*'contemneret et proferret ultro atque uulgaret'*). His internal conflict (initially suggested by the interior perspective of *'anxiam mentem'*) shows that the duality in his character is not always clearly delineated and leads us to see his complexity. Tiberius is not just good and bad, or bad but pretending to be good, but someone genuinely, self-consciously, and continually torn between alternative courses of action. This is what provides him with the second dimension: he is not just a dissembler or a Catiline whose definitively good qualities contrast with a definitively bad nature; he is a complex figure whose good and bad actions suggest someone who really does not know how he should (or how he wants to) behave.

His character dissonance is further intensified when Tiberius reveals his own self-disgust, and even suggests that he foresaw the extent to which he would be detested:

⁶⁰⁶ *Tib.* 66.1.1-6, trans. Rolfe, contra *Tib.* 28. See also Augustus' reactions to lampoons (*Aug.* 55).

postremo semet ipse pertaesus, tali[s] epistulae principio tantum non summam malorum suorum professus est: 'quid scribam uobis, p. c., aut quo modo scribam, aut quid omnino non scribam hoc tempore, dii me deaeque peius perdant quam cotidie perire sentio, si scio.'

Existimant quidam praescisse haec eum peritia futurorum ac multo ante, quanta se quandoque acerbitas et infamia maneret, prospexisse; ideoque, ut imperium inierit, et patris patriae appellationem et ne in acta sua iuraretur obstinatissime recusasse, ne mox maiore dedecore impar tantis honoribus inueniretur.

At last in utter self-disgust he all but admitted to extremity of his wretchedness in a letter beginning as follows: “If I know what to write to you, Fathers of the Senate, or how to write it, or what to leave unwritten at present, may all gods and goddesses visit me with more destruction than I feel that I am daily suffering.” Some think that through his knowledge of the future he foresaw this situation, and knew long beforehand what detestation and ill-repute one day awaited him; and that therefore when he became emperor, he positively refused the title of “Father of his Country” and to allow the senate to take oath to support his acts, for fear that he might presently be found undeserving of such honours and thus be the more shamed.⁶⁰⁷

Tiberius acknowledges a basic, one-dimensional aspect of his character in anticipating the shame and ignominy into which he will fall. His dissonant, two-dimensional qualities emerge in his refusing to take the title of *Pater Patriae* for fear of being undeserving. One could simply read this as pure dissimulation, but Suetonius emphasizes a confessional tone in Tiberius’ self-awareness of his nature and his disgust of same.⁶⁰⁸ Here, Tiberius is directly characterized from his own point of view, and Suetonius even glosses the account with a preface of ‘*ipse pertaesus*’ suggesting a degree of internal conflict. The one-dimensional characterization of Tiberius is duality: he was capable of both good and bad, but it was unpredictable which way he would fall. But the *Life* also allows us a more complex reading of that duality, as real uncertainty: he is represented as genuinely unsure how to behave, and aware of how his reign could go wrong. This takes us past the more familiar figure of the wilful and unpredictable tyrant and gives him, first, a degree of two-

⁶⁰⁷ *Tib.* 67.1.1-2.6, trans. Rolfe. Cf. *Tib.* 26.

⁶⁰⁸ Power rigidly argues that Tiberius has a fixed character and insists on viewing the above passage in such terms despite conceding that it invites Gill’s ‘personality’ viewpoint (Power 2008: 261-262; 257-265). Levick expresses scepticism about any real mental insights offered by the above, and a similar passage in Tacitus (Levick 1978: 95-101. Cf. *Tac. Ann.* 6.6). Lindsay states that Suetonius’ intent with the letter is to demonstrate the despair of Tiberius (Lindsay 1995: 175 ad 67.1). Suetonius’ conscious literary use of it, though, produces the result of elaborating on and complicating Tiberius’ dualistic depiction.

dimensional pathos in his efforts to decide what to do (as in the first passage), and then perhaps even a hint of empathy in his painful awareness that his uncertainty would probably lead to his being regarded as a tyrant. Indeed, this view of Tiberius having foreknowledge briefly shifts characterizing point of view attributing it to other people (*'Existimant'*). The biographer, the subject, and other figures align to convey a seemingly sincere depiction of Tiberius' conflict and not one of insincere duplicity.⁶⁰⁹ What the biographer sets up in ancestry is paid off in moments such as these, thus making Tiberius a complex character.

In the above, his wretchedness is presumably the basic form and his honour its contrast. The following switches this presentation. His integrity is suggested as the basic strain of character and anything else is dissonant, attributed to a change. Tiberius' lot is perpetual, interchanging struggle.

quod sane ex oratione eius, quam de utraque re habuit, colligi potest; uel cum ait: similem se semper sui futurum nec unquam mutaturum mores suos, quam diu sanae mentis fuisset; sed exempli causa cauendum esse, ne se senatus in acta cuiusquam obligaret, quia aliquo casu mutari posset. et rursus:

'Si quando autem,' inquit, 'de moribus meis deuotoque uobis animo dubitaueritis, – quod prius quam eueniat, opto ut me supremus dies huic mutatae uestrae de me opinioni eripiat – nihil honoris adiciet mihi patria appellatio, uobis autem exprobrabit aut temeritatem delati mihi eius cognominis aut inconstantiam contrarii de me iudicii.'

In fact, this may be gathered from the speech which he made regarding these two matters; for example, when he says; “I shall always be consistent and never change my ways so long as I am in my sense; but for the sake of precedent the senate should beware of binding itself to support the acts of any man, since he might through some mischance suffer a change.” Again: “If you ever come to feel any doubt,” he says, “of my character or of my heartfelt devotion to you (and before that happens, I pray that my last day may save me from this altered opinion of me), the title of Father of my Country will give me no additional honour, but will be a reproach to you, either for your hasty action in conferring the appellation upon me, or for your inconsistency in changing your estimate of my character.”⁶¹⁰

⁶⁰⁹ In contrast, Tacitus provides a very succinct account of Tiberius rejecting the title *Pater Patriae* on similar grounds, but the public seemingly did not buy into it as the historian states *'non tamen ideo faciebat fidem civilis animi'* and follows it by discussing the revival of the *Lex Maiestatis* (Tac. *Ann.* 1.72). Tacitus clearly suggests tyrannical duplicity for Tiberius. However, Suetonius' account does not suggest lip service on Tiberius' part but situates it within an extended illustration of internal conflict.

⁶¹⁰ *Tib.* 67.3.1-4.8, trans. Rolfe.

The biography thus creates a situation where Tiberius is struggling against himself. These rejections are not political manoeuvrings but serve to highlight a struggle within him and what he may become, while acknowledging the idea of character development.⁶¹¹ Tiberius' complexity is such that not only is he aware of his own nature but is also keenly aware of the perception of others towards him and how that too can change. The first dimension is his duality, perhaps refined as unpredictability, the familiar quality of a tyrant. The second dimension redefines this as real uncertainty: rather than a wilful figure who does whatever he wants (such as Caligula), Tiberius is established as genuinely struggling to know or decide what to do. The third dimension then shows us his painful self-awareness of this: it does not change his behaviour or even his character, but it makes us empathize with him. Suetonius is allowing us to see an internal struggle in a way that is unlike Tacitus – more specifically, that including these quotations from Tiberius himself (i.e. his point of view) gives us a complexity that Tacitus does not want (as he wants to draw a picture of an inevitable slide into showing his true character). Suetonius' choice to include these perspectives, regardless of any deliberate motive on his part, gives the reader the scope to read the emperors as more complex characters. Ultimately, Suetonius' *Life* wrestles with Tiberius' complexity, trying to show a more easily understood figure, but a resolution to Tiberius' character is only reached upon his death, which the final part of this chapter will address.

⁶¹¹ For instance, Gill states that despite Plutarch having a character viewpoint he 'in no way rules out an awareness of, or interest in, the development of character.' (Gill 1983: 474). On the subject of character change, also see Swain 1989: 62-68.

6.2.2 Downward Spiral

In a similar fashion to the *Tiberius*, Suetonius' *Nero* begins with a detailed genealogical account. However, it discusses one specific side of his family with a focus on vice: 'Suetonius sees a strong link between Nero and his ancestors, but he compares him not with the Antonii but with the Domitii Ahenobarbi.'⁶¹² This connection to Tiberius is perhaps pointed given that Nero's adoption and new name makes him explicitly the heir to all Tiberius' ancestors and to Tiberius himself; so, we can add that to all the Domitii Ahenobarbi that we see in Suetonius' actual account.⁶¹³ The purpose of this is to show Nero degenerating from their virtues and reproducing their specific vices as if by inheritance. Thus, the narrative acts as a prologue to Nero's character.

pluris e familia cognosci referre arbitror, quo facilius appareat ita degenerasse a suorum uirtutibus Nero, ut tamen uitia cuiusque quasi tradita et ingenita retulerit...in hunc dixit Licinius Crassus orator non esse mirandum, quod aeneam barbam haberet, cui os ferreum, cor plumbeum esset... uir neque satis constans et ingenio truci in desperatione rerum mortem timore appetitam ita expauit, ut haustum uenenum paenitentia euomuerit medicumque manumiserit, quod sibi prudens ac sciens minus noxium temperasset. consultante autem Cn. Pompeio de mediis ac neutram partem sequentibus solus censuit hostium numero habendos.

Reliquit filium omnibus gentis suae procul dubio praeferendum...nonnulla et ipse infamia aspersus. nam Antonius eum desiderio amicae Seruiliae Naidis transfugisse iactauit.

It seems to me worth while to give an account of several members of this family, to show more clearly that though Nero degenerated from the good qualities of his ancestors, he yet reproduced the vices of each of them, as if transmitted to him by natural inheritance... He [Gnaeus Domitius Ahenobarbus, cos. 96 BC] it was of whom the orator Licinius Crassus said that it was not surprising that he had a brazen beard [i.e. bronze beard], since he had a face of iron and a heart of lead... [His son, Lucius, cos. 54 BC] was a man of no great resolution, though he had a violent temper, and when he once attempted to kill himself in a fit of despair and terror, he so shrank from the thought of death that he changed his mind and vomited up the poison, conferring freedom on his physician, since, knowing his master, he had purposely given him what was not a fatal dose. When Gnaeus

⁶¹² Garrett 2013: 79.

⁶¹³ Power views the ancestry in *Tiberius* as also setting up at least the *Caligula* and *Claudius* (Power 2009: 218). Although the Claudii can inform *Caligula-Nero*, it fails to consider that Tiberius' ancestry is shaped specifically to him (Garrett 2013: 116). Connection to Tiberius' ancestry only works implicitly rather than as explicit literary construction.

Pompeius brought forward the question of the treatment of those who were neutral and sided with neither party, he alone was for regarding them as hostile.

He left a son [Gnaeus, cos. 32 BC], who was beyond all question better than the rest of the family...Even he did not escape with an unblemished reputation, for Antony openly declared that he had changed sides from desire for the company of his mistress, Servilia Nais.⁶¹⁴

Ancestors act as a direct means through which to read Nero's character. Traits can be directly inherited or deviated from, leaving Suetonius an open field of ancestral traits to choose from to illustrate either positive or negative characteristics. Although the ancestry mentions positive features, its depictions are predominantly negative.⁶¹⁵ The impression is that his character will be boiled down to all but the negative. Garrett makes a persuasive argument that Nero is in fact reviving his ancestral vices rather than degenerating from their virtues and that this is Suetonius focusing on the negative to shape this Caesar.⁶¹⁶ By de-emphasizing virtues and exploring vice, it reduces the chance of complexity in Nero's case to firmly establish him in tyrannical terms.

The ancestral depictions are stern, heartless, resolute, and easily prone to anger. A suicide attempt even signposts Nero's own suicide towards the end of the *Life*.⁶¹⁷ It does not decline at a consistent rate. Despite the occasionally positive character element the overall impression favours the negative. It is clear that 'Suetonius is shaping his material here. Virtues were no doubt available to him, but they serve no purpose.'⁶¹⁸ Even the best example, Gnaeus the consul of 32 BC, does not escape untarnished. Any praise is anodyne, and the final line establishes him as ultimately frivolous. They are figures demonstrating one-dimensional characterization.

⁶¹⁴ *Ner.* 1.2.10-3.2.9, trans. Rolfe.

⁶¹⁵ As Bradley states the 'overall portrait of Nero is condemnatory; hence the origins of the condemnation must be sought.' (Bradley 1978: 23 ad 1-5).

⁶¹⁶ Garrett 2013: 74-95.

⁶¹⁷ *Ner.* 2.3.4-8 Cf. *Ner.* 49.1.1-4.9.

⁶¹⁸ Garrett 2013: 87.

One ancestral character sketch in the *Nero*, however, gives a hint of complexity. Basic positive traits are established through notoriety, skill, and military success. Negative traits are dissonant through examples of arrogance, extravagance, and cruelty.

Ex hoc Domitius nascitur, quem emptorem familiae pecuniaeque in testamento Augusti fuisse mox uulgo notatum est, non minus aurigandi arte in adulescentia clarus quam deinde ornamentis triumphalibus ex Germanico bello. uerum arrogans, profusus, immitis censorem L. Plancum uia sibi decedere aedilis coegit; praeturae consulatusque honore equites R. matronasque ad agendum mimum produxit in scaenam. uenationes et in circo et in omnibus urbis regionibus dedit, munus etiam gladiatorium, sed tanta saeuitia, ut necesse fuerit Augusto clam frustra monitum edicto coercere.

He was the father of the Domitius [Lucius Domitius Ahenobarbus, cos. 16 BC] who was later well known from being named in Augustus' will as the purchaser of his goods and chattels, a man no less famous in his youth for his skill in driving than he was later for winning the insignia of a triumph in the war in Germany. But he was haughty, extravagant, and cruel, and when he was only an aedile, forced the censor Lucius Plancus to make way for him on the street. While holding the offices of praetor and consul, he brought Roman knights and matrons on the stage to act a farce. He gave beast-baitings both in the Circus and in all the regions of the city; also a gladiatorial show, but with such inhuman cruelty that Augustus, after his private warning was disregarded, was forced to restrain him by an edict.⁶¹⁹

Despite positive elements, the passage is given over to a negative depiction underlined with 'arrogans', 'profusus', and 'immitis'. His savageness ('saeuitia') also is a fitting quality to highlight in ancestry given Nero's general presentation. Any positive attributes are almost completely overridden by reducing *equites* and matrons to a farce and indulging in animal and gladiatorial cruelty. Domitius is initially held in some regard due to his connection with Augustus, his skills, and his achievements. However, it falls to Augustus to ultimately reprimand him. The passage's framing thus creates an impression of corrosion. Like Catiline, the portrait here is another example of the dualistic figure of great potential who descends into tyranny. It recalls the baselines of Tiberius: and the complexity Suetonius gives Tiberius emerges even more clearly if compared to this figure. Garrett does concede 'that whatever little virtue Suetonius saw in Nero's ancestors

⁶¹⁹ *Ner.* 4.1.1-10, trans. Rolfe.

does not appear in Suetonius' Nero, and he was indeed unlike his family's better qualities.'⁶²⁰ Nero is certainly a long way from positive ancestral features before we meet him.

Whereas the previous ancestors have at least some positive achievements, Nero's father is irredeemable. Thus, the following passage acts as a literary means of emphasizing certain aspects of Nero's characterization in the biography proper.

ex Antonia maiore patrem Neronis procreavit omni parte uitae detestabilem, siquidem comes ad Orientem C. Caesaris iuuenis, occiso liberto suo, quod potare quantum iubebatur recusarat, dimissus e cohorte amicorum nihilo modestius uixit; sed et in uiae Appiae uico repente puerum citatis iumentis haud ignarus obtruiit et Romae medio foro cuidam equiti R. liberius iurganti oculum eruit; perfidiae uero tantae, ut non modo argentarios pretiis rerum coemptarum, sed et in praetura mercede palmarum aurigarios fraudauerit, notatus ob haec et sororis ioco < > querentibus dominis factionum repraesentanda praemia in posterum sanxit. maiestatis quoque et adulteriorum incestique cum sorore Lepida sub excessu Tiberi reus, mutatione temporum euasit decessitque Pyrgis morbo aquae intercutis, sublato filio Nerone ex Agrippina Germanico genita.

He had by the elder Antonia a son Domitius who became the father of Nero, a man hateful in every walk of life; for when he had gone to the East on the staff of the young Gaius Caesar, he slew one of his own freedmen for refusing to drink as much as he ordered, and when he was in consequence dismissed from the number of Gaius' friends, he lived not a whit less lawlessly. On the contrary, in a village on the Appian Way, suddenly whipping up his team, he purposely ran over and killed a boy; and right in the Roman Forum he gouged out the eye of a Roman knight for being too outspoken in chiding him. He was moreover so dishonest that he not only cheated some bankers of the prices of wares which he had bought, but in his praetorship he even defrauded the victors in the chariot races of the amount of their prizes. When for this reason he was held up to scorn by the jests of his own sister, and the managers of the troupes made complaint, he issued an edict that the prizes should thereafter be paid on the spot. Just before the death of Tiberius he was also charged with treason, as well as with acts of adultery and incest with his sister Lepida, but escaped owing to the change of rulers and died of dropsy at Pyrgi, after acknowledging Nero son of Agrippina, the daughter of Germanicus.⁶²¹

Domitius' character is not mixed, but is shown in strictly negative, one-dimensional terms. His pen portrait is a litany of vice. He has no regard for status or even human life; killing his freedman, running over a child, and assaulting an *eques*. Not only is he a greedy

⁶²⁰ Garrett 2013: 93.

⁶²¹ *Ner.* 5.1.1-2.9, trans. Rolfe. Suetonius confuses Gaius with Germanicus (Bradley 1978: 43 ad. 5.1).

cheat, but distinctly petty given that he begrudgingly reconsiders his theft when pressured by his sister. No Roman portrait of a villain is complete without charges of adultery and incest. His odious characterization wafts through all areas of life; public and private.

Hägg notes a ‘crescendo toward the most outrageous’ in relation to Nero’s character or in the very least its public expression.⁶²² He quotes the following passage as exemplifying this, ‘*paulatim uero inualescentibus uitii iocularia et latebras omisit nullaue dissimulandi cura ad maiora palam erupit.*’⁶²³ This crescendo relates back to ancestry in the *Life* and aligns with the characterizing statement about degeneration. The ancestors from *Nero* 2-4 incrementally establish character descriptions culminating with the account of Nero’s father, Domitius, and an unambiguous set up for Nero himself: ‘*ex Antonia maiore patrem Neronis procreauit omni parte uitae detestabilem*’.⁶²⁴ Garrett also notes that ‘Suetonius carefully selects from the historical Domitii to create the impression of an unbroken line of vice, playing down the virtues in Nero’s ancestors and emphasising their vices for literary effect.’⁶²⁵ Thus, ancestry can act as an implicit programmatic statement which conditions the reader’s interpretation of a Caesar’s characterization.

⁶²² Hägg 2012: 223.

⁶²³ *Ner.* 27.1.1-3.

⁶²⁴ *Ner.* 5.1-2.

⁶²⁵ Garrett 2013: 94.

6.2.3 Fathers and Sons

Ancestral accounts in Suetonius' *Caligula* and *Claudius* offer a variation in approach. Instead of the broader genealogical description seen in the *Tiberius* and the *Nero*, the focus is narrowed to the subjects' fathers.⁶²⁶ The pen portraits of Germanicus and Drusus are sharply contrasted with their respective sons. Their sole purpose is to strengthen the baseline characterization of Suetonius' *Caligula* and *Claudius*. Never has an apple fallen farther from the family tree than *Caligula* from Germanicus or Suetonius would have us think. It is clear that 'the literary technique in the *Caligula* is to bring out the *monstrum* in *Caligula* by contrast with a virtuous foil, the heroic Germanicus.'⁶²⁷ Germanicus is portrayed in almost panegyric tones. This is stated explicitly in that his qualities of both body and mind were unequalled; '*omnes Germanico corporis animique uirtutes, et quantas nemini cuiquam, contigisse satis constat*'.⁶²⁸ Everything about Germanicus is upright and would suggest the ideal exemplar.

formam et fortitudinem egregiam, ingenium in utroque eloquentiae doctrinaeque genere praecellens, beniuolentiam singularem conciliandaeque hominum gratiae ac promerendi amoris mirum et efficax studium. formae minus congruebat gracilitas crurum, sed ea quoque paulatim repleta assidua equi uectatione post cibum.

a handsome appearance, unequalled valour, surpassing ability in the oratory and learning of Greece and Rome, unexampled kindness, and a remarkable desire and capacity for winning men's regard and inspiring their affection. His legs were too slender for the rest of his figure, but he gradually brought them to proper proportions by constant horseback riding after meals.⁶²⁹

In terms of physical appearance and qualities Germanicus is near perfect. The one minor imperfection, slenderness of legs, he manages to correct. This issue with his legs would indicate a bad physiognomic interpretation but in correcting it attains 'perfection in his

⁶²⁶ Cf. Steidle, who notes that a Caesar's family and father can be used for characterization (Steidle 1963: 111).

⁶²⁷ Garrett 2013: 102. *Caligula* is explicitly the opposite of Germanicus in terms of looks, temperament, and even the way they die (Garrett 2013: 103-104).

⁶²⁸ *Calig.* 3.1.1-2.

⁶²⁹ *Calig.* 3.1.2-8, trans. Rolfe.

outer as well as his inner nature'.⁶³⁰ Even this reflects unfavourably on Caligula who likewise has skinny legs and makes no such efforts of improvement.⁶³¹

A positive characterization such as this sets up the expectation for Caligula to follow in his father's footsteps and the initial hope of the public shows as much purely based on his father's memory.

Sic imperium adeptus, p(opulum) R(omanum), uel dicam hominum genus, uoti compotem fecit, exoptatissimus princeps maximae parti prouincialium ac militum, quod infantem plerique cognouerant, sed et uniuersae plebi urbanae ob memoriam Germanici patris miserationemque prope afflictae domus. itaque ut a Miseno mouit quamuis lugentis habitu et funus Tiberi prosequens, tamen inter altaria et uictimas ardentisque taedas densissimo et laetissimo obuiorum agmine incessit, super fausta nomina 'sidus' et 'pullum' et 'pupum' et 'alumni' appellantium.

By thus gaining the throne he fulfilled the highest hopes of the Roman people, or I may say of all mankind, since he was the prince most earnestly desired by the great part of the provincials and soldiers, many of whom had known him in his infancy, as well as by the whole body of the city populace, because of the memory of his father Germanicus and pity for a family that was all but extinct. Accordingly, when he set out from Misenum, though he was in mourning garb and escorting the body of Tiberius, yet his progress was marked by altars, victims, and blazing torches, and he was met by a dense and joyful throng, who called him besides other propitious names their "star," their "chick," their "babe," and their "nursling."⁶³²

The early positive perceptions of Caligula in the narrative merely reinforce, rather than subvert, his ultimately negative portrayal. The initial high regard he is held in is due to those knowing him as a child and projecting his father's character onto him with all of this being epitomized by terms of endearment. This is abruptly cut off when the narrative shifts from Caligula as emperor to Caligula as monster.⁶³³ The phrase 'disappointed expectation' has been used to denote the shift in the *Lives* whereby the positive aspects of an emperor are placed before the negative aspects.⁶³⁴ Langlands notes, in relation to

⁶³⁰ Tatum 2014: 171. Germanicus follows Augustus, who treated his weak hip, thigh, and leg (*Aug.* 80).

⁶³¹ (*Calig.* 50); thus 'Caligula's inaction converts this physical fault into a moral one.' (Garrett 2013: 139. Cf. 102). See also Lindsay 1993: 153-154 ad 50.1.

⁶³² *Calig.* 13.1.1-10, trans. Rolfe.

⁶³³ '*Hactenus quasi de principe, reliqua ut de monstro narranda sunt.*' (*Calig.* 22.1.1-2).

⁶³⁴ Plass 1988: 19, as cited in Langlands 2014: 123.

the *Augustus*, that ‘Such a structure enhances the pleasure of reading with foreknowledge and the frisson of hindsight’.⁶³⁵ This is also the case between Germanicus and Caligula. There is a ‘disappointed expectation’ between father and son in relation to not only the public’s expectations but the expectations of Caligula’s character.

A sharp contrast in qualities between Germanicus and Caligula is presented through their interactions with Tiberius. Germanicus’ filial piety is his distinctive quality. After his soldiers refused to accept Tiberius as emperor after Augustus died, Germanicus turned down their offer to hand him the state and held them to their allegiance.

missusque ad exercitum in Germaniam, excessu Augusti nuntiato, legiones uniuersas imperatorem Tiberium pertinacissime recusantis et sibi summam rei p. deferentis incertum pietate an constantia maiore compefcuit atque hoste mox deuicto triumphauit.

He was sent to the army in Germany, where it is hard to say whether his filial piety or his courage was more conspicuous; for when the death of Augustus was announced, although all the legions obstinately refused to accept Tiberius as emperor, and offered him the rule of the state, he held them to their allegiance. And later he won a victory over the enemy and celebrated a triumph.⁶³⁶

Germanicus’ loyalty provides a somewhat ironic contrast with his son when the reader is later presented with the suggestion that Caligula was directly responsible for the death of Tiberius.⁶³⁷ Caligula does not have the filial piety of Germanicus in general, but he also contradicts his actions towards Tiberius in particular. In effect he lets down his father by contradicting his actions as well as by failing to possess his virtues.

Even Germanicus’ lenient treatment of a man who would bring about his downfall, Piso, is telling of his character. Germanicus was tolerant towards his detractors, regardless of who they were or their motivations. It took a lot for him to break with Piso in a formal, old-fashioned way, and demand to be avenged if anything happened to him; Piso undermined him, mistreated dependents, and subjected Germanicus to potions and

⁶³⁵ Langlands 2014: 123.

⁶³⁶ *Calig.* 1.1.4-8, trans. Rolfe.

⁶³⁷ *Calig.* 12.

spells.⁶³⁸ This depiction sets up an ironic contrast with Caligula's abuse of people in general, let alone his enemies. He is not lenient but distinctly cruel to his family, those close to him, and the senate.⁶³⁹ To further strengthen the virtuous nature of Germanicus and the respect in which the Roman people held him, towards the end of the mini-biography the public reaction and mourning to his death are provided,⁶⁴⁰ which allow the author a means of indirect characterization. The significance of other people's reaction to the death of a figure is a moment that can be exploited by the author for characterizing purposes as the close of this chapter will explore.

The beginning of Suetonius' *Claudius* contains a brief character sketch of the future emperor's father, Drusus. Although a clear contrast in characterization between father and son is provided for the reader, the distinction between the two is subtler than in the case of Germanicus and Caligula.

fuisse autem creditur non minus gloriosi quam ciuilibus animi; nam ex hoste super uictorias opima quoque spolia captasse summoque saepius discrimine duces Germanorum tota acie insectatus; nec dissimulasse umquam pristinum se rei publicae statum, quandoque posset, restitutum. unde existimo nonnullos tradere ausos, suspectum eum Augusto reuocatumque ex prouincia et quia cunctaretur, interceptum ueneno. quod equidem magis ne praetermitterem rettuli, quam quia uerum aut ueri simile putem, cum Augustus tanto opere et uiuum dilexerit, ut coheredem semper filiis instituerit, sicut quondam in senatu professus est, et defunctum ita pro contione laudauerit, ut deos precatus sit, similes ei Caesares suos facerent sibi tam honestum quandoque exitum darent quam illi dedissent. nec contentus elogium tumulo eius uersibus a se compositis insculpsisse, etiam uitae memoriam prosa oratione composuit.

It is the general belief that he was as eager for glory as he was democratic by nature; for in addition to victories over the enemy he greatly desired to win the "noble trophies," often pursuing the leaders of the Germans all over the field at great personal risk; and he made no secret of his intention of restoring the old-time form of government, whenever he should have the power. It is because of this, I think, that some have made bold to write that he was an object of suspicion to Augustus; that the emperor recalled him from his province, and when he did

⁶³⁸ *'obtrektoribus etiam, qualescumque et quantacumque de causa nactus esset, lenis adeo et innoxius, ut Pisoni decreta sua rescindenti, clientelas diu[er]santi non prius suscipere in animum induxerit, quam ueneficiis quoque et deuotionibus impugnari se comperisset; ac ne tunc quidem ultra progressus, quam ut amicitiam ei more maiorum renuntiaret mandaretque domesticis ultionem, si quid sibi accideret.'* (*Calig.* 3.3.1-8).

⁶³⁹ *Calig.* 26.1-3.

⁶⁴⁰ *Calig.* 5-6.

not obey at once, took him off by poison. This I have mentioned, rather not to pass it by, than that I think it true or even probable; for as a matter of fact Augustus loved him so dearly while he lived that he always named him joint-heir along with his sons, as he once declared in the senate; and when he was dead, he eulogized him warmly before the people, praying the gods to make his Caesars like Drusus, and to grant him, when his time came, as glorious a death as they had given that hero. And not content with carving a laudatory inscription on his tomb in verses of his own composition, Augustus also wrote a memoir of his life in prose.⁶⁴¹

Claudius certainly ‘makes for a weaker contrast than was made in the *Caligula*.’⁶⁴² A key aspect to the depiction of Drusus is military competence and certainly a desire for glory. This military inclination offers an immediate dissimilarity between the two. Claudius displays marked intellectual inclinations, and little is made of the only military account of note, which was the invasion of Britain.⁶⁴³ Garrett makes the fair observation that although ‘the expedition to Britain was historically important, the *modicus* suggests Suetonius is unimpressed. Certainly, Claudius’ efforts in Britain, achieved through his generals, are nothing like Drusus’ personal triumphs in Germany.’⁶⁴⁴ The above passage shows how the author manages to acknowledge a negative characterization of Augustus and yet turn it into a positive element. This marks a positive character construction for Drusus, and it signposts Augustus’ critique but ultimately favourable view of Claudius.⁶⁴⁵

In the case of Drusus and Claudius, the contrast between father and son is particularly revealing. Drusus’ inclination to restore the republic is drawn into sharp relief given that Claudius unwittingly prevents that from happening due his accession to emperor. Although not a contrast, the suspicions about Drusus’ death perhaps foreshadow the suspicions that Claudius was poisoned.⁶⁴⁶ Augustus allegedly has concerns about Drusus and, as chapter two has already shown, he had legitimate concerns about Claudius.

⁶⁴¹ *Claud.* 1.4.1-5.10, trans. Rolfe.

⁶⁴² Garrett 2013: 105.

⁶⁴³ On intellectual matters (*Claud.* 3.1; 41-42); on the military campaign (*Claud.* 17).

⁶⁴⁴ Garrett 2013: 105.

⁶⁴⁵ *Claud.* 4.

⁶⁴⁶ *Claud.* 44.

However, the causes of these concerns are the opposite of one another. Also, it is bitterly ironic that Augustus hoped that the gods would make (*facerent*) future Caesars like Drusus, only to end up with someone as poorly made as Claudius.

6.2.4 Caesar by Association

With the end of the Julio-Claudian line, Suetonius makes use of two triptychs of the emperors that follow in their wake. In the scramble for power of AD 68, Galba, Otho, and Vitellius make up a distinct trio; and they are followed by the attempt to establish a new imperial dynasty that was the Flavians.⁶⁴⁷ The *Galba* makes clear from the outset that there is a break from the previous dynasty. The opening line of the *Galba*, '*Progenies Caesarum in Nerone defecit*',⁶⁴⁸ sets apart the previous line of emperors from those to come, and Galba himself is explicitly set apart from the previous Caesars: '*Neroni Galba successit nullo gradu contingens Caesarum domum*'.⁶⁴⁹ Galba, Otho, and Vitellius have their own distinct family backgrounds, and Vespasian's ancestral account serve all the Flavian *Lives*.⁶⁵⁰ However, there is a marked trend to associate emperors, from both trios,

⁶⁴⁷ Power views *Galb.* 1 as a unifying prologue for the triptych of *Galba*, *Otho*, and *Vitellius* (Power 2009: 216-220), contra Syme, who argues that passage was moved from the end of the *Nero* (Syme 1958: 501; 779-780; Syme 1980: 117-118; Syme 1981: 117). Similarly, in acknowledging the deaths of the three emperors before highlighting the Flavian family, *Vesp.* 1 can be considered a 'bridge passage' between the end of the *Vitellius* and the start of the *Vespasian* (Bradley 1973: 257). Suetonius' *Julius* only begins with the loss of his father at age fifteen (*Jul.* 1). On reconstructing the lost beginning of the *Julius* see Garrett 2015: 110-134. The preface itself was seemingly lost but we know from the Byzantine writer Iohannes Lydus that Suetonius' work was dedicated to C. Septicius Clarus (*Lydus. Mag.* 2.6). The scholarly consensus is best summed up in that *Julius-Nero* make up the first six individual books, *Galba-Vitellius* forms book 7, and the Flavian *Lives* are book 8 (Ash 2016: 203 fn. 9).

⁶⁴⁸ *Galb.* 1.1.1.

⁶⁴⁹ *Galb.* 2.1.1-2.

⁶⁵⁰ All their ancestries typically emphasize, if not nobility at least, respectability: *Galb.* 2-3; *Oth.* 1; *Vit.* 1-3; *Vesp.* 1. Naturally, Vespasian's ancestry covers his two sons; the *Titus* begins with a characterizing statement and his birth (*Tit.* 1) and the *Domitian* opens on his birth (*Dom.* 1). On the use of the four respective ancestries as status markers, see Garrett 2013: 54-56; 68-71; 71-73; 57-63. On the use of these lineages for characterization see Garrett 2013: 74-114.

with Julio-Claudian figures. Such a technique provides a sense of narrative cohesiveness and can also be used for supplemental characterization.

A clear separation from the Julio-Claudians is to be expected; however, the narrative reveals connections which tie a new emperor to his predecessors. The use of fantastic family trees was a common way for noble families ‘to enhance their standing (*auctoritas*)’ much in the same way the *gens Julia* used Venus.⁶⁵¹ Once he became emperor, Galba displayed a family tree which traced his lineage back to deities and mythological figures such as Jupiter on his father’s side and Pasiphae on his mother’s side, which of course should call to mind for the reader Julius’ claim of descent from Venus.⁶⁵² Associating Galba with the Julio-Claudian line thus bolsters his standing.

The *Titus* does attempt to create a narrative link to Julio-Claudians, which foreshadows his reign and embellishes his characterization. He is tied to Claudius by growing up in court with Britannicus. This legitimizes his reign as emperor and his connection to the previous dynasty is intensified by the intimacy of their bond.

erant autem adeo familiares, ut de potione, qua Britannicus hausta periit, Titus quoque iuxta cubans gustasse credatur grauique morbo adflictatus diu. quorum omnium mox memor statuam ei auream in Palatio posuit et alteram ex ebore equestrem, quae circensi pompa hodieque praefertur, dedicauit prosecutusque est.

The boys were so intimate too, that it is believed that when Britannicus drained the fatal draught, Titus, who was reclining at his side, also tasted of the potion and for a long time suffered from an obstinate disorder. Titus did not forget all this, but later set up a golden statue of his friend in the Palace, and dedicated another equestrian statue of ivory, which is to this day carried in the procession in the Circus, and he attended it on its first appearance.⁶⁵³

As mentioned in chapter one, this link and by proxy Titus himself is legitimized by the anecdote of a physiognomist, stating that, although Britannicus would not rule, Titus

⁶⁵¹ Shotter 1993: 101 ad 2.

⁶⁵² ‘*imperator uero etiam stemma in atrio proposuerit, quo paternam originem ad Iouem, maternam ad Pasiphaam Minonis uxorem referret.*’ (*Galb.* 2.1.4-7) Cf. ‘*a Venere Iulii, cuius gentis familia est nostra.*’ (*Jul.* 6.1.8-9). For divine lineage see Butler and Cary 1982: 50 ad 6.1.

⁶⁵³ *Tit.* 2.1.7-12, trans. Rolfe.

would.⁶⁵⁴ Suetonius places these two together to provide Titus with a positive association.⁶⁵⁵ Titus' positive characterization is embellished by his friendship with Britannicus and his willingness to die with his friend. In a literary way, this devotion also suggests that he became the emperor that Britannicus never had the chance to be.

A more direct way of achieving such connections is in a portentous anecdote in which Augustus predicts to Galba, then a child, his rise to power.

constat Augustum puero adhuc, salutanti se inter aequales, apprehensa buccula dixisse: καὶ σὺ τέκνον τῆς ἀρχῆς ἡμῶν παρατρώξῃ. sed et Tiberius, cum comperisset imperaturum eum uerum in senecta: 'uiuat sane,' ait, 'quando id ad nos nihil pertinet.'

It is well known that when he was still a boy and called to pay his respects to Augustus with others of his age, the emperor pinched his cheek and said in Greek: “Thou too, child, wilt have a nibble at this power of mine.” Tiberius too, when he heard that Galba was destined to be emperor, but in his old age, said: “Well, let him live then, since that does not concern me.”⁶⁵⁶

Although Galba cannot be linked biologically to the previous line, the narrative explains his rise to emperor through Augustus' prediction and Tiberius not viewing him as a threat thus allowing him to fulfil his destiny. This passage functions more like an omen rather than a characterizing feature.⁶⁵⁷ However, Augustus is seen as personable and pleasant and Tiberius as somewhat of a curmudgeon, thus reaffirming their baselines rather than placing strict emphasis on Galba. Such an anecdote grants Galba a glamour he otherwise would have lacked. On a literary level, it contextualizes him politically and legitimizes him as emperor.

Another explicit example shows Suetonius creating ties for Otho to his predecessors by discussing rumours of his more immediate lineage:

⁶⁵⁴ *Tit.* 2.1.1-7, trans. Rolfe.

⁶⁵⁵ Titus' presence is not mentioned at Britannicus' death in the Nero (*Ner.* 33.2-3). His absence from other sources causes Jones and Milns to speculate that perhaps 'it was an invention of the Flavian historians who whenever possible linked their heroes with the 'good' Julio-Claudians' (Jones and Milns 2002: 93 ad 2).

⁶⁵⁶ *Galb.* 4.1.6-2.1, trans. Rolfe. Galba also enjoyed the favour of Livia. He was left an inheritance in her will, only for Tiberius to ensure Galba did not receive it by exploiting a loophole (*Galb.* 5.2.1-6).

⁶⁵⁷ Garrett 2013: 159.

Pater L. Otho, materno genere praeclaro multarumque et magnarum propinquitatum, tam carus tamque non absimilis facie Tiberio principi fuit, ut plerique procreatum ex eo crederent.

His father Lucius Otho was of a distinguished family on his mother's side, with many powerful connections, and was so beloved by Tiberius and so like him in appearance, that he was believed by many to be the emperor's son.⁶⁵⁸

The belief, that Otho was possibly the grandson of Tiberius, ties him for to the previous imperial regime for the reader. Also, a relatively innocuous link Otho's grandfather has to Livia might allow for speculation about an even closer link to the imperial family in the next generation.⁶⁵⁹ The specific use of Tiberius, and his ill repute, also functions as a set up for any vices or negative characterization that will also appear in Otho's *Life*.

Furthermore, Otho had an intimate and sexual relationship with Nero, contextualizing him too in imperial terms. Otho's interactions with Nero provide the means for narrative cohesiveness while also offering a direct character statement about Otho himself. Not only is their similarity of character noted but also the belief that they had sexual encounters, '*per hanc insinuatus Neroni facile summum inter amicos locum tenuit congruentia morum, ut uero quidam tradunt, et consuetudine mutui stupri.*'⁶⁶⁰ The association with Nero immediately gives a negative impression of Otho's character and prepares us for any unsavoury aspects of his nature. However, in a strange way this legitimates Otho as per the discussion of Chong-Gossard's comments in the previous chapter: having sex with an emperor puts you in the imperial frame.⁶⁶¹

A similar issue is also raised in the *Life* of Vitellius. He is said to have been sexually exploited by Tiberius, while Caligula, Claudius, and Nero all admired him for specific vices normally associated with them.

⁶⁵⁸ *Oth.* 1.2.1-4, trans. Rolfe.

⁶⁵⁹ Marcus Salvius Otho is said to have been reared in Livia's house, and became a senator through her influence (*Oth.* 1.1).

⁶⁶⁰ *Oth.* 2.2.3-6. For further interactions with Nero see also *Oth.* 3.

⁶⁶¹ Chong-Gossard 2010: 303.

pueritiam primamque adulescentiam Capreis egit inter Tiberiana scorta, et ipse perpetuo spint[he]riae cognomine notatus existimatusque corporis gratia initium et causa incrementorum patri fuisse;

sequenti quoque aetate omnibus probris contaminatus, praecipuum in aula locum tenuit, Gaio per aurigandi, Claudio per aleae studium familiaris, sed aliquanto Neroni acceptior, cum propter eadem haec, tum peculiari merito, quod praesidens certamini Neroneo cupientem inter citharoedos contendere nec quamuis flagitantibus cunctis promittere audentem ideoque egressum theatro reuocauerat, quasi perseuerantis populi legatione suscepta, exorandumque praebuerat. Trium itaque principum indulgentia non solum honoribus uerum et sacerdotiis amplissimis auctus...

He spent his boyhood and early youth at Capreae among Tiberius' lewd entourage, being branded for all time with the nickname Spintria and suspected of having been the cause of his father's first advancement at the expense of his own chastity.

Stained by every sort of baseness as he advanced in years, he held a prominent place at court, winning the intimacy of Gaius by his devotion to driving and of Claudius by his passion for dice. But he was still dearer to Nero, not only because of these same qualities, but because of a special service besides; for when he was presiding at the contests of the Neronia and Nero wished to compete among the lyre-players, but did not venture to do so although there was a general demand for him and accordingly left the theatre, Vitellius called him back, alleging that he came as an envoy from the insistent people, and thus gave Nero a chance to yield to their entreaties.

Having in this way through the favour of three emperors been honoured not only with political positions but with distinguished priesthoods as well...⁶⁶²

Vitellius' characterization is rounded out with the claim that he was one of Tiberius' *spintriae* and that his father received advancement as a result, which fits in with the literary motif of sexual submission, as featured earlier in the *Julius* and the *Augustus*.⁶⁶³ Sex also helps to contextualize and legitimize Vitellius through this account. Chong-Gossard comments that 'strategic sexuality is related to political position; it not only helps advance the career of a family member (in Vitellius' case) but ultimately prepares all these men for their brief reign as emperors.'⁶⁶⁴ Keeping his interactions with Gaius and Claudius on their interests and vices ties together the narrative of imperial lineage and characterizes Vitellius through their respective vices.⁶⁶⁵ Vitellius' connection with Nero

⁶⁶² *Vit.* 3.2.8-5.1.2, trans. Rolfe.

⁶⁶³ *Jul.* 49; *Aug.* 68.

⁶⁶⁴ Chong-Gossard 2010: 303.

⁶⁶⁵ Cf. *Calig.* 54-55; *Claud.* 33.2; *Ner.* 22.1; 24.2; 30.3; 5.

places stronger emphasis on the negative portrait by claiming they had the same qualities. The closing point is telling in that Vitellius advanced through the favour of these three emperors. The focus is less on his abilities and family background and instead stresses the links to the Julio-Claudian line.

His ties with the previous regimes go some way in constructing an imperial lineage parallel to the biological ancestry. However, these connections are far from ideal. Vitellius was one of Tiberius' *spintriae*. This is an embarrassing way to tie someone to a previous emperor. This provides negative characterization given that 'the sexual conduct of Otho and Vitellius is condemned through respective associations with Nero and Tiberius'⁶⁶⁶ Vitellius was also a gambling companion of Claudius, and an enabler of Nero's musical ambitions. None of this is very flattering, and it links him to the Julio-Claudians in arguably the least elevating ways imaginable. Vitellius does not get the same lengthy and detailed characterization that the Julio-Claudian's received; thus, these links at least contextualizes his character by association.

Connections can be as subtle as the claims of divine lineage on Galba's part echoing Julius or as direct as Titus' devotion to Britannicus underlining his idealized portrait and contextualizing him as a worthy successor. Galba, Otho, and Vitellius have separate backgrounds but their connections to Julio-Claudian figures are stressed to legitimize their power. This yields a curious result across the three *Lives*. There is a sense of ever-declining relations with Tiberius: Galba is seen as a possible rival to him, Otho's father resembles Tiberius and is rumoured to be his son, and Vitellius is said to have been Tiberius' catamite. Furthermore, Vitellius is characterized by traits specifically associated with and admired by Caligula, Claudius, and Nero.

⁶⁶⁶ Bradley 1985a: 82.

6.3 Death

6.3.1 Augustus and Vespasian

Death is a key moment for creating and understanding a character. Death narratives were an integral part of biography and even by Suetonius' day a sub-genre of its own existed retelling the deaths of famous men.⁶⁶⁷ The death scenes of Suetonius' Caesars can even be read for their interplay with fictional elements but also techniques that convey verisimilitude.⁶⁶⁸ They make for excellent characterizing set-pieces. Lounsbury notes that 'the importance of man's demeanour in his last moments as a test of his character.'⁶⁶⁹ Death is also an author's opportunity to close out a character. Closure is also an integral aspect of any literary text, and Fowler's article encouraged further study of the topic within Classics; of the five different senses of closure he notes that one is the 'degree to which the questions posed in the work are answered, tensions released, conflicts resolved'.⁶⁷⁰ For our purposes, this prompts the question of how character, or more specifically the process of characterization, achieves a sense of closure, especially in biography.

Suetonius' collection also uses deathbed scenes so that the main subject can directly reveal some quality of their own nature: it is the last chance for them to characterize themselves before that responsibility falls to others. The most well-defined deathbed scene is presented in the *Augustus*.

⁶⁶⁷ On *Exitus* literature, in relation to Suetonius, see Wallace-Hadrill 1995: 11; Lounsbury 1987: 63-67; Lewis 1991: 3657-3661 and more generally Steidle 1963: 91; Edwards 2007: 131-136; 248-250.

⁶⁶⁸ Ash takes the assassinations of Julius, Caligula, and Domitian to highlight the role of fictive elements and how techniques such as 'exact numbers, times and dates; the conspicuous naming of minor characters; the selective but authoritative intervention in the narrative by the author himself; and the deployment of picturesque details – all of which together are designed to enhance verisimilitude' (Ash 2016: 209).

⁶⁶⁹ Lounsbury 1987: 64.

⁶⁷⁰ Fowler 1989: 78. Fowler sketches out the concept of closure across a variety of texts and genres within Classics to encourage further study (pp. 75-122).

Supremo die identidem exquirens, an iam de se tumultus foris esset, petito speculo capillum sibi comi ac malas labantes corrigi praecepit et admissos amicos percontatus, ecquid iis uideretur minimum uitae commode transegisse, adiecit et clausulam:

ἐπεὶ δὲ πάνυ καλῶς πέπαισται, δότε κρότον

καὶ πάντες ἡμῶς μετὰ χαρᾶς προπέμψατε.

omnibus deinde dimissis, dum aduenientes ab urbe de Drusi filia aegra interrogat, repente in osculis Liuiiae et in hac uoce defecit: 'Liuiia, nostri coniugii memor uiue, ac uale!' sortitus exitum facilem et qualem semper optauerat.

On the last day of his life he asked every now and then whether there was any disturbance without on his account; then calling for a mirror, he had his hair combed and his falling jaws set straight. After that, calling in his friends and asking whether it seemed to them that he had played the comedy of life fitly, he added the tag:

“Since well I’ve played my part, all clap your hands

And from the stage dismiss me with applause.”

Then he sent them all off, and while he was asking some newcomers from the city about the daughter of Drusus, who was ill, he suddenly passed away as he was kissing Livia, uttering these last words: “Live mindful of our wedlock, Livia, and farewell,” thus blessed with an easy death and such a one as he had always longed for.⁶⁷¹

The focus on his final words place the characterizing point of view mainly with Augustus and the passage as a whole stresses his interest in his public image, the importance he attached to his marriage to Livia (especially the institution of marriage), and his concern with his descendants: all features which are integral to his baseline characterization. It has elements of theatricality and performance in his reference to playing his part in life, hinting at duplicity. His goodness may accordingly be interpreted as an act: indeed, Toher comments that for ‘Suetonius, a deathbed confession suffices: it had all been an act’.⁶⁷² However, Augustus’ baseline portrayal as a self-aware cultivator of his own image need not mean he was disingenuous. Indeed, the scene may be interpreted as a paradigmatic death befitting a good emperor, demonstrating a clear conscience along with concern for both empire and family – which is no doubt what Augustus intended.⁶⁷³ Ultimately,

⁶⁷¹ *Aug.* 99.1.1-11, trans. Rolfe.

⁶⁷² Toher 2015: 228. Toher goes into further detail on the death of Augustus elsewhere (Toher 2012: 37-44). Cf. Dio. 56.30.4.

⁶⁷³ On this interpretation see Wardle 2007: 443-463.

Augustus dies in character, specifically in line with his cultivated one-dimensional baseline.

Vespasian likewise carries his definitive trait of humour through to the point of his death. He too dies in character. He directly characterizes himself like Augustus and both are seemingly in control of their own images, dying on their own terms.

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 Caluinam e gente Augusti pertinere dicebat, alterum ad Parthorum regem qui capillatus esset; prima quoque morbi accessione: 'uae,' inquit, 'puto deus fio.'

He did not cease his jokes even when in apprehension of death and in extreme danger; for when among other portents the Mausoleum opened on a sudden and a comet appeared in the heavens, he declared that the former applied to Junia Calvina of the family of Augustus, and the latter to the king of the Parthians, who wore his hair long; and as death drew near, he said: "Woe's me. Methinks I'm turning into a god."⁶⁷⁴

The recognizable one-dimensional trait of Vespasian's humour is reaffirmed even on the brink of his death. Given that death is a source of fear, Vespasian's humour is incongruous with the moment.⁶⁷⁵ It is, though, emblematic of himself. The closing words, quoted directly, place the characterizing point of view with Vespasian. His self-awareness provides nuance to his final moments and his joke about turning into a god fits in with his baseline of being able to crack a joke about himself. So, the self-aware death scenes of Augustus and Vespasian follow the one-dimensional baselines of these Caesars in contrast to the two-dimensional death of Otho.

⁶⁷⁴ *Vesp.* 23.4.1-7, trans. Rolfe.

⁶⁷⁵ Jones and Milns 2002: 84 ad 22.

6.3.2 Otho

Another definition of closure, in a literary work, provided by Fowler is the ‘degree to which the work allows new critical readings.’⁶⁷⁶ Suetonius’ discussion of Otho’s suicide directly impacts his characterization by forcing the reader to reassess Otho’s character given the dissonance between the way he lived and the way he died. Although distinctly different, the *Nero* and *Otho* suicide passages are linked by the phrase ‘*inter moras*’.⁶⁷⁷ Whereas Nero’s demise is ultimately a negative and cowardly portrayal in terms of his characterization, Otho’s suicide is more positive and presents his character in a more courageous light. Although he delays his death for a day, Otho became resolved upon his death, ‘*atque ita paratus intentusque iam morti*’,⁶⁷⁸ and accepted his fate. He went about his business, went to sleep, and committed suicide in the morning.

et circa lucem demum expergefactus uno se traiecit ictu infra laeuam papillam irrupentibusque ad primum gemitum modo celans modo detegens plagam exanimatus est et celeriter, nam ita praeceperat, funeratus, tricensimo et octauo aetatis anno et nonagensimo et quinto imperii die.

Tanto Othonis animo nequaquam corpus aut habitus competit.

When he at last woke up at about daylight, he stabbed himself with a single stroke under the left breast; and now concealing the wound, and now showing it to those who rushed in at his first groan, he breathed his last and was hastily buried (for such were his orders) in the thirty-eighth year of his age and on the ninety-fifth day of his reign.

Neither Otho’s person nor his bearing suggested such great courage.⁶⁷⁹

Otho carries out his suicide entirely on his own and the taking of his life is interpreted as a courageous act out of keeping with his established character. This act of suicide helps give Otho’s character a second dimension. The contrast is not because one is negative, and one is positive, but because Nero (mostly) dies in character, and Otho (conspicuously)

⁶⁷⁶ Fowler 1989: 78.

⁶⁷⁷ Mooney 1979: 301 ad 11.1. Cf. *Oth.* 11.1.2; *Ner.* 49.2.1.

⁶⁷⁸ *Oth.* 11.1.1-2.

⁶⁷⁹ *Oth.* 11.2.4-12.1.2, trans. Rolfe.

does not; the contrast is especially pointed because Otho is mostly characterized in his *Life* as a Nero wannabe, only to depart definitively from his model in his final moments.

As chapter three has already demonstrated, a character's physical features, personal grooming or sense of dress can be indicative of character traits. Suetonius juxtaposes Otho's appearance and the manner of his death and creates dissonance and complexity. Appearance can imply character but can also mislead. It can be belied by actual behaviour. Suetonius thus discusses the extent to which Otho was opposed to civil strife with the emperor's suicide presented as a noble sacrifice.⁶⁸⁰ He further elaborates on this in context of Otho's bearing and life as follows:

fuisse enim et modicae staturae et male pedatus <s>campusque traditur, munditiarum uero paene muliebrum, uulso corpore, galericulo capiti propter raritatem capillorum adaptato et adnexo, ut nemo dinosceret; quin et faciem cotidie rasitare ac pane madido linere consuetum, idque instituisse a prima lanugine, ne barbatus umquam esset; sacra etiam Isidis saepe in lintea religiosaque ueste propalam celebrasse. per quae factum putem, ut mors eius minime congruens uitae maiore miraculo fuerit.

He is said to have been of moderate height, splay-footed and bandy-legged, but almost feminine in his care of his person. He had the hair of his body plucked out, and because of the thinness of his locks wore a wig so carefully fashioned and fitted to his head, that no one suspected it. Moreover, they say that he used to shave every day and smear his face with moist bread, beginning the practice with the appearance of the first down, so as never to have a beard; also that he used to celebrate the rites of Isis publicly in the linen garment prescribed by the cult. I am inclined to think that it was because of these habits that a death so little in harmony with his life excited the greater marvel.⁶⁸¹

Suetonius has already acknowledged that the link between the external and internal person is not always reliable (*'Tanto Othonis animo nequaquam corpus aut habitus competit'*). Here then a one-dimensional depiction focused on effeminacy is initially presented. The plucking of body hair and the lengths to which he goes to avoid having a

⁶⁸⁰ *Oth.* 10-11. On Otho's death, Edwards states: 'In a way, suicide takes civil war to its logical conclusion. But with the highly significant point of contrast that no-one is made guilty by this death. Rather one death saves many lives by bringing civil war to an instant conclusion (or at least this particular phase of the civil war).' (Edwards 2007: 39).

⁶⁸¹ *Oth.* 12.1.2-2.2, trans. Rolfe.

beard embellishes this effeminate portrait by resisting masculine attributes. Applying moist bread to his face is the kind of specific detail which we might normally associate with ‘realism’, but the passage’s intent here is firmly evaluative. Otho’s insecurity about his thinning hair and his vanity in wearing a wig add to this. The outrageous public celebration of the rites of Isis emphasizes, with a heavy hand, the degenerate and overtly negative connotations. But Suetonius closes by again admitting that the manner of his life is completely discordant with the courage he showed at the end. Indeed, the explicit comment in Suetonius’ own voice (*‘putem’*) suggests that the reader is supposed to see Otho’s death as a surprise. It is this dissonance between character traits which complicate him. Although the saying about judging a book by its cover comes to mind, it is perhaps more accurate to merely say that meaning is malleable in the hands of the author.

The first and second dimensions force a massive reconsideration of the figure making him a complex character. The opening lines of the next passage stresses this further:

multi praesentium militum cum plurimo fletu manus ac pedes iacentis exosculati, fortissimum uirum, unicum imperatorem praedicantes, ibidem statim nec procul a rogo uim suae uitae attulerunt; multi et absentium accepto nuntio prae dolore armis inter se ad internecionem concurrerunt. denique magna pars hominum incolumem grauissime detestata mortuum laudibus tulit, ut uulgo iactatum sit etiam, Galbam ab eo non tam dominandi quam rei p. ac libertatis restituendae causa interemptum.

Many of the soldiers who were present kissed his hands and feet as he lay dead, weeping bitterly and calling him the bravest of men and an incomparable emperor, and then at once slew themselves beside his bier. Many of those who were absent too, on receiving the news attacked and killed one another from sheer grief. In short the greater part of those who had hated him most bitterly while he lived lauded him to the skies when he was dead; and it was even commonly declared that he had put an end to Galba, not so much for the sake of ruling, as of restoring the republic and liberty.⁶⁸²

This is also an example of indirect characterization in the reactions to his death. The soldiers lamented and lauded him as a man and an emperor providing a positive, albeit

⁶⁸² *Oth.* 12.2.2-11, trans. Rolfe.

retroactive, character portrayal. Power notes a strong textual echo from the reaction to Otho's death in the reactions to Titus' death; arguing that while Titus deserved the praise, Otho does not, therefore ironically underlining his negative image.⁶⁸³ Instead of seeing Otho as definitively bad and the praise therefore as ironic, the invitation to reassess Otho's life in light of his death can be taken seriously. The praise here then can be viewed as reinforcing that reassessment. In a life like Otho's, which seems at first sight simplistic, complexity turns out to be provided at the very end with his death and the reactions to it. His death has such an impact that it reverses the popular opinion of him from his lifetime. The *Life* itself thus mimics the view of Otho in his time: all negative until suddenly at the end it turns to the positive.

Conversely, Tacitus, in the *Histories*, acknowledges that Otho gained a glorious reputation as a result of his death ('*quo egregiam Otho famam*') while stressing a negative characterization.⁶⁸⁴ Tacitus' initial presentation of Otho is of an energetic figure, mindful of his own precarious position and the need to act quickly, and ready to capitalize on any opportunity, especially the disadvantages of others such as Galba.⁶⁸⁵ He also explicitly states that 'Otho's mind was not effeminate like his body.'⁶⁸⁶ Tacitus also makes clear the apprehension of the Roman people toward Otho's character (along with Vitellius) with an emphasis on the traits *impudicitia*, *ignavia*, and *luxuria* and that people from all walks of life feared that they would ruin Rome.⁶⁸⁷ The historian then notes that Otho did not give in to his vices but rather deferred them: he deprived himself of and concealed individual vices just to create a better imperial image for himself, '*dilatae voluptates*,

⁶⁸³ Power 2014a: 62-64. He cites the similar expression of heaping praise on the dead, '*tantas mortuo gratias egit laudesque concessit, quantas ne uiuo quidem umquam atque praesenti.*' (Tit. 11.1.7-9).

⁶⁸⁴ Tac. *Hist.* 2.31.

⁶⁸⁵ '*occidi Othonem posse. proinde agendum audendumque, dum Galbae auctoritas fluxa, Pisonis nondum coaluisset. Opportunos magnis conatibus transitus rerum, nec cunctatione opus, ubi perniciosior sit quies quam temeritas.*' (Tac. *Hist.* 1.21).

⁶⁸⁶ '*Non erat Othonis mollis et corpori similis animus.*' (Tac. *Hist.* 1.22., trans. Moore).

⁶⁸⁷ Tac. *Hist.* 1.50. Cf. '*luxuria etiam principi onerosa, inopia vix privato toleranda*' (Tac. *Hist.* 1.21).

dissimulata luxuria et cuncta ad decorem imperii composita', although this only caused people to fear the return of his vices.⁶⁸⁸ In this respect, his level of self-control offers at least a hint that he is capable of a good death.

Suetonius' construction of the biography is certainly artful given that the manner of Otho's death is clearly intended to come as a surprise to the reader (just as it did to his contemporaries). Tacitus is seemingly not interested in this approach. Tacitus gives us an Otho who is ambitious but capable of controlling his vices, from the start, in order to advance his goals. This is undoubtedly a fascinating, and arguably complex, depiction in its own right but nevertheless a consistent character. Suetonius provides us a view of the character strictly from the outside (interestingly in contrast to interior insight generally afforded to Tiberius): Otho is an indolent wastrel who suddenly develops a measure of fortitude. The end result is that his death, so incongruous with his life, prompts the reader to critically reassess Suetonius' characterization of Otho and consider the complexity in his portrait.

6.3.3 Tiberius and Domitian

Death is the obvious moment of closure for a character but, in fact, the reactions to a character's death can provide a resolution and final statement on the depiction. In Suetonius' *Lives*, reactions to an emperor's death offer insights into their portraits. The public reactions to the death of Tiberius paint a consistently negative portrait of the emperor. Given the fact that death scenes or reactions to death tend to provide the final word on the subject, Suetonius thus attempts to resolve Tiberius' complexity:

⁶⁸⁸ Tac. *Hist.* 1.71.

Morte eius ita laetatus est populus, ut ad primum nuntium discurrentes pars: 'Tiberium in Tiberim!' clamitarent, pars Terram matrem deosque Manes orarent, ne mortuo sedem ullam nisi inter impios darent, alii uncum et Gemonias cadaueri minarentur, exacerbati super memoriam pristinae crudelitatis etiam recenti atrocitate. nam cum senatus consulto cautum esset, ut poena damnatorum in decimum semper diem differretur, forte accidit ut quorundam supplicii dies is esset, quo nuntiatum de Tiberio erat. hos implorantis hominum fidem, quia absente adhuc Gaio nemo extabat qui adiri interpellarique posset, custodes, ne quid aduersus constitutum facerent, strangulauerunt abieceruntque in Gemonias. creuit igitur inuidia, quasi etiam post mortem tyranni saeuitia permanente. corpus ut moueri a Miseno coepit, conclamantibus plerisque Atellam potius deferendum et in amphitheatro semiustilandum, Romam per milites deportatum est crematumque publico funere.

The people were so glad of his death, that at the first news of it some ran about shouting, "Tiberius to the Tiber," while others prayed to Mother Earth and the Manes to allow the dead man no abode except among the damned. Still others especially embittered by a recent outrage added to the memory of his former cruelty threatened his body with the hook and the Stairs of Mourning. It had been provided by decree of the senate that the execution of the condemned should in all cases be put off for ten days, and it chanced that the punishment of some fell due on the day when the news came about Tiberius. The poor wretches begged the public for protection; but since in the continued absence of Gaius there was no one who could be approached and appealed to, the jailers, fearing to act contrary to the law, strangled them and cast out their bodies on the Stairs of Mourning. Therefore hatred of the tyrant waxed greater, since his cruelty endured even after his death. When the funeral procession left Misenum, many cried out that the body ought rather to be carried to Atella, and half-burned in the amphitheatre; but it was taken to Rome by the soldiers and reduced to ashes with public ceremonies.⁶⁸⁹

As discussed in chapter four, the childhood anecdote of Tiberius being referred to as 'mud kneaded with blood'⁶⁹⁰ is a moment in which Suetonius' account collapses the characterization into a more basic figure and thus signposts this tyrannical end to the *Life*. The epigrammatic phrase 'Tiberius to the Tiber' succinctly expresses the level of hatred in which he was held by the people and the desire that he should 'receive the punishment he has been inflicting on those accused of *maiestas*.'⁶⁹¹ The passage seeks to reinforce Tiberius' characterization as that of a tyrant, explicitly referring to him as such in relating a story of how his cruelty continued after his death. The basic depiction of Tiberius as

⁶⁸⁹ *Tib.* 75.1.1-3.6, trans. Rolfe.

⁶⁹⁰ *Tib.* 57, trans. Rolfe. See chapter four of this thesis, pp. 174-176.

⁶⁹¹ Lindsay 1995: 186 ad 75.1.

tyrant is strengthened by the public cry for his body to be taken to the amphitheatre and half burned: as Lindsay again helpfully points out, it ‘was notorious that a tyrant’s body could not be totally consumed by the flames’ and that this ‘is presumably because he was considered polluted.’⁶⁹² However, the story then steps back from this one-dimensional portrayal of Tiberius: the soldiers who have custody of Tiberius’ body resist these demands and take him instead to Rome for a public funeral.

The portrayal of Tiberius after his death, indirectly characterizing him through the reactions of the people, abandons almost all the complexity that can be recognized in the rest of the biography. The uncertainty and self-awareness that makes Tiberius more than a tyrant disappears now that he is seen only from the outside: his complex character (which depends on the way he thinks) is reduced to a stereotype of a tyrant (which perhaps reflects his unpredictable actions). And yet Tiberius cannot be entirely reduced to one dimension: although the people insist on this interpretation, the soldiers are determined to give Tiberius some credit. This may not add any complexity to the portrait: even a tyrant might be respected by the army. But it does remind us that multiple reactions were possible, and that the people did not (and maybe should not) always have the last word.

Characterization after the subject’s death is a narrower and more precise category and one which gives us more specific insights. Similarly, more indirect characterizations of Suetonius’ Caesars emerge in other people’s reactions to their deaths. Pitcher discusses various methods of indirect characterization in ancient historiography, such as when another figure or figures in a narrative may characterize or build up a subject before we meet them.⁶⁹³ A type of inverted indirect characterization can be seen in Suetonius taking account of the different reactions to Domitian’s death. This grants him a degree of

⁶⁹² Lindsay 1995:187 ad 75.3. See also Cic. *Phil.* 2. 89-91 and Plut. *Sull.* 38.3, which Lindsay cites as an example of this and similar notions.

⁶⁹³ Pitcher 2007: 107; 109.

complexity, denied to him in the rest of his *Life*. As with other biographies there is a temptation to view him in terms of good and evil, but this is a temptation which must be resisted.⁶⁹⁴ The reactions from the public, the soldiers, and the senators are quite diverse:

Occisum eum populus indifferenter, miles grauissime tulit statimque Diuum appellare conatus est, paratus et ulcisci, nisi duces defuissent; quod quidem paulo post fecit expostulatis ad poenam pertinacissime caedis auctoribus. contra senatus adeo laetatus est, ut repleta certatim curia non temperaret, quin mortuum contumeliosissimo atque acerbissimo adclamationum genere laceraret, scalas etiam inferri clipeosque et imagines eius coram detrahi et ibidem solo affligi iuberet, nouissime eradendos ubique titulos abolendamque omnem memoriam decerneret.

The people received the news of his death with indifference, but the soldiers were greatly grieved and at once attempted to call him the Deified Domitian, while they were prepared also to avenge him, had they not lacked leaders. This, however, they did accomplish a little later by most insistently demanding the execution of his murderers. The senators on the contrary were so overjoyed that they raced to fill the house, where they did not refrain from assailing the dead emperor with the most insulting and stinging kind of outcries. They even had ladders brought and his shields and images torn down before their eyes and dashed upon the ground; finally they passed a decree that his inscriptions should everywhere be erased, and all record of him obliterated.⁶⁹⁵

Senators rejoicing in the death of Domitian, damning and insulting the dead man before finally obliterating his memory seem to be the appropriate reaction for his overall baseline characterization, even if it is curiously intense. The discordant reaction comes with the grief experienced by soldiers, who promptly tried to deify him and seek revenge on his murderers. Their reaction is ‘not unexpected’ in context of their pay raise previously mentioned in the *Life*.⁶⁹⁶ However, this is too small and too cynical to explain the soldiers’ grief, their wish to deify him, and their insistence on revenge. Placing too much stock in the donative as an explanation would be an attempt to deny the complexity suggested by Suetonius’ account and to stick too closely to a simplistic portrait (not unlike Power’s reading of the praise of Otho being undeserved). What is fascinating about the reactions

⁶⁹⁴ Waters depicts Domitian as a moderately decent man and does not fall into the trap of him being simply evil (Waters 1964: 49-77).

⁶⁹⁵ *Dom.* 23.1.1-11, trans. Rolfe.

⁶⁹⁶ Jones and Milns 2002: 168 ad 23. Cf. *Dom.* 7.

is that the public found the middle ground between these reactions by being indifferent to Domitian's passing. As with the reactions to Otho's death, Domitian's death can be viewed through one of Fowler's definitions of closure which points to the 'degree to which the work allows new critical readings.'⁶⁹⁷ In closing out his characterization, the drastically different reactions to Domitian's death provokes a new reading. A consensus cannot be reached, leaving us with multiple perceptions and, ultimately, a complex character.

6.3.4 Nero

Suetonius' elaborate sequence describing the death of Nero reveal examples of all three dimensions of characterization. The section manages to reaffirm his baseline depiction while offering dissonant features and also surrounding the events with realistic (non-evaluative) details. The first dimension of Nero's characterization is stressed through his high camp self-indulgence and the metatextual idea of performing his death as an 'artist'. The second dimension emerges through dissonant features such as struggling against his own cowardice to do deed and end his life. Finally, three-dimensional aspects can be seen with a variety of extraneous details giving a sense of verisimilitude to the situation and the character. Townend discusses Suetonius' depiction of Nero's death as a significant set piece.⁶⁹⁸ Hägg also identifies its unique quality as a continuous, uninterrupted narrative concluding that Suetonius 'sacrifices scholarly systemization and biographical testimonies for captivating narrative, using his

⁶⁹⁷ Fowler 1989: 78.

⁶⁹⁸ Townend 1967: 93-95. Nero's death as a popular set piece is also evident in Lounsbury 1987: 63-89; Lounsbury 1991: 3753-3758.

imagination to recreate the desperate flight and pathetic end of a failed emperor'.⁶⁹⁹

Suetonius and Hägg do not interrupt this narrative and neither will we:

tunc uno quoque hinc inde instante ut quam primum se impendentibus contumeliis eriperet, scrobem coram fieri imperavit dimensus ad corporis sui modulum, componique simul, si qua inuenirentur, frusta marmoris et aquam simul ac ligna conferri curando mox cadaueri, flens ad singula atque identidem dictitans: 'qualis artifex pereo!'

Inter moras perlatos a cursore Phaonti codicillos praeripuit legitque se hostem a senatu iudicatum et quaeri, ut puniatur more maiorum, interrogauitque quale id genus esset poenae; et cum comperisset nudi hominis ceruicem inseri furcae, corpus uirgis ad necem caedi, conterritus duos pugiones, quos secum extulerat, arripuit temptataque utriusque acie rursus condidit, causatus nondum adesse fatalem horam. ac modo Sporum hortabatur ut lamentari ac plangere inciperet, modo orabat ut se aliquis ad mortem capessendam exemplo iuuaret; interdum segnitiem suam his uerbis increpabat: 'uiuo deformiter, turpiter – οὐ πρόπει Νέρωνι, οὐ πρόπει – νήφειν δεῖ ἐν τοῖς τοιούτοις – ἄγε ἔγειρε σεαυτόν.' iamque equites appropinquabant, quibus praeceptum erat ut uiuum eum adtraherent. quod ut sensit, trepidanter effatus:

ἴππων μ'[ε] ὠκυπόδων ἀμφὶ κτύπος οὐατα βάλλει ferrum iugulo adegit iuuante Eraphrodito a libellis. semianimisque adhuc irrumpenti centurioni et paenula ad uulnus adposita in auxilium se uenisse simulanti non aliud respondit quam: 'sero' et: 'haec est fides.' atque in ea uoce defecit, extantibus rigentibusque oculis usque ad horrorem formidinemque uisentium. nihil prius aut magis a comitibus exegerat quam ne potestas cuiquam capitis sui fieret, sed ut quoquo modo totus cremaretur. permisit hoc Icelus, Galbae libertus, non multo ante uinculis exolutus, in quae primo tumultu coniectus fuerat.

At last, while his companions one and all urged him to save himself as soon as possible from the indignities that threatened him, he bade them dig a grave in his presence, proportioned to the size of his own person, collect any bits of marble that could be found and at the same time bring water and wood for presently disposing of his body. As each of these things was done, he wept and said again and again: “What an artist the world is losing!”

While he hesitated, a letter was brought to Phaon by one of his couriers. Nero snatching it from his hand read that he had been pronounced a public enemy by the senate, and that they were seeking him to punish in the ancient fashion; and he asked what manner of punishment that was. When he learned that the criminal was stripped, fastened by the neck in a fork and then beaten to death with rods, in mortal terror he seized two daggers which he had brought with him, and then, after trying the point of each, put them up again, pleading that the fatal hour had not yet come. Now he would beg Sporus to begin to lament and wail, and now entreat someone to help him take his life by setting him the example; anon he reproached himself for his cowardice in such words as these: “To live is a scandal and a shame — this does not become Nero, does not become him — one should be resolute at such times — come, rouse thyself!” And now the horsemen were at hand who had orders to take him off alive. When he heard them, he quavered:

“Hark, now strikes on my ear the trampling of swift-footed coursers!”

⁶⁹⁹ Hägg 2012: 226.

and drove a dagger into his throat, aided by Epaphroditus, his private secretary. He was all but dead when a centurion rushed in, and as he placed a cloak to the wound, pretending that he had come to aid him, Nero merely gasped: “Too late!” and “This is fidelity!” With these words he was gone, with eyes so set and starting from their sockets that all who saw him shuddered with horror. First and beyond all else he had forced from his companions a promise to let no one have his head, but to contrive in some way that he be buried unmutilated. And this was granted by Icelus, Galba’s freedman, who had shortly before been released from the bondage to which he was consigned at the beginning of the revolt.⁷⁰⁰

This passage has a driven and focused narrative which intensifies the moment. It has been noted that this account is the closest Suetonius gets to Tacitus or any other Roman historian when it comes to the art of *narratio*.⁷⁰¹ The first dimension of characterization, which features examples of basic and consistent presentation, can be seen in the overt theatricality by which the text opens with Nero overseeing his own grave being dug. The sense of death as performance is highlighted by the line, ‘*qualis artifex pereo!*’ Hägg is of the view that ‘Suetonius makes sure Nero dies in character’.⁷⁰² Nero’s baseline cowardice does become evident in his resisting suicide and begging one of the others to kill themselves first. However, his depiction is perhaps more complicated.

The second dimension of characterization begins to emerge in the section where Nero reprimands his own sluggishness (‘*segnitiam suam*’) and seems to struggle against even his own cowardice. Although consistent with the one-dimensional theatricality, this self-reproach hints at more complex characterization. Nero is now struggling against his basic character: he is trying to do what he has never done and take his responsibility seriously. It is still somewhat in character that he only does so because he is more afraid of the threatened punishment than of suicide; and he still does not really succeed. But there are hints of a Nero who is trying to do more than he has before. His character’s self-

⁷⁰⁰ *Ner.* 49.1.1-4.9, trans. Rolfe. Cf. ‘*uir neque satis constans et ingenio truci in desperatione rerum mortem timore appetitam ita expauit, ut haustum uenenum paenitentia euomuerit medicumque manumiserit, quod sibi prudens ac sciens minus noxium temperasset.*’ (*Ner.* 2.3.4-8). This allows the *Life* to be bookended with the mention of suicide.

⁷⁰¹ Hägg 2012: 226.

⁷⁰² Hägg 2012: 227.

awareness is arguably seen here as well. Although delivered in a pretentious manner, which is entirely in character, his acceptance of death once he achieves it is a moment of self-realization. The tragedy and irony presented in Nero's last words '*haec est fides*' has been interpreted as stripping Nero of any hint of heroism.⁷⁰³ The young age at which Nero dies coupled with the pathetic violence of his suicide is surely meant to stand as a contrast with the ideal death for an emperor exemplified by the death of Augustus.⁷⁰⁴

The third dimension of characterization strives towards realism with the use of surplus details. When addressing the death narrative of Nero, Townend states that it is striking because of 'the amount of vivid detail'.⁷⁰⁵ In the sections dealing with the run-up to the end of Nero's life and which precedes the above passage, several specific details are relevant. For instance, Nero was shocked by the tremor of an earthquake and a flash of lightning ('*tremore terrae et fulgure aduerso*').⁷⁰⁶ Also, Nero makes his way through a bramble bush ('*inter fruticeta ac uepres*') and ends up tearing his cloak by thorns and having to pick the twigs from them ('*dein diuolsa sentibus paenula traiectos surculos rasi*').⁷⁰⁷ Bradley notes that these are 'details which contribute little or nothing to elucidating the last hours of Nero's life. It is impossible to comment on such items' and that they 'have a telling effect in a novelettish sense, but this is all'.⁷⁰⁸ These details are not overtly concerned with any narrative purpose, to the frustration of the modern commentator.

Admittedly, the earthquake and the lightning could reasonably be interpreted as more than just incidental. They at least convey a sense of drama, and perhaps even loosely imply the anger of the gods with the wrath of nature. As for the brambles, they show the

⁷⁰³ Hägg 2012: 227. Cf. Lounsbury 1987: 71; 79.

⁷⁰⁴ Hägg 2012: 227.

⁷⁰⁵ Townend 1967: 95.

⁷⁰⁶ *Ner.* 48.2.2.

⁷⁰⁷ *Ner.* 48.3.2; *Ner.* 48.4.1-2.

⁷⁰⁸ Bradley 1978: 273 ad 47.3-49.4.

indignity being inflicted on the emperor, added to later in the paragraph by his hunger and thirst.⁷⁰⁹ One can concede that these details are striking enough to have demanded an explanation from modern commentators.⁷¹⁰ However, it can be argued that their purpose is precisely to be extraneous. It can at least be said that one possible effect, for the reader, is the increase in the realism of the scene, and that this may be enough to justify the inclusions of these specific details. Suetonius may not have specifically intended this, but the outcome is that there is so much novelettish detail that a reading of increased realism can be justified.

About examples such as these and others, Sansone notes that there are ‘only a few such details, but they call attention to themselves by their specificity and their apparent irrelevancy’.⁷¹¹ He also notes ‘that the more detailed and verisimilar a narrative is the more likely it is to be fiction.’⁷¹² Whether or not these details were fact or fiction is irrelevant to our interests: what matters is that such seemingly irrelevant details create a sense of realism (i.e. the reality effect). There are also moments of specificity in the main death sequence which add to the three-dimensional realism in that they are surplus to the narrative. The look of horror people experienced on seeing his eyes seems a macabre piece of business, as does the comment that he left specific orders about the handling of his body. Nero’s overall theatrical and negative character presentation is observed throughout this section but within it there are moments which complicate him and make him more realistic.

⁷⁰⁹ *Ner.* 48.4.5-6.

⁷¹⁰ Sansone makes a parallel with myth (Sansone 1993: 180ff.).

⁷¹¹ Sansone 1993: 180.

⁷¹² Sansone 1993: 180.

6.4 Across the Caesars

Suetonius' account sets up Tiberius' conflicted and dissonant character in the express duality of his family lineage. Nero is presented as the endpoint of a mixed but ever declining family line. Caligula and Claudius are starkly contrasted with the early portraits of their respective fathers, Germanicus and Drusus. Separate to their own family ancestries, Galba, Otho, Vitellius, and even Titus are also characterized as Caesars by way of associations with the Julio-Claudian line. On the opposite end of the biographies, death scenes and aftermaths elucidate character complexities. Augustus and Vespasian adhere to their overall images and specifically to their established interest in cultivating said images. Otho's death forces a major reconsideration of how his character was perceived. Tiberius' complexity is boiled down to baseline tyranny in the reactions to his death whereas Domitian achieves complexity because of the diverse reactions to his demise. Finally, the prolonged account of Nero's death arguably demonstrates all three dimensions of characterization.

Suetonius' techniques of characterization are bound into the structure of his collection. The next chapter will treat the complete collection as a macro-text and explore how cross-characterization through the biographies create complexity for individuals within it – and not just for the imperial subjects themselves. One Caesar in the *Life* of another can provide a peer who underpins or contradicts their characterization. Supporting characters too are a part of Suetonius' technique. Not only do they give depth to the portrait of the main character but are themselves constructs pieced together from various cameos.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Crossing the *Lives*

adeo facilius est multa facere quam diu.

(Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, 1.12.7.7-8)

7.1 Introduction

The individual biographies in Suetonius' *De vita Caesarum* stand together as much as they stand alone. This final chapter treats the collection as a macro-text and explores Suetonius' literary techniques which represent complex characters across the *Lives* as a whole, and via interactions with other Caesars.⁷¹³ The chapter asks how the perceived character of a Caesar is affected when juxtaposed with a series of others by way of *synkrisis*, and focuses especially on the appearance of one subject in the biography of another: how, for example, is Vespasian's character informed by the appearances of Caligula and Nero in his *Life*? How does Augustus come across in the *Tiberius* or vice versa? For the most part the emperors who make cameos in the *Lives* of others appear as recognizable forms of themselves, which is to say one-dimensional. Supporting characters also receive substantial portrayals across the biographies. Germanicus is constructed entirely from a mini-biography of sorts in the *Caligula* and from cameos elsewhere. He always appears as a consistently idealized figure.

⁷¹³ The order in which the *Caesars* were written is somewhat debated, which influences our reading of whether or not they were a collection. Townend favours a chronological order and argues that Suetonius was dismissed as *ab epistulis* after the publication of the *Julius* and *Augustus* and gathering some material from the imperial archives for *Tiberius – Claudius*, with the lack of access reflected as the *Lives* progress (Townend 1959: 285-293). Bowersock looks at structure and vocabulary to argue that *Galba-Domitian* were written before the Julio-Claudian *Lives*, during the reign of Trajan (Bowersock 1969: 119-125). Bradley refutes Bowersock and shows that the *Galba* preface does not work as an introduction to a set of *Lives* and that his other arguments are inconclusive at best (Bradley 1973: 257-263). Syme posited that *Julius-Nero* was Suetonius' original plan with the subsequent *Lives* being an afterthought (Syme 1980: 117-118). Power views the collection as being conceived by Suetonius as a whole from the beginning (Power 2014a: 76-77), which supports readings across the *Lives* like Langlands' analysis of how Augustus' exemplarity plays out in other biographies (Langlands 2014: 111-129). Therefore, looking at characterization across the entire *Caesars* seems productive.

Beyond the Caesars, characterizations of imperial women are also created across the entire collection. Intriguing and prominent women such as Julia, Caesonia, Messalina, and Agrippina are one-dimensional figures. They primarily serve to emphasize the characterization of the main subject associated with them, rarely moving past stereotypes of virtue and vice. Livia on the other hand is the most important and well delineated female character. She is a complex character built out of cameos across the biographies and in a way acts as a narrative binding figure. At times she has a basic and recognizable representation, but elsewhere she achieves complexity – she has different sides to her character in different *Lives*. The collection, in its entirety, shows how Caesars and other imperial figures are characterized across the *Lives*.

7.2 Cameos

Suetonius' Caesars are not restricted to their individual biographies. Characterization is further developed through the possibility of comparing one Caesar with another. This juxtaposition is familiar enough from the rhetorical technique of *synkrisis* and in Plutarch's use of such a technique in his *Parallel Lives*.⁷¹⁴ In Suetonius' collection, these juxtapositions occur not only as different *Lives* stack up against one another but also when a previous or forthcoming emperor makes a cameo in one of the biographies. Emperors do figure in each other's biographies, and their characterizations can be carried over too. However, when it comes to the focus and the purpose of such cameos, we need to keep in mind the 'Law of Biographical Relevance'. Townend notes

⁷¹⁴ On *synkrisis*, especially in Plutarch, see Duff 1999: 243-245; 2000: 141-161. On synkritic interpretation of Suetonius' collection see Power 2008: 165-174. On Plutarch, Suetonius, and the genre of *vita Caesarum* see Bowersock 1998: 193-215. For the technique of comparison, as related to encomia and invective, see Quint. *Inst.* 2.4.21.

that for Suetonius or any biographer, their ‘concern is deliberately withdrawn from topics other than the character and career of the central figure, and this meant that he was bound to follow what it is convenient to term the Law of Biographical Relevance’.⁷¹⁵ As a result, the function of such appearances is to influence the characterization of the main subject. It should come as no surprise, then, that when other Caesars do appear, they are basic versions of themselves, letting the focus remain on the main character’s presentation.

When a Caesar comes in the *Life* of another Caesar they appear as recognizable versions of themselves, that is one which adheres to their established baseline. Unsurprisingly, any dissonance between the two figures can reaffirm the baseline characterization of the main subject. Such cameos of the Caesars offer illustrative examples of their qualities and inherent character by way of simple comparison or contrast. When discussing historiographical techniques of characterization, Pitcher plainly observed that the ‘juxtaposition of individuals, then, is the most obvious way in which the structure of a narrative can heighten or draw attention to particular traits and characteristics.’⁷¹⁶ Thus, in the *Life of Augustus* we are told that Augustus’ behaviour at public games was attentive, and this trait is further stressed by way of a contrast with Julius’ lack of regard and attention at such games.

uerum quotiens adesset, nihil praeterea agebat, seu uitandi rumoris causa, quo patrem Caesarem uulgo reprehensum commemorabat, quod inter spectandum epistulis libellisue legendis aut rescribendis uacaret, seu studio spectandi ac uoluptate, qua teneri se neque dissimulauit umquam et saepe ingenue professus est.

But whenever he was present, he gave his entire attention to the performance, either to avoid the censure to which he realized that his father Caesar had been generally exposed, because he spent his time in reading or answering letters and petitions; or from his interest and pleasure in the spectacle, which he never denied but often frankly confessed.⁷¹⁷

⁷¹⁵ Townend 1967: 84. Cf. Stuart 1967: 78.

⁷¹⁶ Pitcher 2007: 114.

⁷¹⁷ *Aug.* 45.1.6-11, trans. Rolfe.

Public games, naturally enough, provide an opportunity for observing contextually appropriate (or inappropriate) lines of behaviour. Edwards points to this passage to say that at ‘games, above all, the emperor was rendered legible to his subjects.’⁷¹⁸ Suetonius certainly seizes on such circumstances to create his emperors. Augustus’ characterization is reinforced by way of this juxtaposition because it attributes his focus on the games to his being mindful of the censure to which Julius was subjected and which he wished to avoid. This reinforces the one-dimensional image of Augustus as a man who not only wishes to cultivate a specific image but learns from the mistakes of others. Julius also appears as a familiar one-dimensional character here, given that his innate disposition is not to be remotely concerned with how he is perceived, and he is not self-conscious.⁷¹⁹ In addition, Power notes that this passage highlights more than one quality by way of contrast, with Augustus also demonstrating *civilitas* as against Julius as paragon of *superbia*.⁷²⁰ Given Augustus’ interest and pleasure in the spectacle, he is certainly the more simpatico of the two; sharing the people’s enthusiasm for games.

Elsewhere in the collection, Vespasian’s basic characterization is strengthened after humiliating and somewhat antagonistic interactions with both Caligula and Nero. To be at odds with either speaks well of his character, and the individual cameos both strengthen the basic depiction of Vespasian. While part of Nero’s entourage on tour in Greece, Vespasian was evidently unable or unwilling to hide his true feelings about the emperor’s artistic pretensions:

Peregrinatione Achaica inter comites Neronis cum cantante eo aut discederet saepius aut praesens obdormisceret, grauissimam contraxit offensam, prohibitusque non contubernio modo sed etiam publica salutatione secessit in paruam ac deuiam ciuitatem, quoad latenti etiamque extrema metuenti prouincia cum exercitu oblata est.

⁷¹⁸ Edwards 2007: 54. Further to this ‘the emperor needed not just to make himself visible at the games and shows but that he had to be seen to be enjoying them’ (Bradley 1981: 135).

⁷¹⁹ Soldiers singing all manner of lewd songs about Julius is illustrative of this point (*Jul.* 49; 50).

⁷²⁰ Power 2008: 242.

On the tour through Greece, among the companions of Nero, he bitterly offended the emperor by either going out often while Nero was singing, or falling asleep, if he remained. Being in consequence banished, not only from intimacy with the emperor but even with his public receptions, he withdrew to a little out-of-the-way town, until a province and an army were offered him while he was in hiding and in fear of his life.⁷²¹

Vespasian's display of inappropriate behaviour here plays rather humorously against Nero's ego and excess. Surely to behave so badly as to offend Nero is to behave well. Wardle notes that Vespasian's offence of Nero fits with a common feature of Roman historiography; tales 'of narrow escape from the death at the hands of bad emperors' which down play 'previous collaboration or benefiting from the hateful regime'.⁷²² But it is not simply that Vespasian is placed in a positive light: in addition, both Vespasian and Nero appear in character and according to their baselines. Vespasian is down-to-earth and sympathetic. Nero is pretentious, highly strung, and tyrannical. The reader's knowledge of Nero is therefore exploited as a short-cut to characterizing Vespasian.

Two examples found in the *Vespasian* show that it is only necessary that the emperor making a cameo be instantly recognizable, whereas the other can be given some complexity. Firstly, we are told that when Vespasian was in his praetorship, he lost no opportunity to curry favour.

praetor infensum senatui Gaium ne quo non genere demereretur, ludos extraordinarios pro uictoria eius Germanica depoposcit poenaeque coniuratorum addendum censuit, ut insepulti proicerentur. egit et gratias ei apud amplissimum ordinem, quod se honore cenae dignatus esset.

In his praetorship, to lose no opportunity of winning the favour of Gaius, who was at odds with the senate, he asked for special games because of the emperor's victory in Germany and recommended as an additional punishment of the conspirators that they be cast out unburied. He also thanked the emperor before that illustrious body because he had deigned to honour him with an invitation to dinner.⁷²³

⁷²¹ *Vesp.* 4.4.1-7, trans. Rolfe.

⁷²² Wardle 2010: 114.

⁷²³ *Vesp.* 2.3.5-10, trans. Rolfe.

This depiction of Vespasian is hardly flattering, and it is notably dissonant with the more familiar no-nonsense characterization seen for example in his encounter with Nero. Wardle notes the difficulty in reading this example given that it could be interpreted as a political survival strategy on one hand and as sycophancy on the other; he concludes that ‘although there is no outright criticism of Vespasian here, his eagerness is not regarded as wholly praiseworthy.’⁷²⁴ However, it is in line with the ambition and instinct for political survival that he demonstrates elsewhere around other emperors. For example, Vespasian was indebted to Narcissus for a command in Germany from Claudius. Later too, Vespasian chose to stay out of the public eye to avoid the enmity of Agrippina, because of his association with Narcissus, given her sway over Nero.⁷²⁵ Indeed, even in the example involving Nero, he is shown prudently withdrawing from public life after his dismissal. This contrasts more strongly with the familiar image of Vespasian as honest and plain-spoken; the interaction with Caligula here therefore provides him with a second dimension.

Naturally, this is possible because the setting is Vespasian’s own *Life*: he can appear in a more complex form because there is so much context in which to set him. Caligula by contrast is given only limited characterization, but it is implicitly in line with what the reader already knows about him: he is at odds with the Senate, and Vespasian’s actions are designed to appeal to his vanity and his cruelty. In the next passage too, Caligula acts entirely in line with his established character, precisely because he is making a cameo appearance.

Mox, cum aedilem eum C. Caesar, succensens curam uerrendis uiis non adhibitam, luto iussisset oppleri congesto per milites in praetextae sinum, non defuerunt qui interpretarentur, quandoque proculcatam desertamque rem p. ciuili aliqua perturbatione in tutelam eius ac uelut in gremium deuenturam.

⁷²⁴ Wardle 2010: 108; 105-108.

⁷²⁵ *Vesp.* 4.1.1-2.7.

Later, when Vespasian was aedile, Gaius Caesar, incensed at his neglect of his duty of cleaning the streets, ordered that he be covered with mud, which the soldiers accordingly heaped into the bosom of his purple-bordered toga; this some interpreted as an omen that one day in some civil commotion his country, trampled under foot and forsaken, would come under his protection and as it were into his embrace.⁷²⁶

Suetonius' overt use of this passage (and its omen) is to neatly foreshadow Vespasian's rule. However, it does enhance the portrayal of both men. This humiliation of Vespasian creates some sympathy for him as tolerant and durable, while reaffirming the familiar streak of cruelty in Gaius – keeping the latter's characterization strictly limited to its most familiar and one-dimensional form.

7.3 Augustus and Tiberius

The interactions between Tiberius and Augustus raise more intricate aspects of such cameos. Basic examples provide contrasts between the two regarding polarities such as sexual modesty-sexual indulgence and generosity-frugality. Telling moments related to their moral attitudes neatly underlines the difference between these two Caesars. Tiberius was given a dinner by a lascivious old man named Cestius Gallus whom he had rebuked in the senate a few days previously and Augustus had degraded, yet Tiberius insisted that Cestius change none of his customs and that nude girls should wait on them at table.⁷²⁷ While this account ties in with Suetonius' focus on Tiberius' sexual peccadilloes and a tyrannical image,⁷²⁸ its main function is to place the characters of Tiberius and Augustus in explicit contrast.

⁷²⁶ *Vesp.* 5.3.1-6, trans. Rolfe.

⁷²⁷ '*Cestio Gall[i]o, libidinoso ac prodigo seni, olim ab Augusto ignominia notato et a se ante paucos dies apud senatum increpito cenam ea lege condixit, ne quid ex consuetudine immutaret aut demeret, utque nudis puellis ministrantibus cenaretur.*' (*Tib.* 42.2.1-5).

⁷²⁸ Lindsay notes the tyrannical connotation and that is it unsurprising 'to find a tyrant lustful at the dinner table' (Lindsay 1995: 139 ad 42.2).

Frugality is a trait attributed to Tiberius and it further underscores the dissonance between him and his stepfather. The only time Tiberius loosened the purse strings for his companions, on foreign tours and campaigns, was due to Augustus covering the costs.⁷²⁹ Frugality, more usually a virtue, is turned into stinginess by Tiberius. This is also consistent with the mention of an incident from earlier in Tiberius' life, when he presented games financed by his mother and stepfather, but he remained absent.⁷³⁰ Tiberius held no public shows at all and rarely attended those held by others out of fear for being asked a favour.⁷³¹ Regardless of a Caesar being shown as good or bad, Bradley sees spectacle in the *Lives* as generally being a positive to them; the implied criticism towards Tiberius for giving none even proving the point.⁷³² Again, Tiberius' meanness is thrown into relief by his reliance on the generosity of Augustus. However, other matters allow for a more nuanced development in their portrayals.

The intricacy and intrigue involved in the representation of Tiberius' succession offers further insight into the characterization of both men. Suetonius shows that from Tiberius' adoption onwards, Augustus took every opportunity to advance Tiberius' reputation, especially after Agrippa had been disowned.⁷³³ The relationship between Augustus and Tiberius as expressed in his letters – especially if what they reflect is a desire to make Tiberius seem more acceptable to the Roman people – is also evident in Augustus trying to excuse disagreeable mannerisms to the senate.⁷³⁴ Again, Pelling's

⁷²⁹ *'Pecuniae parcus ac tenax comites peregrinationum expeditionumque numquam salario, cibariis tantum sustentavit, una modo liberalitate ex indulgentia uirtrici prosecutes...'* (Tib. 46.1.1-4).

⁷³⁰ *'dedit et ludos, sed absens: cuncta magnifice, impensa matris ac uirtrici.'* (Tib. 7.1.7-8). Lindsay states that Tiberius does not get full credit given his 'lack of *civilitas*' in failing to attend and that Livia and Augustus provided the money (Lindsay 1995: 74 ad 7.1).

⁷³¹ *'neque spectacula omnino edidit; et iis, quae ab aliquo ederentur, rarissime interfuit, ne quid exposceretur'* (Tib. 47.1.4-6). Lindsay notes that 'Suetonius relates this to meanness about money' (Lindsay 1995: 143 ad 47).

⁷³² Bradley 1981: 132-133. Cf. Bradley 1976: 250.

⁷³³ *'nihil ex eo tempore praetermissum est ad maiestatem eius augendam ac multo magis, postquam Agrippa abdicato atque seposito certum erat, uni spem successionis incumbere'* (Tib. 15.2.8-10).

⁷³⁴ *'quae omnia ingrata atque arrogantiae plena et animaduertit Augustus in eo et excusare temptavit saepe apud senatum ac populum professus naturae uitia esse, non animi.'* (Tib. 68.3.5-4.1).

‘bio-structuring’ idea comes to mind to view this presentation;⁷³⁵ Augustus, as a subordinate character in this narrative, attempts to exert influence on Tiberius’ reputation and by proxy his characterization. He is a characterizing force that extends beyond himself; indeed, the fact that Augustus needs to exert an influence in such a manner paints Tiberius in a weaker light by way of juxtaposition. A series of these interventions end up showing Tiberius’ character in a different light. As we have seen, Augustus insisted that Tiberius marry Julia; he subsequently obliges him to stay in Rhodes before allowing him to come back if he stays out of politics; and then prevents Tiberius from taking an honorific surname after a military success on the grounds that the title he would inherit after Augustus’ death should suffice.⁷³⁶ Admittedly none of these examples reveals a change to his character, but they create the circumstances for Tiberius to show that meekness, discussed at the end of chapter five, which complicates his baseline portrayal.

Augustus’ presence in the *Tiberius* is at its most expressive in terms of characterization towards Tiberius in an extended passage dealing with the transition of power. Suetonius mentions that once after Tiberius left the room Augustus was overheard lamenting, ‘Alas for the Roman people, to be ground by jaws that crunch so slowly!’⁷³⁷ This humorous but pointed remark depicting Tiberius in a less than flattering light inaugurates a passage which expresses Augustus’ doubts and reservation about his successor. Suetonius notes the claim that Augustus openly disapproved of Tiberius’ austere manner, even to the point of breaking off his lighter conversations when the latter entered the room.⁷³⁸ Tiberius’ rather dour and straight-laced demeanour is thus contrasted

⁷³⁵ Pelling 1997a: 118.

⁷³⁶ *Tib.* 8; *Tib.* 11-13; *Tib.* 17.

⁷³⁷ ‘*miserum populum R., qui sub tam lentis maxillis erit.*’ (*Tib.* 21.2.3-4, trans. Rolfe).

⁷³⁸ ‘*ne illud quidem ignoro aliquos tradidisse, Augustum palam nec dissimulanter morum eius diritatem adeo improbasse, ut nonnumquam remissiores hilarioresque sermones superueniente eo abrumperet*’ (*Tib.* 21.2.4-8).

with the convivial nature of Augustus. This is a basic distinction between one-dimensional versions of each emperor: the dour Tiberius, and the urbane Augustus.

A complex example applies Augustus' defining trait of self-characterization as a means of sharpening Tiberius' portrait, when it is noted that Augustus insisted on going through with his adoption of Tiberius. Suetonius states Augustus' disapproval of Tiberius:

sed expugnatum precibus uxoris adoptionem non abnuisse, uel etiam ambitione tractum, ut tali successore desiderabilior ipse quandoque fieret. adduci tamen nequeo quin existimem, circumspertissimum et prudentissimum principem in tanto praesertim negotio nihil temere fecisse; sed uitiis Tiberi[i] uirtutibusque perpensis potiores duxisse uirtutes, praesertim cum et rei p. causa adoptare se eum pro contione iurauerit et epistulis aliquot ut peritissimum rei militaris utque unicum p. R. praesidium prosequatur.

but that overcome by his wife's entreaties he did not reject his adoption, or perhaps was even led by selfish considerations, that with such a successor he himself might one day be more regretted. But after all I cannot be led to believe that an emperor of the utmost prudence and foresight acted without consideration, especially in a matter of so great moment. It is my opinion that after weighing the faults and the merits of Tiberius, he decided that the latter preponderated, especially since he took oath before the people that he was adopting Tiberius for the good of the country, and alludes to him in several letters as a most able general and the sole defence of the Roman people.⁷³⁹

In the first sentence, Augustus is shown, quite typically, as masterminding not only his own present image but also his memory; and Tiberius is established as obviously unable to live up to his example.⁷⁴⁰ However, the characterization of both is made more intricate when Suetonius offers his own opinion: that Augustus weighed Tiberius' faults and merits and that the good in him tipped the scale. Tiberius is given the benefit of the doubt and allowed some good traits, and Augustus too receives a slightly more complicated characterization as someone who genuinely had the interests of the nation at heart. What seems to be a cameo appearance entirely in line with his basic character, in fact turns into an opportunity to develop both emperors.

⁷³⁹ *Tib.* 21.2.8-3.8, trans. Rolfe.

⁷⁴⁰ For the view that Augustus chose Tiberius as successor just to improve his own reputation after death see Tac. *Ann.* 1.10.26-29.

It must be noted too that Suetonius does use another curious example to raise the motivation behind the nomination of Tiberius as heir. The biographer cites a somewhat ambiguous line from Augustus' will and the interpretation that some placed on it.

testamenti initium fuit: 'quoniam atrox fortuna Gaium et Lucium filios mihi eripuit, Tiberius Caesar mihi ex parte dimidia et sextante heres esto.' quo et ipso aucta suspicio est opinantium successorem ascitum eum necessitate magis quam iudicio, quando ita praefari non abstinerit.

The will began thus: "Since a cruel fate has bereft me of my sons Gaius and Lucius, be Tiberius Caesar heir to two-thirds of my estate." These words in themselves added to the suspicion of those who believed that he had named Tiberius his successor from necessity rather than from choice, since he allowed himself to write such a preamble.⁷⁴¹

This makes clear Augustus' attempts to cultivate a dynasty of Caesars, and people's perception of his doing so, but also makes plain that Tiberius was not the preferred choice. It shows Tiberius being named heir as a last resort rather than on account of his competencies and successes as a leader; and so, it reinforces the negative image of Tiberius as unsuited to the role of emperor.⁷⁴² But at the same time, it more subtly refutes the idea that Augustus picked Tiberius to glorify his own memory. Tiberius was not ideal but chosen out of necessity; Augustus was seemingly sincere in his ultimate decision.

The praise and criticism of Tiberius that is directly offered by Augustus does contribute to Tiberius' characterization. Suetonius quotes from a series of letters which sit awkwardly in their praise given the reservations expressed elsewhere. Amongst the litany of glowing comments, one extract from a letter wishing Tiberius well as he goes to war, characterizes him as a charming, valiant man and a conscientious general.⁷⁴³ Augustus goes on to depict him as a man whose military capabilities saved Rome thus:

⁷⁴¹ *Tib.* 23.1.8-13, trans. Rolfe.

⁷⁴² Although expressed as the view of others, 'Suetonius interprets the impact of *atrox fortuna* as forcing an unwilling Augustus to make Tiberius his heir' (Lindsay 1995: 107 ad 23).

⁷⁴³ 'Vale, iucundissime Tiberi, et feliciter rem gere, ἐμοὶ καὶ ταῖς ἡμονικακαῖς στρατηγῶν. iucundissime et ita sim felix, uir fortissime et dux νομιμώτατε, uale.' (*Tib.* 21.4.1-4). Lindsay states that 'these extracts from imperial correspondence show a close relationship' (Lindsay 1995: 103-104 ad 21.4).

*'unus homo nobis uigilando restituit rem.'*⁷⁴⁴ He further stresses that the safety of Rome rests in Tiberius' hands: *'Deos obsecro, ut te nobis conseruent et ualere nunc et semper patiantur, si non p. R. perosi sunt.'*⁷⁴⁵ All of this tends to complicate the picture of Tiberius as a disastrous choice for Rome: if we are not to believe that Augustus was deluded, we must accept that his qualities indeed recommended him for the role.

There is however a significant contrast between these positive letters and the critical ones produced by Livia. In her anger, having been dismissed by Tiberius, she made public old letters by Augustus which were about Tiberius' austerity and stubbornness. It is suggested that one of the main reasons for Tiberius' retirement was that he was so affected by these letters being saved for so long and used against him in such a spiteful manner.⁷⁴⁶ Augustus here still acts in character, as a hypocrite who suppressed anything that did not fit his cultivated public image. But at the same time, he contributes to Tiberius' dualistic portrayal. Tiberius could plausibly be the subject of both Augustus' praise and his criticism. It is reasonable to say that the reader is not meant to doubt that the letters were real, nor that Augustus believed what he said in the first set. It is the juxtaposition of these traits that gives us Tiberius' character.

It may be noted, finally, that when Tiberius appears in the *Augustus*, they both appear more consistently in character. Tiberius responds angrily to people speaking ill of the emperor; Augustus acts in moderation, conscious of the poor image that would result.

Tiberio quoque de eadem re, sed uiolentius apud se per epistulam conquerenti ita rescripsit: 'aetati tuae, mi Tiberi, noli in hac re indulgere et nimium indignari quemquam esse, qui de me male loquatur; satis est enim, si hoc habemus ne quis nobis male facere possit.'

⁷⁴⁴ *Tib.* 21.5.8.

⁷⁴⁵ *Tib.* 21.7.9-11.

⁷⁴⁶ *'at illa commota ueteres quosdam ad se Augusti codicillos de acerbitate et intolerantia morum eius e sacrario protulit atque recitauit. hos et custoditos tam diu et exprobratos tam infeste adeo grauius tulit, ut quidam putent inter causas secessus hanc ei uel praecipuam fuisse.'* (*Tib.* 51.1.5-2.1). This plays to a frequent theme that has 'Augustus cast aspersions in private on Tiberius' character' (Lindsay 1995: 152 ad 51.1).

When Tiberius complained to him of the same thing in a letter, but in more forcible language, he replied as follows: “My dear Tiberius, do not be carried away by the ardour of youth in this matter, or take it too much to heart that anyone speak evil of me; we must be content if we can stop anyone from doing evil to us.”⁷⁴⁷

Augustus is the *persona* full of bonhomie who is also deeply concerned with political affairs while Tiberius, in line with his habit of self-imposed exile, is reinforced as a reclusive and obstinate person. And yet by contrast, Tiberius is explicitly praised in his own life for his moderation regarding *maiestas* cases; at least until he reverts to taking them seriously.⁷⁴⁸ This interaction in the *Augustus*, therefore does offer one-dimensional instances of both emperors; but if you know the *Tiberius*, or even just Tiberius’ reputation on these matters, it foreshadows the same complication in his character that has him be meek and accepting at some times and stubborn and cruel at others. While each Caesar has a biography devoted to them, therefore, their characters are nevertheless composed and complicated across the entire collection, which functions as a complete and complex text.

7.4 Germanicus

Beyond the Caesars themselves, Suetonius’ collection makes use of recurring supporting characters. Not only do they bring a degree of cohesiveness to the overall narrative, but they directly help characterize the main subjects. Indeed, Suetonius puts such effort into their creation that they amount to character constructions in their own right. Suetonius’ Germanicus is a basic one-dimensional character that embellishes the portrayals of other Caesars. The *Caligula* begins with a mini-biography of Germanicus

⁷⁴⁷ *Aug.* 51.3.1-7, trans. Rolfe.

⁷⁴⁸ *Tib.* 28, contra *Tib.* 58.

‘constructed on something like the standard pattern’.⁷⁴⁹ He receives a condensed version of the biographer’s usual structure, including family, achievements, physical descriptions, popularity, an extended account of his death, and details of his marriage and children.⁷⁵⁰ Suetonius gives Germanicus ‘far more detail than any other minor character’ and provides him with a ‘minor panegyric biography’.⁷⁵¹ Augustus uses him as an exemplar for family life and, even though he is perfect where Claudius is flawed, his little brother tried to keep Germanicus’ name and reputation alive (framing Claudius in a more positive light).⁷⁵² Likewise, chapter six has shown Germanicus’ role in the *Caligula* is to highlight everything that his son is not, perhaps even as an example of his wasted potential.

Suetonius also uses cameos of Germanicus to characterize Tiberius as resentful and tyrannical. In the process, this reduces the complexity Tiberius has shown elsewhere. The presence of the noble and beloved Germanicus forces a damning depiction of Tiberius. Germanicus’ depiction reaches panegyric heights in the account of his death. He is lavished with praise and intense grief from the public and Suetonius takes the opportunity to highlight the public’s scorn for Tiberius. The high regard in which Germanicus was held became evident on the day that he died and afterward.⁷⁵³ Temples and altars were vandalized, household gods were thrown out into the street, and newborn children were abandoned. Barbarian enemies even agreed to a truce as if the loss were theirs too. Some princes shaved their own beards and their wives’ heads in a show of grief. The king of the Parthians called off a hunt and banquet, which was a sign of public mourning.⁷⁵⁴ This is extensively detailed, and the reactions are so extreme they outstrip

⁷⁴⁹ Townend 1967: 83. Although, Townend rightly points out that there is no fixed sequence and even the most basic of ‘Family – Father – Birth – Early life till accession – is varied in different ways’ (p. 83).

⁷⁵⁰ *Calig.* 1-7.

⁷⁵¹ Lindsay 1993: 48 ad 1-7.

⁷⁵² *Aug.* 34; *Claud.* 11.2.

⁷⁵³ ‘*tamen longe maiora et firmitiora de eo iudicia in morte ac post mortem extiterunt.*’ (*Calig.* 5.1.1-3).

⁷⁵⁴ *Calig.* 5.1.3-6.1.1.

even the reactions to some of the main subjects of Suetonius' collection. Both barbarian and Roman alike are grief stricken although their 'exaggerated mourning is flattery'.⁷⁵⁵ Thus, Germanicus is a portrait in panegyric. He is ultimately an idealized figure who never moves past one-dimensional characterization and exists to contrast with others elsewhere. Following on from this account, Suetonius mentions that while the Roman people were still in grief at the initial report of his illness, another dubious report claimed that he had recovered. Even though their hopes would ultimately be dashed, the people rejoiced, and Tiberius was awoken by their song:

*salua Roma, salua patria, saluus est Germanicus.
et ut demum fato functum palam factum est, non solaciis ullis, non edictis inhiberi
luctus publicus potuit duravitque etiam per festos Decembris mensis dies. auxit
gloriam desideriumque defuncti et atrocitas insequentium temporum, cunctis nec
temere opinantibus reuerentia eius ac metu repressam Tiberi saeuitiam, quae mox
eruperit.*

“Safe is Rome, safe too our country, for Germanicus is safe.”

But when it was at last made known that he was no more, the public grief could be checked neither by any consolation nor edict, and it continued even during the festal days of the month of December.

The fame of the deceased and regret for his loss were increased by the horror of the times which followed, since all believed, and with good reason, that the cruelty of Tiberius, which soon burst forth, had been held in check through his respect and awe for Germanicus.⁷⁵⁶

Tiberius here too appears as a one-dimensional character: cruel all along, and only hiding it for Germanicus' sake. This passage then gives us a double cameo which helps define Caligula, the subject of the *Life* in question. The juxtaposition of Germanicus and Tiberius so early in the *Caligula* signposts for the reader certain aspects of the main biographical subject: namely that he will be in explicit contrast to his father's exemplarity and more in line with the ultimate public perception of Tiberius as a hated tyrant.

⁷⁵⁵ Hurley 1993: 14 ad 5. Foreigners shaving their beards contrasts with Roman's growing theirs out in show of grief, as already seen with Caligula lamenting the death of Drusilla (*Calig.* 24.2).

⁷⁵⁶ *Calig.* 6.1.10-2.7, trans. Rolfe.

Tiberius' hatred of Germanicus is also played up in the *Tiberius* itself, so that the depiction in the *Caligula* is merely a less intensified coda. The portrait of Germanicus drawn in the *Tiberius* is consistent with that found in the *Caligula*; however, it is Tiberius' resentment that is the focus. Thus, he disparaged Germanicus and made light of his illustrious deeds and rebuked his most glorious victories as damning to the country ('*Germanico usque adeo obtrecauit, ut et praeclara facta eius pro superuacuis eleuarit et gloriosissimas uictorias ceu damnosas rei p. increparet.*').⁷⁵⁷ The focus in this case is less on glorifying Germanicus and more on intensifying the despicable pettiness of Tiberius. In a sense this 'Germanicus-phase'⁷⁵⁸ reduces Tiberius to one dimension. Tiberius was suspected of having a hand in Germanicus' death through the actions of Gnaeus Piso. When Piso was tried with the charge, it was thought that he would have produced evidence to prove the accusation, but Tiberius had it seized and put him to death. The phrase 'Give us back Germanicus' became common words about the city and Tiberius did his reputation no favours by treating Germanicus' wife and children cruelly.⁷⁵⁹ This suspicion of Germanicus' death being due to the machinations of Tiberius and Piso also maintains consistency with the *Caligula*,⁷⁶⁰ which depict Tiberius' cruelty and the idealized aura around Germanicus. In as much as Germanicus contrasts with Caligula, he also serves as a sharp opposition to Tiberius. The overwhelming praise directed at Germanicus reduces the complexity inherent in Tiberius. The former forces the latter into an outright tyrannical role. In Suetonius' scheme, when Germanicus is around to be the hero, Tiberius is obliged to play the villain.

⁷⁵⁷ *Tib.* 52.2.5-8.

⁷⁵⁸ Pelling 1997a: 118.

⁷⁵⁹ '*...etiam causa mortis fuisse ei per Cn. Pisonem legatum Syriae creditur, quem mox huius criminis reum putant quidam mandata prolaturum, nisi ea secreto ostendant < > quae multifariam inscriptum et per noctes celeberrime adclamatum est: 'redde Germanicum!' quam suspicionem confirmauit ipse postea coniuge etiam ac liberis Germanici crudelem in modum afflictis.*' (*Tib.* 52.3.1-8, trans. Rolfe).

⁷⁶⁰ '*obiit autem, ut opinio fuit, fraude Tiberi, ministerio et opera Cn. Pisonis...propter quae, ut Romam rediit, paene discerptus a populo, a senatu capitis damnatus est.*' (*Calig.* 2.1.1-8). Here 'Suetonius' truncation of events heightens the popular emotion of Germanicus' (Wardle 1994: 108 ad 2).

7.5 Women as Supporting Characters

Characterization throughout *De vita Caesarum* can also be assessed in figures other than the main subjects themselves. The imperial women in Suetonius' work, who are by no means offered extended characterization within individual *Lives*, are examples of characters that are constructed solely across the collection. This fragmented aspect to the depiction of imperial women is attributable, to an extent, to the 'Law of Biographical Relevance'.⁷⁶¹ It fragments because the subject is always the focus, and the biographer has no need to give full background on events or characters in which the subject is involved if they do not affect him directly; an historian might feel obliged to fill in the extra information. Some of the minor female presences mentioned throughout biographies are one-dimensional, underlining aspects of the emperor's character: Augustus' daughter, Julia, is a prime example. Two of the wives of Claudius, Messalina and Agrippina, fit into stereotyped roles loosely modelled on Livia but lack nuance. The most enthralling female characterization within the collection is of course Livia. The final section will therefore examine how intricate and well delineated her characterization is, as presented across several *Lives*.

Imperial women play a role in characterizing their respective Caesars. Barrett states that Suetonius 'describes women only if they add something to the portrait of the emperor in question, usually in terms of the influence they had over them, or their place in their dynastic plans. This does not imply that Suetonius was slighting towards the imperial women. Rather, he saw the literary advantage of focussing almost exclusively on his main subject.'⁷⁶² In discussing Riemer's similar stance, Chong-Gossard notes that 'Women become a function of men in the biographies, and Suetonius is only interested

⁷⁶¹ Pryzwansky 2008: 49. Cf. Townend 1967: 64.

⁷⁶² Barrett 2002: 236.

in them only when they serve the goal of his narrative'; and that while their negative presentation varies according the emperor being judged, it reaffirms the importance of women in imperial court.⁷⁶³ Chong-Gossard argues instead that a contextual function for recounting the mostly scandalous incidents of imperial woman is that readers wanted gossip with which to compare and contrast with the women of Suetonius' day.⁷⁶⁴ Even in viewing the purpose as to provide gossip for readers to compare with the modern emperors, this is not really very different: gossip is only interesting if it sheds light on someone's character: usually the main subjects but at least implicitly also the women involved. Furthermore, even if the gossip seems wholly superfluous, it is precisely these superfluous details that most effectively create complex characters, akin to 'realism' by our standards. In this way, indeed, not only the men but the women who feature in the gossip can achieve a measure of complexity and even realism. Characterizations via association can help in this way to create nuanced portraits not only of the main subjects but the supporting figures.

Of course, very often women in Suetonius' collection are no more than one-dimensional figures that reinforce the characterization of their respective Caesar. Despite her presence in two biographies, Augustus' daughter, Julia, is unequivocally not given a distinctive personality or a complex character portrait. She is defined exclusively in relation to the men around her. Suetonius tells us that she was first married to Marcellus and that, following his death, Augustus considered a variety of alliances but chose to marry her to Tiberius. He adds that Mark Antony claimed that Augustus had previously betrothed her to his son Antonius and then to the King of Getae, Cotiso.⁷⁶⁵ As has been noted 'Julia is a daughter here, and a wife there, with no overlap between these two facets

⁷⁶³ Chong-Gossard 2010: 307. Cf. Riemer 2000: 154-155.

⁷⁶⁴ Chong-Gossard 2010: 308.

⁷⁶⁵ *Aug.* 63.1.1-2.8.

of her life.⁷⁶⁶ Her initial characterization is therefore that of a pawn in Augustus' political manoeuvrings, filling an all too recognizable role as a female *persona* solely dependent on the men around her for some kind of identity.

Furthermore, Augustus' moralistic display is defined and reinforced through Julia. He was particularly strict in keeping her from meeting strangers: for instance, he wrote to a young man of good standing and character named Lucius Vinicius to say he was presumptuous in coming to Baiae to call on his daughter.⁷⁶⁷ His daughter, and indeed his granddaughter, are largely there to underscore (and in the end undermine) Augustus' own moral stance and reforms. Hence, when they do not conform, he finds them guilty of every form of vice and has them banished.⁷⁶⁸ Augustus cannot help but be a hypocrite in his actions here given his own violation of his public morality (according to Suetonius). Augustus' intolerance of vice in his family both reaffirms his commitment to his public image – even at the cost of his daughter and granddaughter – while also underscoring his alleged hypocrisy in ignoring the rules himself.

The strict standards imposed on his daughter and granddaughter and their eventual downfall is read more tragically by Langlands as an example of Augustus being unable to shape his dynasty. In this instance she stresses the role of fate and sees Augustus 'not so much as a hypocrite, brazenly forcing legal restrictions on his subjects that he has no intention of living by himself, but as a man betrayed by fate'.⁷⁶⁹ Even though the very flaws which are central to Augustus' character (his concern for public appearances in particular) are what deny him the possibility of a dynasty of his own blood, this does not mean he is not portrayed as a hypocrite. On the contrary, it relies entirely on the incident's

⁷⁶⁶ Pryzwansky 2008: 49.

⁷⁶⁷ *extraneorum quidem coetu adeo prohibuit, ut L. Vinicio, claro decoroque iuueni, scripserit quondam parum modeste fecisse eum, quod filiam suam Baias salutatum uenisset.* (Aug. 64.2.5-7).

⁷⁶⁸ *'sed laetum eum atque fidentem et subole et disciplina domus Fortuna destituit. Iulias, filiam et neptem, omnibus probis contaminatas relegauit'* (Aug. 65.1.1-4).

⁷⁶⁹ Langlands 2014: 123; 121-123.

reaffirmation of Augustus' established character. Here these imperial women are an efficient way for Suetonius to characterize Augustus. But in the very least they receive a one-dimensional portrayal; after all, Julia becomes a byword for sexual license. Julia is Augustus' only real way to establish a dynasty. This is what allows her to have some say over her destiny: as when she apparently has some say in the choice of Tiberius. Presumably, the real Julia had this power, but Suetonius does not portray her that way, at least not in the *Augustus*. This backs up a very strict version of the view that women are just there to characterize the men. This is not true in every case, and not even for Julia in the *Tiberius*.

In the *Tiberius*, Julia is given a one-dimensional portrait. She is described, in passing, as a libidinous and unfaithful wife. Suetonius tells us that Tiberius was distressed at having to divorce his wife, Vipsania Agrippina, to marry Julia; he disapproved of Julia's character, suspecting that she desired to be with him while her former husband was still alive, which was the general opinion.⁷⁷⁰ Again, Julia is purely presented in evaluative terms and within the context of her relationship. One of Tiberius' retirements is partially attributed to his disgust at Julia, whom he could neither accuse nor put away, and that he simply could not endure her.⁷⁷¹ The first is the dynastic pawn issue: Julia is just a name attached to some man or other, whether her father or a husband. The second is that Julia is given a very one-dimensional characterization: she is an unfaithful wife interested only in sex. She appears in this capacity both in the *Augustus* and the *Tiberius* as a problem for each of them to respond to: so, in this way she reaffirms the idea that women are only there to characterize men.

⁷⁷⁰ *Tib.* 7.2.4-3.1.

⁷⁷¹ 'tot prosperis confluentibus integra aetate ac ualitudine statuit repente secedere seque e medio quam longissime amouere: dubium uxorisne taedio, quam neque criminari aut dimittere auderet neque ultra perferre posset' (*Tib.* 10.1.1-5).

Julia also facilitates both sides of Tiberius' overall dualistic presentation. Even though he was averse to marrying her, Tiberius conducts himself as a dutiful husband not only attempting to reconcile Augustus and Julia but also showing kindness to her.

Comperit deinde Iuliam uxorem ob libidines atque adulteria damnatam repudiumque ei suo nomine ex auctoritate Augusti remissum; et quamquam laetus nuntio, tamen officii duxit, quantum in se esset, exorare filiae patrem frequentibus litteris et uel utcumque merita, quidquid umquam dono dedisset, concedere.

Shortly after this he learned that his wife Julia had been banished because of her immorality and adulteries, and that a bill of divorce had been sent her in his name by authority of Augustus; but welcome as this news was, he yet considered it his duty to make every possible effort in numerous letters to reconcile the father to his daughter; and regardless of her deserts, to allow her to keep any gifts which he had himself made her at any time.⁷⁷²

However, Tiberius' treatment of Julia will eventually shift to emphasize the negative features of characterization, specifically stressing petty cruelty. His interactions with Julia will help reinforce both sides of his dualistic baseline characterization.

Tiberius later found out that Julia was banished for her immorality and adulteries and a divorce was sent to her in Tiberius' name on the authority of Augustus.⁷⁷³ Even in her banishment, Julia was further punished. Although Augustus had confined her to one town, Tiberius further confined her to a house and refused her any human contact.

Iuliae uxori tantum afuit ut relegatae, quod minimum est, officii aut humanitatis aliquid impertiret, ut ex constitutione patris uno oppido clausam domo quoque egredi et commercio hominum frui uetuerit; sed et peculio concessa a patre praebitisque annuis fraudauit, per speciem publici iuris, quod nihil de his Augustus testamento cauisset.

So far from showing any courtesy or kindness to his wife Julia, after her banishment, which is the least that one might expect, although her father's order had merely confined her to one town, he would not allow her even to leave her house or enjoy the society of mankind. Nay more, he even deprived her of the allowance granted her by her father and of her yearly income, under colour of observance of the common law, since Augustus had made no provision for these in his will.⁷⁷⁴

⁷⁷² *Tib.* 11.4.1-6, trans. Rolfe.

⁷⁷³ 'Comperit deinde Iuliam uxorem ob libidines atque adulteria damnatam repudiumque ei suo nomine ex auctoritate Augusti remissum' (*Tib.* 11.4.1-6).

⁷⁷⁴ *Tib.* 50.1.4-2.1, trans. Rolfe.

So, Julia is a basic character to embellish not just Augustus but also Tiberius. He reveals his base cruelty by intensifying Julia's punishment; going beyond her father's original punishment only furthers the dissonance between himself and Augustus. Lindsay states that 'Suetonius interprets Tiberius' strict interpretation of the legal situation as malice'.⁷⁷⁵ It is strikingly petty to hide behind adherence to the law to deprive her of an allowance. Initially, Tiberius treats Julia with respect, even after divorcing Agrippina. Only later does his cruelty manifest.⁷⁷⁶ Suetonius uses Julia to draw out the two sides of Tiberius' nature, thus embellishing his characterization. As a result, Julia is not given any distinct characterization of her own. She is on the receiving end of Tiberius' kindness or anger.

Augustus' response to her sexual misbehaviour reinforces his baseline character as consumed by the need to keep up appearances; interestingly, though, she also brings out his hypocrisy, since he is unwilling to allow her the licence that he allows himself. His basic character – concern for his image – does not allow him to do anything but punish her severely and so put an end to his dynastic hopes. In the *Tiberius*, her basic characterization is as an unfaithful wife. It also characterizes Tiberius as a rather sober and conservative type. Julia remains a problem for him for the rest of his life: she gains no further complexity, being always defined exclusively by her sexual misadventures (and the punishment she received for them); but, even in her one-dimensionality she reaffirms the dualistic characterization of Tiberius, as someone who could be both dutiful and cruel. Julia is therefore used by Suetonius to characterize the emperors she interacts with. She does not become a complex character: just as emperors making cameos are generally one-dimensional, she keeps her basic characterization the whole time. And this, as we might expect, is how women generally appear in the collection.

⁷⁷⁵ Lindsay 1995: 151 ad 50.1.

⁷⁷⁶ Lindsay suggests the contrast between generosity and harshness was related to his 'insecure exile on Rhodes' in the case of the former and the latter due to Tiberius being 'entrenched in power' (Lindsay 1995: 86-87 ad 11.4). Cf. *Tib.* 11.4; 50.1.

Likewise, Titus' daughter, Julia Titi, is mentioned so briefly as to not to be given a hint of personality.⁷⁷⁷ Her seduction at the hands of her uncle, Domitian establishes her as 'less a character in her own right, and more a victim of Domitian's sexual depravity'.⁷⁷⁸ Again, a female figure is given little in the way of characterization and serves instead to emphasize the character of a specific Caesar. However, it may be worth pointing out that the situation seems implausible as Suetonius reports it: Julia Titi seems not in fact to have been a victim here, and there is the suggestion of a positive relationship between her and Domitian. Her historical character may have been travestied just to characterize Domitian as a conventional tyrant.⁷⁷⁹ Women are just as vulnerable to writers as they are to emperors. Julia Titi is a reminder that Suetonius is not simply reporting facts but is rather consciously creating characters by what he chooses to relate and include in his *Lives*.

One of the oft-overlooked female characters within the overall narrative is Caligula's wife, Caesonia. In some ways her depiction suggests an almost genuine, empathetic relationship, but she is ultimately a recipient of Caligula's whims.

Caesoniam neque facie insigni neque aetate integra matremque iam ex alio uiro trium filiarum, sed luxuriae ac lasciuiae perditae, et ardentius et constantius amauit, ut saepe chlamyde peltaque et galea ornatam ac iuxta adequitantem militibus ostenderit, amicis uero etiam nudam. uxorio nomine dignatus est ꝑquam enixam, uno atque eodem die professus et maritum se eius et patrem infantis ex ea natae.

Though Caesonia was neither beautiful nor young, and was already mother of three daughters by another, besides being a woman of reckless extravagance and wantonness, he loved her not only more passionately but more faithfully, often exhibiting her to the soldiers riding by his side, decked with cloak, helmet and shield, and to his friends even in a state of nudity. He did not honour her with the title of wife until she had borne him a child, announcing on the selfsame day that he had married her and that he was the father of her babe.⁷⁸⁰

⁷⁷⁷ *Dom.* 22.

⁷⁷⁸ Chong-Gossard 2010: 314.

⁷⁷⁹ Vinson 1989: 431-450; 435-438. Cf. Levick 2002: 199-211; 206-207.

⁷⁸⁰ *Calig.* 25.3.1-4.1, trans. Rolfe.

The most striking aspect of Caesonia's depiction is that she was not particularly beautiful, or young, and had three daughters by another man. This seems to suggest some complexity: if not for Caesonia herself, then at least for Caligula having such unexpected tastes. Thus, Suetonius also reports the belief that Caesonia gave Caligula a drug so that he would fall in love with her and the effect drove him mad.⁷⁸¹ The point it makes is not that she was likely to have done so, but that she was considered an unlikely match for Caligula. It certainly would explain why Caligula stuck with her and not anyone else.⁷⁸² This gives him a moment more complex than we are used to imagining. Caesonia is an unexpected object of desire for Caligula, as neither young nor attractive; She is very unlike Drusilla. It is underscored in his asking her why he loves her and in the suspicion of a love potion: even he is suspicious of this apparent complexity in his character.

However, Caesonia herself is immediately characterized purely in evaluative terms of vice such as extravagance and debauchery, which serve to underscore Caligula's own characteristics. As Chong-Gossard notes, 'Suetonius reveals more about the man than the woman' before going to elaborate that Caesonia's influence on Caligula reveals a problem with his self-control and even suggests that her influence on the emperor is dangerous.⁷⁸³ Their relationship also exhibits certain instances of which the only function is to emphasize Caligula's negative behaviour by the way he treats his intimates. In a peculiar show of dominance, he is cavalier with her, exhibiting her naked, and threatening to torture or execute her.⁷⁸⁴ He also did not honour Caesonia with the name of wife until after the birth of their daughter, Julia Drusilla.

⁷⁸¹ *'creditur potionatus a Caesonia uxore amatorio quidem medicamento, sed quod in furorem uerterit.'* (*Calig.* 50.2.6-2.7). It must be noted that the accusation of a love potion has been interpreted as a rationale for Caesonia's execution (Hurley 1993: 182 ad 50.2; Lindsay 1993: 156 ad. 50.2).

⁷⁸² Hurley 1993: 182 ad 50.2.

⁷⁸³ Chong-Gossard 2010: 314.

⁷⁸⁴ Stripping a woman is a habit of tyrants from Candaules onwards. Cf. Hdt. 1.8ff.

The reader is further reminded of Caligula's savage impulses in more humorous moments: thus whenever he would kiss the neck of his wife or lover he would say that their beautiful head would come off when he gave the word, he threatened to resort to torture to find out why Caesonia loved him so much.⁷⁸⁵ In Caesonia's case, the implication is that Caligula knows that she makes him act out of character, and is unsettled by it; he resorts to asserting his own baseline character in response. Elsewhere Suetonius gives as an example of his impatience on an occasion in which he condemned more than forty accused of different charges in one sentence; and adds that when Caesonia woke after a nap he bragged about how much work he had done while she was sleeping.⁷⁸⁶ This is a minor example of Caligula's cruelty but, even though in this instance, she receives no direct characterization at all, Caesonia's presence seems significant. Her role is not to be an independent character, but merely witness and reinforce Caligula's nature.

Caligula's daughter Julia Drusilla too serves only to reinforce her father's cruelty.

She offers a brief but fascinating example of a basic characterization:

infantem autem, Iuliam Drusillam appellatam, per omnium dearum templa circumferens Mineruae gremio imposuit alendamque et instituendam commendavit. nec ullo firmiore indicio sui seminis esse credebat quam feritatis, quae illi quoque tanta iam tunc erat, ut infestis digitis ora et oculos simul ludentium infantium incesset.

This babe, whom he named Julia Drusilla, he carried to the temples of all the goddesses, finally placing her in the lap of Minerva and commending to her the child's nurture and training. And no evidence convinced him so positively that she was sprung from his own loins as her savage temper, which was even then so violent that she would try to scratch the faces and eyes of the little children who played with her.⁷⁸⁷

⁷⁸⁵ 'quotiens uxoris uel amicae collum exoscularetur, addebat: 'tam bona ceruix simul ac iussero demetur.' quin et subinde iactabat exquisiturum se uel fidiculis de Caesonia sua, cur eam tanto opere diligeret.' (Calig. 33.1.5-9).

⁷⁸⁶ 'ac ne paululum quidem morae patiens super quadraginta reos quondam ex diuersis criminibus una sententia condemnauit gloriatusque est expergefacta e somno Caesonia quantum egisset, dum ea meridiaret.' (Calig. 38.3.4-7).

⁷⁸⁷ Calig. 25.4.1-6, trans. Rolfe.

Julia Drusilla is cut from the same cloth as her father, and Suetonius uses her brief appearance as a means of reinforcing Caligula's baseline of vicious cruelty. Garrett makes the intriguing suggestion that this is an example of nature over nurture in the *Lives*: 'This reference to Julia Drusilla is quite specific in attributing her behaviour to biology: it proves her origins in *sui seminis*, i.e. in his seed.'⁷⁸⁸ She also notes that the passage, 'characterises Caligula himself by the implication that he shares these character traits with his daughter, much as the portrait of Germanicus characterises Caligula by the emphatic differences between them'⁷⁸⁹ Whereas Germanicus stands in sharp contrast to his son, Caligula's daughter is very clearly used to reflect and strengthen his established viciousness. Like Germanicus, these wives and female relatives generally serve this purpose without ever attaining any complexity of character. But that is not always the case: there are at least some women across Suetonius' *Lives* who receive something closer to complex characterization.

7.6 The Wives of Claudius

The most prominent of Claudius' wives, Messalina and Agrippina, inform the characterization of Claudius but they are quite basic characters themselves, fitting a mould originally formed by Livia. Messalina of course serves in contrast to Claudius' established character given that she is cunning and ambitious and even attempts to seize power through marriage with another man. She is a paragon of wickedness and self-serving machinations who manipulates her husband. Messalina's one-dimensional characterization as an independent and sexually active woman reinforces Claudius'

⁷⁸⁸ Garrett 2013: 157.

⁷⁸⁹ Garrett 2013: 157.

blindness to relationships and his inability to control his own household. This is perfectly illustrated in the following and elaborated on throughout other passages.

post has Valeriam Messalinam, Barbati Messalae consobrini sui filiam, in matrimonium accepit. quam cum comperisset super cetera flagitia atque dedecora C. Silio etiam nupsisse dote inter auspices consignata, supplicio adfecit confirmavitque pro contione apud praetorianos, quatenus sibi matrimonia male cederent, permansurum se in caelibatu, ac nisi permansisset, non recusaturum confodi manibus ipsorum.

Then he married Valeria Messalina, daughter of his cousin Messala Barbatus. But when he learned that besides other shameful and wicked deeds she had actually married Gaius Silius, and that a formal contract had been signed in the presence of witnesses, he put her to death and declared before the assembled praetorian guard that inasmuch as his marriages did not turn out well, he would remain a widower, and if he did not keep his word, he would not refuse death at their hands.⁷⁹⁰

Messalina's ambitions and cunning are in stark contrast to (and so emphasizes) the foolish image of Claudius. However, given the distinct contrast between the two, her characterization is established in one-dimensional terms.

Messalina's role though, like all imperial women, is largely to emphasize the traits of her Caesar, especially Claudius' weakness and gullibility.

nam illud omnem fidem excesserit quod nuptiis, quas Messalina cum adultero Silio fecerat, tabellas dotis et ipse consignauerit, inductus, quasi de industria simularentur ad auertendum transferendumque periculum, quod imminere ipsi per quaedam ostenta portenderetur.

But it is beyond all belief, that at the marriage which Messalina had contracted with her paramour Silius he signed the contract for the dowry with his own hand, being induced to do so on the ground that the marriage was a feigned one, designed to avert and turn upon another a danger which was inferred from certain portents to threaten the emperor himself.⁷⁹¹

It is also telling that Claudius' passionate love for Messalina was tempered not by her insulting behaviour but through fear that Silius aspired to power.⁷⁹² It reveals more than just weakness and gullibility: it makes clear that his blindness is wilful when it comes to

⁷⁹⁰ *Claud.* 26.2.5-3.1, trans. Rolfe.

⁷⁹¹ *Claud.* 29.3.1-6, trans. Rolfe.

⁷⁹² '*Messalinae quoque amorem flagrantissimum non tam indignitate contumeliarum quam periculi metu abiecit, cum adultero Silio adquiri imperium credidisset; quo tempore foedum in modum trepidus ad castra confugit, nihil tota uia quam essetne sibi saluum imperium requirens*' (*Claud.* 36.1.7-11).

his wives, in that he is willing to indulge them even in extreme circumstances and has to be reminded of his political duties in order to take action.⁷⁹³ Furthermore, this is brought out specifically by his interaction with his wives: it requires him to have an evil and scheming wife whom he can indulge, whereas general gullibility could be brought out by all sorts of incidents. What makes her a more ambitious character is her machinations against her husband. Messalina has a baseline characterization of a sexual schemer who does not care for Claudius. Although it must be said that she would not need any clever tricks to fool Claudius if his baseline holds.

Humour can even be found in their relationship, with Claudius' absent-mindedness embellishing the account of how Messalina came to her end.

Inter cetera in eo mirati sunt homines et obliuionem et inconsiderantiam, uel ut Graece dicam, μετεωρίαν et ἀβλεψίαν. occisa Messalina, paulo post quam in triclinio decubuit, cur domina non ueniret requisit.

Among other things men have marvelled at his absent-mindedness and blindness, or to use the Greek terms, his μετεωρία and ἀβλεψία. When he had put Messalina to death, he asked shortly after taking his place at the table why the empress did not come.⁷⁹⁴

If we accept that this is not merely a grim joke on the part of a secretly self-aware Claudius, then it seems at first sight to stress once again his most basic characterization as an absent-minded fool. Claudius is a fool who lacks awareness again, but here too it is given a personal edge by the suggestion that he is so indulgent towards his wife that he has already forgiven (or at least forgotten) her crime. As Suetonius represents it, it reinforces Claudius' baseline character. He is a fool who barely knows what people in his household are up to or what he himself has done.

Brief mentions in other biographies merely pick up on strands of her characterization in the *Claudius* to confirm her character. It is noted in the *Vitellius* that

⁷⁹³ Cf. Claudius' awareness of the types of women that he was attracted to (*Claud.* 43).

⁷⁹⁴ *Claud.* 39.1.1-4, trans. Rolfe.

the future emperor's father, Lucius, knowing of Claudius' devotion to his wife, attempted to gain his favour by begging Messalina to let him take off her shoes, and that he carried her right slipper between his toga and tunic occasionally kissing it.⁷⁹⁵ This toadying confirms the image of Messalina as exerting control over and manipulating her husband. The implication is that one can advance through Messalina's favour, and her influence places her on a par with Claudius' freedmen.⁷⁹⁶ In the *Nero*, we are also told that Nero became so prominent through his mother's influence that word got out that Messalina had sent emissaries to kill Nero, as she regarded him as a rival to Britannicus.⁷⁹⁷ This highlights Messalina's dynastic ambitions and makes her a version of Livia (with Tiberius) and Agrippina (with Nero himself). It does not add complexity, but rather aligns her with the other imperial women: indeed, it makes her a more conventional schemer than would seem to be the case from the Silius example, which was surely a false step as far as imperial ambitions were concerned. Messalina is a one-dimensional portrayal of vice and a strictly negative influence on him.

Agrippina is also cunning, ambitious, and even more successful in her attempts to cultivate dynastic hopes. She at least manages to facilitate Nero's rise to the purple. Agrippina is scarcely complex, however, and remains rather one-dimensional. Nevertheless, her presentation across multiple *Lives* does create an intriguing picture. In the *Caligula*, her presence serves to heighten the characteristics of her brother's sexuality and behaviour. Although it is said that he committed incest with all his sisters, Suetonius also states that he neither loved nor honoured the rest of them as much as Drusilla but

⁷⁹⁵ 'Claudium uxoribus libertisque addictum ne qua non arte demereretur, proximo munere a Messalina petit ut sibi pedes praeberet ex calciandos; detractumque socculum dextrum inter togam tunicasque gestauit assidue, nonnumquam osculabundus.' (Vit. 2.5.4-9).

⁷⁹⁶ Chong-Gossard 2010: 311.

⁷⁹⁷ 'gratia quidem et potentia reuocatae restituaeque matris usque eo floruit, ut emanaret in uulgus missos a Messalina uxore Claudi[i], qui eum meridianem, quasi Britannici aemulum, strangularent.' (Ner. 6.4.1-4).

prostituted them to his intimates and at the trial of Aemilius Lepidus condemned them as adulteresses.⁷⁹⁸ She is nothing more than a background figure in this biography, subjected to her brother's transgressive behaviour, and indeed is not even named. In other *Lives*, her portrait at least develops clearly into a one-dimensional characterization.

Transgressive familial relationships are also evident in the *Claudius*, given her encouragement of her uncle's affection for her.

uerum inlecebris Agrippinae, Germanici fratris sui filiae, per ius osculi et blanditiarum occasiones pellectus in amorem, subornauit proximo senatu qui censerent, cogendum se ad ducendum eam uxorem, quasi rei p. maxime interesset, dandamque ceteris ueniam talium coniugiorum, quae ad id tempus incesta habebantur.

But his affections were ensnared by the wiles of Agrippina, daughter of his brother Germanicus, aided by the right of exchanging kisses and the opportunities for endearments offered by their relationship; and at the next meeting of the senate he induced some of the members to propose that he be compelled to marry Agrippina, on the ground that it was for the interest of the State; also that others be allowed to contract similar marriages, which up to that time had been regarded as incestuous.⁷⁹⁹

Agrippina's character is sexually calculating and here is being developed into a figure ready to engage in manipulation to advance her own interests. There is an account which notes the general belief that Claudius was poisoned but when and by whom it was done was disputed. Among the various possibilities the suggestion is made that at a dinner, Agrippina served him the drug herself in a dish of mushrooms.⁸⁰⁰

Agrippina is thus presented in negative terms and as an overt threat to her emperor husband, although undoubtedly as a mother with her hopes pinned on her son. Viciousness and a desire for self-advancement are further represented as part of her character in the *Galba*, where Galba could not be tempted by a match with her, even

⁷⁹⁸ *'reliquas sorores nec cupiditate tanta nec dignatione dilexit, ut quas saepe exoletis suis prostra-u<er>it; quo facilius eas in causa Aemili Lepidi condemnauit quasi adulteras et insidiarum aduersus se conscias ei...'* (*Calig.* 24.3.1-5).

⁷⁹⁹ *Claud.* 26.3.4-10, trans. Rolfe.

⁸⁰⁰ *'Et ueneno quidem occisum conuenit; ubi autem et per quem dato, discrepat. Quidam tradunt epulanti in arce cum sacerdotibus per Halotum spadonem praegustatorem; alii domestico conuiuio per ipsam Agrippinam, quae boletum medicatum auidissimo ciborum talium optulerat.'* (*Claud.* 44.2.1-6).

though she desired him so much so that his deceased wife's mother publicly scolded her.⁸⁰¹ Agrippina's main lure for him, we are told, was her ancestry; so that in this story Galba comes over as clever, morally upright, and ambitious with Agrippina as a seductress.⁸⁰² The influence she held over her son is a common aspect of Agrippina's depiction. It is a rather telling characterization for Agrippina that upon Nero's accession, he left all private and public business to his mother; this is made emblematic in that the watchword being given on the first day of Nero's rule as 'The Best of Mothers'.⁸⁰³ This of course is further intensified by the accusations of incest between mother and son, as discussed in chapter five. Her characterization is again consistent when Suetonius briefly mentions, in the *Vespasian*, that following his consulship under Claudius he spent more than a decade in rest and seclusion out of fear of Agrippina, who still exerted a strong influence over her son, and hated the friends of Narcissus even after he was dead.⁸⁰⁴ She is for the most part still a power-hungry villainess trying to control her son with her (sexual) charisma and fending off any threat to her power. But Agrippina's character acquires some depth in the extended section which deals with the tension between her and Nero and her ultimate demise.

Agrippina can be seen exerting too much control over her son in Suetonius' comment that Nero would occasionally show his resentment by saying that he would abdicate and retire to Rhodes.⁸⁰⁵ This of course recalls Tiberius' retirement, and the tension in the relationship highlights the parallels with Tiberius and Livia. Nero, or rather

⁸⁰¹ *Galb.* 5.1.1-9.

⁸⁰² Chong-Gossard 2010: 312.

⁸⁰³ '*matri summam omnium rerum priuatarum publicarumque permisit. primo etiam imperii die signum excubanti tribuno dedit 'optimam matrem' ac deinceps eiusdem saepe lectica per publicum simul uectus est.*' (*Ner.* 9.1.3-7, trans. Rolfe). Bradley notes that *optima mater* may have seemed ironic to Suetonius' contemporary readers given 'Trajan's celebration as *optimus princeps*' (Bradley 1978: 69 ad 9).

⁸⁰⁴ '*medium tempus ad proconsulatum usque in otio secessuque egit, Agrippinam timens potentem adhuc apud filium et defuncti quoque Narcissi amici perosam.*' (*Vesp.* 4.2.4-7).

⁸⁰⁵ '*Matrem facta dictaque sua exquirentem acerbius et corrigentem hactenus primo grauabatur, ut inuidia identidem oneraret quasi cessurus imperio Rhodumque abiturus...*' (*Ner.* 34.1.1-4).

Suetonius, seems to be playing on a popular contemporary image of Livia as a tyrannical mother and not the paragon she was supposed to be remembered as. Thus, Chong-Gossard says that ‘Agrippina is another Livia, a royal mother who is constantly enquiring into and reprimanding (*corrigentem*) whatever her son says and does. But Agrippina is a woman whose greatest power comes from her son’.⁸⁰⁶ Suggesting that she is another Livia is a loaded parallel, Nero clearly wants to portray her that way as a rebuke (and perhaps precisely as a reminder where her power, like Livia’s, comes from); but Livia is assuredly a more ambiguous figure than this appears to acknowledge, and elsewhere Suetonius portrays her as such. Here, however, a more one-dimensional idea of Livia’s character is made use of in a way that strengthens Agrippina’s (equally one-dimensional) baseline.

Finally, Agrippina’s death sequence is something of a curiosity: its purpose is to reinforce Nero’s uncontrollable tyrannical impulses, with the presumably unintended result that it distracts the reader from Agrippina’s stated misdeeds and machinations to allow her a measure of sympathy. Suetonius tells us then that the relationship deteriorated even further, and Nero decided to kill his mother. He tried to poison her three times, but she made herself immune with antidotes.⁸⁰⁷ His subsequent plan to kill her by subterfuge using a collapsible boat goes awry, as Agrippina escapes by swimming; ultimately, Nero is obliged to contrive a charge in order to put her to death.⁸⁰⁸ This does not offer quite the same extended narrative as Nero’s death, but it does provide a surplus of circumstantial details and throws all the emphasis on to Nero’s outrageous act of matricide. As a result, it invites a limited amount of sympathy for Agrippina. Admittedly, she gets to do very little in the account – although her escape from the boat shows a certain resourcefulness – but she therefore ends up coming across as an innocent victim of brutality: hence also

⁸⁰⁶ Chong-Gossard 2010: 309.

⁸⁰⁷ ‘*uerum minis eius ac uiolentia territus perdere statuit; et cum ter ueneno temptasset sentiretque antidotis praemunitam...*’ (Ner. 34.2.1-3ff.).

⁸⁰⁸ Ner. 34.1.1-3.7.

the segue into his murders of his aunt and wives, who are certainly innocent.⁸⁰⁹ So, for the sake of demonizing Nero we are encouraged to forget that his mother was presented in such a bad light.

In the end, however, Agrippina is still cunning and trying to hang on to her power even in the most ridiculous circumstances. She is not just a woman defined through her son's wickedness, since she can more than hold her own on the level of abuse and cunning. She is, perhaps, a more successful Messalina. Nevertheless, both of these wives of Claudius remain essentially one-dimensional characters. Only one woman in the *De vita Caesarum* is a well-developed, complex character.

7.7 Livia

Livia is the most prominent female character in Suetonius' collection and the implicit comparison for all the imperial wives. As a recurring and binding presence, her characterization can be seen to develop across the *Lives*. Suetonius uses her much like Germanicus, and in a more significant way than other women, to enhance and inform the character of a Caesar. However, Livia is far from a basic, one-dimensional character. Certainly, her appearance next to Augustus, as the ideal imperial wife, does serve to emphasize his depiction, but it can also be read as her baseline which is developed and complicated elsewhere.

Livia's relationship with her son, Tiberius, shows her characterization from a different perspective. She harbours ambitions for his future and champions him for the most exalted position. They have a contentious relationship too, derived from her own ambitions and refusal to give up her share of power. Being Augustus' wife is one thing

⁸⁰⁹ *Ner.* 34.5.1-35.3.5.

but being Tiberius' mother is something entirely different. Thus, she gains a second dimension through her interactions with Tiberius. The third dimension of characterization, if not quite achieving realism, at least highlights subtle features of her presentation. Livia's awareness of her own image and influence show her in far more depth than is necessary for a supporting character and reveal her as having desires of her own that are strictly irrelevant to the main thrust of the narrative. And ultimately, Suetonius gives Livia a narrative purpose all to herself, as the one who nurtured and cultivated the Julio-Claudian line.

The initial presentation of Livia as a character naturally comes in conjunction with Augustus and the depiction of their relationship. Suetonius tells us that after Augustus divorced the shrewish Scribonia, he took Livia from her husband Tiberius Nero, and loved her to the end without rival.⁸¹⁰ She is portrayed in a direct, positive manner not only in the regard Augustus had for her but also indirectly by way of the shrewish characterization of Scribonia; furthermore, given the theme of marriages for the sake of politics on show throughout the collection, it is striking that theirs is a relationship represented as genuine love. For Augustus, indeed, it is an unusually rash decision: even acknowledging his unrestricted dominance of Roman politics, crossing Tiberius Nero runs the risk of a political cost and the hasty divorce and remarriage is later used as a rebuke, especially by Antony.⁸¹¹ This may challenge Augustus' baseline character, but not Livia's; on the contrary, it helps establish her baseline as an ideal wife. Furthermore, a confirmation of their relationship and commitment is evident in Augustus' last words

⁸¹⁰ *'cum hac quoque diuortium fecit, 'pertaesus,' ut scribit, 'morum peruersitatem eius,' ac statim Liuiam Drusillam matrimonio Tiberi Neronis et quidem praegnantem abduxit dilexitque et probauit unice ac perseueranter.'* (Aug. 62.2.4-7). Cf. Tib. 4.3.3-6; Claud. 1.1.1-6.

⁸¹¹ *'M. Antonius super festinatas Liuiae nuptias obiecit...'* (Aug. 69.1.4-5).

to Livia to remember their marriage.⁸¹² However, what is provided in the *Augustus* is only a preliminary sketch and her character is further constructed and complicated in various *Lives*. It is reasonable to say that ‘Livia’s character is altered in response to the male biographical subjects’.⁸¹³ However, in this shift of perspective a complex figure emerges.

Livia’s more complex characterization emerges through her involvement in imperial affairs. Most notably, her efforts to secure Tiberius’ adoption by Augustus and thus his position as her husband’s successor complicate Livia’s image and give her an active presence in the narrative.⁸¹⁴ She is thus given a role other than pliant wife of Augustus. This is not to say that Augustus is shown to concede to her every request, so that for instance he refused her citizenship for a Gaul who was her dependant.⁸¹⁵ Nevertheless, her attempts to provide patronage here, even if unsuccessful, hints that Livia is already trying to extend her influence further than is strictly legitimate.

A greater depth is given to Livia as a person in light of her complicated relationship with Tiberius. Her attempts to intervene and exert control in affairs left for Tiberius, after Augustus’ death, is represented as a major source of tension between the two. Livia is even alleged to have claimed an equal share of the rule, which led to Tiberius doing his best to avoid any appearance of being guided by her – although Suetonius also assures us that he did indeed need (and take) her advice.⁸¹⁶ This adds depth by showing

⁸¹² ‘*omnibus deinde dimissis, dum aduenientes ab urbe de Drusi filia aegra interrogat, repente in osculis Liuiæ et in hac uoce defecit: ‘Liuiæ, nostri coniugii memor uiuere, ac uale!’ sortitus exitum facilem et qualem semper optauerat.*’ (Aug. 99.1.8-11).

⁸¹³ Pryzwansky 2008: 129.

⁸¹⁴ ‘*sed expugnatum precibus uxoris adoptionem non abnuisse, uel etiam ambitione tractum, ut tali successore desiderabilior ipse quandoque fieret.*’ (Tib. 21.2.8-3.1). It has been noted that the general depiction of Livia’s role in Tiberius’ adoption has been influenced by ‘Roman traditions about wicked stepmothers, as well as by elite criticism of female influence at court’ (Lindsay 1995: 103 ad 21.2). However, this does not neatly align with her idealized image as Augustus’ wife.

⁸¹⁵ ‘*et Liuiæ pro quodam tributario Gallo roganti ciuitatem negauit, immunitatem optulit affirmans facilius se passurum fisco detrahi aliquid, quam ciuitatis Romanæ uulgari honorem.*’ (Aug. 40.3.7-4.1).

⁸¹⁶ ‘*matrem Liuiam grauatus uelut partes sibi æquas potentiae uindicantem, et congressum eius assiduam uitauit et longiores secretioresque sermones, ne consiliis, quibus tamen interdum et egere et uti solebat, regi uideretur.*’ (Tib. 50.2.1-5).

her excessive ambition, while at the same time maintaining an element of her baseline characterization, in that she is actually a source of good advice. It has been said that ‘Suetonius’ comment reveals particularly well the conflicted and weak nature of the emperor who both requires his mother’s aid and rejects her interference.’⁸¹⁷ He mentions that Tiberius was offended by the title ‘son of Livia’ being added to his honorary inscriptions and as a result he would not allow her to be named ‘Parent of her Country’.⁸¹⁸ This does convey Tiberius’ jealousy and frustration with his mother, but with the knock-on effect of highlighting the regard in which Livia was held and her sphere of influence. Tiberius also encouraged her not to interfere with important affairs unbecoming of a woman, especially when after a fire at the temple of Vesta she encouraged the people and soldiers to do better just as she had done while her husband was alive.⁸¹⁹ Livia is characterized as continuing to take an active role even though her son finds it inappropriate. The characterization places her somewhere between overweening ambition and an efficient administrator who suffers from the jealousy of her son. The mere fact that she can be seen both ways gives her a complexity that other imperial women in Suetonius rarely achieve.

In part, of course, her move from ideal partner in empire to interfering mother is reflective of the different attitudes of her husband and son; but there does at least seem to be a change from the modest wife who (mostly) knows her place to the domineering mother who has to be reminded of it. The depiction of Livia and her nature is extended as she is shown becoming much more meddlesome and manipulative in her attempts to

⁸¹⁷ Pryzwansky 2008: 97.

⁸¹⁸ ‘*tulit etiam perindigne actum in senatu, ut titulis suis quasi Augusti, ita et 'Liviae filius' adiceretur. quare non 'parentem patriae' appellari, non ullum insignem honorem recipere publice passus est*’ (Tib. 50.2.9-3.3, trans. Rolfe).

⁸¹⁹ ‘*sed et frequenter admonuit, maioribus nec feminae conuenientibus negotiis abstineret, praecipue ut animaduertit incendio iuxta aedem Vestae et ipsam interuenisse populumque et milites, quo enixius opem ferrent, adhortatam, sicut sub marito solita esset.*’ (Tib. 50.3.3-7).

maintain authority. Their relationship reached open enmity when Tiberius said he would only appoint a juror whom Livia had suggested if it were officially recorded that his mother had forced it upon him.⁸²⁰ As mentioned at the start of this chapter, Livia in response angrily produced old letters by Augustus about Tiberius' austerity and stubbornness and read them; Tiberius' retirement is partly attributed to his being shaken by her saving these letters for so long and using them against him in such a spiteful manner.⁸²¹ Livia's character has thus moved from ideal wife to ambitious mother to controlling mother. The shift between the latter two is not an especially new characterization given that the purpose is to characterize Tiberius rebelling against his mother's ambitions. It is at least a new expression of it and a shift in her ambitions from focused on her son to focused on herself.

This development is somewhat counterbalanced by Tiberius' needlessly harsh actions (foreshadowing to some degree Nero and Agrippina). Suetonius' characterization of Tiberius as cruel also extends to his treatment of Livia: thus, he saw her only once, and then briefly, in the three years she lived after he left Rome. When she fell ill, he did not visit her, nor did he attend her funeral. He vetoed her deification, claiming that it was what she would have wanted and then proceeded to dismantle her network of friends and confidants.⁸²² These actions may seem justified if we accept Livia as an ambitious and domineering mother. Nevertheless, as a victim of such harsh treatment, it gives the reader a measure of sympathy for her. The refusal of deification seems like an especially petty

⁸²⁰ *'dehinc ad similitatem usque processit hac, ut ferunt, de causa. instanti saepius, ut ciuitate donatum in decurias adlegeret, negauit alia se condicione adlecturum, quam si pateretur ascribi albo extortum id sibi a matre.'* (*Tib.* 51.1.1-5). Lindsay views these tensions as seemingly being exaggerated, especially given the influence on historiographical sources of material critical of her political involvement (Lindsay 1995: 152 ad 51.1). However, Suetonius' emphasis on such aspects underlines his approach to characterizing both figures, but especially Livia.

⁸²¹ *Tib.* 51.1.5-2.1.

⁸²² *Tib.* 51.2.1-11. Barrett does suggest that Tiberius' veto of Livia's deification shows 'commendable restraint and common sense' (Barrett 2002: 219). However, Suetonius clearly uses this to depict Tiberius in negative terms with the result that Livia gains a measure of sympathy from the reader.

act of revenge. Certainly, Tiberius' claim about his mother's wishes comes across as unreliable given the surrounding context about his cruelty towards her. The narrative payoff for denying this to Livia comes in the *Claudius*, when her grandson voted her divine honours.⁸²³ This plays out like a vindication of her memory. Livia becomes more than either the modest and retiring wife of Augustus or the tyrannical mother of Tiberius. Her self-awareness of posterity would be consistent with her previous claims to titles. She is to some degree both sinned against and sinning.

Pryzwansky suggests that Livia's presentation in Suetonius as 'distinctly different personalities' has less to do with her constancy and more to do with his interest in the light it sheds on the two imperial subjects.⁸²⁴ We see her as a loyal and dutiful wife of one emperor and as ambitious mother of another, hell-bent on maintaining her son's and her own power. The examples set out above do indeed serve chiefly to characterize Tiberius, and the second half especially reduces Livia to a passive victim. But although Suetonius may not be primarily interested in Livia, her character does develop logically, from her frustrated intervention under Augustus to her ambitions for Tiberius to the revelation that she really wanted influence for herself. She is, like Tiberius, an effective politician in the Augustan model. She is also a woman of frustrated ambitions. As with Augustus, it is the contrast between her political savvy and her private desires that makes her a complex character at least in two-dimensional terms. Livia as ideal wife and scheming mother are 'made less overtly contradictory by the fact that they appear in separate books.'⁸²⁵ These two dissonant features can actually be read as a logical progression of the same character

⁸²³ *'auiae Liviae diuinos honores et circensi pompa currum elephantorum Augustino similem decernenda curauit'* (*Claud.* 11.2.3-5). Claudius' motives may have been more self-serving given that 'enhancement of his grandmother Livia's status would by necessity mean the enhancement of his own.' (Barrett 2002: 222).

⁸²⁴ Pryzwansky 2008: 50. Cf. Barrett 2002: 236.

⁸²⁵ Pryzwansky 2008: 50.

made complex by a shift in perspective. Beyond the difference between the Livia of the *Augustus* and the Livia of the *Tiberius*, we are looking for the third dimension.

Elsewhere, we can see Livia's sophistication as a political operator: this is the trait which contrasts with her spite and anger as directed against Tiberius. Galba was respectful to Livia and was indeed a favourite of hers, even leaving him money in her will.⁸²⁶ Otho's grandfather, Marcus Salvius Otho, became a senator due to the influence of Livia, whose house he was raised in.⁸²⁷ These interactions stress ties between future emperors and the Julio-Claudians but can also be interpreted as Livia effectively cultivating future emperors. As discussed earlier in chapter two, Livia had a practical concern in what was to be done about Claudius as evident in the exchange of letters between her and Augustus at the beginning of the *Claudius*.⁸²⁸ These fragmentary glimpses of Livia are rather matter-of-fact, but they nevertheless hint at a more decisive role.

One of her most striking interventions appears in the *Tiberius*. At the centre of the young Agrippa's death is the distinct possibility that Livia asserted her own autonomy.

Excessum Augusti non prius palam fecit, quam Agrippa iuvene interempto. hunc tribunus militum custos appositus occidit lectis codicillis, quibus ut id faceret iubebatur; quos codicillos dubium fuit, Augustusne moriens reliquisset, quo materiam tumultus post se subduceret; an nomine Augusti Liuia et ea conscio Tiberio an ignaro, dictasset.

Tiberius did not make the death of Augustus public until the young Agrippa had been disposed of. The latter was slain by a tribune of the soldiers appointed to guard him, who received a letter in which he was bidden to do the deed; but it is not known whether Augustus left this letter when he died, to remove a future source of discord, or whether Livia wrote it herself in the name of her husband; and in the latter case, whether it was with or without the connivance of Tiberius.⁸²⁹

⁸²⁶ 'Obseruauit ante omnis Liuiam Augustam, cuius et uiuae gratia plurimum ualuit et mortuae testamento paene ditatus est;' (*Galb.* 5.2.1-3). It should be noted that Tiberius quickly saw to the actual amount of money inherited being drastically reduced (*Galb.* 5).

⁸²⁷ 'auus M. Saluius Otho, patre equite R., matre humili incertum an ingenua, per gratiam Liuiae Augustae, in cuius domo creuerat, senator est factus nec praeturae gradum excessit.' (*Oth.* 1.1.2-6).

⁸²⁸ *Claud.* 3-4.

⁸²⁹ *Tib.* 22.1.1-7, trans. Rolfe. On similar literary depictions of female intervention facilitating the accession of an emperor's stepson see Lindsay 1995: 104-105 ad 22.

The point is not whether it happened or whether we believe it happened, but the fact that Livia is represented here as capable of forging a note in her husband's name, perhaps even without Tiberius' knowledge. It shows her as an independent actor, and a dangerous one: here she is not asking Augustus for permission or nagging Tiberius about what to do (or for honours) but taking charge and getting things done. This seems a step beyond even her general characterization elsewhere in the *Tiberius*. It is this portrait which chimes with Caligula referring to his great-grandmother as 'a Ulysses in petticoats' ('*Vlixem stolatum*').⁸³⁰ The intention here, as has often been commented on, is obviously to emphasize the traits of cunning and dissimulation associated with Ulysses/Odysseus.⁸³¹ These traits alone might be found in the Theophrastan character seen in chapter one, the 'Dissembler'; yet the invocation of Ulysses means that Livia is certainly more than a stock character. This comparison instead suggests Livia's complexity. She is an effective and nuanced political schemer (something Ulysses was heroically good at) and viciously spiteful when things do not go her way, as in the letters story. She has some of Augustus' political suavity, but also the petulant streak of both Tiberius and Caligula. This epigrammatic epithet does nicely convey both her matronly appearance and her capacity for scheming. The more effective dichotomy though is in the very use of Ulysses: a skilful schemer who sometimes, but not always, chose to serve his own ends instead of the greater good.

More intricate and subtle moments are also to be seen and seem to convey some sense of her personal beliefs. When Livia was pregnant with Tiberius she tried to find out if it was a boy by using various omens. She took an egg and warmed it with her own and

⁸³⁰ *Calig.* 23.2.2, trans. Rolfe.

⁸³¹ Hurley 1993: 93 ad 23.2; Lindsay 1993: 106 ad 23.2. Cf. '*scelerumque inuentor Vlixes*' (Verg. *Aen.* 2.164).

her attendant's hands, and it hatched a cock with a fine crest.⁸³² Although the purpose of this anecdote is to set up the birth of Tiberius and to signpost his future success, it also complicates Livia by suggesting her personal interest in omens and the importance she places on them.⁸³³ It also foreshadows her role as curator of the imperial line: she always wants to know the future – so that she could manage it.

Our final and most compelling anecdote shows Livia taking on this role. It deals with omens, specifically related to the line of the Caesars and their eventual end.

Progenies Caesarum in Nerone defecit: quod futurum compluribus quidem signis, sed uel euidētissimis duobus apparuit. Liuiāe olim post Augusti statim nuptias Veientanum suum reuisenti praeteruolans aquila gallinam albam ramulum lauri rostro tenentem, ita ut rapuerat, demisit in gremium; cumque nutriri alitem, pangi ramulum placuisset, tanta pullorum suboles prouenit, ut hodieque ea uilla 'ad Gallinas' uocetur, tale uero lauretum, ut triumphaturi Caesares inde laureas decerperent; fuitque mos triumphantibus, alias confestim eodem loco pangere; et obseruatum est sub cuiusque obitum arborem ab ipso institutam elanguisse. ergo nouissimo Neronis anno et silua omnis exaruit radicitus, et quidquid ibi gallinarum erat interiit.

The race of the Caesars ended with Nero. That this would be so was shown by many portents and especially by two very significant ones. Years before, as Livia was returning to her estate near Veii, immediately after her marriage with Augustus, an eagle which flew by dropped into her lap a white hen, holding in its beak a sprig of laurel, just as the eagle had carried it off. Livia resolved to rear the fowl and plant the sprig, whereupon such a great brood of chickens was hatched that to this day the villa is called *Ad Gallinas*, and such a grove of laurel sprang up, that the Caesars gathered their laurels from it when they were going to celebrate triumphs. Moreover it was the habit of those who triumphed to plant other branches at once in that same place, and it was observed that just before the death of each of them the tree which he had planted withered. Now in Nero's last year the whole grove died from the root up, as well as all the hens.⁸³⁴

Despite opening the *Galba*, the collection here provides a sense of narrative closure for the Julio-Claudian line.⁸³⁵ As the reader might expect, the laurels wither in the time of

⁸³² 'Praegnans eo Liuia cum an marem editura esset, uariis captaret ominibus, ouum incubanti gallinae subductum nunc sua nunc ministrarum manu per uices usque fouit, quoad pullus insigniter cristatus exclusus est.' (Tib. 14.2.1-5).

⁸³³ This account 'suggests that Livia was thought to be a diligent observer of omens' (Lindsay 1995: 91 ad 14.2).

⁸³⁴ *Galb.* 1.1.1-14, trans. Rolfe.

⁸³⁵ One can understand Syme's temptation to view that passage as originally belonging to the end of the *Nero* (Syme 1958: 501; 779-780; Syme 1980: 117-118; Syme 1981: 117). However, Power views the entire preface as unifying the *Galba*, *Otho*, and *Vitellius* (Power 2009: 216-220).

Nero signifying the end of the dynasty; but the anecdote also establishes Livia as a kind of *magna mater*.⁸³⁶ She is, by way of this imagery, the mother of the Caesarian line and the cause of its success and growth. It is also telling that in Suetonius' version of the anecdote Livia takes an active role in deciding to rear the chick and plant the sprig, whereas in another version it is the decision of priests.⁸³⁷ Furthermore, as we have seen, a recurring aspect of Suetonius' *Lives* is for a Caesar to receive an omen of their later rule, including omens of Vespasian's future using a tree as metaphor.⁸³⁸ In this passage not only is Livia afforded a similar omen but cultivates it. The influence of Livia and the role she played in attempting to manage some semblance of an imperial dynasty is amply depicted in this anecdote.

One last point of comment relates to the realistic dimension of characterization; or in this instance the lack thereof. Barthes' 'Reality Effect' is based in what he calls *notations* (extraneous details without narrative relevance). His opposing definition *predictive* relates to aspects concerned with the main story.⁸³⁹ Suetonius' anecdote above is demonstrably not akin to the 'Reality Effect' and has a very clear interpretation relevant to the narrative of the Julio-Claudians as a dynasty. Unlike other imperial women, Livia as a character is given a central narrative binding role independent of individual Caesars. Livia is presented as complex character in her right.

Livia gains an extra dimension not by the inclusion of details irrelevant to the larger story but rather by the revelation of her (previously unrecognized) relevance to the larger story. Of course, Barthes' 'Reality Effect' is not the only way to understand a three-dimensional character. This is a method that most effectively emerges, in Suetonius'

⁸³⁶ The portrait of Livia as Magna Mater appeared in historical artefacts. Zanker highlights a cameo of Livia enthroned like a goddess with a bust of Augustus in hand and states that a 'mural crown and *tympanon* link her to Cybele/Magna Mater.' (Zanker 1988: 234. Cf. 235, Fig. 184).

⁸³⁷ Plin. *HN*. 15.136ff. Cf. Dio. 48.52. See also Shotter 1993: 100 ad 1.

⁸³⁸ *Vesp.* 5. Cf. *Aug.* 94-96; *Claud.* 3; *Galb.* 4.

⁸³⁹ Barthes 1989: 141-142. Cf. Ankersmit 1994: 139-140.

Lives, with a woman character because the presumption is that she will not be important, and that irrelevant details are all we will get. In effect, imperial women are generally one- or two-dimensional precisely because they are points or flat images against which the main (male) characters can act. But here Livia suddenly emerges as a character in her own right and gains depth as a result. This is a trick that could not work with the protagonist of a *Life*; it is only with a background actor that we could be surprised by this kind of revelation. It is striking that this emergence as a character is given to Livia at the precise moment that all the Julio-Claudian men are finally off stage.⁸⁴⁰

Livia is far and away the most fully realized female character in Suetonius' collection. She can be different things to different Caesars. To Augustus she was the ideal wife and real partner in his labours. To her son, Tiberius, she was a scheming and manipulative supporter who facilitated his rise to power. She asserts her own autonomy whether in conflict with her son or offering patronage to others. Although these are two dissonant perspectives on the same figure, they still mark a logical progression of the character across the *Lives*. At the heart of her depiction is a woman who is in the highest realms of power and needs to maintain her position and that of her family. Finally, as we have seen realism is associated with superfluous details that have no narrative purpose. What makes Livia unique is that the anecdote about her cultivation of the laurel grove positions her as the cultivator of the Julio-Claudian line thereby providing her with a narrative purpose all to herself and independent of the Caesars.

⁸⁴⁰ The anecdote provides 'closure' through a sense of finality, a resolution to Julio-Claudian matters, and a new critical reading showing Livia as an important narrative figure, in line with Fowler's definitions of the term (Fowler 1989: 78).

7.8 Behind Every Caesar

A Caesar's appearance in the *Life* of another adds further depth to characterization of Suetonius' subjects. The respective behaviour of Julius and Augustus at games fall in line with their baseline depictions. However, the dissonance between the two Caesars helps further delineate and define them. For Vespasian to get on the wrong side of Caligula and Nero is in line with his overall strong presence; his early attempt to win favour with Caligula is a strikingly discordant character note, although it serves as a reminder of his aptitude for political survival, so that there is more to him than just the plain-spoken bumpkin. A more intricate study is offered by the interactions between Augustus and Tiberius. Both appear in the other's *Life* ostensibly as themselves, but complexities arise when Augustus weighs his opinions on Tiberius' character and ultimate suitability as emperor. Suetonius also creates other significant characters that can serve as a contrast with more than one Caesar. Germanicus is the subject of a mini-biography at the start of the *Caligula* and, although he primarily contrasts sharply with his son, he reflects on others too. This idealized figure reflects all the imperial ambitions of Augustus and helps to define Tiberius in clear tyrannical terms by contrast. Yet he remains one-dimensional, perhaps because he is spread so thinly over multiple *Lives*.

Other figures to receive prominent portraits across the *Lives* are imperial women. Some receive little more than a sketch while others receive a modicum of depth. However, all serve to characterize their Caesars to some degree. Julia's depiction serves to underline Augustus' character and Tiberius' dualistic nature. In the same way, Caesonia is the witness to Caligula's cruel nature while their daughter, Julia Drusilla reflects it. The influence which Claudius' most prominent wives, Messalina and Agrippina, wield is a direct reflection of his own shortcomings but they however receive more detailed portraits establishing at least basic dimensions of characters. Ultimately, they are character types

echoing the one woman who comes close to achieving a three-dimensional portrait. Livia is many things to different Caesars. She is a loyal wife to Augustus. She harbours ambitions for her son, Tiberius, and does not hesitate to exert her power. It takes Caligula to define her cunning by calling her Ulysses in a *stola* and Claudius' honours for her after death to portray her significance and even ambitions with a need for such things that broaches empathetic. Suetonius even uses an anecdote for expressly literary purposes to portrays her as the guardian and cultivator of the Julio-Claudian line.

Conclusion

The use of literary techniques to represent complex characters in ancient writing, especially in biography, is focused on creating a vivid and realistic portrait of a person (chapter one). This chapter sets out three dimensions of characterization that contribute to creating and understanding a complicated figure. The first dimension is concerned with an established, baseline characterization. It gives a basic and easily understood depiction of a person, usually founded on a singular image. Such things are presented through appearance and visual signs. Stock associations with dress, in Roman Comedy, can indicate social status, age, or a certain disposition like greed or licentiousness. The concept of physiognomy, whereby physical appearance indicates personality, works in a similar fashion. Theophrastus' *Characters* offers a spotter's guide for such straightforward character sketches. These are crafted around specific traits such as buffoonery, penny pinching, or flattery. All three dimensions of characterization can be seen in Suetonius' *De vita Caesarum*. However, it is his reasonably uncomplicated presentation of Titus that illustrates one-dimensional characterization. He is exemplary in appearance and behaviour bordering on panegyric. Accounts of scandalous behaviour allude to character contradictions but are ultimately proven untrue. Although this further intensifies his glowing portrayal, it provides a reader with an opportunity for an alternative reading. Despite such perfections, Suetonius hints to a broader palate of complexities.

The second dimension of characterization relies on moments of discordance in a portrait. Theophrastus' work can even be a step towards such aspects. His 'Dissembler' sketch for instance highlights duplicity and character dissonance. This is not necessarily outright complexity given that it is consistently disingenuous, but it suggests that

appearance does not have to match reality. Authors can exploit this to represent the appearance of a character but make him or her more complex. Sallust's portrait of Catiline is an example where positive appearance and superlative capabilities are completely discordant with a corrupted nature. In Suetonius' work, an example of a two-dimensional characterization is Augustus. The emperor's hypocrisy is demonstrated when he deliberately tries to influence public moral and social conduct through marriage laws while privately indulging in his own penchant for adultery.

The third dimension of characterization aims for a realistic portrait, which can be interpreted using Barthes' modern theory of the 'Reality Effect'. It suggests that extraneous and excessive details with no overt narrative function can create realism. This is then complemented with Gill's distinction of 'personality' (which is empathetic and removed from evaluative assessment). Titus, even in his uncomplicated state, can show all three dimensions in one example. His skill with arms, horsemanship, and languages are one-dimensional, his forgery abilities and their potential criminal application hints at two-dimensional dissonance, and his shorthand competitions fit into three-dimensional realism. This tripartite perspective is then applied to a specific case study in the next chapter.

Suetonius' portrait of Claudius shows that the biographer can create a complex character (chapter two). In applying the tripartite perspective to the *Claudius*, it shows the emperor's strong baseline characterization only to then challenge it with dissonant aspects and behaviour, while aiming to transcend these dimensions with a degree of realism. His basic character is Claudius 'the Fool'. From the outset, his physical and mental maladies are emphasized. He is conveyed in somewhat monstrous terms and incomplete as a person. As dignified as his looks may initially seem, the instant Claudius moves a variety of disagreeable mannerisms are revealed only to reinforce his baseline

depiction as an incompetent fool and an uncouth halfwit. This basic characterization of Claudius is expanded upon by Suetonius showing him to be continually under the thumb of not only his freedmen but his wives. Claudius' baseline characterization shares common ground with stock characters and bears more than a passing resemblance to the weak-willed master of Roman Comedy. Claudius is shown as an incapable, vulgar, uncouth fool. However, being branded a fool is one thing but being one is quite another.

Suetonius' portrait of Claudius offers many examples that complicate this depiction and suggest the second dimension of characterization. That Claudius is not entirely what he seems to be is raised when he claims to have feigned stupidity as a survival tactic, although Suetonius does not actively promote this claim. Competent aspects of his reign as emperor are evident enough in his care for the state. However, in judging court cases more specific examples emerge to challenge and refute his dim-witted reputation. In essence, the reader is provided with an opportunity to judge the judge. The idea that Claudius is even remotely competent is completely discordant with his baseline characterization and complicates his character. He is sometimes wise, in an idiosyncratic and often eccentric way, and does not appear to be all that Suetonius would initially have us believe. His shrewdness goes against his image as a fool. As much as all of this shows a well-defined dissonance between the first two dimensions of characterization, Suetonius' portrait of Claudius achieves even more.

The third dimension of characterization involves viewing a character in a realistic way which transcends the baseline and dissonant modes. Keeping in mind both Barthes' 'Reality Effect' theory and Gill's definition of 'personality', a sense of realism can be approached. The former is concerned with extraneous details removed from an explicit narrative function and the latter term removes characterizing aspects from an evaluative framework. Claudius' affinity for history writing (of which he built up a considerable

back catalogue) is a key matter. The intellectual endeavour is indeed dissonant with the perception of him as a fool. However, the extensive catalogue of Claudius' works cited as a result of this discussion is the kind of superfluous detail that can be read, through the 'Reality Effect', as conveying a sense of three-dimensional realism for the reader. Furthermore, letters from Augustus to Livia concerning Claudius, along with examples of Claudius' attempts to manage his own behaviour, arguably afford the reader an opportunity to understand him in an empathetic manner, that leans closer to Gill's definition of 'personality'. The next section uses the tripartite perspective to look at how Suetonius constructs his Caesars across prominent topics such as appearance and names, speech and jokes, and sexual escapades.

The use of the tripartite perspective reveals how various types of external descriptions, from physical appearance, dress, and names, can establish, subvert, and transcend characterization in Suetonius' *Lives* (chapter three). In exploring the link between the external and internal person, it needs to be stressed that the meaning conveyed between the two is ultimately malleable in the hands of the biographer. Suetonius plays to a reader's passing familiarity with theories like physiognomy to legitimize his creations but with a focus on the meaning he has stated or suggested.

One-dimensional depictions of a Caesar are established through their physical appearances. Augustus is both good looking, graceful, and is measured in all aspects of his life, which feeds into the notion of him being not only an imperial paragon but also the meticulous cultivation of his own image. He is aware of the divine connotations surrounding his bright, clear eyes and wishes to be this way presumably because he sees himself this way. On the other hand, Caligula practices grotesque faces in the mirror, which serves to intensify his overall crazed, tyrannical presentation. Caligula has enough self-awareness to realize that his facial features are horrid only to reveal himself further,

and in line with his baseline characterization, by making it worse. Suetonius describes Vespasian in amusing terms, specifically his facial features, with the direct result that it embellishes the emperor's most recognizable trait, humour.

Two-dimensional depictions explore the dissonant moments of a character and are highlighted by Tiberius. The emblematic image of Tiberius' handsome face erupting in pimples is quite striking. It clearly suggests internal struggle in line with Suetonius presenting him as having good and bad qualities. Tiberius' physical mannerisms all tend towards the disagreeable and yet Augustus states that they are not deliberate. He is not a deliberate monster like Caligula, but he is incapable of and uninterested in suppressing his worse traits, unlike Augustus. A brief comparison with Tacitus' presentation of the emperor highlights the distinctions to be made between the two authors and the complexity that can emerge from Suetonius' portrait. Other examples of dissonance in characterization include Nero's remarkable health contrasting with his debauched lifestyle, the link between Caligula's body and mind showing us opposing character traits, and Domitian's duplicitous use of his modest appearance to play upon people's perceptions.

Three-dimensional depictions dealing with the kind of realism achieved through extraneous details (without any narrative or evaluative function) can be seen in the portrait of Julius. He is ideal in form, keen in expression, and healthy but the fact that he suffers from epilepsy is an odd aspect within his basic portrait and yet it is treated in the *Life* as a superfluous detail. This is the reality effect. Caligula too suffered from epilepsy, but Suetonius' accounts treat them somewhat differently. Although Caligula struggles with his physical and mental maladies, this specific aspect serves to reinforce his crazed portrait. What conveys realism for one Caesar is evaluative for another. Further still, a divine interpretation seems obvious for Augustus' constellation of birthmarks and yet the

biographer makes no effort to stress any clear meaning and this discussion then segues into more straightforward examples of realism. One is hard pressed to find a convincing evaluative interpretation (or narrative purpose) in passing gall stones, patches of skin that itched, and weak limbs along with an atrophied forefinger.

The tripartite perspective can also be applied to the sub-categories of hair and dress as extensions of physical appearance. Augustus was not particular about the way his hair looked and indeed would want to avoid too much or too little care thus underscoring his baseline. Julius' sensitivity about his receding hair being discordant with his strongman image. Meaning is once again malleable given that Galba is not bothered by his baldness either way and Otho is rather vain about it. Domitian's obsession with his hair is in one way a baseline facet but a realistic detail appears in his writing a book about hair care. In terms of dress, Caligula's garments are intensely transgressive of social norms, gender and mortality, completely reinforcing his baseline character. Julius' dandified appearance implies his threat to established order, and presumably the Republic, but is completely at odds with the overall representation of him as a reasonable authority figure thus suggesting some complexity. Augustus' modest attire shows him consistently finding a golden means in all aspects of his life highlights his devotion to self-characterization.

Names function as external descriptions which go about characterizing Suetonius' Caesars. Inherited family names can be used to foreshadow the character of a Caesar as in the case of Tiberius, who is made up of both good and bad, and those named Gaius dying violent deaths. Names adopted by Caesars show how they wished to be perceived, for example Augustus side stepping the name of Romulus in a marked instance of self-characterization. Names assigned to Caesars show how they were perceived by others, for example Tiberius being humorously referred to as 'Biberius Caldius Mero' or

‘Callipides’ and Vespasian being called ‘Cybiosactes’. Some names are even presented with a debatable evaluative meaning which suggest a type of realism, for instance the name ‘Thurinus’ from Augustus’ youth, while others offer ambiguous interpretations which approximates realism, as discussed in the origins of Galba’s name.

When Caesar speaks, he reveals himself and Suetonius exploits this to provide depth and detail to his imperial portraits (chapter four). The main category which demonstrates the use of speech in characterizing the Caesars is that of oratory and speechmaking. Suetonius’ Julius and Augustus both speak in character and in a manner consistent with their overall portrayals. As an orator, few could match Julius and he was emblematic of an innate talent rather than concentrated effort. Augustus was very particular about the image he cultivated and though he possessed the ability to speak extemporaneously he carefully composed any speech or remark. He even mocked and chastised people for pedantic or indulgent styles. Julius and Augustus are both standard-bearers, although they reach the same result through different means. Other Caesars fall drastically short of the mark. Tiberius’ manner is marked by archaic and pedantic tendencies (much to Augustus’ chagrin). Caligula has a notable contempt for styles and exercises. Despite his eloquence flourishing at the prospect of verbally abusing people, he is far too spontaneous in speaking. Domitian is overly fixated on, and overly influenced by, Tiberius. Nero is overprotected by Seneca, who foists his influence over the young ‘artist’, although he resists through the creative endeavour of poetry.

Two further sub-categories of speech are epigrams and jokes which can also be viewed through the lens of the tripartite perspective. Epigrammatic moments can be divided into external expressions, where another character refers to the main figure, and internal reflections, where the subject speaks for themselves to give internal insight. External characterization by others is typically reserved, or at least more effective, for

strengthening a bad emperors' baseline; for instance, Domitian's torture of flies. Internal characterization, perhaps unsurprisingly, is used to stress a good emperor's established character. This is illustrated by Titus' idea of what it is to waste a day.

Epigrams can be used in more complicated ways. In terms of external comments, the warning from Sulla, the observations of Cicero, and even the words of Pacuvius strengthen Julius' baseline character. Internal reflections offer much the same especially in the emblematic phrases derived from the Pontic victory and the Rubicon crossing. On the other hand, some examples serve to complicate his characterization. Julius' own attempted rebuttal of his tyrannical reputation, that he was Caesar and not a King, and the genuine surprise expressed in his final words directed at his betrayer, Brutus, challenge his basic presentation and complicate his character.

Augustus reinforces his own baseline characterization by eulogizing his care of Rome, turning brick to marble. He also stresses his moral stance in wishing to be Phoebe's father rather than Julia's. Even Augustus though can make a slip from his carefully managed statements with his reply about the Ptolemies having a distinct lack of diplomacy and is more like Julius' disposition. Although Augustus' representation through speech contains both the first and second dimensions, it also pushes him towards realism given his fondness for folksy sayings and idiomatic phrases.

Caligula's speech reinforces his baseline of vicious lunacy and he actively cultivates his tyrannical image. In the case of Tiberius, external epigrams reinforce tyrannical aspects whether it is crowds screaming to throw his corpse in the Tiber or his own tutor calling him blood mixed with mud. However, numerous other internal examples suggest a conflicted and dissonant nature. And in the Claudius, when the emperor discusses his ambitions for Britannicus, a great white hope who comes to

nothing, there is an element not only of his own self-characterization but a considerable degree of pathos.

Jokes are at their most effective when they adhere to the established image of a Caesar. In fact, a joke fails to work properly if it plays to anything other than their basic character. Julius' assertion of power is expressed humorously in a witticism to strengthen his overall depiction. Caligula's malicious tendencies are emphasized through blackly comical jokes. Vespasian's renowned trait, his witty and vulgar sense of humour, shows his expanded baseline character but also hints at the cultivation of the image in a way not too dissimilar from Augustus' method. A joke about a Caesar is just as telling as those they make about themselves.

The sex lives of the Caesars allow Suetonius to give a more intimate insight into his characters (chapter five). Sexual episodes can be considered in ways to reaffirm characterization, complicate it, or even to fully realize his Caesars. Suetonius acknowledges that sex does not have to be indicative of character in an evaluative way and is certainly not destiny. Claudius' sexual preferences were strictly heterosexual, and the idea of sex with men left him cold. Galba was partial, sexually speaking, towards mature men. Sexual preferences in the case of both emperors are presented in such a matter-of-fact manner to be considered ethically neutral. In short, their sexual characterization is made realistic.

Sex in *De vita Caesarum* is far from simplified and quite nuanced. The tripartite perspective shows patterns of sexual characterization and the ways in which it modulates according to the Caesar. The baseline presentation of Julius' sexual character is that of an uncontrollable conqueror of women. However, this picture is subverted given through the rumour and innuendo of passivity and effeminacy, especially relating to Nicomedes. The

seemingly legitimate attachment to Servilia does, at least, hint to empathetic intimacy and realistic concerns.

Augustus' baseline sexual characterization cultivates a moderate and chaste image that goes hand in hand with his public moralizing agenda and advocacy of the family ideal. However, his adultery was known but discreet and thus strikes a dissonant note with this established portrait. Augustus is also subjected to the same rumours of passivity, with Julius as well no less. Such a depiction expands on the dissonance in Augustus' sexual characterization. Finally, Augustus' relationship with Livia adheres the one-dimensional image he actively cultivates and even accommodates his two-dimensional sexual depiction given her active collaboration with his affairs. A three-dimensional, empathetic reading is also suggested given their seemingly genuine intimacy.

The sexual characterization of Caligula extends and warps the patterns already established. He openly claims to be following in the tradition of Augustus in his womanizing, made more apparent when taking other men's wives as a political ploy. Unlike Julius and Augustus, accounts of Caligula's heterosexual and homosexual proclivities serve to reinforce his baseline character through excessive sexual tyranny. Where Caligula's sexual behaviour becomes truly subversive of cultural norms is that Caligula would have an almost ideal intimate relationship if it were not for the fact that he was committing incest with his sister Drusilla.

Nero's sexual depiction is also informed by this pattern. His sexual excess with both women and men reinforce his one-dimensional debauchery, whether it is seducing married women or freeborn men. The transgressive accusations of incest with his mother, Agrippina, expand this baseline. However, it takes something truly unique for a sexual tyrant to be transgressive. Nero achieves this by warping the roles of marriage and gender

in the anecdotes related to Sporus and Doryphorus, which complicates his sexual portrayal.

Domitian's sexual presentation reflects elements of both patterns. His sexually excessive disposition is epitomized by his phrase, 'bed wrestling'. He lusted after his own niece and treated her abhorrently, according to Suetonius, thus situating himself somewhere between Claudius and Caligula in relation to incestuous behaviour. When Suetonius stresses the account that Domitian was passive with Nerva, he raises the issue of imperial characterization through homosexual acts, which is a wandering motif also seen in the cases of Julius and Augustus, and Tiberius and Vitellius. Domitian's sexual characterization is a watered-down version of a tyrant.

Finally, this chapter provides differing perspectives on a monster. Tiberius' sexual representation is ultimately monstrous. The obscene accounts of his activities on Capri, rooted in the tradition of invective, exist in the most basic form of negative one-dimensional portraiture. However, complexity emerges in the level of intimacy in both of his marriages. Tiberius' marriage to Julia was purely a necessity to achieve imperial power. The later sexual tyrant meekly obliges the demands made of him. He was initially dutiful to Julia before their relationship became soured. Genuine and intimate complexity is in his remorse and breakdown for having to divorce Agrippina to marry Julia. The sexual excess of Tiberius' later life reduces his sexual character to depravity and violence in the most basic way. This is discordant with his earlier intimate life given the conflict between his love for Agrippina and the benefit from marrying Julia.

Section three uses the tripartite perspective to show how the structure of Suetonius' collection help to develop his characterizations. Ancestry and death act to confirm or complicate his Caesars. Treating the collection as macro-text shows how

Suetonius informs characterization and creates supporting characters through appearances across the *Lives*.

The beginning and ends of a *Life* are key moments of characterization for a biographer (chapter six). Suetonius sets out a Caesar's character through immediate comparison or explicit contrast with their family heritage. Tiberius' distinct duality is signposted when his biography discusses early on how the Claudians were responsible for both services and disservices to Rome. This dualistic baseline can perhaps be more helpfully refined as unpredictability, a trait typically associated with tyrants. It does, however, achieve proper dissonance when the turmoil of his own mind and self-disgust manifest ultimately leading to him trying to refuse the title of *Pater Patriae*. When contrasted again with Tacitus' presentation of Tiberius, the differences between the authors highlight more clearly the complexity that emerges from Suetonius' characterization.

The function of ancestry as a characterizing mechanism can also vary. Nero is presented as the endpoint of a mixed but ever-degenerating line. However, in culminating with Nero's father and Nero it is clear some complexity has been lost. An emperor's father can also stand in sharp contrast to their son. Germanicus is an idealized figure, practically perfect in every respect. Although this reputation initially extends to Caligula, upon accession to emperor, he proves to be quite the opposite. In a similar fashion, Drusus' military experience and success contrasts severely with the physical infirmity of his son Claudius. Supplemental connections to other Caesars also bolster character portraits. They can be as subtle as the claims of divine lineage on Galba's part echoing Julius or as direct as Titus' devotion to Britannicus underlining his idealized baseline and contextualizing him as a worthy successor. There is also a sense of ever-declining relations with Tiberius: Galba is seen as a possible rival to him, Otho is rumoured to be

Tiberius' grandson, and Vitellius is said to have been Tiberius' catamite. Furthermore, Vitellius is characterized by traits specifically associated with and admired by Caligula, Claudius, and Nero.

In contrast, death plays a key role in the characterization of Suetonius' Caesars. Augustus and Vespasian both adhere to their established characterization. Augustus' meticulous attention to the image he cultivated so carefully did not fail him in the end. The trademark humour of Vespasian, both vulgar and witty, marks his death scene too. The death of Otho signifies a complex character construction given that the bravery and nobility in which he faced his end was discordant with the debauched life he led. Finally, Suetonius' portrait of Tiberius, which starts as dualistic unpredictability and develops into genuine conflicted uncertainty as a complex character, is for the most part boiled down to a more straightforward tyrant with the reaction to his death and the public's cries to send him to the Tiber. He loses complexity. Conversely, the reactions to Domitian's death present a contrast to his rather one-dimensional portrait up to that point. Domitian gains a degree of complexity after his death to close out his character. The use of the tripartite perspective shows how the death of Nero contains all three dimensions. Nero's cowardice is a basic, established trait that reinforces his overall negative portrait. The fact that he struggles against his cowardice nevertheless creates some complexity. And the elaborate staging of his death by Suetonius, and the generous detail provided in the narrative, displays some realism.

Across multiple chapters of this thesis, it has been shown that Tiberius emerges as a uniquely complex character. The ancestral account that Suetonius provides for Tiberius foreshadows both the good and bad that the emperor would go on to do. It is this dualistic depiction, perhaps better refined as the unpredictability more commonly associated with tyrants, that forms his baseline characterization (chapter six). Tiberius'

physical appearance is also suggestive of both positive and negative traits. Although, it might initially fit with the Tacitean presentation of Tiberius as more of cunning a dissembler, the two authors differ: Tacitus explicitly directs the reader in what to think, whereas Suetonius presents Tiberius' physical features in a way that is more open to the reader's interpretation (chapter three).

However, Tiberius' characterization becomes dissonant and complex when he begins to manifest genuine internal conflict whether it is his legitimate uncertainty about how to respond to criticism and abuse or his self-disgust and self-reproach in front of the senate, in refusing to take up the title of *Pater Patriae*. This not a case of a tyrant paying lip service, as in the case of Tacitus' presentation, but rather genuine internal conflict (chapter six). The anecdote wherein Tiberius' tutor in childhood refers to him as mud mixed with blood marks a narratological point of concern. Here Suetonius seems to collapse this conflicted presentation to suggest a more familiar stock tyrant (chapter four), thereby signposting how he intends to resolve the character in giving him a tyrants' death. The reactions to his death paint a damning picture and causes Tiberius to lose a measure of complexity afforded to him throughout the *Life*, although he does not lose his complexity entirely (chapter six).

Cameos offer a unique opportunity for Suetonius to give depth to his Caesars (chapter seven). Through them, characterizations of the different emperors can be elaborated on not just in their own biography but also across other *Lives* in the collection. At the same time, Suetonius also develops supporting figures throughout *De vita Caesarum*. When Caesars are juxtaposed the insights can be illuminating. Julius and Augustus' respective behaviour at games, the former dismissive and the latter attentive, serves as an example. Both are in line with their own established characters but are neatly delineated from one another. Vespasian's interactions with both Nero and Caligula aid

with his character creation. A dissonant moment to Vespasian's overall authoritative characterization has him seeking Caligula's favour but this is easily interpreted as ploy for political survival, and more befitting of his baseline. The humiliation Vespasian suffers sharply distinguishes from the crazed tyrant while gaining sympathy from the reader. He also goes on to draw Nero's ire, but this reaffirms his basic portrait in being opposed to excess and tyranny. Surely to offend Nero is a good thing anyway.

The interactions between Augustus and Tiberius in the collection take this juxtaposition to a more advanced level. The dissonance between the two is striking and although both have their basic character reaffirmed greater intricacies emerge in their crossing paths. In exploring the motivations and contradictions surrounding Tiberius being named as Augustus' successor we can actually see the complex ways that they are characterized. Suetonius then constructs Germanicus as a character through a mini-biography in the *Caligula* and via cameos elsewhere. He is depicted as a paragon of virtue and nobility whose function is to sharpen the characterization of the Caesar opposite him. Naturally, he carries out this role for his son Caligula. However, he is also presented as a major check on Tiberius. Whether alive or dead, Germanicus was always the hero and by default Tiberius was the villain, thus reducing the complexity in Tiberius by comparison.

Imperial women play a role in characterizing their respective Caesars but are also basic characters themselves. Julia is defined by her role as the daughter of Augustus or the wife of several other men and a pawn in her father's politics. Her sexual proclivities then serve to contradict Augustus' public and moral presentation of himself. As the wife of Tiberius, she underlines his dualistic nature given the different ways in which he treats her. Caesonia's role is to emphasize Caligula's cruelty as he subjects her to a variety of degradation; but she is a surprising object of affection for him, and Suetonius hints that she has some unusual qualities of her own. Claudius' wives, Messalina and Agrippina,

are presented as powerful and independent schemers who ultimately receive their punishment: Agrippina has more (male) imperial connections to fall back on and is marginally more successful than Messalina, but neither achieves real independence. Considering the tripartite perspective of characterization all these figures are basic in terms of their portrayal and never move beyond the first dimension.

However, one woman does. Livia is the most prominent woman in the *De vita Caesarum* and her character is created through her cameos. She is even close to a fully realized character, who develops and differs in every appearance. Livia is initially presented as Augustus' wife, who for the most part remains in the background as a passive recipient of his affection. She is later given a dissonant representation as the mother of Tiberius, constantly championing and scheming to position her son for greater things. Livia has her own interests and agendas making her a distinct character. She is also presented through an anecdote that makes clear her narrative purpose. In being responsible for the growth and cultivation of a laurel garden which symbolized the Julio-Claudians, Livia is mother of the family line and a character in her own right: one who binds together the *Lives*.

Appendix

A Boy Named Sue:

On the Life and Works of Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus

Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus was born around 69-70 AD, possibly in Hippo Regius, North Africa.⁸⁴¹ His father was Suetonius Laetus, an equestrian who served as military tribune in the army during Otho's reign as emperor.⁸⁴² Suetonius mentions that his grandfather told him tales that the reason for Caligula bridging Baiae and Puteoli was because, as revealed through Thrasyllus, that Tiberius had said Caligula had more of a chance of riding over the gap with horses than become emperor.⁸⁴³ Suetonius and his family were thus ingratiated with imperial circles. He describes himself as having been an *adulescens* around 88 AD when rumours of a second Nero surfaced.⁸⁴⁴ He can be placed in Rome, sometime in the 80's AD, when he recounts, again referring to himself as an *adulescentulus*, witnessing the examination of an elderly man in front of the procurator in order to determine if the man was circumcised.⁸⁴⁵ Suetonius recalls attending the lectures of a man called Princeps.⁸⁴⁶ In one text he is referred to, perhaps erroneously, as a Roman grammarian.⁸⁴⁷ A life of letters, both literally and metaphorically, awaited Suetonius and perhaps no one was better suited. As a man, Pliny

⁸⁴¹ For a general introduction see *OCD* s.v. 'Suetonius (Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus)'. Various arguments have been put forward about Suetonius' date of birth, including 70-71, 68-69, 65-70 or 61-62, for a summary of which see Benediktson 1993: 381. Baldwin argues for 61-62 (Baldwin 1975: 61-70). Syme points out that it is fitting for Suetonius to have been born in 70 AD due to the name 'Tranquillus' and its connotation of peace (Syme 1977: 44). Townend suggests his place of birth as Hippo Regius due to the inscriptions found there (Townend 1961a: 105). Pisarum has also been suggested (Syme 1958: 778-82).

⁸⁴² *Oth.* 10.

⁸⁴³ *Calig.* 19.

⁸⁴⁴ *Ner.* 57.

⁸⁴⁵ *Dom.* 12.

⁸⁴⁶ *Suet. Gramm.* 4.

⁸⁴⁷ *Suda*, s.v. 'Τράγκυλλος' (tau, 895).

later referred to him as *scholasticus*⁸⁴⁸ and ‘*probissimum honestissimum eruditissimum virum*’.⁸⁴⁹ Suetonius is perhaps best summed up as scholar, writer, and bureaucrat.

His career was intrinsically linked to his relationship with Pliny the Younger. Patronage within the Empire was alive and well. Pliny investigated a piece of property, or more specifically the price of said estate, which his protégé was interested in purchasing.⁸⁵⁰ He also secured a tribunate for Suetonius, which he turned down and had bestowed onto a relative.⁸⁵¹ Their relationship also entailed support relating to literary endeavours as Pliny encourages Suetonius to publish his work.⁸⁵² In fact their relationship, as evidenced by Pliny’s letters, even recounts a dream of Suetonius.⁸⁵³ Pliny also managed to secure the benefits of the *ius trium liberorum* for Suetonius, whose marriage was childless, from the Emperor Trajan.⁸⁵⁴ Suetonius also may have accompanied Pliny on his administrative staff to Bithynia.⁸⁵⁵

In his official career, Suetonius was an imperial bureaucrat of the best kind: literary and intellectual. This is evident from the major positions he held, namely *a studiis*, *a bibliothecis*, and *ab epistulis*.⁸⁵⁶ Within Hadrian’s court Suetonius was not alone since there was another associate of Pliny’s holding an important position. Septicius Clarus

⁸⁴⁸ Plin. *Ep.* 1.24.4. A.N. Sherwin-White noted this letter for its ‘valuable indication of Suetonius’ occupations, since Pliny uses *schola*, *scholasticus* of literary ‘declamation’ rather than forensic rhetoric...’ (Sherwin-White 1968: 141 ad 1.24.4).

⁸⁴⁹ Plin. *Ep.* 10.94.1.

⁸⁵⁰ Plin. *Ep.* 1.24.

⁸⁵¹ Plin. *Ep.* 3.8.

⁸⁵² Plin. *Ep.* 5.8. Presumably, the work which Pliny refers to in this letter is Suetonius’ *De Viris Illustribus*, but it has been also noted that the ‘implication favours a volume of verses, rather than the lost prose work *De Viris Illustribus*...’ (Sherwin-White 1968: 338 ad 5.10.1).

⁸⁵³ Plin. *Ep.* 1.18.

⁸⁵⁴ Plin. *Ep.* 10. 94-95.

⁸⁵⁵ ‘It appears that from the reading ‘quanto nunc propius inspexi’ below that he accompanied Pliny to Bithynia as a member of his *cohors*...’ (Sherwin-White 1968: 689 ad 10.94.1).

⁸⁵⁶ These imperial posts are recorded in the Hippo Inscription, which is generally restored as: ‘*C. Suetoni[o | ... fil ...] Tra[n]quillo | flami [ni ... | adlecto i]nt[er selectos a di]uo Tr[a]iano Parthico p]on[t] Volca[n]li (or Volca[n]i) | [...a] studiis a byblio[thecis | ab e]pistulis | [imp. Caes. Trai]ani Hadrian[i Aug. Hipponenses Re]gii d.d.p.p.’ (Bradley 1991: 3705 fn. 17). Cf. Townend 1961a: 104-105. On Suetonius as *ab epistulis*: Townend 1961b: 375-381; Lindsay 1994: 454-468; Wardle 2002: 462-480.*

held the position of praetorian prefect.⁸⁵⁷ He was also among Pliny's coterie; the programmatic letter of his collection is addressed to Clarus,⁸⁵⁸ and indeed the postulated dedicatee of Suetonius' *De vita Caesarum* was Clarus.⁸⁵⁹ Suetonius' privileged bureaucratic post was not to last. According to the *Historia Augusta*, Hadrian removed Suetonius as imperial secretary (circa 122), along with Septicius Clarus (the prefect of the guard) seemingly because of inappropriate court behaviour towards the emperor's wife.⁸⁶⁰ Following the fall, not much else is known and his death possibly occurred sometime after 130 AD. Suetonius' biographies provide a reader with some of the greatest insights into the Roman world. Given the survival of some of his work, this author was never deemed to be wholly lost to history.

Suetonius' major surviving works are *De vita Caesarum* ('On the life of Caesars') and *De viris Illustribus* ('On Illustrious Men'). The former consists of biographies of the first twelve Caesars, from Julius to Domitian. The latter, although incomplete, is made up of *Lives* of various literary figures, including poets and grammarians. According to the *Suda*, Suetonius had other works (needless to say either lost or fragmentary) which are thematically similar to topics in his *Lives* such as Greek pastimes, Roman festivals and contests, the Roman year, proper names, clothes and footwear, terms of abuse, and Roman laws and customs.⁸⁶¹ Suetonius' *De vita Caesarum* would prove to have a lasting influence on the genre of biography.⁸⁶²

⁸⁵⁷ SHA. *Hadr.* 11.3; 9.5.

⁸⁵⁸ Plin. *Ep.* 1.1.

⁸⁵⁹ Suetonius' *Julius* only begins with the loss of his father at age fifteen (*Jul.* 1). The preface was seemingly lost but we know from the Byzantine writer John Lydus that Suetonius' work was dedicated to C. Septicius Clarus, 'Now, Tranquillus, when addressing in writing his *Lives of the Caesars* to Septicius...' (Lydus, *Mag.* 2.6, trans. Bandy). On the manuscript tradition of all of Suetonius' work see Reynolds 1986: 399-405.

⁸⁶⁰ SHA. *Hadr.* 11.3. On Suetonius' dismissal see Baldwin 1997: 254-256.

⁸⁶¹ *Suda*, s.v. 'Τράγκυλλος' (tau, 895). See also Taillardat (1967).

⁸⁶² For the influence and reception of Suetonius in subsequent centuries, see Bowersock 1998: 206-210 (as a model for subsequent ancient biographies); Bowersock 2009: 52-65 (in the eighteenth century); Wood 2014: 273-291 (in the Carolingian Empire and Einhard's *Life of Charlemagne*); Lounsbury 1987: 27-61 (on *nachleben*).

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