

Nicoletta Bruno

Suetonius on Tiberius' Misanthropy and Self-Reproach

Non, elle est générale, et je hais tous les hommes:
Les uns, parce qu'ils sont méchants et malfaisants;
Et les autres, pour être aux méchants complaisants,
Et n'avoir pas, pour eux, ces haines vigoureuses
Que doit donner le vice aux âmes vertueuses.
Molière, *Le Misanthrope*

1 Preliminary Remarks

Suetonius' *Lives of the Caesars* is one of the Latin works which best lends itself to a narratological approach, which finds its origins in ancient literary criticism.¹ Suetonius is "an author whose literary talent is only now receiving the attention it deserves".² Verena Schulz has rightly pointed out that Suetonius can be well understood in relation to encyclopedic and miscellaneous literature, a mixture of entertainment and a source of anecdotes to share with learned friends in the performance of elite education: in fact, "encyclopedic and miscellaneous works require an active reader, someone who creatively makes use of knowledge presented, who transfers it to another setting, or adapts it for new intellectual purposes".³ Starting from these premises, I focus on Suetonius' narrative choice of lingering on the psychological aspects of Tiberius' personality, through the events and the actions the author 'strategically' decides to write. It will be shown how Suetonius does not need to go into lengthy explanations, descriptions, or in-depth studies, but how he is able to show the facts by going into the details of some significant and carefully selected episodes, using the narrative technique called in contemporary terms as 'show, don't tell'.⁴ Therefore, the readers discern the behavioral traits of Tiberius, without the author having to explain them. The facts Suetonius chooses to write speak for themselves. Compared to other

1 See De Jong 2014, 3–6. For the recent narratological approach applied to Suetonius see Garrett 2019; Schulz 2019; Kirstein 2020.

2 Power 2014, 18.

3 Schulz 2019, 348.

4 On this technique Linhares-Dias 2006; Klauk/Köppe 2014.

Note: I am deeply grateful to Phoebe Garrett, for reading this chapter and for helpful comments, to Edoardo Galfré, Christoph Schubert, and Verena Schulz for precious suggestions, and to Rafał Matuszewski for allowing me to read chapters of Matuszewski 2021 before his edited volume was published.

literary accounts on Tiberius, Suetonius holds a distinct advantage as he begins his biography from the emperor's childhood. This advantageous starting point allows Suetonius to explore Tiberius' formative years, which were marked by discontent, denial, personal losses, and an enduring desire to evade his responsibilities, leading to repeated episodes of seclusion.⁵

The scholars who in recent years have dealt with Suetonius' *Life of Tiberius* have found serious and numerous contradictions that the author himself would have faced when attempting to portray the enigmatic emperor.⁶ The contradictions raised by the scholars reflect the contradictions of the ancient accounts on the life and the reign of Tiberius. Despite the existence of chronological discrepancies with other historical narratives, such as those provided by Velleius, Tacitus, and Cassius Dio, along with their varied assessments of the emperor, the *Life of Tiberius* presents a coherent evaluation of Tiberius within the context of time and circumstances. The structure of a Suetonian *Life*, with its rubrics, narrative passages, divisions, and transitional statements, displays devices that give the impression of unity inside the text or a text passage.⁷

Suetonius acknowledges Tiberius' misanthropic tendencies, which emerge from his early years and serve as an explanation for many of his future behaviors. These inclinations, such as *simulatio*,⁸ *dissimulatio*, and *saevitia*,⁹ marked by a deep-seated aversion to human interaction, are intricately woven into the narrative of the *Life of Tiberius* through Suetonius' skillful use of 'foreshadowing' and 'flashback' techniques.¹⁰ In what follows, I try to shed light on the interpretation of some related aspects of Tiberius' personality emphasized in Suetonius' account: Tiberius' misanthropy, his two retreats in Rhodes and Capri, and a shadow of a sincere self-reproach and self-condemnation of his actions. A clear testimony of Tiberius' self-denigration is Suet. *Tib.* 67, including a letter from Tiberius to the senators, also reported by Tac. *Ann.* 6.6: a reading of this passage will conclude this essay.

⁵ Seager 2005, 238.

⁶ For a survey of Suetonius' *Life of Tiberius* and a detailed bibliography see Giua 1991, 3733–3735; Ramondetti 2000, 7–11; more generally Power 2014, 4–14.

⁷ Schulz 2019, 312; on the tripartite structure of many of the *Lives*, a sort of 'sandwich technique', where the reign of the *princeps*, dealt with in rubric form (*per species*), is framed by the chronological chapters (*per tempora*) at the beginning and at the end, see Hurley 2014, 21–37; cf. also Garrett 2018.

⁸ Domitian was accused of *simulatio* as well, see Plin. *Pan.* 49.6; Tac. *Agr.* 39.1; 42.2; *Hist.* 4.86.2; Suet. *Dom.* 2; the idea of Domitian's *simulatio* as a character trait connected to his (fake) military achievements is not fully developed in Suetonius, see Schulz 2019, 280; Cass. Dio 67.1.2.

⁹ Giua 1975; Baar 1990, 86–109; Strocchio 2001, 33.

¹⁰ Garrett 2019.

2 Tiberius' Duplicity

The *Life of Tiberius* seems to be based on the emperor's duplicity. Nevertheless, reading Suetonius' Tiberius as a deceitful and hypocritical character is limiting, since it is based on an interpretation linked to the political sphere alone. The duplicity of Suetonius' Tiberius lies in his two ways of behaving, in the public and in the private, and this difference is marked in the treatment of the two retreats of Tiberius, Rhodes and Capri, in two distant phases of his life: youth and old age. In Suetonius' narrative, exile provides many explanations for Tiberius' behavior. The exile is central to understanding the game of truth and fiction in the actions of the emperor. There is no 'involution' or 'evolution' of Tiberius, a declining path from good to evil, but a static consistency. His evil and torment find their origins in Tiberius' childhood (*Tib.* 6.1: *infantiam pueritiamque habuit laboriosam et exercitatom, comes usque quaque parentum fugae*),¹¹ and in the vices inherited from the lineage of *Claudii*, to which Suetonius dedicates the first four chapters of the *Vita Tiberii*. The vices of the *Claudii* were lust, cruelty, contempt for *religio*, arrogance and pride, although there are quite a few virtues.¹²

The chapters dealing with Tiberius' self-isolation (10–13; 39–67) underline his way of expressing his most authentic side. Public life and contact with people push Tiberius to resort to the defense weapon he will use more and more: *dissimulatio*. Chapter 42 of the *Life of Tiberius* serves as a crucial turning point in the narrative, marking the transition between two distinct phases of Tiberius' principate: before and after his seclusion in Capri. This chapter has been read as a clear statement about the hypocrisy of Tiberius,¹³ but more significantly here Suetonius provides the reader with a valuable clue to understand the importance of isolation (*secretum*) for Tiberius, the only way to show his *vitia male diu dissimulata*, the vices he had so long struggled to conceal. The lexical choice is particularly meaningful. Tiberius is at ease when he is far from the eyes of the city (*civitatis oculis remotis*), inevitably prying eyes. Before his vices came to light, they remained hidden by a mask of formality and hypocrisy. *Tandem* is a particularly meaningful adverb in this passage (*Tib.* 42: *ceterum secreti licentiam nactus et quasi civitatis oculis remotis, cuncta simul vitia male diu dissimulata tandem profudit; de quibus singillatim ab exordio referam*).¹⁴ the adverb can refer

¹¹ On the same episode in Suetonius' *Life of Tiberius*, cf. Tac. *Ann.* 6.51.1; Cass. Dio 48.15.3. Cf. also Somville 2002, 85–92. On Tiberius' childhood, cf. Vell. 2.75.3: he portrays Livia and the infant fleeing desperate and lonely until they join her husband and father in Naples. Velleius makes a prediction of the relationship between Livia and Tiberius: a painful dependence on his mother for him, an unshakable will to protect him, at all costs, for her.

¹² The behavior of Tiberius' father was erratic, he was haughty and arrogant, as many of the *Claudii*. A value common to all the *Claudii*, and emphasized especially by Velleius, was military competence. Cf. Garrett 2021 on the value of ancestry and family identity in Suetonius' *Caesars*. See also Lindsay 1998.

¹³ Lindsay 1995, 138.

¹⁴ Moučková 1968, 86, 103 cites a similar use of *tandem* in *Ner.* 40.1; *Vit.* 17.2; *Dom.* 14.1.

not only to the biographer's expectation about a behavior of his character that he knows in advance, but also to the expectation of Tiberius himself, to be able to give free rein, letting it burst out, spread (*profudit*, there is a use of the metaphor of the liquid that spreads) all his *vitia* (*cuncta simul*, "all of them together"), long kept hidden and badly concealed.

In contrast to Tacitus' assessment, which portrays a degenerative change from good to evil in Tiberius' principate, Suetonius presents a different perspective. Rather than depicting a stark transition from good to evil, Suetonius suggests a more nuanced interpretation of Tiberius' principate, where the dynamics and complexities of his character are not easily categorized into distinct positive and negative phases.¹⁵ Jacques Gascou rightly argues that "Tibère devient en fin ce qu'il était".¹⁶ This 'essentialisme' of Suetonius, to use Gascou's word, responds to an empirical perspective on human nature. Consequently, Tiberius should not be regarded merely as a hypocrite, but rather as someone who strategically engages in hypocrisy with other hypocrites out of a sense of contempt. The lack of significant character evolution and Tiberius' relatively static nature is often accompanied by a narrative device employed by Suetonius, known as the 'crescendo effect'. The portrayal of Tiberius' seclusion in Capri does not represent a clear division between a positive and negative phase of his principate. Instead, it serves as a point of connection or transition between two distinct phases in which Tiberius, who remains fundamentally unchanged throughout his life, consciously chooses to adopt a markedly different behavior and present himself in a contrasting manner. While Suetonius and Cassius Dio acknowledge Tiberius' frequent engagement in hypocritical and dissimulating actions, the complexities of his character and motivations go beyond a simple dichotomy, requiring a more nuanced understanding.¹⁷

Tiberius' ability to hide his feelings is described by Tacitus in *Ann.* 1.24.1.¹⁸ The *princeps* represses his fear and apprehension towards his son Drusus' imminent departure for Pannonia.¹⁹ This defensive and self-protective attitude is also reported by

15 On the technique of 'chiaroscuro' see Jones/Milns 2002, 143; Power 2014, 11.

16 Gascou 1984, 432.

17 Historical proof of Tiberius' *dissimulatio* is found in the *Tabula Siarensis*, reporting that Tiberius had praised Germanicus in the Senate. On the *Tabula Siarensis* cf. Zecchini 1986; González 1999. Cassius Dio is more cautious in choosing terms to describe Tiberius: his personality is defined as 'singular', with a certain propensity for confusion or blur of his authentic intentions. Tiberius dissembled what he wanted, and he never wanted anything of what he said (Cass. Dio 57.1.1). See Mallan 2020, ad loc.

18 *Haec audita quamquam abstrusum et tristissima quaeque maxime occultantem Tiberium perpulere, ut Drusum filium cum primoribus civitatis duabusque praetoriis cohortibus mitteret, nullis satis certis mandatis, ex re consulturum.*

19 On Tiberius' emotional self-control see Vekselius 2021, 225: "Tiberius' reputation for emotional self-control is to be understood as an aspect of his public image and self-fashioning and as an expression of *gravitas* and *maiestas* adapted for political purposes".

Suetonius (*Tib.* 7).²⁰ following the compelled divorce from his ex-wife Vipsania Agrippina, Tiberius made a deliberate choice to avoid any potential encounters with her. This decision stemmed from his emotional response to their separation, as evidenced by the tears in his eyes, revealing his deep sadness and regret. Indeed, Suetonius does not explicitly delve into the more sensitive and emotional aspects of Tiberius' character. It is clear that Tiberius' first marriage to Vipsania Agrippina was marred by political motives orchestrated by Livia and Augustus. The union became futile after the death of Vipsania's father, Marcus Agrippa. The subsequent forced marriage to Julia, Augustus' daughter, proved to be disastrous and, according to Suetonius, may have been one of the factors contributing to Tiberius' decision to retreat to Rhodes (*Tib.* 10).²¹

Tiberius conceals the true reasons behind his desire to leave Rome. Initially, he offers a false excuse, claiming that he is weary of honors and seeks some rest. However, there are actually two underlying motives, one personal and one political. Firstly, Tiberius is repulsed by the licentious behavior of his wife, Julia. Secondly, there is a political aspect related to his stance on the designated heirs of Augustus, Gaius and Lucius, the sons of Julia and Marcus Agrippa. Suetonius draws an interesting parallel to the past, specifically mentioning Marcus Agrippa's behavior towards Marcellus, the favored nephew of Augustus and son of his sister Octavia. It is worth noting that Tiberius' departure appears unjustified since he had recently obtained significant positions, including the *tribunicia potestas* for a five-year term and the *imperium proconsulare* for a military expedition to Armenia during the same period. Suetonius emphasizes Tiberius' inclination towards self-isolation. With the periphrasis *vitato adsiduitatis fastidio* in chapter 10, Tiberius' tendency to hide emerges: at the height of so many honors and in the prime of life and health, he suddenly asked for leave, to rest and to continue his studies in Greece. Furthermore, Tiberius remains resolute and does not yield to the pleas of his mother or stepfather, who even express their abandonment in the Senate (*Tib.* 10).

Indeed, Suetonius and Velleius (2.99) present the official version of Tiberius' departure to Rhodes, attributing it to the need for rest and the desire not to overshadow Gaius Caesar. But why would Augustus feel the need to complain in the Senate about Tiberius' 'abandonment'? Perhaps Augustus was hiding something from the Senate. The circumstances surrounding Tiberius' exile in Rhodes may involve a greater level of complexity than initially presented, suggesting that Suetonius possessed additional knowledge that he chose not to fully disclose. It is plausible that political factors, including the rivalry between Tiberius and his adopted sons, Gaius and Lucius, played a role in the decision for his exile.²² The doubt as to whether the stay on Rhodes was not a

²⁰ *Sed Agrippinam et abegisse post divortium doluit et semel omnino ex occurso visam adeo contentis et umentibus oculis prosecutus est, ut custoditum sit ne umquam in conspectum ei posthac veniret.*

²¹ Suet. *Tib.* 10; 12; 13.

²² Thanks to the political maneuvers of his mother Julia, Gaius was designated *consul* when he was just fourteen years old, nineteen years ahead of the rules in force for the stages of the career of magistrates. It could have been the mother Julia who turned her children against Tiberius. The relationship

voluntary exile arises from the testimony of Cassius Dio (55.9.2–7). According to the historian, Tiberius' departure from Rome can be attributed to multiple factors. These include his disagreements with Augustus' nephews, especially Gaius Caesar, discord within his marriage to Julia,²³ his resentment for not being designated as Caesar but only given the *tribunicia potestas*, and accusations of plotting against his adopted sons, Gaius and Lucius, who were the adopted heirs of Augustus himself. These various reasons contributed to Tiberius' decision to distance himself from Rome. But there is something more: Cassius Dio and Tacitus (*Ann.* 1.53.1–3) enrich the story with further details. Tacitus reports that Julia, in that same year, had sent letters to Augustus, probably written by her lover Sempronius Gracchus, to defame Tiberius with the accusation of hatching a plot against her children, despite being outside Rome at that moment, but acting with the help of his mother Livia. Cassius Dio asserts that Tiberius harbored the intention of removing Gaius and Lucius from their rights of succession to the principate. In light of such a grave accusation, one might expect that Augustus would have taken the straightforward course of action and exiled Tiberius. If faced with such an accusation, it is likely that Livia, Tiberius' mother, would have been unable to shield her son from the consequences. Consequently, she might have accepted Tiberius' fate, including his exile to Rhodes. Suetonius' alignment with Velleius Paterculus' account is evident, but there is a possibility that he was aware of and, in fact, supported the alternative version presented by Tacitus and that he would not want it buried in the *versiculi*, reported in chapter 59. The Suetonian account of Tiberius' exile would be confirmed by the popular epigram reported in *Tib.* 59: *regnavit sanguine multo, / ad regnum quisquis venit ab exilio*.²⁴ Therefore, it would not have been a voluntary exile on the island of Rhodes, but a 'gentle *relegatio*' imposed by Augustus. To support this thesis, there is a minor detail: Tiberius left Rome without an armed escort and without the entourage of his slaves, which suggests a rather hasty and not too thoughtful departure, rather than the will of Tiberius to live as a 'private' citizen, at his own risk, despite the fact that it was what he did in the end. Suetonius states that Tiberius, during the period of seclusion in Rhodes,

between Tiberius and Julia had never been idyllic. On the rivalry between Tiberius and the Caesars (Gaius and Lucius) cf. Tac. *Ann.* 6.51.1 and Cass. Dio 55.9.7. Cf. also Vout 2013, 59–77.

23 The second cause is the one most handed down by tradition, the private discord between Tiberius and his wife. Tiberius did not want to cause scandals either by divorcing or catching her in flagrant adultery. Suetonius underlines in *Tib.* 10 his impotence in protecting his honor, he says that Tiberius did not want to incriminate or repudiate his wife even though he could no longer bear her (*dubium uxorisne taedio, quam neque criminari aut dimittere auderet neque ultra perferre posset*). Tiberius' irritation is expressed both by Cassius Dio (55.9.7) and by Suetonius (*uxoris taedium*).

24 Suetonius points out in *Tib.* 13 that Tiberius was tired of being in Rhodes, and he wanted to return to Rome. However, the term *exilium* is generic: despite its prevalent meaning of 'the fact or condition as banishment' (cf. *OLD*, s.v. *exilium*), it can also indicate voluntary exile, although it is often accompanied by the epithet *voluntarium*. There are other appropriate terms in Latin to indicate removal, such as *fuga*, *peregrinatio*, cf. *ThLL* V, 1484, 66–72.

in his youth, lived as a hermit, alone, in a modest house, dressed like a Greek, far from honors, but always disliked. In Rhodes, study was his only distraction and Tiberius stopped riding and practising weapons, and he abandoned Roman clothing to adopt a Greek cloak and sandals (*Tib.* 13). Therefore, Augustus' goal was to keep him away from his stepchildren, both from their sight and from their range of action. Augustus was certainly aware of the political intelligence and the dangerousness of Tiberius and Livia. While the exact nature of Tiberius' exile to Rhodes remains open to interpretation, Suetonius leaves room for speculation regarding whether it was a voluntary decision for rest, study, and separation from his wife and Rome, or if it was imposed or strongly advised by Augustus. However, Suetonius does suggest that the period spent in Rhodes was relatively contented, possibly one of the least unhappy phases in Tiberius' life. The choice of seclusion will be replicated in the years of his late maturity, when he will again choose self-isolation in Capri.²⁵ This is a further demonstration of the consistency of Suetonius' narrative: Tiberius' self-isolation, derived primarily from an instinct of self-preservation and his misanthropy, is a reaction to the *dissimulatio* and *simulatio*, which he resorted to when he was in the midst of others, so as not to degenerate into *saevitia*. "Tiberius became a fatalist, ruled by astrology, a doctrine entirely consistent with the Stoicism which became almost obligatory for conservative Romans active in political life. The ambition natural to a Roman of family forced him to compromise. His responsibilities oppressed him", wrote Barbara Levick.²⁶

3 Tiberius' Misanthropy: *odium* and *saevitia*

Odium opens chapter 50 of the *Tiberius*. The whole chapter is concerned to underline Tiberius' bad relationship with his family.²⁷ Suetonius' emphasis on hatred for his fam-

25 Frass 2021, 283: "Gerade die *vita* des Tiberius bietet eindrucksvolle gesellschaftliche Vorstellungen von Isolation und auf Rückzug (*secessus*) basierenden Folgen für Herrscher und Staat. Sueton ist, wie hier anhand der Kernthemen 'Charakter und Rückzug' sowie 'Raum und Rückzug' gezeigt werden konnte, bemüht staatsschädigendes Fehlverhalten des Herrschers aufgrund seiner Persönlichkeit und Veranlagung (*natura*), besonders aber aufgrund der gerüchteumwobenen Abwesenheit des Tiberius in Rhodos vor und auf Capri nach der Herrschaftsübernahme und seiner bewussten räumlichen Distanz durch das Verlassen Roms, aufzuzeigen". Cf. also Thornburn 2008.

26 Levick 1999, 179. On Tiberius as astrologer and intimate of Thrasyllus cf. Tac. *Ann.* 6.20.3 (study on Rhodes); Suet. *Tib.* 14.4; 62.3; Cass. Dio 55.11 (on Rhodes); 58.27 (death of Thrasyllus). Cf. Krappe 1927; Hayes 1959, 2–8.

27 Chapters 50–54 are dedicated to bad relations between Tiberius and his relatives. According to Suetonius, Tiberius was unable to keep the *odium* hidden from his brother, which, however, is not reflected in other sources (Suet. *Claud.* 1.4). The biographer provides us with proof in Suet. *Tib.* 7.3 of the official behavior of Tiberius, as a good and most devoted brother, on the occasion of the death of Drusus.

ily members appears particularly amplified: first, hatred for his brother Drusus,²⁸ loved by Romans almost as much as his son Germanicus, then hatred for his second wife Julia, and especially for his mother Livia. Suetonius reports in *Tib.* 51 rumors about one of the possible reasons for his seclusion in Capri: it was related to his strained relationship with Livia.²⁹ In fact, his mother read out some old notes Augustus had written to her in the past concerning Tiberius' bad character and his intolerance (*acerbitate et intolerantia morum*). In *Tib.* 52, Tiberius shows his contempt for his son Drusus, too weak and submissive.³⁰ Moreover, Suetonius puts forward an accusation for the indifference of Tiberius after the death of his son, and for being the instigator of the murder of his nephew and adopted son Germanicus. Tiberius' *saevitia* manifests itself gradually (chapters 57–62) and comes more and more to light, despite Tiberius' attempts to hide it behind the usual mask of pretense, but it ends up bursting out after his retreat to Capri (cf. 57.1; 59.1; 61.1).³¹ In chapter 57,³² Suetonius reports a significant episode, through a 'flashback': even when he was a boy, Tiberius' savage and inflexible nature was not completely hidden. Tiberius was a pupil of Theodore of Gadara, his teacher of rhetoric in Rhodes, who knew well these surly and gloomy attitudes.³³ Theodore of Gadara was

28 Suetonius is the only one to allude to Tiberius' hatred for his brother Drusus. There are two traditions about Drusus' death. According to Cass. Dio (55.1.4), Drusus dies of disease, as for Suetonius in *Claud.* 1.2. According to Valerius Maximus (5.5.3), Drusus dies following a fall from a horse (*ex fractura*). A third one is reported by Suetonius (*Claud.* 1.3–4), for poisoning (*interceptus veneno*). According to the *nonnulli* who reported the rumor, the instigator of the murder would have been Augustus, as Drusus would have been co-heir together with Gaius and Lucius. A suspicious fact is the surprising rush of Tiberius to go to Germany to the bedside of his dying brother. He reaches him starting on horseback from Pavia and covering hundreds of kilometers in one day and one night, as attested not without surprise by Val. Max. 5.5.3 and Pliny *HN* 7.84. Was he driven by brotherly love or was there another reason that justified his haste? The decision to make the dying Drusus face a long journey to Rome is also suspicious, as Cass. Dio 55.1.2 reports, stating that Tiberius found him still alive when he took him to Rome and once there, he was already dead. Sources on Drusus' death and funeral journey include Liv. *Per.* 142; Suet. *Tib.* 7.3, *Claud.* 1.3; Val. Max. 5.5.3; *Cons. Liv.* 167–270; Sen. *ad Marc.* 3.1–2, *ad Pol.* 15.5; Tac. *Ann.* 3.5.1; Cass. Dio 55.2.1–3.

29 On Tiberius and Livia, see Tac. *Ann.* 1.72.4; 3.64.1; 4.57.3; 5.11.3; 6.51.1; Dio Cass. 57.12; 58.2; Vell. 2.130.5. Cf. Seager 2005, 209; Braccisi 2017.

30 Suet. *Tib.* 52.

31 Cf. Suet. *Calig.* 11.

32 *Saeva ac lenta natura ne in puero quidem latuit; quam Theodorus Gadareus rhetoricae praeceptor et perspexisse primus sagaciter et assimilasse aptissime visus est, subinde in obiurgando appellans πηλὸν αἵματι πεφυραμένον, id est lutum a sanguine maceratum. Sed aliquanto magis in principe eluxit, etiam inter initia cum adhuc favorem hominum moderationis simulatione captaret. Scurram, qui praetereunte funere clare mortuo mandarar, ut nuntiaret Augusto nondum reddi legata quae plebei reliquisset, adtractum ad se recipere debitum ducique ad supplicium imperavit et patri suo verum referre. Nec multo post in senatu Pompeio cuidam equiti R. quiddam perneganti, dum vincula minatur, affirmavit fore ut ex Pompeio Pompeianus fieret, acerba cavillatione simul hominis nomen incessens veteremque partium fortunam.* See Heurgon 1985, 401–405.

33 Quint. 3.1.17; Sen. *Suas.* 3.7; Vell. 2.94.2. For the insult to Tiberius see also Cass. Dio 58 fr. 1.

a rhetorician of Stoic education, who lived in the late republican / early imperial age, and was in controversy with Apollodorus of Pergamum, teacher of Augustus (Suet. *Aug.* 89.1). Suetonius reports that, when Theodore castigated Tiberius, he called him 'mud steeped in blood'. Tiberius' arrogance was congenital and was a legacy of his *gens*, and, though he repressed them, signs of cruelty emerged (Tac. *Ann.* 1.4.4: *Tiberium Nero-nem maturum annis, spectatum bello, sed vetere atque insita Claudiae familiae superbia, multaque indicia saevitiae, quamquam premantur, erumpere*). Tiberius undoubtedly inherited a haughty pride from his lineage, but his reserved and closed-off nature contrasted with that of his beloved and popular brother Germanicus, as mentioned in Tacitus (*Ann.* 1.33.3: *nam iuveni civile ingenium, mira comitas et diversa a Tiberii sermone vultu, adrogantibus et obscuris*). Germanicus was known for his civil demeanor, remarkable affability, and stark differences in speech and countenance compared to Tiberius, who displayed arrogance and impenetrability. This portrayal unveils a proud individual whose outward demeanor masks deep unhappiness and insecurity. Suetonius' depiction of Tiberius in chapter 68 is rather unsparing, highlighting the silence of the *princeps* as evidence of his *superbia*. The periphrasis *nullo aut rarissimo sermone* is a poignant characterization of Tiberius' behavior, emphasizing his usual silence and infrequent speech, which was slow and reserved for those in his inner circle. The biographer repeatedly remarks on the slowness of Tiberius' actions, decision-making, and speech, all of which reflect the very essence of his nature.³⁴

The underlying sense of being disliked or, at the very least, less loved by his mother, Augustus, and his teacher creates an inner discomfort within Tiberius. This discomfort manifests itself in his inability to tolerate flattery. Suetonius alludes to this intolerance in chapter 27.³⁵ The episode seems to be the same reported by Tacitus in *Ann.* 1.13.6, referred to Q. Haterius.³⁶ In chapter 27, Suetonius does not need to explain to the reader that Tiberius is a misanthrope: "He was so opposed to flattery that he would permit no senator to approach his litter to pay his respects or to broach some matters of business, and indeed once, in his attempts to avoid a man of consular rank who went down on his knees to beg his pardon, he fell flat on his back".³⁷ The examples provided let the reader form his own idea without the need for the narrator's judgment to evaluate him. His hatred leads to *saevitia*, cruelty.

³⁴ Cf. also Suet. *Tib.* 21.2 according to Augustus himself.

³⁵ *Adulationes adeo aversatus est, ut neminem senatorum aut officii aut negotii causa ad lecticam suam admiserit, consularem vero satisfacientem sibi ac per genua orare conantem ita suffugerit, ut caderet supinus; atque etiam, si quid in sermone vel in continua oratione blandius de se diceretur, non dubitaret interpellare ac reprehendere et commutare continuo. Dominus appellatus a quodam denuntiavit, ne se amplius contumeliae causa nominaret. Alium dicentem sacras eius occupationes et rursus alium, auctore eo senatum se adisse, verba mutare et pro auctore suasorem, pro sacris laboriosas dicere coegit.*

³⁶ On Q. Haterius cf. Balbo 2007, 3–22. Cf. also Tac. *Ann.* 3.57.2.

³⁷ Transl. C. Edwards.

Suetonius has a coherent idea about Tiberius' personality and repeated cruelty. A few people turned to invective verses (*nonnulli versiculis quoque et praesentia exprobrarent et futura denuntiarent mala*) enumerating the evils he had already committed and anticipating those to come, as reported by Suetonius in *Tib.* 59:

*Asper et inmitis, breviter vis omnia dicam?
dispeream, si te mater amare potest.*

*Non es eques; quare? non sunt tibi milia centum;
omnia si quaeras, et Rhodus exilium est.*

*Aurea mutasti Saturni saecula, Caesar:
incolumi nam te ferrea semper erunt.*

*Fastidit vinum, quia iam sitit iste cruorem:
tam bibit hunc avidae, quam bibit ante merum.*

*Aspice felicem sibi, non tibi, Romule, Sullam
et Marium, si vis, aspice, sed reducem,
nec non Antoni civilia bella moventis
non semel infectas aspice caede manus,
et dic: Roma perit! **regnabit sanguine multo,**
ad regnum quisquis venit ab exilio.³⁸*

The source of such poetry is the indefinite *nonnulli*, which means that, whatever its actual provenance, Suetonius presents it as non-elite commentary, but it is the voice of the people that speaks. In chapter 28, reference is made to the insults and infamous verses that circulated against Tiberius and the complete neglect of the *princeps* towards them. As it is not specified when exactly the *versiculi* cited in chapter 59 were circulating, it is not possible to establish whether chapter 28 could properly be called a 'flashforward'. It is highly likely that *versiculi* like these were circulated throughout the course of Tiberius' reign and perhaps even earlier, during the reign of Augustus.³⁹ Nevertheless, chapter 28 can be read as a 'foreshadowing', which Suetonius used to presage the reader that the infamous verses about Tiberius will be read in chapter 59 as well. Furthermore, at the end of chapter 28, there was already an attitude of defiance and provocation of Tiberius towards his people. When he was still in Rome, as can be deduced from sections 26 to 37, *dissimulatio* and silence were his main defense strategies, but in Capri, far from the curious eyes of the senators and citizens, they

³⁸ *FPL (Fragmenta Poetarum Latinorum, Versus populares in Tiberium et Germanicum)* 1–5, p. 301 (= p. 476 Courtney), cf. Gasco 1984, 563–565.

³⁹ In Tac. *Ann.* 1.72.4, Tiberius is said to have been patient in the early years of his principate about anonymous verses, *libelli*, pamphlets. Lampoons did cause their authors trouble under Tiberius (see Tac. *Ann.* 6.39): Sextius Paconianus was strangled in prison (*Ann.* 6.3), they were the cause of the fall of Sextus Vestilius (*Ann.* 6.9).

were no longer needed. Tiberius' carefree attitude towards criticism and his confidence, exhibited in chapter 28, degenerate, in chapter 59, into pride, indifference, and an ostentatious pleasure at being reciprocated with the same hatred he harbored towards his people. Suetonius makes Tiberius pronounce this literary quotation: "Let them hate me, as long as they approve of me!" (*oderint, dum probent*). Given his taste for archaic and refined speech, Tiberius could certainly have pronounced these words, but Suetonius could also have taken them from Sen. *De Ira* 1.20.4, who in turn quotes the words of Accius (*Atreus, oderint, dum metuunt*, Acc. *Trag.* 203 R).⁴⁰

Reporting these verses in chapter 59, Suetonius lets the slander against Tiberius be uttered by the people themselves, a people deprived of their own *princeps* by choice of their *princeps* himself, who refuses to be *Pater Patriae*. Tiberius' decision to reject his role, retreat to Capri, and relinquish the responsibilities of governing the 'ship of the State' reflects his deliberate choice of self-isolation. This retreat to the harsh and rocky island of Capri in the final years of his life was motivated by his desire to reclaim privacy and disengage from the demands of public life. This echoes the sense of well-being and disengagement that Tiberius had previously experienced during his time in Rhodes decades earlier. Tiberius is defined *asper et immitis*, with a clear reference to the violence and cruelty of his character (so similar to the geomorphological features of Capri), which not even his mother, according to the people, could love. Livia, unlike Tiberius, had consistently enjoyed the love and admiration of the Roman people. This contrast in public perception creates disbelief among the people that a woman like Livia, held in high regard, could genuinely love her son, Tiberius. Furthermore, this epigram defines Tiberius *exul*.⁴¹ This is a further confirmation of the fact that probably also in Rome there were rumors that Tiberius had not gone into voluntary exile in Rhodes, but Augustus had encouraged him to leave Rome. The biggest fault of Tiberius, according to the Roman *cives*, is to have brought Rome from the Golden Age (the reign of Augustus) to the worst one, the Iron Age (the reign of Tiberius).⁴² This belief draws upon the mythical concept of the Ages of the world, where the Golden Age, governed by Kronos (Saturn), represented a time of utmost happiness and prosperity. In contrast, the Iron Age, the fourth and final age, is characterized by wicked individuals who are violent, disre-

⁴⁰ It is an emblematic expression of tyrannical authority (Cic. *Off.* 1.28.97; Sen. *Clem.* 1.12.4; 2.2.2; Suet. *Calig.* 30.1). Seneca refers to Caligula in *De Ira* 1.20.4–9.

⁴¹ Cf. Levick 1999, 118.

⁴² The Golden Age, with its references to Augustan ideology, is opposed to the Iron Age (cf. Cic. *ND* 2.159; Verg. *Ecl.* 4.6; *Georg.* 2.58; *Aen.* 6.792; Ov. *Met.* 1.89–150; Sen. *Apoc.* 4; Calp. Sic. 1.42). In the Augustan era, the myth of the Golden Age also assumed specific importance as a factor of political propaganda. In fact, it represents the idealization of the new political reality (*Aen.* 6.791–795): Saturn is seen as a political author and legislator, above all as a guarantor of peace. The figure of Saturn thus characterized anticipates that of Augustus, who would bring back the *aurea saecula* according to the prophecy of Anchises. In his didactic poem, the *Georgics* (1.121–154), Virgil takes up the theme of the evolution of the world from the Golden Age to the Iron Age, indeed from the reign of Saturn (*ante Iovem*) to the reign of Jupiter.

spectful towards the gods, lacking in justice, loyalty, modesty, and compassion. This lineage is depicted as being dominated by deceit, war, distrust, and an insatiable desire for possessions.⁴³ As often occurs in epigrams, the author of the poem in *Tib.* 59 addresses the recipient directly, Romulus, the first king of Rome, from whom the greatness of the city was born. *Aspice*, an imperative addressed to Romulus, who is invited to look at what is happening in Rome, is repeated three times. In the reported epigram there is a reference to three figures – and the number three recurs – Lucius Cornelius Sulla, Gaius Marius, and Marcus Antonius, in various ways protagonists of tragic moments in Roman history. Tiberius is represented with the typical traits of the blood-thirsty tyrant: the reference to his passion for wine and his habit of ‘Greek’ drinking (without diluting the wine with water),⁴⁴ is used as an argument to emphasize his loss of control and *moderatio*, which would have led him to perform heinous acts.⁴⁵ *Regnavit sanguine multo, / ad regnum quisquis venit ab exilio*, “Whoever comes to rule from exile, rules with much bloodshed”: this line clearly refers to Tiberius’ exile in Rhodes. Suetonius implies that the Romans perceived Tiberius’ departure to Rhodes as an exile, indicating that both the author of the epigram and Suetonius himself understood the deep political motivations that drove Tiberius to leave for Rhodes. As a result, the anonymous author of the epigram interprets Tiberius’ subsequent cruelty as a reaction stemming from his resentment upon returning from Rhodes, effectively equating his return to Rome with emerging from exile. This perspective suggests that upon his return, Tiberius transforms into a figure characterized by monstrosity, engaging in acts of killing, sadism, violence, and perversion.

4 Decline: Tiberius’ Self-Reproach

The misanthrope despises humanity and ends up hating himself as well. In chapters 66 and 67, there are indications of behaviors that could lead to Tiberius being perceived as an archetypal tyrant. However, these chapters also reveal a distinct aspect where Tiberius experiences a profound sense of animosity directed towards himself. In the earlier mentioned chapters, 51 and 59, it seems that Tiberius paid considerable attention to the opinions and regard others, including the Romans, Augustus, and his own mother Livia, held for him. This stands in contrast to his overt declarations of indifference in chapters 28 and 59. In chapter 66 Tiberius was an avid reader of pamphlets, *codicilli*, letters, *versiculi* that circulated about him or directly addressed to him.⁴⁶

⁴³ Hes. *Op.* 106–201.

⁴⁴ Cf. Plin. *HN* 14.143–145.

⁴⁵ Like Lycaon in Plat. *Resp.* 565D–566, cf. also Sen. *Clem.* 1.12.2.

⁴⁶ Morello 2006, 353 on Tiberius “as epistolographer, he is also figured, by the very nature of his correspondence, as a nervous (even paranoid) reader of the *libelli*, *codicilli* and *epistulae* of others”.

Urebant insuper anxiam mentem varia undique convicia, nullo non damnatorum omne probri genus coram vel per libellos in orchestra positos ingerente. quibus quidem diversissime adficiebatur, modo ut prae pudore ignota et celata cuncta cuperet, nonnumquam eadem contemneret et proferret ultro atque vulgaret. quin et Artabani Parthorum regis laceratus est litteris parricidia et caedes et ignaviam et luxuriam obicientis monentisque, ut voluntaria morte maximo iustissimoque civium odio quam primum satis faceret.

Suetonius suggests that his behavior was increasingly exacerbated by the judgments of the people, the Senate and other rulers, above all due to the fact that Tiberius, with his self-isolation in Capri, was looking for the well-being found in Rhodes (*vitato adsi-duitatis fastidio*). His self-isolation did not prevent him from receiving even more harsh judgments about his behavior. In this regard, in Suetonius' narrative, Artabanus, king of the Parthians, despised Tiberius' behavior, accusing him of crimes, massacres, indolence, and lust, inviting him to atone for his sins in the only way possible, committing suicide. Emperors often employed the method of instigating suicide as a means to deal with their enemies or those who defied their commands. Suetonius skillfully suggests that the severity of Tiberius' actions must have been exceptionally egregious, to the extent that even an Eastern king would find them scandalous. What is most remarkable is Tiberius' contradictory and uncertain reaction to the violent and ultimate 'advice' of suicide, as he was affected in a unique manner: sometimes he wanted these writings to be intercepted and kept hidden out of shame, at other times it happened that he himself wanted to read, declaim, and repeat them to himself and to those who were close to him in Capri. In Suetonius' carefully devised narrative construction, the invitation to die a violent death proposed by Artabanus finds an 'ideal' answer in the next chapter. *Tib.* 67 contains an answer that Tiberius gives not only to the senators and to all citizens, to all the governors of the Roman provinces, to the foreign kings, but first and foremost to himself. Suetonius, and Tacitus as well, make sure that Tiberius comes to terms with himself. In chapter 67, Suetonius reports the same words as the letter in Tacitus *Ann.* 6.6.⁴⁷ Tacitus' construction of the character of Tiberius often relies on attributing to the emperor a fair number of epistles and written messages.⁴⁸ Here is the text of *Tib.* 67:

Postremo semet ipse pertaesus, tali epistulae principio tantum non summam malorum suorum professus est: "Quid scribam vobis, p. c., aut quo modo scribam, aut quid omnino non scribam hoc tempore, dii me deaeque peius perdant quam cotidie perire sentio, si scio". Exis-

⁴⁷ *Insigne visum est earum Caesaris litterarum initium; nam his verbis exorsus est: 'quid scribam vobis, patres conscripti, aut quo modo scribam aut quid omnino non scribam hoc tempore, dii me deaeque peius perdant quam perire me cotidie sentio, si scio'. adeo facinora atque flagitia sua ipsi quoque in supplicium verterant. neque frustra praestantissimus sapientiae firmare solitus est, si recludantur tyrannorum mentes, posse aspicere laniatus et ictus, quando ut corpora verberibus, ita saevitia, libidine, malis consultis animis dilaceretur. quippe Tiberium non fortuna, non solitudines protegebant quin tormenta pectoris suasque ipse poenas fateretur.*

⁴⁸ See Morello 2006. Cf. also Ash 2013.

timant quidam praescisse haec eum peritia futurorum ac multo ante, quanta se quandoque acerbitas et infamia maneret, prospexisse; ideoque, ut imperium inierit, et patris patriae appellationem et ne in acta sua iuraretur obstinatissime recusasse, ne mox maiore dedecore impar tantis honoribus inveniretur. Quod sane ex oratione eius, quam de utraque re habuit, colligi potest; vel cum ait: similem se semper sui futurum nec umquam mutaturum mores suos, quam diu sanae mentis fuisset; sed exempli causa cavendum esse, ne se senatus in acta cuiusquam obligaret, quia aliquo casu mutari posset. Et rursus: “Si quando autem,” inquit, “de moribus meis devotoque vobis animo dubitaveritis, – quod prius quam eveniat, opto ut me supremus dies huic mutatae vestrae de me opinioni eripiat – nihil honoris adiciet mihi patria appellatio, vobis autem exprobrabit aut temeritatem delati mihi eius cognominis aut inconstantiam contrarii de me iudicii”.

In *Tib.* 67 and *Tac. Ann.* 6.5–6, Tiberius had agreed to defend his longtime friend, Cotta Messalinus, from various accusations made against him by the Senate in the year 32 CE, including that of having dared to insult the young son of Germanicus, Gaius, of homosexuality. The tone of the letter is quite surprising: disgusted with himself (*pertaesus*), Tiberius writes to the senators he wants himself to die. But it is not the first time Tiberius claims to wish for death in front of the Senate and, as for example in *Ann.* 1.7.5, Tiberius’ preference for letters is a matter of guileful temperament or, more likely, a sort of defense strategy. According to Tacitus, this is a further proof of Tiberius’ hypocrisy, in fact it was certainly not the first time that Tiberius said he wanted to die. In *Tib.* 23, Tiberius cries and declares that he has lost his voice because of the pain, but he would prefer to lose his life: it happens after the death of the young Agrippa Postumus, murdered, perhaps at the behest of Livia (according to Suetonius), or at the behest of Tiberius together with Livia, according to Tacitus and Cassius Dio (57.3.5–6). The scornful tone often adopted by Tacitus when portraying Tiberius’ interactions with senators leads to the hypothesis, as proposed by Barbara Levick and Ruth Morello, that Tiberius’ tragic demeanor may have been an exaggerated performance, a subtle and hypocritical means of mocking the servile senators. This interpretation suggests that Tiberius employed a calculated strategy to manipulate and deride the senators while maintaining an air of tragedy and seriousness. “Tiberius was not in despair, but simply annoyed”, according to Seager.⁴⁹ The sombre humor of some of Tiberius’ correspondence, a mixture of mockery and seriousness (*Ann.* 6.2.4), partly consists in his acknowledgment that any of his words, written or spoken, were subject to overestimation or misinterpretation by senators. Tiberius has a full control of his readership and is able to play it as he wishes: and Suetonius himself always emphasizes that Tiberius’ style is characterized by rhetorical emphasis and a style that is always sought after.⁵⁰ Tiberius’ decision to willingly and deliberately seclude himself in Capri was not only perceived as a display of the emperor’s irresponsibility but also as a violation of the fundamental socio-political principles of the principate. The act of self-imposed isolation was perceived as a withdrawal from

⁴⁹ Seager 2005, 230.

⁵⁰ Balbo 2007, 120–123; see Vogt 1975, 298.

the traditional duties and obligations expected of a ruler, displaying a disregard for the established norms and anticipations associated with the principate. Consequently, Tiberius' retreat to Capri was met with criticism and seen as a breach of the core principles that governed the socio-political structure of the Roman Empire. In *Tib.* 67.3, Tiberius makes a solemn declaration to the Senate regarding his character: it would never change as long as he has control of his mental faculties. In this episode, it is possible to read a reference to the first chapters of the *Life of Tiberius*, and especially to *Tib.* 3.2, where Tiberius' ancestor Salinator is mentioned. In a reversal of fate compared to his descendant Tiberius, Salinator experienced a rehabilitation and was honored with a second consulate. This honor came after he had been unjustly condemned for allegedly deliberately exiling himself to the countryside. Despite the rehabilitation, Salinator wanted to refuse the second consulate, likely due to the injustice he had faced. This situation highlights the complexities of Roman politics and the potential for both unjust condemnation and subsequent attempts at restoration and recognition. This connection between the two chapters can be read as an example of a flipped 'foreshadowing' of what is going to happen in chapter 67, anticipated at the beginning of the biography.

It is interesting that this chapter closes a section of the *Life of Tiberius* (chapters from 26 to 67 describe the entire course of his reign), and this letter represents the ideal narrative closure. Unlike Tacitus, who recounts and contextualizes the historical episode of the letter, Suetonius does not provide any indication of it, and not by chance.⁵¹ Suetonius 'strategically' extracts these first lines of his letter and uses them as the conclusion of a final verdict on Tiberius. In this chapter there is a 'flashback' that recalls Tiberius' rejection of the title of *Pater Patriae*, as he was allegedly undeserving of that title⁵² – a sort of Stoic *displacentia sui*. There are innumerable manifestations of this vice of the soul, as Seneca affirms in *De tranquillitate animi* 2.8–10,⁵³ but there is only one effect, its result: *sibi displicere* (being discontented with oneself). This intemperance, imbalance of the soul, arises from intemperate desires, which either do not dare to try to achieve what they crave, or try in vain to achieve it. This disgust at the successes of others and the desperation of their own unsuccess make those who feel dissatisfaction with themselves inclined to harbor their own pains, to the point of being unhappy and ashamed of themselves.

51 Letters of this kind were incorporated into the *acta senatus*. In this case, did Suetonius consult the originals or did he derive them from a literary source? Cf. Bardon 1940; Gascou 1984, 483, 488; Levick 1999, 201; Seager 2005, 226.

52 See also Tac. *Ann.* 1.72.1.

53 [...] *Hinc illud est taedium et displacentia sui et nusquam residentis animi volutatio et otii sui tristis atque aegra patientia, utique ubi causas fateri pudet et tormenta introrsus egit verecundia, in angusto inclusae cupiditates sine exitu se ipsae strangulant; inde maeror marcorque et mille fluctus mentis incertae, quam spes inchoatae suspensam habent, deploratae tristem; inde ille affectus otium suum detestantium querentiumque nihil ipsos habere quod agant, et alienis incrementis inimicissima invidia (aliter enim livorem infelix inertia et omnes destrui cupiunt, quia se non potuere provehere).*

Suetonius' opinion on Tiberius emerges from the facts, and in this case 'strategically' from the words of the emperor himself, the conclusion that he has reached about himself, that is, self-hatred and desire to die.

5 Final Remarks: "I Do Not Remember What I Was"

"I do not remember what I was". It is what Tiberius would have replied, at the beginning of his reign, to an acquaintance who had asked him: "Do you remember?". This episode was reported by Seneca in *Ben.* 5.25.2:⁵⁴ here Tiberius wants to forget who he is. But who or what did Tiberius want to forget? Perhaps he wanted to forget who he had been before he became *princeps*, to avoid returning favors to old friends, or because old friends could remember unpleasant or unwelcome actions and facts, and he hated any relationship with friends or peers, as they could have become dangerous spies. Even Seneca, in this very brief anecdote, subtly refers to the misanthropy of Tiberius. However, an expression that is so vague and at the same time so enigmatic, like the one who uttered it, can also be read as the need to detach oneself from one's self-image, to turn the page from what one has been, the will to dissociate from oneself.

Suetonius drew a negative picture of the emperor especially in his personal relationships and emotional ties within his family circle. In this way, Tiberius is an autocrat, despised by his family and people, isolated in his self-imposed emotional and spatial seclusion. Of course, there are common and recurring characteristics, typical of the tyrant in Tiberius, but his peculiarity and his experience make him very different from the stereotypical tyrant.⁵⁵

"As a private citizen he would merely have been a lonely, suspicious, frightened old man. But because of the power that circumstances had forced on him, his suspicions and fears were transformed into lethal weapons, at first forged and skilfully directed by Seianus, then in the last years scattered at random by a warped and haunted

54 *Ti. Caesar inter initia dicenti cuidam: "meministi" – antequam plures notas familiaritatis veteris proferret: "non memini," inquit, "quid fuerim". ab hoc quidni non esset repetendum beneficium? optanda erat oblivio; aversabatur omnium amicorum et aequalium notitiam et illam solam praesentem fortunam suam adspici, illam solam cogitari ac narrari volebat. inquisitorem habebat veterem amicum!* On this passage see Roller 2001, 208–209; Gowing 2005, 1–2.

55 Frass 2021, 284: "Historische Realität und Individualität sind in der Kaiserbiographie Suetons, als Konstrukt traditioneller Tugenden und Laster sowie stereotyper Herrschertopik, nur bedingt fassbar. Dennoch lassen sich auf Grund der Verdichtung der Aussagen zu Rückzugs- und Isolationsbestrebungen in der *vita* des Tiberius auch spezifische Vorstellungen eines geschmähten von Volk und Familie, verlassenen ‚individualisierten‘ Alleinherrschers erkennen, eines Herrschers ‚allein‘ in selbstgewählter emotionaler und räumlicher Isolation".

mind”.⁵⁶ To conclude, the doubt about Tiberius remains. Was he really sincere in the last letter reported by Suetonius? When he writes those letters to the Senate at the end of his life, does he keep making fun of the senators? Does he play the part of the penitent? Or does he really believe it? Tacitus would seem to opt for hypocrisy, because his consideration of Tiberius in his obituary (6.51) is that of an inexorable descent into evil.⁵⁷ Tacitus, as Ronald Syme pointed out,⁵⁸ was a nostalgic republican who could not fail to admire the efforts Tiberius made in the first years of his reign to build a constructive dialogue with the senators, a dialogue in which Tiberius himself no longer believed, because of the servility of the senators (cf. *Ann.* 3.65 *o homines ad servitutem paratos!*). Suetonius, unlike Tacitus, does not show any sign of admiration for Tiberius, but reveals a comprehension and justification of his deplorable actions, since they are inherited from the *Claudii*, the sins of the fathers from which he cannot free himself. Suetonius has the detachment of a biographer, who does not write history to discern and face the present times or to predict the future, but biographies, full of anecdotes and tailored for entertainment. Perhaps the *princeps* had never removed the mask of hypocrisy and derision in his letters, a written and polysemic means of communication, much more rhetorical and narrative than the preferred form of communication used by Tiberius, silence.⁵⁹

Bibliography

- R. Ash, “Tacitean Fusion: Tiberius the Satirist?”, in: T. D. Papangelis/S. J. Harrison/S. Frangoulidis (edd.), *Generic Interfaces in Latin Literature: Encounters, Interactions and Transformations*, Berlin/Boston 2013, 433–447.
- M. Baar, *Das Bild des Kaisers Tiberius bei Tacitus, Sueton und Cassius Dio*, Stuttgart 1990.
- A. Balbo, *I frammenti degli oratori romani dell'età augustea e tiberiana*, parte seconda, Alessandria 2007.
- H. Bardon, *Les empereurs et les lettres latines d'Auguste à Hadrien*, Paris 1940.
- J. Bellemore, “Tiberius and Rhodes”, *Klio* 89, 2007, 417–453.
- L. Braccesi, *Livia*, Roma 2017.
- N. Bruno, “Better Not to Speak under Trajan? Reticence and Omission in Tacitus”, in: N. Bruno/M. Filosa/G. Marinelli (edd.), *Fragmented Memory: Omission, Selection, and Loss in Ancient and Medieval Literature and History*, Berlin/Boston 2022a, 163–183.
- N. Bruno, “Unspoken Messages: Tiberius and the Power of Silence in Tacitus' *Annals*”, in: N. Bruno/G. Dovico/O. Montepaone/M. Pelucchi (edd.), *The Limits of Exactitude in Greek, Roman, Byzantine Literature and Textual Transmission*, Berlin/Boston 2022b, 37–58.
- I. J. F. De Jong, *Narratology and Classics. A Practical Guide*. Oxford 2014.
- C. Edwards, *Lives of the Caesars*, Oxford/New York 2000.

⁵⁶ Seager 2005, 211.

⁵⁷ Woodman 1989.

⁵⁸ Syme 1958, I.427–428.

⁵⁹ See Strocchio 1992; Bruno 2022a; Bruno 2022b.

- M. Frass, "Alleinherrscher – Herrscher allein? Das Tiberiusbild in der Kaiserbiographie Suetons", in: Matuszewski 2021, 265–286.
- Ph. Garrett, "Structure and Persuasion in Suetonius' *De vita Caesarum*", *Ramus* 47, 2018, 197–215.
- Ph. Garrett, "Foreshadowing and Flashback: Childhood Anecdotes in Suetonius' *Caesars*", *CQ* 69, 2019, 378–383.
- Ph. Garrett, "Ancestry and Family Identity in Suetonius' *Caesars*", *CQ* 71, 2021, 777–790.
- J. Gasco, *Suétone historien*, Rome 1984.
- M. A. Giua, "Tiberio simulatore nella tradizione storica pretacitiana", *Athenaeum* 53, 1975, 352–363.
- M. A. Giua, "Una lettura della biografia svetoniana di Tiberio", *ANRW* II.33.5, 1991, 3733–3747.
- J. González, "Tacitus, Germanicus, Piso, and the *Tabula Siarensis*", *AJPh* 120, 1999, 123–142.
- A. M. Gowing, *Empire and Memory. The Representation of the Roman Republic in Imperial Culture*, Cambridge 2005.
- W. M. Hayes, "Tiberius and the Future", *CJ* 55, 1959, 2–8.
- J. Heurgon, "Une calomnie sur Tibère enfant (Suét., *Tib.* 57)", *Annales de la Faculté des Lettres et Sciences Humaines de Nice* 50, 1985, 401–405.
- D. W. Hurley, "Suetonius' Rubric Sandwich", in: T. Power/R. K. Gibson (edd.), *Suetonius the Biographer: Studies in Roman Lives*, Oxford 2014, 21–37.
- B. Jones/R. Milns, *Suetonius: The Flavian Emperors: A Historical Commentary*, Bristol 2002.
- R. Kirstein, "Narratologie und Biographie: Suetons *Vita Augusti*", in: A. Cucchiarelli (ed.), *Racconto nei testi, racconto nelle immagini. La narratologia come approccio alla letteratura e all'arte antiche*, Atti della Giornata di Studi tenutasi presso il Museo dell'Arte Classica il 18 maggio 2018, Roma 2020, 115–127.
- T. Klauk/T. Köppe, "Telling vs. Showing", in: *The Living Handbook of Narratology*, Hamburg [2014], <http://www.lhn.uni-hamburg.de/article/telling-vs-showing>, accessed on 30 August 2023.
- A. H. Krappe, "Tiberius and Thrasyllus", *AJPh* 48, 1927, 359–366.
- B. Levick, "The Retirement of Tiberius to Rhodes in 6 BC", *Latomus* 31, 1972, 779–813.
- B. Levick, *Tiberius the Politician*, London 1999.
- H. M. Lindsay, *Suetonius: Tiberius*, Bristol 1995.
- H. M. Lindsay, "Characterisation in the Suetonian *Life of Tiberius*", in: T. W. Hillard (ed.), *Ancient History in a Modern University*, Proceedings of a Conference Held at Macquarie University, 8–13 July 1993, North Ryde (N. S. W.) 1998, 299–308.
- R. Linhares-Dias, *How to Show Things with Words. A Study on Logic, Language and Literature*, Berlin 2006.
- C. T. Mallan, *Cassius Dio: Roman History Books 57 and 58 (The Reign of Tiberius)*, Oxford 2020.
- R. Matuszewski (ed.), *Being Alone in Antiquity: Greco-Roman Ideas and Experiences of Misanthropy, Isolation and Solitude*, Berlin/Boston 2021.
- R. Morello, "A Correspondence Course in Tyranny: the 'Cruentae Litterae' of Tiberius", *Arethusa* 39, 2006, 331–354.
- B. Mouchová, *Studie zu Kaiserbiographien Suetons*, Prag 1968.
- T. Power, "Introduction: The Originality of Suetonius", in: T. Power/R. K. Gibson (edd.), *Suetonius the Biographer: Studies in Roman Lives*, Oxford 2014, 1–20.
- P. Ramondetti, *Tiberio nella biografia di Svetonio*, Napoli 2000.
- J. Rich, "Drusus and the *spolia opima*", *CQ* 49, 1999, 544–555.
- M. Roller, *Constructing Autocracy: Aristocrats and Emperors in Julio-Claudian Rome*, Princeton 2001.
- V. Schulz, *Deconstructing Imperial Representation: Tacitus, Cassius Dio, and Suetonius on Nero and Domitian*, Leiden/Boston 2019.
- R. Seager, *Tiberius*, Malden/Oxford² 2005.
- P. Somville, "Psychographie de Tibère", *L'Antiquité Classique* 71, 2002, 85–92.
- R. Strocchio, "I significati del silenzio nell'opera di Tacito", *Memorie dell'Accademia delle Scienze di Torino. Classe di Scienze Morali, Storiche e Filologiche*, Serie V, 16, 1992, 4–49.
- R. Strocchio, *Simulatio e dissimulatio nell'opera di Tacito*, Bologna 2001.

- R. Syme, *Tacitus*, I–II, Oxford 1958.
- J. E. Thornburn, “Suetonius’ Tiberius: a Proxemic Approach”, *CPh* 103, 2008, 435–448.
- F. Varvaet, “*Subsidia dominationi*: The Early Careers of Tiberius Claudius Nero and Nero Claudius Drusus Revisited”, *Klio* 102, 2020, 120–201.
- J. Vekselius, “Tiberius and Tears: Grief and Genre”, in: A. D. Poulsen/A. Jönsson (edd.), *Usages of the Past in Roman Historiography*, Leiden/Boston 2021, 225–261.
- W. Vogt, *C. Suetonius Tranquillus. Vita Tiberii*, Würzburg 1975.
- C. Vout, “Tiberius and the Invention of Succession”, in: A. G. G. Gibson (ed.), *The Julio-Claudian Succession. Reality and Perception of the “Augustan Model”*, Leiden/Boston 2013, 59–77.
- J. A. Weller, “Tacitus and Tiberius’ Rhodian Exile”, *Phoenix* 12, 1958, 31–35.
- M. H. Williams, “Tiberius and the Disobliging Grammarian of Rhodes: Suetonius, *Vita Tiberi* XXXII, 2 Re-considered”, *Latomus* 54, 1995, 625–633.
- A. J. Woodman, “Tacitus’ Obituary of Tiberius”, *CQ* 39, 1989, 197–205.
- A. J. Woodman, *The Annals of Tacitus. Books 5 and 6*, Cambridge 2017.
- G. Zecchini, “La *Tabula Siarensis* e la *dissimulatio* di Tiberio”, *ZPE* 66, 1986, 23–29.

