

LITERARY QUOTATION AS LITERARY PERFORMANCE IN SUETONIUS

Abstract: Most acts of literary quotation in Suetonius are ironical reflections by emperor-characters on the burdens of imperial rule, deployed at transitional moments in the biographies. Consideration of literary performance traditions in Suetonius' society, from the classroom to the recitatio to the acroamata at dinner parties, allows us to understand these transitional quotations as moments in which Suetonius' listener is invited to sympathize with the emperor-character as a fellow enthusiast for literature. The biography of Nero reverses this scheme, as Nero's quotations bathetically distance him from the listener.

“The subject of quotation being introduced,” Boswell reports, “Mr. Wilkes censured it as pedantry. JOHNSON. ‘No, Sir, it is a good thing; there is a community of mind in it. Classical quotation is the *parole* of literary men all over the world.’”¹ Dr. Johnson might further have included the ancient world, in which a literary mind like Cicero’s would instinctively sprinkle quotations, mostly poetical, into his correspondence and presumably likewise into conversation;² after all, it was such a culture of joyfully clever allusion which fostered Latin literature’s poetics of intertextuality, which could be so epically satirized in Athenaeus’ *Deipnosophistae* or Gellius’ *Noctes Atticae*.³ It is striking, however, that, as Horváth writes in his treatment of Greek

¹ Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, 8 May 1781.

² The definitive treatment is Armleder (1957), who notes that Cicero’s “quotations were employed to exhort, to inspire, to lay down rules for action and conduct, to lay bare the secret thoughts of the heart, to convey emotion, to promise assistance, to show the consequences of actions, to impart the lessons of past history, to argue philological points, to describe, to portray character and personality, and to serve as climaxes and vivid contrasts” ((1957) 96). Interestingly, Cicero’s Latin quotations, which are far outnumbered by the Greek, are more often lighthearted (Armleder (1957) 98–9). As to the degree to which styles of quotation in Cicero’s letters may be taken as indicative of quotation in spoken discourse, it is striking that, as Armleder (1957) 19–21 observes, quotations usually appear without introductory verbs; I might suggest that such use of quotation as interjection mirrors the sudden interjection of a literary quotation in educated conversation by one interlocutor.

³ On Athenaeus as satirist, see Baldwin (1976); on Gellius’ satirical aims, see Keulen (2009).

quotations in Suetonius,⁴ extended direct quotation was a late addition to Roman literature, particularly when it came to Greek authors:

It was a firmly established overall tradition that, in Latin-language literary works, at most isolated Greek words could be employed. In the writing of history, authors such as Sallust, Livy, Curtius Rufus and Tacitus never make use of an isolated Greek word. Only if no Latin equivalent was available did Cornelius Nepos twice employ Greek words and, like Vitruvius and Pliny the Elder (*NH* 2.13, 16.6) obliged to do in the same circumstance, he then asked the reader's pardon. There must therefore be a reason for the exceptionally numerous quotations in Suetonius' imperial biographies.⁵

Suetonius is thus a central figure in the Roman tradition of direct engagement with the *ipsissima verba* not only of biographical subjects but of canonical texts. Horváth concludes that Suetonius employs literature as one element in his portrayal of a Roman confrontation with Greek culture at the imperial level. While Horváth's approach is to treat Suetonius' quotations principally as evidence of Roman cultural attitudes towards Hellenism, in what follows I consider instead the structural and dramatic functions of such quotations within Suetonius' texts and the reciprocal relationship of such quotation-laden texts with the "community of mind" (in Dr. Johnson's phrase) of Roman elite culture.

Suetonius' twelve Caesars are nearly as literary as they are powerful. Notoriously, all twelve composed some written work;⁶ five were poets (usually in both Greek and Latin); three wrote their memoirs; collectively they produced handbooks on astronomy, grammar, the military art, dicing and hair-care; Claudius, of course, was a professional historian called to Empire. Secondarily but significantly, however, the Caesars are also presented by Suetonius as *performers* of literature, engaging in poetic performance at critical moments — if not of their reigns, then at least of their biographies. I shall argue that, as a narrator, Suetonius generally employs the act of literary quotation as a device to create ironic distance between an emperor's public and private characters,

⁴ Horváth (1996) 71–83.

⁵ Horváth (1996) 71–2. In what follows, translations from ancient and modern writers are my own unless noted. On Suetonius (who quotes more frequently than any Latin author whose works are not centered on quotation) as an innovator with regard to the quotation of Greek, see also Townend (1960), esp. 99–100.

⁶ Dilke (1957).

reminding his listener of the cultural background which united biographer, biography-reader and biography-listener alike with the Caesars: the practice of literary performance in ancient grammatical education. I am thus concerned not only with the depiction of “reading events”⁷ by Suetonius the historian but with how Suetonius’ text itself would function as the object of such a “reading event.”

Before I begin, a note on historicity. Few of the acts of literary quotation described by Suetonius are otherwise attested, so it is usually impossible to adjudge the historical authenticity of his reports.⁸ What follows is therefore a historiographical study of the relationship between literary performance within Suetonius’ text, on the one hand, and the literary training of his audience of Roman élite and performance techniques of the Suetonian *lector* (“professional reader”) on the other. In order to make clear that I am discussing not the emperors themselves as historical figures but rather their depiction in biography by Suetonius, I refer in what follows not to “emperors” but to “emperor-characters.”

Acts of Quotation by Emperor-Characters

Let us first enumerate the actual quotations made by the emperor-characters in Suetonius. There are twenty-two:⁹

1. *Jul. Caes.* 30 (Latin translation of Eur. *Ph.* 523–4): *Nam si violandum est ius, regnandi gratia / violandum est; aliis rebus pietatem colas*¹⁰ (“For if the law is to be violated, it should be violated for the sake of ruling; in other matters observe piety”);

⁷ I follow Johnson both in his insistence on a diversity of “reading events” as typical of Roman (or any other) society rather than a single reading practice and, below, in his description on the importance of the audience not only for the duration of any given literary performance but as a general “reading community” for which literary performance functions as “part of a larger fabric of social negotiations relating to literary production” ((2010) 36–62; quotation p. 52).

⁸ Tiberius’ Latin paraphrase of a tragic line (#8 below) is paralleled at Tac. *Ann.* 4.52, though with a different Latin version of the lost and (to us) anonymous Greek original; Dio puts the quotation in the mouth of Tiberius (58.23.4). Dio reports two other of these quotations by Nero, #14 below (63.27.2, in slightly different form) and #15 below (63.28.5). On literary quotation in Dio Cassius, see Freyburger-Gallard (2007).

⁹ All quotations appear in the mouths of the emperor-characters whose biographies Suetonius is writing, save for those at *Tib.* 21, which appear in a letter from Augustus to Tiberius.

¹⁰ Euripides’ original is εἴπερ γὰρ ἀδικεῖν χρή, τυραννίδος περὶ / κάλλιστον ἀδικεῖν, τὰλλα δ’ εὐσεβεῖν χρεῶν, “For if it is necessary to do wrong, it is best to do wrong for the sake of tyrannical power, and it is good to behave piously in other matters.”

2. *Jul. Caes.* 32 (Menander¹¹): *Alea iacta est* (“The die is cast”);
3. *Aug.* 40 (Vergil *Aen.* 1.284): *Romanos, rerum dominos, gentemque togatam* (“Romans, masters of the world, the toga-wearing nation”);
4. *Aug.* 65 (Homer *Il.* 3.40): αἰθ’ ὄφελον ἀγαμός τ’ ἔμειναι ἄγονός τ’ ἀπολέσθαι¹² (“Would that I had chosen to be unwed and to die childless”);
5. *Aug.* 98 (improvised tetrameters¹³): κτίστου δὲ τύμβον εισορῶ πυρούμενον / ὄρας φάεσσι Μασγάβαν τιμώμενον (“I look out on the tomb of the founder as it burns; do you see Masgabes being honored with torches?”);
6. *Aug.* 99 (unknown Greek comedy¹⁴): ἐπεὶ δὲ πάνυ καλῶς πέπαισται, δότε κρότον / καὶ πάντες ἡμᾶς μετὰ χαρᾶς προπέμψατε (“Since it has been well played, give your applause, and send us forth with joy”);
7. *Tib.* 21 (Ennius [Skutch 363]; Homer *Il.* 10.246–7): *Unus homo nobis vigilando restituit rem* (Ennius); τούτου γ’ ἐσπομένοιο καὶ ἐκ πυρὸς αἰθομένοιο / ἄμφω νοστήσαμεν, ἐπεὶ περίοιδε νοῆσαι (“One man by his vigilance has restored the State for us” (Ennius); “With this man coming along, we would both come back even out of blazing fire, since he is exceptionally good at thinking” [Homer]);
8. *Tib.* 53 (“A Greek verse” [Latin paraphrase in Suetonius]¹⁵): *Si non dominaris ... filiola, iniuriam te accipere existimas?* (“If you are not ruler, dear daughter, do you think you are receiving an injury?”);

¹¹ The line quoted by Suetonius as *Alea iacta est* (though he does not authorially flag it as a literary quotation) is twice attested for the same occasion by Plutarch (*Plut. Caes.* 32 and *Pomp.* 60) as Greek ἀνερρίφθω κύβος (“let the die be cast”), a phrase which Athenaeus (*Deipn.* 13.8) quotes from Menander.

¹² Here Augustus modifies the person of the verb from second to first person: Homer has ὄφελος in lieu of ὄφελον (“Would that you had chosen” rather than Augustus’ “Would that I had chosen”).

¹³ Augustus improvises these lines while pretending to quote them, as a way of making fun of Thrasyllus.

¹⁴ Kock 3.771; presumably a conventional ending to a Greek comedy.

¹⁵ Since Tacitus (*Ann.* 4.52) gives a different translation, presumably this act of quotation by Augustus is historically authentic and featured the original Greek line, but in Suetonius’ text the emperor-character here can only doubtfully be said to be engaging in direct literary quotation, since the Latin translation, unlike that of Julius Caesar above (#1), is not in verse and moreover is interrupted by an *inquit*. Tacitus likewise paraphrases the line in indirect discourse: *correptamque Graeco versu admonuit non ideo laedi quia non regnaret* (“Seizing her, he warned her with a Greek verse that it was not the case that she was being harmed because she was not ruling”). Suetonius

9. *Gaius* 22 (Homer *Il.* 204–5): εἷς κοίρανος ἔστω, / εἷς βασιλεύς (“Let there be one commander, one king”);

10. *Gaius* 30 (possibly Accius): *Oderint dum metuant* (“Let them hate, so long as they fear”);

11. *Claud.* 42 (Homer *Od.* 16.72): ἀνδρ’ ἀπαμύνασθαι, ὅτε τις πρότερος χαλεπήνη (“Ward off that man who shall first grow angry”);

12. *Claud.* 43 (tragedy on Telephus and Achilles, author unknown¹⁶): ὁ τρώσας ἰάσεται (“The one who made the wound shall heal it”);

13. *Nero* 38 (a tragic line, author unknown [TFA 513 Nauck]): ἐμοῦ θανόντος γαῖα μειχθήτω πυρὶ [ἐμοῦ ζῶντος]¹⁷ (“When I am dead, let fire consume the earth” [While I am alive]);

14. *Nero* 40 (a tragic line, author unknown): Τὸ τέχνιον ἡμᾶς διατρέφει (“My art supports me”);

15. *Nero* 46 (a tragic line, author unknown): θανεῖν μ’ ἄνωγε σύγγαμος, μήτηρ, πατήρ (“Spouse, mother, father have compelled me to die”);

16. *Nero* 49 (Homer *Il.* 10.535): ἵππων μ’ ὠκυπόδων ἄμφι κτύπος οὐατα βάλλει (“The crash of swift-footed horses strikes about my ears”);

17. *Galba* 20 (Homer *Il.* 5.254): ἔτι μένος ἐμπεδος ἔστιν (“Strength is still secure”);

18. *Vesp.* 23 (Homer *Il.* 7.213): μακρὰ βιβιάς, κραδάων δολιχόσκιον ἔγχος (“Striding lengthily, brandishing his far-shadowing spear”);

19. *Vesp.* 23 (Menander¹⁸): ὦ Λάχης, Λάχης / ἐπὶ ἀποθάνης, αὐθις ἐξ ἀρχῆς ἔσει / σὺ Κηρύλος (“O Laches, Laches, once you have died, you will again be Cerylus from the beginning”);

(*Tib.* 53) here uses the same tag for his paraphrase, *graeco versu (manu apprehendit Graecoque versu: “si non dominaris,” inquit...)*.

¹⁶ CPG Vol. 2, *Mantissa Proverbiorum* 2.28.8.

¹⁷ A friend of Nero’s first quotes the verse with ἐμοῦ θανόντος, which Nero changes to ἐμοῦ ζῶντος.

¹⁸ This is a playful combination of two lines of Menander (fr. 921 Kock and fr. 223.2 Kock) with the σὺ Κηρύλος as Vespasian’s own addition.

20. *Dom.* 9 (Vergil *Geo.* 2.537): *impia quam caesis gens est epulata iuencis* (“Before an impious nation feasted on slaughtered bullocks”);

21. *Dom.* 12 (Homer *Il.* 2.204): οὐκ ἀγαθὸν πολυκοιρανίη (“Having many commanders is not good”);

22. *Dom.* 18 (Homer *Il.* 2.108): οὐχ ὀράας οἶος κἀγὼ καλὸς τε μέγας τε; (“Do you not see what a beautiful and tall man I am?”).

It will be seen that the quotations are fairly evenly distributed among the twelve biographies. The only biographies not to feature an emperor-character engaged in literary quotation are those of Otho, Vitellius and Titus, the briefest biographies in Suetonius’ *oeuvre*. Further, no emperor-character engages in literary quotation more than four times, if we assign Augustus’ quotation of Homer at #6 to the biography in which it appears (that of Tiberius). Apart from Julius Caesar, all the emperor-characters who engage in literary quotation quote Homer (a total of nine times); no biography features more than one Homeric quotation, save that of Domitian. The other literary quotations are of Vergil (twice), tragedy (seven times, with three of those coming from Nero) and Greek comedy (three times). Thus, even before we come to examine the context for these quotations, it appears that literary quotation by an emperor-character is a device that Suetonius uses consistently but sparingly, with a marked preference for Homer and tragedy.¹⁹

Quotation and the Burden of Empire

In terms of subject-matter, the quotations fall broadly into two categories: quotations which illustrate the wit of the emperor-character and quotations which reflect on the subject of power and the burden of imperial rule. The majority of the quotations are from the latter category.

While by their nature all apt quotations advertise the wit of the one who quotes them, Suetonius explicitly cites Vespasian’s quotations of Homer and of Menander (#18 and #19) as examples of his *dicacitas*. Augustus’ improvised lines (#5), the source of which he pretends to ask of Thrasyllus, are likewise an occasion for laughter. Domitian’s second Homeric line (#22), inscribed to a friend in his manual on hair-care, is a joke upon his own baldness.

Most of the quotations by emperor-characters, however, are on the subject of power and the burden of imperial rule. Julius Caesar’s quotation of Euripides

¹⁹ It is striking that only one of the seven quotations from tragedy is from an extant text.

(#1) sums up his public unscrupulousness and private rectitude; with (#4) Augustus laments his problem of succession; in the deathbed lines (#6) he famously mocks his own control of his imperial image. Augustus' double quotation of Ennius and Homer (#7) concern Tiberius' suitability for the imperial throne. Tiberius' tragic line paraphrased into Latin (#8) encapsulates imperial paranoia; though directed at Agrippina, it fits Tiberius himself best. Caligula's quotations endorse one-man rule (#9) and explain his methods of terror (#10) in terms of his own image. Claudius' Homeric line (#11) is a password given to his bodyguards, bidding them watch out for assassins after he has put enemies to death;²⁰ his tragic line (#12) describes his personal power to heal as well as harm. Nero's lines are in a special, ironic category, as I argue below. Galba's Homeric line (#17), given after the emperor-character's death, appears as an ironic reflection on his hubris and personal vanity, the cause of his downfall.²¹ Domitian's first Homeric line (#21) is an endorsement of one-man rule. Thus 11 of 21 quotations, or 11 of 17 if we except Nero's quotations as being in a special category, concern power and the burden of imperial rule; six of these 11 are quotations of Homer.

Filling out the list are the two quotations of Vergil, by Augustus (#3) and by Domitian (#20), both of which allude to a better former condition of the Roman people to which the ruler aspires to restore them, Augustus by reforming citizens' dress and Domitian by preventing excessive sacrifice. While related to imperial rule in that they explain an emperor-character's policy, these Vergilian quotations do not directly concern the personal experience of being emperor.

Quotation as a Transitional Device

Arguing for the foreign character of the Greek-language quotations to Roman ears, Horváth observed that in Suetonius emperors' deaths are often foretold or preceded by some Greek cultural element, sometimes literary;²² more generally, however, it can be shown that the quotations on the subject of power and the burden of imperial rule are consistently deployed by Suetonius as structural devices, appearing in his texts at moments of transition in his subjects' imperial careers.

²⁰ For an interesting discussion of the resonance of this line, see Power (2011), who notes that Dio quotes the same line as an example of Claudius' literary bumbling and argues that it has the same effect in Suetonius' text, in the spirit of the Homeric quotations in the *Apocolocyntosis*.

²¹ Power (2009).

²² Horváth (1996) 77–8.

Julius Caesar's quotation of Euripides (#1), for example, by which that emperor-character discusses "ius violandum," concludes Suetonius' description of the legal dilemmas which provoked the civil war (*Jul. Caes.* 28–30); immediately afterwards, in a short chapter, Caesar crosses the Rubicon (*Jul. Caes.* 31). The lines themselves, like the sentiment they express, thus bridge the gulf between legality and ambitious insurrection. The crossing of the Rubicon is itself marked by a quotation from Menander (#2). Augustus' quotation of Homer (#4), lamenting his problem of succession, concludes Suetonius' long description of Augustus' family life and family troubles (*Aug.* 61–5); immediately afterwards the subject shifts to his friends (66). The same emperor-character's quotation of Greek comedy (#6) precedes his demise. In the case of Tiberius, when Suetonius quotes (*Tib.* 21) from the letter of Augustus in which the older emperor had quoted Ennius and Homer (#7) in praise of Tiberius' suitability as emperor, the quotations appear three sentences before Tiberius announces Augustus' death and claims the throne (22–3). Tiberius' tragic quotation (#8) on the all-or-nothing character of imperial ambition introduces his swift annihilation of Agrippina (*Tib.* 53), the culmination of his attacks on his own family (50–3). Apart from the assumption of some hubristic titles, Caligula's quotation of Homer (#9) opens the lengthy *de monstro narranda* ("account of the monster") (22–49). Claudius' quotation of Homer (#11) occurs just at the end of the description of his career as a writer and historian (*Claud.* 41–2) and precedes the story of his death (43–6); his quotation of a tragic line concerning Telephus and Achilles (#12) occurs at the outset (*Claud.* 43) of his downfall (44–6). (I again skip over Nero's tragic and Homeric quotations, discussed below). Galba's quotation of Homer (#17), which occurs chronologically after Galba's death (*Galba* 20), concludes his downfall (18–20) and precedes Suetonius' final summary (21–2). Domitian's first quotation of Homer (#21) concludes the catalogue of his crimes (10–12) and precedes the note on his madness (13) and the story of his assassination (14–17).

It will be seen that this list of transitional uses of quotation matches neatly with the list of those concerned with power and the burden of imperial rule: of those, only #10 (Caligula's "*Oderint dum metuant*") is not transitional, serving rather as a vivid highlight amidst a catalogue of that emperor-character's hateful and fearsome crimes (27–33). Likewise occurring amidst catalogues are both the quotations of Vergil (#3 and #20), the former (*Aug.* 40) illustrating the sartorial aspect of Augustus' programme for social reform (32–42), the latter (*Dom.* 9) occurring in the middle of the account of Domitian's early, positive actions (7–

9); likewise illustrative as opposed to structural are those quotations which merely illustrate an emperor's wittiness (#5, #13 and #14).

Overall, then, we find that, in the mouths of emperor-characters, literary quotations in Suetonius can provide evidence of wittiness, serve as highlights in catalogues of good and bad actions, or shift the narrative to another subject. This last function is by far the most typical, and in this case the theme of the quotation is almost always power and the burden of imperial rule. In order to explain the effect of these structural, power-themed quotations, I turn first to the principal social manifestation of literature in the High Roman Empire: performative reading.

Emperor-Characters as Literary Performers

With the exception of Nero, whose literary quotations in Suetonius I discuss separately below, the emperor-characters thus generally quote literature *ad hoc*, in a manner that suits both the structural purpose of the biographer and their own imperial situations; they do not quote from literary works in the course of formally performing those works. Besides the production and quotation of literature, however, there is a third aspect to the emperor-characters' literary engagement in Suetonius, namely their participation in acts of *lectio* and *recitatio*, respectively the reading aloud and semi-public presentation of literary works. Here is the young Augustus (*Aug.* 84–5):

Eloquentiam studiaque liberalia ab aetate prima et cupide et laboriosissime exercuit. Mutiensi bello in tanta mole rerum et legisse et scripsisse et declamasse cotidie traditur ... Pronuntiabat dulci et proprio quodam oris sono, dabatque assidue phonasco operam; sed non nunquam, infirmatis faucibus, praeconis voce ad populum concionatus est ... Multa varii generis prosa oratione composuit, ex quibus nonnulla in coetu familiarum velut in auditorio recitavit, sicut *Rescripta Bruto de Catone* ...

Even in childhood he studied eloquence and the liberal arts with great care and diligence. During the Mutina campaign, with so much to do, he is said to have read and written and declaimed on a daily basis ... He pronounced his words with a pleasant and suitable tone of voice, and constantly practiced with a teacher of elocution; but sometimes, when his voice was weak, he made use of a herald for addressing the people ... He composed many prose works in various genres, of which he recited a good number to a group of close

friends as though in a lecture hall, for example the *Reply to Brutus on Cato* ...

Here is Claudius, young and old (*Claud.* 41):

Historiam in adulescentia hortante T. Livio, Sulpicio vero Flauo etiam adiuuante, scribere adgressus est. At cum primum frequenti auditorio commisisset, aegre perlegit refrigeratus saepe a semet ipso. Nam cum initio recitationis defractis compluribus subsellis obesitate cuiusdam risus exortus esset, ne sedato quidem tumultu temperare potuit, quin ex interuallo subinde facti reminisceretur cachinnosque revocaret. In principatu quoque et scripsit plurimum et assidue recitavit per lectorem.

In his [Claudius'] youth, with the encouragement of Livy and the help of Sulpicius Flavius, he started writing history. But when he first delivered it to a packed audience, he barely finished reading it, often interrupting himself. For at the beginning of the recitation everybody laughed when a fat man broke several stools, and even when everybody quieted down he couldn't restrain himself, but after a while would remember what had happened and burst into laughter again. Likewise, while Emperor, he both wrote a good deal and frequently gave recitals by means of a *lector*.

Claudius' enthusiasm for the *recitatio* is confirmed by Pliny (*Ep.* 1.13), who reports that Claudius once invited himself to a recitation by Nonianus which he happened to overhear while strolling on the Palatine.

These performances by Augustus and Claudius are in keeping with the "semi-private" character of the *recitatio*, at which performer and audience together both exclude the multitude and engage in self-presentation in a context beyond the strictly private sphere of the house and family.²³ Even if Augustus' performances here take place "to a group of friends," Suetonius gives us to understand that he performed "as though in a lecture hall," that is, as though performing at a *recitatio*. In spite of Claudius' exalted rank, it is evidently normal for him as a young man to perform his history personally in a *recitatio*; indeed, his speech impediment (well known, though not mentioned in this context by Suetonius) is insufficient to

²³ Dupont (1997) 45–52.

check his obligation to perform, his zeal to perform, or both.²⁴ His later practice, as emperor, of employing a *lector* was a wholly respectable alternative to personal performance at an author's *recitatio*. In short, save for Augustus' addressing his *recitatio* "to a group of friends," nothing marks these emperor-characters' *recitationes* as unusual. Given the "semi-private" character of the *recitatio* in general, these emperor-characters' enthusiasm for it indicates that the *recitatio* could provide relief from the official persona an emperor was obliged to adopt in public: indeed, the point of Pliny's story of Claudius' sudden appearance at Nonianus' *recitatio* is precisely that the lofty emperor did not hesitate to join the audience, as though a private citizen, in order to gratify his appetite for literature. This "semi-private" character of the *recitatio* contrasts strongly with the emperors' public participation in performance, a mandatory aspect of the job which was in every respect spectacular.²⁵ An emperor participating in a *recitatio* is nearly a contradiction in terms:²⁶ thus, emperor-characters in *recitationes* are temporarily doffing their imperial role as such.

Another notable trait of these emperor-characters as *recitatio*-enthusiasts is their youth. In his maturity as emperor, Claudius employs a *lector* ("professional reader") at his *recitatio*, but in his youth he performs personally. So too with Augustus, who, since he had come to power so young, is obliged to practice declamation on campaign, and whose performance of his own *Rescripta ad Brutum de Catone* presumably belongs to his pre-Pharsalian period. Domitian, likewise, in his pre-imperial youth (*Dom.* 2),

simulavit et ipse mire modestiam, in primisque poeticae studium,
tam insuetum antea sibi quam postea spretum et abiectum,
recitavitque etiam publice.

greatly pretended to modesty and, most of all, a taste for poetry,
which he had little cultivated beforehand and later despised and cast
off, and went so far as to recite publicly.

²⁴ Dupont (1997) 55 describes the *recitatio* performed by a young person as a "rite of passage," citing the social forces described by Pliny (*Ep.* 1.13.1) on the occasion of a *recitatio* by a young man named Calpurnius Piso, who read from an astronomical poem he had composed.

²⁵ Wiedemann (1992) 165–83; Millar (1992) 368–75; Potter (1996) 129–60; Kyle (2001) 8–9.

²⁶ See Dupont (1997) 52 on the essentially Republican character of the Imperial *recitatio*.

The association here of poetic performance with *modestia* underscores the non-spectacular connotations of the *recitatio*, while “*recitavitque etiam publice*” surely implies an initial phase of private practice followed by a larger, if still elite audience: “*publice*” need not suggest performance before the *populus*.

It is not surprising that, in all these cases, literary performance is associated with youth. Scholarship on the *recitatio* has tended to overlook the central role of poetic performance in ancient education. The older view, which takes Seneca at his word that the *recitatio* was introduced by Asinius Pollio in 38 BC, has been modified to allow that Pollio perhaps glamorized the *recitatio*,²⁷ applying the term *recitare*, earlier reserved to the reading out of legal and political documents, to literature. The practice of performing literary works, even if that practice was not termed a *recitatio*, dates at least to Crates of Mallos in the mid-second century BC: in his *De Grammaticis*, Suetonius tells us that, in introducing the “*studium grammaticae*” (“pursuit of *grammatica*,” i.e. of literary culture) Crates gave “*plurimas acroasis*” (“numerous *listenings*,” i.e. performances before an audience²⁸), inspiring public performance and criticism of Latin-language authors.²⁹ These performances evidently formed part of the *studium grammaticae* with which Suetonius opens this account of how the *γραμματικοί* (Greek “men of letters”) arrived at Rome; it is no coincidence that, apart from Vargunteius, these first exponents of *γραμματική* (Greek “literary culture”) bear Greek names (Lampadio, Archelaus, Philocomus, together with Crates himself). We must not

²⁷ Dalzell (1955) 20–8; Markus (2000) 139.

²⁸ This is the regular term for literary and rhetorical performance, first, most famously, and most contemptuously used at Thu. 1.33.

²⁹ *Primus igitur, quantum opinamur, studium grammaticae in urbem intulit Crates Mallotes, Aristarchi aequalis ... Plurimas acroasis subinde fecit assidueque disseruit, ac nostris exemplo fuit ad imitandum. Hactenus tamen imitati, ut carmina parum adhuc divulgata vel defunctorum amicorum vel si quorum aliorum probassent, diligentius retractarent ac legendo commentandoque etiam ceteris nota facerent; ut C. Octavius Lampadio Naevii Punicum bellum ... : ut postea Q. Vargunteius annales Ennii, quos certis diebus in magna frequentia pronuntiabat; ut Laelius Archelaus Vettiasque Philocomus Lucilii satyras familiaris sui (Suet. De Gram. 2) (“The first, therefore, as far as we can judge, to bring the pursuit of literary culture to the city was Crates of Mallos, the coeval of Aristarchus ... He at once gave many “listenings” and lectured continuously, and he was an example for our people to imitate. So far, however, did they imitate him that they carefully took up again poems which had not been widely known, either by friends who had died or by others whom they approved of, and by reading and commenting on them made them known to other people also; as C. Octavius Lampadio did with Naevius’ *Punic War* ... : as afterwards Q. Vargunteius did with the *Annals* of Ennius, which he pronounced on fixed days before a large crowd; as Laelius Archelaus and Vettias Philocomus did with the *Satires* of their friend Lucilius”).*

forget, however, that these *grammatici* were simultaneously importing the Hellenistic educational programme, one which quickly flourished on Roman soil, remaining virtually unchanged for centuries.³⁰ Between the contemptible (to the ancients³¹) γραμματιστής or *litterator* (“letterer”), charged with teaching basic literacy, and the prestigious *rhetor* (“rhetorician”), education was literary and supervised by the γραμματικός. Though we are apt to distinguish two types of *grammatici*, the “high school” teacher and the “man of letters” in our sense, the ancients evidently made no such formal distinction, viewing “man of letters” as a description of the man’s character and interests and “teacher” as a type of employment in which many such “men of letters” earned a living.³² Since the experience of literature in antiquity was fundamentally aural and oral,³³ these *grammatici* not only excelled at performance themselves (as we have already seen in the case of Crates) but supervised, as teachers, an educational programme in literature that was fundamentally geared towards performance.³⁴

³⁰ On the peculiar durability of Hellenistic and Roman educational practice, see Marrou (1982) 95–6; on the rise of the γραμματικός in Greek education and the arrival of γραμματική in Rome, see Booth (1978).

³¹ On the low-status γραμματιστής, in contrast to the high-status γραμματικός, see Booth (1978); Booth (1979); Kaster (1988) 99–134; Criboire (2001) 59–62.

³² Quinn (1982) 104–5. Most of the *grammatici* in Suetonius’ *De Grammaticis* are not independently wealthy, earning their living by teaching.

³³ See most recently Parker (2009), who catalogues evidence for the consumption of literature in performance (via professional *lectores*, at the *recitatio*, and *via* readings as entertainment; he omits the school system and the Greek-speaking part of the Empire) while nevertheless arguing that performative reading was “considered and presented as preparatory, ancillary, or supplementary to the main event, the unmarked case of private reading” (188), on the basis of incidents reported about private, silent reading by Cicero, Cato the Younger, Horace, Seneca, Pliny the Younger, Caesar. These are all authors, however, and it does not necessarily follow that because people were able to read silently, would sometimes read silently (like Martial’s secret admirers among the chaste), or liked to read silently because they were intensely literary (as in the cases of Cicero, Cato, Horace, Seneca, Pliny, Caesar, or *grammatici* in Aulus Gellius), that silent reading as opposed to performative reading aloud was the social norm. We may compare the relationship between sheet music and the performance of classical music in, say, the 18th century: professionals and those highly devoted to music might regularly study sheet music, others with some education could read written music but did not regularly do so, most people experienced classical music in performance, and for everyone the definitive experience of music was the concert hall not the music library. This analogy fits the evidence for ancient Rome in the case of the physical book and performative reading.

³⁴ On the performance-oriented character of Quintilian’s early educational programme, see Fantham (1982); on Dionysius Thrax’ view of performative manner, see Markus (2000) 147–8.

Such performance-oriented literary education is most classically described by Quintilian, who insists that the student practice breathing, pausing, pacing, the raising and lowering of the voice, modulation, intensity of utterance and so forth: all practical tasks for the student reading aloud, the basis of which, Quintilian insists, is understanding (*Inst.* 1.8.1-2). He is particularly concerned that the *prosopopoeia* or impersonation of character not be undertaken *ad comicum morem*, though he notes that others hold a contrary opinion and follow the contrary practice.³⁵ Here he insists that the term *cantare* is not to be taken literally (1.8.2):

Sit autem in primis lectio virilis et cum suavitate quadam gravis et non quidem prosae similis, quia et carmen est et se poetae canere testantur; non tamen in canticum dissoluta nec plasmate (ut nunc a plerisque fit) effeminata; de quo genere optime C. Caesarem praetextatum adhuc accepimus dixisse: Si cantas, male cantas; si legis, cantas.

But above all his reading must be manly, combining dignity and charm; it must be different from the reading of prose, for poetry is song and poets claim to be singers. But this fact does not justify degeneration into sing-song or the effeminate modulations now in vogue: there is an excellent saying on this point attributed to Gaius Caesar while he was still a boy: "If you are chanting, you are 'chanting' badly: if you are reading, you are 'chanting'."

Quite apart from the issues of gendered self-presentation at play here,³⁶ we note particularly that the authority cited by Quintilian on the terminology and best practice of performance is none other than Augustus' youthful grandson. Poetic performance is thus firmly associated with the Roman elite and indeed with the imperial family, in a school-age setting.

³⁵ *Nec prosopopoeias, ut quibusdam placet, ad comicum morem pronuntiari velim; esse tamen flexum quendam, quo distinguantur ab iis in quibus poeta persona sua utetur* (Quint. *Inst.* 1.8.3) ("Neither would I like the presentations of character (*prosopopoeia*) to be performed (*pronuntiari*) in the manner of a comic actor, as some would have it; rather there should be a certain shift, whereby they are distinguished from those places in which the poet uses his own persona"). The art of taking on the role of a fictional character (*prosopopoeia*) was central to performative reading, not least in the classroom: see Degenhardt (1909) 50; Lausberg (1998) 367–72.

³⁶ On these, see Markus (2000) 141–4.

Augustus', Claudius' and Domitian's youthful enthusiasm for literary performance is thus quite in keeping with the normal experience of "grammatical" education on the part of the Roman élite. As we have seen illustrated in the contrast between Claudius' youthful performance at a *recitatio* and his middle-aged employment of a *lector* at the *recitatio* when emperor, education in literary performance was entirely compatible with adult use of *lectores*,³⁷ especially as part of the *acroamata* ("aural entertainment") at dinner parties,³⁸ but also in solitude.³⁹ The material performed could include classic texts, contemporary literature, works of scholarship and a host's own poems.⁴⁰ Just as in the élite's grammatical classroom, the challenge of such reading aloud by the slave *lector*⁴¹ was not merely vocal: it included *hypocrisis*⁴² and aimed to display character (*ethos*) euphoniously.⁴³ It follows that Suetonius' texts will have been read aloud, with full *hypocrisis* of *ethos*, by a *lector* to an audience, both when they were works of contemporary literature and when they became classics; and there is no reason to suppose that their author will have composed them without

³⁷ On the *lector*, see Starr (1991); Parker (2009) 199–206.

³⁸ Starr (1991) 341; Parker (2009) 203–6.

³⁹ Starr (1991) 340–1.

⁴⁰ For the classics: Juv. 11.179–82 speaks of Homer and Vergil as typical, as noted by Starr (1991) 342 and Balsdon (1969) 44 n. 170. Petronius 68.4–5 is a satire on the reading aloud of classics at dinner parties. For contemporary literature, Martial claims (7.97.11) that his addressee Aulus Pudens will have Martial's poems presented at a dinner party. The texts performed are most often verse texts, but the relentless performance of *prose* texts dominates Pliny's portrait of "Spurinna's behavior as the model (*exemplum*) for an elderly man of high status" (Johnson (2010) 36) in *Ep.* 3.1. It was to Spurinna's and Pliny's circle that Suetonius himself belonged, as Pliny's various letters to and about him (1.18, 3.8, 5.10, 9.34, 10.95) make clear; one letter to Suetonius (5.10) concerns the development and circulation of one of his works (probably the *De Viris Illustribus*); see Power (2010). We may thus be confident that the *De Vita Caesarum* were most likely performance pieces, intended if not for a broad public then for the Pliny's "reading community," which could be trusted to appreciate (for example) offhand Vergilian allusion (Power (2012)).

⁴¹ In Epictetus (*Disc.* 1.26.14) the social gulf between slave *lector* and citizen student becomes a teachable moment.

⁴² Ὑπόκρισις ("acting out") is a key word for the activity of the *lector* or ἀναγνώστης ("reader"): cf. Dio Chr. 18.6, where the reading aloud of Menander and Euripides is described as a ὑπόκρισις; Dionysius Thrax tells us that "ἀναγνωστέον δὲ καθ' ὑπόκρισιν" ("one must read according to *hypocrisis*") among other elements (*GG* I.1.6); Vergil was praised by a rival for his *hypocrisis* (Suet. *Vita Verg.* 29); many more examples might be cited.

⁴³ See for example Fronto's description of a good *lectio* ("reading") as one which will be "useful and euphonius" and full of "displays of character" (Fronto 4.1.3).

an eye and an ear for the effects his texts would have on an audience when performed by such a *lector*. Indeed, the younger Pliny evidently regarded Suetonius himself as an expert on the dynamics of the *recitatio*, nervously soliciting his advice before entrusting his own works to a *lector* (*Ep.* 9.34).

Moments of Quotation

This cultural background of literary performance in an educational context provides the answer, I suggest, to why Suetonius has his emperor-characters quote the classics on the broad theme of power at various turning points in their biographies.

Apart from the emphasis which live performance naturally places on the unity of each of Suetonius' biographies, as being (in modern terms) essentially a script for a one-man theater production, our perception of his texts in general and of his use of quotation in particular must, as *per* the above, be conditioned by how we imagine the sort of reading aloud advocated by Quintilian and Dionysius Thrax would be put into effect by the Suetonian *lector*. Quotations by emperor-characters are therefore principally challenges of *prosopopoeia*. Whether *ad comicum morem*, or in the subtler manner advocated by Quintilian, the *lector* must not only bring the emperor-character to life but, further, bring him to life while he is himself engaged in a form of literary performance: at moments of quotation, the *lector* is (to speak colloquially) "doing" the emperor "doing" the quoted poet, whose verses may in turn be from the mouth of a character in the poem:⁴⁴ when Caligula quotes Homer, for example (#9 above), we must imagine *lector* impersonating Caligula impersonating Homer's Agamemnon. To achieve such prosopopoetic layering would require nothing less than a virtuoso performance by the *lector*.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Of the literary quotations classified at the beginning of this article, all quotations on the broad theme of power, the sources for which can be ascertained, are taken from first-person speeches. Of the quotations from Homer, who as we have seen is the most frequently quoted author by far, only #17 (an example of Vespasian's wit, not on the subject of power) is taken from third-person narration.

⁴⁵ The most extreme example of this layering in Suetonius is Julius Caesar's quotation of Euripides (#1), an anecdote which Suetonius explicitly borrows from Cicero's *De Officiis* (3.82). In this case the audience hears Euripides through Caesar through Cicero through Suetonius, the *lector* functioning as Suetonian narrator "doing" Cicero "doing" Caesar "doing" Euripides "doing" Eteocles. The effect would be analogous to reading aloud (let us imagine) of a modern biographer's citation of George Orwell's description in *The Lion and the Unicorn* of Neville Chamberlain's quotation of Shakespeare's Philip the Bastard's concluding speech in *King John*: "Come the four

Such moments of quotation would not only have been technical challenges, however: they would also have resonated with Suetonius' audience. In layering an emperor-character's *lectio* on top of his own, the actual *lector* is performing two *lectiones* simultaneously: thus emperor-character and actual *lector* overlap not only in that *lector* is impersonating emperor but in that their skills as literary performers are parallel. Both are bringing texts to life, Caligula that of Homer and the *lector* that of Suetonius. The emperor-character's literary performance *within* the *lectio* would be all the more vivid by virtue of its being enacted by a *lector* in the very act of *lectio*.

Furthermore, in their acts of quotation, the emperor-characters are engaging in just the type of literary performance — albeit in abbreviated form — that the educated audience for Suetonius' text would themselves have undertaken regularly in school. If everyone from Gaius Caesar to the common schoolboy had in their youth struggled to read literature aloud performatively, not only would they be appreciative in adult life of a virtuoso act of *lectio* but the act of quotation on the part of the emperor-characters would surely have reminded them of their own school experience. Given that, in Suetonius' day, literary performances by members of the social elite themselves were limited to the private or semi-private sphere,⁴⁶ the act of quotation by emperor-characters must surely represent a sudden injection of the "semi-private" world of *otium*, associated with school, with

corners of the world in arms / and we shall shock them" (*King John* V.7, quoted at the end of Orwell's *The Lion and the Unicorn*). On the printed page, such layering is sidestepped, as the reader is apt to interpret Shakespeare's lines as directly communicated from the Bard; but the reader aloud is obliged to select a voice (the modern biographer's, Orwell's, Chamberlain's, Shakespeare's, or Philip the Bastard's), or rather some combination of voices, in order to display the various personae here speaking in unison.

⁴⁶ Performative reading aloud by the elite (i.e. equestrian and senatorial classes) was chiefly limited to the school environment, in which it was at the core of the curriculum, and to the *recitatio*, which could be more private or less but differed from the truly public theater and forum: see especially Johnson (2010) 32–62 on Pliny's construction of his ideal reading community (a consistently private or semi-private one) in his *Letters*. Johnson does note several examples of performative reading aloud by the adult elite elsewhere, however, for instance by Pliny's correspondent Bassus (39) who will *multum lectitare* (39) in retirement (*Ep.* 4.23), by Pliny himself (42) in practicing oratorical reading (*Ep.* 9.36), by Pliny's enemy Regulus (48, *Ep.* 4.7) whose non-private *recitatio* is condemned as grotesque; we may compare Suetonius' being aghast at Domitian's going so far as to read works aloud publicly (*recitavit etiam publice*).

recitatio, and *lectio*,⁴⁷ into the dramatically public careers being described in Suetonius.

Both as characters within the narrative and as momentary creations of the *lector*, the emperor-characters thus step back from their official, exalted, spectacular imperial personae at transitional moments of their biographies: they revert momentarily to the level of the elite citizen and enthusiast for literature. When they do so, moreover, they quote literature which reflects on the situation of an emperor, whether ruefully or hubristically; they thus step outside the narrative itself to comment indirectly on the very biography of which they are the subject. It is no wonder that this metatextual device, which involves the listener by distancing the protagonist from his own story and unites the two on the basis of their shared cultural experience of performed text, is one which Suetonius uses sparingly, albeit consistently, and always at a crucial moment of his text.

The Neronian Inversion

We have thus far omitted Nero's poetic performances, but these deserve mention as the inversion of the model of literary performance described above. As we have seen, highly public emperor-characters like Augustus and Claudius are eager to retreat to the semi-private world of literary performance; by contrast, Nero's *recitatio*, in his early, youthful, benevolent phase, could not have been more public (*Nero* 10):

Ad campestris exercitationes suas admisit et plebem declamavitque saepius publice; recitavit et carmina, non modo domi sed et in theatro, tanta universorum laetitia, ut ob recitationem supplicatio decreta sit eaque pars carminum aureis litteris Iovi Capitolino dicata.

He admitted even the ordinary folk to his field exercises and he often declaimed in public; further, he recited poems, not only at home but even in a theatre, to such universal joy that a festival of

⁴⁷ In his *Protrepticus ad nepotem*, Ausonius plays fondly (lines 6–9) on the etymology of the “school” at which his grandson is learning to read the classics aloud, tracing it to σχολή (“leisure,” Latin *otium*): from the point of view of an élite grown-up, if not from that of the teenaged student, literary education in school resembled an ideal *otium*.

thanksgiving for his *recitatio* was decreed and that part of his poems was dedicated to Capitoline Jupiter in gold letters.

As Suetonius' series of emphatic *et*'s here (*et plebem ... et carmina ... et in theatro*) makes plain, in this passage literary performance caps the list of private or semi-private activities (exercise, declamation, recitation) which Nero literally vulgarizes, integrating them into his own highly public imperial role in terms of his imperial person and in terms of his religious position.⁴⁸ Significantly, the passage above precedes three full chapters which describe Nero's *spectacula* (*Nero* 11–13). In short, the semi-private has been perverted into the spectacular — and that during the emperor-character's benevolent phase. While a survey of Nero's artistic career is beyond the scope of this essay,⁴⁹ we may note that Suetonius shifts his narrative to Nero's *probra* and *scelera* at the close of chapter 19,⁵⁰ and chooses to begin with six long chapters on Nero's singing and acting (*Nero* 20–5), punctuated by notes on his forays into charioteering (*Nero* 22.1–2 and 24.2).

Given his unbridled ambitions as a tragic actor, in which he assimilated, or we should perhaps say devoured, his roles so far as to wear masks of his own face, it is not surprising that most of Nero's quotations are from tragedy (#13–15 above). As with the majority of quotations by emperor-characters examined above, these serve to structure the narrative: #13 (“ἐμοῦ θανάτου γαῖα μειχθήτω πυρὶ” at *Nero* 38 (“when I am dead, let fire consume the earth”), corrected to ἐμοῦ ζώντος (“while I'm alive”) by Nero⁵¹) introduces the worst public disaster of his reign, the Great Fire; as this incident follows Suetonius' description of Nero's most unrestrained spurt of murders (*Nero* 37), the tragic line and its effect on Rome's very buildings caps the emperor-character's whole career of crime. Furthermore, it is through the perversion (i.e. witty correction) of the line that Nero

⁴⁸ On the increasing emphasis on the figure of the emperor in the *supplicatio*, see Halkin (1953).

⁴⁹ On Nero as artist, see Manning (1975) and Edwards (1994).

⁵⁰ *Haec partim nulla reprehensione, partim etiam non mediocri laude digna in unum contuli, ut secernerem a probris ac sceleribus eius, de quibus dehinc dicam* (*Nero* 19) (“All these things, some of which are not reprehensible, others of which are even quite praiseworthy, I have assembled, so that I should separate them from his disgraceful and criminal acts, of which I will now speak”).

⁵¹ Although this line is not actually spoken by the emperor-character, I treat it as belonging essentially to Nero because it is evidently spoken by a friend of his (*dicente quodam in sermone communi*, “as somebody was saying in conversation”) and is immediately corrected by Nero, so that the *lector*, while not performing the emperor when reading the line from Suetonius, is nevertheless certainly impersonating a Roman reciting a tragic line in the imperial environment of Nero's circle.

consummates the perversion of his protective function as emperor, as the city is sacrificed (in Suetonius' narrative⁵²) to Nero's perversion of semi-private performance (the tragic line had first been delivered *in sermone communi*, "in conversation") to a public performance so spectacular that its audience of ordinary Romans is actually consumed in flame.

His two other tragic lines, both likewise of uncertain authorship, also serve to signpost pivotal moments in the narrative: #14 ("Τὸ τέχνηον ἡμᾶς διατρέφει" at *Nero* 40 ("My art supports me")) immediately follows the first sentence of Suetonius' tale of Nero's downfall, which introduces the revolt of Vindex; #15 ("Θανεῖν μ' ἄνωγε σύγγαμος, μήτηρ, πατήρ" at *Nero* 46 ("Spouse, mother, father have compelled me to die")) is not only from Nero's last *rôle* but appears in the narrative as his last action prior to his realization that all is lost. Both are unintentionally self-reflexive, in that #14 expresses the futility of Nero's artistic ambition, while #15 assimilates Nero into the character of Oedipus.⁵³ Whereas, according to the scholia to Dionysius Thrax,⁵⁴ the literary performer ought to master and assimilate his material, the material here overmasters the performer. His final quotation, of Homer (#15), immediately precedes his suicide; it is remarkable mainly for its pointlessness, as it merely describes the sound of pursuit: it is an inversion of the art of apt Homeric quotation practiced by most of Suetonius' other emperor-characters, as though the failed tragedian were grasping at an epic moment at the last, only to come up empty-handed. As Connors puts it, "the Suetonian emphasis on Nero's hesitation and fumbling in his attempts to control his destiny by committing suicide undercuts Nero's pose as an artist who artistically contrives the script of his final moments" with various attempts at a poetic epitaph.⁵⁵

⁵² Of course, this is not to suppose that, historically speaking, Nero was the cause of the fire: see Bohn (1986), Beaujeu (1960).

⁵³ See Champlin (2003) 101–2 for a discussion of Nero's portrayal of Oedipus on the stage.

⁵⁴ e.g. the *Scholia Vaticana* to Dionysius Thrax (*GG* 1.3.174), who comment, *à propos* of the performance of lamentations, that λέγει οὖν τοὺς οἰκτους προφέρεσθαι ὑπεμμένως καὶ γοερῶς, τουτέστι συνεσταλμένως, ταπεινῶς καὶ μετὰ πένθους, οἰκτρῶς, θρηνητικῶς· δεῖ γὰρ τὸν ἀναγιγν/σκοντα τὸν οἰκτον τοιοῦτον φαίνεσθαι, ὡς ἐλεεῖσθαι ὑπο τῶν ἀκούοντων ("He [Dionysius Thrax] thus says that we should pronounce lamentations *in a subdued and tearful manner*, that is simply, softly and with grief, pitifully, keeningly; for the reader must make the grief manifest, so that he is pitied by the listeners.") In this regard, the scholia to Dionysius Thrax generally aim to help the young reader take on the characteristics of the literary genre he is performing.

⁵⁵ Connors (1994) 230. On the artistry with which Suetonius handles the set-piece scene of Nero's demise, see Lounsbury (1979) 169–74.

Suetonius' Embedded Literary Culture

Overall, therefore, I suggest that the role of literature in Suetonius is consistently self-reflexive. If the emperor-characters' personal literary output as writers — the minor poems, the handbooks on astronomy and hair-care — strike us as mere curiosities and relics of private life, their moments of literary performance, on which their biographies frequently pivot, are steeped in irony and thus in tragedy (or, with Nero, in tragedy as unintentional comedy) as the doomed emperor-characters look wistfully back to their pre-imperial selves. Surprising as this may seem in the chronicles of tyranny, it is less surprising that the author of *De Grammaticis* should make literature itself one backdrop for his imperial dramas. Indeed, most touchingly amidst the titillating catalogues of paranoia and revenge, literary performance serves, I argue, as an oasis of humane culture for the emperor-characters and for Suetonius' own audience; such a civilized attitude would itself explain why it was this biographer whom, amongst all the correspondents in his élite "reading community," the nervous Pliny sought out for comfort and advice about Roman literary performance (*Ep.* 9.34).

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