

The University of Adelaide

Sex in Suetonius: Sexual Material as a  
Characterisation Device for Tyrannical  
Emperors.

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# Table of Contents

Abstract	2
Declaration	3
Acknowledgements	4
Editions and Abbreviations	5
Introduction	6
The Author	10
Roman Sexuality	20
Normative Roman Sexuality	23
Methodology	26
Chapter 1: The Roman Tyrant and Suetonius	29
1.1 The definition of a tyrant	29
1.2 The stereotypical behaviour of the tyrant	31
1.3 The tyrant in Suetonius	38
1.4 Tyrannical <i>libido</i> in Suetonius	42
1.5 Conclusion	43
Chapter 2: Structural and Rhetorical Devices in Suetonius' Rubrics on Sex	45
2.1 Suetonius' structural techniques	46
i. Use of <i>divisio</i> : public/private axis	46
ii. Use of <i>divisio</i> : good/bad axis	51
2.2 Climactic arrangement	57
2.3 Suetonius' rhetorical techniques	72
i. Pluralisation	72
ii. Contrast	77
2.4 Conclusion	81
Chapter 3: Sexual Deviancy and Power in the <i>Caesares</i>	83
3.1 Sexual deviancy as a lack of masculinity	84
3.2 Sexual deviancy as an abuse of power	91
3.3 Conclusion	98
Conclusion	101
Appendix A: Table of the emperors' deviant sexual acts in the <i>Caesares</i>	106
Appendix B: Summery of the <i>Tiberius</i> , <i>Caligula</i> , <i>Nero</i> , and <i>Domitian</i>	107
Bibliography	111

## Abstract

This thesis analyses the ways in which Suetonius uses sexual material as a characterisation device in his *de Vita Caesarum*. While Suetonius' detailed descriptions of the emperors' sex lives have long entertained readers, scholars usually dismiss them as scarcely credible gossip. However, these passages do warrant serious study. The thesis approaches Suetonius' *Caesares* from a literary standpoint and argues that sexual material serves as a device to characterise the 'bad' emperors as archetypal tyrants.

I begin by assessing the stereotypical behaviour of the tyrant character and determine that Suetonius is employing this character-archetype in the biographies of his tyrannical emperors. I argue that sexual behaviour was a key aspect of the tyrant figure, who was often characterised by his unrestrained and deviant sexual desires and by the ways in which he abused his power in order to fulfil them.

Suetonius employs various structural and rhetorical techniques within his passages on the emperors' sexual habits to emphasise this tyrannical characterisation. I demonstrate that the passages are placed at vital points within the biographies, drawing emphasis to their cruel, arrogant, and lustful nature. The tyrannical character is further highlighted through Suetonius' arrangement of each anecdote within the passage, as well as his use of other rhetorical techniques, including generalisation and contrast. My analysis of the passages shows that they drastically alter the reader's perceptions of the emperor in question and thus serve a key function in Suetonius' narrative.

I also argue that deviant sexual material is employed by Suetonius precisely because it was so emotive to Roman readers. Deviant sexual behaviour served as 'proof' that a man lacked the necessary masculine virtues to rule others. As sexual encounters in Roman society were usually constructed around a power imbalance, Suetonius' tales of deviant sexual behaviour serve as metaphors and *exempla* for how an emperor uses (or abuses) his power, and whether he is fit to wield it. Suetonius' passages on the tyrannical emperors' sex lives influences the reader to view the men as justifiably removed from power.

This thesis demonstrates that Suetonius' descriptions of deviant sexual behaviour are more than just prurient gossip. Rather, his rhetorical use of sexual material serves a strong narrative purpose, furthering his characterisation and judgement of these emperors as tyrants.

## Declaration

I certify that this work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in my name, in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. In addition, I certify that no part of this work will, in the future, be used in a submission in my name, for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without the prior approval of the University of Adelaide and where applicable, any partner institution responsible for the joint-award of this degree.

I give permission for the digital version of my thesis to be made available on the web, via the University's digital research repository, the Library Search and also through web search engines, unless permission has been granted by the University to restrict access for a period of time.

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## Editions and Abbreviations

My references to Suetonius' *Caesares* follow the text of M. Ihm (ed.) *C. Suetoni Tranquilli De vita Caesarum libri VIII* (Leipzig, 1908). All translations of Suetonius' *Caesares* are my own unless otherwise stated. Translations of other Latin and Greek works are that of the Loeb Classical Library unless otherwise stated.

References to Suetonius' *Caesares* are abbreviated thus:

<i>Iul.</i>	<i>Divus Julius</i>
<i>Aug.</i>	<i>Divus Augustus</i>
<i>Tib.</i>	<i>Tiberius</i>
<i>Cal.</i>	<i>Caligula (Gaius)</i>
<i>Claud.</i>	<i>Divus Claudius</i>
<i>Ner.</i>	<i>Nero</i>
<i>Galb.</i>	<i>Galba</i>
<i>Oth.</i>	<i>Otho</i>
<i>Vit.</i>	<i>Vitellius</i>
<i>Vesp.</i>	<i>Divus Vespasianus</i>
<i>Tit.</i>	<i>Divus Titus</i>
<i>Dom.</i>	<i>Domitianus</i>

The abbreviations of other ancient authors and their works cited follow that of the Oxford Classical Dictionary. References to modern periodicals are abbreviated according to *L'Année Philologique*.

*OLD Oxford Latin Dictionary*

*CIL Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*

*FrGH Die Fragmente der Griechischen Historiker*, ed. F. Jacoby

## Introduction

‘It [Suetonius’ *Caesares*] is biography, written by a scholar in the hellenistic tradition, composed neither to instruct nor to titillate but to inform. The neutral, non-committal presentation is that expected of a scholar: *even details of sexual life are recorded without condemnation and without relish.*’ Wallace-Hadrill 1983, 25.  
(emphasis my own)

It is the aim of this thesis to combat the opinion put forward by Andrew Wallace-Hadrill in 1983, quoted above. In his efforts to demonstrate that Suetonius’ style is ‘business-like’ and straightforward, he enters himself into a paradoxical argument, where Suetonius has ‘no poetry, no pathos, no persuasion, no epigram’,<sup>1</sup> but Suetonius also ‘enables the reader to form a judgement of the performance of a series of rulers’.<sup>2</sup> How, indeed, does Suetonius do this if not through the art of persuasion and through rhetorical skill? While Wallace-Hadrill does acknowledge the importance of characterisation in Suetonius’ depictions of the emperors,<sup>3</sup> he fails to see how certain topics, such as sex, actually achieve this characterisation. Like many scholars who neglect the literary aspects of Suetonius’ *Caesares*, Wallace-Hadrill dismisses the sexual details as inconsequential, and does not take into account how impactful their presence in the narrative is to the Roman reader.

Suetonius’ inclusion of sexual material within the *Caesares* is also one of the most shocking aspects of his biographies to any modern reader. The tales he tells, of sultry dinner parties, orgiastic scenes in swimming pools, rapes of virtuous maidens, and incestuous relations with sisters and mothers, all create a vivid image of sexually depraved emperors. In the original Loeb edition of Suetonius’ *Caesares* published in 1913, the passage on Tiberius’ sexual misdeeds (*Tib.* 43-44) was left in the Latin. It was not until 1998, when the volume underwent its second revision, that the Loeb finally translated this passage.<sup>4</sup> Clearly, some of these tales were deemed too abhorrent for the average modern reader. Suetonius had a reputation as a gossip,<sup>5</sup> relishing in the scandalous deeds of the first Roman emperors: a

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<sup>1</sup> Wallace-Hadrill (1983), 19.

<sup>2</sup> Wallace-Hadrill (1983), 24.

<sup>3</sup> Wallace-Hadrill (1983), 143.

<sup>4</sup> The Loeb underwent its first revision in 1951 and the passage was still left untranslated in this revised edition. The second revision, in 1998, was conducted by Donna Hurley. The first English edition to translate the passage in full was that of Philomen Holland (1606). Robert Graves’ Penguin edition of the work, which remains the most popular, first translated the passage in the original 1957 edition of the work.

<sup>5</sup> T.F. Carney (1968, 8 n.5) asserts that the overwhelming impression of the *Caesares* is one of

serious study of his use of sexual material is long overdue.

Most scholarship that examines the sexual anecdotes within the *Caesares* does so from a historical perspective. This focus is demonstrated by the overwhelming amount of commentaries that deal only with Suetonius as a historian.<sup>6</sup> Any analysis of the rubrics on sex from this perspective ultimately come to the inevitable conclusion that we can never know if what Suetonius describes actually happened.<sup>7</sup> We can determine dates, and add the names of the emperors' sexual victims to the historical record, but beyond this, the sexual material adds very little to our understanding of Roman political history. This thesis is one of the first to examine Suetonius' rubrics on sex from a literary perspective. My aim is to demonstrate that Suetonius was a skilled writer, employing the use of literary and rhetorical devices to judge the character of the emperor.

Suetonius' most distinguishing feature is his use of 'rubrics' within his structural programme. Suetonius states he will organise his work *neque per tempora sed per species* ('not by chronology, but by topic'; *Aug.* 9.1). Each *Life* tends to follow the same structure, beginning with the subjects' ancestry, circumstances of their birth, and then describing events and honours up until their ascension. Suetonius then employs the use of rubrics to organise the emperors' reigns into good and bad deeds, before he returns to some semblance of chronological order and narrates the death of the emperors and their treatment *post-mortem*.

Suetonius' rubrics are usually signposted by a key word that appears in the first sentence, immediately informing the reader of what kind of anecdotes they can expect to follow. Rubrics may focus on public policies, such as legal reform, the sponsorship of public spectacles, or relationships with senators and advisors, or they may take a moralistic approach, demonstrating a specific virtue or vice, such as *clementia*, *avaritia*, and indeed, *libido*. Not every *Life* will contain the exact same set of rubrics, nor will they appear in the

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erotica. Wardman (1974, 145) writes that 'it is as though Suetonius were a writer of pornography'.

<sup>6</sup> Bradley (1978); Carter (1982); Mottershead (1986); Murison (1992) and (1993); Lindsay (1993) and (1995a); Hurley (1993) and (2001); Wardle (1994) and (2014); Jones (1996) and (2000); Jones & Milns (2002).

<sup>7</sup> Lindsay (1995a, 141) notes that Tiberius' escapades on Capri were 'often dismissed as the product of rhetorical *vituperatio*'. Both Bradley (1978, 160-5) and Warmington (1977, 84-6) take the more historical approach in their commentaries of Nero, only discussing facts that can be properly determined. Jones and Milns (2002, 167) note how Domitian's seduction of his niece Julia is 'based on unsupported rumour and nothing else'. Wardle (1994, 275), however, is right to point out that Caligula's sexual transgressions serve a 'characterising function'.



same order every time. Part of Suetonius' art is the manner in which he organises the rubrics within a *Life*, creating a structure where each rubric adds a new element to the emperor's character, altering the reader's opinion of the emperor as they progress through the *Life*.

The majority of Suetonian studies analyse the effects of the rubric system on the reader. Thus, in the past two decades, there has been a growing interest in Suetonius' literary skill and merit. Various studies have examined a single rubric from within the *Caesares* in order to determine what that rubric contributes to Suetonius' overall aims.<sup>8</sup> There have been two relatively small studies on the role of sex and sexual deviancy within the *Caesares*. The first, Werner Krenkel's 'Sex und politische Biographie' determined that Suetonius' use of sexual material was a literary *topos*.<sup>9</sup> The second, by K.O. Chong-Gossard, demonstrated that Suetonius' tales of sexual deviancy were an aspect of his subject's public personas and were not deemed private business.<sup>10</sup>

In addition to these standalone studies, Helmut Gugel has a substantial chapter in his work, *Studien zur biographischen Technik Suetons*, that examines the function of erotic content within the *Caesares*. Gugel argues in much the same vein as I do, that Suetonius uses sexual content to characterise the emperors. He crucially and rightly, makes the argument that Suetonius' rubrics are carefully constructed, often following a climactic arrangement where the sexual misdeeds increase in severity to create a lasting impression upon the reader.<sup>11</sup> However, he does not extend his study to note how sexual content provides a commentary on the emperors' use of their power. He also, mistakenly, divides sexual misdeeds into heterosexual and homosexual sections.<sup>12</sup> Both of these terms are outdated in our discussion of Roman sexuality, as I will outline below.

Apart from Gugel, these studies do not account for how Suetonius' rhetorical techniques affect the readers' judgement of the emperors, nor do they acknowledge the crucial role that stereotypes of tyrants and their abuse of power have to play in Suetonius' depictions. This is what I aim to rectify in my thesis. This will be the first study to analyse

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<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Evans (1935), (1941), (1969) and Couissin (1953) on physical appearance and physiognomy; Bradley (1981) on spectacles and (1985) on marriage; and Goddard (1994) on eating habits.

<sup>9</sup> Krenkel (1980).

<sup>10</sup> Chong-Gossard (2010).

<sup>11</sup> Gugel (1977), 85, 87, 89, 91-2.

<sup>12</sup> Gugel (1977), 76, 86.

Suetonius' rubrics on sex within their literary and structural context to show how tales of sexual deviancy contribute to the characterisation of the four tyrannical emperors: Tiberius, Caligula, Nero, and Domitian.<sup>13</sup>

The rubrics on sex occur in eleven of the twelve *Lives*.<sup>14</sup> For some of these, the topic of the rubric is made explicit through the use of the term *pudicitia* or *libido* in the first sentence. This is the case in the rubrics of the *Julius* (49-52), *Tiberius* (43-5), *Caligula* (36), *Galba* (22), *Titus* (7), and *Domitian* (22). In the *Augustus* (68-71),<sup>15</sup> and the *Nero* (28-9),<sup>16</sup> the rubrics are introduced through the use of periphrastic synonyms that act as clear signals to the reader that sexual matters are to follow. For other rubrics, the sexual topic is introduced implicitly, signalled by the subject matter as opposed to any direct signposting on the part of Suetonius; this is the case for the *Otho* (2.2-3.1), *Vitellius* (12), and *Vespasian* (3).<sup>17</sup> Claudius is the only emperor for whom Suetonius does not provide a rubric on his sexual misdeeds. Suetonius, instead, gives us just one sentence: *libidinis in feminas profusissimae, marum omnino expertus* ('He had excessive passion for women, but none at all for men'; *Claud.* 33). The fact that Suetonius feels it necessary to include even a short sentence in the *Claudius* demonstrates the significance that sexual material had in Suetonius' depictions of the emperors. It appears in every *Life* and usually as a key part of Suetonius' characterisation of the men.

The question at the core of this thesis is to determine what Suetonius aims to achieve by including material on the emperors' sexual deviancies. For this reason, I focus on only four of Suetonius' twelve Caesars: Tiberius, Caligula, Nero, and Domitian. As I will demonstrate, Suetonius characterises these four men as stereotypical tyrants and my primary interest is

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<sup>13</sup> For why these four men are depicted as tyrannical, and the other subjects of the *Caesares* are not, see my analysis at 1.3, below.

<sup>14</sup> The length of the rubric is roughly in proportion with the length of the *Life*, with the rubrics in the *Julius*, *Augustus* and *Tiberius* being the longest, the rubrics in the *Caligula* and *Nero* being of moderate length, and those of the last six emperors being the shortest.

<sup>15</sup> Rather than *libido* or *pudicitia* being used, Suetonius' 'heading' for this rubric is *dedecorum infamia* (*Aug.* 68.1). The topic becomes clear with the use of the term *pudicitia* in the sentence afterwards.

<sup>16</sup> The term *pudicitia* heads chapter 29 of the *Nero*, but the rubric begins one chapter earlier at 28. Suetonius' terminology at the beginning of 28.1 (*concupinatus* and *vim tulit*) informs the reader of the sexual material that will follow.

<sup>17</sup> Otho's rubric details how he fell madly in love with a freedwoman (*Oth.* 2.2), and also with Poppaea Sabina, Nero's wife (*Oth.* 3.1). Vitellius' rubric mainly concerns his passion for a favourite freedman Asiaticus (*Vit.* 12), and Vespasian's rubric is possibly intended to be the latter half of chapter 3 with the description of his love for Caenis, but references to Vespasian's sexual habits also occur at 22.

exploring how anecdotes about sexual misdeeds could create and reinforce this tyrannical characterisation.

By using literary devices to heighten the impact of his descriptions of the emperors' sexual habits, Suetonius influences the reader to infer the tyrannical character of these men. The kinds of acts that Suetonius depicts demonstrate the intrinsic link between power and sex. In all of the anecdotes that Suetonius provides, from rapes to incest to submission to other men,<sup>18</sup> Suetonius offers an explicit judgement of the emperor and the way he wields his power.

### The Author.

Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus was born ca. AD 70 and grew up during the Flavian period. His father, Suetonius Laetus, was an equestrian who served under Otho in 69. What little information we have on Suetonius is either provided by himself in his works, or is revealed in letters from his friend and patron, Pliny the Younger.<sup>19</sup> A reference in the *Historia Augusta* suggests that Suetonius worked in the imperial administration as *ab epistulis* under Hadrian.<sup>20</sup> This was confirmed in the 1950s, following the publication of an inscription from Hippo Regius recording that Suetonius also held the positions of *a studiis* and *a bibliothecas*, as well as the *ab epistulis* position, within the imperial courts of Trajan and Hadrian.<sup>21</sup> It is likely that he held the former two positions under Trajan, and the position of *ab epistulis* he held under Hadrian. The *Historia Augusta* also tells us Suetonius was dismissed from his position in the imperial court after a supposed scandal with Hadrian's wife, Sabina. The date of his dismissal is debated, but likely occurred ca. 122.<sup>22</sup>

The *De Vita Caesarum* (henceforth the *Caesares*) is Suetonius' most famous work, and survives mostly intact, lacking only the title, dedication, and the beginning of the *Julius*.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> See Appendix A for a full table of these sexual acts in Suetonius' *Caesares*.

<sup>19</sup> Plin., *Ep.* 1.18; 1.24; 5.10; 3.8; 10.94.

<sup>20</sup> SHA, *Hadr.* 11.3. *Septicio Claro praefecto praetorii et Suetonio Tranquillo epistularum magistro multisque aliis, quod apud Sabinam uxorem iniussu eius familiaris se tunc egerant quam reverentia domus aulicae postulabat, successores dedit, uxorem etiam ut morosam et asperam dimissurus, ut ipse dicebat, si privatus fuisset.*

<sup>21</sup> Marec and Pflaum (1952). Suetonius also held the position of a priest of Vulcan.

<sup>22</sup> Lindsay (1994), has suggested a later date of AD 128, reconciling the Hippo Regius inscription with a trip to Africa by Hadrian in 128.

<sup>23</sup> The dedication was known to Johannes Lydus (*De Mag.* 2.6) who reports that the dedication of the *De Vita Caesarum* was to Septicius Clarus. The *Historia Augusta* links Suetonius' dismissal from court with this Septicius. See n.20, above.

The other eleven *Lives*, from Augustus to Domitian, are complete. The work consisted of eight books of roughly equal length.<sup>24</sup> The *Lives* of Galba, Otho, and Vitellius were likely to have formed one complete book. The same is the case for the *Lives* of Vespasian, Titus, and Domitian. The rest of the *Lives*, from the *Julius* through the *Nero* were single books. Suetonius' entry in the Byzantine encyclopaedia, the *Suda*, reveals him to be an author with great and varied interests. He wrote on such subjects as Greek insults, public games, the Roman year, Roman dress, weather signs, and physical defects.<sup>25</sup> He also appears to have had a personal interest in the prurient, writing a work titled *On Famous Courtesans*. All of these works are now lost. The only other work of Suetonius to survive in more than just fragments is his *De Viris Illustribus*, which comprised biographies of famous poets, grammarians and rhetoricians.

The *Caesares* were published sometime in the 120s, most likely after the appearance of Tacitus' *Annals* and Plutarch's *Parallel Lives*.<sup>26</sup> It is also likely that the *Caesares* were the last work that Suetonius published and the work post-dated his *De Viris Illustribus*, which was published earlier in c. 110.<sup>27</sup> Suetonius disappears from the historical record after his fall from grace in the 120s. The date of his death is unknown, and possibly occurred shortly after his dismissal.

The term 'biography' deserves definition, as the ancients referred to the genre as a *Life* (*vita/bios*). Ancient biography was seen to be distinct from history (*historia/ιστορία*), as the focal point remains on one single person, the subject of the biography, rather than the typical narration of chronological events of multiple people that occurs in histories.<sup>28</sup> Suetonius

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<sup>24</sup> The *Suda* (τ 895) records eight books of Suetonius' *Caesares*. The suggestion that the Galba-Otho-Vitellius sequence and the Vespasian-Titus-Domitian sequence were each one book has been conjectured by Ihm (1908) vii-ix, and is confirmed by the Memmianus manuscript (ca. 820) which predates the *Suda* and splits the work into eight books.

<sup>25</sup> *Suda* (τ 895). See Wallace-Hadrill (1983, 43 n.22) for a full list of Suetonius' works.

<sup>26</sup> As the dedication of the *Caesares* was to Septicius Clarus, who became Pratorian Prefect in 119, it is likely that the work was published after this date, but before Septicius' dismissal in 122.

<sup>27</sup> The date of publication for the *De Viris Illustribus* is much debated. Bradley (1998, 10) notes the 'the most plausible view' is that the *De Viris Illustribus* were published sometime in the last ten years of Trajan's reign. Rives (2007) gives a date range of 107-118 AD. See also Lindsay (1995b), 77 and (1994), 464. Wallace-Hadrill (1983, 59-60) is slightly more skeptical, although he still subscribes to the idea that the *Caesares* post-date the *De Viris Illustribus*. *contra* Baldwin (1983), 380; Power (2008), 16 n.7; Hurley (2011), xv.

<sup>28</sup> The standard definition is given by Plutarch in his *Parallel Lives* (*Alex.* 1.2) 'for it is not history (*ιστορία*) I am writing, but Lives (*βίοι*)'. He states that he wishes to focus on the virtues, vices, and character of his subjects leaving tales of battles and sieges to others. Trans. Perrin (1919).

undoubtedly wrote *vitae*. The lost beginning of the *Caesares* would likely clarify this fact, but there is no doubt amongst scholars that the work is biographical. His focus is on the actions of a single subject only. Very rarely is the emperor a passive player in any of the anecdotes that Suetonius describes.<sup>29</sup> For this reason, major historical events that do not focus on the emperor as subject of the action are often relegated to small paragraphs or even single sentences.<sup>30</sup> For instance, Suetonius' treatment of the Pisonian conspiracy against Nero (*Ner.* 36.1) receives a passing mention, whereas Tacitus' account is far longer (*Ann.* 15.48-74), as is that of Cassius Dio (62.24.1-4). This focus on the emperor's actions, and the emperor's actions alone, leaves little doubt in our classification of his work as 'biography'.

In spite of the fact that they were published as late as the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, Suetonius' *Caesares* provides one of our earliest extant examples of Roman biography. The genre has a long and complicated history which was first studied scrupulously by Friedrich Leo and has been generously extended by the studies of Arnold Momigliano.<sup>31</sup> Leo's major contribution to the field was his hypothesis that biography had two types, a 'Suetonian' (systematic) and 'Plutarchean' (chronological) scheme.<sup>32</sup> His titles are slightly misleading, as they are named after their most famous adherents, not their inventors. The systematic structure is one in which the *Life* is organised according to themes or rubrics. Certain aspects, qualities or achievements are grouped under headings. A chronological structure, as the name suggests, simply follows the subject's life chronologically, and discusses their achievements and qualities as they become apparent throughout the *Life*. Leo's hypothesis has long been disputed on the grounds that almost every extant example of *vitae* employs elements of both. Suetonius is no different. The beginning of each Suetonian *Life*, with a description of the emperors' ancestry, birth, and honours and achievements up until their ascension clearly follows a chronological arrangement. Plutarch employed the so-called 'Suetonian' techniques of systematic organisation throughout his *Lives*.<sup>33</sup> Thus, the divide between these two forms

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<sup>29</sup> Power (2008, 162-3) provides a statistical analysis of two of the *Lives*, demonstrating that the emperor is the subject of 68.7% of main verbs in the *Vitellius*, and 77.2% in the *Titus*. He concludes that Suetonius makes the emperor the subject of the main verb a high percentage of the time in comparison with other biographers. Hurley (2011, xxvi) rightly points out Suetonius' use of 'repeated (and monotonous) third-person singular past-tense verbs'. This does not do Suetonius any credit as to his art, but his straightforward style does aid in clarity.

<sup>30</sup> Edwards (2000), xxii.

<sup>31</sup> Leo (1901); Momigliano (1971).

<sup>32</sup> Leo (1901).

<sup>33</sup> Plutarch himself tells us, at one point, that he is breaking with chronology in his *Life of Cato the Younger* (25.5). Plutarch explains that it is more appropriate for him to include an anecdote about Cato's wife out of chronological sequence because it demonstrates how Cato interacts with women,

is often blurred, and certainly is not as strict as Leo makes it out to be.

Momigliano's major work on the origins of biography traced the genre back to the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC in Greece.<sup>34</sup> These include works such as Skylax of Caryanda's 'story of the tyrant Heraclides of Mylasa',<sup>35</sup> Xanthus of Lydia's account of Empedocles,<sup>36</sup> and Stesimbrotus of Thasos's pamphlet titled *On Themistocles, Thucydides, and Pericles*.<sup>37</sup> All these works exist in small fragments of a few lines or as titles only, from which nothing concrete can be determined. Their titles do, however, suggest a growing interest in accounts of specific individuals, including political figures.<sup>38</sup>

Biography in the 4<sup>th</sup> century continued along similar lines but more of these works survive to us today. Some of these take the form of encomia, such as Isocrates' *Euagorus* and Xenophon's *Agesilaus*, both accounts of kings. The *Agesilaus* is split into two parts. The first gives a chronological account of Agesilaus' life, as Isocrates also does in the *Euagorus*. The second part of the *Agesilaus*, on the other hand, gives a systematic discussion of Agesilaus' virtues, divided so that each virtue is examined in its own right. This systematic, or thematic, structure is almost identical to what would occur in Suetonius' *Caesares*. Other examples from the 4<sup>th</sup> century include Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*, a kind of pedagogical novel, albeit almost entirely fictional, and Theopompus' *Philippica*, a work on Philip II of Macedon. The *Cyropaedia* follows the life of Cyrus the Great from birth to death and includes his education and acts as king. There is also a summation of his virtues, in a similar fashion to what we see in Xenophon's other work, the *Agesilaus*. Unlike the others which just focus on virtues,

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the topic currently under Plutarch's consideration.

<sup>34</sup> Momigliano (1971, 23) admits that these are 'antecedents'; that is not a genre that the ancient Greeks, nor us, should call 'biography'. Nevertheless, their titles suggest a focus on a single subject, and should be considered as biographical antecedents.

<sup>35</sup> Suda (σ 710).

<sup>36</sup> From Diogenes Laertius (8.63) who is quoting Aristotle (fragment now lost) who is quoting Xanthus.

<sup>37</sup> The Thucydides mentioned by Stesimbrotus is Thucydides the son of Melesias, not the famous historian. Stesimbrotus' pamphlet is quoted as a source various times by Plutarch, most commonly in the *Themistocles* (2.3; 4.3; 24.5), the *Cimon* (4.4; 14.3; 16.1; 16.3) and the *Pericles* (26.1; 8.9). See *FrGH* 1002 [=107].

<sup>38</sup> Momigliano (1971, 40-42; 45) suggests that this growing interest in individuals is due to the changes in the political climate of Greece during the 5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries BC. Early pseudo-biographical works also exist on literary figures. Damastes of Sigeum wrote a work on poets and sophists sometime in the 5<sup>th</sup> century and Glaucus of Rhegium, active around the 410s BC, wrote on 'ancient poets and musicians'. (Momigliano 1971, 28).

Theopompus' *Philippica* also focuses on its subjects' vices.<sup>39</sup>

During the Hellenistic period, there was an explosion of biographical works, with numerous *βίοι* appearing on a varied range of people. There also emerged a tradition of grouping people together based on their occupation. Collections of *Lives* of philosophers, poets, and other literary figures saw a large increase in popularity. It is within this period that the term *βίος* is first used to describe a biographical work.<sup>40</sup> Jerome, in his preface to his *De Viris Illustribus*, lists four Hellenistic writers as predecessors to this genre: Hermippus the Peripatetic, Antigonus of Carystus, Satyrus and Aristoxenus of Tarantum.<sup>41</sup> From the fragments that remain of these men, the genre of *βίοι* appears to be highly experimental and flexible, adapted to suit the author's needs and focus.<sup>42</sup>

Biography in Rome was influenced by these earlier Greek and Hellenistic examples. The only Latin biographer whose work survives prior to Suetonius in a substantial form is Cornelius Nepos. Nepos wrote a series of parallel *Lives*, his own *de Viris Illustribus*, which compared Romans with non-Romans. All that survives is the section on foreign generals and two *Lives* of Romans, those of Cato the Elder and Pomponius Atticus. Nepos gives a structure for one of his lives in the *Epaminondas* (1.4), where he states 'I shall speak first of his family, then of the subjects which he studied and his teachers, next of his character, his natural qualities, and anything else that is worthy of record. Finally, I shall give an account of his exploits...'.<sup>43</sup> His focus is on the character and habits of his subjects. As such, Nepos' biographies, like many of the Greek examples, have strong moralising elements, focusing on virtues and vices.

It is Nepos, along with Varro, Santra, and Hyginus, that Jerome lists as Suetonius' Latin predecessors in his preface to the *Caesares*.<sup>44</sup> Varro's *Imagines* survives only in fragments, but was a collection of seven hundred 'portraits' (*imagines*) of various subjects including

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<sup>39</sup> Dionysius of Halicarnassus (*Pomp.* 6) notes how Theopompus includes details on vices and well as virtues, and this earned him a 'reputation for malice'. Momigliano (1971), 63.

<sup>40</sup> See for instance, Aristoxenus of Tarentum's *Life of Pythagorus*, *Life of Archytas*, *Life of Socrates*, and *Life of Plato*. Others include, Satyrus' *Life of Euripides*, *Life of Aeschylus*, and *Life of Sophocles*.

<sup>41</sup> Reifferscheid (1860), fr.3.

<sup>42</sup> Momigliano (1971), 108.

<sup>43</sup> Nep. *Epam.* 1.4. *Quare dicemus primum de genere eius, deinde, quibus disciplinis et a quibus sit eruditus; tum de moribus ingenique facultatibus, et si qua alia memoria digna erunt; postremo de rebus gestis.* Trans. Rolfe (1929).

<sup>44</sup> Reifferscheid (1860), fr.1.

kings, politicians, priests, poets, philosophers, etc. By calling them *imagines*, Varro links them very strongly with the Roman autobiographical tradition.<sup>45</sup> Almost nothing is known of Santra, and Hyginus wrote a *de Vita Rebusque Inlustrum Virorum (On Lives and Deeds of Famous Men)*, which was at least six books in length and mostly focused on Republican Roman subjects.<sup>46</sup> These four men are most likely responsible for popularising the genre in Rome during the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC. The works of Nepos, along with those of Varro, are our most solid evidence of Greek biographical traditions entering the Roman literary sphere. In them, we see an emphasis on virtues and vices,<sup>47</sup> the use of anecdotal evidence, and an increasing interest in the private life of the subject.

It is likely that these authors were also influenced by a strong tradition of autobiography in Republican Rome. There is evidence of various memoirs from the Republican period, often under the title of *Res Gestae* or *Commentarii de Vita Sua*.<sup>48</sup> Sulla's *Res Gestae* is the only one of the Republican autobiographical works that survives as more than just a title. We can look to Augustus' own *Res Gestae* as a model for imperial autobiographical works. Augustus adhered to a systemic arrangement, discussing various topics such as offices and honours (2-14), public benefactions (15-24), and military feats (25-33), although there are still chronological elements within these topics.<sup>49</sup> We also know that Scipio Africanus wrote an autobiographical letter to Philip of Macedon and that Gaius Gracchus wrote a similar such letter to Marcus Pomponius.<sup>50</sup> What form these letters took is not certain. It should be noted that all of these autobiographical works are, first and foremost, self-promotion. They are clearly fostered by the aristocratic preoccupation with ancestry, political advancement, and personal and familial honour. With their categorical focus on

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<sup>45</sup> These *imagines* were the wax masks of dead family members, often displayed in the atrium of home. For more on the *imagines* in Roman culture see Flower (1996). Varro's choice of title links the idea of a literary biography with that of a portrait, and in doing so shows how the Roman biographical tradition is linked with ideals of ancestry and self-promotion.

<sup>46</sup> Aulus Gellius, *NA*. 1.14.1; 6.1.2.

<sup>47</sup> Nepos' characterisation of Alcibiades, for example, is of a man who was equal parts virtue and vice (*Alc.* 1.1). However, the overall tone of his *Parallel Lives* is laudatory.

<sup>48</sup> Sulla, Rutilius Rufus, Julius Caesar, and Augustus himself wrote such autobiographical works.

<sup>49</sup> The topics under consideration in Augustus' *Res Gestae* all appear in Suetonius' *Augustus*, and it is likely that he used this work as a source. Lewis (1991, 3666) notes that the structure of the *Res Gestae* may have influenced Suetonius' own structure.

<sup>50</sup> Polybius 10.9.3 reveals that Scipio's letter contained an account of his military exploits in Spain. Plutarch, (*Tiberius Gracchus* 8.7) states that Gaius' letter contained information about his brother Tiberius passing through Tuscany. This letter, rather than focusing on a single subject, may have focused on the Gracchi as a family, with Gaius, Tiberius and their father, all serving as subjects. See Momigliano (1971, 91-3) for the argument that the Roman autobiographical letter was influenced by Greek biographical precedents.



virtues, they resemble the encomiastic biographies of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC. Suetonius' structure of the *Caesares* is certainly not without precedent. Except Suetonius takes this systemic structure further, including not only virtues, but substantial lists of vices as well.

But does this mean that biography was inherently moralistic? Our extant examples of biographical antecedents from the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC certainly lean that way. Isocrates' *Euagorus*, Xenophon's *Agesilaus*, and *Cyropaedia*, and Theopompus' *Philippica*, all deliver moral judgement on their subjects. Of course, as the *Euagorus* and *Agesilaus* are encomia, this moral judgement is wholly positive. The *Cyropaedia*, too, is entirely positive, acting as a kind of 'how-to' guide for kingship. These all serve a didactic purpose, providing positive examples for political figures to emulate. Theopompus' *Philippica*, too, is didactic, albeit through negative as well as positive *exempla*. In this regard, Theopompus' work is the most similar to Suetonius', whose consistency in weighing 'good' and 'bad' deeds amongst the Roman emperors serves to provide examples of behaviour to emulate, and behaviour to avoid. The various *Lives* of philosophers in the Hellenistic period, too, are moralistic, encouraging the reader to follow the philosophies of the subject. The genre of *vitae* was inherently didactic; sometimes this was the expressly stated purpose.

Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* is one such collection where the stated purpose is didactic. Plutarch tells the reader in the *Life of Timoleon* how his *Lives* can serve as a moral lesson. He states that his own life has been much improved by 'using history as a mirror and endeavouring in a manner to fashion and adorn my life in conformity with the virtues therein depicted.'<sup>51</sup> Timothy Duff's major study on Plutarch's *Lives* (1999) has demonstrated just how much virtue and vice permeate the narrative.<sup>52</sup> Plutarch's *Lives* act as a moral exemplar for his readers, allowing them to see how virtue leads to a good life.<sup>53</sup>

Suetonius' consistent use of virtues and vices as his structural model surely indicates a moralistic approach to his *Caesares*. Whether we can go so far as to say they have an explicit didactic purpose, as a warning to Hadrian, is unlikely.<sup>54</sup> Whether the work is didactic is

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<sup>51</sup> Plut., *Tim.* 1.1. Trans. Perrin (1918).

<sup>52</sup> Duff (1999).

<sup>53</sup> Plutarch's *Lives* also teach through negative exempla, which is particularly the case in his *Life of Antony*, who had the potential for virtue, but who was destroyed by succumbing to his vices.

<sup>54</sup> Carney (1968) argued that the Suetonius critiques Hadrian's own regime through reference to the negative behaviour of the emperors in the *Caesares*. His views have mostly been dismissed. See Wardle (1998), Wallace-Hadrill (1983), 24.

impossible to prove without Suetonius' dedication. Nevertheless, even if not explicitly didactic, the *Caesares* are inherently moralistic. Suetonius' description of an emperor's behaviour and his adherence to certain virtues and vices guides the reader into forming positive or negative impressions of the emperor. An emperor's character is established as either 'good' or 'bad', usually with little middle ground.

The structure and moralistic undertones present in Suetonius' *Caesares* became the model for others in the later Roman period, including Marius Maximus, the *Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, as well as Einhard in the 9<sup>th</sup> century with his *Life of Charlemagne*. Suetonius' popularity never waned, even during the medieval period, and scholarly interest in the work began in earnest in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with various forms of textual criticism and commentaries.<sup>55</sup> Of these, Alcide Macé's 1900 *Essai sur Suétone* was the most comprehensive, discussing Suetonius' career and background as a *scholasticus* and *grammaticus*. His work is now outdated due to the discovery and publication of the Hippo Regius inscription in 1952.<sup>56</sup> This discovery renewed scholarly interest in the biographer and various studies emerged on Suetonius' significant dates, his positions within the imperial court, his dismissal, and his connection with the town of Hippo Regius.<sup>57</sup> However, up until 1983 there were no major monographs in English. This was rectified by Andrew Wallace-Hadrill's *Suetonius: The Scholar and his Caesars* (1983), and by Barry Baldwin's *Suetonius* (1983).

Baldwin's study was primarily concerned with the standard Suetonian questions: who he was, the influences upon his genre, and his sources. Baldwin also analyses Suetonius' techniques, style, and language in his final chapter and briefly deals with Suetonius' artistic skill.<sup>58</sup> Overall, Baldwin was mainly concerned with historical aspects of Suetonius and his *Caesares*. He also briefly examines the sexual habits of the emperors, albeit through the problematic lens of 'homosexuality',<sup>59</sup> a term that has no place in discussions of Roman sexuality. Baldwin does, however, crucially conclude that 'a man's sexual preferences are some guide to his character'.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Geel (1828); Reifferscheid (1860); Becker (1862); Shuckburgh (1896).

<sup>56</sup> Marec and Pflaum (1952).

<sup>57</sup> Townend (1961); Bowersock (1969); Baurain (1976); Syme (1981); Lindsay (1994); Wardle (2002)

<sup>58</sup> Baldwin (1983), 487-491.

<sup>59</sup> Baldwin (1983), 501-7.

<sup>60</sup> Baldwin (1983), 507.

Wallace-Hadrill's monograph remains the fundamental work on Suetonius in English. The first part of the book discusses Suetonius 'the author', focusing on the same standard questions of genre, sources, and Suetonius' career. The second part proceeds to analyse Suetonius' various rubrics, discussing the significance of each within the social context of empire. However, Wallace-Hadrill only briefly analyses the sexual content in the *Caesares*,<sup>61</sup> and even then, it is only to conclude that an element of philhellenism exists in various rubrics, including those of Tiberius, Nero, and Domitian.

Only a year later, Jacques Gascou followed with his own monograph, *Suétone Historien* (1984). As the title suggests, Gascou was predominately concerned with Suetonius as an historian, and argued that he should be considered as an historical writer. In his efforts to rehabilitate the author amongst scholars, however, he did show an appreciation for Suetonius' artistic merits, commenting particularly on Suetonius' use of false impartiality to establish authority with his readers.<sup>62</sup>

All of these major works treat Suetonius as an historian. While they have helped rehabilitate Suetonius as a serious historian, comparable with Tacitus, their main focus was never on Suetonius' literary and artistic skill. Suetonius was trained in rhetoric, and clearly a revered literary figure given his positions within the imperial court. It is somewhat standard for any scholarship on Suetonius' literary features to firstly establish that Suetonius did, in fact, have control over his own narrative. This is because Suetonius has been regarded as nothing more than a 'compiler', copying his sources without any style.<sup>63</sup> Eduard Norden subscribed to this idea, relegating Suetonius to a single footnote in his major work on Roman prose.<sup>64</sup> Leo called his style 'hypomnematische, kunst- und schmucklose' and criticised his departure from the more 'artistic' Hellenistic biographies.<sup>65</sup> Suetonius has thus had his fair share of critics.<sup>66</sup>

The rehabilitation of Suetonius as a man of literary art and skill has been an arduous task for scholars. The major shift occurred with Wolf Steidle's fundamental work *Sueton und*

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<sup>61</sup> Wallace-Hadrill (1983), 185-6.

<sup>62</sup> Gascou (1984), 675-706. Suetonius divides each *Life* into good and bad sections, giving the false impression that he, himself, is impartial. However, Gascou notes that this is misleading, as the reader is influenced, through the structure of the narrative, to view these men as either good or bad.

<sup>63</sup> Syme (1958) Vol.1, 464 n.1.

<sup>64</sup> Norden (1958) Vol.1, 371. 'Sueton schreibt farblos'.

<sup>65</sup> Leo (1901), 134.

<sup>66</sup> See Power (2008), 37 n.140 for a full list of these scholars.

*die Antike Biographie* (1951). Scholars now generally agree with Steidle's central argument that Suetonius manipulates and arranges the material in order to create a characterisation of the emperor. Suetonius composed each *Life* with a certain character in mind and deliberately arranged and included material that would lead the reader to discover this character for themselves. Suetonius, therefore, was not impartial, nor a compiler of facts, but a man in deliberate and conscious control of his work. Giovanni D'Anna's *Le idee letterarie di Suetonio* (1954) focused on Suetonius' literary features but contributed an ultimately negative view of the biographer as an imitator of his sources, rather than as a man with his own literary talent. Scholars have rightly dismissed his views.<sup>67</sup>

Richard Lounsbury, following in Steidle's footsteps, strongly defended Suetonius' merit. His book, *The Arts of Suetonius* (1987), argued that Suetonius skilfully employed literary and rhetorical devices. It is in the last two chapters, and in particular his analysis of the death of Nero that Lounsbury demonstrates the sophisticated art of Suetonius' narrative style.<sup>68</sup> Lounsbury added to the various Francophone discussions of Suetonius' 'art'.<sup>69</sup> Eugen Cizek's monograph (1977), in much the same way as Steidle, argues that Suetonius aimed to show the character of an emperor through his virtues or vices. Cizek's statistical approach, however, of numerically counting up the vices and virtues of the emperor, is deeply flawed and has received its fair share of criticism.<sup>70</sup> Notwithstanding this, his emphasis on Suetonius' use of *gradatio*, where passages slowly build to a climactic event, is certainly of merit.<sup>71</sup>

R. G. Lewis in his 1991 essay also supported the notion that Suetonius' work had a strong rhetorical basis, arguing that the structural and moral programme of the *Caesares* had Roman antecedents. Lewis demonstrated that Suetonius' choice of particular virtues and vices has strong similarities with Republican oratory and invective, particularly that of Cicero.<sup>72</sup> He crucially observes that Suetonius' supposed objectivity is an 'illusion', and stressed how Suetonius' judgement of the emperor mirrors that of the courts, with both a 'prosecution' and 'defence', inviting the reader to judge the emperor accordingly.<sup>73</sup> This line is also adopted by

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<sup>67</sup> Gascou (1984), 685 n. 29; Lounsbury (1987), 26; Power (2008), 3 n. 15.

<sup>68</sup> Lounsbury (1987), 71-9.

<sup>69</sup> Sage (1979a), (1979b); Croisille (1969-70); Cizek (1977); Ektor (1980).

<sup>70</sup> Knecht (1979). Wallace-Hadrill (1983), 114.

<sup>71</sup> Cizek (1977), 118-34.

<sup>72</sup> Lewis (1991), 3637.

<sup>73</sup> Lewis (1991), 3653. This false impartiality is also noted by Gascou (1984). See n. 62, above.

Tristan Power in his thesis *Suetonius: The Hidden Persuader* (2008).<sup>74</sup> Power provides the most comprehensive analysis to date of Suetonius as a writer of considerable rhetorical skill.<sup>75</sup> He argues persuasively that Suetonius has literary aims and a moralistic programme, stating that Suetonius' moral dimension 'is entirely implicit, since his main focus is not the moral improvement of the reader but the reader's moral judgement of the emperors'.<sup>76</sup> It is this notion of the reader's 'moral judgement' that is crucial to my analysis of the rubrics on sexual material found within the *Lives* of Tiberius, Caligula, Nero, and Domitian.

Through the efforts of scholars such as these, we have mostly moved away from viewing Suetonius as an impartial, unbiased author. Instead, Suetonius' skill in shaping the character of the emperors, and the rhetorical techniques he uses to achieve this, has come to the forefront of Suetonian studies.<sup>77</sup> It is in this vein that I examine Suetonius' use of sexual material in, what I label as, Suetonius' 'tyrannical *Lives*': those of Tiberius, Caligula, Nero, and Domitian.

### Roman Sexuality.

Sexuality in the ancient world is a field with a similarly contentious history. The most influential argument, put forward by Kenneth Dover (1978) and championed by Michel Foucault (1978, 1985, 1986), is that sexuality in the ancient world was constructed according to an active/passive dichotomy.<sup>78</sup> This model has been heavily criticised, particularly in the 'sexuality wars' of the 1990s.<sup>79</sup> There are certainly valid criticisms of Foucault's, and indeed Dover's, model, but many of them propose their own hierarchy, or a different hierarchy, that at its core, still reflects the fact that the normative sexual practice of the ancient world is for a male to actively penetrate a passive partner, be that male or female.<sup>80</sup> Such a dichotomy is

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<sup>74</sup> See also Power's edited volume with Roy Gibson (2014), which contains various essays on literary and rhetorical features of Suetonius' *Caesares* (and other works).

<sup>75</sup> For a more recent and succinct view, see Garrett (2019).

<sup>76</sup> Power (2008), vi.

<sup>77</sup> See, for example, Garrett (2019) and Hurley (2014).

<sup>78</sup> Dover (1978), 16. Foucault (1985), 47; 215.

<sup>79</sup> Some key works in this debate are Richlin (1991), (1993a), (1993b), (1998); duBois (1995) (1998); Cantarella (1992); Halperin (1990); and Winkler (1990). See Skinner (1996) for an overview of the 'sexuality wars'. Central arguments in these debates were the attempts to reconstruct a female sexuality, as focus remained almost purely on men; whether 'homosexuality' as an identity existed in Roman culture; and whether the 'active'/'passive' dichotomy worked as an effective model in which we could frame Roman sexual identities.

<sup>80</sup> Davidson (2007) furiously argued against the penetrative paradigm, believing current scholarship to be dominated by an emphasis on anal sex within male same-sex relationships. In his attempts to refocus the narrative on the emotional aspects of the relationship, he greatly misses the power

still essential to our understanding of Roman sexuality. Terms such as ‘active’ and ‘passive’ employed by modern scholars highlight the essential power dynamics at play within the sex act itself. I see no reason to contribute to the ‘sexuality wars’ debate of the 1990s, as scholarship has mostly moved on and there is now general agreement that Roman sexuality was based on an active/passive dichotomy or what we might call a ‘penetrative paradigm’ or ‘Priapic model’.<sup>81</sup>

While Dover, Foucault and many of their critics have focused on Ancient Greece, there are some important monographs that shed light on Roman sexuality. The first to examine sex in the Roman world in any depth was Otto Kiefer's *Kulturgeschichte Roms unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der römischen Sitte* (1933), translated into English by Gilbert and Helen Highet as *Sexual Life in Ancient Rome* (1934). The translated title is perhaps somewhat misleading. It is meant to invoke Hans Licht's *Sexual Life in Ancient Greece* (1931); however, Kiefer's aim is not just an exploration of sexual life. He also explores how sex is integrated with marriage, women, the home, and Roman religion. The main thesis of his book is how Roman sexual habits degenerated over time. He argues that sexual habits began much as Rome did, simple and rustic within a ‘normal’ married life, and then, as Rome became more sophisticated, its people also become hyper-fixated on sensuality and ‘degenerat[ed] into sadism’.<sup>82</sup> Kiefer’s hypothesis is typical of pre-Foucauldian studies of ancient sexuality, which focus on the peculiar and fixate on the eroticism of the past. He is, however, one of the first scholars to draw attention to the particular brand of Roman ‘cruelty’ and ‘sadism’ that tends to permeate tales of their sexual vices.<sup>83</sup> While Kiefer's adjectives are perhaps overly strong, his observation that aggression played a significant role within Roman sexuality is correct.

This view was further expounded by Amy Richlin, in her monograph *The Garden of Priapus: Sexuality and Aggression in Roman Humour* (1983). While a stout defender of the feminist critiques of Foucault and the essentialist view of sexuality, her book contributes some major insights. She argues that to the Romans, some sexual acts, and the people

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dynamics at work in same-sex relationships, and the degradation that the passive partner faces.

<sup>81</sup> The recently released *Companion to Greek and Roman Sexuality* (2013) attests to the nature of a general scholarly consensus on the penetrative paradigm. See in particular Skinner’s chapter where she looks forward to a ‘emerging synthesis of feminist gender analysis and Foucauldian-inspired discursive critique’ (Skinner 2013, 1).

<sup>82</sup> Kiefer (1933), 6. Kiefer also subscribes to the idea of a ‘moral decline’ in the Republic period which was so prevalent in the sources.

<sup>83</sup> Kiefer (1933), 67.

involved in them, are ‘bad, dirty, low, and disgusting’ and that in what she calls ‘The Priapic Model’, ‘normal male sexuality’ was inherently aggressive.<sup>84</sup>

These ideas are further developed in Judith Hallett's and Marilyn Skinner's edited volume *Roman Sexualities* (1997), a major contribution to the study of Roman sexuality. Skinner, in the introduction, states that ‘Roman discourses on sex are more engrossed with departures from established norms, chiefly because they employ ... moral irregularities as symbolic frameworks for identifying and denigrating alterity in class, ethnicity, lifestyle, and political agenda’.<sup>85</sup> Essentially, Skinner is arguing here that the active/passive dichotomy, and all of the gendered stereotypes that go along with it, can be superimposed on to any relationship where one person has power over the other. As such, inferior persons, whether they be women, slaves, Greeks, or any other subgroup that elite Roman men deemed inferior were often ‘feminised’ and placed into the passive role. This argument is crucial for understanding how sexual dynamics work within Suetonius’ narrative, as this sexual power dynamic can be superimposed onto the emperor’s relationships with his subjects. We can thus use this dynamic as a tool to examine perceptions of the emperors’ power.

Of particular note is Jonathan Walters’ essay, also within *Roman Sexualities*, titled ‘Invading the Roman Body: Manliness and Impenetrability in Roman Thought’. While the topic of the impenetrable body had already been analysed in a Greek context by David Halperin and John Winkler,<sup>86</sup> Walters was the first to examine it with any depth in the Roman world. He argues that bodily integrity was of paramount importance to elite men.<sup>87</sup> Not having control over one’s body, and what was done to it, was the mark of a slave. Keeping one’s bodily integrity, that is, ensuring it was never penetrated, was crucial to Roman conceptions of their own masculinity and what it meant to be the ‘active’ sexual partner.

The fundamental work on Roman masculinity is Craig Williams’ *Roman Homosexuality: Ideologies of Masculinity in Classical Antiquity* (1999), with a revised second edition published in 2010.<sup>88</sup> William’s detailed analysis of Roman masculinity neatly

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<sup>84</sup> Richlin (1992), 57-8.

<sup>85</sup> Hallett and Skinner (1997), 5.

<sup>86</sup> Halperin (1990); Winkler (1990). See also their edited volume with Froma Zeitlin; Halperin, Winkler, and Zeitlin (1990).

<sup>87</sup> Walters (1997), 30.

<sup>88</sup> Williams (2010, 6; 253) acknowledges that the term ‘homosexuality’ shouldn’t be used in Roman contexts but admits that the book title was used to pay tribute to Kenneth Dover’s *Greek Homosexuality* (1978).

determined three ‘basic rules’ of Roman sexuality. Firstly, a man must always play the ‘insertive’ role in intercourse. Secondly, freeborn persons (male and female) were off-limits to a male citizen. Thirdly, a man should show a preference for youthful bodies, particularly those of adolescent boys, and only *adolescent* boys (not adults). Williams admits this third rule is ‘less of a rule than a tendency’,<sup>89</sup> but the preference is noteworthy. In part, it represents an ideology by the elite male class, who are adults themselves, of an unwillingness to view their own bodies as sexually desirable; that is as something another man may wish to penetrate.

To date, studies on sexuality in the Roman world have focused on constructing this normative model. Studies on sexual deviancy, that is those that break the rules that Williams describes, mostly focus on the works of poets.<sup>90</sup> Any studies on how sexual deviancy functioned within Latin prose, are few and far between.<sup>91</sup> This thesis seeks to fill this gap, by examining in detail Suetonius’ tales of sexual deviancy and analysing how they contribute to his characterisation of the emperors. In so doing, it makes an argument that has hitherto been overlooked by scholars: sexual deviancy was a key aspect of the stereotypical tyrant. When Suetonius employs this stereotype in the tyrannical *Lives*, the vivid details of the emperors’ sexual deviancies persuade his readers to view these emperors as tyrants in every aspect of their lives.

### Normative Roman Sexuality.

Normative Roman sexuality describes a set of sexual desires and acts that must be adhered to or else the person will face social ostracism on account of their ‘deviancy’. In the case of the Roman world, a phallogentric model of sexuality is this norm, where the insertion of the penis into an orifice forms the basis of most sexual encounters.

It is important to stress that normativity is the ideal. Only a small percentage of a population would actually be able to reach this ideal. It is impossible to determine the lived

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<sup>89</sup> Williams (2010), 19.

<sup>90</sup> Wray (2001); Skinner (1993) on Catullus. Sullivan (1979) on Martial. See, more generally, Greene (1999), and Dunton-Downer (1998).

<sup>91</sup> Langlands (2006) looks at the role of *pudicitia* in various Latin historical works. There has also been an interest in the sexuality of Roman women within Tacitus’ works. See Kaplan (1979) and Swindle (2003). Studies on Suetonius’ use of sexual deviancy remain focused on individual emperors as opposed to the *Caesares* as a whole. See Anagnostou-Laoutides and Charles (2010) on Suet. *Dom.* 8.3; (2012a) on Vespasian’s relationship with Caenis; (2012b) on Galba; (2014) on Otho’s effeminacy; and (2015) on Titus’ relationship with Berenice.



realities of Roman men, and what their sexual lives were truly like. What remains in the literature is a very strong sense of what was deemed deviant. Through references to deviant sexual behaviour in the Roman sources, a reconstruction of the ideal can be created.<sup>92</sup> This normative construction creates an environment of shame if it is broken. Not only would Roman men be shamed by others for engaging in deviant acts, but the expectation is that they should feel shame themselves.

The sources that survive on sexual behaviour are written by elite men, with the purpose of being read mainly by elite men. This thesis is thus not able to determine a ‘complete’ Roman sexuality, but only the ideal sexual behaviour of elite Roman men. These men belonged to the senatorial or equestrian class and were deemed to be on a very different social level from the male slaves or non-citizens of the Roman world. This distinction is important. Different sexual roles were expected of male slaves. And so there really is no ‘male role’ in Roman sexual encounters. When this thesis makes reference to expectations of Roman ‘men’, it refers only to men from these upper-classes, the *viri*; men whose power and authority rested upon their ‘manly virtue’ (*virtus*) and their display of masculine qualities.

Notwithstanding the above, the presence of graffiti does indicate that the plebeian class also subscribed to the same set of sexual ideals. Statements such as ‘Secundus fucked [...] boys in the arse’<sup>93</sup> and ‘Hey, Octavius, you suck cock’,<sup>94</sup> suggest that the phallogocentric ideal based on an insertive/receptive dichotomy was used by all classes of society, not just the elite. But, as this thesis deals with the work of an upper-class man (Suetonius) about senatorial-class men (the emperors), it shall limit itself to speaking only of elite ideals, even if they do appear to be universal among Rome’s male citizenry to some extent.

The normative ‘rules’ of Roman sexuality are precisely those described by Williams (2010). The first and principal rule of normative Roman sexuality is that a man must always play the insertive role in an insertive/receptive dichotomy. This dichotomy has been represented with various terms: active/passive, dominance/submission, male/female. All of these describe a similar mechanic. The man who plays the insertive role should be active, dominant, and (obviously) male. The person who plays the receptive role should be passive, submissive and ‘feminine’. The insertive partner could penetrate a vagina, anus, or mouth.

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<sup>92</sup> This is precisely the aim of Williams (2010, 9).

<sup>93</sup> *CIL* 4.2048. *Secundus pedicavit pueros lucl[e] utis.*

<sup>94</sup> *CIL* 11.6721.9 *[s]alv[e] Octavi felas.*

All three orifices were acceptable options, as was intercrural sex. In general, the Romans saw sex as an insertive act.<sup>95</sup> The penis must be inserted somewhere. Whoever (and whatever) received the penis should be of inferior status, whether that be man, woman, slave, or non-citizen. To insert the penis is to establish and reinforce masculine power and authority. To receive the penis is to be defiled, to be inferior. This is the most important aspect of normative Roman sexuality and takes precedence over all the other rules.

The second rule that a man should follow is that freeborn citizens are off-limits. A man could, of course, penetrate his own wife. But for a man to have sex with any other freeborn, whether man or woman, was considered *stuprum*, and thus a crime.<sup>96</sup> Bodily protection for freeborn citizens was important. The mark of a slave was their lack of bodily autonomy, and so to receive sex is to be marked as servile, as lesser. It was suitable, however, for a Roman man to have sex with his wife, freedmen/freedwomen, prostitutes, his own slaves, and non-citizens of either gender.

The third rule is a preference for youthful bodies. Girls and boys were deemed to be most attractive in their ‘flower of youth’, beginning at the onset of puberty and the maturation of the genitals. Lack of body hair, particularly on the legs, buttocks, and jaw, was also seen as desirable. A look of ‘softness’ (*mollitia*) defined the receptive role in Roman discourses of sex and the lack of body hair was a part of achieving this look.<sup>97</sup> There does not seem to be a precise age when boys lose their attractive qualities. Rather their desirability wanes as they show increasingly masculine features of puberty, particularly the growth of body hair, and especially a full beard.<sup>98</sup> The same is true for girls, although their ‘prime’ years

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<sup>95</sup> I acknowledge that not all sex acts require the insertion of a penis into an orifice. However, I still prefer the terms insertive and receptive over those such as active and passive which allow for a possible confusion. The person ‘receiving’ could still play an ‘active’ role if they are the one in control of the sexual encounter. It is more important, in the Roman mindset, that a man inserts his penis, than it is that he maintains an ‘active’ or ‘domineering’ presence in the sexual act. By using terms such as insertive and receptive I hope to do away with this possible confusion. When I do use terms such as ‘passive’ or ‘submissive’, it is because I wish to bring emphasis to the power imbalance inherent in the sexual act.

<sup>96</sup> The general view is that there was no formal law during the Republic that directly penalised acts of *stuprum*. The offence would be handled privately by the *paterfamilias*, who could exact whatever punishment he saw fit on his relatives (Gardner 1986, 121-5; Treggiari 1991, 264-77). The *Lex Julia de adulteriis coercendis*, passed in 17 BC, formally criminalised adultery for both the married woman and the man. Prior to this law, the *Lex Scantinia* may, as Williams (2010, 131-136) claims, have criminalised sex with freeborns of both sexes.

<sup>97</sup> Williams (2010), 141-4; Edwards (1993), 68-9.

<sup>98</sup> Williams (2010), 79.

may extend longer than that of boys as there are fewer physical markers of adulthood (such as the beard in men).

To these three rules of normative Roman sexuality described by Williams, I wish to add another, which he acknowledges at points but fails to list as a definitive ‘rule’: a man must not be sexual excessive.<sup>99</sup> Heavily influenced by Stoicism, the Romans perceived self-mastery and self-restraint as the guiding principles of their moral attitudes. A man must exercise dominion not only over others, but also over himself and his bodily desires. Sexual excess encompasses behaviour such as having sex too frequently, and thus neglecting public duties, or showing excessive affection for a sexual partner, and thus allowing that partner too much influence over oneself and one’s political decisions.<sup>100</sup> These actions are seen as a failure to exercise masculine control over the self (*continentia*).

And so, with these observable rules, the normative Roman sexual behaviour is as follows. An elite man must always play the insertive role, whether that be vaginally, anally or orally. He should find youths of either sex attractive, but he cannot have sex with freeborn citizens of Rome. And lastly, he must be restrained, and engage in sexual acts sparingly, without openly demonstrating too much affection or passion for a partner.

### Methodology

Suetonius approaches his subjects from the viewpoint that they had a fixed character, judging them as either wholly good or wholly bad.<sup>101</sup> There is no attempt to understand their actions, or why they are taken, beyond the assessment that they did so because they were a good or bad person. This kind of character focus does allow for some sense of personal agency on the part of the emperor. He chooses to act the way he does, because he has a bad character (or, conversely, because he is a good man). It is this principle that guides my interpretation of the text. Suetonius characterises the emperors according to stereotypes; my focus is one of these, the tyrannical stereotype. This focus on the tyrant archetype enables me to determine how sexual material functioned within the *Caesares*; that is, how it helped to

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<sup>99</sup> Williams (2010), 153.

<sup>100</sup> Plutarch (*Cat. Mai.* 17.7) records a remark by staunch moralist Cato the Elder, that he would never embrace his wife unless it was thundering. Cicero complains of the Roman people being subject to the will of Chelidon, Verres’ mistress (*Verr.* 2.5.34). Antony is portrayed as being sexually and politically subservient to Cleopatra in various accounts such as Plutarch’s *Life of Antony*.

<sup>101</sup> Gill (1983), esp. 476-7.

build this character, and also why it was so effective at doing so.

It is the aim of this thesis to analyse the passages of Suetonius' *Caesares* that are concerned with sexual deviancy in order to determine their role within the narrative. Sexual behaviour, due to the inherent power imbalance between insertive and receptive roles, becomes a method for analysing how the emperor exercises his own power. Suetonius uses sexual material in the tyrannical *Lives* to express two interrelated points: firstly, that the emperor is cruel and abuses his power over others, and secondly, that the emperor is effeminate, unfit to hold power due to his loss of masculine status. As I will demonstrate in Chapter 1, effeminacy was also an aspect of the stereotypical tyrant. Suetonius' inclusion of sexual material within the *Lives* of Tiberius, Caligula, Nero, and Domitian, therefore, serves as an explicit commentary on whether the emperor was fit to rule. The reader finds these men lacking the expected male virtues and judges their nature to be tyrannical. Ultimately, this thesis argues that Suetonius' descriptions of deviant sexual behaviour are more than just prurient gossip. Rather, they serve a strong narrative purpose, enabling him to create vivid character portraits of these emperors as unmitigated tyrants.

Chapter 1 demonstrates that sexual deviancy is a key aspect of the Roman archetypal tyrant. An examination of significant texts, such as various plays, the speeches of Cicero, and the histories of Livy and Sallust, shows the role that deviant sexual material played in creating portraits of various tyrannical characters, such as Lycus, Tereus, Verres, Mark Antony, Clodius Pulcher, Tarquinius Superbus, Appius Claudius, and Catiline. Roger Dunkle has shown that a set of four key vices define the tyrant: cruelty, forcefulness, arrogance, and lust.<sup>102</sup> Using his model, I demonstrate how the sexual material in the *Lives* of Tiberius, Caligula, Nero, and Domitian stress these four vices. While Suetonius characterises these men as tyrants, he tends to focus upon different aspects of their tyrannical behaviour for each of them. I discuss each of these men in turn, demonstrating the particular 'flavour' of tyranny unique to each emperor. Lastly, I examine how the anecdotes that Suetonius chooses to include within the sexual rubrics are ones that are particularly suited to the stereotypically lustful tyrant.

In Chapter 2, I show how Suetonius deploys his sexual material to create a judgemental (and often emotive) response within the reader. In the first section of this chapter, I examine

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<sup>102</sup> Dunkle (1967).

the placement of the rubric on sex within the wider *Life* of each of the four tyrannical emperors. This is crucial for understanding how sexual material works as a characterisation device. When it holds a prominent position in the story, such as at the beginning or end of the *Life*, or indeed at the *divisio* between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ attributes, sexual material works in a particularly powerful way upon the reader, ensuring that their judgement of the emperor is drastically altered. In the second section of this chapter, I examine specific rhetorical techniques that Suetonius employs within the rubrics on sexual material. These techniques include; climactic arrangement (the events related in the passage steadily grow worse and worse), pluralisation (one event is made to sound like many), and contrast (the emperor’s deviancy is made all the worse through contrast with innocent and ‘pure’ victims).

In my third and final chapter, I seek to explain why sexual material works so well as a characterisation device within Suetonius’ tyrannical *Lives*. I do this by examining the anecdotes through the lens of power and power relations. The concept of power, and who is fit to hold it, is essential in Roman discourses of the emperor. The emperor held absolute power, and there were no legal avenues available to depose him. Sexual behaviour, particularly deviant sexual behaviour, works as an effective tool in demonstrating that an individual is unfit to rule. Within this chapter I argue that sexual relationships serve as examples of the abuse of the emperors’ position in society. The first section of this chapter examines the various sexual deviancies of the emperors that denote their feminisation and emasculation. In doing so, I demonstrate that the concept of masculinity was linked with the right to hold power. When Suetonius states that an emperor submitted sexually to another, he implies that the emperor has relinquished his masculine status, and therefore, also lost his right to hold power over others. The second section of this chapter examines the sexual deviancies that demonstrate an abuse of power on the part of the tyrannical emperors. In these tales the emperor often humiliates or uses excessive force upon his victims. These tales are constructed in such a way that Suetonius’ readers could easily place themselves into the position of victim in these tales. Sex, therefore, becomes a way to illustrate the emperor’s abuse of his absolute power over the Roman people. Ultimately, this thesis serves to prove that Suetonius’ inclusion of sexual material had a powerful emotive resonance with his Roman readers.

# Chapter 1

Sexual material, despite being deemed frivolous or gossipy by many modern historians, actually permeated much of Rome's political discourses. It features everywhere, from depictions of political figures on the stage, to court orations, personal letters, philosophical treatises, and in historical and biographical works. This is partly due to the way in which characteristics associated with the stereotypical tyrant were employed in attacks upon political figures. In this chapter I show how sexually deviant behaviour formed a key part of the tyrannical character. When Roman authors wish to portray a person in a tyrannical light, they superimpose this archetype onto the figure, depicting them as behaving in the manner of a tyrant. This stereotypical behaviour included their indulgence in sexual deviancies and their abuse of power over their sexual victims.

This chapter will first discuss how the Romans defined tyranny, before moving on to discussing how cruelty, forcefulness, arrogance, and lust were the four key aspects of the tyrant stereotype. I then demonstrate that sexual deviance, in particular, was almost always a key aspect of the tyrant in the Roman world by examining depictions of figures such as Lycus, Verres, Clodius, Mark Antony, Catiline, Tarquinius Superbus, and Appius Claudius. The chapter concludes with a discussion of how the tyrant archetype is applied in Suetonius' *Caesares*, and demonstrates that Suetonius' characterisation of Tiberius, Caligula, Nero, and Domitian includes many of the same tyrannical sexual behaviours as those attributed to the tyrants listed above.

## 1.1 The Definition of a Tyrant

The term *tyrannus* has a long history in the ancient world. It entered the Latin language as a loan word, borrowed from the Greek *τύραννος*. The term did not originally have negative connotations in the Greek world. There were various tyrants who received popular support in the cities they ruled. Indeed, this popular support was often the means by which they were able to gain power. Tyrants such as Cypselus of Corinth and Peisistratus of Athens did exactly this.<sup>103</sup> Cypselus, who ruled in the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC, and Peisistratus, who ruled in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC, are instances of tyrants in the earliest sense of the term 'tyranny', where it could denote a man who gained power through usurpation but could also rule effectively.

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<sup>103</sup> Dunkle (1967), 152.

An ideological construction of good leadership emerges at roughly the same time, which centres on the service and protection of the community. Fragments from Solon already indicate an association of tyranny with bad leadership, suggesting that tyrants use their power to fulfil personal interests that lead to the destruction of the state.<sup>104</sup> This same sentiment is repeated in one of Theognis of Megara's 6<sup>th</sup> century poems, warning of evil men who destroy the people and commit injustices for the sake of their own private gain and power.<sup>105</sup> This is certainly the meaning that Herodotus (3.80.5) has in mind in the 5<sup>th</sup> century when he describes a tyrant as a man who answers to no laws, rapes women, and murders indiscriminately. It appears that from the time of Herodotus, perhaps earlier, a tyrant's domination over his subjects could be expressed through his sexual deviancies, such as rape.

In the late 5<sup>th</sup> century, pro-monarchists were growing in popularity. Their ideological basis for good governance was to avoid the pitfalls of the stereotypical monarch who could do whatever he liked with absolute power. Instead, their focus was on the morally upright, disciplined monarch. He would be virtuous, and his virtue would guide him away from corruption to the benefit of the state.<sup>106</sup> It is in the 4<sup>th</sup> century that moral accounts such as Xenophon's *Agesilaus* and *Cyropaedia* or Isocrates' *Euagoras* and *Nicocles* all stress the importance of a good moral education for a ruler.<sup>107</sup> In the opinion of these writers, one-man rule could be conducted in a correct way, by an upright moral citizen, and in a bad way, by a tyrant who was immoral and corrupt.

It is this negative tradition that the term *tyrannus* carries with it when it enters the Latin language. But this is not the only word used by the Romans to describe a despot. They already had terms such as *rex* and *dominus* and all of their cognates which they used to describe a tyrant. Both *rex* and *dominus*, as well as *tyrannus*, are used synonymously by Cicero to describe a despot.<sup>108</sup> The term *rex* has a long history in Rome, used to describe the

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<sup>104</sup> Solon fr. 4, 9, 32. West (1972).

<sup>105</sup> Forsdyke (2009), 234-5.

<sup>106</sup> Hedrick (2009) is a useful summary for the importance of virtue in early Greek biography. See also Momigliano (1971), 50-51.

<sup>107</sup> Xen. *Ages.* 3-9 considers Agesilaus' virtues of piety, justice, self-control, courage, and wisdom and asks his readers to imitate his virtues if they wish to live a moral life. See Momigliano (1971), 55-6 on morality in Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*. Isoc. *Nicocles* (2.2; 11-14) urges Nicocles to cultivate virtue, intelligence and wisdom. See also. Isoc. *Euagoras* 10, 73, 76-7, 80.

<sup>108</sup> *Rex*: Cic. *Verr.* 2.3.71, 77; *Leg. Agr.* 2.15, 29, 33, 43; *Pis.* 23; *Phil.* 2.34, 80, 87; *Dominus*: *Verr.* 2.1.58; 2.3.31, 71; *Leg. Agr.* 2.15, 21, 43, 61; *Pis.* 86; *Sest.* 127; *Phil.* 8.12. *Tyrannus*: *Verr.* 2.1.82; 2.3.25, 31; 2.4.51; 2.5.103, 117; *Leg. Agr.* 2.32; 3.5; *Cat.* 2.14; *Red. Sen.* 12; *Dom.* 75, 94; *Sest.* 32, 109; *Vat.* 23; *Pis.* 18, 24; *Mil.* 35, 80; *Deiot.* 33, 34; *Phil.* 2.90, 96, 110, 117; 13.17-18; 14.15. See

legendary kings from Romulus to Tarquinius Superbus. Tarquinius, Rome's greatest tyrant, was, of course, overthrown, and in his place the Romans installed the Republican system. This change of the political system, and the legend attached to it, demonstrates how kingship, and rule by a *rex*, became synonymous with tyranny. Furthermore, various allusions within Latin literature to the *dominatio* of the *rex* equate the relationship between king and subject as one similar to master and slave, whereby the freeborn subjects of the *rex* are equated with slaves.<sup>109</sup> The *rex*, behaving in the manner of a domineering master, was deemed unfit to uphold the safety of the state. Such ideologies are at the core of Roman perceptions of one-man rule.

Men could more credibly accuse their enemies of being a *rex* or of seeking tyranny if they embodied a certain set of negative traits. We can see this throughout the Republican period, in the accusations levelled against figures such as Tiberius Gracchus, Cinna, Sulla, Catiline, and Caesar among others. With the emergence of the Principate from 27 BC, these ideologies did not fade from the minds of the *populus Romanus* but became all the more crucial.<sup>110</sup>

## 1.2 The Stereotypical Behaviour of the Tyrant

The tyrant archetype forms the basis of all tyrannical characterisations. There existed a stereotype, one which ancient rhetoricians, historians, tragedians, and others would impose upon various people (either real or fictional), in order to characterise them as tyrants. It was not enough for a writer to simply claim a man was a tyrant; he must demonstrate his tyrannical behaviour by showing the man adhered to a stereotypical set of vices. Roger Dunkle's analysis of the key vocabulary associated with terms such as *tyrannus*, *rex* and *dominatio* has convincingly shown that a tyrant displays four key vices: *saevitia/crudelitas* (cruelty), *vis* (force/violence), *superbia* (arrogance), and *libido* (lust).<sup>111</sup>

Perhaps the tyrant's most pervasive aspect is his cruelty. Various Latin terms are used to

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Dunkle (1967), 152 n.3 for a full list of these occurrences and their cognates.

<sup>109</sup> Roller (2001), ch. 4, esp. 214-232 argues for the prevalence of the master/slave metaphor in tyrannical discourses.

<sup>110</sup> The Roman ideology of leadership was expressed along a good king/tyrant antithesis, whereby a 'good' leader was one who acted as a 'father' or a 'saviour' to the state. We can see this reflected in official titles for the emperor, such as *pater patriae*. The tyrant stood in opposition to this ideal. See Stevenson (1992) for further discussion of the good/fatherly king and the tyrant.

<sup>111</sup> Dunkle (1967).



describe cruelty, the most common being *crudelitas* and *saevitia*. *Saevitia* is the more commonly used term during the imperial period, particularly in the works of Tacitus and Suetonius.<sup>112</sup> It describes animal savagery and is thus used as a metaphor for that savagery and ferociousness within a human.<sup>113</sup> It is, perhaps, stronger in meaning than *crudelitas*. Cruelty can encompass any act by the tyrant that is both ruthless and arbitrary. Often his actions are depicted as completely unnecessary because he has used excessive force in order to achieve his desired outcome. In such a way, a tyrant's cruelty becomes the manifestation of his abuse of power.

Strongly linked with cruelty is the use of force/violence (*vis*). This could be the force by which a tyrant seized and maintained power but also encapsulated the use of bribery or threats in order to achieve whatever the tyrant wanted.<sup>114</sup> Various stereotypical acts occur that display this vice. The use of a personal bodyguard appears to be a common one.<sup>115</sup> A tyrant's *vis* represented his absolute control, and his ability to force others into humiliating or degrading acts.

In this way, a tyrant's *vis* is also a sign of his *superbia* (arrogance). This term, in particular, had additional resonance in the Roman tradition as it was the cognomen of Tarquinius Superbus, the tyrannical last king of Rome. A tyrant believes himself to be above his subjects, disregarding the laws of the state.<sup>116</sup> His *superbia* is on display when he neglects the needs of his subjects for his own selfish indulgences and does not care how he is regarded by his people or the gods.

The last of these four key tyrannical vices is *libido*, which Dunkle interprets as the 'capriciousness' of the tyrant.<sup>117</sup> Dunkle, perhaps, misses the true meaning with this translation. The term *libido* is better translated as a 'lust', not only for sex, but for all kinds of indulgence in excess. This lack of restraint is key to our understanding of the Roman tyrant. A

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<sup>112</sup> Dunkle (1971), 14.

<sup>113</sup> *OLD* s. v. 1.

<sup>114</sup> Icks (2014), 95.

<sup>115</sup> Arist. *Rh.* 1.1357b.35, *Pol.* 1285a26; 1311a8; *Hdt.* 1.59.5-6; *Cic. Phil.* 2.8, 15, 19, 18; *Livy* 24.5.3-6.

<sup>116</sup> Cicero (*Leg. Agr.* 3.5) compares the dictatorship to tyranny, stating 'for, while in all other states, when tyrants are set up, all laws are annulled and abolished, in this case Flaccus by his law established a tyrant in a republic'. Trans. Freese (1930). The lawlessness of the tyrant figure has been noted by Lewis (2006, 181-2) and Dunkle (1967, 168). For whether the dictatorship was an 'elected tyranny' see Kalyvas (2007).

<sup>117</sup> Dunkle (1967), 168.

virtuous Roman man should exercise *moderatio* (moderation) and *abstinentia* (restraint). The influence of Stoic ideals on Roman political philosophy is essential to our understanding of why *libido* was viewed as such a devastating vice. Only through the control of the self and disregard of bodily desires, such as lust, could a man aspire to virtue and rule the state effectively.<sup>118</sup> To indulge in excess was to reveal that one lacked these virtues, and would thus lead the state into ruin.<sup>119</sup> Extravagant feasts, extreme drunkenness, wasteful spending on personal items, and concentrating too much on satiating sexual desires are all encapsulated in this vice. However, Suetonius, like other Roman writers, has a particular fascination with a man's sexual deviancies above all of these other forms of *libido*.

Effeminacy as an aspect of *libido* deserves particular attention. Dunkle appears to have missed this crucial element of our understanding of Roman tyranny. Roman tyrants may be seen to behave in the manner of an 'Eastern' monarch. Roman xenophobic attitudes associated the Greek 'East' with an effeminate softness (*mollitia*) that was ideologically incompatible with the ideal of a tough and robust Roman man.<sup>120</sup> It would be an indulgence in excess that would lead to this softness. Men who could not control their sexual urges, therefore, were considered effeminate.<sup>121</sup> In this way, sexual acts that emasculated a man also become a component of the tyrant archetype, enforcing the stereotype of a soft, self-indulgent Eastern monarch.

Tales of sexual deviance often act as the most emotive examples of *libido* to a Roman audience. With stories of rape and other forms of sexual coercion the reader can see the real-world effects of the tyrant's absolute power. His dominion over others is metaphorically transferred into the sexual arena, whereby all of his subjects can view themselves as victims of his sexual appetite. This is what makes tales of sexual deviancy particularly emotive to Roman audiences, and why they serve as some of the strongest *exempla* of a tyrant's uncontrollable desires.

These four vices, *saevitia*, *vis*, *superbia*, and *libido*, form the crux of the tyrant stereotype in Rome. They have been separated here for analytical purposes, but the four vices

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<sup>118</sup> See Wallace-Hadrill (1981), esp. 316.

<sup>119</sup> Dunkle (1971, 19) notes *libido* encapsulates 'government by the whim of one man' and that it encapsulates 'the vices which the tyrant can practice without restraint'.

<sup>120</sup> Edwards (1993), 92-7; Williams (2010), 148-151.

<sup>121</sup> Edwards (1993), 81-7; Williams (2010), 151-169, esp. 151-7. For the notion of the 'effeminate womaniser' see Williams (2010, 157), Langlands (2006, 292), and Halperin (2002, 111).

intersect and reinforce each other. Any anecdote or tale that an author describes will likely encapsulate some combination of these vices, if not all four. The tyrant is not only cruel, or only lustful. Rather, he is cruel *and* forceful *and* arrogant *and* lustful. A tyrant character cannot possess any virtues that would make him redeemable in Roman eyes. His character must only consist of vices. These key vices, together, encapsulate all the negative traits of bad rulers, and thus they become key aspects of a man's nature when an author is creating a tyrannical characterisation of them.

These key aspects of the tyrant archetype work together to form the stereotypical image of a man who abuses his power and neglects the state. The ways in which Romans applied this archetype to literary figures and real politicians shows us the role that sexual deviancies played in the Roman ideology of the tyrant. This occurs on the stage with depictions of various tragic tyrants such as Tereus or Lycus, or in rhetorical invective when Cicero attacks figures such as Verres, Clodius and Antony, or within the works of historians with Sallust's portrayal of Catiline or Livy's portrayals of Tarquinius Superbus and Appius Claudius.

It is through the theatre that the concept of the Greek tyrant first enters Rome. Adaptions of Greek tragedies were being performed in Rome from 240 BC,<sup>122</sup> and the Romans appeared to like them, as many more were produced throughout the Republican period.<sup>123</sup> The tyrannical figure was a staple of various tragedies adapted from Greek originals. Republican tragedies are so fragmented that analysing their portrayal of tyrants is difficult. However, in the fragments that do remain, lust appears to be a vice strongly associated with several tyrannical characters.

Accius' *Tereus*, despite existing in only a few fragments, features Tereus' lust as a crucial aspect of his character. Tereus rapes his sister-in-law Philomela and cuts out her tongue to silence her. One fragment from the play notes that Tereus was 'a man of ways untameable / And savage heart, did turn his gaze upon her; / Senseless with flaming love, a man laid low, / The foulest deed he fashioned from his madness'.<sup>124</sup> Accius' *Tereus* exhibits

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<sup>122</sup> Livius Andronicus is usually credited as Rome's first playwright, adapting Greek originals to the Roman stage. See Manuwald (2011, 188-9) for the ancient debates over the chronology of Livius Andronicus' life.

<sup>123</sup> See Manuwald (2011, ch. 4) for a comprehensive list of Republican playwrights and plays.

<sup>124</sup> Accius, *Tereus* 639-42 (Ribbeck). *Tereus indomito more atque animo barbaro, / conspexit in eam; amore vecors flammeo, / depositus facinus pessimum ex dementia confingit.* Trans. Warmington (1936).

the sexual characteristics of tyrants, forcing himself on women, and silencing their attempts to speak out.<sup>125</sup> The play appears to have been interpreted politically at Rome, as it replaced Accius' *Brutus* at the *ludi Apollinares* in 44 BC after the assassination of Julius Caesar.<sup>126</sup> The tyranny of stage characters served as reminders of the tyranny of real men.

It is only in the imperial period that plays featuring tragic tyrants exist as more than just titles and fragments. One such tragedy is Seneca's *Hercules Furens*, where he creates a tyrannical portrait of Lycus. Lycus seizes power through force, threatens violence upon others to maintain his control (341-44), and is accused of being arrogant (*superbus*; 385). Overall, this is a man who has gained power unlawfully, and is using it to abuse his new subjects. This is expressed when Lycus taunts Megara sexually and threatens to rape her (489-494). In this episode Megara becomes a symbol of the oppression of a tyrant. The threat of rape serves as a reminder of Lycus' complete control and the powerlessness of those subject to his every whim.

Of course, Tereus and Lycus are fictional, but the immoral attitudes and behaviours of the stereotypical tyrant were also superimposed onto real men. This was a common device of Republican rhetoricians when they engaged in invective against their opponents. It is not surprising that most of the rhetorical material comes from Cicero, who characterises three major figures as tyrants: Verres, Clodius Pulcher, and Mark Antony. These are not the only three,<sup>127</sup> but they are depicted as the most tyrannical.

In 70 BC Cicero wrote the *Verrine Orations*, a series of speeches that accused Verres, the provincial governor of Sicily, of various tyrannical deeds. He accused Verres of being the king of the Sicilians (*rex Siculorum*), claiming that he had adopted the manner of Eastern kings.<sup>128</sup> Cicero seizes every opportunity to link Verres with the tyrants of Sicily's past. Verres is cruel to Roman citizens (*Verr.* 2.2.9; 1.56; 2.1.14), he has them flogged (*Verr.* 2.1.122-3), and he impiously plunders temples, demonstrating his arrogant belief that he is greater than the Gods (*Verr.* 2.1.7; 1.56; 1.14). Furthermore, Verres is particularly lustful. He

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<sup>125</sup> Russo (2017, 100) notes that Tereus is 'the precise image of a tyrant' that commits *stuprum*. Boyle (2006, 134) notes that Tereus demonstrated similarities to the Tarquins.

<sup>126</sup> Cic. *Att.* 16.2.3, 16.5.1; *Phil.* 1.36. Fitzpatrick (2001, 92) and Boyle (2006, 134) comment on the political interpretation of the text as support for the tyrannicide committed by Caesar's conspirators.

<sup>127</sup> Others that Cicero characterises as tyrants include L. Calpurnius Piso, Publius Rullus, Catiline, P. Cornelius Lentulus Sulla, and Cinna.

<sup>128</sup> Cic. *Verr.* 2.3.77; also 2.3.71.

rapes freeborn girls and matrons and forces a family of high station in every Sicilian town to offer up a woman to satisfy his lust (*Verr.* 2.4.116; 2.5.28). Verres also committed rape when he was a legate (*Verr.* 2.1.62) and attempted to rape the beautiful daughter of Philodamus, a citizen of Lampsacus (*Verr.* 2.1.82). These acts of sexual deviancy culminate in Cicero characterising Verres as a *tyrannum libidinosum crudelemque* ('lustful and cruel tyrant'; *Verr.* 2.1.82). We can see in Cicero's depiction of Verres that certain sexual acts, such as rape and the abduction of women of high-station from their fathers or husbands, best demonstrate tyrannical lust.

Clodius, too, feels the full brunt of Cicero's attacks against him. Cicero uses *dominus* twice (*Sest.* 125, 127) and *tyrannus* twice (*Mil.* 80, 89) to refer to Clodius. He makes various allusions to the oppression that would be faced under a Clodian consulship (*Mil.* 78, 89). Clodius has demonstrated his impious arrogance by most cruelly destroying Cicero's house in the name of religion (*Dom.* 109), and, most importantly, he violated the sacred *Bona Dea* festival to satisfy his shameful lusts (*Prov. Cons.* 24). In Cicero's account, Clodius dresses up in female clothes to enter the all-female religious event. The implication is that he entered this festival to seduce Julius Caesar's wife, Pompeia. His assumption of feminine garb to do so thus emasculates him and demonstrates his lack of masculine virtue. He lacks self-control and is willing to debase himself in order to indulge in his selfish desires. Cicero also accuses Clodius of incest with his sisters. In the *Pro Caelio*, Cicero makes a light-hearted comment at the expense of Clodia Metelli, stating he would treat her more harshly if everyone did not already know that there was animosity between himself and *istius mulieris viro – fratrem volui dicere* ('that woman's husband – I mean brother'; *Cael.* 32). Cicero's orations are littered with various other allusions to Clodius' incestuous relations.<sup>129</sup> The picture of Clodius that Cicero paints is one of a man who is effeminate, with little self-control, and also of one who has violated his own family, with the implication that if he were to gain more power and influence he would re-enact these abuses upon Roman citizens.

Cicero's use of the tyrant archetype also extends to his treatment of Mark Antony. In his *Philippics*, delivered after the assassination of Caesar in 44 BC, Cicero claims there is nothing virtuous in Antony, only lust (*libido*) and cruelty (*crudelitas*).<sup>130</sup> He speaks of Antony's *crudelissimus dominatus* ('most cruel dominion'; *Phil.* 3.29), he even possessed an

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<sup>129</sup> Cic. *Cael.* 32, 36, 38, 78; *Sest.* 16; *Pis.* 28; *Dom.* 26, 92; *Mil.* 73; *Har. Resp.* 42.

<sup>130</sup> *Phil.* 3.28. *quid est in Antonio praeter libidinem, crudelitatem, petulantiam, audaciam?*

armed bodyguard (*Phil.* 2.8; 2.19). Antony's behaviour is clearly that of a tyrant. His use of the bodyguard demonstrates his *vis*, and the references to his cruelty and lust solidify the characterisation. He dishonoured his wife and committed adulteries (*Phil.* 2.77) and openly displayed his affair with an actress (*Phil.* 2.58). Antony even gave in to his sexual desires by acting as a prostitute and submitting himself to Curio, becoming his 'wife' (*Phil.* 2.44-45). In fact, most of the second *Philippic* deals with Antony's sexual deviancies. Antony's lusts in particular demonstrate his lack of self-control. Antony is shown to be effeminate, as he lacks masculine restraint. The image of Antony that emerges is one in which lust appears to be his defining vice. Cicero's Antony lacks all the self-control necessary for a good and moral leader. This is the aspect that Cicero emphasises the most about Antony. He is an uncontrollable tyrant.

The characterisation of real men as tyrants does not just belong to rhetorical invective, but also appears in various historical works. Sallust depicts Catiline as a tyrant in his *Catilinae Coniuratio*. Catiline wants to hold the power of a king (*regnum*; 5.6) and he revels in murder and civil discord (5.2). He has a reckless, cunning and treacherous mind (5.4) and, due to the supposed corruption of public morals he fell into a life of *luxuria atque avaritia* ('extravagance and avarice'; 5.8). Like most tyrants, Sallust's Catiline also exhibits unbridled lusts. Catiline committed *stuprum* with noble women and a Vestal Virgin before he was seized with a passion for Aurelia Orestilla (15.1-2). Catiline also appears to have encouraged the sexual deviancies of youths, and Sallust strongly implies that Catiline took their *pudicitia* and that freeborn boys submitted to him (14.4-7; 16.2). The affairs with freeborn citizens and noblewomen are familiar tyrannical actions as seen in Cicero's attacks on Antony and Clodius, discussed above. The sexual abuse of a Vestal would be viewed as a particularly heinous crime, as her chastity was believed to be paramount to the wellbeing of the Roman state. Sallust's description of Catiline's sexual deviancies helps to create the image of a man who has lost all moral integrity and ensures that Catiline's character is read as the archetypical tyrant.

Livy also makes extensive use of the tyrant stereotype in his characterisation of many figures from the early history of Rome. Livy's *Ab Urbe Condita* recounts the rise and fall of tyrannical figures such as Tarquinius Superbus and Appius Claudius. Tarquinius' *cognomen* ensures that *superbia* is his most flagrant vice.<sup>131</sup> He gained power through *vis* (1.49.3) and

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<sup>131</sup> Livy 1.53.6, 9; 1.54.1, 7; 1.59.9; 3.39.4.

ruled through cruel deeds. Tarquinius' tyrannical character also extends to his son, Sextus, whose own tyrannical actions reflect upon his father. Sextus is the one responsible for the most well-known tale of sexual deviancy in Latin literature; the rape of Lucretia (1.58.5). The consequence of his actions brought about the fall of the Kings and the installation of the Republican system. Sextus' rape of Lucretia is achieved through his *vis* (1.58.7) and her subsequent suicide to preserve her reputation turns her into a martyr, representing the honourable path for subjects of oppressive tyrannical rule. Sextus' treatment of Lucretia is one of the founding myths of the Republic and ensures that Roman conceptions of freedom from tyrannical rule are always intertwined with metaphors of sexual domination and submission.

Livy's Appius Claudius is also a particularly stereotypical tyrannical figure. Livy depicts Appius as cruel (*crudelis*), arrogant (*superbus*), and forceful (*vis*) (3.44.4). He is from a 'most arrogant (*superbissimus*) and cruel (*crudelissimus*) family' (2.56.7), but his *libido* is his most damning vice. Appius lusts after the plebeian Verginia and has one of his clients abduct her and claim she is a slave. The reduction of Verginia to servile status certainly serves as an apt metaphor for the powerlessness and oppression of citizens under tyrannical rule. Verginia's abduction and treatment by Appius directly associates him with the Tarquins of the regal period.

All of these examples of tyrannical characters serve to demonstrate how a stereotypical conception of tyranny emerged in the imperial period. A tyrant's abuse of power was demonstrated through his possession of four key vices: *saevitia/crudelitas*, *vis*, *superbia*, and *libido*. Descriptions of sexual deviancies formed a regular part of this characterisation. From the examples above, the typical sexual deviancies of the Roman tyrant emerge. A tyrant will rape women of high-status, perhaps even a Vestal. He may coerce women and boys into compromising their chastity. He may commit incest with family members, and he may even be effeminate and submit to other men. To the Roman orator or historian, these all are stock accusations to be hurled at whichever man they wished to paint as a tyrant. As such, the acts themselves, whether that be rape, incest, or sexual submission, become a stock part of the archetypal tyrannical character, a stereotype to which Suetonius himself subscribes.

### 1.3 The Tyrant in Suetonius

Suetonius very clearly employs the tyrant archetype in four of the *Lives*; those of

Tiberius, Caligula, Nero and Domitian. These four men are characterised by the aspects of tyranny discussed above, namely *saevitia/crudelitas*, *vis*, *superbia*, and *libido*. Suetonius' use of the archetype is in no way novel or unique. Various examples can be seen on the Roman stage, in the speeches of rhetoricians and in historical works. What is unique is the way in which Suetonius uses various structural and rhetorical techniques to emphasise these vices (see Chapter 2, below). The ways in which Suetonius depicts these emperors' behaviour and deeds reinforces their tyrannical characterisation, ensuring that the reader views these men in an entirely negative light.

Suetonius' Tiberius is certainly depicted as a stereotypical tyrant, and is the only one that he explicitly terms a *tyrannus* (75.3). Tiberius is shown to engage in strange sexual deviancies (43-4), forcing men and women to suicide (45, 49); he has no familial piety and even has members of his own family murdered, fearing usurpation (50, 52). He murders more than a dozen of his counsellors (55), and he has a savage nature (57). Suetonius also reminds the reader of Tiberius' notorious treason trials (58, 61). There are countless other examples,<sup>132</sup> and to quote Suetonius himself, 'it would take a long time to relate his cruel deeds one by one' (61.2). All of the key elements of tyranny are present, but it is Tiberius' cruelty and use of violence that takes precedent in Suetonius' tyrannical characterisation of him.

Caligula receives much the same treatment. Suetonius devotes very few chapters to Caligula's achievements and public deeds, instead focusing on his tyrannical actions. Caligula beheads religious statues and destroys temples in the Forum (22); he acts impiously towards his family and does not give them the honours they deserve (23), and he engages in incest (24, 36). Chapters 26 to 34 describe various misdeeds of Caligula, including murders and floggings, and Caligula boasts about his display of cruelty and arrogance. He indulges in extravagant expenditure and seeks money through nefarious means (37-41). Suetonius even remarks on his apparent insanity (50-51). While there are elements of cruelty and violence in Suetonius' characterisation of him, Caligula's main vice appears to be his insane arrogance; he believes himself to be above the rule of law, and the rule of the gods.

Suetonius' Nero demonstrates almost every aspect of tyranny possible. Suetonius' various allusions to Nero's philhellenism, including his fascination with the theatre and with

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<sup>132</sup> Tiberius' tyrannical deeds are outlined from 41-67.



singing, taint even his youth.<sup>133</sup> Neither activity is deemed to be fitting for a Roman man of elite status. From chapter 27 onwards, Nero's tyrannical attributes are given full focus. He gorges himself on lavish banquets (27), commits all kinds of sexual crimes such as rape and incest (28-9), spends exorbitant amounts of money, particularly on his new private palace (30-1), he murders family members (33-5) and others for no reason (36-8). Nero is cruel, violent and arrogant. He lives in fear of usurpation and rules through fear. Suetonius' literary portrait of Nero becomes a narrative culmination of all that is terrible about his dynasty. Whatever Tiberius and Caligula have done, Nero does as well, and he does so in public and in the most grandiose way.

The last tyrannical figure (and the final subject of the entire *Caesares*) that Suetonius depicts is Domitian. Suetonius tells us that Domitian's virtues deteriorated into faults and that fear made him cruel beyond what was already in his nature (3.2). He acted impiously towards his family, including his brother, Titus (2) and his wife (3). Domitian's tyrannical attributes are described in detail from chapter 10. He cruelly put to death various senators and others on the flimsiest charges (10). He would delight in his subjects' humiliation and fear of him (11). He sought various immoral means of attaining new financial sources (12) and arrogantly boasted of his power to the senate (13). He was ruled by, and ruled through terror (14), and indulged in excessive lusts and incest with his niece (22). This description of his tyrannical behaviour has strong similarities to the behaviour of Tiberius, Caligula and Nero. Domitian abuses his power, ruling through cruelty and force. He possesses an arrogant attitude and neglects the state, preferring rather to satiate his selfish lusts.

Suetonius depicts all four men behaving in a similar manner to figures such as Lycus, Verres, Clodius, Antony, Catiline, Tarquinius, and Appius. He is drawing on a rich tradition of tyrannical stereotypes to create his characterisations of Tiberius, Caligula, Nero, and Domitian. Within Suetonius' narrative, these men become archetypal tyrants. That is not to say that Suetonius is necessarily inventing material to contribute to this characterisation. Instead, his structure and organisation by rubric helps to draw out these aspects of the emperors' nature, ensuring that the reader's ultimate judgement of these men is as oppressive

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<sup>133</sup> *Ner.* 20-1. Suetonius also relates how Nero performed the roles of Canace giving birth, Orestes the matricide, Oedipus blinded, and Hercules insane (21.3). As Shadi Bartsch (1994, 40) has observed, comparisons to these figures highlight the tyrannical actions of Nero himself. He has tried on the guise of the tyrant, before enacting it in his real life.

tyrants.

While it is immediately apparent that Tiberius, Caligula, Nero, and Domitian are all depicted as tyrants, there are other *Lives* where the subject possesses some tyrannical attributes which I have excluded from my discussion for various reasons. The *Lives* of Augustus, Vespasian, and Titus are, in general, positive accounts of these emperors' reigns. Any bad deeds committed by these men are entirely superseded by a litany of good policies and behaviour. In some respect, these *Lives* serve as positive exemplars in contrast with the tyrannical *Lives*. I have excluded the *Claudius* from close analysis because, while he may display some tyrannical attributes, Suetonius' overall characterisation of Claudius is as a bumbling fool, a puppet-emperor for his wives and freedmen, not as a cruel tyrant. In this regard, Suetonius follows the historical tradition about Claudius.

As for Suetonius' Caesar, he does not fit the tyrant stereotype for various reasons. Suetonius treats Caesar more even-handedly. Unlike the *Lives* of Tiberius, Caligula, Nero, and Domitian, Caesar's misdeeds do not build in a crescendo towards his death narrative. Instead, various good traits break up the structure, with rubrics on loyalty (71-2) and clemency (73-5) preceding the rubric on Caesar's growing arrogance in public life (76-80), before finally culminating in the death narrative (80-89). A characterisation of Caesar as a tyrant is not given sufficient time to build within the reader's mind before his death is narrated, with the result that Caesar is perhaps the most morally ambiguous figure of the *Caesares*. As I mentioned earlier, a tyrant must exhibit all of the tyrannical traits, but Caesar's well-known *clementia* counteracts the cruelty that is to be expected in the tyrant figure. Suetonius deliberately emphasises this virtue within Caesar (*Iul.* 73-5), and therefore a tyrannical characterisation is subverted. Furthermore, Caesar was never truly an 'emperor'. While he did hold absolute power, in the form of the dictatorship, he did not have full control of the state in the same manner as Augustus and his successors. Caesar, also, did not hold the position for very long, and lacked the time to enact the kinds of tyrannical policies of the others.

This is also true for the *Lives* of Galba, Otho and Vitellius, who all rule for only a few months each. The majority of their time in power is spent with their armies, and away from the city of Rome. This is not to say that Suetonius does not give them tyrannical attributes. All three of the short-lived emperors display vices such as cruelty or *libido*, but the brevity of

their reigns does not allow a strong tyrannical characterisation to develop. While some of their actions could be regarded as cruel, arrogant, or lustful, their inability to maintain power means that they cannot effectively wield it in the way a stereotypical tyrant would.

#### 1.4 Tyrannical *libido* in Suetonius

A closer inspection of the rubrics on the sexual deviancies of Tiberius, Caligula, Nero, and Domitian shows how the men all adhere to the typical *libido* of the tyrant stereotype. As I have demonstrated above, tyrants often rape freeborn citizens or abduct noblewomen. They commit incest, or submit themselves to other men, compromising both their chastity and their manliness. This is exactly the type of sexual behaviour which Suetonius' tyrannical emperors engage in.

Both Tiberius and Nero commit rapes that are explicitly termed as such in the text. Rape was a common element of the tyrannical *libido*, as I have demonstrated above with the cases of Lycus, Verres, Catiline, and Tarquinius. Suetonius' tyrants are no different. Tiberius rapes (*constupraret*) two young religious attendants who were beaten after they complained of their disgrace (*Tib.* 44.2). While *stuprum* can denote a wide range of sexual crimes, given the context of the boys' complaints, this is clearly a forced sexual encounter. Nero's rape of a Vestal Virgin is made explicit through the Latin *vim intulit*, quite literally meaning that the Vestal suffered the violence of Nero (*Ner.* 28.1).

Caligula and Domitian both abduct noblewomen from their fathers or husbands for their own personal use. Caligula steals his wives (*Cal.* 25.1-2) and issues divorce notices to women he corrupted at dinner parties (*Cal.* 36.2) and Domitian took his mistress, and later wife, Domitia from her husband (*Dom.* 1.3). As we have seen above, the abduction of noblewomen was also a standard aspect of the tyrannical character's *libido*: Verres, Catiline and Appius all abduct women to serve them sexually, either as wife, or in the case of Appius, as a slave. While Verginia was a plebeian, her citizen status still makes this an illegal act on the part of Appius.

Three of Suetonius' four tyrannical emperors commit incest with family members. Caligula violates all three of his sisters, Drusilla, Livilla and Agrippina the Younger (*Cal.* 24.1). Nero commits incest with his mother, the very same Agrippina the Younger (*Ner.* 28.2), and Domitian commits incest with his niece, Julia Titi (*Dom.* 22). The speeches of Cicero have already demonstrated how accusations of incest could be levelled against a

figure such as Clodius to indicate his tyrannical nature. The unnatural desires of these men shatter familial bonds.

Finally, Suetonius depicts Caligula, Nero, and Domitian as assuming the receptive role during intercourse with another man. Caligula submits himself to Marcus Lepidus, Mnester, certain hostages and Valerius Catullus (*Cal.* 36.1). Nero submits himself to his freedman Doryphorus (*Ner.* 29) and Domitian submits to Clodius Pollio and Nerva (*Dom.* 1.1-2). Like Cicero's Antony who supposedly submitted to Curio, these men are now deemed 'soft' and effeminate, lacking the typical toughness of the honourable Roman man.

Suetonius, therefore, provides a tyrannical characterisation of Tiberius, Caligula, Nero, and Domitian that is consistent across their rubrics on their sexual deviancies. By deciding to include anecdotes about rapes, incest, sexual submission, and the abduction of noblewomen, Suetonius is actively choosing to depict the emperors performing sexual acts that conform with the stereotypes of tyranny. How a man acted in his sexual life forms a key part of Suetonius' narrative. Without such anecdotes, Suetonius' characterisation of the emperors would not be complete.

### 1.5 Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that sexual deviancy was a central aspect of the tyrant archetype. Our survey of the early meanings of the term *τύραννος/tyrannus* has revealed that sexual misdeeds were always part of the characterisation of this figure. Various examples of tyrants in the Roman world show how a man's sexual behaviour was deemed to be a key aspect of his inner character. The tyrant archetype is applied to these figures, but they also help to reinforce it. With each depiction, Roman audiences come to expect a certain standard of behaviour from tyrants. They are cruel, violent, arrogant, and lustful, and these central aspects of tyrannical character are displayed through various nefarious deeds.

Suetonius applies this tyrant archetype to his characterisations of Tiberius, Caligula, Nero, and Domitian. These men possess *saevitia*, *vis*, *superbia*, and *libido*, and as such they are characterised as men who abuse their power over others, shatter lives, and forgo their duties to the state. The sexual crimes they commit highlight these vices, and reinforce this tyrannical stereotype. They lack all virtue, and were, with the exception of Tiberius who died

a natural death,<sup>134</sup> justifiably removed from power. Ultimately, this is Suetonius' goal. He is not impartial in his treatment of these men. Rather, Suetonius deliberately chooses to emphasise their tyrannical attributes, persuading the reader that these men are totally unfit for power.

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<sup>134</sup> Suetonius does mention that Caligula may have assassinated Tiberius (*Tib.* 73.2) but appears to subscribe to the belief that Tiberius died of illness.

## Chapter 2

In Chapter 1 I have shown that Suetonius inclusion of sexual material helps to create the tyrannical characterisation of Tiberius, Caligula, Nero, and Domitian. In this chapter, I demonstrate exactly how Suetonius achieves this characterisation through his use of rhetorical techniques. My aim is to demonstrate that Suetonius' inclusion of the material is more than just petty gossip, but rather he includes it with the express purpose of condemning the tyrannical emperors for their sexual behaviour. Suetonius' arrangement of the sexual material provides a unique way of interpreting these rumours, and the effect they had upon Suetonius' readers. His arrangement of material into rubrics is the most defining feature of the *Caesares*. The rubric on sexual conduct is just one of many of Suetonius' standard inclusions that feature in all of the *Lives*. Details about sexual habits were clearly an essential part of demonstrating character and helped to reinforce the tyrannical stereotypes that Suetonius sought to create within the *Lives* of these four emperors.

An emperor's sexual deviancies would exemplify various aspects of the tyrant archetype, focusing on deeds that display excessive indulgence in *libido*, but also traits such as cruelty (*saevitia*) or arrogance (*superbia*), amongst others. Suetonius uses various structural and rhetorical techniques to help reinforce the tyrannical characterisation of each of the four emperors. Suetonius' use of *divisio*, where he creates major structural divides in the narrative, is well documented.<sup>135</sup> Through the use of *divisio*, each *Life* is separated into 'public' and 'private' sections, as well as 'good deeds' and 'bad deeds'. Suetonius' placement of the rubric on sex within these sections, as either public or private business, or as a good or bad deed, provides an implicit commentary on the emperor's sexual actions. Furthermore, Suetonius arranges individual rubrics in ways that highlight certain tyrannical aspects of each of these emperors' characters. Many of the rubrics progress in a climactic arrangement that focuses upon either cruelty, arrogance, or excess.

This chapter will also analyse two rhetorical techniques that Suetonius employs to heighten the impact of his anecdotes about these emperors' sexual vices and make them appear as extensions of their tyrannical character. Suetonius uses a form of generalisation, dubbed 'pluralisation', whereby he takes a singular act and 'pluralises' it so that the reader

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<sup>135</sup> The best discussions are Hurley (2014); Power (2008), 130-154; and Townend (1967), 85-7.

assumes it took place multiple times. He also makes use of direct contrasts, where the sexual deviancies of the emperors are made to appear all the more abhorrent through comparison with their innocent victims or other more virtuous statesmen.

## 2.1 Suetonius' structural techniques

Suetonius' skill as a biographer lies largely with his structure. Suetonius arranges material into rubrics or topics which he claims is done so that 'the account can be more easily understood and assessed'.<sup>136</sup> This appears to be Suetonius' preferred biographical method as he uses a similar structure in his *Lives of Illustrious Men*.

Particularly noteworthy is Suetonius' use of *divisio* within the *Caesares*. It is his most discussed rhetorical technique, and one that certainly warrants attention. Suetonius creates divisions within each *Life*, where he transitions from one major section into the next. Each *Life* has one major *divisio*, on which everything in the *Life* is centred, and other minor *divisiones*, that mark lesser transitions, or list a set of topics that will soon be discussed. These major *divisiones* are provided on one of two axes, a good/bad divide or a public/private divide.<sup>137</sup> The place where the rubric on sex occurs within a *Life*, therefore, has major implications for how the material is interpreted. If sexual material falls within the public section, then there is an implication that Suetonius believes an emperor's behaviour had a significant impact upon the public administration of the empire. Likewise, if the material falls within the 'good' section, then clearly the behaviour was appropriate (or at the least, forgivable). If the material occurs in the 'bad' section, as it does in the *Lives* of Tiberius, Caligula, Nero, and Domitian, the implication is that the behaviour is inexcusable.

### 2.1.i Use of *divisio*: public/private axis.

Only the *Julius* and *Augustus* have the major *divisio* along a public/private axis. In both, the *divisio* occurs roughly halfway through the *Life*. It is in these two *divisiones* that Suetonius provides a clear explanation for what kind of material he deems 'private'.

*De qua prius quam dicam, ea quae ad formam et habitum et cultum et mores, nec minus quae ad civilia et bellica eius studia pertineant, non alienum erit summatim exponere. (Iul. 44.4).*

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<sup>136</sup> Aug. 9.1. *Proposita uitae eius uelut summa partes singillatim neque per tempora sed per species exequare, quo distinctus demonstrari cognoscique possint.*

<sup>137</sup> See Hurley (2014) for her analysis of the *divisiones* in each *Life*.

Before I speak of his end, it will not be inappropriate to describe briefly his appearance, character, dress, and conduct, as well as his pursuit of civil and military matters.

*Quoniam qualis in imperiis ac magistratibus regendaque per terrarum orbem pace belloque re p. fuerit, exposui, referam nunc interiorem ac familiarem eius vitam quibusque moribus atque fortuna domi et inter suos egerit a iuventa usque supremum vitae diem.* (Aug. 61.1)

Since I have described how he governed the state as a commander and magistrate during war and peace, I shall now set forth his personal and domestic life, how he acted in his conduct and his fortune at home, from his youth until the last day of his life.

These are rare authorial statements from Suetonius and help to shift the narrative from details of public policies and political offices to anecdotes that are more focused on personal characteristics. This is the crucial distinction on which the public/private axis is defined within the *Caesares*. The ‘public’ section includes material about how the empire was run, including administration, edicts, sponsorships and the likes. In effect, this section dictates how the emperor had an effect upon the *populus Romanus*, whether that be positive or negative. The ‘private’ section, on the other hand, deals with personality quirks and attributes that had little to no direct effect upon the administration of the empire.

Rubrics that Suetonius often, but not always, includes in these personal sections are: personal appearance, drinking and eating habits, literary pursuits, relationships with family members, and religious beliefs.<sup>138</sup> The fact that he was composing biography, as opposed to history, allowed Suetonius to explore these more private topics that were often deemed unimportant, inconsequential or frivolous by ancient historians.<sup>139</sup> For Suetonius, these details helped reflect inner character.

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<sup>138</sup> *Iul.* 45-56; *Aug.* 61-96; *Tib.* 68-71; *Cal.* 50-55; *Claud.* 26-33; 41-2; *Ner.* 51-6; *Galb.* 21-2; *Oth.* 12; *Vesp.* 20-1; *Tit.* 7.1; *Dom.* 18-22. The *Vitellius* does not have a large range of ‘private’ vices, although his eating habits are discussed (*Vit.* 13).

<sup>139</sup> Nepos (*Pref.* 1) states ‘I doubt not, Atticus, that many readers will look upon this kind of writing as trivial and unworthy of the parts played by great men, when they find that I have told who taught Epaminondas music or see it mentioned among his titles to fame that he was a graceful dancer and a skilled performer on the flute [...]’. Trans. Rolfe (1929). Nepos reminds his readers that biography was the genre for the trivial. Plutarch (*Alex.* 1.2), too reminds his readers that he is writing biography, not history and that ‘a slight thing like a phrase or a jest often makes a greater revelation of character than battles where thousands fall, or the greatest armaments, or sieges of cities’. Trans. Perrin (1919). Both Nepos’ and Plutarch’s distinctions neatly sum up ancient opinions of the genres. Private details and personal tidbits were for the realm of biography and not for a ‘high’ genre like history.



The public/private dichotomy is also a minor *divisio* in almost all of the other *Lives*. However, after the *Julius* and *Augustus*, Suetonius no longer introduces it with an authorial statement. Instead, the sections on private life begin rather unceremoniously with a description of the subject's appearance. Suetonius describes the physical appearance of each of his emperors, usually introducing it with the term *statura* or *corpus*.<sup>140</sup> This is usually the first rubric in the private life section.<sup>141</sup> The physical description is the very first rubric that follows the public/private *divisio* in the *Julius*, and thus establishes the pattern for the whole of the *Caesares*. Aspects of public personality versus true personal character are never absent from the rest of the *Caesares*, but they are relegated to a lesser *divisio* than the major one.

This is the case in the *Lives* of Tiberius, Caligula, Nero and Domitian. All four *Lives* have a personal life section, which is never formally introduced by Suetonius as with the *Julius* and *Augustus*, but they all begin with a description of the emperor's personal appearance. These are all minor *divisiones*, as all four have a major *divisio* built on the good/bad axis (see 2.1.ii, below). Suetonius' section on Tiberius' personal attributes begins at 68 with a rubric on appearance, followed by rubrics on religious beliefs (69) and literary pursuits/interests (70-71). The rubric on Tiberius' sexual activity (43-5), therefore, falls outside of this and within his list of public deeds, and occurs very shortly after the major *divisio* (42.1).

Similarly, Suetonius' section on Caligula's private life includes rubrics on appearance (50), mental state (51), dress (52), literary pursuits (53), performing pursuits (54), and behaviour towards favourites (55). The rubric on Caligula's sexual desires (36), and the account of his incest (24), are both firmly within the 'public' section of his *Life*. We find the same pattern in the *Nero*, where his personal life section includes rubrics of appearance (51), literary pursuits (52), desire for fame (53-5), and religious beliefs (56). Nero's rubric on sex (28-9), therefore, also falls outside of this section and occurs earlier within the 'public' section. Suetonius is placing the material on sex, which would be considered private information by any modern reader, into sections on public behaviour and policy.

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<sup>140</sup> Suetonius provides a physical description for every emperor. Rubrics headed with the term *corpus* are: *Tib.* 68.1; *Claud.* 30; *Oth.* 12; *Vit.* 17.2; *Tit.* 3.1. Rubrics headed with the term *statura* are: *Iul.* 45.1; *Cal.* 50.1; *Ner.* 51; *Galb.* 21; *Vesp.* 20; *Dom.* 18.1. The rubric in the *Augustus* is headed by the term *forma* (*Aug.* 79).

<sup>141</sup> The only exception is Vitellius. Vitellius' physical description is instead placed within his death narrative (*Vit.* 17.2).

To the Romans, one's behaviour in sexual activities, like other 'private' activities, was a reflection of one's inner character. This belief is evident across all manner of Roman writings. Republican court speeches, from Cicero and others, report sexual desires and behaviour as proof of bad character.<sup>142</sup> Pliny's panegyric of Trajan compliments the emperor on his self-restraint with sexual partners as proof of his outstanding inner character.<sup>143</sup> The topic was certainly 'private' in the sense that the Romans believed that sex should take place behind closed doors. However, for the emperors, their sexual relationships were public knowledge and of public consequence. What is common, across the *Lives* of Tiberius, Caligula and Nero, is that their sexual encounters took place within 'public' spaces and locations. Tiberius' were on Capri, where all manner of sexually deviant behaviour could be observed all over the island, and where Tiberius decorated areas of his villas with images of sexual acts (*Tib.* 43-44). Caligula's sexual escapades are with public figures like Marcus Aemilius Lepidus and Valerius Catullus and he would also openly critique the sexual performance of senatorial wives in front of their husbands at dinner parties (*Cal.* 36). Nero too, has Sporus paraded around the streets of Greece and Rome, and creates a game (*ludus*) designed to imitate a spectacle (*Ner.* 48-9). All of these actions take place in a public sphere, and certainly warrant inclusion within Suetonius' public section.

This is not the only reason that Suetonius included the rubrics on sex within the public sections. Their placement implies that Suetonius views these emperors' sexual activities as a matter of public importance. This much is revealed through a contrast with the kind of material Suetonius includes in the 'private' sections. Rubrics on personal appearance and dress, literary pursuits, religious beliefs and unusual habits are the most popular in Suetonius' personal sections. All of these are deemed inappropriate topics for Roman historians.<sup>144</sup> They are viewed as inconsequential or trivial. They are of no importance because they did not have any significant effects on the Roman populace. To include sexual material within these private sections would be to imply that they were of little consequence to the state. Suetonius' inclusion of the rubrics on sex within the public section, therefore, reflects an attitude where the emperors' sex lives were a matter of public consequence. Who the emperor bedded was a matter of public importance, lest his sexual partner have too much influence over him. And

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<sup>142</sup> See my discussion at 1.2, above. Lewis (1991, 3637 n. 48) notes various other examples from the Republican period.

<sup>143</sup> Plin. *Pan.* 83. Pliny also praises Trajan for his appropriate choice of wife in Plotina and her sexual restraint, seen to be a reflection of Trajan's own personal qualities of moderation.

<sup>144</sup> Wallace-Hadrill (1983), 17-8.

thus, Titus is praised for setting aside Queen Berenice as a matter of public good (*Tit.* 7.2).<sup>145</sup> The selection of female partners was also paramount, to ensure the production of an heir, on whom the future of the empire depended. By including rubrics on sex within the public section, Suetonius creates a narrative where the emperors' sex lives directly affected their public policy. The tyrannical emperors lack the self-control to restrain their desires, and in doing so, their desires intrude into the public sphere.

However, this does not explain why Suetonius chooses to place Domitian's rubric on sexual activity in the 'private' section. Of the tyrannical emperors, it is only in the *Life* of Domitian that the rubric on sex (22) falls within the section on private life. Even without an authorial statement, the rubrics that surround it confirm that this sex rubric belongs to this 'private' section. Suetonius' section on Domitian's private life begins with a description of his personal appearance (18-19) and is followed by rubrics on literary pursuits (20), dining habits (21), and sexual habits (22). Personal appearance and literary pursuits are well-attested as 'private' material within the *Caesares*. That the rubric on sex appears in the private section is not unique to the *Domitian*. The same occurs in the *Lives* of Caesar, Augustus, Claudius and Galba. What is interesting is the Suetonius does not take the opportunity to assign Domitian's sexual misdeeds to the public section, as he has with all of the other tyrants.

The explanation for this lies in the unique ring composition of the *Domitian*.<sup>146</sup> At the beginning of the *Life*, when Suetonius discusses Domitian's political life prior to his ascension, Domitian's lust is also commented on (1.1-3). Suetonius states that Domitian promised to have 'a night' (*noctem*) with Clodius Pollio, was 'defiled' (*corruptum*) by Nerva, had sex with a large number of married women, stole Domitia Longina from her husband and 'exercised (*exercuit*) the whole of his power so licentiously (*licenter*) [...]'. Similar language also occurs in 22 where Domitian defiles (*corruptit*) his niece, Julia and there is another allusion to Domitian's sexual activities being some kind of exercise (*exercitationis*). Even without these similarities in vocabulary, the multiple references to Domitian's sexual appetite throughout 1.1-3 and again at the end of the *Life* at 22 demonstrate that the rubrics concerning Domitian's lust fall within this ring composition. Suetonius often uses tales of

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<sup>145</sup> Suetonius states *neque vitio ullo reperto et contra virtutibus summis* ('no vice was found in him, but on the contrary, only the highest virtues'; *Tit.* 7.1), and then follows this with examples of Titus sending away his sexual favourites, of whom Berenice was just one (7.2).

<sup>146</sup> Power (2008), 301. Suetonius may use a ring composition within certain rubrics in other *Lives*. See Gugel (1977) for ring composition within the *Caesares*, esp. 50-1 for the *Caligula*. Also, Lounsbury (1991) on ring composition in the *Nero*; and Benediktson (1997) for the *Galba*.

sexual deviance to act as a vivid display of negative behaviour that will continue to taint the rest of the *Life*. This is no different for the *Domitian*, where the emperor's lack of self-control is revealed from the very beginning. His relations with two senatorial class men are certainly of public consequence, as is his treatment of his wife. If Suetonius is to follow his ring composition, then Domitian's rubric on sex must end the *Life*, within the private section, which is exactly the case. Suetonius' ring composition allows him to discuss how Domitian's sexual tastes affected his public administration, as well as his private life.

Understanding these public/private *divisiones* is important when discussing Suetonius' placement of his rubrics on sexual material. It is clear that Suetonius views the tyrannical emperors' sexual appetites and exploits as a matter of public policy and public importance. In so doing, Suetonius is able to justify his inclusion of sexual material as a serious topic, worthy of discussion. By placing such material within the 'public' section, Suetonius implies that the sex lives of Tiberius, Caligula, Nero, and Domitian had major political ramifications. Their sexual deviancies act as evidence for why they should not hold power. When sex is relegated to the private section in the case of Domitian, this is simply to complete the ring composition of this *Life*. By analysing sex within this public/private axis, I have demonstrated that Suetonius' inclusion of sexual material was something that he considered to be of great importance to his readers' understanding of the emperors' public acts.

#### 2.1.ii Use of *divisio*: good/bad axis.

The major *divisio* that dominates the rest of the *Lives* is built on a good/bad axis. The manner in which this functions is crucial to the overall characterisation of the emperor and the impression left on the reader. For the 'bad' emperors, Suetonius includes anecdotes that depict wrongdoings, non-commendable deeds, and vices towards the end of the *Life* and they are often the most numerous. Any good or commendable deeds are related early on. This structural organisation creates a narrative where the commendable deeds are forgotten or superseded by the emperors' vices and wrongdoings.

The *divisio* clearly separates these two sections, and Suetonius may include character judgements to demonstrate that the 'good' deeds related in the first half were not the 'true' man. Rather, the 'true' man will be revealed through his 'bad' deeds. It is quite obvious that in the *Lives* of Tiberius, Caligula, Nero, and Domitian, the rubric on sex falls within the 'bad' section. Suetonius uses the 'bad' rubrics to demonstrate the emperors' tyrannical attributes

and to emphasise and establish their inner character. The placement of the rubric on sex is often at key points in the narrative, where the formation of the tyrannical character is of primary importance. These can be directly after the good/bad *divisio*, as is the case with Tiberius, at the beginning and end of the *Life*, like the *Domitian*, or at other crucial points in the narrative, as with the *Caligula* and the *Nero*.

In the *Tiberius*, the major *divisio* occurs close to midway through the *Life*, at 42.1. Suetonius states how, on Capri, Tiberius ‘finally gave in simultaneously to every vice (*vitium*) which he had concealed so poorly for a long time. I shall describe these one by one from the beginning.’ This change in geography, from Rome to Capri, could also be construed as a public/private divide. However, as the following rubrics do not only contain anecdotes from Tiberius’ stay on Capri but also anecdotes that take place in Rome and elsewhere, the major focus remains on Tiberius’ vices (*vitia*), his bad deeds. Tiberius’ good deeds are dismissed as an act, something he did while in the guise of a good man. Through the use of *divisio*, anecdotes that displayed Tiberius’ modesty and restraint (26-32) are completely overtaken by others that display the exact opposite. All of Tiberius’ public edicts and policies that were described in the preceding rubrics are cast as hypocritical when compared with all of the policies that he adopts within this negative section after the *divisio*.<sup>147</sup> That Tiberius was always of bad character, in Suetonius’ mind, is later confirmed with the statement that ‘his cruel and unrelenting nature was not even concealed as a boy’ (57.1).<sup>148</sup> Suetonius’ depiction of Tiberius, therefore, is of a man of vicious character which he attempted to hide with good deeds.

Suetonius’ rubric on Tiberius’ sexual activities (43-45) occurs very shortly after this major *divisio* (42.1), amongst various other exempla of Tiberius’ *luxuria* and excess, including drunkenness (42) and greed (46-9). By placing *libido*, alongside drunkenness, as the first two vices after the major *divisio*, Suetonius immediately establishes Tiberius as a tyrant who indulges in excess and sets the tone for the rest of the *Life*. Tiberius’ character is portrayed as particularly cruel, and the anecdotes within Tiberius’ rubric on sexual misdeeds highlight this aspect of his character immediately after the major *divisio*. Cruelty (*saevitia*) is

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<sup>147</sup> For instance, prior to the *divisio*, Suetonius relates how Tiberius was welcoming of free speech and was civil when senators disagreed with him (28-9). Such behaviour is completely hypocritical to the Tiberius portrayed at 61, where Tiberius murders friends and senators who have spoken against him. See also Tiberius’ moral reform mentioned at 35.2 compared to his own personal sexual behaviour on Capri (43-45).

<sup>148</sup> *Tib* 57.1: *Saeva ac lenta natura ne in puero quidem latuit.*

a vice that will continue to permeate the rest of the narrative.<sup>149</sup> Likewise, Tiberius' excessive appetite for sex is later mirrored by an excessive appetite for violence. Right from the beginning of the *divisio*, Tiberius is painted as a man with no restraint, as a man who tortures and humiliates. Suetonius' placement of the rubric on sex just after the major *divisio*, therefore, helps to create key themes of excess and cruelty which extend throughout the rest of the *Life*.

The major *divisio* in the *Caligula*, like that of the *Tiberius*, dismisses any commendable deeds of the subject. Suetonius states, *hactenus quasi de principe, reliqua ut de monstro narranda sunt* ('Thus far, I have told his story as if he were an emperor, the rest is of the true monster'; *Cal.* 22.1).<sup>150</sup> Any commendable deeds of Caligula are thus dismissed as falsehoods. Everything that comes afterwards is a reflection of the real, monstrous Caligula. It seems obvious that Caligula's rubric of sexual misdeeds should belong in this 'monstrous' section.

Almost directly after this *divisio*, Caligula's incestuous lusts are revealed. Suetonius states, 'He habitually committed incest with all his sisters [...]. Of his sisters, he is believed to have violated the virginity of Drusilla while still a boy and was even caught once lying with her by his grandmother, Antonia' (24.1).<sup>151</sup> This occurs very close to the *divisio* at 22.1, and is only preceded by a discussion of Caligula's divine aspirations (22)<sup>152</sup> and impiety towards ancestors and heirs (23).<sup>153</sup> Furthermore, a hint at Caligula's taste for incest is even

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<sup>149</sup> References to Tiberius' *saevitia* occur at *Tib.* 57.1, 59.1, 61.1, 61.2, 62.1, and 75.3.

<sup>150</sup> As Power (2008, 146) notes, most translations of this line give both aspects (*principe* and *monstro*) equal weight. In actuality, Suetonius' use of *quasi* (as if) in correlation with *ut* (which denotes the truth 'as in fact') means that the emperor side (*principe*) is false and the monstrous side (*monstro*) is true. Compare Rolfe (rev. 1998): 'So much for Caligula as emperor; we must now tell of his career as a monster'; Graves (rev 2007): 'So much for the Emperor, the rest of this history must deal with the Monster'; Edwards (2000): 'The story so far has been of Caligula the emperor, the rest must be of Caligula the monster'. Hurley (2011) appears to offer some aspect of this dismissal of virtues, translating *quasi* as 'so to speak': 'So far, this has been about an emperor—so to speak. What is left is about a monster'. She later (2014, 28) takes the view of Power, translating it as, 'To this point, I have told his story as though he were an emperor. The rest must be told as if about a monster'. Power's (2008, 146) own translation is thus: 'That was the alleged emperor, now to describe the monster he really was'.

<sup>151</sup> *Cal.* 24.1 *Cum omnibus sororibus suis consuetudinem stupri fecit [...] Ex iis Drusillam vitiasse virginem praetextatus adhuc creditur atque etiam in concubitu eius quondam deprehensus ab Antonia avia.*

<sup>152</sup> While emperors could ascend to divine status through apotheosis after their death, to be treated as god-like while still living was almost sacrilegious and a gross sign of arrogance.

<sup>153</sup> The ancestors being Augustus, Livia and Antonia, the only three who were deified. The heirs are Tiberius Gemellus and Silanus, both were potential heirs to Caligula. It is not just coincidence that

provided earlier at 23, where it is told that Caligula claimed his mother, Agrippina the Elder, was a child of incest between Augustus and Julia the Elder.<sup>154</sup> That Caligula's taste for incest is revealed early on in his list of monstrous crimes and vices is done so to characterise him as tyrannical from the beginning of the 'bad' section. Suetonius needs to establish a powerful image of a tyrant from the beginning of the *divisio* in order to directly combat the 'good' deeds related from 15-21. The anecdote about incest achieves this. As with the *Tiberius*, this tyrannical characterisation and theme of excess is carried through the long list of Caligula's vices and negative deeds that culminates in his death.

Suetonius' main rubric on Caligula's sex life occurs later, at 36, and is blatantly signposted through Suetonius' use of the key word *pudicitia* (chastity). This rubric is placed within the middle of the large list of Caligula's monstrous vices (22-49). However, its position signals a change in the kinds of vices being discussed. Rubrics on excess and luxury tend to be grouped together by Suetonius.<sup>155</sup> Topics like excessive drinking/eating, extravagant spending and indulgence in sex all demonstrate *incontinentia* and a lack of *moderatio*. In the *Caligula*, it is the rubric on sex (36) that begins this transition from vices of impiety, arrogance and cruelty (22-35) to vices of excess (36-42). Caligula's sexual tastes establish an impression that will be further developed in the rubrics on greed (37-42) that follow. The rubric on sex, as the first in this sequence, plays a major role in persuading the reader to view him as a man of excess, with little or no self-restraint.

The *divisio* in the *Nero* is also dismissive of Nero's good deeds. At the *divisio* Suetonius states, 'I have collected these deeds, some of them blameless, others worth of some praise, in order to separate them out from his abuses (*probris*) and crimes (*sceleribus*), which I will now speak of' (19.3).<sup>156</sup> Suetonius' list of Nero's positive acts is rather short, only ten chapters long (9-19), whereas Nero's negative traits are nearly double that at 19 chapters long (20-39). These numerous *proba* and *scelera*, of which sexual vice is just one of many, supersede the few good deeds that came before. Suetonius' *Nero* is a man whose evil deeds

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Suetonius mentions them both here as victims of Caligula's murderous plots. Caligula killed all possible competition for the throne.

<sup>154</sup> *Cal.* 23.1 *Praedicabat autem matrem suam ex incesto, quod Augustus cum Iulia filia admisisset, procreatam.*

<sup>155</sup> *Iul.* 49-54; *Aug.* 68-78; *Tib.* 42-49; *Cal.* 36-42; *Claud.* 32-3; *Ner.* 27-32; *Galb.* 22; *Vit.* 13; *Tit.* 7.1; *Dom.* 19-22.

<sup>156</sup> *Ner.* 19.3 *Haec partim nulla reprehensione, partim etiam non mediocri laude digna in unum contuli, ut secernerem a probris ac sceleribus eius, de quibus dehinc dicam.*

clearly outweigh any of the good.

As was the case with the *Caligula*, Nero's rubric on sex falls in the middle of the 'bad' section. Nero's sexual crimes are particularly noteworthy due to the strongly emotive language that Suetonius employs at the major *divisio*. Nero's sexual behaviour must be interpreted as either a *probrum* or a *scelus*, or both. These words are emotionally charged and present Nero's behaviour as a serious crime and disgrace. From the major *divisio* Suetonius relates Nero's distasteful obsession with public performance (19.3-25.3). Then he provides another minor *divisio* (26.1) which gives a list of vices that Suetonius then catalogues systematically: *petulantia*, *libido*, *luxuria*, *avaritia*, and *crudelitas* (insolence 26-7, lust 28-9, luxury 30-1, greed 32, and cruelty 33-8). Nero's lusts come second in this list, but there is foreshadowing of them earlier at 26.2 and 27.2 (see 2.3.i, below). Nero's sexual behaviour, therefore, begins Suetonius' foray into Nero's personal character. The behaviour that Nero exhibits in the rubric on sex establishes the image of a lustful tyrant which influences how the excessive and cruel deeds that follow (30-38) are read. Suetonius' placement of this rubric, near the beginning of a long list of vices, ensures the reader forms an impression of him as a tyrant early on, allowing his subsequent cruel deeds to reinforce this impression and leave the reader with an entirely negative image of Nero by the end of the *Life*.

The *Domitian* follows a similar pattern to the other three *Lives*, where good deeds are listed first and are later dismissed through the *divisio* and the subsequent tyrannical deeds. Power has demonstrated how Suetonius' Domitian has a 'fixed character', and that whatever good deeds occurred, they are outweighed or shown to be false and hypocritical by his bad deeds.<sup>157</sup> Furthermore, Suetonius sums up Domitian's reign with two strongly emotive vices, *saevitia* and *cupiditas*, at the very beginning of Book 8, the Flavian book.<sup>158</sup> These same two vices occur again at the major good/bad *divisio* in the *Domitian*. The *divisio* sits at 10.1, again roughly close to half-way through the *Life*, with a declaration that 'he continued on a course of neither mercy nor restraint, but fell into cruelty (*saevitia*) more swiftly than he did into greed (*cupiditas*)'.<sup>159</sup> These appear to be Domitian's defining vices and Domitian's sexual habits are an exemplar of both.

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<sup>157</sup> Power (2008), 297-306, esp. 299.

<sup>158</sup> *Vesp.* 1.1 *constet licet Domitianum cupiditatis ac saevitiae merito poenas luisse.*

<sup>159</sup> *Dom.* 10.1 *Sed neque in clementiae neque in abstinentiae tenore permansit, et tamen aliquanto celerius ad saevitiam descivit quam ad cupiditatem.*



The general ring composition of the *Domitian* means that the emperor's lusts are discussed twice (1.1-3 and 22). It is telling that Suetonius chooses to begin and end the *Domitian* with reference to his lusts. Initial impressions are established by references to Domitian's sexual submission to Clodius Pollio and Nerva, and his abduction of Domitia from another man (1.1-3). This initial impression tarnishes the 'good' deeds that follow (4-9) before Suetonius tells us at the *divisio* (10.1) that he plunged into cruelty and greed. Suetonius, therefore, uses sexual material to establish the image of Domitian as a tyrant with the reader. As one would expect from a ring composition, this means that Domitian's lusts both create an impression at the beginning of the *Life*, and also leave a lasting impression upon the reader at the end of the *Life*. Just after the rubric on sex (22), Suetonius describes the treatment of Domitian's body post-mortem and subsequent *damnatio memoriae* (23.1), before the very last rubric which gives portents for 'happier and more prosperous times' with emperors who 'displayed self-control (*abstinentia*) and moderation (*moderatio*)'.<sup>160</sup> The rubric on sex is left to the penultimate chapter because it provides the greatest contrast with the two virtues on which Suetonius ends the *Caesares*: *abstinentia* and *moderatio*. Domitian's sexual behaviour (*libido*) demonstrates his *cupiditas* and *saevitia*. This powerful contrast of vices against virtues helps to round out the overall ring composition within the *Domitian*, while also blackening Domitian's character through contrast with more virtuous emperors that come after him (Nerva, Trajan and Hadrian). Suetonius' placement of the material on sex, as first and last topics within a ring composition, demonstrates that Domitian's sexual behaviour was a key aspect of his overall characterisation. Domitian's *libido* makes the initial and final impression upon the reader. As such, sex becomes a vital part of Suetonius' rhetorical method, ensuring a powerful tyrannical characterisation is achieved at key points in the narrative.

The same is true for the other *Lives*. Suetonius' placement of the sexual material within the 'bad' sections of the tyrannical emperors comes as no surprise. But its relation to the *divisio* and the overall, wider structure of the *Life* as a whole, can help us determine why Suetonius viewed sexual material as an essential rubric in his biographies. Sex demonstrates other tyrannical vices and can help to introduce other themes that will pertain to the rest of the *Life*. This is seen in the *Tiberius* and the *Domitian*, where cruelty forms a large part of the overall narrative tradition. Within the *Nero* and *Caligula*, rubrics on sex create a transition

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<sup>160</sup> *Dom.* 23.2 *pro certoque habuisse beatiorem post se laetiolemque portendi rei publicae statum, sicut sane brevi evenit abstinentia et moderatione insequentium principum.*

from vices of cruelty and disgrace to vices of luxury and indulgence, and therefore, make a strong impression on the reader, where the emperors are viewed as excessive in all areas of life. Suetonius' placement of the sexual rubrics show that they play a major role in creating the tyrannical characterisation of Tiberius, Caligula, Nero, and Domitian.

## 2.2 Climactic Arrangement

Suetonius' skill in arrangement extends beyond the level of the Book; he also arranges each rubric with careful consideration. David Wardle, in the introduction to his commentary on the *Life of Caligula*, lays out four types of rubric arrangement within Suetonius' *Caesares*: chronological, hierarchical, generic and climactic.<sup>161</sup>

The chronological arrangement proceeds through the topic in a sequential order. Suetonius uses such an arrangement when describing Caligula's marriages, as he provides details about the wives, Livia Orestilla, Lollia Paulina, and Milonia Caesonia, in the order that Caligula married them (*Cal.* 25).<sup>162</sup> Likewise, chronological arrangement can be seen in Suetonius' account of Claudius' military campaign into Britain which begins with military preparations and ends with details of his triumph in Rome (*Claud.* 17). This kind of arrangement is best suited to describing military campaigns or the acquisition of titles and honours.

The hierarchical arrangement was first noticed by Gascou, who demonstrated that Suetonius uses it to indicate how the emperor's actions impact the various levels of Roman society.<sup>163</sup> Wardle also observes that within the *Caligula*, Suetonius usually progresses down the social hierarchy from Senate to *equites* to *populus* to slaves to provinces/foreigners.<sup>164</sup> Sometimes the imperial family is added at the start of this progression. In one rubric, Suetonius discusses Caligula's lack of respect towards friends, the senate, a consul, a quaestor, equites, and then the general populace (*Cal.* 26).<sup>165</sup> Examples are evident in other *Lives*, including the *Tiberius*, where Tiberius' cruel deeds follow a general hierarchy down

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<sup>161</sup> Wardle (1994), 22.

<sup>162</sup> Suetonius discusses Caligula's first wife, Junia Claudilla, earlier in the *Life* (12.1-2), and so she is excluded here.

<sup>163</sup> Gascou (1976), 263 n.5; 269.

<sup>164</sup> Wardle (1994), 23.

<sup>165</sup> This rubric is preceded by various other rubrics about general lack of respect towards family (*Cal.* 23-5). The hierarchy may indeed start from 23 then, with family heading the hierarchical arrangement.

the levels of society (*Tib.* 52-9).<sup>166</sup> Similar patterns can be discerned in the *Claudius* and the *Nero*.<sup>167</sup>

The third type of arrangement, Wardle calls ‘generic’. In this arrangement, Suetonius takes a general topic and demonstrates different subtopics within it. Wardle notes that Suetonius does this within Caligula’s rubric on public spectacles, where he deals with Caligula’s sponsorship of gladiatorial games, theatrical productions, circus games, the Baiae bridge spectacle, and games produced abroad (*Cal.* 18-20).<sup>168</sup> Indeed various other rubrics on public games receive the same treatment including those of Nero and Domitian.<sup>169</sup> Sometimes, the rubric will begin with a sentence that will list the subcategories before Suetonius expands on them further.<sup>170</sup> At other points, as with the *Caligula*, this kind of organisation is not always labelled and Suetonius simply proceeds without listing the subcategories at the beginning.<sup>171</sup> Nevertheless, the categorisation, as the name suggests, is quite generic and works well for certain topics, like spectacles and lists of building projects.

The last method of arrangement is termed ‘climactic’. Wardle notes that often in the *Caligula*, the final anecdote within a rubric will be the most objectionable deed.<sup>172</sup> For instance, Caligula’s final act of *saevitia* is against a senator, the highest rank of anyone within the rubric, who meets the most gruesome fate of all of them (*Cal.* 28).<sup>173</sup> There are various other examples from the *Caligula*, such as the climactic ending to Caligula’s luxurious expenditure of him rolling around in piles of gold (*Cal.* 40-2). Not only does climactic arrangement bring focus to the final anecdote of the topic, it also creates a progression. Climactic arrangement is so persuasive because of the progression from deeds that are less objectionable to the most extreme. This progression creates a *gradatio*, a building effect,

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<sup>166</sup> Tiberius’ cruel deeds descend from family, including his sons (52), his daughter-in-law Agrippina (53), and his grandsons (54), to friends and intimates (55), to Greek companions and teachers (56-7), to praetors and the courts (58), before ending with the *populus* (59).

<sup>167</sup> *Claud.* 24-5.; *Ner.* 33-8. The hierarchical arrangement in the Claudian passage descends from the Senate to the *equites* to the people to the provinces. Nero’s cruel deeds descend from family (33-4), to wives (35), to the Senate (36-7), to the people (38).

<sup>168</sup> Wardle (1994), 24.

<sup>169</sup> *Ner.* 11-13; *Dom.* 4.

<sup>170</sup> In the *Nero* Suetonius gives these subcategories in a ‘topic sentence’ before expanding on each. *Spectaculorum plurima et varia genera edidit: iuvenales, circenses, scaenicos ludos, gladiatorium munus* (‘He gave many entertainments of various kinds: The Juvenalia, circus games, theatrical productions, and a gladiatorial combat’; *Ner.* 11.1).

<sup>171</sup> *Dom.* 4.

<sup>172</sup> Wardle (1994), 24.

<sup>173</sup> This rubric ends with a gruesome depiction of the senator’s dismembered body.

where each new rumour or anecdote builds upon the last. As the reader progresses through the passage, each fresh item only heightens their general sense of repulsion and disgust. In this way, climactic arrangement can also be seen within the other *Lives*. Claudius' paranoia gradually builds to a crescendo within a rubric on fearfulness (*Claud.* 35-6) and the rubric on Nero's musical and theatrical pursuits culminates in the striking image of Nero being bound on stage (*Ner.* 20-1). Climactic arrangement is best observed when Suetonius wishes to demonstrate excessive tendencies, particularly in the case of the 'bad' emperors. With each new misdeed the emperors' control over themselves slip and they fall further and further into a life of vice. They become steadily more corrupted as the rubric progresses.<sup>174</sup> The climactic arrangement is best suited, therefore, for topics of cruelty and for excessive vices such as luxury and sex.

It is this climactic arrangement that can be observed in the rubrics dedicated to the emperors' sexual desires. There are two climaxes present within the passage on Tiberius' sexual misdeeds on the island of Capri. The first focuses on a disparity of age, which is present from chapters 43-44, where Tiberius' sexual partners diminish in age. The second climax, which spans all three chapters (43-45) is focused on a theme of abuse, particularly the use of violence and cruelty.

**43.1** *Secessu vero Caprensi etiam sellaria excogitavit, sedem arcanarum libidinum, in quam undique conquisiti puellarum et exoletorum greges monstrosique concubitus repertores, quos spintrias appellabat, triplici serie conexas, in vicem incestarent coram ipso, ut aspectu deficientis libidines excitaret. 43.2* *Cubicula plurifariam disposita tabellis ac sigillis lascivissimarum picturarum et figurarum adornavit librisque Elephantidis instruxit, ne cui in opera edenda exemplar imperatae schemae deesset. In silvis quoque ac nemoribus passim Venerios locos commentus est prostantisque per antra et cavas rupes ex utriusque sexus pube Paniscorum et Nympharum habitu, quae palam iam et vulgo nomine insulae abutentes "Caprineum" dictitabant.*

**44.1** *Maiore adhuc ac turpiore infamia flagravit, vix ut referri audirive, nedum credi fas sit, quasi pueros primae teneritudinis, quos pisciculos vocabat, institueret, ut natanti sibi inter femina versarentur ac luderent lingua morsuque sensim adpetentes; atque etiam quasi infantes firmiores, necdum tamen lacte depulsos, inguini ceu papillae admoveret, pronior sane ad id genus libidinis et natura et aetate. 44.2* *Quare Parrasi quoque tabulam, in qua Meleagro Atalanta ore*

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<sup>174</sup> In this way, climactically arranged rubrics also represent the general Roman Stoic attitude. If a man commits one vice, he will steadily fall further and further into a life of vice until he has become completely corrupted.

*morigeratur, legatam sibi sub condicione, ut si argumento offenderetur decies pro ea sestertium acciperet, non modo praetulit, sed et in cubiculo dedicavit. Fertur etiam in sacrificando quondam captus facie ministri acerram praeferentis nequissime abstinere, quin paene vixdum re divina peracta ibidem statim seductum constupraret simulque fratrem eius tibicinem; atque utrique mox, quod mutuo flagitium exprobrarant, crura fregisse.*

**45.1** *Feminarum quoque, et quidem illustrium, capitibus quanto opere solitus sit inludere, evidentissime apparuit Malloniae cuiusdam exitu, quam perductam nec quicquam amplius pati constantissime recusantem delatoribus obiecit ac ne ream quidem interpellare desiit, "ecquid paeniteret"; donec ea relicto iudicio domum se abripuit ferroque transegit, obscaenitate oris hirsuto atque olido seni clare exprobrata. Unde nota in Atellanico exhodio proximis ludis adsensu maximo excepta percrebruit, "hircum vetulum capreis naturam ligurire."*

**43.1** Having withdrawn to Capri, he even created the *Sellaria*, a site for his secret pleasures, where he brought groups of girls and boys past their sexual prime from all over as sexual deviants, whom he called *spintriae*, and who would defile each other in front of him in groups of three, so that the sight would arouse his failing erection.

**43.2** He had the bedrooms decorated and adorned with pictures and statues in many places of the most lascivious scenes and figures and equipped them with the books of Elephantis, so that no example of a prescribed position was lacking for those engaging in the work. He also created 'places of Venus' all over the island in woods and groves, where youths of both sexes dressed as Pans and Nymphs offered their sexual services through the caves and grottoes. Those at the time used to commonly misname the island '*Caprineum*' ('goatish-place').

**44.1** He became notorious for a still greater and fouler depravity, that it is almost not right that it be related or heard, let alone believed. The story being that he trained boys of a young and delicate age, whom he called his 'little fishies' to occupy themselves between his thighs when he was swimming and tease and rouse him gently with their licks and nibbles. And the story goes that he even directed babies, quite strong but not yet weaned, to his penis as if it were a nipple, being more inclined to this kind of pleasure due to his nature and age. **44.2** And so, when a picture of Parrasius's (which depicted Atalanta pleasuring Meleager with her mouth) was bequeathed to him on the condition that if he was offended by the subject matter, he would instead receive one million sesterces for it. He not only preferred it, but also set it up in his bedroom. It is reported that even, once, while conducting a sacrifice, he was seized by the sight of the attendant carrying the incense, and, unable to abstain, with the ceremony barely finished, he drew him aside and raped him and his brother, the flute-player, at the very same time. And afterwards, when both boys complained of their disgrace, he had their legs broken.

**45.1** How greatly he was in the habit of giving himself pleasure with the heads of women, even noble women, is most clearly shown by the death of a certain Mallonia, who was brought to him but refused most firmly to submit to anything further. He turned her over to the informers and did not cease asking the defendant

“are you sorry?”; until she left the trial, took herself home, and stabbed herself, publicly castigated the hairy, stinky old man for the foulness of his mouth. Hence, the line given in the Atellan farce at the next theatrical show was received and spread with the greatest approval; ‘The old goat is licking the sex of the does’.

There is a noticeable decrease in the age of Tiberius’ male victims from chapters 43 to 44. The first sexual partners listed are *puellae* (girls) and *exoleti* (boys past their sexual prime). *Exoleti* are often considered to be of adult age.<sup>175</sup> Tiberius’ next sexual partners are *utrius sexus pubes* (youths of both sexes). At chapter 44 the decline of ages becomes starkly apparent. Suetonius uses two comparative adjectives, *maiore* (greater) and *turpiore* (fouler) to describe Tiberius’ *infamia*. The use of the comparative creates a sense of progression, or rather regression. It is difficult to determine how old these boys are, but *prima* (young) and *teneritudo* (delicate) as descriptors certainly contributes to the impression that their ages range from toddlers to perhaps the age of twelve or so. The climax to this regression in age is perhaps the most abhorrent act to any modern reader: Tiberius’ abuse of *infantes* (infants) still breast-feeding for the purpose of *fellatio*. Having sexual relations with infants goes beyond what was viewed as normal pederastic desires in Roman men. This reduction in age throughout the passage enables a kind of reverse association, whereby all of the sexual attendants on the island can be envisioned as frighteningly young. Now the ‘boys of a young and delicate age’ are infantilised further, purely by their association with the infants. The use of vague age terms such as *puella* and *pubes* also allows for the possibility that these sexual attendants are quite young. Tiberius’ desires are far beyond normative Roman sexual standards, and the decreasing age gives the impression that Tiberius keeps seeking out younger and younger victims to satiate his jaded sexual palate.

The rubric as a whole builds towards a climax which focuses upon Tiberius’ cruelty and abuse. There are hints of his cruel character in chapter 43 with the insinuation of Tiberius’ goat-like behaviour. What is most notable is that the social class of the *puellae* and *exoleti* are not defined, nor are the *utrius sexus pubes*.<sup>176</sup> As Suetonius states later on, the emperor

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<sup>175</sup> The term *exoletus* is the participle of the verb *exolescere* (to grow up/to outgrow). *OLD* s.v. 1, 2. The *exoletus*, then, is the ‘grown up’ or ‘outgrown’ man. Scholarship is in agreement that the *exoleti* were adult; however, their social class remains contested.

<sup>176</sup> There is much debate about the status and role of the *exoletus*. Williams (2010, 92) argues they are prostitutes *contra* Butrica (2005, 223-231) who argues the *exoleti* were grown up *puer delicati*, and possibly slaves. Taylor (1997, 361) had also noted *exoleti* could be freeborn. It appears that the term *exoletus* may be vague, and that the term did not denote social status at all, only the age of the person.

Vitellius may have been amongst these *spintriae*.<sup>177</sup> As Vitellius was a freeborn male, the implication is that these youths may not just be slaves and could also have included free citizens. Thus, their treatment on Capri, and the acts in which they are forced to participate, would be viewed as an act of abuse upon them.

The abuse, while somewhat vague in chapter 43, becomes much more explicit as the passage progresses. At chapter 44, Suetonius relates Tiberius' treatment of pre-pubescent boys. Verbs such as *institueret* ('trained'; 44.1) and *admoveret* ('directed'; 44.1) imply the use of orders or commands. The nature of Tiberius' power is that none of the *pueri primae teneritudinis* or the *infantes* could resist these commands. As before, their class is never revealed but, if they include free citizens, the abuse is only heightened. Later in the chapter Tiberius rapes two young attendants at a religious sacrifice (44.2). Suetonius states that 'with the ceremony barely finished' and 'unable to abstain', Tiberius raped the two boys and proceeded to break their legs when they complained of their disgrace (*flagitium*). The rape alone is abusive, but the breaking of their legs is also an excessive use of violence. Tiberius' cruel character has grown, from committing offences against possible citizens, to the abuse of power over toddlers and infants, and to the physical abuse of boys.

This abusive behaviour in the rubric ends with the treatment of Mallonia in chapter 45. Hugh Lindsay is right to point out that in this tale, Tiberius is depicted as a 'cruel tyrant'.<sup>178</sup> In the climax to this passage on Tiberius' sexual misdeeds, Mallonia, who refused to submit herself to Tiberius, is brought to trial and she kills herself from the disgrace. Once again, Tiberius not only abuses his power, but does so in a manner that also abuses the bodies and dignity of his victims (see 3.2, below). At the trial Mallonia, is taunted by Tiberius as he repeatedly asks her if she was sorry, presumably for refusing him. Suetonius' arrangement of the material on Tiberius sexual exploits is crafted to display a steady rise in the level of cruelty and abuse faced by his victims. This *gradatio* effect highlights Tiberius' cruel nature and ensures the reader views it as the most important aspect of his tyranny. Such a technique builds a sense of disgust within the reader, ensuring that the most vile deeds remain at the forefront of the reader's mind. In so doing, Suetonius carefully creates a picture of an abusive tyrant hell-bent on satisfying his deviant sexual tastes and leaving a trail of destruction in his

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<sup>177</sup> Vit. 3.2. *Pueritiam primamque adulescentiam Capreis egit inter Tiberiana scorta, et ipse perpetuo Spintriae cognomine notatus existimatusque corporis gratia initium et causa incrementorum patri fuisse.*

<sup>178</sup> Lindsay (1995a), 142.

wake.

Suetonius' use of climactic arrangement can also be seen in the passage on Nero's sexual proclivities. Chapters 28-29 describe various misdeeds in succession, including seductions, rapes, incest, various 'marriages' and a bizarre game in the arena. These all build to a climax of utter brazenness and arrogance.<sup>179</sup>

**28.1** *Super ingenuorum paedagogia et nuptiarum concubinitus Vestali virgini Rubriae vim intulit. Acten libertam paulum a fuit quin iusto sibi matrimonio coniungeret, summissis consularibus viris qui regio genere ortam peierarent. Puerum Sporum exsectis testibus etiam in muliebrem naturam transfigurare conatus cum dote et flammeo per sollemnia nuptiarum celeberrimo officio deductum ad se pro uxore habuit; exstatque cuiusdam non inscitus iocus bene agi potuisse cum rebus humanis, si Domitius pater talem habuisset uxorem. 28.2 Hunc Sporum, Augustarum ornamentis excultum lecticaque vectum, et circa conventus mercatusque Graeciae ac mox Romae circa Sigillaria comitatus est identidem exosculans. Nam matris concubinitum appetisse et ab obtrectatoribus eius, ne ferox atque impotens mulier et hoc genere gratiae praevaleret, deterritum nemo dubitavit, utique postquam meretricem, quam fama erat Agrippinae simillimam, inter concubinas recepit. Olim etiam quotiens lectica cum matre veheretur, libidinatam inceste ac maculis vestis proditum affirmant.*

**29.1** *Suam quidem pudicitiam usque adeo prostituit, ut contaminatis paene omnibus membris novissime quasi genus lusus excogitaret, quo ferae pelle contactus emitteretur e cavea virorumque ac feminarum ad stipitem deligatorum inguina invaderet et, cum affatim desaevisset, conficeretur a Doryphoro liberto; cui etiam, sicut ipsi Sporus, ita ipse denupsit, voces quoque et heulatus vim patientium virginum imitatus. Ex nonnullis comperi persuasissimum habuisse eum neminem hominem pudicum aut ulla corporis parte purum esse, verum plerosque dissimulare vitium et callide optegere; ideoque professis apud se obscaenitatem cetera quoque concessisse delicta.*

**28.1** Besides making prostitutes of freeborn boys and seducing married women, he also raped the Vestal Virgin, Rubria. He almost made his freedwoman, Acte, his lawful wife, having bribed some ex-consuls to swear falsely that she was of royal birth. He had the testicles cut off his slave-boy, Sporus, and attempted to transform him into a woman, marrying him with a dowry and bridal veil and all appropriate ceremony; then, attended by a great crowd, led him to his house and treated him as his wife. Someone made a clever joke, which is still told, that it would have been good for humanity if Nero's father, Domitius, had had such a wife. **28.2** This Sporus was 'honoured' with the ornaments of the empresses, carried in a litter, and Nero accompanied him around the meeting places and markets of Greece, and afterwards,

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<sup>179</sup> Barton (1994), 53.



of Rome around the Sigillaria, constantly kissing him fondly. And no one doubted that he desired to sleep with his mother, but was discouraged by her detractors, lest this arrogant and unbridled woman grow more powerful through this kind of favour, especially afterwards when he added to his concubines a prostitute who was known to look very similar to Agrippina. They say that even before that, whenever he rode in a litter with his mother, his incestuous lusts were confirmed by the stains on his clothing.

**29.1** He prostituted his own chastity to such an extent that when nearly every part of his body was defiled, he devised something new as though it was a kind of game, where he would disguise himself in the pelt of a wild animal and be let out from a cage and attack the genitals of men and women tied to stakes; and when he had raged enough, he would be “skewered” by his freedman Doryphorus, whom he even married, and was wife to this man just as Sporus was with him, and he even imitated the cries and wails of virgins being raped. I know from several sources that he was convinced that no man was chaste or pure in any part of their body, but that almost everyone concealed their vices and hid them skilfully. And so, when anyone confessed to him their sexual transgressions, he forgave them all other faults.

Suetonius begins the passage on Nero’s sexual deviancies by stating he made prostitutes of freeborn boys, seduced married women, and raped a Vestal Virgin named Rubria. All three are clearly unacceptable partners for Nero’s sexual lusts. Freeborn citizens of Rome have a right to bodily integrity and should not be penetrated. Married women should not be forced into adultery and a Vestal should maintain her virgin status. That Nero disregards these norms is a mark of his arrogance, demonstrating his belief that he is above the laws and ‘rules’ of normative sexuality in Roman society.

Suetonius then moves on to Nero’s ‘almost-marriage’ with the freedwoman, Acte. Nero now attempts to cast off legal precedents to secure a marriage to someone of far lower social status than him. The same is true of Nero’s relationship with Sporus, where a marriage appears to have actually taken place. Caroline Vout has argued that Suetonius ‘invites us to view Sporus as a living doll’.<sup>180</sup> Sporus himself is described as ‘honoured’ (*excultum*) with the ornaments (*ornamenta*) of the empresses, carried about in a litter, and married ‘with a dowry and bridal veil and all appropriate ceremony’. Suetonius use of the terms *excultum* and *ornamenta* imply that Sporus was created or crafted, like a piece of marble or like an actor on the stage, into becoming a wife for Nero.<sup>181</sup> Furthermore, Sporus was paraded around Greece

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<sup>180</sup> Vout (2007), 152.

<sup>181</sup> Vout (2007), 152.

and even through the Sigillaria in the centre of Rome.<sup>182</sup> This kind of public display of a pseudo-wife, by which Nero makes a mockery of the traditional role of marriage, graphically illustrates his arrogance. In the Acte episode, Nero only attempts to have a sham-marriage, but with Sporus he succeeds. His responsibility to produce an heir has been disregarded in order for him to pursue his deviant lusts. Nero's arrogance has grown here, as he has demonstrated that he believes himself to be above the Roman legal system.

The *gradatio* continues with the story of Nero's incest with his mother, Agrippina the Younger. Suetonius states that *nemo dubitavit* (no one doubted; 28.2) that Nero desired his mother. Here is another example of Nero's sexual deviancy that is apparently known by all of Rome. Suetonius also includes the detail that 'whenever he rode in a litter with his mother, his incestuous lusts were confirmed by the stains on his clothing'. The litter would be used to travel through the streets of Rome, making this a public announcement of his incestuous acts. Nero has progressed from publicly displaying his relationship with Sporus to engaging in actual sex acts in public, albeit behind the visual protection of the litter. The privacy of the screen appears to be of no concern to Nero, however, as Suetonius states he would emerge from the litter with semen stains on his clothing. Nero has taken something that should be private, and made it public. Nero is unconcerned about the public reaction to the display of his incestuous lusts, which Suetonius uses to help illustrate Nero's tyrannical arrogance.

Nero's sexual depravities extend beyond sexual acts in a public space to sexual acts performed during some kind of mock spectacle. Following the incest, Suetonius relates how Nero deliberately violated his chastity (*pudicitia*) and devised a new kind of game (*ludus*) where he would 'disguise himself in the pelt of a wild animal and be let out from a cage and attack the genitals of men and women tied to stakes'. This 'attack' is most likely a euphemism for oral sex, given the placement of this tale within the rubric on sex.<sup>183</sup> Suetonius' use of the term *ludus* ensures the reader views this as a public spectacle, reminiscent of those that would occur in the arena. But this is some twisted version. Instead of real animals, it is Nero disguised as a wild (*fera*) beast (see 3.1, below). Suetonius' description of men and women tied to stakes is reminiscent of the public punishments and

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<sup>182</sup> The Sigillaria was the last day of the Saturnalia festival in Rome, but was also a physical place, likely on the Campus Martius, constructed to sell the *sigillaria*, which were small figurines given as traditional gifts during the Saturnalia festival

<sup>183</sup> See 3.1, below, for my discussion of this interpretation.

executions (the ‘fatal charades’), which also took place in the arena.<sup>184</sup> Nero’s use of public spectacle as a display for his sexual excesses heightens the sense that he is descending to a hitherto unknown level of deviancy. Nero is now a man who is openly putting not just his sexual partners on display (such as Sporus), but also the very sex acts themselves.

The same is true in the final anecdote that Suetonius describes in the rubric on Nero’s sexual habits. Nero marries another man, an ex-slave Doryphorus,<sup>185</sup> except this time Nero plays the role of wife. Suetonius also includes the detail that Nero ‘even imitated the cries and wails of virgins being raped’ (*heiulatus vim patientium virginum imitates*; 29). With this final detail, Nero’s brazenness has reached a climactic finale. Suetonius’ Nero is so arrogant, that he will make a mockery of a serious sexual crime, one which he himself committed against Rubria at the beginning of the rubric. Nero has no regard for others, and audibly mocks the pain of virgin sex and of rape victims. Nero’s sexual deviancies have progressed to the point where he not only openly displays his sexual desires, but also humiliates his victims by mocking their pain.

Suetonius completes the passage with Nero himself admitting that he believed sexual chastity does not exist in men. Moreover, Nero forgives those that have behaved immorally by forgiving them all their sexual misdeeds. This is the final nail in the coffin, as Suetonius reinforces that Nero simply does not care about his moral reputation. With this climactic ending to Nero’s rubric on sex, Suetonius has ensured Nero’s tyrannical arrogance has created a lasting impression upon the reader.

Suetonius’ climactic arrangement in Nero’s rubric has progressed through corrupting free citizens of Rome and a Vestal, to seeking out the wrong choice in wife, to the open display of sex acts in public, from the semen stains on his clothing after incest with his mother, to spectacles in the arena, and culminating in Nero’s brazen imitation of the pain of rape. Such a progression is a deliberate rhetorical device, enabling Suetonius to create a *gradatio* effect, where, by the time the reader has reached the end of the passage, they have

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<sup>184</sup> See Coleman (1990) on the ‘fatal charades’ held in the Roman arena.

<sup>185</sup> Both Bradley (1978, 164-5) and Warmington (1977, 85) state that Suetonius has confused Nero’s freedman, Doryphorus, with another named Pythagoras. In Tacitus (*Ann.* 15.37) and Dio (62.28.3; 63.13.2; 63.22.4), it is this Pythagoras that Nero marries. The only other mention of a Doryphorus is at Tac. *Ann.* 14.65.1, where no sexual relationship is stated between him and Nero. While it is possible that Suetonius may have confused the two, Power (2014, 206) has argued that Suetonius deliberately uses the nickname Doryphorus in order to make his pun on *conficeretur*. See 3.1, below.

almost forgotten about the freeborn boys at the beginning and so Nero's most abhorrent acts remain at the forefront of the reader's mind. This kind of stacking effect, where all the tales are taken together as evidence of Nero's attitude towards sex, builds a graphic picture of a tyrant whose arrogance is such that other people's lives function as a backdrop for his displays of sexual excess.

Climactic arrangement is also apparent in the *Domitian*. This *Life* is significantly smaller than the *Lives* of Caesar through to Nero. The rubric on Domitian's sex life, therefore, is also significantly smaller. However, as I have stated above, other anecdotes on Domitian's sexual proclivities do occur throughout the *Life* (1.1-3). Yet, chapter 22 is the formal rubric that Suetonius created to deal with Domitian's *libido*, and it is this one that demonstrates his climactic arrangement. Unlike the *Tiberius* and the *Nero*, which both steadily build towards a climax, the climax in the *Domitian* rubric occurs only with the final anecdote about his niece Julia, which goes through its own climactic progression.

**22.1** *Libidinis nimiae, assiduitatem concubitus velut exercitationis genus clinopalen vocabat; eratque fama, quasi concubinas ipse develleret natarique inter vulgatissimas meretrices. Fratris filiam adhuc virginem oblatam in matrimonium sibi cum devinctus Domitiae nuptiis pertinacissime recusasset, non multo post alii conlocatam corrumpit ultro et quidem vivo etiam tum Tito; mox patre ac viro orbatam ardentissime palamque dilexit, ut etiam causa mortis exstiterit coactae conceptum a se abigere.*

**22.1** He was a man of excessive lusts; he used to call his constant sexual activities 'bed-wrestling' as if it were some kind of exercise. There was a rumour that he would depilate his mistresses himself and swim with the most common prostitutes. He had most stubbornly refused his niece, who had been offered to him in marriage when she was still a maiden, because he was still entangled in his union with Domitia. Not long afterwards he defiled her, when she was married to someone else, and even with Titus still living at the time. Soon, after she was bereft of her father and husband, he loved her most passionately and publicly so that he even became the cause of her death as he forced her to abort the child which was conceived by him.

The first two anecdotes demonstrate the *libido nimia* of Domitian. Domitian referred to his sexual activities as *clinopalen*, a compound of *clino*; to recline, and *palen*; to wrestle. While not the most damning of items (Brian Jones notes that this is a joke Suetonius might

find humorous from the mouth of Vespasian),<sup>186</sup> it certainly functions as an example of excessive lusts. Suetonius also claims that Domitian would ‘depilate his mistresses himself’ and, secondly, that he would ‘swim with the most common prostitutes’. These two details give the impression that Domitian is performing acts of service similar to a slave and debasing himself with inappropriate sexual partners. While these anecdotes do not build to a climax, they do demonstrate Domitian’s character to be particularly lustful.

The rubric comes to its climax when Suetonius relates the most damning sexual crime of Domitian: his treatment of his niece, Julia. Unlike Claudius’ marriage to his niece, Agrippina Minor, this relationship has not been approved by the senate.<sup>187</sup> As such, it carries the same incestuous undertones that are apparent in similarly incestuous episodes in the *Nero* and the *Caligula*. Domitian’s inability to restrain himself has even led him to violate the boundaries of familial relationships. The tale itself goes through its own climactic progression, where Domitian exhibits less and less control over himself. Domitian initially refuses Julia, in rather the same way that his brother, Titus, sent his own paramour, Berenice, from Rome (*Tit.* 7.1). However, Domitian’s refusal is not out of virtue, but rather because he was already entangled with another sexual partner, Domitia. The connection between Julia and Domitia should be noted. Domitian took Domitia to serve as his mistress, before marrying her, divorcing her, and then remarrying her. Both women are refused by him, before he eventually seduces them back under his power. Suetonius tells us it was only after Julia was married to someone else that he defiled her. The mention of Titus still living at this point in the tale emphasises that Julia was under the protection of two men, her husband and her father. Domitian must wait for both men to die, before he can actively and openly claim her as his own. The progression here moves from a lack of interest, to the seduction and corruption of her, to the open and passionate display of their relationship. Domitian, it seems, cannot abstain from Julia, in much the same way he could not bear to be rid of Domitia. The rubric comes to a climactic finish, describing how Domitian forced Julia to abort a child

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<sup>186</sup> Jones (1996), 150.

<sup>187</sup> As Julia is Domitian’s niece, the union would be considered incest amongst the Roman people. The precedent had been set when Claudius had married his niece, Agrippina, in AD 49 but Suetonius points out that Claudius had to seek special senatorial approval in order to marry her (*Claud.* 26.3). Uncle/niece marriages were not made illegal again until the reign of Nerva (Dio 68.2.4), meaning it was legally permissible for Domitian to marry Julia. However, Suetonius tells us that no one else was found to have followed the example set by Claudius with only one exception. Given their relative unpopularity, it is likely that uncle/niece marriages were still considered incestuous by the Roman people, or at least deviant to some degree, in the time of Domitian.

conceived by him, causing her death. Domitian's sexual vices have led him into further and further into acts of depravity and cruelty, culminating in the ruin of his own family and dynasty. With this last detail, Suetonius ensures the readers view Domitian's *libido nimia* as a key aspect of his tyrannical character.

Suetonius' arrangement of the sexual rubrics in the Tiberius, Nero, and Domitian all build towards a distinctive climax. This progression or *gradatio* allows for a sense of disgust to grow within the reader and ensures that their final impression from the rubric is the emperor's most objectionable deeds. The progression also allows for a distinctive tyrannical character to be created and reinforced. The rubric in the *Tiberius*, for instance, demonstrates how Tiberius' cruelty is his most defining attribute, and how his acts became more and more abusive. In the *Nero*, the emperor's increasing brazenness and disregard for public decency displays his arrogance and disrespect for the imperial position. In the *Domitian*, the reader learns how an excessive *libido* can result in familial ruin and death. Suetonius' use of climactic arrangement helps to demonstrate how the emperors fall into a life of vice. Their inability to restrain themselves grows as they indulge their sexual appetites. In effect, the climactic arrangement ensures the reader cannot form any other opinion of these emperors besides that of a sexually excessive tyrant, absorbed in pursuing his individual lusts to the detriment of the Roman state.

For the *Caligula*, however, Suetonius' arrangement is less of a clear progression from least objectionable to most objectionable deed. Instead, Suetonius starts and ends the rubric with two of the most sordid details, and glosses over inconsequential rumours in the middle of the rubric. Instead of a *gradatio* effect, this kind of arrangement ensures that two of Caligula's sexual deviancies can be used to demonstrate two different aspects of Caligula's tyrannical lust.

**36.1** *Pudicitiae neque suae neque alienae pepercit. M. Lepidum, Mnesterem pantomimum, quosdam obsides dilexisse fertur commercio mutui stupri. Valerius Catullus, consulari familia iuvenis, stupratum a se ac latera sibi contubernio eius defessa etiam vociferatus est. Super sororum incesta et notissimum prostitutae Pyrallidis amorem non temere ulla inlustriore femina abstinuit.* **36.2** *Quas plerumque cum maritis ad cenam vocatas praeterque pedes suos transeuntis diligenter ac lente mercantium more considerabat, etiam faciem manu adlevans, si quae pudore submitterent; quotiens deinde libuisset egressus triclinio, cum maxime placitam sevocasset, paulo post recentibus adhuc lasciviae notis reversus vel laudabat palam vel vituperabat, singula enumerans bona malave corporis atque*

*concubitus. Quibusdam absentium maritorum nomine repudium ipse misit iussitque in acta ita referri.*

**36.1** He had no regard for his chastity nor that of others. He is said to have had sexual relations, both giving and receiving, with Marcus Lepidus, the actor Mnester and certain hostages. Valerius Catullus, a young man of consular family, loudly announced that he had penetrated the emperor and his loins were exhausted in intercourse with him. In addition to the incest with his sisters and his notorious passion for the prostitute Pyrallis, there was scarcely any woman of rank that he abstained from. **36.2** Most of these women he invited to dinner with their husbands and, as they passed by the foot of his couch, he carefully and slowly appraised them as if buying slaves, even raising their heads with his hand if they had modestly looked downwards. Then whenever it pleased him, he left the dining room, having called aside whoever had pleased him the most. He returned not long afterwards with signs of his recent lustful activities being seen, and he openly praised or blamed them, listing out one by one the good and bad features of their bodies and sexual performance. To some he personally sent divorce papers in the names of their absent husbands and gave orders that these were to be placed in the public records.

Within this rubric Suetonius places emphasis upon Caligula's sexual relations with men, by mentioning these at the beginning of the rubric, but also draws attention to the final anecdote about noblewomen being humiliated at dinner parties by placing it last. These two tales of sexual deviancy demonstrate two different tyrannical attributes of Caligula's character: effeminacy and arrogance.

Caligula's lack of *pudicitia* is established at the beginning of the rubric. When Suetonius uses *pudicitia* to describe a man's sexual status, he uses it exclusively to refer to whether he has been penetrated by another.<sup>188</sup> Suetonius makes clear by the use of the phrase *mutui stupri* that the men both penetrated, and were penetrated by, Caligula. The list that Suetonius provides of insertive sexual partners is considerable, including Marcus Lepidus, Mnester, hostages, and Valerius Catullus. Suetonius provides further details about one of Caligula's male partners. Catullus 'loudly announced that he had penetrated the emperor and his loins were exhausted (*latera defessa*) in intercourse with him'. That Caligula took the passive role is itself abhorrent, let alone that the sex was so vigorous that Valerius was exhausted. Caligula's proclivity to indulge himself excessively is graphically illustrated by this anecdote. In much the same way as Domitian's 'constant' bed-wrestling, there is an implication that Caligula's bedroom activities take up a large amount of time. The list of

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<sup>188</sup> *Iul.* 2.1; 49.1; 52.3; *Aug.* 68.1; 71.1; *Cal.* 36.1; *Ner.* 29; *Vesp.* 13.

names alone demonstrates a tyrannical indulgence in excess and serves as proof that Caligula has lost his masculinity (see 3.1, below). By beginning the rubric in this manner, Suetonius gives his readers the immediate impression that Caligula lacks masculinity and self-control.

From here, however, the passage does not build as we would expect into a climactic arrangement. Instead, two sexual allegations are passed over quite quickly. The first is incest with his sisters, which Suetonius dealt with elsewhere at 24, and so there is no use repeating it. The dalliance with Pyrrallis, however, is understated for no obviously apparent reason. Yet, Caligula's relationship with Pyrrallis is unknown in other sources, and could be a Suetonian invention. If she is not his invention, then nothing else seems to be known of her.<sup>189</sup> This may explain why this particular rumour receives such cursory attention from Suetonius.

The sexual deviancy of Caligula rises to its climactic conclusion with the anecdote about Caligula's abuse of women at dinner parties. This is the most detailed example that Suetonius relates in the entire passage and it, itself, goes through its own climactic arrangement in the same way that the tale of Domitian and his niece does. Suetonius begins by stating that Caligula would appraise the women at dinner parties in front of their husbands, as though he were looking for slaves at the market. Then he escalates the rubric by claiming that Caligula would remove whichever woman he liked best from the dining room and would return with them some time later with 'signs of his recent lustful activities' displayed to all those in the room.<sup>190</sup> He further escalates the rubric with his tale of Caligula's public humiliation of the women, demonstrating Caligula's arrogance by the way in which he praised and blamed the women for their sexual performances. Lastly, Caligula's cruelty and arrogance reach such heights that they intrude upon the public arena; Suetonius concludes with the detail that Caligula would force some of the husbands to divorce these women by tampering with state records. The climactic arrangement here ensures that each new detail only adds to the general disgust. Caligula's arrogance steadily increases, culminating in his blatant disregard for public decency and public records.

Overall, the composition of the Caligulan rubric ensures that the reader forms two key impressions of Caligula; first, that he is excessive and effeminate, and second, that he is arrogant. Both are key elements of the tyrannical character that Suetonius creates in this *Life*.

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<sup>189</sup> Suetonius may have included further details on Pyrrallis in one of his works *Lives of Famous Courtesans*. The work is lost, and therefore nothing conclusive can be said but the possibility remains.

<sup>190</sup> Likely semen stains. Nero, too, shows 'stains' (*maculae*) of his desires on his clothing. *Ner.* 28.2



The arrangement of this rubric, therefore, demonstrates how Suetonius influences the reader to view the men as tyrants, and how he constantly reinforces this through his descriptions of sexual deviancies.

Whilst the composition of *Cal.* 36 is not so straightforward as the rubrics on the sexual proclivities of Tiberius, Nero and Domitian, the overall effect is the same. Suetonius crafts these passages carefully to ensure that the reader is left with whatever overall impression that he wishes to create. Tiberius is cruel, and so his sexual deviancies are cruel; Nero is completely brazen and arrogant, and so too are his sexual acts; Domitian is cruel and excessive, and so are his lusts; Caligula is arrogant, and his sexual habits highlight this aspect. These aspects of the emperors' tyranny are emphasised through the arrangement of the tales, ensuring that the character portrait that is formed is one that is consistent with the rest of the *Life*.

### 2.3 Suetonius' Rhetorical Techniques

Structural composition is not the only rhetorical technique that Suetonius employs within these passages. Other techniques include pluralisation, where one instance or rumour is used to imply multiple occurrences; and contrast, where excessive *libido* is often juxtaposed against extreme chastity.

#### 2.3.i Pluralisation

The first rhetorical technique that Suetonius employs, with considerable liberality, is pluralisation.<sup>191</sup> Its presence in the *Caesares* is widely apparent, often to the frustration of historians when they search for specific dates and events. Suetonius' use of pluralisation is a form of generalisation, whereby single events or persons are made into vague multiples. Suetonius does this by concealing names of individuals, presenting a single event as evidence of many and by listing multiple sexual partners. Thereby, examples of an emperor's tyrannical character cannot be tied to a specific event or person, but are rather pluralised, with the result that the reader will view the behaviour as occurring on multiple occasions or with multiple people. Gascoy has argued that Suetonius' use of generalisation allows for his

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<sup>191</sup> The term 'pluralisation' was dubbed by Donna Hurley (1993, 138) as she noticed that Suetonius frequently uses a single event as evidence for proof that multiple took place. She later (2011, xxvii) uses the term 'generalisation' to refer to the same rhetorical technique.

justification of the emperors' character.<sup>192</sup> By taking one event, and pluralising it, Suetonius is able to exaggerate the vices of the tyrannical emperors and ensure that this is the final character impression left upon the reader in these *Lives*.

Several of Suetonius' passages on the sexual transgressions of the emperors make use of such pluralisation. In the *Tiberius*, Suetonius states how Tiberius gave himself pleasure with 'the heads (*capitibus*) of women (*feminarum*)', but then follows this with only one example, the case of Mallonia (45). Mallonia's subsequent treatment, where she is handed over to informers and humiliated at trial, is therefore pluralised by the preceding statement where both 'heads' and 'women' are plural. The reader is invited to view Mallonia's treatment not as a singular example, but as one of Tiberius' many acts of sexual abuse against noblewomen. The pluralisation ensures that Tiberius' actions are interpreted as habitual. This is reinforced by the phrase *solitus sit* (he was in the habit). Therefore, this tale not only accentuates Tiberius' cruelty by his treatment of Mallonia, but also his abuse of women in general.

A similar pluralisation occurs in the *Caligula*. Suetonius states *non temere ulla inlustriore femina abstinuit* ('There was scarcely any woman of rank that he abstained from'; 36.1) and that *quas plerumque cum maritis ad cenam vocatas* ('most of these women he invited to dinner with their husbands'; 36.2). The use of *non...ulla* pluralises the anecdote that follows, which is further pluralised by *quas* and *maritis*. As Suetonius tells it, Caligula would appraise these women at dinner as if buying slaves and would have sex with them in a separate bedroom before returning to dinner and criticising or praising the women's sexual performance. As Hurley notes, this anecdote is an example of 'frequent Suetonian pluralization' as Suetonius appears to be drawing on a single incident that occurs in Seneca's *Dialogues*.<sup>193</sup> Seneca writes of Caligula:

*huic in convivio, id est in contione, voce clarissima, qualis in concubitu esset uxor eius, obiecit. Di boni, hoc virum audire, principem scire et usque eo licentiate pervenisse, ut, non dico consulari, non dico amico, sed tantum marito princeps et adulterium suum narret et fastidium!*

At a banquet, that is at a public gathering, using his loudest voice, Gaius taunted this man [Asiaticus Valerius] with the way his wife behaved in sexual intercourse. Ye gods! what a tale for the ears of a husband! what a fact for an emperor to know! and

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<sup>192</sup> Gascou (1984), 450.

<sup>193</sup> Hurley (1993), 138.

what indecency that an emperor should go so far as to report his adultery and his dissatisfaction in it to the woman's very husband—to say nothing of his being a consular, to say nothing of his being a friend!<sup>194</sup>

Whether Suetonius used Seneca as a source is not certain. If he did not, then they both likely drew on the same post-Augustan histories. This anecdote concerning Caligula was probably a well-known one, but Suetonius adds his own information.<sup>195</sup> In Seneca, it is a single instance. By removing the names of specific individuals, Suetonius is able to turn what was a singular occurrence into vague multiples. Caligula's behaviour, therefore, seems habitual and uncontrollable and his tyranny is not only revealed by the act itself, but also by its regularity.

Suetonius makes use of a similar technique earlier on in the *Caligula*. After the *divisio* at 22.1, Suetonius lists Caligula's various 'monstrous' deeds, including abuses against his family (24-5). It is in this rubric that Suetonius chooses to describe Caligula's incestuous relations. Suetonius states that the emperor *cum omnibus sororibus suis consuetudinem stupri fecit* ('He habitually committed incest with all his sisters'; 24.1), and gives the proof that each woman occupied the seat of wife at dinner, while Caligula's actual wife was relegated to the honoured guest's position.<sup>196</sup> Suetonius then provides explicit details about Drusilla only and concludes that Caligula *reliquas sorores nec cupiditate tanta nec dignatione dilexit, ut quas saepe exoletis suis prostraverit* ('regarded his other sisters with so little desire or respect that he often prostituted them to his male prostitutes'; 24.3). Wardle notes that Suetonius 'may have worked backwards from the charges of adultery alleged by Caligula against Agrippina and Livilla to the notion of incest'.<sup>197</sup> Allegations of incest against Caligula are not a Suetonian invention. Josephus mentions an incestuous relationship between Caligula and a single sister (*ἀδελφῆ*); presumably, Drusilla.<sup>198</sup> Agrippina and Livilla are not involved in the incest in Josephus' narrative. Of our extant sources, Suetonius is the first one to pluralise the

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<sup>194</sup> Sen. *Const.* 18.2. Trans. Basore (1928).

<sup>195</sup> The appraisal of the women and the intercourse with women while the others continue to dine are details found only in Suetonius. While Suetonius may be 'inventing' details, it is important to note that the use of invention is well attested in Roman rhetorical handbooks. Quintilian (*Iust.* 4.2.89) approves of the use of fictitious details so long as they are 'within the bounds of possibility [...], consistent with the persons, dates, and places involved [...], and that it presents a character and sequences that are not beyond belief'. Trans. Butler (1920)

<sup>196</sup> Hurley (1993), 97; Wardle (1994), 225.

<sup>197</sup> Wardle (1994), 229. Both Agrippina and Livilla are charged with adultery with Marcus Aemilius Lepidus who, it appears, was planning some kind of plot against Caligula. Both sisters appear to have been involved in this plot.

<sup>198</sup> Josephus, *AJ.* 19.204.

incestuous relations.<sup>199</sup> By doing so, Suetonius projects Caligula's intimate relationship with Drusilla onto all three of his sisters, further blackening his character. Caligula's *libido* is demonstrated as even more excessive and unrestrained as a result. He is not satisfied with only the one sister; he must have all three.

Suetonius further pluralises this passage by stressing the habitual and frequent nature of the incest. Not only is the amount of people pluralised, but also the frequency of the act itself. This is evident by his use of *consuetudinem stupri* which stresses the habitual element as well as *conlocabat* in the imperfect tense in the next sentence which indicates frequency and habitualness.<sup>200</sup> This is not a one-off instance that was caught by their grandmother. Suetonius stresses this point by his use of *quondam*. They were caught once; that is, on only one occasion out of many. Thus, Suetonius implies that the act occurred many times. Pluralisation of the frequency of the act also helps to build a picture of Caligula's excessive and uncontrollable *libido*. Along with the pluralisation of the sisters, this pluralised behaviour serves to paint him as all the more tyrannical.

Nero, too, is a target of Suetonius' pluralisation technique. Suetonius begins his rubric on Nero's sex life with vague and nameless allegations of sex with freeborn boys and married women (28.1). Suetonius also refers to nameless respectable women slightly earlier (27.3), who are turned into prostitutes, and there is also passing reference to another senatorial woman (again nameless) whom Nero had molested (*adrectauerat*; 26.2). The structural closeness of these cases needs to be considered. One case occurs at 26.2, another at 27.3, before the *libido* rubric at 28-9, which once again makes mention of respectable married women being made into prostitutes. The proximity of these anecdotes, along with the namelessness, allows for this pluralisation. What previously seemed like isolated instances are no longer isolated. Suetonius pluralises them (*nuptae*) at 28.1, referring back to these married women. Nero's adulteries, therefore, are multiple, and Nero's *libido* is shown to be

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<sup>199</sup> Incest is not mentioned by Seneca or Philo, who are Caligula's earliest historians. Later, post-Suetonian sources mention the plural: sisters. Dio 59.3.6; 59.22.6; 59.26.5; Aurelius Victor, *Epit.* 3.4, *Caes.* 3.10; Eutropius 7.12; Orosius 7.5.9. Of these, Aurelius Victor, Eutropius and Orosius all drew heavily on Suetonius, which would explain the pluralisation of the sisters in the subsequent historical tradition. Whether Cassius Dio used Suetonius as a source is still debated. Dio's pluralisation may be an indication that Suetonius could be drawing on an earlier source that also pluralises the incest. Nevertheless, whether it is a Suetonian invention or not, it does not lessen the effect within Suetonius' narrative.

<sup>200</sup> Wardle (1994), 225.

excessive due to the countless women that he has prostituted.

Furthermore, Nero's incestuous relations with his mother are also pluralised. Suetonius claims that 'whenever (*quotiens*) he rode in a litter with his mother, his incestuous lusts were confirmed by the stains on his clothing' (28.1). Through the use of *quotiens*, Suetonius implies that every time that Nero entered a litter with his mother, he committed incest with her. As was the case with Caligula, the habitual nature of Nero's incest is a further illustration of Nero's excessiveness. Once was not enough. The pluralisation allows for Nero's incestuous desires to become a habitual aspect of his character.

Domitian's sexual activities are also pluralised. While Domitian's rubric on sex is smaller than the others, Suetonius still finds room to exaggerate Domitian's sexual transgressions. He states that 'he used to call his constant (*assiduitatem*) sexual activities "bed-wrestling" (*clinopalen*)'. Domitian's sexual activities have been anticipated throughout the *Life*. Various rumours are present at the beginning of the *Life*, including supposed relations with Clodius Pollio and Nerva, wives of many men, and the abduction, marriage, divorce and re-marriage of Domitia (1.1-3; 3.1). Suetonius choice of the noun *assiduitas*, therefore, reminds the reader of all of these previous details and also prepares them for the sexual activities to follow. This is not so much a pluralisation of a specific instance, as Suetonius does with his anecdotes about Caligula's abuse of senatorial women or Tiberius' abuse of Mallonia. Rather, this is a pluralisation delivered via Suetonius' word choice (*assiduitas*). Stressing frequency ensures that Domitian's sexual desires are seen as something close to an addiction. As such, when Suetonius states that Domitian called his sexual activities *clinopalen*, 'as if it were some kind of exercise', the implication is that Domitian is so active in bed he has no need for normal exercise. The excessive nature of Domitian's *libido* is made all the more explicit by the opening statement to the rubric: *libidinis nimiae* ('[He was a man of] excessive lust'). Excessive lust is certainly one of the tyrannical vices that Suetonius focuses on throughout his *Caesares*, and here we can see how Suetonius' use of pluralisation has applied his tyrannical topology onto Domitian.

Suetonius also makes use of the pluralisation technique by listing multiple sexual partners for his tyrannical emperors. Caligula submits to Marcus Lepidus, Mnester, various hostages and Valerius Catullus. Thus, Caligula is portrayed as a man who appears to regularly submit to others. Likewise, Tiberius' long list of attendants on the island of Capri from girls

and boys to *spintriae* to the pangs and nymphs, the ‘little fishies’, the infants and the two young religious attendants all serve to create a picture of an endless list of victims. Nero too, accumulates a large list of sexual partners from freeborn boys, married women, a Vestal Virgin, Acte, Sporus, to his mother, nameless people tied to stakes and Doryphorus. The sheer number of accusations against an emperor is itself a pluralisation technique. It further highlights the excessive *libido* of these emperors, which is the vice at the forefront of all of the rubrics on the tyrannical emperors’ sexual proclivities.

The technique of pluralisation allows for Suetonius to use single incidents as evidence for wider behavioural patterns and deviancies. Given Suetonius’ adherence to constancy of character (at least in the tyrannical *Lives*), evidence of a single act is, to Suetonius, evidence of wider behavioural patterns and desires. And so, in Suetonius’ view, if an emperor commits incest once, then he likely committed it multiple times. Through pluralisation, aspects of tyranny are not just conveyed by the nature of the acts themselves, but also are exaggerated by their regularity.

### 2.3.ii Contrast.

Suetonius also makes use of contrasts to further denigrate the character of the tyrannical emperors. In all of the *Lives*, good and bad elements of the emperors are ‘weighed up’ against each other. P.A. Brunt applied the modern artistic term ‘chiaroscuro’ to Suetonius’ treatment of the emperors as ‘a man is first praised, to set his wickedness in higher relief’.<sup>201</sup> In effect, Suetonius’ treatment of the tyrannical emperors’ good deeds, simply serves to make the bad deeds more noteworthy and reprehensible. This can be seen in the *Lives* of not only the tyrannical emperors, but also those of Caesar, Claudius, Galba, Otho, and Vitellius. Their good deeds are listed first, then a *divisio* will discount or discredit them, before finally Suetonius reveals their bad deeds. Suetonius’ use of ancestry rubrics is one of the major forms of contrast that he employs.<sup>202</sup> For instance, Caligula is made to appear all the worse when compared to the almost encomiastic mini-biography of Germanicus at the beginning of his *Life*. Likewise, the same thing occurs with the short mini-biography of the elder Drusus at the beginning of the *Claudius*. Across the *Lives*, Domitian appears all the worse through direct comparison with his brother Titus and father Vespasian.

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<sup>201</sup> Brunt (1961), 221.

<sup>202</sup> Garrett (2013), 78.

Contrast also occurs at the paragraph level, often with a chiaroscuric or blackening effect. Chiaroscuro, as a rhetorical technique, blackens character through extreme contrast. Whatever the topic of Suetonius' rubric, whether it be cruelty, avarice, or lust, the character of the emperor is usually blackened further through contrast with others who behave in the 'proper' manner. Within the context of Suetonius' passages on sexual indulgence, this contrast is often achieved through examples of extreme chastity or *pudicitia*. The emperors' victims that Suetonius lists are usually chaste, virginal, or innocent, providing a vivid contrast with the misbehaviour of the emperor (see 3.2, below).

For instance, Caligula's sexual partners are listed as Marcus Lepidus, Mnester, 'certain hostages', Valerius Catullus, his sisters, Pyralis and several unnamed women of rank. Of these, Suetonius only provides extensive details for (and thus draws emphasis to) the unnamed women of rank.<sup>203</sup> It is this tale that Suetonius wishes to focus on. Suetonius makes a point of telling his readers that the senatorial women cast their eyes downwards modestly (*pudore*). Caligula's behaviour, relayed just previously, therefore stands in direct contrast with these women. Suetonius' word choice is quite explicit in providing this contrast; he states that Caligula lacks *pudicitia* at the beginning of this very rubric, whereas these women possess *pudor*. Caligula lacks what these women possess, and what Caligula ultimately steals from them. Such a contrast helps to display Caligula's excessive lust as all the more abhorrent. He has corrupted the chastity of others, through his lack of it. Caligula's tyranny is shown not only by his possession of a tyrannical vice, *impudicitia*, but also by the fact that he corrupts others who possess it. It demonstrates that Caligula's behaviour has wider ramifications beyond just himself, and thus the public ramifications of Caligula's lust can be felt by Suetonius' readers.

This same kind of chiaroscuric contrast can be seen in the *Tiberius* as well, particularly in the Mallonia episode. Mallonia refused Tiberius 'most firmly' (*constantissime*; 45). Her refusal of him highlights her chastity, thus also highlighting Tiberius' lack thereof. This tale is given additional resonance by the similarities of Mallonia's plight with those of two legendary women of Rome, Lucretia and Verginia. As I discussed earlier (1.2, above), Lucretia, the paragon of the chaste Roman wife, was raped by Sextus Tarquinius, after

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<sup>203</sup> The exception being that Caligula's sisters were, however, discussed in detail earlier (*Cal.* 24). Besides the women of rank, the only other anecdote that receives more than a passing mention is that concerning Valerius Catullus, but even then only a single detail is added, that he was exhausted.

stubbornly refusing him, only relenting when he threatened her reputation. She kills herself in an effort to maintain this reputation of chastity.<sup>204</sup> Verginia is stabbed by her father in an attempt to prevent her being claimed as a slave by the decemvir Appius Claudius.<sup>205</sup> This same story is told by Suetonius at the beginning of the *Tiberius*, when he describes the history of the Claudian *gens*. ‘Claudius Regillianus, a decemvir for drafting laws, attempted to use force to enslave a freeborn maiden in order to gratify his lust. This was the reason for another secession of the plebs from the patricians.’<sup>206</sup> In both circumstances, the rape (or attempted rape) of a woman resulted in her death by stabbing and the overthrow of the tyrannical regime. Given Suetonius’ allusion to the Verginia episode of 2.2 it seems highly likely that the instance of Mallonia is meant to be another such example of a high-born noblewoman, stabbing herself due to the insatiable lusts of a tyrant. Unlike Verginia’s death, Mallonia’s does not result in the overthrow of his regime. But due to these associations, Tiberius’ tyrannical nature, particularly his vice of cruelty (*saevitia*), stands out alongside his *libido* in contrast to the chastity of figures such as Lucretia and Verginia. This contrast, delivered through a metaphor, is particularly effective as it serves further to denigrate the character of Tiberius through the associations of Mallonia with Lucretia and Verginia.

Suetonius also uses a chiaroscuro effect to highlight Tiberius’ old age. After relating how Tiberius would train ‘boys of a young and delicate age’ (*pueros primae teneritudinis*) to perform *fellatio* on him, and how he would do the same to infants (*infantes*), Suetonius states that Tiberius was ‘more inclined to this kind of pleasure due to his nature (*natura*) and age (*aetate*)’ (44.1). Suetonius’ allusion to Tiberius’ old age draws a strong contrast with the age of his young victims. Gladhill’s translation of this passage instead takes *natura* and *aetate* to apply to the infants, not Tiberius; ‘Tiberius was more inclined to this kind of pleasure due to their nature and age’.<sup>207</sup> The two nouns could be applied in this way. However, as they are both singular, and *infantes* is plural, I am more inclined to take the traditional approach, and translate this line as ‘he was more inclined to this kind of pleasure due to his nature and age’. This emphasis on Tiberius’ age brings attention to Tiberius’ supposed erectile dysfunction that is evident throughout this passage. As Hallett has already observed, Tiberius’ compulsion

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<sup>204</sup> This is the general account of the tale as found in Livy, 1.57-9 and Ovid, *Fast.* 2. 721-856.

<sup>205</sup> Livy, 3.44-58.

<sup>206</sup> *Tib.* 2.2. *Claudius Regillianus, decemuir legibus scribendis, virginem ingenuam per vim libidinis gratia in servitutem asserere conatus causa plebi fuit secedendi rursus a patribus.*

<sup>207</sup> Gladhill (2018), 196. Emphasis my own.



for receiving oral sex may be because he struggles to achieve a full erection.<sup>208</sup> As such, Suetonius' use of contrast between the age of Tiberius' victims and Tiberius himself serves to highlight Tiberius' cruel unnatural abuse of young children to bolster his waning sexual powers.

The *Nero*, too, shows similar chiaroscuro contrasts through Suetonius' stress on the status of Nero's sexual partners. He states, *super ingenuorum paedagogia et nuptarum concubinatus Vestali virgini Rubriae vim intulit* ('Besides making prostitutes of freeborn boys and seducing married women, he also raped the Vestal Virgin Rubria; 28.1). Warmington notes that Nero's sexual vices 'are made the more disgraceful by the two contrasts'.<sup>209</sup> *Paedagogia* were usually boy prostitutes of slave or freedman status. That Nero's are freeborn (*ingenui*) highlights Nero's corrupting nature. Likewise, the women are *nuptae* (married or soon-to-be married) and have no place amongst prostitutes. Suetonius' references to the chastity of women and freeborn boys ensure that a contrast is created that makes Nero seem all the more tyrannical; his lusts have corrupted not only himself, but also the innocent. This impression is reinforced with the anecdote about Nero's rape of a Vestal. In these first few lines of the rubric on Nero's sexual misdeeds, Suetonius has set the tone for the rest of the rubric on Nero's sexual deviancy.

There is contrast, too, in the *Domitian* at the rubric on *libido* (22); however, it is not at the paragraph level. Instead, the contrast in this rubric is established through a comparison with Titus, Domitian's brother. Suetonius explains that Titus was 'suspected' of *libido* (*suspecta...libido*) because of his *exoletorum et spadonum greges* ('troupes of older men and eunuchs'; *Tit.* 7.1) and his great passion for Queen Berenice. After the *divisio* in the *Titus*, 'no vice was found in him, but on the contrary, only the highest virtues'.<sup>210</sup> Suetonius states Berenice was 'immediately sent from Rome' and that Titus ceased supporting and watching his young slave boys.<sup>211</sup> Titus' restraint in sending his lovers away is in direct contrast to Domitian's 'constant bed-wrestling' (*Dom.* 22). Whereas Titus refuses his lovers, Domitian cannot seem to abstain. He initially refuses his 'brother's daughter', only to seduce Julia once she is married to another man. Domitian, therefore, is not able to restrain himself in the same

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<sup>208</sup> Hallett (2015), 410.

<sup>209</sup> Warmington (1977), 84.

<sup>210</sup> *Tit.* 7.1. *neque vitio ullo reperto et contra virtutibus summis.*

<sup>211</sup> *Tit.* 7.2. *Berenicen statim ab urbe dimisit invitum invitam. Quosdam e gratissimis delicatarum quanquam tam artifices saltationis, ut mox scaenam tenuerint, non modo fovere prolixius, sed spectare omnino in publico coetu supersedit.*

way as Titus. The mention of Titus in this rubric, too, both nameless at *fratris filiam* ('brother's daughter'), and then named a little later when Suetonius says Domitian defiled Julia *quidem vivo etiam tum Tito* ('and even with Titus still living at the time'; *Dom.* 22) only serves to heighten this contrast. The direct mention of Titus at 22 invites this contrast and creates a chiaroscuro effect where Domitian's faults are laid out against Titus' successes. Domitian cannot restrain himself and his tyrannical lusts are laid bare.

Suetonius' use of contrast is so numerous that I cannot cover every instance, but I have shown how Suetonius employs it within his rubrics of the emperors' sexual deviancies to further his tyrannical characterisation of them. Each emperor is made to seem all the more unchaste and sexually excessive through the use of this chiaroscuro effect. The status and chastity of the emperors' sexual partners throws their own corrupt character into high relief. It ensures that each emperor is typecast as a sexually excessive tyrant, who is so unrestrained that he acts as a corrupting force upon virgins and freeborn/noble victims.

## 2.4 Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated how Suetonius reinforces and emphasises the tyrannical characterisation of Tiberius, Caligula, Nero, and Domitian in their respective discussion of sex. The structural elements of Suetonius' narrative are paramount in how the reader understands the rubric's purpose within a *Life*. When this sexual rubric falls within the 'public' section, there is an implication, on Suetonius' part, that the emperor's sexual behaviour affected and reflected his public policy. An emperor's sexual behaviour which exhibits various tyrannical attributes serves as evidence for the man's inability to rule. Furthermore, Suetonius draws attention to the rubric on sex by placing it at crucial points in the narrative. In the *Tiberius*, the rubric is placed very shortly after the good/bad *divisio*, ensuring that the reader immediately forms a strongly negative impression of Tiberius which is then reinforced through all of the other rubrics until Suetonius narrates his death. In the *Domitian*, tales of sexual deviancies bookend the *Life*, ensuring the first and last impression of the man is as a lustful tyrant with no self-restraint. The arrangement of each individual rubric on sex also contributes to Suetonius' tyrannical characterisation. In the cases of Tiberius, Nero, and Domitian, the rubrics follow a distinct climactic arrangement, helping the reader form a tyrannical image of the emperor as they progress through the rubric. This progression ensures that the most damning sexual deviancies remain at the forefront of the reader's mind and leave a lingering negative opinion of the man. The arrangement of the

Caligulan rubric achieves the same result through a different arrangement, where the most damning deeds are placed first and last in the rubric. Overall, Suetonius' arrangement of the rubrics helps to draw attention to other aspects of the emperors' tyranny, whether that be cruelty, arrogance, or excess. His tyrannical characterisation of the emperors is also enhanced by his use of rhetorical techniques such as pluralisation and contrast. While these are only two such examples, they best portray how Suetonius exaggerates the emperors' sexual deviancies. This exaggeration ensures the reader understands these men to be more tyrannical than they may appear to be on the surface. Suetonius achieves his tyrannical characterisation through several methods, but they all work together to ensure that the reader can only determine these men to be tyrants. These rubrics on sex are one of the strongest and most vivid ways that Suetonius achieves this characterisation, thereby influencing the reader to determine that these men are unfit to wield the power that they do.

## Chapter 3

Thus far, this thesis has examined how Suetonius uses sexual material in order to characterise Tiberius, Caligula, Nero and Domitian as tyrants. I have examined the ways in which Suetonius' considerable rhetorical skill is employed to emphasise their tyrannical attributes. But I have not yet answered why. In this chapter I investigate why sexual material worked so well as a characterisation device. Ultimately, this is because the emperors' sexual deviancies served as particularly apt demonstrations of their lack of masculine virtue, and also because they served as concrete examples of their abuse of power.

For the purposes of this chapter it is worth briefly reiterating the 'rules' of normative Roman sexuality set out in the introduction to this thesis. The first, and most important rule, was that a man should always be the insertive partner. Insertive sex, whether it be in the vagina, anus, or mouth, was seen as 'acceptable' behaviour and reasserted a man's masculinity. The second 'rule' is that men should not have sexual relationships with freeborn citizens of Rome. These groups were clearly seen to have some kind of bodily integrity, which an insertive partner could ruin or tarnish through an illicit sexual act (*stuprum*). The third 'rule' was that men should show a preference for youthful bodies of both sexes, and the fourth 'rule' was to show restraint in one's sexual desires. By breaking these rules, Suetonius' tyrannical emperors are judged as sexually deviant.

The Roman emperor, in essence, held absolute power. He had control over the entire Roman army, over the praetorian guard, and effectively, over the Senate. This is not the place to engage in the arduous task of examining the various legal and social reforms that led to the increasing powers of the emperor.<sup>212</sup> Suffice it to say that the emperor was the authority-figure in Rome. All matters of the empire's administration were decided by him. Of primary concern in this chapter is the lack of legal avenues for victims of the emperor. The only viable way to remove him from power was through assassination. Complaints against the emperor were dangerous, and victims could be severely punished for speaking out.<sup>213</sup> The population's freedoms, particularly their freedom of speech, were under threat from tyrannical leaders. This association, between power and freedom, is at the core of tyrannical discourses. Within

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<sup>212</sup> For this see Syme (1939), Millar (1977), Nicolet (1984), Hurlet (2006), Ferrary (2001 [2009]), and Rich (2012).

<sup>213</sup> See Raaflaub (2004) on freedom of speech in antiquity. See also, McHugh (2004) in the same volume and Ahl (1984).

Suetonius' tales of sexual deviancies, he makes explicit commentary about the emperors' right to rule. Emperors who engage in emasculating acts, or emperors who abuse their power over their sexual victims, are deemed ineffective and inappropriate rulers.

In the first part of this chapter I will establish the crucial role that masculinity and masculine virtue (*virtus*) played in discourses of power. Suetonius' emperors are often emasculated, even dehumanised, demonstrating their lack of the virtues of leadership. In the second part, I will show how Suetonius places particular emphasis on the emperors' sexual victims, allowing the reader to associate these victims with their own oppression under a tyrannical regime. In doing so, I will justify why sexual material plays such a key role in the tyrannical characterisation of Tiberius, Caligula, Nero, and Domitian.

### 3.1 Sexual deviancy as a lack of masculinity.

Many of the sexual deviancies that Suetonius describes serve to sully the emperors' masculinity. To the Romans, masculinity (or the appearance of it) was deemed an essential aspect of obtaining and maintaining power. Roman men rule through virtue of being men. Roman *vir*i justified their power over others through their possession of certain virtues. Ideologies of moderation (*moderatio*), abstinence (*abstinentia*), and self-control (*continentia*) permeate Roman discourses on power and authority.<sup>214</sup> Without these key virtues, a man could become corrupt, even tyrannical. It is telling that Suetonius, when he looks forward to the future at the end of the *Caesares*, sees the emperors that follow, that is Nerva, Trajan, and Hadrian, as demonstrating *abstinentia* and *moderatio* (*Dom.* 23.2).

Being a *vir* grants a man the right to hold power not only over his wife, his children, and his household, but also over other (lesser) men. As a *vir*, he possesses *virtus*, which I translate here as 'masculine virtue'. The term *virtus* is quite vague and denotes almost all aspects of Roman masculinity. Originally, during the early and middle Republic, it denoted a kind of manly courage displayed on the battlefield.<sup>215</sup> Towards the later Republic, it came to denote masculine virtue in the political sphere.<sup>216</sup> During the early Empire, *virtus* continues to be used in a variety of contexts to refer to the general robustness, toughness, and *dignitas* that

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<sup>214</sup> They are fundamentally linked to Stoicism. On how Stoicism came to become the dominant philosophy of the Roman elite see Griffin (1989). On the role of virtues in political discourses see Wallace-Hadrill (1981)

<sup>215</sup> McDonnell (2006), ch. 1.

<sup>216</sup> McDonnell (2006), 319.

comes from being a *vir*.<sup>217</sup> If a man's *virtus* is compromised, as it would be through sexual submission, he is thus emasculated and considered inferior by his peers. Suetonius' descriptions of the emperors' sexual submission should be read through this lens.

Suetonius' Tiberius is feminised, albeit not explicitly, through two allusions to his sexual role during intercourse. The first occurs midway through the rubric, when Suetonius informs his readers of the rumours about the 'little fishies' (*pisciculi*) that swim amongst his thighs (44.1). Gladhill has pointed out that Suetonius uses the accusative plural form of *femur* (*femina*) to describe Tiberius' thighs, punning on the Latin *fēmina* meaning woman.<sup>218</sup> Tiberius' groin is thus feminised. He relinquishes his masculinity and acts as some kind of perverted 'mother' to these babies, where his semen replaces mother's breast milk.<sup>219</sup> This kind of imagery, would not be lost amongst Roman readers, particularly with the interplay of *fēmina/fēmina*. The feminisation of Tiberius is subtle rather than blatant, but it is apparent.

Suetonius ends the rubric with another allusion to Tiberius' feminisation, in which he quotes an Atellan farce that proclaims 'the old goat is licking the sex of the does' (45). In the previous chapter (2.2, above) it was mentioned that Tiberius had a special proclivity for receiving oral sex from the infants and boys (44.1), and this notion is reinforced by the allusion to his purchase of the painting of Meleager and Atalanta engaged in *fellatio* (44.2). Indeed, even at the beginning of 45 the innuendo is very much that Tiberius abuses the heads (*capita*), that is the mouths, of women. Tiberius enjoys receiving oral sex and may also find this practice necessary to boost his waning sexual capabilities.<sup>220</sup> Yet Mallonia's reference to the 'foulness of his mouth' (*obscaenitate oris*), earlier in this chapter, combined with the line from the Atellan farce, lead the reader to the conclusion that Tiberius is performing *cunnilingus*.<sup>221</sup> This is perplexing. Giving and receiving oral sex were not the same on the scale of sexual normativity. For a man to insert his penis into the mouth of another was an acceptable masculine act. But to give oral sex to another was quite a different matter. Holt Parker has argued that to engage in *cunnilingus* was a feminising act, equating the man with the 'receptive' role during sex.<sup>222</sup> The man receives no physical stimulation from the act, and

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<sup>217</sup> McDonnell (2006), 388.

<sup>218</sup> Gladhill (2018), 196. He builds on what was previously noticed by Hallett (1978), 198.

<sup>219</sup> Hallett (1978), 198; Gladhill (2018), 196.

<sup>220</sup> Hallett (2015), 410-11.

<sup>221</sup> That notion of the foul mouth (*os impurum*) is prevalent in much of Roman literature. See Richlin (1992), 26-8.

<sup>222</sup> Parker (1997), 52.

is thus merely a tool for the pleasure of the woman. This allusion to Tiberius performing *cunnilingus*, therefore, emasculates him, giving the reader cause to view him as a lesser man.

The emasculation of Caligula is far less subtle. From the very beginning of the rubric (36.1) the reader is told Caligula had no *pudicitia*, a word which Suetonius exclusively uses to describe a man's sexual integrity (that is, whether or not he has been penetrated).<sup>223</sup> Suetonius then supplies the names of some of Caligula's sexual partners: Marcus Lepidus, Mnester, and 'certain hostages' (*quidam obsides*). Sexual acts, in the Roman mindset, are a defiling force, whereby the receptive partner becomes tainted, dirtied, and violated by the act.<sup>224</sup> It is noteworthy that the list of partners that Suetonius provides decrease in social status from a senator, to an actor, to hostages. Each time, Caligula is violated by an increasingly inferior person, and Caligula's own body is thus sullied even more with each mention of a new partner. Furthermore, Suetonius states that Caligula engaged in *mutuum stuprum* with these men; that is, he both penetrated and submitted to them. The exchanging of roles suggests a strange power-play, where Marcus Lepidus, Mnester, and the hostages are somehow both lower and higher in status than Caligula. By submitting himself to these men he is 'less than', but as penetrator he is also 'greater than'. There is a certain foulness unique to Caligula, as he is violated by the very men whom he has also violated. Caligula's bodily integrity has been severely compromised by his involvement with these men.

Suetonius takes Caligula's feminisation further, describing how 'Valerius Catullus, a young man of consular family, loudly announced that he had penetrated the emperor and his loins were exhausted in intercourse with him' (36.1). This is the last of the acts described in the rubric that deals exclusively with Caligula being penetrated. That Suetonius sees fit to emphasise how Caligula's appetite for anal sex was so great that he would 'exhaust' his partners, is particularly demonstrative of Caligula's excessive sexual tastes. Suetonius' use of the term 'exhausted' (*defessus*) also implies a particularly rigorous or rough act. Caligula is insatiable. He craves to be the penetrated partner, to be submissive. Caligula lacks self-control, and so Suetonius demonstrates, implicitly, that Caligula should not hold the power that he does if he is going to misuse it by being vigorously penetrated by another. Suetonius also gives the reader details of Valerius Catullus' status as a senatorial man. This emphasis draws attention to the power dynamic that has been altered through the sexual act. Caligula,

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<sup>223</sup> See n. 188, above.

<sup>224</sup> Richlin (1992), 26-31.

as emperor, should hold more authority and power than everyone else. Instead, a man of senatorial rank, Valerius Catullus, is holding the traditional role of dominance over Caligula. Caligula has relinquished his power and authority to another man, and the implication is that Valerius could rule through Caligula. Suetonius' description of this incident would prompt a question in his readers' minds: if Caligula submits in the bedroom, what other aspects of his administration has he submitted to others?

Suetonius is also explicit about Nero's violation of his own *pudicitia*, stating he 'prostituted his own chastity (*pudicitia*) to such an extent that [...] nearly every part of his body was defiled' (29). He then provides two examples of Nero's lack of *pudicitia*; a strange animal game and his submission to Doryphorus. The animal game is somewhat perplexing. Suetonius states, 'he devised something new as though it was a kind of game (*ludus*), where he would disguise himself in the pelt of a wild (*fera*) animal and be let out from a cage and attack the genitals of men and women tied to stakes' (29). At first glance, there is perhaps nothing too overly sexual or submissive about this tale. The torturing of genitals is also a punishment that Tiberius inflicted (*Tib.* 62.2).<sup>225</sup> Tiberius ties off the penis and testicles, forcing the closure of the urinal tract; the victim's genitals swell causing extreme pain. However, Tiberius' torture of these genitals is not included in the rubric on sex. Rather, the tale appears in the passages that relate different tales of Tiberius' cruel punishments and deeds, where it fits well (*Tib.* 57-65). We almost might expect this animal game episode to be a similar example of genital torture. However, as it is framed either side by two references to Nero's sexual submission to male partners, it seems likely that the reader is meant to interpret this act as sexual. The logical conclusion is that because an animal 'attacks' with its mouth, Nero is performing oral sex on these victims. This is certainly suggested in Cassius Dio's version of the tale, as he uses the term *ἔσθίων* (devouring) to describe the act (Dio 63.13.2). Tristan Power has suggested that the text here may be corrupt and that *invaderet* (attack) may have been intended to be *devoraret* (devour).<sup>226</sup> His argument is compelling, and strongly suggests that Suetonius' intention for this passage was for it to be read as an act of oral sex. Like Tiberius engaging in *cunnilingus*, Nero has placed himself in the receptive role in the sexual act. As I have previously mentioned (see 2.2, above), Suetonius' allusions to men and women tied to stakes recalls the punishments of prisoners that would take place in the arena. As such, Nero is performing oral sex on people implied to be of far lesser social station than

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<sup>225</sup> So, too, does Domitian who inserts fire into the genitals of conspirators (*Dom.* 10)

<sup>226</sup> Power (2014), 207.



himself. The act of oral sex itself is particularly degrading, but the discrepancy in their social status makes it all the more so. Nero's body has been corrupted and he has lost his masculine bodily integrity.

Suetonius continues his evidence of Nero's lack of *pudicitia* with an account of Nero's relationship with Doryphorus. He states, 'when he had raged enough [with the animal game], he would be "skewered" by his freedman Doryphorus, whom he even married, and was wife to this man just as Sporus was with him, and he even imitated the cries and wails of virgins being raped' (29). Suetonius makes a pun on Doryphorus' name, which means 'spear-bearer' in Greek.<sup>227</sup> Nero has been penetrated by Doryphorus' 'spear'. There could be no plainer meaning; Nero was the receptive partner in this exchange. Men traditionally acquired *virtus* within militaristic settings. Nero has forsaken the traditional uses of a spear in battle, for his own sexually perverted version. Not only is he submissive in a sexual exchange, but Suetonius takes his feminisation further with his claim that Nero played the role of wife to Doryphorus. Nero has completely transformed into a woman, there is no masculinity left in him. Suetonius' emphasis on Nero being married to Doryphorus 'as Sporus was with him' implies that Nero has even been castrated, as Sporus was earlier in the rubric (28.1). Even if the implication is not literal, Nero's actions and desires have metaphorically 'castrated' him; he is now utterly non-masculine, completely feminised and 'othered'.

Suetonius also adds the detail that Nero would imitate the cries of virgins being raped during sex (*heiulatus vim patientium virginum imitates*; 29). Suetonius' Nero is a man who makes a mockery of the pain of being the receptive partner. The rubric began with a rape, that of a Vestal (28.1), and ends with the rape of Nero himself. But this latter rape is still more perverted, one in which the 'victim', Nero himself, desires the rape. As with Suetonius' emphasis on how Caligula was 'exhausted' by Valerius Catullus, Nero's 'rape' is not gentle. Nero craves the pain and he craves to be submissive.<sup>228</sup> Such desires are utterly unmasculine. Nero holds none of the authority and dignity necessary for leadership and shows active contempt for these virtues. By throwing away all pretence of his masculinity, Nero is no longer fit to hold power.

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<sup>227</sup> See n. 185, above.

<sup>228</sup> The pleasure of the receptive partner is not normally taken into account in normative Roman sexual practice. While the receptive partner could receive pleasure, the sexual act was seen primarily as a means to satisfy the insertive partner. Parker (1997), 55-6.

Domitian, too, is emasculated through his sexual submission. From the very beginning of the *Life*, Suetonius tells the reader that Domitian was sexually deviant. At 1.1 the reader learns that Domitian spent his adolescence and young adulthood ‘engaging in scandal’ (*infamia gessisse*). Suetonius then provides two instances of Domitian’s lack of sexual virtue, stating that everyone knew a letter existed in Domitian’s handwriting where he promised a ‘night’ (*nox*) with Clodius Pollio, and that Domitian was seduced by Nerva, the emperor who soon (*mox*) succeeded him (1.1). Both men are of senatorial rank, but the Flavian *gens* came from plebeian beginnings.<sup>229</sup> Domitian’s submission emphasises his less-than-distinguished status in relation to other senatorial men. Suetonius’ reference to Domitian’s sexual submission could be seen as a way for the family to ‘get ahead’. Michael Charles has suggested that Suetonius’ use of *mox* may imply that the relationship with Nerva occurred during Domitian’s reign, when he was an adult, rather than when he was a youth.<sup>230</sup> If that is the case, Domitian’s bodily integrity is still further compromised by an act that may have been excusable in his youth.

Suetonius also states that while retreating from Vitellius’ army, Domitian ‘spent the night’ (*pernoctavit*) in the quarters of a temple attendant from the temple of Isis, and disguised in an attendant’s clothing he hid amongst them. Priests of the cult were eunuchs, seemingly appropriate bedtime companions for a man who has also lost his masculinity through his sexual submission to Pollio and Nerva.<sup>231</sup> While Domitian might still have his genitals, the symbolism should not be lost. Domitian is thus emasculated and further feminised in this passing reference to the cult of Isis. The suggestion that he lacks the manly courage needed to lead is further emphasised by the fact that the night in the temple was during a military retreat. The reference to the military retreat is bookended by two tales of sexual submission, the first to Pollio and Nerva, and the last to the eunuchs of the cult of Isis.<sup>232</sup> The allusions to his military retreat should not be separated from these tales of sexual submission. Domitian’s leadership and authority are called into question due to his lack of masculinity. Suetonius implies, through these references, that Domitian’s lack of *virtus* is the reason for his military failure.

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<sup>229</sup> *Vesp.* 1.1-3

<sup>230</sup> Charles (2006), 83.

<sup>231</sup> Edwards (2000), 353.

<sup>232</sup> What role Domitian took in the intercourse with the eunuchs is left to the imagination. Presumably, he was the penetrative partner, as eunuchs would struggle to sustain an erection. Nevertheless, the reference to the cult is what emasculates Domitian, not the role he played in the intercourse.

Through these various tales of the emperors' sexual submission, Suetonius leads the reader to infer that the men have destroyed the better part of their *virtus*. Their status, as *vir*, has been compromised. But this is also achieved in another way in these rubrics, when an emperor is likened to animals. Rather than being feminised in these exchanges, he is dehumanised.<sup>233</sup> His status as a *vir* has been diminished, and he lacks masculine control of the self.

This is the case in the *Tiberius*, where Suetonius makes several allusions to Tiberius' goatish behaviour. The first is the pun at 43.2, where Suetonius states that 'those at the time used to commonly misname the island *Caprineum* (goatish-place)'. Tiberius' sexual escapades predominantly took place on Capri, and so Suetonius makes a pun on the Latin term *caper* (goat), and the island's name. Suetonius concludes the rubric with another reference to Tiberius' goatish nature, giving a quote from the Atellan farce that states 'the old goat (*hircus*) is licking the sex of the does' (45). Neither of these two references to goats are Suetonius' own invention (or so he says),<sup>234</sup> but the symmetry of these references, one at the beginning and one at the end of the rubric, around such uncontrollable sexual behaviour, makes an emotive impact. Mallonia, too, likens him to an animal when she castigates the 'hairy and stinky old man for the foulness of his mouth' (*obscaenitate oris hirsuto atque olido seni*; 45). Like a goat, or the satyrs of comedy, Tiberius is reduced to a randy animal, intent on fulfilling his sexual urges.<sup>235</sup>

Likewise, Nero is also dehumanised through references to his animalistic behaviour. Nero would 'disguise himself in the pelt of a wild animal and be let out from a cage' to attack/devour men and women tied to stakes (29). He assumes the role of an animal, wearing the pelts, being caged, and using his mouth as a 'weapon' to perform the sexual act. As with the allusions to goats in the Tiberian rubric, Nero is associated with an animal, except this one is wild (*fera*), unlike the more domesticated goat. That Nero is let loose from a cage serves as an apt metaphor for Nero's savagery and lack of restraint. In this tale, Nero throws

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<sup>233</sup> Seneca (*Clem.* 1.5.5) connects animalistic rage and behaviour with a loss of manhood.

<sup>234</sup> The pun on the island is said by 'those at the time' (43.2) and the Atellan farce line was 'spread with the greatest approval' (45). Suetonius often reports the words of others. Whether this is the truth or a rhetorical 'trick' to lend him credibility amongst his readership cannot be known. See n. 62, above, for Suetonius' false impartiality.

<sup>235</sup> For allusions to the lusty nature of goats see: Plautus, *Mostell.* 40, *Merc.* 273-75, 575, *Pseud.* 738; Columella, *Rust.* 7.6.4; Horace, *Carm.* 1.17.1 & 7, 3.13.3-5, *Epod.* 10.23, 12.5, *Epist.* 1.5.29, *Sat.* 1.2.27, 1.4.92.

off all pretence of a respectable masculine image for himself. Instead, he is ruled by passions. He is an animal operating on base instinct.

In these two allusions to animalistic urges within Tiberius and Nero, Suetonius makes it clear that they have relinquished their *virtus*. As well as being feminised, as is common in tales of sexual submission, these emperors have become dehumanised. They are non-*vir*. Their animalistic instincts set them apart from the rationality of Roman men. The reader is persuaded to judge them as lacking the necessary masculine virtues of *continentia*, *moderatio*, and *abstinentia*. In this way, dehumanisation is also linked with feminisation. Suetonius' tales of the emperors' sexual submission to others also invites the reader to make a moral judgement, one where they deem the emperor as devoid of the *virtus* necessary to hold power. Through their sexual submission, they have allowed another to exert power and control over their bodies. They have been violated, and their bodily integrity (*pudicitia*), their masculinity, has been corrupted. They are effeminate and have shown themselves to be lacking in manly virtues. By actively relinquishing these virtues, they have corrupted themselves, and by extension, the Empire as well.

### 3.2 Sexual Deviancy as an Abuse of Power.

As sexual relationships in the ancient world were built upon and relied upon a power imbalance between the two partners, they become a particularly emotive way for ancient writers to explore the nature of power. It is important that we read these power dynamics into Suetonius' tales of sexual deviancy. Something that is striking throughout the rubrics on sex within Suetonius' *Caesares* is his emphasis upon the victims. These are almost always innocent victims made to bear the brunt of the tyrannical control and authority of the emperor. They are often explicitly named, and when they are not, their social class is usually indicated through Suetonius' choice of vocabulary. Through their degradation and humiliation, the reader is invited to view them in a sympathetic light. These descriptions of sexual deviancy in the tyrannical lives are designed to illustrate how these emperors' abuse of power extends even to the most intimate areas of life. This occurs in various ways within the text, but some of the most common ways of demonstrating an abuse of power is through the use of violence or force upon the victims, through the seduction or coercion of the victims, or through the humiliation of the victims, often in public settings.

The explicit use of violence is present in two of the tales that Suetonius tells. The first

is that of Tiberius' rape of two religious attendants. Suetonius reports that 'once, while conducting a sacrifice, he was seized by the sight of the attendant carrying the incense, and, unable to abstain (*abstinere*), with the ceremony barely finished, he drew him aside and raped (*constupraret*) him and his brother, the flute-player, at the very same time. And afterwards, when both boys complained of their disgrace (*flagitium*), he had their legs broken' (44.2). Tiberius has committed a rape within a religious precinct, and upon two religious attendants. The impiety of this act should not be understated. Tiberius, himself, is a religious leader, the conductor of this sacrifice. That he himself has defiled the sacrifice is demonstrative of his neglect of the state as he has violated the *pax deorum*, inciting the anger of the gods. Tiberius abuses his power not only by raping the boys, but also in the aftermath, breaking their legs when they speak out against him. Their bodily integrity has been violated through their rape, but also through the breaking of their bones.<sup>236</sup> Furthermore, they cannot seek justice for the crimes committed against them. When they attempt to speak out, they are physically tormented. The oppression of these two boys can be metaphorically extended to all of Tiberius' subjects. The message is clear. Tiberius has complete control over all of his subjects' bodies and any attempt to 'speak out' or protest will be instantly and violently repressed.

Nero's rape of the Vestal Virgin is particularly demonstrative of his abuse of power. Suetonius explicitly calls this a rape, stating *vestali virgini Rubriae vim intulit* (28.1). The use of *vim intulit* as the verb ensures that Nero's more dominant and powerful position over others is expressed through this sexual dynamic. This is the only mention of Rubria, and with no other references to a Vestal Virgin breaking her oath during Nero's reign, the rumour is almost certainly a fabrication.<sup>237</sup> Whether Suetonius invented it himself or is simply reporting a rumour that existed is not known. Nevertheless, the presence of this anecdote at the beginning of the rubric accentuates Nero's willingness to abuse his power. The virginity of the Vestals was sacrosanct. If one was compromised, it symbolised the ruin of the Roman

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<sup>236</sup> Suetonius is vague about the social status of the two religious attendants, and they may be slaves. If they are slaves, Tiberius has the legal right to use their bodies however he wishes, including raping them and breaking their legs. Even so, the Romans did have a sense of what was a 'reasonable' punishment, even for a slave. Galen (*On the Passions and Errors of the Soul* 4) mentions a similar episode where the emperor Hadrian, in a fit of anger, gouged out one of his slaves' eyes. Hadrian offered the slave a gift as recompense. There is an acknowledgement here, that violence performed in anger is unnecessary. The act of breaking the legs is surely an indication that Tiberius' punishment of the boys was unnecessary and performed in anger. Tiberius has now rendered the slaves useless.

<sup>237</sup> Bradley (1978, 160) is hesitant to dismiss it outright as fiction. Although with no other record of the event it is likely that the tale is false.

state.<sup>238</sup> That Nero himself is the one to do so in Suetonius' narrative, serves as a metaphor for Nero bringing about his own ruin, and by implication the ruin of the state, through his lusts. Nero has abused his power to metaphorically 'fuck' the state of Rome.

Victims may not always be explicitly raped in Suetonius' narrative; oftentimes they will be seduced, coerced or molested. This is implied in Suetonius' tales of Tiberius' abuse of the young boys and infants on Capri (44.1). Tiberius 'trained' (*institueret*) boys of a young and delicate age, whom he called 'little fishies' (*pisciculi*), to arouse him with licks and nibbles. He also 'directed' (*admoveret*) infants to his penis. Suetonius' choice of verbs (*institueret* and *admoveret*) imply coercion. Furthermore, the ages of the boys are far beyond normal pederastic desires in Roman men. These boys are dehumanised 'little fishies' (*pisciculi*) forced to swim amongst his thighs. The abuse of toddlers and infants is particularly demonstrative of Tiberius' abuse of power. They are entirely innocent victims, even by Roman standards.

The impact that the emperors' sexual deviancies have upon victims' lives is also of primary importance in the *Nero*. Suetonius begins the rubric by stating that Nero made prostitutes (*concupinatus*) of freeborn boys and married women (28.1). Suetonius has scattered some passing references to Nero's sexual tastes in the chapters just prior to the rubric on sex. The reader is informed that Nero molested (*adrectaverat*) a senatorial man's wife (26.2), and that as Nero proceeded down the shores of the Tiber he visited 'respectable women (*matronae*) pretending to be dancing girls (*copae*)' (27.3). The rubric begins just after this reference where Suetonius makes it a point to emphasise the social status of Nero's victims. The boys are *inguenui* (freeborn) and the women are *nuptae*, married or soon-to-be married (28.1). The references to a senatorial woman and *matronae* in the previous rubric serve to add to Nero's list of respectable victims. These are persons who have a right to bodily integrity, and Nero has reduced them to something lesser. Their namelessness allows Suetonius' readership to picture themselves within the narrative, living under oppressive tyrants.

Domitian, too, is a seducer of respectable women. At the beginning of the *Life*, after Suetonius has detailed Domitian's sexual submission and his escapades in the temple of Isis, he states that 'after having sex with many married women (*uxores*)', he abducted (*abduxit*)

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<sup>238</sup> See Beard (1980) and (1996) for the sexual status of the Vestals. Also Parker (2004).

Domitia Longina from her husband Aelius Lamia and married her (1.3). Suetonius states later that Domitian divorced Domitia, only to take her back because he could not bear the separation (3.1). Domitian's behaviour towards respectable women matches that of Nero. He treats them as if they are of lesser status, as prostitutes, to be picked up and discarded at will.

Suetonius ends the rubric with the tale of Domitian's incest with his niece, Julia, who received similar treatment. He states that 'he defiled (*corruptit*) her, when she was married to someone else, even with Titus still living at the time' (22). Like with his treatment of Domitia, and now with Julia, Domitian cannot control his own desires. He abuses his power in order to satiate his lusts, stealing the woman he wants from her husband. His victims are abducted (*abducere*) or defiled (*corrumpere*) and have no agency. They are mere objects for Domitian to use. Furthermore, Julia is vulnerable, without the protection of her father or husband. She serves as an example of the unchecked power of Domitian once his brother dies. Waiting for her husband's and father's death in order to openly claim Julia as his own shows how Domitian abused his ascension to power in order to fulfil his lusts.

But perhaps the most deviant part of this tale is the final detail. Suetonius concludes the rubric by stating that Domitian caused Julia's death, by forcing her to abort the child which was conceived by him. Domitian has complete control over her body. Such a tale graphically illustrates Domitian's abuse of power. Not only has his lust led to the death of a respectable woman, but she was his own family. After the death of her father and husband she would only have the protection of Domitian. By corrupting her and causing her death, Domitian has violated his familial duty. He has also murdered a potential heir.<sup>239</sup> Julia's death, and that of his unborn child, serve as a reminder of the downfall of the Flavian dynasty. With the destruction of her and her child, all hope of its future has been lost.

Each of these victims described above had a right to bodily integrity that was violated by the emperor. He abuses the power he holds, and the victims serve as metaphors for all subjects under tyrannical rule. Sometimes, Suetonius will increase the emotional intensity of these tales by drawing attention to the victims' humiliation, suffered at the hands of the emperor.

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<sup>239</sup> While a bastard child could not inherit, there were a number of ways Domitian could get around this law. He could marry Julia before the birth of the child, or force Julia to marry another while adopting the child himself.

This is the case with Tiberius' treatment of Mallonia in Chapter 45. She was a noblewoman, although whether she actually existed is not known. Mallonia is 'brought' (*perductam*) to Tiberius, but refuses him 'most firmly' (*constantissime*). I have already argued that the associations between her plight and those of Lucretia and Verginia serve to emphasise Tiberius' tyrannical qualities (see 2.3.ii, above). Here I wish to draw attention to the humiliation she faces in the trial. Mallonia is repeatedly asked if she were sorry (*ecquid paeniteret*), presumably for refusing Tiberius. This episode in particular demonstrates Tiberius' abuse of power, ensuring that an innocent, upper-class woman is publicly humiliated because of her refusal to fulfil his unnatural lusts. The farce of a trial that she is put through also resembles the similarly farcical *maiestas* trials that Tiberius would later implement (61.1-6).<sup>240</sup> Mallonia, therefore, becomes one of the first victims of Tiberius' cruelty within the Suetonian narrative. Her tale reflects the lack of legal avenues available for those bringing charges against the emperor. Her only avenue for free speech, for *libertas*, is her suicide, where she loudly (*clare*) castigates him. She serves as an example of the oppression of tyrannical regimes, and the restrictions on freedom of speech that occur under their rule.

The humiliation of victims is also particularly evident in Suetonius' rubric on Caligula's sexual misdeeds, when he relates the anecdote of Caligula's treatment of his dinner party guests (36.2). The critique of the women's sexual performance in which Caligula engages would more likely have been directed at prostitutes in the ancient world, and thus was a way in which he debased the status of these *matronae*. The women are appraised in a 'classic tyrant-tableau' as if Caligula were picking out slaves at the market (*mercantium more considerabat*).<sup>241</sup> The allusion to slavery is utterly humiliating, metaphorically lowering them to a state far less than their senatorial status. The slavery metaphor would be particularly emotive to Roman audiences. Suetonius draws attention to the complete control that Caligula has over these women's bodies, as he can 'raise their heads with his hand if they had modestly looked downwards' (36.2). This lack of bodily autonomy is the mark of slavery. Caligula holds ultimate power, and without any proper systems in place to keep him accountable, he can abuse his power over others, exactly as a master does a slave.

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<sup>240</sup> For Tiberius' *maiestas* trials see Rutledge (2001), 89-102. For *maiestas* more generally see Bauman (1967) and (1974).

<sup>241</sup> Barton (1994), 54.



The act is also humiliating for the men, who are meant to own and control their wives. That Caligula now has this power, and is flaunting it in front of them at dinner, is a humiliating act in itself. Caligula has violated the sanctity of the family, and has also shown a disregard for the laws of hospitality. The humiliation only deepens when Caligula returns to the dinner party with signs of his recent sexual acts on him and then proceeds to critique the women's sexual performance. Not only are the men at the dinner party forced to acknowledge that they do not hold authority over their own wives, but they are also forced to hear Caligula talk about the sexual encounters directly to their faces. These men are meant to be able to protect their wives from this treatment. Caligula ensures they fail in this duty. The humiliation of these men culminates in the issuing of divorce notices by Caligula to their wives in the men's names. Legally, Caligula has no power to do such a thing, and yet Caligula takes that extra step. The wives are guilty of an adultery that has been forced on them.<sup>242</sup> Caligula is both the criminal and the judge. Suetonius' focus on the repercussions for the victims involved in this anecdote allows the reader to sympathise with their plight. Caligula has demonstrated his complete control over their lives, and the reader thus determines Caligula's actions to be the most blatant abuse of his power.

Suetonius' emphasis on the victims in these tales draws attention to the corrupting force of the tyrannical emperors. The victims are almost always innocent and defenceless and are forced or coerced into the sexual act. The sexual abuse they face serves as *exempla* of the oppressive nature of tyrannical rule. Through them, the reader connects emotionally to the powerlessness of Roman subjects under the dominion of tyrants like Tiberius, Caligula, Nero, and Domitian.

There is one notable final aspect of the rubrics on sex that is unique to the *Nero*. Nero's sexual deviancies are linked directly to his public administration of the Empire. Within his rubric, Suetonius repeatedly reinforces the point that Nero neglects his public duties and does not listen to his advisors. The first example of this is in Suetonius' tale of how Nero attempted to make his freedwoman, Acte, his wife. Nero uses corrupt politicians to swear that Acte is of royal birth in order to legally marry her (28.1). Although the marriage never actually took place, this anecdote demonstrates Nero's willingness to misuse the administration of the empire and the corruption that occurs at a state level in order for Nero to

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<sup>242</sup> See Gardner (1986, 127-131) on Roman adultery laws.

pursue his private lusts.

Nero takes his abuse of power to new extremes in the Sporus episode. While Nero did not marry Acte, he does “marry” his slave-boy Sporus. Nero’s treatment of Sporus is particularly transgressive and arrogant. Sporus is forced into a womanly role. Nero has him castrated and then dresses him in the proper clothes for an ‘appropriate ceremony’ (28.1). The wedding itself is an abuse of power, as Nero cannot legally marry a slave, let alone a male one.<sup>243</sup> The attempt to change Sporus’ very nature (*natura*) from man into woman demonstrates an almost insane desire within Nero.<sup>244</sup> He is so far removed from the reality of his imperial position, and the need for heirs, that he would rather have a boy as his wife than a noblewoman. The Sporus anecdote shows that Nero has forsaken his imperial duties in order to pursue personal pleasures. His sham of a marriage exemplifies Nero’s neglect for the state.

Nero’s abuse of power over particular individuals also extends to his own mother, Agrippina the Younger. Suetonius states, ‘no one doubted that he desired to sleep with his mother, but was discouraged by her detractors, lest this arrogant and unbridled woman grow more powerful through this kind of favour’ (28.2). While Suetonius uses this anecdote to illustrate the same excessive lust and abuse of power that has already been seen in this rubric, the added incestuous element makes this episode a monstrous culmination of Nero’s abuse of his position. Suetonius states Nero was held back by advisors who feared that a sexual relationship would grant Agrippina too much power over Nero. Nero directly goes against the advice of his advisors, who act as stand-ins for the opinions of the *populus*. Such arrogant attitudes, particularly from a young and inexperienced emperor, shows his disregard for the power that he holds.

Suetonius’ account of the incest also makes Nero the instigator of the affair. Tacitus and Dio state the opposite, with Agrippina being the one to seduce Nero in order to gain more political influence.<sup>245</sup> The centrality of Nero in Suetonius’ narrative is partly due to the nature

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<sup>243</sup> The marriage may well have been a ‘farce’ as Champlin (2003, 149) claims. Sporus was likely a slave, although Charles (2014, 668) has suggested the possibility that he was a *libertus*. There is no legal precedent for a senatorial man marrying a slave of either gender. The marriage would have likely have been illegal and it was essentially useless, as no offspring could be born from the union. On Roman marriage laws see Treggiari (1991) and Gardner (1986, ch. 3).

<sup>244</sup> Suetonius encapsulates a double meaning of *natura*, meaning both ‘nature’ and ‘genitals’. *OLD* s.v. 1; 15.

<sup>245</sup> Tac. *Ann.* 14.2; Dio 61.11.3-4.

of biography, because the emperor is the central character and the prime mover of most actions. But Suetonius does, on occasion, have the emperor act as a passive player.<sup>246</sup> That Suetonius chooses not to do the same in this case, and instead make Nero himself responsible for the incestuous relations, is telling; he characterises Nero as a man whose personal faults are the reason for his own downfall.

Suetonius ends the rubric by summarising Nero's general views towards sex. Nero believed no man's body was pure and chaste but that most men simply concealed their sexual vices (29). Moreover, Nero made no effort to regulate or control sexual deviancies, believing that others should be forgiven (29). Nero's sexual actions, therefore, are reflected in his public policy. Whereas other emperors, such as Augustus or Claudius, introduced laws that restricted sexual behaviour and promoted marital ideals, Nero sees no reason to do this.<sup>247</sup> With this final statement Suetonius explicitly links Nero's personal deviancies with public administration of the empire. Believing everyone to be as morally corrupt as him, he makes no attempt to serve as a moral exemplar for the citizens. Through Nero's influence, Rome is doomed to decline into immorality. How Nero's sexual behaviour reflects upon his values for the state is essential. Suetonius' description of Nero's sexual behaviour serves as an exemplar for how Nero disrespects the power of the emperor and the welfare of the state.

### 3.3 Conclusion.

In this chapter, I have demonstrated the emotive impact that tales of sexual deviancy would have upon Suetonius' readers. Sex and power were intrinsically linked in the Roman mindset. A focus upon sexual relationships, therefore, becomes a prime means for ancient writers to explore how an emperor exercised his power over others. Like the other rubrics within the *Caesares*, Suetonius' rubrics on sex guide the reader to make a moral judgement about the emperor, persuading them to see the men as either virtuous or full of vice.

I demonstrated that Suetonius' tales of sexual submission invite the reader to view the tyrannical emperors as effeminate. Tiberius is feminised through the inverted motherly role

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<sup>246</sup> See n. 29, above. For instance, Suetonius lists a series of natural disasters that occurred during Nero's reign (*Ner.* 39.1). He admits Nero is not at fault for any of them.

<sup>247</sup> *Aug.* 34.1; *Claud* 23.1. Augustus introduced the *Lex Iulia de maritandis ordinibus* and the *Lex Iulia de adulteriis coercendis* in 17 BC. These were supplemented by the *Lex Papia Poppaea* in AD 9. See Frank (1975) for Augustus' moral legislation. Claudius amended the *Lex Papia Poppaea*, presumably ensuring that men past the age of sixty could not be penalised for not fathering children. Hurley (2001), 162.

he plays over the infants, feeding them semen instead of mother's milk. In this act, Tiberius has lost some of *virtus*, his masculine virtue. The blatant sexual submission of the other three, Caligula, Nero, and Domitian, also serves to exemplify their lack of *virtus*. Their bodily integrity has been compromised and they have become non-*viri*. This non-*vir* state is also achieved by dehumanising the emperors, as Suetonius does by likening Tiberius to a goat and Nero to a wild beast. The sexual misdeeds of Tiberius, Caligula, Nero, and Domitian clearly lead the reader to the conclusion that these are not even men, let alone men fit to wield power.

In the latter half of this chapter, I have shown how Suetonius enables the reader to emotionally connect with the plight of the tyrannical emperors' victims, highlighting their abuse of power. Tiberius' rape of the religious attendants, and the physical repercussions of their attempt to speak out against him, demonstrate how much violence and force an emperor could utilise. Nero's rape of a Vestal Virgin is also an act of violence and shows how the emperor's sexual abuse of his victims can lead to the metaphorical ruin of the state. Suetonius' tyrannical emperors also demonstrate their abuse of power through the seduction and coercion of various victims. The 'little fishies' of Tiberius are 'trained' (*institueret*) or 'directed' (*admoveret*) to perform oral sex upon him. Nero, too, 'molests' (*adtrectare*) and coerces senatorial women and freeborn boys. Domitian 'abducted' (*abduxit*) Domitia and 'defiled' (*corruptit*) Julia. Suetonius' choice of vocabulary in these tales serves to amplify the lack of agency of the victims. These victims are reduced from noble or free-born status to mere objects for the emperor to abuse. Suetonius also draws attention to the humiliation faced by the emperors' victims. Tiberius' treatment of Mallonia serves to publicly shame her in the courts, forcing her to suicide in her attempt to regain her honour. Caligula's treatment of senatorial wives at dinner parties humiliates not only the women, but their husbands as well. In these demonstrations of the emperor's power, they are degraded to servile status.

Within the *Nero*, Suetonius also demonstrates how an emperor's sexual deviancies are linked to the public administration of the state. Nero bribes senators to swear Acte is of noble birth so that he can marry her. He forsakes his duty to produce heirs by marrying a slave-boy, and he refuses to heed the counsel of his advisors on his mother, Agrippina, committing incest with her and thus violating a sacred family bond. Suetonius concludes the rubric with the note that Nero took no action against those who confessed their sexual misdeeds to him. Nero takes no action on public morals, and through his direct action, or rather inaction, the people of Rome suffer.

How the emperor abuses his power is of paramount importance to Suetonius, whether that abuse is through violence and force, through coercion, through humiliation, or through the corruption of public institutions. Suetonius' examples show the reader how tyrannical emperors behave when they have total control. The abuses they inflict upon their victims exemplify their antipathy for the people of Rome, and their neglect of the state.

This chapter has shown that Suetonius' inclusion of sexual material is more than just prurient gossip. Instead, Suetonius chooses anecdotes that demonstrate how an emperor abuses his power. He guides the reader to judge the emperors as effeminate and abusive tyrants, ignoring the needs of the state to pursue their deviant pleasures.

## Conclusion

The broad aim of this thesis was to show that Suetonius' *Caesares* are not impartial or a compilation of facts but are morally charged and carefully structured. Suetonius' judgements are not as explicitly pronounced as those of his contemporaries, but they do still exist. Suetonius judges the emperors, and invites his readers to make the same judgements, through the use of stock characters. The tyrannical characterisation of Tiberius, Caligula, Nero, and Domitian is achieved by them behaving in the stereotypical manner of tyrants.

This thesis has specifically sought to interpret sexual behaviour as a part of Suetonius' characterisation. These rubrics on sex are not merely gossip but are part of Suetonius' moral programme. How a Roman man behaves in sexual acts can demonstrate a multitude of vices. These rubrics are constructed with considerable rhetorical skill, influencing the reader to judge these men as tyrants who are justifiably removed from power.

The first chapter of this thesis demonstrated that Suetonius employs the tyrant archetype in his depictions of Tiberius, Caligula, Nero, and Domitian. I began by exploring what the term *tyrannus* meant in the antique world. Through an analysis of early Greek fragments and Herodotus' description of a tyrant, I demonstrated that sexual crimes had been a standard aspect of the tyrannical stereotype, even in the Greek world. I also examined the term *tyrannus* in the Roman setting, demonstrating that it had similar negative connotations as terms such as *rex* or *dominatio*.

I also examined the stock behaviour of the tyrannical figure. This character would display four standard vices: *saevitia/crudelitas* (cruelty), *vis* (force/violence), *superbia* (arrogance), and *libido* (lust). These first three vices demonstrate the tyrant's abuse of power and disregard for the state. The vice of *libido* deserved my particular attention, as it demonstrated, most clearly, that tyrants were defined not just by bad deeds, but by their internal thoughts and character. Tyrannical men have a propensity to indulge in excessive lust and hold absolute power which allows them the license to fulfil this lust without fear of consequences. This indulgence makes them soft (*mollis*), and they are thus set in opposition to the Stoic principles of the elite class that demanded men should exhibit moderation (*moderatio*), restraint (*abstinentia*), and self-control (*continentia*).

I also analysed a range of tyrannical figures from a variety of genres to demonstrate that

sexual deviancy was a standard part of the tyrant archetype in the Roman world. Figures from the stage, such as Accius' Tereus or Seneca's Lycus show that rape appears to be a standard behaviour of the tyrant. This much is confirmed by Cicero's invective against Verres, who rapes various Sicilian citizens. Cicero's invective also demonstrates other standard sexual behaviours of tyrants, including the incest of Clodius Pulcher, and the effeminacy of the womaniser Mark Antony. In historical works, too, such as those of Sallust and Livy, sexual crimes served as examples of the men's tyrannical character and as justifications for why Catiline, or the Tarquins and Appius Claudius, were unfit for power.

Suetonius builds upon this rich tradition of the tyrant archetype, when creating his characterisations of Tiberius, Caligula, Nero, and Domitian. All four of these men exhibit the standard vices of the rhetorical tyrant. Through this analysis I justified why Suetonius chose to include such detailed accounts of the emperors' sexual habits. Just like rubrics on public building works, or military exploits, Suetonius' rubrics on sex were another realm in which the reader is invited to judge the emperor's performance. This chapter ultimately demonstrated that rubrics on sex influence the reader to judge Tiberius, Caligula, Nero, and Domitian as abusive tyrants.

Chapter 2 analysed how Suetonius manipulates the reader's viewpoint through his use of rhetorical techniques within the rubrics on sex. In doing so, it aimed to demonstrate that Suetonius was not a simple compiler of facts or anecdotes, but rather that his narrative is carefully constructed in order to draw the reader's attention to the character portrait he creates of each emperor. Suetonius includes the rubrics on sex within the 'public' sections of the *Life*, with a clear inference that the emperors' sexual deviancies were a matter of public policy and public concern. The emperor was responsible for choosing an appropriate wife, and producing an heir. Sexual behaviour that was not in accordance with these aims was condemned. I also showed how the rubrics on sex are placed at key points in the narrative, such as at the beginning and end (as in the *Domitian*), or at major turning points in the narrative (for instance, directly after the *divisio* in the *Tiberius*). These rubrics act as a quick and effective way of establishing the emperors' tyrannical character to the reader.

This chapter also discussed the importance of the narrative arrangement in each individual rubric. Within three of the four tyrannical *Lives*, Suetonius uses a climactic arrangement, where the rubric progresses with a *gradatio* effect as each new rumour becomes

more deviant and abhorrent than the last. This kind of effect ensures that the final anecdote is the one which lingers in the reader's mind as they progress through the narrative, and so it is the emperor's worst deeds that are remembered. Within each rubric, Suetonius draws attention to the emperors' particular 'brand' of tyranny. Tiberius' sexual acts are particularly violent and cruel, Nero's are especially brazen, and Domitian's accentuate his excessiveness and lowly plebeian origins. Within the *Caligula*, I also demonstrated that Suetonius uses climactic arrangement within the final anecdote to highlight Caligula's arrogance. This kind of climactic progression demonstrates that Suetonius' tyrannical emperors lack self-control. It gives the reader the impression that the emperors fall further and further into a life of vice. They cannot, and indeed choose not to, pull themselves out of these depths.

Chapter 2 also examined Suetonius' use of two other rhetorical techniques: pluralisation and contrast. His use of pluralisation ensures that the reader views the emperors' sexual deviancies as habitual and regular behaviour. Through his use of contrast, the emperors are made to appear all the more abhorrent compared to their virtuous victims. All of the rhetorical techniques that Suetonius uses in these rubric draws the reader's attention to the worst aspects of the emperor, cementing Suetonius' tyrannical characterisation of Tiberius, Caligula, Nero, and Domitian.

The final chapter of this thesis took the findings from the first two chapters, and sought to determine why Suetonius chose to use sexual behaviour as a rubric at all. Suetonius' rubrics all seek to praise or condemn emperors on their behaviour in certain spheres. I demonstrated that sexual behaviour was a vital area in which tyrannical character could be shown. Through my analysis of the passages, I showed that tales of the emperors' sexual submission served to feminise and dehumanise them. By allowing themselves to be penetrated, Caligula, Nero, and Domitian have corrupted and violated their bodies. Their actions debase and degrade them, reducing them to persons of lesser status. Their actions emasculate them, turning them into non-*vir*. As such, they exist in some liminal space, othered to a realm where they are not quite men, but not wholly women either. This non-*vir* status is also achieved through various references to the animalistic features of the emperors' desires. Tiberius behaves like a randy goat, lacking the human qualities of restraint. Nero himself actually becomes an animal, albeit in disguise. The bodies of Tiberius and Nero have not just been degraded, but have metaphorically transformed into non-human form. They exist on animal instinct, forgoing human rationality and control. Proper Roman men rule by



virtue of being *viri*, and justify their rule through the possession of virtues such as rationality and control. As non-*viri*, Suetonius' tyrannical emperors lack the masculinity necessary for the role of emperor. Through their sexual submission, they have demonstrated that they lack control over themselves. They have allowed other men into positions where they have power over the emperor, demonstrating that the Empire itself is not within their control. When Suetonius provides anecdotes that describe the emperors' sexual submission, he is asking the reader to make a moral judgement about the emperor, one which Suetonius has already predetermined. In effect, the reader is led to decide that Tiberius, Caligula, Nero, and Domitian are utterly non-masculine and are incapable of effectively ruling the Empire, preferring to use their power to pursue personal pleasures.

I have also shown how Suetonius' emphasis on the emperors' sexual victims serves as a way for the reader to connect emotionally to their abuses. These victims serve as extended metaphors for all persons living under the oppression of tyrannical rule. By naming the emperors' victims or making explicit references to their freeborn status, Suetonius influences his readers to empathise with the victims in the tales. The bodily integrity of virgins, noblewomen, and freeborn males was paramount. These people are the very citizens that the emperor should be protecting. Instead, he has violated them. When their bodies are compromised and controlled by another, as Tiberius, Caligula, Nero, and Domitian do, they are reduced to slaves who lacked the right to the control of their own bodies. The restrictions upon the victims' freedoms also associated them with servile status. They cannot refuse the emperor's propositions and their *libertas* is also violated when they cannot speak out against the emperor. If they attempt to, then they are punished most cruelly. They are, effectively, silenced. Within these tales, Suetonius' readers are invited to view the victims' shattered lives. The oppression that they face represents the oppression of all of the subjects under a tyrant.

This thesis has demonstrated that Suetonius characterises Tiberius, Caligula, Nero, and Domitian as sexually deviant tyrants. These men possess *libido*, which they enact in self-indulgent and abusive ways. They lack moderation (*moderatio*), restraint (*abstinentia*) and self-control (*continentia*), all key virtues in Roman moral discourses. Through these virtues, a man could lead the state effectively and for the benefit of the people. Suetonius implies this when he ends his *Caesares* looking forward to the *moderatio* and *abstinentia* displayed by future emperors. Without these virtues a man would descend to a life of vice, pursuing

personal pleasures and neglecting his duties. This is exactly the moral judgement that Suetonius invites his readers to make upon Tiberius, Caligula, Nero, and Domitian. Contrary to Wallace-Hadrill's comment at the beginning of this thesis, I have shown that Suetonius does record details of sexual life *with* condemnation and *with* relish.

## Appendix A

Table of the emperors' deviant sexual acts in the *Caesares*.

	<i>Iul.</i>	<i>Aug.</i>	<i>Tib.</i>	<i>Cal.</i>	<i>Claud.</i>	<i>Ner.</i>	<i>Gal.</i>	<i>Oth.</i>	<i>Vit.</i>	<i>Vesp.</i>	<i>Tit.</i>	<i>Dom.</i>
Plays Receptive Role?	x [49]	x* [68]		x [36.1]		x [29]		x [2.2]	x [3.2]			x [1.1]
Effeminate?	x [45]	x* [68]		x [52]		x [51]		x [12.1]				
Sex with noblewomen?	x [50-2]	x [69]	x [45]	x [36.2]		x [27-8]					x* [10.2]	x [1.3]
Commits rape?			x [44.2]			x [28.1; 35.4]			x [12]			
Incestuous?				x [24]	x [26.3]	x [28.2]						x [22]
General excess in sexual desire?			x [43-5]	x [36]		x [28-9]	x [22]		x [12]		x* [7.1]	x [22]

\* Indicates doubt on the part of Suetonius

# Appendix B

## Summary of the *Caesares*.

### Tiberius

1. Background early life (1-25)
  - i. Ancestry of the Claudian *gens* (1-4)
  - ii. Birth and childhood (5-6)
  - iii. Life up to accession (7-25)
    - a. Public life under Augustus (7-9)
    - b. Retirement to Rhodes (10-13)
    - c. Omens of his rule (14)
    - d. Tiberius becomes first in line in the succession (15)
    - e. Tiberius return to public military engagements (16-20)
    - f. Augustus' opinion of Tiberius (21)
    - g. Accession (22-5)
2. Positive/neutral aspects of his reign (26-37)
  - i. Modesty and restraint, particularly with the senate (26-32)
  - ii. Public policy and laws (33-7)
    - a. Not interfering with public trials (33)
    - b. Fiscal policy (34)
    - c. Correction of morals (35)
    - d. Religious edicts (36)
    - e. Public safety (37)
3. Negative Aspects of his reign (38-67)
  - i. Residence (38-41)
    - a. Residency in Rome (38)
    - b. Withdrawal to Capri (39-40)
    - c. Neglect of public affairs (41)
  - ii. Vices (42-67)
    - a. Excessive consumption of food and drink (42)
    - b. Sexual excess (43-5)
    - c. Stinginess and greed (46-9)
    - d. Hatred to family (50-54)
    - e. Hostility to friends (55-6)
    - f. Cruelty (57-65)
    - g. Reaction to accusations (66)
    - h. Self-hatred (67)
4. Personal habits (68-71)
  - i. Appearance and health (68)
  - ii. Attitude to religion (69)
  - iii. Literary accomplishments (70-71)
5. Death (72-6)
  - i. Illness and death (72-3)
  - ii. Omens (74)
  - iii. Reactions to his death and will (75-6)

## Caligula

1. Background and early life (1-14)
  - i. Biography of Germanicus (1-7)
  - ii. Birth and life up to accession (8-12)
  - ii. Accession and initial popularity (13-14)
2. Positive/neutral aspects of reign (15-21)
  - i. Piety towards family members (15)
  - ii. Public policy and edicts (15-16)
  - iii. Public offices and donations (17)
  - iv. Games, theatre and spectacles (18-20)
  - v. Building projects (21)
3. Negative aspects of his reign (22-49)
  - i. Arrogance and divine aspirations (22)
  - ii. Disrespect (23-6)
    - a. Towards family (23-4)
    - b. Towards wives (25)
    - c. Towards friends, Senate, *equites* and people (26)
  - iii. Cruelty (27-33)
  - iv. Envy and spite (34-5)
  - v. Sexual excess (36)
  - vi. Luxurious spending (37)
  - vii. Greed (38-42)
  - viii. Military incompetence (43-9)
4. Personal habits (50-55)
  - i. Appearance and health (50)
  - ii. Paranoia (51)
  - iii. Dressing habits (52)
  - iv. Literary and artistic pursuits (53-4)
  - v. Behaviour towards favourites (55)
5. Death and aftermath (56-60)
  - i. Formation of conspiracy (56)
  - ii. Omens and death (57)
  - iii. Death and burial (58-9)
  - iv. Aftermath (60)

## Nero

1. Background and early life (1-8)
  - i. Ancestry (1-5)
  - ii. Birth and early life (6-7)
  - iii. Accession (8)
2. Positive/neutral aspects of his reign (9-19)
  - i. Virtues (9-10)
  - ii. Sponsorship of games and spectacles (11-13)
  - iii. Public offices (14)
  - iv. Public policy and edicts (15-17)
  - v. Military pursuits (18)
  - vi. Travels abroad (19)
3. Negative aspects of his reign (20-39)
  - i. Obsession with public performance (20-25)
    - a. Music and theatre (20-21)
    - b. Chariot racing (22)
    - c. Tour of Greece and return to Rome (22-5)
  - ii. Vices (26-38)
    - a. Insolence (26-7)
    - b. Sexual excess (28-9)
    - c. Extravagance (30-31)
    - d. Greed (32)
    - e. Cruelty (36-8)
  - iii. Disasters during reign and invective against Nero (39)
4. Death (40-50)
  - i. Revolts in provinces (40-45)
  - ii. Omens (46)
  - iii. Suicide (47-9)
  - iv. Burial (50)
5. Personal habits (51-6)
  - i. Appearance (51)
  - ii. Literary pursuits (52)
  - iii. Desire for fame (53-5)
  - iv. Religious beliefs (56)
6. Aftermath to death (57)

## Domitian

1. Background and early life (1-2)
  - i. Birth and youthful lusts (1)
  - ii. Relationship with father and brother (2)
2. Positive/neutral aspects of his reign (3-9)
  - i. Beginning of reign (3)
  - ii. Games and spectacles; public donations (4)
  - iii. Building projects (5)
  - iv. Military campaigns (6)
  - v. Public policy and edicts (7-9)
3. Negative aspects of his reign (10-13)
  - i. Cruelty and deviousness (10-11)
  - ii. Greed (12)
  - iii. Arrogance (12-13)
4. Death (14-17)
  - i. Omens and fearfulness (14-16)
  - ii. Assassination (17)
5. Personal habits (18-22)
  - i. Appearance (18)
  - ii. Literary pursuits (20)
  - iii. Gambling and dining habits (21)
  - iv. Sexual excess (22)
6. Reactions to Death (23)

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