REVIEW ARTICLE

THE REDISCOVERY OF SUETONIUS*

For almost twenty years the standard English introduction to Suetonius and his *Lives of the Caesars* has been G. B. Townend's essay, "Suetonius and His Influence," which appeared in the book, edited by T. A. Dorey, entitled *Latin Biography* (London, 1967). Though marred by some inaccuracies and of necessity all too brief, Townend's essay has been cited frequently and still remains a valuable introduction. But the fact that a single paper has for so long been the most conspicuous source of information on an author of some consequence is a telling sign of the neglect Suetonius and his work have received from scholars in the English-speaking world. In modern times some commentaries on individual lives have of course appeared, and inevitably there has been a steady, but relatively small, amount of periodical literature. By and large, however, Suetonius has been given more attention by Continental than English-speaking scholars, the most important contribution by far being the monograph of W. Steidle, *Sueton und die antike Biographie* (2d ed.: Munich, 1963). Even so, the only truly comprehensive treatment, until now, has been A. Macé's *Essai sur Suétone*, a work which was published in 1900 and which today is thus out of date in some, though not all, respects.[1]

This neglect of Suetonius is easily explicable. To many Suetonius has seemed a second-rate author unworthy of serious attention—an objection hard to deny from an aesthetic perspective—and much of the material contained in the *Caesares* has simply been written off as trivial or, worse, morally distasteful. As recently as 1980, R. M. Ogilvie could write, baldly and dismissively, "Suetonius is compiling a series of portraits based upon anecdote, scandal and fact, which are meant to divert, amuse and, on occasion, shock" (*Roman Literature and Society* [Harmondsworth, 1980], p. 264), while the Loeb edition, first printed in 1913 but still unchanged, presents at *Tiberius* 43–44 a Latin text on *both* pages for a section describing the sexual diversions of Tiberius on the island of Capri. The self-defeating nature of that convention seems never to have made an impact on the editors of the Loeb series, even though in today's climate the contents of *Tiberius* 43–44 are not all that shocking. Still, the judgments on Suetonius, both explicit and implicit, are obvious.

**Suetonius*. By BARRY BALDWIN. Amsterdam: Adolph M. Hakkert, 1983. Pp. x + 579.

Suetonius: The Scholar and His Caesars. By ANDREW WALLACE-HADRILL. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1984. Pp. xii + 216. $22.50.

1. Wallace-Hadrill (pp. 206–7) provides a select list of editions and commentaries, to which should be added P. Venini, *C. Suetonio Tranquillo: Vite di Galba, Otone, Vitellio* (Turin, 1977), and H. Martinet, *C. Suetonius Tranquillus: Divus Titus: Kommentar* (Königstein/Ts., 1981). For interest in Suetonius in England in a much earlier period, see G. W. Bowersock, "Suetonius in the Eighteenth Century," in *Biography in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. J. D. Browning (New York, 1980), pp. 28–42.

More importantly, Suetonius is overshadowed on artistic grounds by his contemporary Tacitus, and the consequent tendency among scholars to pay greater attention to the historian than to the biographer has been accelerated in the modern era since the publication in 1958 of R. Syme's *Tacitus,* a work of immense consequence for later scholarship and one in which Suetonius himself received very short shrift. Suetonian biography was derided by Syme, and severe verdicts continue to be given.[2] Predictably, therefore, study of Suetonius has languished as an appendage to the study of Tacitus.

Yet it was under the spell cast by Syme that a long sequence of works appeared, exploring authors whose works provide important information for study of the Roman Empire, and so perhaps it was ultimately inevitable that new and independent interest in Suetonius would arise. By no criteria will it ever be possible to claim that Suetonius should be raised to the rank of Tacitus. But now, through one of those strange coincidences of scholarship, two books which will do much to dispel the neglect which has surrounded Suetonius for so long have appeared simultaneously, and, taken together, the works of Baldwin and Wallace-Hadrill demonstrate beyond doubt that Suetonius and his *Caesares* must be paid serious attention. The books represent a real advance in knowledge and each is to be warmly welcomed. In what follows I describe first the general character of each author's work, then discuss some particular problems which arise from their books, before considering the purpose of the *Caesares* from a wider view. In so doing I proceed from the assumption that the two books represent an important rediscovery of Suetonius in the English-speaking world, from which all those interested in the age of Suetonius will derive great benefit.

The two authors bring fundamentally different approaches to their common subject, and to this extent their books complement rather than rival one another. B. is concerned, on a comprehensive scale, with all the traditional problems of Suetonian scholarship: problems of genre, of chronology, of sources (on Suetonius' use of archival sources L. de Coninck, *Suetonius en de Archivalia* [Brussels, 1983], is now essential). He presents throughout all sides of a given issue, injects a healthy dose of skeptical common sense (a quality he sees in Suetonius, p. 339) into all his discussions, and goes no further in conclusion than the fragile limits of certain knowledge will allow. At times this means that the reader is disappointed or frustrated when definitive answers to questions are sorely wanted, but on reflection the reader is often compelled to agree that definitive solutions are indeed beyond reach. Thus, for example, although most would concur in believing that Suetonius was born about 70, consensus is based only on estimates, and the fact of the matter is that Suetonius' year of birth is unknown. With some diffidence B. himself (pp. 3–28) argues for a date of birth as early as 61/62, and while I would suspect that that is too early, the issue must be permitted to remain open. Likewise with the *patria:* although most now seem willing to opt for Hippo Regius, the site of the discovery of Suetonius' *cursus*

2. See Syme, *Tacitus,* p. 502: "Suetonius estimated correctly the taste and market of the times. Readers were drawn to the personal items that formal history disdained. There was room for a rival or supplement to the *Annales*—and the chronicle of ancient folly and depravity, compiled by a government official, carried no political danger." Cf. similarly, "The Travels of Suetonius Tranquillus," *Hermes* 109 (1981): 105–17.

inscription (*AE* 1953, 73), certainty is again elusive (cf. B., pp. 28–35; Ostia, however, should now be discountenanced as a realistic possibility: cf. R. Meiggs, *Roman Ostia*[2] [Oxford, 1973], p. 584).

In general terms B.'s book can be characterized as "philological," whereas W.-H. brings a more "modernizing" approach to his treatment. Adding to the genre of historical studies pioneered by Syme's *Tacitus*—and indeed the shadow of Tacitus is never far removed here—W.-H. has "concentrated on reconstructing the social and cultural world" of Suetonius the scholar and imperial official, and so "on explaining the unusual angle from which he views his Caesars" (pp. vii–viii). The result is that while he avoids many of the more traditional issues, his book is an important contribution to the social history of the Roman elite in general as well as to Suetonian studies in particular. For example, by establishing the background of Suetonian scholarship in part through the medium of Pliny's evidence on *studia* (pp. 26–29), W.-H. is able both to evoke the cultural mentality of the late first and early second centuries and subsequently to elucidate material in the *Caesares*. An integrated portrait of Suetonius and his age emerges, one that is compelling and imaginative.

Naturally there is a great deal of overlap in the two books, and their authors hold similar views on some topics. Each one reveals how Suetonius is occupied with identical areas of interest in both the *Caesares* and the lesser biographical composition, *De viris illustribus* (cf. B., pp. 382–449; W.-H., pp. 50–66); each one stresses the scholarship of Suetonius (e.g., B., pp. 106, 121, 147, etc.; W.-H., pp. 4–8, 25, 41–49, etc.); each one investigates the literary context of the period (e.g., B., pp. 66–91; W.-H., pp. 66–72); and each one points up the mediocrity of Suetonius' style (e.g., B., p. 339; W.-H., pp. 19–22; what else is possible?). Nevertheless the books remain totally distinct in character, and the virtues of each palliate the vices of the other. If B. is perhaps overly cautious or baffled on occasion, the subtle insights of W.-H. help create new modes of understanding. Conversely if W.-H. is perhaps too imaginative or beguiling at times, the sober approach of B. helps redress the balance. Some examples follow.

The religious content of the *Caesares* elicits something of an unsympathetic response from B., who shows almost a lack of sensitivity to the complexities of Roman religious experience (cf. p. 362). If, for instance, incompatibility is sensed between the composition of a book on famous prostitutes and the tenure of a priesthood (p. 32), that may be no more than the result of a modern, rational skepticism. If "sincerity in religious officials" (p. 358) is sought, it cannot be that sincerity of faith normally understood in a modern Christian context. And whereas recognition of an interest in dreams and ghost-stories among the Romans is valuable (p. 128), recognition is not a substitute for explanation; reminders of "how even educated, politically powerful Romans believed in the supernatural" (K. Hopkins, *Death and Renewal: Sociological Studies in Roman History,* vol. 2 [Cambridge, 1983], p. 234) have to be taken up, and pursued. Again, it may be true that a skeptical reaction to the deification of some emperors is on record, but it does not altogether follow that "most Romans took this [i.e., deification] no more seriously than we do" (p. 172). How, otherwise, are the survival and expansion of the imperial cult to be accounted for (cf. the analysis of K. Hopkins, *Conquerors and Slaves: Sociological Studies in Roman History,* vol. 1 [Cam-

bridge, 1978], pp. 197–242)? By what criteria are we ever to know what "most Romans" believed?

From study of the omens and portents in the *Caesares,* W.-H. concludes (pp. 189–97) that Suetonius emphasizes, through this kind of material, how the rise and fall of Roman emperors were predestined, how events could be foreseen if signs were correctly interpreted (cf. P. Brind'Amour, "Problèmes astrologiques et astronomiques soulevés par le récit de la mort de Domitien par Suétone," *Phoenix* 35 [1981]: 338–44, at p. 344: "Il y a donc, dans le récit de la vie de Domitien . . . une trame astrologique qui achemine peu à peu l'empereur à son destin."). The intellectual nature of prognostication, he maintains, was more in tune with Greek dream-interpretation and astrology than the conventional, and irrational, divination of the Romans. The analysis indeed allows at least one aspect of Roman religious mentality to emerge clearly (cf. Hopkins, *Conquerors and Slaves,* pp. 231–40), yet at the same time it does not seem valid to deny all traditional Roman cult an emotional quality (cf. *EMC/CV* n.s. 3 [1984]: 120–21), and it should perhaps be remembered that the sorts of omens and portents reported by Suetonius were to some degree controlled by their biographical relevance, so that their distinction from the signs reported in works of history (pp. 191–92) may be overstated.

In elucidating how the imperial court controlled the social and cultural life of the Roman upper class, W.-H. is able to detect in the *Caesares* evidence of "the progressive hellenization of Roman society" (p. 181) and, thereby, to redeem from the level of the trivial much of what Suetonius has to say about music, sexual appetites, diversions such as gambling (cf. B., p. 170), and so on. It is a separate issue, however, whether Suetonius consciously set out to reveal the intrusion of Greek *mores* at Rome, or whether he necessarily approved what he depicted. W.-H. believes that Suetonius did not set out to cater to a "vulgar, tasteless, trivial and prurient audience" (p. 197), although he admits that the *Caesares* contain a modicum of scandal (p. 24). Suetonius, he argues, presents his information in neutral fashion (p. 187), yet "even behind the apparent neutrality of his rubrics, strong moral presuppositions are implicit" (pp. 167–68). There are therefore inconsistencies of thought and presentation here (we are never, in actuality, told for whom Suetonius was writing), attributable to W.-H.'s tendency to overdo the rehabilitation of the *personalia* in the *Caesares* by squeezing everything into a Greek explanatory mold. When Suetonius' readers read, or listened to, passages such as those on Tiberius at Capri, one wonders whether they reflected then on "the progressive hellenization of Roman society" or instead indulged a taste for entertainment that readers of biography at any time share. As B. says (p. 354), "There is much about Greece in the biographies, little about its inhabitants." But what has happened here is that Suetonius' intentions have been confounded by too large a dose of philhellenic enthusiasm. Despite his deference to the Flavian reaction (pp. 186–89), W.-H. has left unconsidered the possibility, raised several times by B. (e.g., pp. 144, 252, 354, 418), that Suetonius felt a certain animus toward the Greeks.

It is one of the apparently welcome aspects of W.-H.'s book that he does not allow himself to become bogged down in painstaking chronological discussions of Suetonius' career and literary output of the sort that have been manifold since

the discovery of the *cursus* inscription. Relatively speaking, we know a great deal of Suetonius, but an absolute chronology for his life and the composition of his works is beyond recovery in the present state of knowledge. W.-H. is more interested in showing how the two principal facets of Suetonius' life visible in the sources, his devotion to scholarship and his service as an imperial administrator, have to be understood dialectically and not viewed as mutually exclusive or antagonistic if the literary works are to be properly appreciated. He builds on the work of F. Millar to demonstrate how emperors such as Trajan and Hadrian needed men like Suetonius in their service for the general promotion of literary culture. At once, however, he assumes that the *Caesares* "appeared within a decade or so of the accession of the emperor Hadrian in A.D. 117" (p. 1; cf. pp. 6, 123, 148, etc.), a statement I take to refer (approximately) to the period 117–127. This is a very important assumption, for W.-H. will ultimately contend that the *Caesares* reflect the ethos of the Hadrianic era and to some degree the concerns of Hadrian himself, not in the sense that the *Caesares* contain specific allusions to events in Hadrian's reign (a theory sensibly set aside by both authors; cf. W.-H., p. 200; B., p. 386), but in their love of systematic knowledge, attention to philology, and interest in the diffusion at Rome of Hellenistic culture (pp. 200–205).

Now it is well known that John the Lydian attributes dedication of the *Caesares* to the praetorian prefect C. Septicius Clarus (*De mag.* 2. 6), who seemingly held the prefecture from 119 to 122 (cf. R. Syme, "Guard Prefects of Trajan and Hadrian," *JRS* 70 [1980]: 64–80, although the terminal date cannot, to my mind, be regarded as absolute). But there are difficulties. It is not known whether all the *Caesares* were dedicated to Septicius Clarus or just the *Iulius* or, say, the *Iulius* and *Augustus* together, with the remainder to follow later in serial order. But if, as is possible, all the *Caesares* were dedicated to Septicius as early as 119, it would seem plausible that much of their composition (as distinct from publication) had occurred under Trajan. And indeed it has to be kept in mind that John the Lydian's evidence is late and weak, and should not be automatically believed simply because it exists. These are points made by B. (cf. pp. 39, 51), who also, in one of the most successful sections of his book (pp. 468–88), presents powerful linguistic arguments against the view of Bowersock ("Suetonius and Trajan," *Hommages à Marcel Renard,* Collection Latomus, vols. 101–3 [Brussels, 1969] 1: 119–25) that the last six biographies (i.e., *Galb.-Dom.*) were written first (although B. did not know that Bowersock's theory had been questioned previously; cf. W.-H., p. 1, n. 1). The fact remains that composition of the *Caesares* under Hadrian cannot be a matter of mere assumption: the era of Trajan may also have to enter the picture; and if so, that makes a difference, for the tastes to which W.-H. looks in evaluating the *Caesares* are those of the generation of Fronto and Gellius (cf. also B., p. 123), a generation well beyond the reign of Trajan. Views on "Hadrianic reflections" may therefore need modification.

W.-H.'s analysis of the *De viris illustribus* is dazzling. He maintains that the work shows a special interest on Suetonius' part in the age of Cicero through Augustus, which is followed by a loss of appetite for subsequent ages, especially the Flavian period (pp. 50–59). The pattern is analogous to that observable in

the *Caesares* later, and so too with Suetonius' predilections for authors and public affairs (p. 60). "In the *Caesars* we see emperors not only as orators, but as historians, poets, grammarians, critics and essayists. The *Illustrious men* leaves its unmistakable stamp" (p. 66). "It is worth lingering over the *Illustrious men* simply because it explains so much about the *Caesars*. . . . In its wake, Suetonius could approach the *Caesars* with a mind already stocked with information; and this is surely what he did, moving more or less directly from the lives of authors to Caesars" (p. 59).

Since the *De viris illustribus* does not survive intact, the argument is based on the partial reconstruction of the work made possible by Jerome's evidence, and W.-H. is scrupulously honest about the limits of that material (for a clear statement on Suetonian authorship of Donatus' *Life of Virgil,* see recently H. Naumann, "Suetonius' Life of Virgil: The Present State of the Question," *HSCP* 85 [1981]: 185–87; contrast B., p. 393). As the quotations above show, however, he assumes throughout, as indeed do most (e.g., Syme, *Tacitus,* p. 501, n. 1) and perhaps rightly, that the *De viris illustribus* was written before the *Caesares.* But B. shows again how dangerous it is to assume anything for Suetonius. While himself acknowledging similar enthusiasms in the two sets of biographies (cf. pp. 82–83, 104, 442–43), B. proceeds with circumspection: "there is no evidence that the *De viris illustribus* was antecedent to the imperial biographies. For all we know, it was subsequent; indeed, Suetonius might have worked on the projects concurrently" (p. 380; cf. W.-H., p. 8, n. 12). So despite the initial attractiveness of W.-H.'s presentation, the more cautionary approach of B. means, in the end, that the case for a progression from the *De viris illustribus* to the *Caesares* has not been proven.

To turn now to wider issues. The lives of Caesar and Augustus are the most comprehensive of the imperial biographies, though they are not laudable on all accounts. For B., the *Iulius* is little more than "a methodological shambles" (p. 123), and the *Augustus,* while being "a much better effort" (p. 123), is still open to criticism: "there is all too often the same failure to assess bias in sources, the glaring neglect of available materials, and the same self-contradiction over points of detail" (p. 145). Nevertheless, a special interest on Suetonius' part in the revolutionary era might well seem indicated by the length of these lives (cf. W. C. McDermott, "Suetonius and Cicero," *Gymnasium* 87 [1980]: 485–95, reviewing Suetonius' references to Cicero and conjecturing that Suetonius intended a "multi-volume work on Cicero"), whatever the chronological link with the *De viris illustribus;* and such a predilection may well be an important factor in explaining what is usually called the decline of standards in the later lives (cf. Townend, "Suetonius and His Influence," pp. 90–91). Even so, it still remains to decide why Suetonius went on at all with the Julio-Claudian and Flavian biographies if his main interests lay in the earlier period. What was the point in continuing the sequence?

That question only raises the broader problem of Suetonius' purpose, or purposes, in composing the *Caesares,* a problem that one has to control by paying attention to several factors. First, W.-H. is surely right to contend that Suetonius wrote a kind of literature that was technically "'non-historical,'" that

his scholarly and antiquarian interests led to a work which would inform his audience of the details of imperial life and manners normally eschewed by historians (pp. 8–10, 45–49); and it does not have to follow, as some would maintain, that an inferior literary product was the inevitable result. Second, recapitulation of the origins of the genre of biography and demonstration of biography's popularity under the principate promote understanding of Suetonius' selection of material in the *Caesares,* without explaining away the originality of the work, and both B. and W.-H. are keen to point up the unique aspects of the collection (e.g., B., pp. 76, 241, 324; W.-H., p. 72). Third, while neither author refers directly to Townend's "Law of Biographical Relevance" ("Suetonius and His Influence," p. 84), each is conscious of the elementary fact that much of what was known to have occurred under a given emperor was irrelevant to the narrow focus of biography, where a single individual was the only object of concern. Fourth, comparison of Suetonius with Plutarch is also valuable, permitting the generalization that the latter "narrates and ruminates where Suetonius lists, analyses, informs" (W.-H., p. 69), although the extent to which Suetonius may have considered himself in direct competition with Plutarch, a favorite theory of B., is difficult to measure, given that Plutarch's imperial biographies have almost entirely disappeared. If, however, Plutarch's set was written before the death of Domitian and did not include lives of the Flavians, as is likely (cf. C. P. Jones, *Plutarch and Rome* [Oxford, 1971], pp. 72–80), I cannot accept that Suetonius composed his biographies, including the Flavians, simply to outstrip a recent predecessor (see B., pp. 89, 192, 220, 226, 278, 294). Fifth, the value of the *Caesares* as sheer entertainment should not be entirely rejected, as it tends to be by both B. and W.-H., for even when all allowance is made for the defects of Suetonian style and presentation, it remains true that the biographies are worth reading on the simple level of human interest.

If, however, a higher level of understanding is sought, it is only from the internal evidence of the biographies themselves that real progress can be made, no matter what the impact upon them of literary tradition and form may have been. In my view, the key to understanding the main purpose of the *Caesares* has to derive from those elements which recur throughout the lives, because it is in the choice and organization of the topical material that the hand, if not the mind, of Suetonius can be most clearly seen. I mean by this not so much those elements which were, and are, essential in the composition of any historical biography—the subject's family background, birth, early life, death, and so on—but such features of emperors' public behavior as dispensation of justice, provision of largesse and *spectacula,* building projects of a beneficial sort, and military leadership, together with such features of emperors' private behavior as religious attitudes and sexual tastes. Moreover, Suetonius' record of imperial actions and activities is often mediated by the terminology of virtue and vice, and great stress needs to be placed on this fact. The consequence is that Suetonius evaluates his biographical subjects against a standard of ideal imperial comportment that had emerged, and indeed crystallized, by the time the *Caesares* were composed. To some extent, that standard is discernible through an assessment of the historical significance of Suetonius' topical material. Thus, for example, if the Roman emperor was expected in Suetonius' day to be competent,

at least, as an orator (F. Millar, *The Emperor in the Roman World* [London, 1977], pp. 203–6), Suetonius' remarks on imperial oratory and rhetoric become more comprehensible than if we simply refer to his scholarly interests alone for explanation (contrast W.-H., p. 66; see further K. R. Bradley, "The Significance of the *Spectacula* in Suetonius' *Caesares*," *RSA* 11 [1981]: 129–37; "Suetonius' Judgement of Roman Emperors," *ANRW* [forthcoming]).

Recurrent subject-matter is an important aspect of the *Caesares* and demands investigation. B. and W.-H. both pursue the possibilities. B., for example, is very conscious that "there are motifs and patterns in the *De vita Caesarum* to be looked out for—and against" (p. 215). But he tends to gloss over the importance of the public elements mentioned above, preferring to come to a verdict on each individual life based on comparison between Suetonius and Plutarch, or Tacitus, or whomever. Thus, while he can state, "the *Divus Julius* is basically the study of a man seeking power: the prize is won, but not long enjoyed" (p. 217), he adds the following comment: "Suetonius does not employ the Parallel Lives technique in his biographies. . . . We have remarked before that the Greek biographer placed Julius Caesar in his collection of parallels, adducing the commonplace of Alexander to make up the pair; whereas the Roman biographer rightly saw that Caesar was the logical introduction to an imperial series. The point is duly iterated here, since a good deal of the subsequent analysis of Suetonius' treatment will involve the Plutarchean account" (pp. 217–18). B. certainly catches glimpses of the imperial ideal. He recognizes that "games, benefactions, and public works are commonly listed by Suetonius as imperial virtues" (p. 298), but it is not his concern to investigate these topics beyond the confines of the *Caesares* themselves. Nor is he interested in the history of virtue-terminology in itself, despite the earlier researches of Charlesworth, Béranger, and others. Hence the special distinctiveness of the *Caesares* tends to remain obscured. Not (once more) that attempts to rehabilitate Suetonius as a stylist are justifiable (yet even here B. is reluctant to specify what he understands "artistic" to mean à propos of Suetonius: cf. pp. 158, 269–70, 284–85, 298), but attempts to evaluate the topical preoccupations are.

By using a wider focus, W.-H. is able to show from the contents and organization of the *Caesares* that Suetonius was sensitive to gradations and fluctuations of social status, and that he approved of emperors who satisfied the demands of all social ranks through the promotion of order and maintenance of the traditional social hierarchy (pp. 99–118; cf. B., pp. 337, 353, briefly). The view of F. della Corte, which has never found much favor, that Suetonius, an *eques*, wrote his lives as a spokesman for the equestrian order, is vigorously demolished (pp. 74–78; cf. p. 99, n. 2), and instead W.-H. rightly insists that the frame of reference underlying the *Caesares* depends upon an ideal conception of the Roman emperor. Suetonius' "analytic presentation enables the reader to form a judgment of the performance of a series of rulers. Thus a picture emerges both of an ideal and of its opposite. But the ideal is not the conclusion so much as the presupposition of the *Caesares*" (p. 24). Suetonius started "from a clearly formulated mental image of how an emperor ought to behave" (p. 201) and could "tacitly take for granted which the vital virtues are because he expects his readers to be of one mind with himself" (p. 152).

Both authors illustrate Suetonius' debt to the *Panegyricus* of Pliny (W.-H., p. 155; B., pp. 269–70), of great importance in this context given the speech's clear representation for Suetonius' day of the ideal *princeps* both in public and private life. The links between Pliny's composition and the *Caesares* are indeed strong, and suggest not least that the distinction between public and private should not be drawn too strictly. Yet it needs to be emphasized too that the origins of the ideal go all the way back to Augustus, and especially to the *Res Gestae,* if the strength of the imperial ideal, as it had developed by Suetonius' time, and Suetonius' "analytic presentation" are to be fully appreciated. It is relatively unimportant to worry over the extent to which Suetonius drew on the *Res Gestae* as a source (cf. B., pp. 133–34, 214, 238–39), and more valuable to stress that the document, for the first time, offered an unambiguous statement of how the emperor, not just Augustus but *any* future emperor, could be and should be expected to behave. "Dans quelques catégories . . . qu'on les range, les *Res Gestae* sont évidemment un écrit apologétique destiné à perpetuer une image idéale d'Auguste et de son oeuvre. . . . L'histoire qu'elles écrivent est celle que l'auteur souhaitait d'imposer à la posterité" (J. Gagé, *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*[3] [Paris, 1977], p. 34); and among the posterity looked to, it must be supposed, were those who were to succeed to Augustus' position.

In essence, the *Res Gestae* commemorates the *honores* and *acta* of Augustus. But it is relevant here that several of the categories into which the record of the *acta* is arranged correspond closely to the rubrics of the *Caesares;* financial liberality to the populace, provision of games and shows, construction of buildings both religious and utilitarian, generalship, beneficent and paternalistic administration—these are all topics for evidence of which Suetonius looked when composing his lives (cf. *RG* 5, 8, 15–18, 19–21, 24–33). Therefore, if the concerns of the *Res Gestae* are set alongside those of the more elaborate *Panegyricus,* and if both are placed in conjunction with the programmatic messages of many of the coin issues of the first century, the *Caesares* can ultimately be regarded as a record of how successive emperors had met the longstanding obligations enjoined upon them, once fostered by Augustus' own perception of himself and by popular expectations which had subsequently resulted therefrom. It is the ethos of emperorship visible in the *Res Gestae* which is most pertinent to study of Suetonius, and so what often passes for neutrality of tone in his presentation of material may well have been far less neutral to a contemporary audience than now appears, as consideration of the associations naturally evoked by terms such as *liberalitas, clementia,* and *comitas* (*Ner.* 10. 1) will suggest (cf. K. R. Bradley, *Suetonius' Life of Nero: An Historical Commentary* [Brussels, 1978], pp. 71–74; contrast W.-H., p. 120).

Still, there are undeniable differences between the *Iulius* and *Augustus* on the one hand and the remainder of the lives on the other, so that it is almost axiomatic to think in terms of a progressive deterioration of quality in the *Caesares* (cf. W.-H., pp. 61–62). Various explanations of the decline have been posited—Suetonius became tired of the project, was unable to maintain access to the imperial archives after his dismissal from the post *ab epistulis,* was interrupted in his work by having to accompany Hadrian on provincial journeys (cf. B., p. 155)—and any one, or more than one, may be valid. One of the

symptoms of decline often noted is an apparently increasing use of vague plurals when Suetonius is authenticating statements (e.g., *Ner.* 7. 1 *ferunt;* cf. also the use of impersonal verbs such as *Vesp.* 21 *traditur* and *Dom.* 14. 2 *creditur*). But W.-H. is able to show that the vagueness of some passages in the lives of Tiberius and Claudius is attributable to Suetonius' concern with the social rank rather than with the exact identity of persons under reference (p. 104), with the result that the traditional criticism of a progressive lack of attention to detail in the post-*Augustus* lives is somewhat mitigated. B., moreover, suggests that vague plurals were sometimes used for sarcastic or ironic effect, and that moderns now expect too much precise documentation from Suetonius (p. 110). It needs to be remembered also that vagueness is apparent in the *Iulius* and *Augustus* as well as the later lives, perhaps functioning as a particular means of conveying negative information on the biographical subject (see D. A. Pauw, "Impersonal Expressions and Unidentified Spokesmen in Greek and Roman Historiography and Biography," *Acta Classica* 23 [1980]: 83–95; cf. B., p. 155). Conversely, it remains true that even in the comparatively brief Flavian lives there are occasional signs of Suetonius' taking some care over the information reported (e.g., *Vesp.* 16. 3, *Dom.* 17. 2). Perhaps, therefore, what is visible is not so much a decline of standards as a greater selectivity of material on Suetonius' part as the *Caesares* progress, and it is possible that the notion of the imperial ideal significantly determined the relative fullness, or otherwise, of the biographies, whatever the validity of other explanations.

When the *Caesares* were composed the principate had existed for close to a century and a half, so that no one (to state the obvious) knew any other kind of political dispensation at Rome. In creating the *novus status* (*Aug.* 28. 2) and in setting the standard for his successors, the achievement of Augustus—who had chanced to survive for half a century after Actium, during which interval acclimatization to autocracy could occur—must have seemed amazing, as it still does today. An extensive biography was necessary, consequently, not merely because of Suetonius' interest in the revolutionary era itself, or because he knew certain sources thoroughly, but because Augustus (of whom Suetonius clearly approved) created the model against which the successors were to be judged. But even in the *Augustus,* as B. (pp. 131–32) shows, Suetonius is a selective, not a comprehensive reporter, and it must follow that in all the lives Suetonius included no more, and no less, than what he considered appropriate for the purpose at hand. Once adherence to or deviation from the ideal had been exemplified in each life, with the necessary information all set in the framework dictated by genre, that purpose had been served and embellishment was unnecessary. Thus the whole idea of decline may have been exaggerated by commentators seeking a superabundance of material, when Suetonius was really concerned to give only a qualitative assessment of his subjects based on the ideal model. If so, to think in terms of an abrupt break in the lives may be erroneous. In reality, there is no barrier to regarding the full sequence of biographies as a coherent whole, conceived as such from the outset, regardless of whether serial publication has to be reckoned with.

Why then did Suetonius begin with Caesar? A desire to fill the void left by Tacitus or rivalry with Plutarch can be invoked. Yet rivalry would seem to

depend upon aims and intentions shared by authors, whereas Suetonius and Plutarch had very different conceptions of biography (cf. and contrast B., pp. 181, 226). More significantly, "the point is that Julius Caesar is recognised as one of the essential keys to an understanding of the Augustan principate" (B., p. 234; cf. p. 50), and that fact perhaps renders superfluous a presumed renewal of interest in Caesar in the era of Trajan. But in what sense, for Suetonius, was Caesar "essential" for understanding the new dispensation? The answer to that question must derive in the last analysis from the verdict on him given at *Iulius* 76. 1: "praegrauant tamen cetera facta dictaque eius ut et abusus dominatione et iure caesus existimetur." The verdict is unequivocal, Suetonius' judgment plain: Caesar went beyond the limits of what was thought acceptable in the pursuit of political power and so paid a just price. It was not that Suetonius objected so much to *dominatio* (how could he?) as to the abuse of *dominatio,* and therein lies the significance of the biography. If Augustus created the ideal of what was acceptable in the autocrat, Caesar revealed the opposite, and throughout the lives Suetonius of course catalogs *vitia* as well as *virtutes.* The antithesis is important, recalling the historiographical convention of presenting *exempla,* both good and evil, which an author wishes to impress on his audience (cf. W.-H., p. 23). Admittedly it is too much to claim that the *Caesares* have an overtly didactic purpose; Suetonian biography is not Tacitean history. But to the extent that biography is in a broad sense a form of historical writing, and given the fact that Suetonius' subjects could often be shown to have fallen short of the ideal, the historiographical tradition of antithesis, visible from Cato on (cf. recently T. P. Wiseman, "Practice and Theory in Roman Historiography," *History* 66 [1981]: 375–93, at p. 379), can be expected to have left its mark.

The *Caesares,* then, form a coherent whole; the central, connecting thread is the manner in which the ideal, whose origins lay in the period of Caesar and Augustus, had been emulated by a given ruler, as Suetonius interpreted the record before him. Consciousness of the imperial ideal was strong in Suetonius' day, and it was his purpose to render judgments on past rulers through the medium of that ideal. Insofar as interests and subject-matter remain constant in the *Caesares,* consistency of purpose has to be acknowledged, and in all of this the kind of material included is just as important as the quantity.

In the pursuit of a public career at Rome ambition was a prerequisite for an individual's success. In the imperial age the aristocratic mentality of the Republic lived on among the new elite and, in spite of the dangers to some individuals posed by autocratic government, there was never any shortage of men willing to strive for public eminence. One of the new features of the principate was the emergence of an equestrian career-structure, analogous to the senatorial *cursus,* in the development of which Hadrian himself played a considerable role. The ambitions of politically minded equestrians could thus now find outlets, and indeed real power could be enjoyed by those who acquired the greatest prizes—the grain supply, the praetorians, and Egypt. Although not of the first order, the secretaryships held by Suetonius in his maturity brought proximity to Trajan and Hadrian and thus, at the least, the possibility of political influence. It is no strain on the imagination to believe that Suetonius came to the attention of the

emperors because of his reputation as a scholar and author, or that patronage, whether from Pliny or Septicius Clarus, played a part in his elevation. But it does seem difficult to imagine that Suetonius was dragged from a cloistered world of scholarship, almost against his will, in order for his expertise to be made available to emperors, a forced victim of his literary success. The refusal of the military tribunate (Pliny *Epist.* 3. 8) is not in itself evidence of a lack of interest in an equestrian career, and it has to be remembered that the gaps in the inscription from Hippo probably conceal positions held before the secretarial posts. Scholarship is no impediment to public ambition, and any notion that it was for Suetonius should be dispelled: when the right mix of conditions obtained, Suetonius aspired to and gained positions of importance in the palace, and such success has to be predicated on personal ambition (cf. W.-H., pp. 5, 18; B., pp. 32, 304, 345, 349).

Whatever lay behind his eventual dismissal, therefore, Suetonius must be considered a supporter of the principate, and it was to men for whom the principate as a form of government posed no ideological problems, but rather the reverse, that Suetonius addressed himself in the *Caesares.* His audience was composed of those who, like himself, benefited from the principate, the successful, who were eager to dwell, for diversion and instruction, on the modes of imperial behavior now synonymous with the emperorship. The *Caesares* is thus, as both B. and W.-H. agree, a loyalist work, in which none of Tacitus' political rancor is to be found, nor anything of opposition to the current dispensation. The strength of the principate as a form of rule and the unquestioning obedience to it on the part of the elite are the facts which emerge from study of the *Caesares:* government was personalized in the figure of the *princeps,* and the literate elite provided an audience for portraits of the men on whom the fortunes of all depended. Certainly to that extent "Suetonius estimated correctly the taste and market of the times." Thus from the rediscovery of Suetonius represented by the combined efforts of B. and W.-H. it emerges that in many ways Suetonius, despite his artistic inferiority, presents a better guide to his age than his more celebrated contemporary. Whatever discussion may follow, both authors have achieved great success in their task of rediscovery, and the benefits to scholarship are considerable.

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