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THE UNCANNY AFTERLIVES OF AUGUSTUS: READING ACROSS SUETONIUS' *LIVES OF THE CAESARS*

ABSTRACT

This article examines the appearances of Augustus in Suetonius' Lives of the Caesars *outside Augustus' own* Life*. It shows how Suetonius contrasts the positive image of Augustus drawn in the* Life of Augustus *with the distortion of this image by Augustus' successors, depicted in the later* Lives*. In their reception, he is still presented as an ideal to follow, yet as a role model for cruelty (Tiberius), adultery and military failure (Caligula), or lyre-playing (Nero)—roles which Suetonius' real Augustus never or only marginally assumed. Thus in a series of close and intratextual readings, this article invites a more general reassessment of Suetonius' work: it suggests that the* Lives of the Caesars *draw a more critical image of the Principate than has often been said, that they are more consciously part of an image-making process and, above all, that they should more commonly be understood as one whole work, rather than read individually and in isolation.*

Keywords: Suetonius; Augustus; reception history; intratextuality; biography; Principate

In the penultimate chapter of the *Life of Augustus*, Augustus' funeral is shown as the splendid finale of a splendid life. Throughout major parts of Suetonius' biography, the *princeps* manifests the most praiseworthy virtues and enjoys universal esteem in return. Now, after his death at Nola, the senators vie with each other for honouring him so energetically that a limit has to be set by law. Decurions, knights and senators carry the body on their shoulders to be cremated on the Campus Martius. An ex-praetor confirms Augustus' ascension into heaven; his human remains are placed in his Mausoleum, by men with bare feet and unbelted togas, a symbol of solemn mourning. As Augustus' will is read and the *Life* closes, we are left with the image of a virtuous *princeps*, justly beloved by his people.[1]

Studies on Suetonius' Augustus normally stop here. They highlight how the image of Augustus in the *Life of Augustus* is 'overwhelmingly positive' (Wardle) and argue that he was, in Suetonius' eyes, 'le souverain idéal' (Zecchini), even a 'model for Hadrian' (Wallace-Hadrill).[2] This consensus is not misguided; nor is, at first sight at least, their focus on the *Life*. For Suetonius is writing biography, and biography, it is generally assumed, is concerned with the life of *one* man (or, rarely, woman).[3] With this in mind,

[1] *Aug*. 100–1. I use R. Kaster's edition (Oxford, 2016); my translations are based on J.C. Rolfe's, as revised by D. Hurley (Cambridge, MA and London, 1998).

[2] D. Wardle, *Suetonius:* Life of Augustus (Oxford, 2014), 39; G. Zecchini, 'Auguste selon Suétone', in S. Luciani (ed.), *Entre mots et marbre: Les métamorphoses d'Auguste* (Bordeaux, 2016), 209–18, at 210; A. Wallace-Hadrill, *Suetonius* (London, 1995^2), 199. See also R. Hanslik, 'Die Augustusvita Suetons', *WS* 67 (1954), 99–144; U. Lambrecht, *Herrscherbild und Principatsidee in Suetons Kaiserbiographien* (Bonn, 1984), 84–155. There are also less positive parts in Suetonius' *Life*, notably in the sections on his role during the Civil Wars (chs. 9–19); yet these are outweighed by the numerous virtues of Augustus, the *princeps* (28–93).

[3] See the definition in *BNP* s.v. 'biography' (H. Görgemanns): 'Biography as a literary genre is the account of the life events of an individual human being.'

we expect that each of Suetonius' *Caesars* has one main protagonist only; we look for Augustus in the *Life of Augustus*, for Tiberius in the *Life of Tiberius*, and so on.[4]

But does the history of Augustus in the *Lives of the Caesars* really end with his funeral? Open the *Life of Tiberius* and it turns out that 'Augustus' occurs more than twice as often as the name of Tiberius himself (41 vs 19 times).[5] In part, this is due to Latin grammar: as in other *Lives*, it is still the protagonist, Tiberius, who governs most of the verbs.[6] Yet the overbearing presence of Augustus in the 'wrong' biography is striking. Searching further, we find him recurring in all but one of the other biographies (the short *Life of Titus*), making for a total of some ninety appearances outside of his own. Suetonius' ideal *princeps* moves beyond the restrictions of genre. This raises questions: is the Augustus who makes his guest appearances in later *Lives* the same who stars in his own *Life*? How does it change our view of Suetonius' biographical series if we focus not on Augustus' life but on his afterlives?

This article is about these afterlives.[7] It looks at how Augustus, as a figure or a concept, appears in biographies other than his own; and how this image confirms, completes or contradicts the image we get from his *Life*. In this context, not all of Augustus' recurrences are equally interesting: it is self-evident, for example, that Tiberius' designation as successor involves his predecessor too (*Tib*. 21); and it will not revolutionize our image of the first *princeps* to learn that Vespasian was born five years before his death (*Vesp*. 2.1). Here Augustus' afterlife is rather the continuation of his life, with the main action still happening while he was alive, or he remains in the background. Yet what does Augustus have to do with Tiberius' *maiestas* trials, Caligula's adultery or Nero's lyre-playing? It is passages such as these that I will focus on: when Augustus suddenly, and often surprisingly, takes up the lead role in a story set long after his death; when later protagonists refer to Augustus in their acts and words; when they are shown actively shaping his afterlife. In other words, I will focus on Augustus' reception history, as depicted by the *Lives of the Caesars*.[8]

I will precede in three parts, focussing on the *Lives* of Tiberius, Caligula and Nero, respectively. For while Augustus, as we have seen, appears in almost all *Lives*, these are

[4] See e.g. Zecchini (n. 2); W. Wittke, *Das Tiberiusbild und seine Periodisierung in der Tiberiusvita Suetons* (Freiburg, 1974); R. Lugand, 'Suétone et Caligula', *REA* 32 (1930), 9–13; E. Cizek, 'Claude chez Suétone: un personnage énigmatique?', in Y. Burnand, Y. Le Bohec, J.-P. Martin (edd.), *Claude de Lyon, émpereur romain: Actes du Colloque Paris–Nancy–Lyon* (Paris, 1979), 47–58; D. Pausch, 'Kaiser, Künstler, Kitharöde: Das Bild Neros bei Sueton', in C. Walde (ed.), *Neros Wirklichkeiten: Zur Rezeption einer umstrittenen Gestalt* (Rahden, 2013), 45–81.

[5] Here and in the following, I mean 'Augustus' as used for the historical figure. I do not speak of 'Augustus' as a title designatory of the position of *princeps*. This use of 'Augustus' seems to be rare in the *Lives* anyway (but see *Vit.* 8.2), since *Caesar* becomes the synonym of 'emperor' (see *Aug*. 51.2; *Tib*. 31.2; and, of course, the title of the work).

[6] See T. Power, 'Introduction: the originality of Suetonius', in T. Power and R.K. Gibson (edd.), *Suetonius the Biographer: Studies in Roman Lives* (Oxford, 2014), 1–18, at 6 on the grammatical dominance of the name-giving emperor in Suetonius' biographies.

[7] Augustus 'beforelives' (appearances in the *Life of Julius*) are restricted to three mentions of his letters (*Iul.* 55.3, 55.4) and one as Caesar's heir (*Iul.* 88.1). Unsurprisingly, none of this concerns Augustus' reception history which is the focus of my article; therefore, I write only of 'afterlives'.

[8] The use of Augustan references by his successors is obviously also a historical phenomenon, well attested beyond Suetonius, yet one on which there is still surprisingly little scholarship. E. Lyasse, *Le principat et son fondateur: L'utilisation de la référénce à Auguste de Tibère à Trajan* (Brussels, 2008) does not succeed in the (admittedly difficult) task of disentangling the historical from the literary, and pays little attention to the significant material evidence. Marco Besl in Munich is currently working on a PhD thesis that aims to fill this gap. In the meantime, I will bracket the topic's historical side in this article and not enquire into the veracity of Suetonius' depiction.

the three where he is mentioned most often and in the most significant way.[9] I will offer a close reading of those passages that imply a particular interpretation of Augustus by their protagonists, and link them to descriptions of Augustus in his own *Life*. Thereby, various mechanisms of reception emerge. The resulting images of Augustus differ both in themselves and from the one in his *Life*: hence the plural of my title.

All this necessitates taking the Suetonian *Lives* seriously as a whole. It posits that we miss important aspects of the work if we regard each *Life* as a closed and separate sphere; it assumes that meaning is generated intratextually, across the *Lives*.[10] Following the transformations of Augustus after his death, we gain a new understanding of Suetonius' biographical project. Suetonius will be found to be less optimistic about the Augustan Principate than he is often said to be, and more aware that his image-making is itself part of a process.

TIBERIUS: AUGUSTUS THE TYRANT

Coming to the *Life of Tiberius* from the *Life of Augustus*, and still dazzled by the latter's magnificent funeral, we would expect the next emperor to position himself hastily within this glorious tradition. Yet unlike Tacitus' Tiberius, who demonstratively proclaims that he follows 'all words and acts of Augustus as if they were law' (*Ann.* 4.37.3), the Suetonian Tiberius remains conspicuously silent about his predecessor. Instead, he increasingly distances himself from him through his actions: he dines with Cestius Gallus, 'a lustful and prodigal old man, who had once been degraded by Augustus' (*libidinoso ac prodigo seni, olim ab Augusto ignominia notato*, *Tib.* 42.2); he deprives Augustus' daughter Julia 'of the allowance granted her by her father' (*peculio concesso a patre*, *Tib.* 50.1); and he bans books that 'had been read with approval even in the presence of Augustus some years before' (*probarentur ante aliquot annos etiam Augusto audiente recitata*, *Tib.* 61.3). Even more striking perhaps is the case of Marcus Hortalus: the impoverished senator, who, in Tacitus, requests financial support from Tiberius for his family by evoking a previous grant from Augustus (*Ann.* 2.37–8), in the Suetonian version, does not even dare ask (*Tib.* 47). Augustan precedent does not

[9] We see notably less of Augustus in the six later *Lives* (from Galba to Domitian): only 10 occurrences compared to 77 in the four *Lives* from *Tiberius* to *Nero* (which are longer, but not more than twice the size altogether), and hardly any of these scenes is set after Augustus' death. This might have historical reasons (a drop in interest following the end of the Julio-Claudian dynasty) or literary reasons: the suggestion of G.W. Bowersock, 'Suetonius and Trajan', in J. Bibauw (ed.), *Hommages à Marcel Renard* (Brussels, 1969), 119–25 (followed by D. Pausch, *Biographie und Bildungskultur: Personendarstellungen bei Plinius dem Jüngeren, Gellius und Sueton* [Berlin and New York, 2004], 252–5)—namely, that Suetonius started by composing the later six *Lives* before going on to the sequence from *Caesar* to *Nero*—deserves more attention than it has received.

[10] For similar recent approaches, see R. Langlands, 'Exemplary influences and Augustus' pernicious moral legacy', in T. Power and R.K. Gibson (edd.), *Suetonius the Biographer: Studies in Roman Lives* (Oxford, 2014), 111–29 and E. Gunderson, 'E.g. Augustus: *exemplum* in the *Augustus* and *Tiberius*', in T. Power and R.K. Gibson (edd.), *Suetonius the Biographer: Studies in Roman Lives* (Oxford, 2014), 130–45. Both of them also deal with Augustus' troubled legacy, yet focus on one topic (Langlands: Augustus' moral legislation) or on one *Life* (Gunderson: the *Life of Tiberius*), therefore missing some of the more systematic nature of Augustus' 'reinterpretation' that I explore in this article. The only area in which scholarship has dealt with intratextual connections across the *Lives* more extensively is in discussing varying depictions of the same event in different biographies: e.g. W. Steidle, *Sueton und die antike Biographie* (Munich, 1963[2]), 73; J. Gascou, *Suétone historien* (Paris, 1984), 373–90.

make for a promising argument here. Suetonius' Tiberius is radically different from his predecessor, and is not even trying to conceal it.

An exception to this rule stands out, therefore, as all the more noticeable. In one instance, Suetonius' Tiberius is suddenly eager to preserve Augustus' legacy. Tellingly, the passage is part of a larger section on his cruelty (57–62). It narrates Tiberius' behaviour during the notorious *maiestas* trials (*Tib.* 58):

> sub idem tempus consulente praetore an iudicia maiestatis cogi iuberet, exercendas esse leges respondit—et atrocissime exercuit. statuae quidam Augusti caput dempserat ut alterius imponeret: acta res in senatu et quia ambigebatur per tormenta quaesita est. damnato reo paulatim <id> genus calumniae eo processit ut haec quoque capitalia essent: circa Augusti simulacrum seruum cecidisse, uestimenta mutasse, nummo uel anulo effigiem impressam latrinae aut lupanari intulisse, dictum ullum factumue eius existimatione aliqua laesisse. perit denique et is qui honorem in colonia sua eodem die decerni sibi passus est quo decreti et Augusto olim erant.
>
> It was at about this time that a praetor asked him whether he should have the courts convened to consider cases of *lèse-majesté* to which he replied that the laws must be enforced—and he did enforce them with the greatest cruelty. One man had removed the head from a statue of Augustus, to substitute that of another; the case was tried in the Senate, and since the evidence was conflicting, the witnesses were examined by torture. After the defendant had been condemned, this kind of accusation gradually went so far that even such acts as these were regarded as capital crimes: to beat a slave near a statue of Augustus, to change one's clothes there, to carry a ring or coin stamped with his image into a privy or a brothel, or to criticize any word or act of his. Finally, a man was put to death merely for allowing an honour to be voted him in his native town on the same day that honours had previously been voted to Augustus.

As a comprehensive account of the *maiestas* trials, this is rather disappointing. A glance at Tacitus shows how different it could have been. Throughout the *Annals*, dozens of cases are individually discussed; the Senate's, the accused's, the emperor's responsibility is weighed; peaks and troughs are marked. In short, the *maiestas* trials are made a mirror of Tiberius' obscure and complex rule, or rather of Tacitus' ingenious analysis of it.[11] We miss most of this in Suetonius' account. There are no names, no dates (even *sub idem tempus* is vague, referring to a point somewhere at the beginning of Tiberius' reign);[12] Tiberius is given the full responsibility of these juridical excesses (*leges ... atrocissime exercuit*—although Suetonius himself mentions that 'the case was tried in the Senate'); the only evolution is towards a general radicalization. No wonder, then, that Suetonius' treatment of the *maiestas* trials has been criticized as 'karge Mitteilungen' and 'unkritische Verallgemeinerungen'.[13] Seen like this, the section is just another example of his misleading biographical approach: reprimandable acts are ascribed to an emperor's character, external factors are neglected, and the thematic structure *per species* does not allow for change in time and chronological precision.[14]

[11] See E. Koestermann, 'Die Majestätsprozesse unter Tiberius', *Historia* 4 (1955), 72–106.

[12] *Tib*. 57 *sed aliquanto magis in principe eluxit, etiam inter initia ... nec multo post* leading to *sub idem tempus* at the beginning of ch. 58.

[13] Koestermann (n. 11), 75 n. 6; similarly, M. Baar, *Das Bild des Kaisers Tiberius bei Tacitus, Sueton und Cassius Dio* (Stuttgart, 1990), 96–101.

[14] For ascribing virtues to an emperor's nature, see Wallace-Hadrill (n. 2), 151; for the lack of temporal change, see Gascou (n. 10), 390–436 ('La chronologie sacrifiée', 'L'écrasement de la perspective historique' are telling chapter titles). Such verdicts are part of a long tradition stemming back to Leo's reproach that Suetonius applies the 'wrong' structure to his subject, i.e. the thematic structure developed by Alexandrian philologists for literary, not political, biographies: F. Leo, *Die griechisch-römische Biographie nach ihrer litterarischen Form* (Leipzig, 1901), especially 15–16, 141–5.

Think across the *Lives*, however, and new perspectives open up. While the senators, the informers and the accused might play a less significant role here than they historically deserve, another protagonist of the *Lives* emerges almost more prominently than the emperor himself—Augustus. It is his majesty, rather than that of Tiberius, which is meant to be protected in these trials. The effect of Suetonius' anecdotal climax is that ever more trivial acts are held to impinge on this majesty: first, the decapitation of Augustus' statue, which can at best be seen as an intentional act of dishonouring his legacy; later (*paulatim ... eo processit, ut ...*), acts such as getting changed next to Augustus' statue, acts which for the most part were not in the least directed at him; finally (*perit denique et is*), accepting honours on the same date on which Augustus had previously been honoured—something of which the culprit was probably not even aware. As the charges become ever more absurd, Tiberius' jurisdiction becomes ever more resolute in protecting his predecessor's *grauitas*.

One does not need to commune with the dead to know that Suetonius' Augustus would hardly have been pleased by such protection. Two of his most commendable virtues in the *Life of Augustus* are *ciuilitas* and *clementia*. Suetonius dedicates six chapters to the 'numerous and strong examples' of them (*multa et magna documenta*, *Aug*. 51.1), describing how he refuses temples to be voted to him, rejects being called *dominus* even in jest, and refutes lampoons rather than forbidding them (*Aug.* 51–6). Yet in Tiberius' hands both of these virtues are turned upside down. The same Augustus who once 'melted down the silver statues which had been set up in his honour' (*Aug.* 52) would now have to witness his statues serve as the sole reason for the execution of innocent people. The same Augustus under whom 'nobody suffered for his freedom of speech or insolence (*libertas aut contumacia*)' (*Aug.* 54) is now supposed to be 'hurt' by any critical word (*laesisse* has a physical connotation). Tiberius himself should know better. For when he had complained about other people's libelling Augustus, while his predecessor was still alive, Augustus had replied in a letter: '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 (*de me male loquatur*); we must be content if we can stop anyone from doing evil to us (*nobis male facere*)' (*Aug.* 51.3).

Why does Tiberius suddenly parade himself as a protector of Augustus, and in such an un-Augustan way? The beginning of the chapter following our main passage gives a hint (*Tib*. 59.1):

multa praeterea specie grauitatis ac morum corrigendorum, sed re magis naturae obtemperans ita saeue et atrociter factitauit.

He committed many other cruel and savage acts besides these, ostensibly under the guise of strictness and improvement of the public morals, but in reality rather because his nature was so inclined.

If Suetonius' Tiberius was looking for a 'guise' (*species*) with which to cover his cruelty, Augustus was undoubtedly an excellent choice: by defending someone who, according to Suetonius, was adored by the majority at the time of his death, Tiberius had the perfect opportunity to showcase his *grauitas* and concern for *mores*. Rather than looking to his own majesty, he was simply protecting a shared ideal. For the knowing reader, however, the irony is that in protecting this ideal, he is acting against it.

These are moves that are alien to the Tacitean narrative of the *maiestas* trials. If some of the cases Tacitus describes are provoked by slurs against Augustus' majesty, they are rare and scattered. All bar one tellingly end with the acquittal of the accused and with

Tiberius openly seeking to counter the misuse of Augustus, declaring such charges to be against his predecessor's will.[15] In contrast, the climax of *Tib.* 58 is purely Suetonian: only he arranges all cases concerning Augustus in one place, only he puts them into this order, only he has Tiberius direct proceedings. So while we might question the historicity of his account, we cannot say that Suetonius does not give his own genuine analysis: for him, the *maiestas* trials are above all a sly and abject violation of Augustus.[16]

Therefore, in the *Life of Tiberius*, we encounter a first mechanism of remaking the Augustan image: pure reinvention. Tiberius does not openly say that he is acting on Augustus' behalf. But how long would the Romans resist the belief that he does, or at least that Augustus had a share in these excesses because he had chosen Tiberius? How long would their memory keep the image of the 'real', ideal emperor alive, if the only way they would encounter him under Tiberius is as a reason for execution? In the *Life of Tiberius* we witness a first clash between Augustus' life and his afterlife. In his successor's reception, the mild and affable *princeps* has become a cruel and conceited tyrant.

CALIGULA: AUGUSTUS THE ADULTERER AND MILITARY FAILURE

New game, new luck. If Tiberius had ruined the image of imperial power and slandered the name of Augustus, the accession of Caligula reads promisingly: 'By thus gaining the throne, he fulfilled the highest hopes of the Roman people, or I may say of all mankind' (*Calig.* 13). The following nine chapters (13–21) report in the main laudable (or at least not overly reprehensible) acts of the mostly young *princeps*.[17] At times, we get the impression of reading a second edition of the *Life of Augustus*: Caligula readily allows free speech, calling a halt to the *maiestas* trials (*Calig.* 15.4), restores public morals by banishing from Rome 'the *spintriae*, monsters of lust (*monstrosarum libidinum*)' (*Calig.* 16.1), and inspects the body of Roman knights (*Calig.* 16.2). All this can be easily associated with acts of Augustus and opposed to those of Tiberius.[18] At one point, the narrator makes explicit this return to Augustan practice: 'He published the accounts of the empire (*rationes imperii*), which Augustus had been in the habit of publishing, but which Tiberius had kept back' (*Calig.* 16.1). Given this proximity, it does not surprise that Caligula fosters worship of his role model: 'he completed the public works which had been left half-finished under Tiberius (*opera sub Tiberio semiperfecta*), namely the temple of Augustus and the theatre of Pompey' (*Calig.* 21). Thus, in the reception of Caligula's early reign, the 'authentic' Augustus, the one

[15] Trials including Augustus: Tac. *Ann.* 1.72–4 (with Tiberius intervening on behalf of the accused), 2.50, 3.66 (leading to the only conviction). For Tacitus, these trials could not slander the legacy of Augustus because, according to him, Augustus himself had extended the *maiestas* law to cover written libel, thus making these juridical excesses possible (*Ann.* 1.72).

[16] This is emphasized by the internal structure of the Suetonian biography as well: ch. 58 assembles all cases concerning Augustus, while all other trials are dealt with in the long ch. 61.

[17] The structure in the *Life of Caligula* is half-chronological and half-thematical. While most of the acts reported in chs. 13–21 fall within the first two years of the reign, this is not true, for example, of Caligula's third consulship (*Calig.* 17.1) and the games at Lugdunum (*Calig.* 20), both of which took place in A.D. 40. See D.W. Hurley, *An Historical and Historiographical Commentary on Suetonius'* Life of C. Caligula (Atlanta, GA, 1993), 73–4; D. Wardle, *Suetonius'* Life of Caligula*: A Commentary* (Brussels, 1994), 90–2, 202.

[18] Free speech and clemency: *Aug.* 51–6 vs *Tib.* 58; public morals/*spintriae*: *Aug.* 34 vs *Tib.* 43.1; inspection of knights: *Aug.* 37.3 vs *Tib.* 41.

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from his own *Life*, seems to be resurrected. Augustus finally enjoys the afterlife that he, and his biographer, must have wished for: as the script for any good emperor to follow.

Yet here already we might question the sincerity of the emperor performing the script. If Suetonius introduces this part by detailing the hopes that Caligula fulfilled 'by thus gaining the throne' (*sic imperium adeptus*, *Calig.* 13), we learnt just before what this 'thus' looked like: in chapter 12, Suetonius discusses at length different versions of how Caligula might have murdered Tiberius, which he holds to be 'likely enough' (*nec abhorret a ueritate*, *Calig.* 12.3). This is unsurprising: already as a young man at Capri, Suetonius' Caligula cannot control 'his cruel and vicious nature' (*naturam tamen saeuam atque probrosam*, *Calig.* 11); he is eager to witness tortures and executions, indulges in gluttony and adultery, and passionately devotes himself to acting and dancing (*Calig.* 11). In this light, and in the light of what follows, some of the 'good' Caligula's statements cannot but seem deeply ironic: we may wonder, for instance, whether it truly was 'wholly to his interest that everything which happened be handed down to posterity' (*Calig.* 16.1). This raises questions about Augustus' afterlife too: is the exemplarity of the first *princeps* really in good and proper use here? Or is it simply an effective way of 'courting popularity', as Suetonius describes Caligula's intention in these first months?[19] If the latter, Augustus does not experience a true resurrection so much as veil the deeper, and darker, endeavours of his second successor.[20]

When Suetonius' narrative turns from the quasi-*princeps* to the *monstrum* (*Calig.* 22), this necessarily implies deviation from Augustan practice too.[21] At first, this seems to entail the abandonment of Augustan symbolism: Caligula 'forbade the celebration of his victories at Actium and off Sicily by annual festivals, on the grounds that they had been disastrous and ruinous to the Roman people (*uictorias … ut funestas populo Romano et calamitosas*, *Calig.* 23.1)'. None the less, here already Caligula makes it clear that he is not willing to do away with the fame of the great *princeps* completely: 'he even boasted (*praedicabat*) that his own mother was born in incest, which Augustus had committed with his daughter Julia' (*Calig.* 23.1). Suetonius calls this an 'insult to Augustus' (*Augusti insectatione*); yet however abstruse the reference might seem, the verb *praedicare* implies that Caligula himself is proud of Augustus' action here, an action which he might consider a warrant for his own incest with his sisters (*Calig.* 24). Thus, the monster-emperor uses the grandeur of Augustus for something which, according to Suetonius, the first *princeps* never did: an incestuous Augustus would be completely at odds with the Augustus of Suetonius' *Life*.

If this reminds us of Tiberius' invention of 'Augustus the tyrant', Caligula's interpretations of Augustus become subtler as we read further. At one point, in fact, he seems to follow the Augustan script again, and openly declares it (*Calig.* 25.1):

> matrimonia contraxerit turpius an dimiserit an tenuerit non est facile discernere. Liuiam Orestillam C. Pisoni nubentem, cum ad officium et ipse uenisset, ad se deduci imperauit intraque paucos dies repudiatam biennio post relegauit quod repetisse usum prioris mariti tempore medio uidebatur. alii tradunt adhibitum cenae nuptiali mandasse ad Pisonem contra accumbentem, 'noli uxorem meam premere', **statimque** e conuiuio **abduxisse** secum ac proximo die edixisse matrimonium sibi repertum exemplo Romuli et Augusti.

[19] *Calig.* 15 *incendebat et ipse studia hominum omni genere popularitatis*.

[20] On some other ambiguities of chs. 13–21, see Wardle (n. 17), 90–2.

[21] See immediately after this 'turn' his pretensions of changing the Principate into a 'form of monarchy' (*in regni formam*) and of being worshipped as a god (*Calig.* 22; cf. *Aug.* 28, 52).

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It is not easy to decide whether he acted more basely in contracting his marriages, in annulling them, or as a husband. At the marriage of Livia Orestilla to Gaius Piso, he attended the ceremony himself, gave orders that the bride be taken to his own house, and within a few days divorced her. Two years later he banished her, because of a suspicion that in the meantime she had gone back to her former husband. Others write that being invited to the wedding banquet he sent word to Piso, who reclined opposite to him: 'Don't have sex with my wife', and **at once took** her **away** with him from the table, the next day issuing an edict that he had got himself a wife in the manner of Romulus and Augustus.

Augustus' hasty marriage to Livia, who was already married to Tiberius Nero and pregnant by him, is one of the best-known incidents of his 'private' life. In Suetonius, it is narrated a remarkable three times (*Aug.* 62.2; *Tib*. 4.3; *Claud*. 1.1), and even presages the above passage in its choice of words (*Aug*. 62.2):

cum hac quoque diuortium fecit … ac **statim** Liuiam Drusillam matrimonio Tiberi Neronis et quidem praegnantem abduxit.

He [Augustus] divorced her [his former wife Scribonia] … and **at once took** Livia Drusilla **away** from her husband Tiberius Nero, although she was with child at the time.

statim, *abduxit*, *et quidem praegnantem*—the vocabulary is, in all cases, that of a man ruthlessly imposing his will.[22] Therefore, we might say that Caligula is right in stating that he got Livia Orestilla in the same way as Augustus got 'his' Livia.[23] What is more, even his use of precedent seems to follow Augustan precedent. Suetonius' Augustus was himself a supporter of the old Roman tradition of evoking *exempla*: 'In reading the writers of both tongues, there was nothing for which he looked so carefully as precepts and examples (*praecepta et exempla*) which could be of benefit in public or private life' (*Aug*. 89.2).[24] In our case, it is as though Caligula had searched the *Life of Augustus* for such examples, and that, quoted and followed by Caligula, the first *princeps* enjoys the afterlife which he deserves.

However, if this shows the ingenuity of Suetonius' Caligula, it also shows his brazenness. For Suetonius, this incident manifests questionable conduct on the part of Augustus, yet it is also out of character. On the one hand, as we have seen, Suetonius does report the marriage with critical overtones, and shows it to be the object of Mark Antony's invective and a source of public ridicule.[25] On the other hand, this is one of the few flaws in Augustus' biography, largely outweighed by his achievements and virtues.[26] Perhaps learning from his youthful mistakes, Augustus later arduously commits himself to the restoration of public morals, introducing among other things a

[22] See M. Flory, '*Abducta Neroni uxor*. The historiographical tradition on the marriage of Octavian and Livia', *TAPhA* 118 (1988), 343–59, at 348–52; Wardle (n. 2), 407.

[23] Cassius Dio (59.8.7) records the same episode but calls Caligula's bride Cornelia, not Livia. See Wardle (n. 17), 231: 'the nomen Livia, which only Suetonius records, is probably an error'; Langlands (n. 10), 112 n. 4 replies to him: 'or a deliberate allusive tweak?'.

[24] See also *RGDA* 8.5 *legibus nouis me auctore latis multa exempla maiorum exolescentia iam ex nostro saeculo reduxi et ipse multarum rerum exempla imitanda posteris tradidi*. On the importance of exemplarity in the *Life of Augustus*, see Gunderson (n. 10).

[25] *Aug*. 69.1 *M. Antonius super festinatas Liuiae nuptias obiecit et feminam consularem e triclinio uiri coram in cubiculum abductam, rursus in conuiuium rubentibus auriculis incomptiore capillo reductam*. The second of these charges might be reflected in the Caligula passage as well; see Flory (n. 22), 355–8; *Claud.* 1.1 *fuitque suspicio ex uitrico* [*sc*. *Augusto*] *per adulterii consuetudinem procreatum* [*sc*. *Drusum*]. *statim certe uulgatus est uersus*: τοῖς εὐτυχοῦσι καὶ τρίμηνα παιδία.

[26] Thus charges *circa libidines* are the only ones which Augustus does not frankly refute by his behaviour, as he does with reproaches of *impudicitia* and *lautitia* (*Aug*. 71). This questionable conduct

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limit on divorces (*Aug*. 34.2). Moreover, at second sight, Caligula's action does not accord quite as well with Augustan precedent as he wants it to. Livia's husband gives her voluntarily to Augustus, at his request yet apparently without force (*Tib*. 4.3); yet Caligula does not wait for Piso's consent to carry his Livia off. Suetonius also lessens his criticism of Augustus by adding that, after the hasty wedding, he 'loved and esteemed [Livia] uniquely and without ceasing' (*dilexitque et probauit unice ac perseueranter*, *Aug*. 62.2). In Suetonius' view, more important than the courtship and ceremony is the fact that Augustus maintained this alliance for 52 years, and this despite Livia's failure to produce a male heir.[27] Caligula, however, divorces Livia after just a few days. Therefore, in quoting Augustus as the example he follows, Caligula radically distorts the Augustus of Suetonius' *Life*: he overemphasizes minor aspects and defines him as an adulterer.

This particular mode of reinterpretation is further illustrated by another of Caligula's references to Augustus (*Calig*. 31):

queri etiam palam de condicione temporum suorum solebat, quod nullis calamitatibus publicis insignirentur, Augusti principatum clade Variana, Tiberi ruina spectaculorum apud Fidenas memorabilem factum, suo obliuionem imminere prosperitate rerum, atque identidem exercituum caedes, famem, pestilentiam, incendia, hiatum aliquem terrae optabat.

He even used openly to deplore the state of his times, because they had been marked by no public disasters, saying that the rule of Augustus had been made famous by the Varus massacre, and that of Tiberius by the collapse of the amphitheatre at Fidenae, while his own was threatened with oblivion because of its prosperity; and every now and then he wished for the destruction of his armies, for famine, pestilence, fires, or a great earthquake.

Once again, Caligula is not completely wrong by saying that 'the rule of Augustus had been made famous by the Varus massacre'. Suetonius does indeed stress the catastrophic importance of this event, mentioning it among 'two severe and ignominious defeats' (*graues et ignominias clades*, *Aug*. 23.1), calling it 'almost fatal' (*paene exitiabilem*, *Aug*. 23.1) for the number of casualties, and recalling it in the *Life of Tiberius*, where public mourning prevents the emperor-to-be from holding his Pannonian triumph (*Tib*. 17.2). Yet if this is one of two defeats, it is also one of *only* two (*clades duas* ***omnino***, *Aug*. 23.1). Just before, Suetonius had praised Augustus' many successful military campaigns and had highlighted the almost unprecedented closure of the temple of Janus, symbol of universal peace (*Aug*. 21–2). Also, Augustus' reaction to the defeat does not make it likely that he had 'wished for the destruction of his armies' as does Caligula: 'In fact, they say that he was so greatly affected that for several months in succession he cut neither his beard nor his hair, and sometimes would dash his head against a door, crying: "Quintilius Varus, give me back my legions!"' (23.2). Therefore if, from Suetonius' perspective, Varus' defeat was certainly *one* memorable part of Augustus' reign, it is distorting to say that the reign was memorable *for* it; and the hope that this disaster recurs perverts Augustus' intentions further. 'Augustus the military failure' constitutes another misinterpretation of his Suetonian *Life*.

Thus Caligula's technique, similar in the case of the marriage as in the case of the Varus massacre, reveals a further mechanism of how Augustus' afterlives are created in the *Lives of the Caesars*. In Tiberius' *maiestas* trials, Augustus had been used for

is out of character and, for Suetonius, should not come to dominate the image as a whole: *in ceteris partibus uitae continentissimum constat ac sine suspicione ullius uitii* (72.1).

[27] See Wardle (n. 2), 408.

something he never was nor wanted to be, a tyrant meticulously guarding his majesty. Caligula precedes more cautiously but also more deviously. At first, Augustan precedent seems to be in good hands again, although this 'seems' deserves emphasis. When Caligula then turns into a 'monster', he still seeks to profit from the grandeur associated with Rome's re-founder. However, he emphasises two negative and relatively minor aspects of the Suetonian *Life*, and declares them to be the true source of Augustus' exemplarity. Instead of referring to Augustus for his *liberalitas*, *ciuilitas* or *clementia*, Caligula chooses Augustus as a role model for behaviour at odds with the norm: adultery and military failure.

NERO: AUGUSTUS THE LYRE-PLAYER

As far as Suetonius' *Caesars* and our search for Augustus' afterlives are concerned, the reign of Claudius seems like an odd intermezzo.[28] Right after his accession, the new emperor makes 'by Augustus' his 'most sacred and frequent oath', but only in the context of honouring a number of relatives to showcase his *pietas*, even celebrating the birthday of Mark Antony, Augustus' fiercest opponent (*Claud*. 11). References to Augustus remain brief and erratic in the remainder of the *Life*: Claudius goes against Augustan precedent by draining the Lake Fucinus (*Claud.* 20.1) and by restaging secular games, alleging that Augustus had given them too early (*Claud.* 21.2), while he furthers Augustan legislation by abolishing the religion of the Druids (*Claud.* 25.5).

At the beginning of Nero's reign, however, Augustus again seems ripe for a resplendent revival. If many of Caligula's early acts referred more or less implicitly to the first *princeps*, the young Nero makes this kind of referentiality his declared political slogan (*Ner.* 10.1):

> atque ut certiorem adhuc indolem ostenderet ex Augusti praescripto imperaturum se professus, neque liberalitatis neque clementiae, ne comitatis quidem exhibendae ullam occasionem omisit.
>
> To make his disposition still more evident, he declared that he would rule according to the principles of Augustus, and he let slip no opportunity to demonstrate his generosity, his clemency or even his affability.

In this statement, 'Augustus' appears like a veritable programme of good government (*praescriptum*: something fixed and precise), including *liberalitas*, *clementia* and *comitas*, virtues that Suetonius' 'authentic' Augustus did indeed uphold (*Aug.* 41, 51, 53.2). In the following, Suetonius gives numerous examples of how the young Nero kept this promise, and the reader might once again hope that Augustan example has finally come to good use. However, just as in the case of Caligula, peculiar overtones disturb this harmony. Nero uses his Augustus declaration to manifest his *indoles*, his 'natural disposition' or 'character'. This character was not quite as Augustan as Nero wants his subjects to think. The whole story of Nero's ancestors is one of gradual depravation (*Ner.* 1–5); and from his early boyhood it is clear that, if he is to resemble a defunct Caesar, this is unlikely to be Augustus: Seneca dreams that he is teaching Caligula, 'and soon afterwards Nero provided confirmation of this dream, revealing his monstrous nature (*immanitate naturae*) at the earliest possible opportunity' (*Ner.* 7.1). Against this

[28] On the particularities of the *Life of Claudius*, see Wallace-Hadrill (n. 2), 149–50.

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background, the Augustan programme of government seems apt to conceal rather than reveal Nero's character. The reader is led once again to wonder whether 'Augustus' as a concept is not just the easiest way of courting popularity, dazzling people so they do not see latent, and looming, vices.

Nero's use of Augustus becomes soon more specific and even more questionable. When he establishes the *Neronia*, 'a quinquennial contest in three parts, after the Greek manner' (*Ner.* 12.3), Augustus appears in them unexpectedly but all the more significantly (*Ner.* 12.3):

deinde in orchestram senatumque descendit et orationis quidem carminisque Latini coronam, de qua honestissimus quisque contenderat, ipsorum consensu concessam sibi recepit, citharae autem a iudicibus ad se delatam adorauit ferrique ad Augusti statuam iussit.

Then he went down into the orchestra among the senators and accepted the prize for Latin oratory and verse, for which all the most eminent men had contended but which was given to him with their unanimous consent; but when that for lyre-playing was also offered him by the judges, he knelt before it and ordered that it be conferred to the statue of Augustus.

Why does Nero, not normally a paragon of selflessness, make a stage for Augustus here, granting him the final and highest accolade? Unlike in the case of *liberalitas*, *clementia* and *comitas*, nothing in Suetonius indicates that Augustus himself took any pleasure in lyre-playing. The only time he is said to assist Greek games is within the ambivalent narrative of the last days before his death, and even then only in Naples, an almost Greek city, and only for a gymnastic contest (*Aug.* 98.5). Staging these games in the capital of the empire certainly contradicts Augustus' sense of restoring Roman traditions, and singing or lyre-playing does not figure among Augustus' broad scholarly interests (*Aug.* 84–9). This Augustus would have hardly felt honoured by a musical prize gained at an irregular Greek contest.

By contrast, the lyre and its associations are of pivotal importance to Nero. While the first *Neronia* appear to be a barely acceptable form of public entertainment, soon Nero will no longer limit his musical commitment to organizing such festivals. He will long to take part in them himself, and will appear on stage, most notably as a lyre-player. Suetonius dedicates six chapters to Nero's career as *citharoedus* (*Ner.* 20–5): from his early exercises to preserve and protect his voice, including syringes and vomiting (*Ner.* 20.1), to his personal performance on stage at the second *Neronia* (*Ner.* 21) and his lengthy tour in Greece (*Ner.* 22–4). The *princeps citharoedus* is to become the symbol of Nero's reign and dominate his afterlife. When Vitellius makes funeral offerings to Nero, to leave no doubt about 'what model he chose for the government of the state (*quod exemplar regendae rei publicae eligeret*)', he also asks a lyre-player 'to render something from the Master's book' and enthusiastically applauds Nero's songs (*Vit.* 11.2).[29]

Read our passage against this background and the whole symbolism of Nero's gesture reveals itself. First, he pays special attention to the wreath awarded for lyre-playing (*adorauit*), thus marking its importance for his reign. Perhaps we might even imagine

[29] The 'acting emperor' is well attested beyond the Suetonian biography: S. Bartsch, *Actors in the Audience: Theatricality and Doublespeak from Nero to Hadrian* (Cambridge, MA and London, 1994), 1–62; E. Champlin, *Nero* (Cambridge, MA, 2003), 53–83. On the dominant lyre-playing part, see T. Power, *The Culture of* Kitharôidia (Washington, D.C. and Cambridge, MA, 2010), 90–103, 148–53. Suetonius' thematical structure allows for a particularly concise treatment of the 'acting emperor': Pausch (n. 4), 46.

him 'kneeling down', as in Rolfe's translation; at least, *adorare* was how one would worship an emperor with divine ceremony.[30] Then, by having the wreath placed on Augustus' statue, he makes his great ancestor part of his performance. It is as though Augustus himself had participated in the contest, and now receives his due prize. With both actions taken together, Nero establishes Augustus as a prop of his government programme: lyre-playing is made the symbol of his reign and Augustus the champion in lyre-playing.

This tactic is now familiar. Just as Tiberius takes Augustus' image as a pretext for cruelty, Nero misuses its authority to bolster his artistic passions. Neither of them says explicitly that they act with Augustus' consent, that the founder of the Principate wanted his statues to be rigorously protected or adorned with musical honours—yet they act as though he did. In doing so, they reshape and reinvent the image of Augustus, making him a conceited tyrant or an ambitious lyre-player.

On second thought, however, 'invention' is perhaps too strong a word in Nero's case. For if the *cithara* was to become the symbol of Nero's dreadful reign, it was also known as the symbol of Apollo. And with Apollo we are not far from Augustus. A second passage, set at the return from Nero's artistic tour to Greece in A.D. 67, will help to illuminate the more subtle aspects of Nero's reinterpretation (*Ner.* 25.1–2):

reuersus e Graecia Neapolim, quod in ea primum artem protulerat, albis equis introiit disiecta parte muri, ut mos hieronicarum est, simili modo Antium, inde Albanum, inde Romam, sed et Romam eo curru, quo Augustus olim triumphauerat et in ueste purpurea distinctaque stellis aureis {chlamyde} coronamque capite gerens Olympiacam, dextra manu Pythiam, praeeunte pompa ceterarum cum titulis ubi et quos quo cantionum quoue fabularum argumento uicisset, sequentibus currum ouantium ritu plausoribus Augustianos militesque se triumphi eius clamitantibus. dehinc diruto Circi Maximi arcu per Velabrum Forumque Palatium et Apollinem petit.

Returning from Greece, since it was at Naples that he had made his first appearance, he entered that city with white horses through a part of the wall which had been thrown down, as is customary with victors in the sacred games. In like manner he entered Antium, then Albanum and finally Rome; but at Rome he rode in the chariot which Augustus had once used in his triumphs, and wore a purple robe and a Greek cloak adorned with stars of gold, bearing on his head the Olympic crown and in his right hand the Pythian, while the rest of the crowns were carried before him with inscriptions telling where he had won them and against what competitors, and giving the titles of the songs or the subject of the plays. Following his chariot came the applauders shouting rhythmic praise and proclaiming that they were the attendants of Augustus and the soldiers of his triumph. Then through the arch of the Circus Maximus, which was thrown down, he made his way across the Velabrum and the Forum to the Palatine and the Temple of Apollo.

At first sight, this presents just another blatant abuse of Augustus' legacy. Nero rides in Augustus' triumphal chariot; his cheerleaders claim to be *Augustiani*, referring to the emperor's title but in this context certainly also evoking associations with the original carrier of the name; and the triumph proceeds to the Temple of Apollo on the Palatine, erected by Augustus. At the same time, the very reason for Nero's procession stands in stark contrast to Augustan principles: Nero celebrates his successes in musical and theatrical contests—rather not the kind of exploits Augustus had in mind when he set up statues of great Romans in triumphal garb (*triumphali effigie*), as role models for the 'emperors of future ages' to follow (*insequentium aetatium principes*, *Aug.* 31.5).

[30] *OLD* s.v. *adoro* 4.

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Consequently, the artistic triumph Nero stages looks different from the military triumphs Augustus celebrated after his victories in Dalmatia, Actium and Alexandria (*Aug.* 22). Nero uses the traditional Roman frame but fills it with elements more fitting in the homecoming procession for a Panhellenic victor: he wears the Olympic crown rather than the laurel wreath of the Roman *triumphator*; he holds the Pythian wreath instead of a laurel branch for Jupiter; inscriptions record the place and the adversaries of his artistic, rather than his military, victories; and his trained applauders replace the habitual suite of soldiers.[31] Finishing on the Palatine constitutes another breach with a century-long tradition, in which Roman generals and emperors would follow Romulus' (alleged) precedent and end their procession at the Temple of Jupiter on the Capitoline.[32] As we all but expect by now, Nero puts the Augustan references in this passage to a very un-Augustan use.

However, Nero's making for the Temple of Apollo also invites a more nuanced interpretation. This temple was not only as closely connected with Augustus as any temple could be: vowed and dedicated by him after his victories at Naulochus and Actium, located close to his residence and counted by Suetonius among his three most remarkable public buildings (*Aug.* 29.1).[33] It was also a temple of Apollo, the patron of poetry and music. Indeed, the main cult image in the temple showed Apollo in this guise, wearing a long robe—and playing the lyre.[34] A second statue of *Apollo citharoedus*, situated in the portico, might even have born Augustus' own likeness, thus further illustrating the connection between Augustus, Apollo and the art of lyre-playing.[35] This makes Nero's choice of scenery suddenly seem reasonable. If Augustus equals Apollo, and Apollo equals the lyre-player, is Nero's artistic triumph not, after all, an adequate homage to his great ancestor and his ancestor's imagery? Nero might even be following the script of a truly Augustan poet: on the shield in *Aeneid* Book 8, Virgil sets Augustus' triumph after Actium in front of a temple of Apollo, probably that on the Palatine.[36]

Yet this does not mean that Suetonius' Nero is not reinterpreting Augustus and Augustus' Apollo. For Apollo was god not only of poetry and music but also of healing, prophecy, light, archery and more. This polyvalence, reflected in the *Life of Augustus*, is probably the reason why Apollo was so attractive to Augustus.[37] Nor were these roles clearly distinct or their images to be taken literally: Propertius interprets the statue of *Apollo citharoedus* on the Palatine not as promotion of art, as the lyre might suggest, but as a symbol of peace and reconciliation.[38] Yet in the *Life of Nero*, Nero radically

[31] J.F. Miller, '*Triumphus in Palatio*', *AJPh* 121 (2000), 409–22, at 415–18.

[32] On Nero's change of route, see Miller (n. 31), 412; M. Beard, *The Roman Triumph* (Cambridge, MA and London, 2007), 268–71. For the *exemplum* of Romulus, Plut. *Vit. Rom*. 16.5–8.

[33] P. Zanker, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus* (Michigan, 1988), 85–9; K. Galinsky, *Augustan Culture: An Interpretive Introduction* (Princeton, 1996), 213–24.

[34] Zanker (n. 33), 85; Galinsky (n. 33), 218 with Prop. 2.31.15–16.

[35] Power (n. 29), 154; Champlin (n. 29), 142 with Prop. 2.31.5–6 and Ps.-Acro on Hor. *Epist.* 1.3.17.

[36] Verg. *Aen*. 8.714–22; Miller (n. 31), 410, 419. Cassius Dio (63.20) has a similar account of the triumph but does not include the temple of Apollo: this rendering of Augustus' afterlife is specific to Suetonius.

[37] Galinsky (n. 33), 215–16. In Suetonius' *Life of Augustus*, Augustus enlarges a sanctuary after Actium (18.2), makes the temple of the Palatine the location of public libraries (29.3), is said to be fathered by the deity (94.4), and is ridiculed by his opponents as 'Apollo the Tormenter' (70.2).

[38] Prop. 4.6.69–70 *citharam iam poscit Apollo | uictor et ad placidos exuit arma choros*. For Augustus' careful ponderation of motifs of victory and of reconciliation in the temple's imagery, see Zanker (n. 33), 85 and Galinksy (n. 33), 215–18.

reduces this complexity to establish Apollo as a musical god alone and takes the imitation of him in this role very seriously. Not only does he make the god's temple the focal point of his artistic triumph, he also considers himself 'the equal of Apollo in singing' (*Apollinem cantu ... aequiperare*, *Ner.* 53), and thus has the audience in the theatre call for his 'divine voice' (*caelestem uocem*, *Ner.* 21.1). Suetonius even shows how the Roman public ridicules this restricted use of Apollo in two verses that were circulating (*Ner.* 39.2):

> dum tendite citharam noster, dum cornua Parthus,
> noster erit Paean, ille Hecatebeletes.
>
> Since our leader strings his lyre, the Parthian his bow,
> Ours will be musical Apollo, theirs the great archer.

In this logic, Nero so neglects the warring aspect of Apollo that Rome's fiercest enemies can take it over. Once again, we are far from the world of Augustus.

Therefore, in the *Life of Nero*, a third mechanism of reception emerges. Suetonius' Nero does not invent a new Augustus from scratch, as Tiberius does, nor does he reinterpret negative aspects as assets, like Caligula. Rather, he takes up well-known elements of Augustus' official representation: the lyre-player and the patron of the arts, both connected with his ancestor's favourite god Apollo. Seen like this, there was no problem in using Augustus' chariot and landmark temple for an artistic triumph, or in awarding musical honours to his statue—the reader might even imagine this statue to show Augustus as *Apollo citharoedus*.[39] Yet the context in which Nero uses Augustus' representation implicates his ancestor in something alien to his abstract and multilayered symbolism: into Greek games in Rome, into an emperor's appearances on stage, into a *princeps* who takes music more seriously than politics. Nero isolates one element of Augustus' imagery and takes it literally; he uses the lyre-playing Apollo to link his own artistic passions with the grandeur of Augustus.

CONCLUSION

'None of the information that appears about Augustus in other *Lives* forces the reader to reconsider his verdict or suggests that Suetonius himself has changed his verdict; he has not acquired new information nor is he concerned to reflect on the complexity of truth by presenting the same information from differing perspectives. *Augustus* stands alone and must be read as such.'[40]

If scholars have ever acknowledged the appearances of Augustus in the *Lives of the Caesars* other than his own, they have come to conclusions like that of Wardle. My study proves them right: the only 'new information' that we have acquired about Augustus is false, and clearly contrary to Suetonius' own view. More significantly, however, my study shows these conclusions to be limited: when it comes to understanding Suetonius' biographical series, its 'fake news' is as pertinent as its news.

In the course of three *Lives*, we have observed different methods by which Augustus' successors employ and remodel the image of their great ancestor. From a blatant invention (Tiberius) to an accurate, yet insincere, 'formulation' (early Caligula, early

[39] As do Champlin (n. 29), 142 and Power (n. 29), 156 with respect to *Ner.* 12.3.
[40] Wardle (n. 2), 31.

Nero); from a distorting overemphasis of minor aspects (Caligula) to an all-too-literal and selective reinterpretation of Augustan imagery (Nero). Apart from the short-lived 'formulation', the resulting images of Augustus have one thing in common: they present a *princeps* very different from the one we know from Suetonius' *Life*. Not that, in the eyes of posterity, Augustus has become less ideal. To the great majority, Augustus' successors still seek his proximity, and recognize his grandeur. Yet in their reception, this grandeur is linked to something which Suetonius' Augustus never, or only marginally, was. While Augustus in the *Life of Augustus* is famous for affability, clemency and generosity, in the abuse by his successors he becomes the symbol of a tyrant, an adulterer, a military failure or a lyre-player. There is a conspicuous clash between Augustus' life and his afterlives in the *Lives of the Caesars*.

This clash, in this particular form, is unique to Suetonius. In Tacitus' *Annals*, for example, the narrator himself constantly casts doubt about the intentions and achievements of the first *princeps*, while other characters refer to him as *Diuus Augustus*, a benchmark for excellence.[41] For Tacitus, the clash is between a dubious life and an ideal afterlife, the scandal is not that Augustus is used as *exemplum* for depraved aims, but that he is used as *exemplum* at all. Suetonius' depiction is distinctly different, and it stands on its own two feet: hardly any of the passages discussed in this essay can be found in other literary sources of that time; or if they do exist in parallel tradition, it is often Suetonius' narrative which emphasizes references to Augustus.[42]

If, then, the afterlives of Augustus in the *Lives of the Caesars* are genuinely Suetonian, what do they reveal about his biographical series? First, they ask us to reconsider the common verdict of Suetonius as an author who is 'not interested in politics' (Wallace-Hadrill) or naively apologetic, 'un partisan avéré du principat' (Cizek).[43] Many of these judgements draw on the 'uncritical' depiction of Augustus in Suetonius' *Life*.[44] Yet, while the *Life of Augustus* might paint an image of virtue, most of the other biographies make for a gallery of vices. In here, the afterlives of Augustus take up a prominent place. Not only do they highlight the contrast between the venerable first *princeps* and his numerous malevolent successors; they also shed a rather tragic light on Augustus' own efforts to establish a good form of government.[45] For it is, of course, thanks to this new form of government that Tiberius, Caligula and Nero enjoy the power they use to slander his legacy, that one person decides whether Augustus is remembered for peace or for adultery. And this, in turn, is just one part

[41] Contrast e.g. the critical vocabulary employed by the narrator in his brief account of Augustus' rise to power (*cunctos dulcedine otii pellexit*, 1.2.1; *subsidia dominationi*, 1.3.1; *specie recusantis*, 1.3.2) with the role of Augustus in Tiberius' accession scene, in which both the emperor-to-be and the Senate repeatedly refer to Augustus as to an ideal (1.11.1, 1.11.3, 1.12.3). This tension continues throughout the *Annals*: we find the critical view insinuated by the narrator, for example, in 2.59.3, 3.28.3, 3.56.2, and the exemplary use by the protagonists, for example, in 1.34.4, 2.37–8, 12.11.1, 14.55.2.

[42] See above, page 333, as well as n. 23 and n. 36.

[43] Wallace-Hadrill (n. 2), 118 and E. Cizek, *Structures et idéologie dans* Les vies des douze Césars *de Suétone* (Paris, 1977), 178. Similarly, Lambrecht (n. 2), e.g. 82–3 and 158; Gascou (n. 10), e.g. 799–800; and still V. Schulz, *Deconstructing Imperial Representation: Tacitus, Cassius Dio and Suetonius on Nero and Domitian* (Leiden and Boston, 2019), e.g. 341.

[44] See e.g. Lambrecht (n. 2), 154 and Wallace-Hadrill (n. 2), 111, both of whom extrapolate from the positive depiction of Augustus' Principate in *Aug*. 28 to Suetonius' view of the Principate in general.

[45] Cf. Langlands (n. 10) on the afterlife of Augustus' moral legislation, who considers its subsequent failure in philosophical rather than political terms: 'a commentary on the relationship between fate and the individual' (127). Both interpretations are possible and not mutually exclusive.

of a bigger picture in which one person also decides whether senators are honoured or prosecuted, whether the people are given games or taxes. How well is a political system working if it produces many more bad than good rulers, and if any bad ruler impinges on society as gravely as Suetonius depicts it? Seen like this, the afterlives of Augustus capture in a nutshell Suetonius' and Tacitus' different views of the Principate. For Tacitus, the system is profoundly flawed by its founder's intentions, and false language merely serves to conceal it; for Suetonius, Augustus can justly be called 'the author of the best possible *status*' (*optimi status auctor*, *Aug.* 28.2)—and still this *status* is dangerously dependent on the man at its head. *Both* are political reflections, and neither sounds overly optimistic.[46]

On a second level, Augustus' afterlives offer insight not only into Suetonian politics but also into Suetonian poetics. For if the *Lives of the Caesars* show many protagonists creating their image of Augustus, the author is necessarily implicated in this process. His *Life of Augustus* is also an afterlife, written some one hundred years after the death of the *princeps*. Yet in the eyes of the biographer, this is naturally the afterlife which comes closest to Augustus' real life. By presenting concomitantly so many other 'wrong' representations of this life, Suetonius shapes out his own 'correct' image and protects it against misinterpretations. More importantly still, by drawing attention to cases of misleading reception, Suetonius highlights the relevance of his own work. Throughout the Early Principate, we are shown, Augustus has been subject to so many distortions, that it is high time to say once and for all what he was *really* like: hence the *Life of Augustus*.

All this invites further deepening, for instance looking at the afterlives of other emperors. My study has provided the method for this. For its third and perhaps most essential outcome is that we can obtain the others only if we take Suetonius' *Lives* seriously as a whole. Therefore, if my study has proved Wardle's conclusion correct in some senses and limited in others, in a third sense it has shown it to be wrong: '*Augustus* stands alone and must be read as such.' In many ways, Augustus' funeral is only the beginning of his story in the *Lives*, and we can only discover these ways if we read *across* them.

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[46] Would Suetonius' judgement on the Principate of his own days be more favourable? The only explicit reference is ambiguous: in the final sentence of the work (*Dom.* 23.2), Suetonius asserts that the condition of the state improved after Domitian's death thanks to the *abstinentia* and *moderatio* of the succeeding emperors, yet this also implies that it still rests on the virtues and vices of a single man (quite apart from the question whether this is lip service). And while one might consider adoptive emperorship to be a (self-declared) solution to the problem of vicious successors, Suetonius argues vehemently that Augustus selected Tiberius with the best intentions (*Tib.* 21)—Tiberius who is then shown to become one of the cruellest tyrants.

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