

# Suetonius' Tacitus\*

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## ABSTRACT

*This article discusses the relationship of Tacitus to his younger contemporary Suetonius, challenging the view that Suetonius wrote a 'supplement' to the historian. Scholarly focus on this pair has led to the widespread belief that Suetonius had read Tacitus' Annals, which is unsupported by the evidence. The prevailing consensus that the biographer may at times be subtly criticizing the historian persists in commentaries on Suetonius' Caesars. It is argued that where their two accounts appear to meet, Suetonius is better seen as responding to the earlier common source or sources, or distinguishing himself from the conventions of historiography at large.*

**Keywords:** Suetonius; Tacitus; allusion; biography; historiography

One of the misconceptions that continue to haunt Suetonian scholarship is the notion that the biographer's *Lives of the Caesars* must in some way have been inspired by Tacitus, or have used the historian as a source. Naturally, Suetonius is often compared with Tacitus, usually to bring out their unique perspectives on the Roman emperors, and occasionally differences in the two writers' styles.<sup>1</sup> However, scholars have also long speculated on Suetonius' possible influence by Tacitus, whose last work, the *Annals*, seems to have been published at least in part by A.D. 118,<sup>2</sup> probably in time to have been consulted by Suetonius in advance of the publication of his *Caesars*, which occurred sometime between A.D. 119 and 122.<sup>3</sup> Yet more space has been devoted to discussion of Tacitus in books and commentaries on Suetonius than is warranted by the evidence, and he should perhaps not be mentioned at all except as a representative of the historiographical genre and a parallel author who drew on the same sources.<sup>4</sup> The problem is that our estimation of Tacitus is increased by the loss of so much other ancient literature on the early imperial period, and the history of the Caesars has become indistinguishable to us from Tacitus, much like the Peloponnesian War was to the ancients from Thucydides.<sup>5</sup>

\* I wish to thank the editorial committee of *JRS*, as well as the journal's Editor Catherine Steel, for helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper. Ancient references follow the edition of A. Rostagni for Suetonius' *Poets* (1944), that of A. Reifferscheid for his fragments (1860), and those of H. Heubner for Tacitus' *Histories* (1978) and *Annals* (1983). Translations of the *Caesars* and *Annals* are taken from the Loeb editions of J. C. Rolfe (1914) and J. Jackson (1931–7) respectively. All other translations are my own.

<sup>1</sup> For stylistic comparisons, see, e.g., Ektor 1980; Mouchová 1986–7; 1991: 95–6, 99; Lounsbury 1987: 71, 78–9, 104–5; Bayer 2002: 43–5; Oakley 2009: 206–11; Damon 2014: 44–6, 49–50.

<sup>2</sup> For this date, see Goodyear 1981: 393, but the matter is controversial; cf. Birley 2000: 242–7.

<sup>3</sup> On the publication date of Suetonius' *Caesars*, see Power 2010: 140; 2014a: 76–7.

<sup>4</sup> For Tacitus as a parallel author who used common sources, see, e.g., Syme 1958: 674–6; Shotter 1993: 33–5; Murison 1999: 12–17; Damon 2003: 22–30; Champlin 2008: 418–19; Potter 2012: 131–4.

<sup>5</sup> On distinguishing whether an allusion is to an historical event or its literary treatment, see Pelling 2013: 3–4 with bibliography.

We must be careful when assessing Suetonius' broad and programmatic contrast with historiography, which he states as writing 'neque per tempora sed per species' ('not in chronological order, but by classes', *Aug.* 9.1), to use Tacitus only as an example, among others, of that genre's conventions, rather than taking Suetonius to be engaging directly with Tacitus. However, this error of exaggerating the importance of Tacitus in studies of Suetonius has unfortunately been committed by scholars to the point where the biographer's entire project has been recast in terms of Tacitus. This recasting has led scholars such as Lindsay to muse on whether Suetonius included Julius Caesar in his collection to fill a gap left by Tacitus,<sup>6</sup> or Hurley to ponder the possibility that the biographer's account of the death of Nero is so lengthy because it completes, as it were, a last part of the *Annals*, which Tacitus may have died writing.<sup>7</sup> It has even been proposed by one of Suetonius' translators that his *per species* method may be due to competition with Tacitus, and one recent commentator suggests that the same reason may possibly lie behind Suetonius' greater research for the period of the foundation of the Principate.<sup>8</sup> This is not to mention the arguments for allusions to lost books of Tacitus, where the reconstruction of the original text is suspect,<sup>9</sup> or those *ex silentio*, such as Baldwin's suggestion that Agricola and Verginius Rufus are avoided by Suetonius because they are particularly Tacitean themes.<sup>10</sup>

Suetonius is frequently held to be 'supplementing' Tacitus in this way, that is, subtly correcting or one-upping him.<sup>11</sup> In this paper, I shall first trace the origin of this viewpoint, which may be found in a 1967 argument by Townend for three subtle allusions to the *Annals*, as well as in the earlier description by Syme of Suetonius' relationship to the historian as that of a 'supplement'. Identifying this origin is especially necessary because there is often an unstated acceptance of the theory of Tacitean corrections in Suetonius, which is thought to have been proven viable long ago, and few scholars take the time to investigate, or even cite, its basis. The effects of Townend's argument in particular continue to be felt because it has never been systematically refuted. As groundwork for this refutation, appeal will be made to more current models for the practice of allusion in ancient texts. I shall then go through the allusions proposed by Townend one by one in the second part of this paper, to show how they do not in fact constitute a sufficient basis for the probability that Suetonius alludes to Tacitus. In the third part, conclusions will be drawn that suggest a new understanding of Suetonius' task as a biographer.

## I

Almost fifty years ago, Townend put forth an interpretation of Suetonius that continues to influence the way that the biographer's works are read by scholars. On the one hand,

<sup>6</sup> Lindsay 1993: 4–5. For more profitable discussions of Suetonius' decision to include Julius Caesar, see, e.g., Pelling 2009: 253–4; Henderson 2014.

<sup>7</sup> Hurley 2013: 40–1. This argument is weak most of all because there is no way to know that Tacitus did not finish and publish the *Annals* in its entirety, including the death of Nero, as Jer., *Comm. Zach.* 3.14 suggests.

<sup>8</sup> See respectively Edwards 2000: xv; Osgood 2011: xxiii–xxiv. With the latter, cf. Hurley 2011: xix–xx. For a better explanation of Suetonius' biographical form, see Power, 2014c: 4–14; and of the biographer's concentration on this period, including his naming of sources, Power 2010: 160–1; cf. Fantham 2013b: 189.

<sup>9</sup> Luck 1964: 75; Townend 1967: 89; Gascou 1984: 690; Hurley 2001: 9, n. 33, 74, 189, cf. 102.

<sup>10</sup> Baldwin 1979a: 104–5 = 1983: 72 = 1989b: 15–16; cf. Syme 1980: 123 = 1984: 1270, pointing also to Corbulo's absence. However, Baldwin is elsewhere more circumspect; see references below, n. 15. Suetonius generally marginalizes or excludes secondary figures; cf. SHA, *Quad. Tyr.* 1.1–2, with, e.g., Townend 1964: 351.

<sup>11</sup> See also, e.g., Bird 1973; Cizek 1977: 46, n. 80; Wallace-Hadrill 1983: 1–2, 8–10, 111–12, n. 15; Birley 1984: 249; 1997: 96; Gascou 1984: 284, 292, 345, 542, 776; Momigliano 1984: 1147 = 1987: 394; Hurley 1989: 325–7; 1993: 26; Lindsay 1993: 54; Mellor 1993: 138; 2011: 196; Barrett 1996: 204–5; Whittaker 2000; Baltussen 2002: 33, 39; Sharrock and Ash 2002: 365; Damon 2003: 24, n. 21; Devillers 2003: 221–2; Longrée 2003: 315; Martin 2009: 83–4; O'Gorman 2011: 293; Fantham 2013b: 160.

Townend, like Syme, had earlier conceded that there was no solid support for Suetonius' direct borrowing from Tacitus:<sup>12</sup>

Syme is surely right in his conclusions that there is no positive evidence that Suetonius used either the *Annals* or the *Histories* ... Suetonius recognized the double unsuitability of employing Tacitus for his own work. In the first place, borrowings from the *Annals* would require much more thorough assimilation than he normally allowed his material, if they were not to stand out from the non-descript style of the *Caesars*; and secondly he was well aware of the cavalier use Tacitus had made of sources which might more safely be used at first hand.

On the other hand, both scholars still believed that Suetonius must have been acquainted with Tacitus' historical works. Take the rather different tack of Townend in his most famous paper, in which he offered what is still the most forceful argument to date for implicit criticisms of Tacitus by Suetonius:<sup>13</sup>

if Suetonius irritates modern readers ... it is because they are hoping to use him as an historical source, to provide a factual account of the events of such-and-such an emperor's reign. This is not, of course, how Suetonius intended his *Lives* to be read. He could hardly have dreamed that an age would come when readers lacked even certain books of Tacitus' *Annals* and *Histories*, not to mention the less-brilliant historical works of Aufidius Bassus and the elder Pliny.

To some extent, Townend's argument is in the right spirit, but there is no doubt that it goes too far by claiming Suetonius' familiarity with Tacitus' *Annals*. Compare the provocative comments by Syme, in which the word 'supplement' first appears in a prominent discussion of Suetonius:<sup>14</sup>

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.

Syme and Townend are certainly correct to assume that Suetonius was familiar with the history of the period that he covered, and expected his readers to be, especially since he regularly omits so much historical material that could be considered common knowledge among educated Romans. However, the idea that he relied specifically on Tacitus in any way has never been proven, and until it can be proven it is a dangerous proposition, relegating Suetonius' *Caesars* to the less important office of being a mere 'supplement' to Tacitus, rather than a work that stands on its own. The implications of this view for the study and interpretation of Suetonius are considerable, and so this point should not be taken lightly. Prudence on the matter of Suetonius and Tacitus could always be found among sober-minded scholars,<sup>15</sup> but these voices of scepticism have not been the most heeded.

For example, Wallace-Hadrill's book on Suetonius, which continues to be followed as the standard introduction to the author among Anglophone readers, makes much of this notion that Suetonius was a follower, rather than equal, of Tacitus:<sup>16</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Townend 1959: 285.

<sup>13</sup> Townend 1967: 84. This paper's influence is wider than its acknowledged use, but for citations by adherents still in the present century, see, e.g., Edwards 2000: xxviii, n. 32; Whittaker 2000: 103, n. 20; Baltussen 2002: 33, n. 14. For precursors of Townend's theory, see, e.g., Lehmann 1858: 40–7; Macé 1900: 179; Haverfield 1916: 198; Harrer 1918: 342–3; Braithwaite 1927: xiv; Della Corte 1958: 118–39; Questa 1963: 109–23.

<sup>14</sup> Syme 1958: 502, cf. 689. However, Syme is elsewhere (689–91, 781–2) more sceptical on the matter.

<sup>15</sup> e.g., Heeren 1820: 189; Goodyear 1972: 135–6, 167–8; 1982: 663; Bradley 1978: 287; Baldwin 1983: 151–2, 178, 191–2; von Albrecht 1997: 1393; Pettinger 2012: 177–8, n. 28, 217; Cornell 2013a: 127–8.

<sup>16</sup> Wallace-Hadrill 1983: 9–10; cf. Goodyear 1982: 663: 'he never attempted to vie with writers of major history'; also Hurley 1989: 325; 2001: 8–9; Edwards 2000: xiii–xv; Pausch 2004: 271–3; Ash 2007: 30, n. 84; Konstan

Rather than let biography become history, he would write not-history ... history for him was what Tacitus wrote. He had no reason not to admire it. Written by one who understood public life as it was traditionally defined, devastating in its exposé of the springs of human action and stylistically a self-conscious masterpiece, it could hardly be rivalled on its own terms. Suetonius was too modest or honest to challenge Tacitus. But there was still room for a supplement. As a man of learning and a servant of Caesars, he had something to add.

Townend's argument for occasional corrections of Tacitus in the *Caesars* and Syme's passing denunciation of the work as a less austere version of the *Annals* have here melded into the more developed view that Suetonian biography was actually modelled as an inversion of Tacitus. For Wallace-Hadrill, 'not-history' means 'not-Tacitus', but the argument would otherwise lack controversy: ancient historians and biographers used sources in some of the same ways, at times sharing much of the same material and being somewhat close in purpose, so that distinctions often had to be made through mutual contrast.<sup>17</sup> There is certainly validity in comparing Suetonius with Tacitus, the major extant example of the historiographical tradition from the same era, but the danger is in eliding that tradition with Tacitus' unique writing, a fine line which has certainly been crossed in these discussions. This is the difference that I mentioned above between using Tacitus as a source for Suetonius and using him simply as a representative annalist or a parallel author with sources in common, that is, between allusion and source-criticism. The latter remains a useful way to contrast the two writers' styles, as well as to draw wider conclusions about the unique natures of ancient historiography and biography.

Another distinction should be made here between two different kinds of intertextuality. While some scholars have certainly argued for direct borrowings by Suetonius from Tacitus for particular phrases and details,<sup>18</sup> there is another layer of criticism, indoctrinated by Townend and followed by Wallace-Hadrill, which supports a belief that Suetonius was merely double-checking with Tacitus or 'supplementing' him, while still relying on earlier first-century material, as we have already discussed. In other words, according to Townend's view, a less obvious competition with the historian may exist on top of their shared use of common sources. The weakness of this argument lies in its lack of tangible evidence, since more recent models for allusion would reduce this case to being pointless speculation without at least one solid allusion (or external testimony for one author's acquaintance with the other's text). While it would be astonishing if Suetonius was not aware of Tacitus the man, especially when one considers their shared friendship with Pliny the Younger,<sup>19</sup> whether he actually read his historical works is another, unattested matter — especially since authors of the same time whom we might expect to have been familiar with each other sometimes wrote independently, despite mutual acquaintances.

and Walsh forthcoming. A similar contrast with biography too in Suetonius is implied by Konstan 2009: 459, who draws partly on Wallace-Hadrill's argument, which concludes that Suetonius is ultimately '*sui generis*'; see especially Wallace-Hadrill 1983: 66–72 (quotation at 72). Cf. next note.

<sup>17</sup> See especially Gascou 1984, with Wallace-Hadrill 1986. On Wallace-Hadrill's phrase as meaning 'not-Tacitus', cf. Tatum 2014: 164. For defining Suetonius by contrast, see also Henderson 1989: 168: 'imperial hagiography and its bend sinister, the Suetonian *Vita*'. Against the view of Suetonius as a 'tabloid Tacitus', see Sharrock and Ash 2002: 365. On biography's proximity to, and distinctions from, history in antiquity, see Power 2014c: 1–3, 13.

<sup>18</sup> e.g., Gascou 1984: 254, n. 2; Brugnoli 1985: 330, 334; Delarue 1995: 299–300; Lindsay 1995: 10–11; Woodman 2009b: 36 = 2012: 248; Levick 2012: 276; Ash forthcoming; cf. De Temmerman forthcoming.

<sup>19</sup> Mackail 1895: 230; Syme 1958: 502; 1980: 111–12 = 1984: 1258–9; Wardle 1994: 44–5; Warmington 1999: xi. Pliny's statements that the *Historiae* was an 'eternal' ('*aeternitas*', *Ep.* 6.16.2) and 'immortal' ('*immortales*', *Ep.* 7.33.1) work are made in letters to Tacitus himself, where effusiveness could be expected, and Tacitus' influence on later antiquity was at any rate minimal; cf. Whitton 2012: 347; Rutledge 2014: xiii; *pace* Benario, 2012: 103, whose view that Pliny's opinion echoes 'the response of the reading public to the work' is unconvincing. Suetonius' estimation of literature differed from Pliny's on several points, not the least important of which was the biographer's favouring of earlier eras; see Gibson 2014.

Even Townend's delicate argument for more implicit engagement with Tacitus must have a basis on which to build; otherwise, the belief that Suetonius read him would be nothing more than a *a priori* assumption: 'he simply *must have* read Tacitus', 'surely he read Tacitus', 'of course he did, if Pliny did', and so on.

Before subtler Tacitean allusions can be cogently detected in Suetonius, a connection between the two authors must first be established to anchor the argument. Since there is no explicit mention of Tacitus' *Annals* by Suetonius (or other external testimony), this connection must come in the form of a clear allusion. Recent scholarship on allusion shows that the criteria for establishing such an anchoring allusion may be stated as follows: there must be (i) a contextual similarity or (ii) a textual echo — be it verbal, positional, or rhythmical; and the certainty of the allusion is determined by the uniqueness and extent of these connections, so long as they cannot be explained by a common source or *topos*.<sup>20</sup> The presence of (i) alone can occasionally be sufficient,<sup>21</sup> but clear evidence of (ii) removes practically all doubt. Cumulative cases can only stand if the author's knowledge of the text alluded to is already somehow certain, or if a solid allusion has already been established.<sup>22</sup> As Momigliano put it, when he argued against Syme's fanciful attempt to prove the *Historia Augusta's* use of Ammianus, many bad allusions do not add up to one good one.<sup>23</sup> As I shall argue, the argument of Townend is weak even as a cumulative case, and would remain so, however many even subtler allusions we combined with it.

## II

Scrutiny of Townend's three allusions reveals how the perception that Suetonius is doing very uncharacteristic things in these passages is misguided, and even the *semblance* of polemic with Tacitus is more convincingly explained in other ways. Although these three allusions may seem few, they are the strongest and most compelling passages that have been put forth for allusion to Tacitus in Suetonius. Not only have they found the widest acceptance, but they have also inspired countless other lesser arguments. According to our model for allusion above, one clear case of allusion must be independently established for others to be in any way valid. Our best bet for such a case, therefore, is among these three originally proposed allusions. If we cannot establish one of Townend's allusions as distinct in its own right, then all subsequent arguments fall.

Let us take the alleged allusions in order of appearance. The first occurs when the biographer refutes the belief that Augustus chose Tiberius to succeed him merely to throw his own good deeds into sharp relief.<sup>24</sup>

ne Tiberium quidem caritate aut rei publicae cura successorem adscitum, sed quoniam adrogantiam saeuitiamque eius introspexerit, comparatione deterrima sibi gloriam quaesiuisset. etenim Augustus paucis ante annis, cum Tiberio tribuniciam potestatem a patribus rursus postularet, quamquam honora oratione quaedam de habitu cultuque et institutis eius iecerat, quae uelut excusando exprobraret.

<sup>20</sup> Wills 1996: 18. Cf. Syme 1958: 690; Hinds 1998: 25–6; Bosworth 2004: 551, n. 1; Power 2007: 792; 2014a: 75; Kelly 2008: 166–9; Gibson 2011: 189–93; also below, n. 23.

<sup>21</sup> See, e.g., Trinacty 2009: 271–2; Baldwin 2010: 459–60.

<sup>22</sup> cf. Ash 1997: 46; Kelly 2008: 170.

<sup>23</sup> Syme 1968: 69–71, 94–103; *contra*, Momigliano 1968–9: 429 = 1975: 98; cf. den Hengst 2009: 96–7; Power 2014b.

<sup>24</sup> An allusion to Tacitus is perceived here by Townend 1967: 89; 1982b: 1054; Edwards 2000: xxviii; Hurley 2001: 74; Shotter 2008: 9.

Even in the adoption of Tiberius to succeed him, his motive had been neither personal affection nor regard for the state: he had read the pride and cruelty of his heart, and had sought to heighten his own glory by the vilest of contrasts. For Augustus, a few years earlier, when requesting the Fathers to renew the grant of the tribunician power to Tiberius, had in the course of the speech, complimentary as it was, let fall a few remarks on his demeanour, dress, and habits which were offered as an apology and designed for reproaches. (*Ann.* 1.10.7)

scio uulgo persuasum quasi egresso post secretum sermonem Tiberio uox Augusti per cubicularios excepta sit: 'miserum populum R., qui sub tam lentis maxillis erit'. ne illud quidem ignoro *aliquos tradidisse*, Augustum palam nec dissimulanter morum eius diritatem adeo improbasse, ut nonnumquam remissiores hilarioresque sermones superueniente eo abrumperet; sed expugnatum precibus uxoris adoptionem non abnuisse, uel etiam ambitione tractum, ut tali successore desiderabilior ipse quandoque fieret. adduci tamen nequeo quin existimem, circumspcctissimum et prudentissimum principem in tanto praesertim negotio nihil temere fecisse; sed uitii Tiberii uirtutibusque perpensis potiores duxisse uirtutes, praesertim cum et rei p. causa adoptare se eum pro contione iurauerit et epistulis aliquot ut peritissimum rei militaris utque unicum p. R. praesidium prosequatur. ex quibus in exemplum pauca hinc inde subieci ...

I know that it is commonly believed, that when Tiberius left the room after this confidential talk, Augustus was overheard by his chamberlains to say: 'Alas for the Roman people, to be ground by jaws that crunch so slowly!' I also am aware that *some have written* that Augustus so openly and unreservedly disapproved of his austere manners, that he sometimes broke off his freer and lighter conversation when Tiberius appeared; but that overcome by his wife's entreaties he did not reject his adoption, or perhaps was even led by selfish considerations, that with such a successor he himself might one day be more regretted. But after all I cannot be led to believe that an emperor of the utmost prudence and foresight acted without consideration, especially in a matter of so great moment. It is my opinion that after weighing the faults and the merits of Tiberius, he decided that the latter preponderated, especially since he took oath before the people that he was adopting Tiberius for the good of the country, and alludes to him in several letters as a most able general and the sole defence of the Roman people. In illustration of both these points, I append a few extracts from these letters ... (*Tib.* 21.2–3)

Although Suetonius sometimes likes to generalize from specific instances, turning singulars into plurals,<sup>25</sup> there is reason to think that 'aliquos tradidisse' does not refer to Tacitus, even if it masks a single source. For one thing, Suetonius reports details that were unknown to Tacitus about Augustus' opinion of Tiberius, such as the exclamation that he quotes, which no doubt would have been found in the same source as the theory about Augustus' more self-serving motive.<sup>26</sup>

For another thing, where the two writers do overlap, Suetonius seems clearly not to echo Tacitus, but to have rephrased whatever lost historical writer he is following in his usual matter-of-fact style ('ut tali successore desiderabilior ipse quandoque fieret'), just as Tacitus does in his more flamboyant language ('comparatione deterrima sibi gloriam quaesiuisse'). It is usually assumed that when Suetonius and a parallel author diverge, despite his uniform prose style, the biographer is generally closer to the common source

<sup>25</sup> See, e.g., *Tib.* 30 (cf. Tac., *Ann.* 1.52.2), *Tib.* 51.2 (*Ann.* 6.10.1), *Tib.* 61.4 (*Ann.* 6.40.1), *Tib.* 61.5 (*Ann.* 5.9.3), with Wiseman 1979: 57–8; *Claud.* 24.3 (Tac., *Ann.* 11.20.3), with Malloch 2013: 299–300; *Ner.* 30.2 (Tac., *Ann.* 11.20.2; Dio 60.30.5), with Bradley 1978: 166–7 (ad loc.); Suet., *Otho* 7.1 (Plut., *Otho* 3.2), with *FRHist* 3.619 (on Cluvius Rufus F4b = Suet., loc. cit.; cf. Levick 2013: 556, n. 38); Power forthcoming. See also Pauw 1980: 91–3; Syme 1981: 115 = 1984: 1347; Baldwin 1983: 256–7; Kaster 1995: 354, 359.

<sup>26</sup> cf. Goodyear 1972: 167; Lindsay 1995: 103.

and preserves its diction,<sup>27</sup> but it is equally possible that this Suetonian line constitutes no less an independent and unique revision than Tacitus' does. Suetonius was certainly capable of drawing a sentiment from the earlier first-century material and moulding it to suit his own ends. In fact, he occasionally chose as his raw material the same verdict on an emperor in his source as Plutarch and Tacitus, which took on a different form in each of their hands.<sup>28</sup> It seems that here Suetonius did something similar, responding with a critical view to the same originally hostile passage that Tacitus more approvingly included. Suetonius' version in fact seems to be closer to the truth, with Tacitus' sensationalistic claim finding no support in the historical realities of the time.<sup>29</sup>

Moreover, it is important to remember that, despite these tangents between them, both authors also creatively assimilated material from additional sources, which can be especially instructive with regard to their distinctive emphases.<sup>30</sup> Here the letters of Augustus on this matter, appended at length after the above quoted passage (*Tib.* 21.4–6), serve a higher agenda for the biographer. Those believing that Suetonius goes out of his way in an uncharacteristic manner to refute this theory about the Tiberian accession in large part because it is an opportunity to one-up Tacitus do not take into account the necessity of excusing Augustus' adoption of Tiberius if Suetonius is to maintain the positive portrayal of the previous biography.<sup>31</sup> The same mandate had led the biographer to dismiss the evil deeds of Octavian the triumvir (*Aug.* 27),<sup>32</sup> as well as his vices of sexual debauchery and gambling (*Aug.* 71.1). For Augustus to remain a programmatically good emperor in the *Caesars*, Suetonius must take pains to disprove the adoption as an object of criticism. Augustus' exemplary rôle in Suetonius' biographical collection therefore stands as a much more convincing reason for this digression than a polemical dialogue with Tacitus. Suetonius, after all, ultimately viewed the Principate created by Augustus as a blessing, while Tacitus viewed it more pessimistically<sup>33</sup> — an ideological reason that can also better explain the discrepancy between their interpretations of this event. Literary imperatives trump scholarly squabbles.

The second passage typically adduced by adherents to the allusion theory concerns the birthplace of Caligula, and once again the Suetonian version is at odds with Tacitus:<sup>34</sup>

iam infans in castris genitus, in contubernio legionum eductus, quem militari uocabulo Caligulam appellabant, quia plerumque ad concilianda uulgi studia eo tegmine pedum induebatur.

There was also her little son, born in the camp and bred the playmate of the legions; whom soldier-like they had dubbed 'Bootikins' — Caligula — because, as an appeal to the fancy of the rank and file, he generally wore the footgear of that name. (*Ann.* 1.41.2)

<sup>27</sup> For the tendency to presume that Suetonius is closer to the common source, see, e.g., Harrer 1918: 343; D'Anna 1954: 208; Grant 1954: 118–19; 1970: 338; Carney 1963: 5; Wardman 1967: 418; Goodyear 1970: 27–8; Ektor 1980: 325; Townend 1982a: xv; Hurley 2001: vii, 17; Bellandi 2006: 637, n. 11; Ripat 2006: 167–8; Ash 2007: 303; Shotter 2008: 10; Woods 2009: 73, n. 1; Rodeghiero 2012: 113, n. 1.

<sup>28</sup> cf. especially Suet., *Galb.* 14.1 (~ Plut., *Galb.* 29.2; Tac., *Hist.* 1.49.4), with Damon 2003: 200–1; Power 2007: 795; Suet., *Otho* 12.1 (~ Plut., *Galb.* 25.2; Tac., *Hist.* 1.22.1), with Perkins 1993: 851; Morgan 2005: 581; Suet., *Otho* 12.2 (~ Plut., *Otho* 18.3; Tac., *Hist.* 2.50.1; Dio 64.15.2<sup>2</sup>), with Potter 2012: 132; Power 2014a: 63, n. 8.

<sup>29</sup> See Stevenson 2013: 136–7.

<sup>30</sup> Wilkes 1972: 180–1; Bradley 1978: 17–18; Gascou 1984: 317–26; Murison 1992: xii–xiii; Lewis 1993: 631–2; von Albrecht 1997: 1109.

<sup>31</sup> This necessity is brought out by Osgood 2013: 20–3, 35–8.

<sup>32</sup> See also McDermott 1972b: 496–7 on the suppression of his most notable victim Cicero.

<sup>33</sup> Wallace-Hadrill 1983: 111. On Suetonius' view of the Principate, see also, e.g., Devillers 2003: 224; Duff 2003: 106; for Tacitus', Syme 1958: 408; Davies 2004: 145.

<sup>34</sup> This alleged allusion is believed by Townend 1967: 89; 1982b: 1054–5; Hurley 1989: 325–7; 1993: 19, 22; 2001: 74; Lindsay 1993: 64; Edwards 2000: xxviii; Shotter 2008: 9; cf. Barrett 1989: 7.

ubi natus sit, incertum *diuersitas tradentium* facit. Cn. Lentulus Gaetulicus Tiburi genitum scribit, Plinius Secundus in Treueris uico Ambitarvio supra Confluentes; addit etiam pro argumento aras ibi ostendi inscriptas ob Agrippinae puerperium. uersiculi imperante mox eo diuulgati apud hibernas legiones procreatum indicant:

in castris natus, patriis nutritus in armis,  
iam designati principis omen erat.

ego in actis Anti editum inuenio. Gaetulicum refellit Plinius quasi mentitum per adulationem, ut ad laudes iuuenis gloriosique principis aliquid etiam ex urbe Herculi sacra sumeret, abusumque audentius mendacio, quod ante annum fere natus Germanico filius Tiburi fuerat, appellatus et ipse C. Caesar, de cuius amabili pueritia immaturoque obitu supra diximus. Plinium arguit ratio temporum. nam qui res Augusti memoriae mandarunt, Germanicum exacto consulatu in Galliam missum consentiunt iam nato Gaio. nec Plini opinionem inscriptio arae quicquam adiuerit, cum Agrippina bis in ea regione filias enixa sit, et qualiscumque partus sine ullo sexus discrimine puerperium uocetur, quod antiqui etiam puellas pueros, sicut et pueros puellas dicitarent. exstat et Augusti epistula ...

*Conflicting testimony* makes his birthplace uncertain. Gnaeus Lentulus Gaetulicus writes that he was born at Tibur, Plinius Secundus among the Treveri, in a village called Ambitarvium above the Confluence. Pliny adds as proof that altars are shown there, inscribed 'For the Delivery of Agrippina'. Verses which were in circulation soon after he became emperor indicate that he was begotten in the winter-quarters of the legions:

'He who was born in the camp and reared 'mid the arms of his country,  
Gave at the outset a sign that he was fated to rule.'

I myself find in the gazette that he first saw the light at Antium. Gaetulicus is shown to be wrong by Pliny, who says that he told a flattering lie, to add some lustre to the fame of a young and vainglorious prince from the city sacred to Hercules; and that he lied with the more assurance because Germanicus really did have a son born to him at Tibur, also called Gaius Caesar, of whose lovable disposition and untimely death I have already spoken. Pliny has erred in his chronology; for the historians of Augustus agree that Germanicus was not sent to Germany until the close of his consulship, when Gaius was already born. Moreover, the inscription on the altar adds no strength to Pliny's view, for Agrippina twice gave birth to daughters in that region, and any childbirth, regardless of sex, is called *puerperium*, since the men of old called girls *puerae*, just as they called boys *puelli*. Furthermore, we have a letter written by Augustus ... (*Calig.* 8.1–5)

In this case, there is even less reason to suspect a correction of Tacitus, since the birthplace receives only the briefest mention in the *Annals*, unlike the historian's more fully delineated opinion on Tiberius' adoption, which as we saw is forcefully argued with evidence. Would Suetonius really have gone out of his way to debate such a fleeting reference about Caligula? The same criticism could be made of Suetonius' alleged allusion to Tacitus' quick aside about Drusus (*Ann.* 2.82.2) in his sizeable justification for believing in Augustus' fondness for that stepson (*Claud.* 1.4–5),<sup>35</sup> which again seems to have been included by the biographer to redeem the emperor, rather than anything else. More importantly, just as in that passage ('nonnullos tradere ausos', 'some have made bold to

<sup>35</sup> For this alleged allusion, which to my mind is unconvincing, see Questa 1963: 109; Townend 1982b: 1055; Gasco 1984: 776; Hurley 2001: 64.



write'), the biographer here shows that there was indeed a pre-existing controversy in the sources ('diuersitas tradentium'), which he even names outright: Gaetulicus, Pliny the Elder, anonymous verses, *acta*, the 'historians of Augustus', and Augustus himself.<sup>36</sup>

Since there was disagreement in the earlier sources about Caligula's birthplace, this would have been reason enough to detain Suetonius, and the more likely motive than responding to a passing reference in Tacitus. In fact, further considerations preclude a possible swipe at Tacitus from being taken seriously even as a secondary aim. Scholars have noted that such scholarly excursuses as we find at *Tiberius* 21 and *Caligula* 8 are rare in Suetonius,<sup>37</sup> although their scarcity has certainly been overstated.<sup>38</sup> We have already accounted for the former passage; on the latter, appeal can now be made to the simple explanation that the category of birthplace is more germane to biography than historiography,<sup>39</sup> and sometimes involves a display of research by Suetonius (e.g., *Vita Ter.* 1–10). Such passages of explicated erudition increase the biographer's authority with the reader and demonstrate his ability to weigh conflicting pieces of evidence, often in the first person.<sup>40</sup> These ultimate biographical aims are what really lie behind Suetonius' lengthy comments on Caligula's origin, which are hardly a historiographical tangent by the biographer; rather, the parallel passage in the *Annals* is a biographical moment by Tacitus.<sup>41</sup> Suetonius is shown judiciously getting the facts right even about a bad emperor such as Caligula, gaining himself credibility as a supposedly fair and impartial biographer for when he later denounces the same ruler as a 'monster' ('monstro', *Calig.* 22.1).

The third passage often thought to be an allusion to Tacitus is Suetonius' discussion of Nero's poems:<sup>42</sup>

ne tamen ludicrae tantum imperatoris artes notescerent, carminum quoque studium adfectauit, contractis quibus aliqua pangendi facultas necdum insignis aestimatio. hi considerare simul, et adlatos uel ibidem repertos uersus conecere atque ipsius uerba quoquo modo prolata supplere. quod species ipsa carminum docet, non impetu et instinctu nec ore uno fluens. etiam sapientiae doctoribus tempus impertiebat post epulas, utque contraria adseuerantium discordia frueretur.

And yet, lest it should be only the histrionic skill of the emperor which won publicity, he affected also a zeal for poetry and gathered a group of associates with some faculty for versification but not such as to have yet attracted remark. These, after dining, sat with him, devising a connection for the lines they had brought from home or invented on the spot, and eking out the phrases suggested, for better or worse, by their master; the method being obvious even from the general cast of the poems, which run without energy or inspiration and lack unity of style. Even to the teachers of philosophy he accorded a little time — but

<sup>36</sup> On the same grounds, one might also suspect the similarly weak case of Gascou 1984: 284 and Hurley 2001: 237–8 for allusion to Tac., *Ann.* 12.66–7 at *Claud.* 44.2, where the Tacitean passage is more substantial, yet the alleged corrections are presented by Suetonius as variants, and are not only negligibly slight, but independently supported in part by Dio 60.34.2–3. Hurley herself even brings out the advantageous literary effect of the differences in Suetonius' and Dio's respective versions.

<sup>37</sup> Syme 1958: 690; Hurley 1989: 326; Wardle 1994: 44; 1998: 428.

<sup>38</sup> See, e.g., *Aug.* 5–6, *Tib.* 5; also Baldwin 1983: 362–5.

<sup>39</sup> cf. Malloch 2004: 206–7. On birthplaces in Suetonius, see Steidle 1951: 68–70; Allen 1958: 2–3; Questa 1963: 109–10; Baldwin 1979b: 21 = 1984: 47; 1983: 128–9; 1989a: 471–2; de Coninck 1983: 110–20; Wardle 1994: 127; 2007: 444; Hurley 2003; Power 2012b; 2013b: 325.

<sup>40</sup> See, e.g., *Gramm.* 2.1, 7.1, 25.2, *Aug.* 2.3, *Tib.* 2.1, *Ner.* 1.2, *Vesp.* 1.4, with Power forthcoming.

<sup>41</sup> On biographical moments in historiography generally, see Power 2014c: 2, n. 5.

<sup>42</sup> For this proposed allusion, see Townend 1967: 89; 1982b: 1055; anticipated by Harter 1918: 343. It has since found other supporters: e.g., Griffin 1984: 235; Baldwin 1989a: 486; Shotter 2005: 106; 2008: 9; Fantham 2013b: 160 (cf. 2013a: 25–6); Hurley 2013: 41; cf. Pausch 2013: 63, n. 73.

after dinner, and in order to amuse himself by the wrangling which attended the exposition of their conflicting dogmas. (*Ann.* 14.16.1–2)

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

When a boy he took up almost all the liberal arts; but his mother turned him from philosophy, warning him that it was a drawback to one who was going to rule, while Seneca kept him from reading the early orators, to make his admiration for his teacher endure the longer. Turning therefore to poetry, he wrote verses with eagerness and without labour, and did not, *as some think*, publish the work of others as his own. I have had in my possession note-books and papers with some well-known verses of his, written with his own hand and in such wise that it was perfectly evident that they were not copied or taken down from dictation, but worked out exactly as one writes when thinking and creating; so many instances were there of words erased or struck through and written above the lines. He likewise had no slight interest in painting and sculpture. (*Ner.* 52)

Both passages are obviously informed by a single common source that criticized Nero's interests in poetry and philosophy together. However, as with the historian's ultimately groundless claim about Augustus' adoption of Tiberius, Tacitus does not appear to show any of the scepticism here toward his source's bias that he elsewhere exhibits (e.g., *Ann.* 14.9.1, 15.38.1).<sup>43</sup> In this case it is Tacitus who seems to be following the source more closely than Suetonius, who instead enriches the tradition with his own unique research and even turns up the emperor's actual drafts, although not necessarily from the palace's secret archives.<sup>44</sup> The biographer also appears to have gleaned the detail about Nero's oratory from a different source that was hostile to Seneca, which is likewise used elsewhere by Dio, but notably not by Tacitus.<sup>45</sup> It cannot easily be guessed whether Suetonius' last sentence on Nero's other artistic abilities was in the source that he shared with Tacitus, but if so, it was unlikely to have been as positive toward the emperor as we find it in the *Caesars*, where it strengthens the point that the emperor did indeed show signs of artistic creativity.

The most probable interpretation of this comparison is that Tacitus and Suetonius both read the same lost source, which was likely one of the main annalistic accounts of the reign — possibly the historian Cluvius Rufus, who was a palace insider and thus in a better position to know personal information than other sources such as Pliny the Elder.<sup>46</sup> Whoever it was, this source was obviously hostile to Nero, and discussed his interests in both philosophy and poetry in the same place. Why else would these two subjects pop up together so prominently in Tacitus, who only rarely discusses the emperor's literary output, and then only briefly?<sup>47</sup> Suetonius, on the other hand, habitually gathers literary

<sup>43</sup> Griffin 1984: 236–7.

<sup>44</sup> See Baldwin 2005: 309; Power 2010: 161; *pace* Bradley 1978: 287.

<sup>45</sup> Warmington 1999: 86 (ad loc.).

<sup>46</sup> For Cluvius Rufus, who at least wrote on Nero and may have begun with Caligula, see *Ner.* 21.2; also Plut., *Quaest. Rom.* 107; Tac., *Ann.* 13.20, 14.2; Dio 63.14.3; with Murison 1993: 75–80; Wardle 1994: 48–54; Devillers 2003: 24–7; Wiseman 2013: 109–16. Cf. references above, nn. 4, 25.

<sup>47</sup> Although see *Ann.* 13.3.2 on Nero as the first Caesar whose speeches were written for him (cf. *Dom.* 20). Literary endeavours are mentioned by Tacitus at *Hist.* 4.86.2, *Ann.* 11.13–14, 15.39.3, and a speech is quoted

material together in the same rubric as indications of the imperial virtue of *studia*; hence his inclusion of other material too on Nero's oratory, painting, and sculpting.<sup>48</sup> It is the common source ('ut quidam putant') that Suetonius refutes by defending Nero as a poet, and by portraying his mother's clichéd intervention during his dangerous philosophical dabbling, an intervention which was a familiar *topos* in the context of a young ruler preparing for a career in public life: it points for a brief instant to the semblance of Nero as a virtuous leader (cf. Tac., *Agr.* 4.3; SHA, *Alex. Sev.* 14.5).<sup>49</sup>

Suetonius therefore draws on the same tradition as Tacitus, but reshapes it for his own purposes. What is more, the two versions are not as incompatible as they might at first appear. Nero certainly did pursue philosophy, for however little time,<sup>50</sup> and the erratic corrections to the writing tablets described by Suetonius do not disprove that he pieced together the verses of others; on the contrary, they suggest that he may indeed have done so.<sup>51</sup> The version of Suetonius even leaves room for a merely cursory focus on liberal arts by the emperor through its verb 'attigit', which could imply only a brief interest.<sup>52</sup> If we had lacked Tacitus' account, which explains the poems' revisions in a plausibly sinister way as a patchwork of other poets, we might instead take the biographer's word, which could now serve ironically to confirm the common source's scathing report that Nero's poems were not his own. Suetonius apparently decided to diminish this source's bias for being too overt. In adducing the new evidence of Nero's drafts of poetry, and excusing his errant forays into philosophy as signs of the typical good ruler, Suetonius questions these charges and emerges all the more ostensibly even-handed in his presentation of Nero. As in our previous passages, Suetonius again demonstrates how he can carefully interpret contradictory pieces of evidence; his trustworthiness as a seemingly objective source is thus bolstered, and by extension the reader's credence in his overall considered verdict on this emperor.

The context of this literary rubric within the *Life* may shed further light on Suetonius' generally uncharacteristic defence here of Nero, which has prompted some to feel that he must have had some alternative reason, such as a wish to attack Tacitus, due to this supposed goodwill towards the emperor. The rubric falls in an extensive addendum of personal characteristics that follows the death and funeral of Nero, which has been fittingly compared to that at the end of the *Domitian* in its disproportionate length.<sup>53</sup> Many of the categories found in this final part of the biography (*Ner.* 51–7) are more often witnessed preceding an emperor's death in Suetonius. In the *Nero*, however, these indications of character, some of which appear positive, are removed to a sort of appendix, as though these attributes can now be seen to reveal the truth of his character and how it led to his death through a sort of post mortem explanation. Nero's literary

at *Ann.* 6.6.1, but titles of writings are never catalogued in the manner of Suetonius; on Tacitus' evidence for the emperor's works, see Dilke 1957: 81, 93–4.

<sup>48</sup> On Nero's interest in painting and sculpting, see Pausch 2013: 64. For *studia* as a moral category in Suetonius, see Wallace-Hadrill 1983: 83–6; Coleman 1986: 3088–9, 3093; Billerbeck 1990: 198; Bradley 1991: 3727–8; Hurley 1993: 189; 2014b: 27, 29–30, 33–4; Power 2011a: 731; 2014c: 12; Tatum 2014: 167–9.

<sup>49</sup> See Morgan 1998: 420–3; Levick 2002: 137. For the conflict between philosophy and politics more generally, see, e.g., Cic., *Tusc.* 2.1, with Baraz 2012: 15–22; and for suspiciousness towards the former, e.g., Cic., *Off.* 2.1.2; Tac., *Hist.* 4.5; with Bradley 1978: 286. On Nero's poetry generally, see *ibid.*: 288 with bibliography; also Morford 1985: 2015–18; Baldwin 2005.

<sup>50</sup> For further evidence of Nero's interest in philosophy, see Bradley 1978: 286.

<sup>51</sup> Warmington 1999: 86–7; *pace* Bradley 1978: 287. That Suetonius and Tacitus might instead refer to two entirely different, yet both seemingly composite, works of Nero's poetry would seem a coincidence beyond belief; *pace* Morford 1985: 2017–18, n. 73.

<sup>52</sup> Bradley 1978: 285 (ad loc.).

<sup>53</sup> See, e.g., Hägg 2012: 227–9, erring in the claim that the emperor's physical description directly follows his death only in those two *Lives*; *contra*, see Galb. 21, *Otho* 12.1 (and cf. *Vit.* 17.1–2), with Lewis 1991: 3661–2, who compares Tac., *Agr.* 44.2 and the ancient death-mask (*imago*). Cf. also *Aug.* 99.1 and *Vesp.* 24 on the emperor's concern for his appearance at his death.

pursuits are part of this condemning crescendo, and supply a transition to his arrogant desire for immortal glory.<sup>54</sup> They are the one exception to this list of bad traits, and noticeably come towards the front, so that the final rubrics are entirely negative and pack more of a punch by contrast, being left as the reader's last, and lasting, impression. By redeeming Nero's writing, Suetonius therefore paradoxically reinforces his point about the emperor's ultimately evil character all the more through chiaroscuro.<sup>55</sup> Even the rubrics of Suetonius that may appear trivial have a higher purpose; they need not simply be attacks on a contemporary writer.

Finally, a more recent case for allusion to Tacitus in Suetonius is worth considering for good measure, since it takes its lead from the general belief in Townend's theory by subsequent scholars. Whittaker has tried to revive the neglected suggestion of Wallace-Hadrill that the statement in the *Augustus* about the emperor's disallowance of temples being dedicated in his honour may be a similar kind of implicit correction of Tacitus:<sup>56</sup>

nihil deorum honoribus relictum, cum se templis et effigie numinum per flamines et sacerdotes coli uellet.

He had left small room for the worship of heaven, when he claimed to be himself adored in temples and in the image of godhead by flamens and by priests! (*Ann.* 1.10.6)

*templa, quamuis sciret, etiam proconsulibus decerni solere, in nulla tamen prouincia nisi communi suo Romaeque nomine receipt. nam in urbe quidem pertinacissime abstinuit hoc honore; atque etiam argenteas statuas olim sibi positas confluit omnis exque iis aureas cortinas Apollini Palatino dedicauit.*

*Although well aware that it was usual to vote temples even to proconsuls, he would not accept one even in a province save jointly in his own name and that of Rome. In the city itself he refused this honour most emphatically, even melting down the silver statues which had been set up in his honour in former times and with the money coined from them dedicating golden tripods to Apollo of the Palatine. (Aug. 52)*

As has been noted, Dio too says that Augustus received unprecedented divine honours (51.20.7),<sup>57</sup> so that it appears to have been a claim in the first-century source material used by both historians for the emperor. If anything, therefore, Suetonius probably refutes a report in a common source shared with Tacitus. Against her own case, Whittaker even adduces two passages of Cicero (*QFr.* 1.1.26; *Att.* 5.21.7) on which Suetonius may plausibly rely for the existence of temples dedicated to magistrates.<sup>58</sup> The argument for direct use of Tacitus is less than thin, with no clear verbal echoes and only a loose contextual resemblance that could well have been expected, since the subject of divine honours was an important gauge of an emperor for both historian and biographer alike. Moreover, this chapter is an integral part of an important discussion in Suetonius' biography (*Aug.* 52–6) that establishes Augustus' virtue of *ciuilitas* in part through the refusal of the sort of divine honours adopted by Caesar in the previous *Life* (*Iul.* 76–9, cf. *Aug.* 52–3).<sup>59</sup> Once again, contrast with other parts of the *Caesars*, not

<sup>54</sup> cf. Hurley 2014b: 30. For other crescendos in this *Life*, see *Ner.* 28–9 and 33–8, with Power 2014d and Gascou 1984: 697–700 respectively.

<sup>55</sup> For Suetonius' chiaroscuro technique, see Power, 2014c: 11.

<sup>56</sup> Whittaker 2000: 103, making a more forceful argument for this allusion, which had been tentatively proposed in the first place by Wallace-Hadrill 1983: 111–12, n. 5.

<sup>57</sup> Whittaker 2000: 99–100.

<sup>58</sup> Whittaker 2000: 101.

<sup>59</sup> Wallace-Hadrill 1983: 162–3. For an emperor's *recusatio* upon accession, see also Wallace-Hadrill 1982: 36–7; Yakobson and Cotton 1985: 497.

with Tacitus, is at issue, and Suetonius' chiaroscuro technique is further underscored by another implied comparison with Caesar in the *Caligula*, where Suetonius alludes to the same topic of divine honours, only this time to suggest similarity, rather than difference (*Calig.* 22.1).<sup>60</sup>

## III

Important conclusions may be drawn from this study about the nature of Suetonius' political *Lives*. The idea that Tacitus had been read by Suetonius has lingered for too long in the biographer's scholarship, and has led to the misconception of his task in the *Caesars* as merely supplemental, rather than a unique form of biography that distinguishes its independence from a broader tradition of history- and biography-writing. As a consequence, Suetonius' own literary reasons for adapting his material in the way that he does have been ignored.<sup>61</sup> Wallace-Hadrill begins his book on Suetonius by speaking of the biographer's 'temerity' in writing so soon after the historian, claiming that he was 'undoubtedly looking over his shoulder at Tacitus'.<sup>62</sup> But this alleged awareness of Tacitus and avoidance of his themes can no longer be held to explain Suetonius' selection of details and subject matter. The famous methodological statement that he will articulate his text 'neque per tempora' can now be said to refer to the eschewal of a convention of historiography in the larger sense (true 'not-history').

Tacitus survives as merely one of our best examples of the annalistic framework, and, aside from his use of common sources, it is in this that his value for comparison with Suetonius lies. The full-scale roundedness of the *Caesars* with regard to biographical matters implies a readership that was interested in the character of these men in and of itself. Suetonius did not mean for his work to be interpreted as history, even if that is what eventually happened.<sup>63</sup> At the same time, biography need not be interpreted alongside it either; it may still be considered an alternative to history, even if it cannot fully substitute for it. In other words, neither is it the case that Suetonius' *Lives* themselves need to be supplemented by historiography, for they rewrite and supplant the first-century sources on this period in the same way as the *Annals*. Suetonius only assumes that his readers are already familiar with the history of the time-period in question and with historiography in general, not necessarily with any of those particular predecessors. If anything, Suetonius' political biographies are better conceived of more positively as their own version of 'anti-history', the term used by Clarke of Tacitus, who himself opposed some of the expectations of historiography.<sup>64</sup>

Although Pliny the Younger may try to better Tacitus through some of his more historiographical letters, Suetonius' implicit contrast in the *Caesars* appears to be with

<sup>60</sup> See Power 2012–13: 40 with bibliography. For other implicit comparisons with Caesar in the *Caligula* and elsewhere in Suetonius, see Power 2014a: 64, 70; also Henderson 2014: esp. 93–9; Hurley 2014a: 154, 156–8; 2014b: 28.

<sup>61</sup> Equally distracting from appreciation of Suetonius' choices are alleged contemporary reminiscences of Trajan and Hadrian, whether through the same kind of subtle criticism or *ex silentio* by avoidance of particular themes, since these too have yet to be substantiated by a solid allusion other than the explicit references to these emperors (*Aug.* 7.1 and *Dom.* 23.2; cf. Nerva at *Dom.* 1.1), which cannot be used to support the kind of oblique dialogue suggested by scholars: Syme 1958: 490; 1980: 128 = 1984: 1274; 1981: 117 = 1984: 1348; Townend 1959: 290–3; 1967: 90; 1982b: 1055–6; Carney 1968; Bowersock 1969; Cizek 1977: 181–92; Abramenko 1994; Pausch 2004: 258, n. 142; Vout 2007: 138–40; Charles and Anagnostou-Laoutides 2010: 184–6; Rowland 2010; and more tentatively, Wallace-Hadrill 1983: 6, 198–200; *contra*, see Bradley 1976; 1991: 3723; Baldwin 1983: 13–14, 278; Gascou 1984: 758–73; Lindsay 1993: 18; Wardle 1994: 338; 1998: 434–6; Chong-Gossard 2010: 304–6, 315–21. For a similar argument about Plutarch and Trajan, see Pelling 2002a: 253–66 = 2002b.

<sup>62</sup> Wallace-Hadrill 1983: 1–2.

<sup>63</sup> Wallace-Hadrill 1983: 13, 25; cf. Martin 1981: 37–8.

<sup>64</sup> See Clarke 2002. On Tacitus' ironic contrast with historiography, cf. Martin and Woodman 1989: 170–2 on the digression at *Ann.* 4.32–3.

historiography in general, as represented by the earlier historians whose biographies he had written in the *Illustrious Men*, such as Sallust (Suet., fr. 73–4, 177, *Gramm.* 10.6, 15.2, *Aug.* 86.3) or Livy (Suet., fr. 76–7, *Calig.* 34.2, *Claud.* 41.1, *Dom.* 10.3).<sup>65</sup> Pliny could conceivably have had Tacitus in mind when he coyly professed, ‘neque enim historiam componebam’ (‘I was not composing history’, *Ep.* 1.1),<sup>66</sup> but the same cannot be said of Suetonius, who seems entirely ignorant of Tacitus’ writing. Whether he knew the man personally through Pliny, he does not appear to have read his work even once. With regard to Tacitus’ *Histories*, Suetonius wrote ‘as though that masterpiece did not exist’.<sup>67</sup> Perhaps to the biographer, it did not. There were certainly other, better historians for Suetonius to consult on this period — those containing first-hand information. In addition to his own individual research from other sources, Suetonius was working from the same main accounts from the first century as Tacitus, which were relatively dependable and rich in detail. As Townend rightly asked, why would Suetonius have used Tacitus as a source if he had these earlier ones? The argument that Suetonius merely double-checked with Tacitus is also unconvincing. The twice removed version of Tacitus was superfluous, derivative, and, given the rhetorical nature of Roman historiography, doubly tainted. It would have been deemed a poor source in contrast to the earlier, more direct evidence by any responsible biographer or historian, and rightly shunned.

Comparison with the later historian Dio is likewise instructive. About a century after Suetonius, when Tacitus was certainly available, the same pattern can be seen in Dio’s similar neglect of the historian.<sup>68</sup> Dio too understood the valuable quality of the original first-century sources in preference to later ones for the early imperial period. To write history or biography is to decide for oneself on an interpretation of events and characters, and Tacitus’ already polished vision would thus have precluded Dio’s new opinion of the facts. This is why Suetonius himself was in turn avoided by Dio, despite some *a priori* assumptions to the contrary.<sup>69</sup> It is also for this reason that Plutarch would have been disregarded by Suetonius,<sup>70</sup> or for that matter by Tacitus and Dio — if

<sup>65</sup> On Suetonius’ *Lives* of historians, see Wallace-Hadrill 1983: 54–9; Gibson 2014: 213.

<sup>66</sup> cf. Pliny’s insincere claim that ‘writing a letter is indeed one thing, history another’ (‘aliud est enim epistulam aliud historiam ... scribere’, *Ep.* 6.16.22), which, although a generalization, may have referred to Tacitus, the letter’s addressee. For Pliny’s rivalry with Tacitus in that letter, see Ash 2003; Berry 2008: 301, 308; Power 2010: 147; and more generally, Griffin 1999: 142–4.

<sup>67</sup> Syme 1980: 111 = 1984: 1258.

<sup>68</sup> *pace*, e.g., Baltussen 2002: 34. Against the brittle arguments of Syme (1958: 690–2; 1980: 112 = 1984: 1258) that Dio used Tacitus for the reign of Tiberius, see Townend 1959: 290–1. Dio’s use of Tacitus is unconvincingly suggested for Tiberius’ accession (Dio 56.45.3 ~ Tac., *Ann.* 1.10.7) by Lindsay 1995: 103; and for the campaigns of Nero’s general Suetonius Paulinus (Dio 62.1–12 ~ Tac., *Ann.* 14.29–39) by Peter, *HRRel.* 2.cxxxviii–cxxxviii (*contra*, see Martin 1981: 210).

<sup>69</sup> That Dio drew on Suetonius is held by Hardy 1890: lx = 1906: 334; Fabia 1898: 166–8; Questa 1957: 42–6; Millar 1964: 85–6, 105; Hurley 1989: 326; 2003: 114, n. 43; del Castillo 2002: 455; Brunet 2004: 150–1; Freyburger-Galland 2009; Davenport 2014: 97–8, n. 10, 100, 108, 112; cf. Woods 2006–7: 52, entertaining the possibility. It has even been believed that Dio may have used an allegedly lost work of Suetonius for the triumviral wars; see Reifferscheid 1860: 470; *contra*, Macé 1900: 346–54. For Dio as almost certainly independent of Suetonius, see Syme 1958: 690–1; Gascou 1984: 10–87; Baar 1990: 234; Barrett 1996: 205; Murison 1999: 17; Power 2011b: 486; 2012a: 431, n. 4; 2013a: 103.

<sup>70</sup> Suetonius’ use of Plutarch is tenuously proposed by Krause 1831: 6; Della Corte 1958: 139–48; Jones 1971: 61–2; Baldwin 1979a: 115–18 = 1983: 86–90 = 1989b: 26–9; 1983: 49, 117–18, 181, 294, 509, 526, 544–6; *contra*, see Bowersock 1998: 195, 205; Hägg 2012: 240–1; Fantham 2013b: 189; Geiger 2014: 302; Georgiadou 2014: 259–60; cf. Wardle 1998: 430–1. Suetonius possibly did not even know who Plutarch was (*pace* Pelling 2009: 252). Conversely, it has been argued that Plutarch for his *Cicero* used Suetonius’ earlier work the *Illustrious Men* (Plut., *Cic.* 1.1–2 ~ Suet. fr. 50 Reiff.; *Cic.* 3.4–6 ~ fr. 52 Reiff.); see Gudeman 1889: 150–8; 1902: 48–63, esp. 49–52; cf. Macé 1900: 244, 411; Wright 2001: 444–5, n. 30. Although Plutarch’s *Cicero* could have been written as late as A.D. 115 (Jones 1966: 69), and Suetonius’ *Illustrious Men* probably appeared by A.D. 110 (Power 2010: 156–9), the more likely source is M. Tullius Tiro’s lost biography of Cicero, which is not only cited by Tacitus (*Dial.* 17.2) but also by Plutarch himself (*Cic.* 41.4, 49.4); see McDermott 1972a: 282–4; 1980: 486. As Gudeman (1889: 151–2) points out, the common material can also

they had at least heard of him (an uncertainty at best).<sup>71</sup> If their respective chronologies had been reversed, neither would Tacitus have used Suetonius. By the same token, what use to Suetonius was Tacitus' filtered and elevated language, devoid of the sparkling minutia that would make his biographies so vivid and lively?

Suetonius availed himself of far more than Tacitus' leavings: he drew from the original reservoir of first-century sources, appropriating some of the same items, but probably without consciousness of the substance of his older contemporary's work. While Tacitus is relevant to discussions of Suetonius' sources, and of his contrast with the historiographical framework more generally, further tangents between the two authors cannot be accepted. Their few moments of close overlap are simply a tribute to the occasionally similar focus of two Roman imperial minds, which was inevitable in their sifting through the same earlier writers. In acquitting Suetonius of such pedantic allusion, most telling of all is the fact that these moments are more precisely when Tacitus' history leans toward biography, rather than when Suetonian biography approximates annals. It is Tacitus who crosses paths with Suetonius, not vice versa, and it is mostly when he follows the more hostile traditions, which naturally included personal details. Since no solid evidence for the biographer's specific use of Tacitus has yet been offered, the source material that they are known to have shared is the only cogent explanation for correspondences between them. The *Caesars* does not seem indebted to the *Annals*, and the author of the latter cannot be said to have inspired the former. As Plutarch demonstrates, Tacitus did not invent the *Caesars* as a literary theme.<sup>72</sup> Without Tacitus, there would still have been Suetonius.

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be found in the *De uiris illustribus* attributed to Aurelius Victor (81). The error that Cicero's assassins were Herennius and Popillius (Plut., *Cic.* 48.1 ~ Suet., fr. 54 Reiff.), which was by no means unique (Sen. *Controv.* 7.2.8), simply suggests the use of another common source that was post-Augustan; cf. *FRHist* 3.507 (on Tiro F3). Nor is Suetonius a likely source for the dream at Plut., *Cic.* 44.2–6 (as thought by Gudeman 1902: 60); see Wardle 2005: 40, n. 49.

<sup>71</sup> *pace* Hardy 1890: lx = 1906: 334; Pade 2007: 45–8; and Ash forthcoming: n. 11; whose respective proposals that Dio had read Plutarch are unconvincing. The same goes for the presumption of Momigliano 1931: 171–87 = 1992: 170–81 that Tacitus' *Histories* may have been a source for Plutarch's *Caesars*, which seems impossible for chronological reasons, since the latter work was probably published first; see Bowersock 1998: 203–4. Against Plutarch and Tacitus' use of each other, see Syme 1980: 110 = 1984: 1257 with bibliography; Martin 1981: 190; for further references, Levick 2013: 555, n. 36.

<sup>72</sup> Syme 1980; Georgiadou 1988; 2014; Bowersock 1998.

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