CHAPTER FIVE

CANDIDISSIMUS SCRIPTOR

Suetonius is *emendatissimus et candidissimus scriptor*.[1] The weight of these words is upon correctness and lucidity, *oratio emendata et dilucida*, an accuracy which implies clarity and complexity, the distinguishing traits of the *genus subtile*, the Plain Style—*brevis quidem cum iucunditate et propria et carens supervacuis eloquentia*—and of its principal requirement, *acumen* (Quint. 12.10.58ff.); it is the density of detail and reasoning which makes necessary a clear apprehension, not any presumed ease of understanding possessed by the materials with which the Plain Style happens to deal. *Ego iugulum statim video, hunc premo* was the vivid and grim adage of M. Aquilius Regulus; yet its value depends upon its delicacy. Although Pliny complained that Regulus often missed the throat, it cannot have been very often, according to Pliny himself elsewhere: *est enim locuples factiosus, curatur a multis, timetur a pluribus, quod plerumque fortius amore est* (*Ep*. 1.20.14; 1.5.15). But he is right in this: if one goes for the telling detail, one must be sure of hitting it. Hence the importance of clarity, to Demetrius the special virtue and necessity of the Plain Style (*Eloc*. 203). Demetrius went further (209ff.): the light by which the writer sees, must be seen; the excellence of the Plain Style derives from a supernal plainness, *enargeia*. This is the *evidentia* or *repraesentatio* of Quintilian, which is more than *perspicuitas* (8.3.61ff.); this is also the excellence of Suetonius, a various excellence (for others have it otherwise), and worth weighing.

It is helpful, first, to assemble some texts.

> Demonstratio est cum ita verbis res exprimitur ut geri negotium et res ante oculos esse videatur. Id fieri poterit si quae ante et post et in ipsa re facta erunt conprehendemus, aut a rebus consequentibus aut circum instantibus non recedemus . . . Haec exornatio plurimum prodest in amplificanda et commiseranda re huiusmodi enarrationibus, statuit enim rem totam et prope ponit ante oculos.
>
> (*Ad Her*. 4.55.68–69)

> Illustris explanatio rerumque quasi gerantur sub aspectum paene subiectio . . . et in exponenda re plurimum valent et ad illustrandum id quod exponitur et ad amplificandum, et eis qui audient illud quod augebimus quantum efficere oratio poterit tantum esse videatur.
>
> (Cic. *de Or*. 3.53.202)

Illustris autem oratio est si et verba gravitate delecta ponuntur et translata et superlata et ad nomen adiuncta et duplicata et idem significantia atque ab ipsa actione atque imitatione rerum non abhorrentia. Est enim haec pars orationis quae rem constituat paene ante oculos, is enim maxime sensus attingitur; sed ceteri tamen, et maxime mens ipsa moveri potest. Sed quae dicta sunt de oratione dilucida, cadunt in hanc illustrem omnia; est enim pluris aliquanto illustre quam illud dilucidum: altero fit ut intellegamus, altero vero ut videre videamur.

(Cic. *Part. Orat.* 6.20)

Evidentia in narratione . . . est quidem magna virtus, cum quid veri non dicendum, sed quodam modo etiam ostendendum est; sed subiici perspicuitati potest.

(Quint. 4.2.64)

Quas φαντασίας Graeci vocant, (nos sane visiones appellemus), per quas imagines rerum absentium ita repraesentantur animo ut eas cernere oculis ac praesentes habere videamur, has quisquis bene ceperit is erit in adfectibus potentissimus. Quidam dicunt εὐφαντασίωτον qui sibi res voces actus secundum verum optime finget: quod quidem nobis volentibus facile continget; nisi vero inter otia animorum et spes inanes et velut somnia quaedam vigilantium ita nos hae de quibus loquor imagines prosecuntur ut peregrinari navigare proeliari, populos adloqui, divitiarum quas non habemus usum videamur disponere, nec cogitare sed facere: hoc animi vitium ad utilitatem non transferemus. Hominem occisum queror: non omnia quae in re praesenti accidisse credibile est in oculis habebo? non percussor ille subitus erumpet? non expavescet circumventus, exclamabit vel rogabit vel fugiet? non ferientem, non condidentem videbo? non animo sanguis et pallor et gemitus, extremus denique expirantis hiatus insidet? Insequetur ἐνάργεια, quae a Cicerone inlustratio et evidentia nominatur, quae non tam dicere videtur quam ostendere, et adfectus non aliter quam si rebus ipsis intersimus sequentur.

(Quint. 6.2.29–32)

Ornatum est quod perspicuo ac probabili plus est. . . . Itaque ἐνάργειαν . . . quia plus est evidentia vel, ut alii dicunt, repraesentatio quam perspicuitas, et illud patet, hoc se quodam modo ostendit, inter ornamenta ponamus. Magna virtus res de quibus loquimur clare atque ut cerni videantur enuntiare. Non enim satis efficit neque, ut debet, plene dominatur oratio si usque ad aures valet, atque ea sibi iudex de quibus cognoscit narrari credit, non exprimi et oculis mentis ostendi. . . . Est igitur unum genus, quo tota rerum imago quodam modo verbis depingitur. . . . Plurimum in hoc genere sicut ceteris eminet Cicero: an quisquam tam procul a concipiendis imaginibus rerum abest ut non, cum illa in Verrem legit:

"stetit soleatus praetor populi Romani cum pallio purpureo tunicaque talari muliercula nixus in litore," non solum ipsos intueri videatur et locum et habitum, sed quaedam etiam ex iis quae dicta non sunt sibi ipse adstruat? . . . Interim ex pluribus efficitur illa quam conamur exprimere facies. . . . Sic et urbium captarum crescit miseratio. Sine dubio enim qui dicit expugnatam esse civitatem complectitur omnia quaecumque talis fortuna recipit, sed in adfectus minus penetrat brevis hic velut nuntius. At si aperias haec, quae verbo uno inclusa erant, apparebunt effusae per domus ac templa flammae et ruentium tectorum fragor et ex diversis clamoribus unus quidam sonus, aliorum fuga incerta, alii extremo complexu suorum cohaerentes et infantium feminarumque ploratus et male usque in illum diem servati fato senes: tum illa profanorum sacrorumque direptio, efferentium praedas repetentiumque discursus, et acti ante suum quisque praedonem catenati, et conata retinere infantem suum mater, et sicubi maius lucrum est pugna inter victores. Licet enim haec omnia, ut dixi, complectatur "eversio," minus est tamen totum dicere quam omnia. Consequemur autem ut manifesta sint si fuerint veri similia, et licebit etiam falso adfingere quidquid fieri solet. . . . Naturam intueamur, hanc sequamur.

(Quint. 8.3.61–71)

Quid opus erat tantum studiis laboris impendere, asked Quintilian, pondering the proper form of narrative (here history is the model) to be taught to the rhetor's students, *si res nudas atque inornatas indicare satis videretur?* (2.4.3) It might seem that he had forgotten the praise bestowed by his master Cicero upon the *commentarii* of Caesar: *nudi enim sunt, recti et venusti, omni ornatu orationis tamquam veste detracta*, with their *pura et illustris brevitas* (*Brut.* 262). It is *illustris* which will bridge the difficulty. For *illustratio*, as Cicero had named *enargeia*, although a part of *perspicuitas*, yet surmounts it: it is a denser, a brighter illumination, illumination calling attention to itself, heightening rather than revealing its object—not unlike a forest fire, through which can be seen the consumed and transformed branches and trunks, the bones of the flames. Dionysius of Halicarnassus identified *enargeia* as more internal, immanent, when he attributed it to the richness and luster of gold.[2] A *res* is conceived to be a core, such as *urbs capta*, around which cluster attendant, antecedent, and consequent *res voces actus*: *enargeia* will expound, will amplify and heat with emotion, especially *commiseratio*, will work out the *res*-cluster into an *imago* which is more than itself, alive with suggestion

that the spectator is to work out in like manner, further. By this understanding, the Suetonian *vitae* can be looked upon as a series of such clusters.

Illumination, Cicero demanded, will require a splendid, elaborated style, fertile of figures; his *rem constituere ante oculos* casts back to Aristotle, who had considered it wholly in terms of metaphor (*Rhet.* 3.11.1–4). But the style is closely tied to *actio atque imitatio rerum*: the perplexity being to illustrate *res*, and to underpin the illustration with a body of theory adaptable to multiple cases, illumination has the widest competence. It quickens rather than relates; it develops; it is an *active* process. *Historia quoquo modo scripta delectat: sunt enim homines curiosi, et quamlibet nuda rerum cognitione capiuntur*: Pliny here (*Ep.* 5.8.4) may have been mindful of Cicero, who had written that, like *mulieres inornatae quas id ipsum deceat, haec subtilis oratio etiam incompta delectat: elegantia modo et munditia remanebit* (*Or.* 23.78–79). So much skill at pleasing the rhetorical intellect, an educated and a discriminating pleasure, could not be omitted from rhetoric itself, the duty of which was to inculcate and direct discrimination. The *ornatus* of which Cicero had stripped the *genus subtile*, and the Caesarian *commentarii*, was *suave et affluens*: vivid and vigorous prose need not meet that definition. Quintilian, placing *enargeia* amid *ornatus*, and Demetrius, according to whom the *genus subtile* welcomed *enargeia* as a valued weapon (*Eloc.* 208), had been so moved by the necessity to explain the artistry of lack of art, the power of fact when *enargeia* intervenes to let it alone. It is the mystery of a map:

> It was certainly not much from the standpoint of design. The high ground, in tan and an even paler tone of brown, meandered in and out of various shades and shapes of green, and there was nothing to call you or stop you on one place or the other. Yet the eye could not leave the whole; there was a harmony of some kind. Maybe, I thought, it's because this tries to show what exists.[3]

Like the fire sweeping through a forest, flaming higher from tree to tree, so *enargeia* feeds upon particularities—*minus totum dicere quam omnia*—and absorbs them into its own strength.

Its basis in nature is man's capacity for vision, hallucination, *phantasia*. It empowers the writer to create the reality of deeds out of the mind's reality (*nec cogitare sed facere*). For this *animi vitium*, if managed by the rhetorical mind, becomes a *virium genus* (Quint. 8.3.88). As such, it is properly within the province of the sublime, as much as

of the *genus subtile* of which it is more usually a characteristic technique. Longinus devotes some discussion to it. The distinction which he takes care to draw between rhetorical *phantasia* and that of the poets, is initially from their results, in the second *ekplêxis*, and in the first *enargeia*. But it soon becomes clear that both kinds strive after *ekplêxis*, and that a truer judgment may be made upon the materials suitable to each. The poets work upon the fabulous and the incredible; but the greatest beauty of the rhetorical imagination comes of τὸ ἔμπρακτον καὶ ἐνάληθες Armed with this, the orator does not merely convince, he masters, the audience, and not the audience only: the force of *phantasia* superabounds, overwhelms the demonstrated argument in the light bathing it (*de Sublim.* 15.1–2, 8–11).

Having this as its source, *enargeia*, to the historian whose task was to record and make memorable the *res voces actus*, was a liberating and perilous resource: *secundum verum fingere* left much to the author's discretion, more with the additional temptation of *etiam falso adfingere quidquid fieri solet*. Violent occasions, especially, would urge him to prefer, or conjure, the version richest in detail and drama (Cic. *Brut.* 11.42–43). But it is a matter of more than discrepant accounts; his very duty demanded the potency which ever threatened to mislead him, if he did not lead. Lysias excelled, according to the judgment of Dionysius (*Lysias* 7), in *enargeia*, the fruit of his ability to submit to the senses what was narrated, and of his grasp of the details attending the narrative's thread. Hence, his version seemed to be the only version, encompassing all likelihood of events, what happened, was felt, thought, spoken. This was Quintilian's *in adfectibus potentissimus*. No hearer would seek to know further. It was the assurance of authenticity that the historian desired, and constructed.

The tone of the judgments handed down by Phylarchus Plutarch deemed to sound of the law courts (*Aratus* 38.8). It was his incessant care, moreover, to recreate before the eyes of his hearers the most violent and dramatic events, such as (Polybius specifies, who delivers the indictment) the sack of Mantinea, an instance of the *res* called *urbs capta* which we have observed Quintilian to cite as demonstration of what *enargeia* can do to excite pity.[4] But no conclusion follows that *enargeia* was noxious to historiography. The hostile notice of Polybius is not disinterested, he being concerned to discredit Phylarchus to the benefit of the historical account by the Achaean Aratus (2.56–63). More generally, literary finish need not imply a shrieking excess, nor excess an enabling finish. Dionysius couples Phylarchus and the notorious Duris of Samos with, it is significant,

Polybius himself, for their careless and tiring composition; Theopompus he praises for energy, point, a deliberate moral capacity, and expression in language worthy of an heir of Isocrates (*Comp. Verb.* 4.30; *Ep. ad Pomp.* 6). Developing an axiom of Simonides, that painting is silent poetry, poetry painting in speech, Plutarch maintains that the ablest and most effective historian is he who can make of his narrative an image as an artist his painting. It is for this *enargeia* that Thucydides strives, in order that his hearers may duplicate the sights and the passions of those present at the events set out (*Mor.* 346F–347C). From the same line of thinking Pliny draws to support his request to Tacitus that an action of his be recorded in the *Historiae*: *nam si esse nobis curae solet ut facies nostra ab optimo quoque artifice exprimatur, nonne debemus optare, ut operibus nostris similis tui scriptor praedicatorque contingat?* (*Ep.* 7.33.2)

The metaphor of painting is proper to be applied to the *enargeia* of Thucydides, for it is the visual nature which the rhetoricians summon again and again. It need not be a stationary nature: movement and position are alike the concern and opportunity taken by *illustratio*: *geri negotium et res ante oculos esse*. Tension between them, the writer's skills as he manipulates his effects toward the one or the other, elucidate how the *oculi mentis* may be appealed to.

> ecce autem gemini a Tenedo tranquilla per alta
> (horresco referens) immensis orbibus angues
> incumbunt pelago pariterque ad litora tendunt;
> pectora quorum inter fluctus arrecta iubaeque
> sanguineae superant undas; pars cetera pontum
> pone legit sinuatque immensa volumine terga.
> fit sonitus spumante salo; iamque arva tenebant
> ardentisque oculos suffecti sanguine et igni
> sibila lambebant linguis vibrantibus ora.
>
> (*Aen.* 2.203–11)

So Vergil beholds the serpents appearing from the sea to destroy Laocoon. Color and sound, the blood-red crests and the blood-shot eyes gleaming with fire reflected in them, the hiss and foaming of serpent and sea, are absorbed into movement, oppressing and overarching the waves, the writhing of the enormous coils of the monsters, alliteration, echoes, and rhythm as buttress to the meaning and disposition of images.[5]

> Our plenteous Streams a various Race supply;
> The bright-ey'd Perch with Fins of Tyrian Dye,

> The silver Eel, in shining Volumes roll'd,
> The yellow Carp, in Scales bedrop'd with Gold,
> Swift Trouts, diversify'd with Crimson Stains,
> And Pykes, the Tyrants of the watry Plains.
>
> (*Windsor Forest* 141–46)

Here movement is absorbed into color. The sinuosity of the eel is expressed in the gleam and flash of its silver; the trouts may be swift, but their movement is in the variety of their hues flushed with crimson; and the carp is set, like a jewel in a pendant, in the solid richness of "bedrop'd with Gold." Rich, too, and eminently civilized, are the plains ruled by the pikes, like the cards in a game of ombre that "Draw forth to Combat on the Velvet Plain." Justly has Pope's artistry here been compared with the splendor of heraldry, a formality of design amplified by "the magnificent euphony and voluptuous movement" in

> The silver Eel, in shining Volumes roll'd.[6]

The consumption of movement into station, wherein activity, fixed, yields to the spectator who himself moves about it in order to view from every vantage, may be taken a step further.

> eumque post antegressos multiplices alios, purpureis subtegminibus texti, circumdedere dracones, hastarum aureis gemmatisque summitatibus inligati, hiatu vasto perflabiles, et ideo velut ira perciti sibilantes, caudarumque volumina relinquentes in ventum.

This passage appears in the account by Ammianus Marcellinus of the emperor Constantius arriving, *post Magnenti exitium absque nomine ex sanguine Romano triumphaturus*, at Rome (16.10). The whole is not unlike Benozzo Gozzoli's *Procession of the Magi*, a mural commissioned for the chapel in the Medici palace, and for which, at the urging of Piero de' Medici, great quantities of gold and the most brilliant paints were reserved.[7] Although it is a procession, such movement as a procession implies has been assimilated, a technique like any other, into the design, the disposition of detail. The eye does not follow movement and sweep within the picture, but settles upon each detail, each group of details, each figure and image, and the groups of them in turn, which accumulate into the whole. The painter has built his work, which the spectator will also build, his pleasure in the elaboration and assurance of the design. So the dragons surrounding the emperor are by Ammianus painted upon the vision, units of color and language to which adhere, little by little, attendant particulars (*texti . . . inligati . . .*

perflabiles . . . sibilantes . . . relinquentes). From Vergil to Ammianus movement, beginning a liquid, stiffens into ice: the mobile energy, which declines along the succession of artistic choice, is regained in other form, in sheen and studied, elaborated density of effect. This is the government of mannerism: diversity, difficulty, complexity, artifact as acheivement of structure and proof of control, at pleasure.[8]

Retaining but not pressing the analogy with painting, we may divide the manipulation of detail in narrative according as the writer directs the eye as if across a picture, either stressing movement or fixing the attention to a stationary image. Tacitus describes the reaction of Agrippina to the collapse of Britannicus at a banquet:

> at Agrippinae is pavor, ea consternatio mentis, quamvis vultu premeretur, emicuit, ut perinde ignaram fuisse atque Octaviam sororem Britannici constiterit: quippe sibi supremum auxilium ereptum et parricidii exemplum intellegebat. (*Ann.* 13.16.4)

The presiding detail is the flashing movement of *emicuit* (used only here by Tacitus); this is what we see. When movement is not so brief, it can sweep over a whole scene, as the following, cited, from the speech of Caelius Rufus against C. Antonius, by Quintilian as a *credibilis rerum imago*:

> namque ipsum offendunt temulento sopore profligatum, totis praecordiis stertentem ructuosos spiritus geminare, praeclarasque contubernales ab omnibus spondis transversas incubare et reliquas circum iacere passim: quae tamen exanimatae terrore, hostium adventu percepto, excitare Antonium conabantur, nomen inclamabant, frustra a cervicibus tollebant, blandius alia ad aurem invocabat, vehementius etiam nonnulla feriebat: quarum cum omnium vocem tactumque noscitaret, proximae cuiusque collum amplexu petebat: neque dormire excitatus neque vigilare ebrius poterat, sed semisomno sopore inter manus centurionum concubinarumque iactabatur. (4.2.123–24)

Movement is engendered by rhetorical effect. The scene is set by a few broad strokes, suddenly burst into by a panicked frequency of imperfect verbs, the cast of the sentence swerving back and forth, the bewildered general flung staggering between his agitated associates. The voluptuous skill and exuberance blend their own energy with the motion depicted, a joy in derision.

> umbratus dux ipse rosis et marcidus ibit
> unguentis crudusque cibo titubansque Lyaeo,
> confectus senio, morbis stuprisque solutus.
> excitet incestos turmalis bucina somnos,
> imploret citharas cantatricesque choreas

> offensus stridore tubae discatque coactus,
> quas vigilat Veneri, castris impendere noctes.

The emperor Honorius describes the African rebel Gildo in a speech to the troops sent to suppress him, his eloquence borrowed from the poet Claudian in his *De Bello Gildico* (444–50). The lovely and ludicrous image *umbratus rosis* introduces suitably this comic villain, his digestive difficulties, his wincing at the clarion—no exhibit for the diagnostic eye, but a clown set into motion by Claudian's contempt.

Suetonius, however, although his matter is no less dramatic and violent, his characters no less vivid, will startle and stay the observer with a single clarity of detail, so instant an impression that it must be true, and true the surrounding picture. In this way Caesar shoves an incriminating document, as he walks to his assassination, among the papers *quos sinistra manu tenebat*; and soon, dying, *toga caput obvolvit, simul sinistra manu sinum ad ima crura deduxit, quo honestius caderet etiam inferiore corporis parte velata* (*DJ* 81.4; 82.2). Otho hastening to meet his fellow conspirators is stopped short *laxato calceo* (*Otho* 6.3), a detail not found in the accounts of Tacitus and Plutarch.

This technique is able to bring a rapid narrative, in which single events are swallowed up in the need to cover so much material, suddenly to a halt: during his adventures, still a child, after Perusia, Tiberius

> per Siciliam quoque et per Achaiam circumductus ac Lacedaemoniis publice, quod in tutela Claudiorum erant, demandatus, digrediens inde itinere nocturno discrimen vitae adiit flamma repente e silvis undique exorta adeoque omnem comitatum circumplexa, ut Liviae pars vestis et capilli amburerentur. (*Tib.* 6.2)

Such abrupt diminutions of narrative concentration vary again and again the stream of happenings. They need not, like Livia's scorched hair, come at the close of a period:

> vixdum mense transacto, neque diei neque temporis ratione habita, ac iam vespere, subito a militibus e cubiculo raptus, ita ut erat in veste domestica, imperator est consalutatus circumlatusque per celeberrimos vicos, strictum Divi Iulii gladium tenens detractum delubro Martis atque in prima gratulatione porrectum sibi a quodam. (*Vit.* 8.1)

The "dishabille" of Vitellius is at the center of his elevation to the purple—and ludicrously. For it begins to become clear that mere detail can be so disposed as to carry an emotional impact: *porrectum sibi a*

quodam is properly casual for this casual, comic principate. But there is brutality in farce. When Vitellius attempted a second time to abdicate,

> rursus interpellante milite ac populo et ne deficeret hortante omnem que operam suam certatim pollicente, animum resumpsit Sabinumque et reliquos Flavianos nihil iam metuentis vi subita in Capitolium compulit succensoque templo Iovis Optimi Maximi oppressit, cum et proelium et incendium e Tiberiana prospiceret domo inter epulas.
>
> (*Vit.* 15.3)

The distaste of the final two words is plain (Tacitus, although his account is much fuller, does not include this detail). Such economy is a Suetonian gift: notice the force of *dimotis pallulis* in this passage, as Titus makes his last journey:

> deinde ad primam statim mansionem febrim nanctus, cum inde lectica transferretur, suspexisse dicitur dimotis pallulis caelum, multumque conquestus eripi sibi vitam immerenti.
>
> (*Titus* 10.1)

It is a reminder that the object of *enargeia* was viewed by the rhetoricians as being to evoke an emotional response, chiefly of *commiseratio* according to the *Ad Herennium*, but more generally, as both the rhetoricians' examples and the practice of narrative writers suggest, of awe and astonishment. It is pity not unmixed with irony that summons perhaps the most striking Suetonian detail: *exanimis diffugientibus cunctis aliquamdiu iacuit donec lecticae impositum, dependente brachio, tres servoli domum rettulerunt* (*DJ* 82.3). The diminutive *servoli* is surely pathetic, but the effect is not owed chiefly to it: "That unforgettable arm," writes a recent biographer, "is the hallmark of Suetonius' genius." It could have been worthily transcribed by Jacques Louis David, as, indeed, was it, perhaps, in his portrait of the dead Marat? Certainly Jean-Leon Gérôme, in his *Death of Caesar*, 1867, showed the murdered dictator, at the foot of Pompey's statue, with one arm flung conspicuously forward across the pavement: an earlier version, of 1859, may have suggested Edouard Manet's *The Dead Toreador*.[9]

Such suffusion of mood may belong to detail whether static or kinetic. Valerius Asiaticus, compelled to suicide because, in part, Messalina coveted his magnificent gardens, *venas exsolvit, viso tamen ante rogo iussoque transferri partem in aliam, ne opacitas arborum vapore ignis minueretur: tantum illi securitatis novissimae fuit* (*Ann.* 11.3.3). Tacitus has not pressed movement; the scene can be reconstructed in various ways and tableaux, illustrating the contemptuous calm of the victim. The technique is different with a different sort of victim:

> Ac puella vicesimo aetatis anno inter centuriones et milites, praesagio malorum iam vitae exempta, nondum tamen morte adquiescebat. paucis dehinc interiectis diebus mori iubetur, cum iam viduam se et tantum sororem testaretur communesque Germanicos et postremo Agrippinae nomen cieret, qua incolumi infelix quidem matrimonium, sed sine exitio pertulisset. restringitur vinclis venaeque eius per omnes artus exsolvuntur; et quia pressus pavore sanguis tardius labebatur, praefervidi balnei vapore enecatur.
>
> (*Ann.* 14.64.1–2)

Once the tormenting delay is broken, Octavia is rushed to her death; it is the haste and helplessness of this (note the passive verbs) that are the import of the details; the despairing words of the doomed girl[10] are not far unlike those of another, the daughter of Sejanus: *puella adeo nescia, ut crebro interrogaret, quod ob delictum et quo traheretur; neque facturam ultra, et posse se puerili verbere moneri* (*Ann.* 5.9.1). The evoked pity here needs no elaboration, nor yet—detail is a versatile servant—the hilarity when Suetonius tells of the accession of Claudius:

> latentem discurrens forte gregarius miles, animadversis pedibus, studio sciscitandi quisnam esset, adgnovit extractumque et prae metu ad genua sibi adcitentem imperatorem salutavit.
>
> (*DCl* 10.2)

The farcical and debased description of Claudius, called imperator at the very moment of grovelling, is only proper to open the reign of, in Suetonius' opinion, a clownish and timorous prince.

The Tacitean account of Octavia's death concludes with grim vituperation, not, like that of Caelius against Antonius, rejoicing in the manipulation of contempt, but seeking to distil that contempt into a solid, unanswerable certainty, sufficient unto the derangement of the moral order which incites it. Tacitus speaks in his own person, imposing upon his arranged facts his *ethos*; he has become, himself, a technique upon which he can draw. It is a potent addition. Yet it can be separated from the rest of his artistry.

> inritatusque suppliciis cunctos, qui carcere attinebantur accusati societatis cum Seiano necari iubet. iacuit immensa strages, omnis sexus, omnis aetas, inlustres ignobiles, dispersi aut aggerati. neque propinquis aut amicis adsistere, inlacrimare, ne visere quidem diutius dabatur, sed circumiecti custodes et in maerorem cuiusque intenti corpora putrefacta adsectabantur, dum in Tiberim traherentur, ubi fluitantia aut ripis adpulsa non cremare quisquam, non contingere. interciderat sortis humanae commercium vi metus, quantumque saevitia glisceret, miseratio arcebatur.
>
> (*Ann.* 6.19.2–3)

Now the details which he disposes express him. The Tiberian terror has ceased to have, in its particular facts, any existence outside Tacitus. This argument a Pyrrhonist would be prepared to develop of any historian: the distinction here is that it is the artistry, and the intent, of Tacitus to render the Pyrrhonist position indisputable. Complaints of exaggeration, distortion, inaccuracy, are beside the point: they presume that the true numbers of dead, the true importance of the terror, can be recovered or, if that be not possible, it is regrettable that they cannot; that, indeed, they would supersede Tacitus, if Tacitus had not survived them.[11] It is as if the paints in their jars enjoy some prior potency, separable from the art they serve.

Suetonius did not seek to impose his *ethos* on his material after the appreciable fashion of Tacitus. This is not to maintain that he made, in the narrative, no explicit comment upon the deeds and traits of his characters. Sometimes he is even indignant, as at the exquisite harshness of Tiberius toward his exiled wife (*Tib.* 50.1), or at the brutal loutishness of Vitellius visiting the battlefield at Bedriacum, the manifestations of which he records carefully, as against the weaker disapproval by Tacitus (*Vit.* 10.3; *Hist.* 2.70). Yet these are exceptional cases. He aims for a concretion of effect, an impassive, imperturbable gaze, to which he matches his chill Latinity and through which the audience are induced to adopt an equal vision. They are asked, not to apprehend emotionally and by intellect what he means them to apprehend, but to see the same. This decorum of vision and the visual it would be difficult to press too far. Over various and discordant materials must be laid a cohesion and control, both of structure and of style; this is especially so when the writer seeks his effects from variety and discordance, a multiplicity of detail, upon the force of which he is instant even as he must force them to his will. For him, of the discrete and efficacious parts it is the interweaving, not the interwoven, that is the whole.[12] The perpetual tension is arduous to maintain.

Because it relates close, personal adventures, a rarity in ancient literature from which almost all memoirs have been lost, one of the most fascinating accounts in the history of Ammianus is of his flight from the city of Amida in Mesopotamia, after its fall to the Persians (19.8.5–12). A part discusses an effort made by him and his two companions to alleviate their thirst:

> Et quia per aestum arida siti reptantes, aquam diu quaeritando, profundum bene vidimus puteum, et neque descendendi prae altitudine, nec restium aderat copia, necessitate docente postrema, indumenta lintea, quibus tegebamur, in oblongos discidimus pannulos, unde explicato fune ingenti, centonem quem sub galea unus ferebat e nostris, ultimae aptavimus summitati, qui per funem coniectus, aquasque hauriens ad periculi modum, facile sitim qua urgebamur exstinxit.
>
> (19.8.8)

It is ingenuity not unlike that found recorded in the first-person narratives of P.O.W. literature, such as this:

> That same day I got to work on my compass. First, I placed an old razor-blade in the fire and de-tempered it until it had lost all its brittleness and flexibility. I then punched in it three holes, carefully spaced, two small ones on the outside of a larger centre one. Next I cut out from one half of the de-tempered blade an elongated diamond shape, the larger hole being dead in the centre. I scrounged around and pinched some brass, which was non-magnetic, from an electric light fitting. This I cut to shape and fastened it to the blade through the two small holes after careful trimming to give correct horizontal balance and suspension when placed on a pivot. The actual pivot was also cut from brass and possessed a needle-like point which fitted into an indentation punched in the centre dome of the brass pendulum. Taking possession of the razor containing the magnet, I went outside and located the Pole Star for true northern direction. Thereupon I stroked into the de-tempered piece of razor-blade the correct polarity and magnetism.[13]

Yet the similarity of these two accounts clashes harshly with the divergence in their style, a divergence only to be appraised, perhaps, if one were to rewrite the second somewhat in a fashion to approach the first.[14] This material Ammianus has been unable to assimilate into the tension by which his work is stamped. Its diction and style are an achievement as praiseworthy as remarkable: Ammianus has great sensory power, pictorial, contorted by its gruesome, hysterical matter; it is monumental, gestural, straining for balance, overburdened, an opulent and feared disequilibrium—so the analysis of Erich Auerbach.[15] Like the golden car of Constantius, *fulgenti claritudine lapidum variorum, quo micante lux quaedam misceri videbatur alterna* (16.10.6), it enjoys a tremulous and gorgeous cohesion improper to any matter which, intractably commonplace, it cannot forge into itself.

The detachment of Suetonius freezes detail and diversity into subservience. Its beauty is icy, and has the icy virtues, contempt and balance. Avoiding the treacherous edge which it is Ammianus' art always to tempt, yet it sacrifices, too, the excitement and vigor invited by that treachery. It risks the lack of risk, expecting to make its mark elsewhere. Illustration of this will come of looking at a motif and an incident as managed by Suetonius and by others: *horror vacuorum* and the *clades Variana*.

HORROR VACUORUM

Vacancy and desolation generate feelings by no means equivalently grim—hence the pleasure of ruins. *Proximus dies faciem victoriae latius aperuit: vastum ubique silentium, secreti colles, fumantia procul tecta, nemo exploratoribus obvius*. So Tacitus depicts the field after Mons Graupius (*Agr.* 38.2). It has poetic color, poetic language.[16] Once a character is inserted into it, whose vantage is followed, it is quickened:

> dein mobilitate ingenii et, quae natura pavoris est, cum omnia metuenti praesentia maxime displicerent, in Palatium regreditur vastum desertumque dilapsis etiam infimis servitiorum aut occursum eius declinantibus. terret solitudo et tacentes loci; temptat clausa, inhorrescit vacuis; fessusque misero errore et pudenda latebra semet occultans ab Iulio Placido tribuno cohortis protrahitur.
>
> (*Hist.* 3.84.4)

Of the scene Suetonius makes this:

> mox levi rumore et incerto, tamquam pax impetrata esset, referri se in Palatium passus est. ubi cum deserta omnia repperisset, dilabentibus et qui simul erant, zona se aureorum plena circumdedit confugitque in cellulam ianitoris, religato pro foribus cane lectoque et culcita obiectis.
>
> (*Vit.* 16)

The Tacitean account imposes solemnity, size, emptiness. Where Suetonius but mentions the palace, Tacitus makes it vacancy (*vastum desertumque*); where Suetonius specifies a rumor and its content which deceives the emperor into returning, a general moral reflection supplies, for Tacitus, the explanation. Suetonius represents the hiding place, Tacitus refers it to the emperor's situation (*pudenda latebra*). The very silence and emptiness, resonant of the Vergilian underworld (*Aen.* 6.265, 269), are, in Tacitus, the terrifying companions of Vitellius; in Suetonius he is abandoned: for the *infimi servitiorum* (more splendid a phrase than *infimi servi* or, as Suetonius might put it, *servoli*), who are left unidentified and who appear, by the context, to be slaves already in the palace to which Vitellius returns, according to Suetonius are the emperor's prior companions, now deserting him, a baker and a cook. The Tacitean Vitellius is an actor upon a stage; action is passed before the eyes of the Suetonian Vitellius like a film. It is the same with the Suetonian Nero who, unable to rouse his friends from their wings of the palace, *clausis omnium foribus, respondente nullo, in cubiculum rediit, unde iam et custodes diffugerant, direptis etiam stragulis, amota et pyxide veneni*.[17]

Tacitus' later handling of this motif is yet more pregnant with terror and awe. The charges against Titius Sabinus laid by an agent provocateur had left the whole city *anxia et pavens*: on New Year's Day a letter from Tiberius is read out accusing Sabinus of treason and conspiracy.

> nec mora quin decerneretur; et trahebatur damnatus, quantum obducta veste et adstrictis faucibus niti poterat, clamitans sic inchoari annum, has Seiano victimas cadere. quo intendisset oculos, quo verba acciderent, fuga vastitas, deseri itinera fora. et quidam regrediebantur ostentabantque se rursum, id ipsum paventes, quod timuissent.
>
> (*Ann.* 4.70.1–2)

The abstractions (*fuga*, *vastitas*), the passive verb (*deseri*), the asyndetic expanse of *itinera fora*, diffuse the fear through the scene itself, while yet intensifying it.[18]

A like resonance, but ambiguous and individual, permeates the account of Caligula's sleeplessness:

> neque enim plus quam tribus nocturnis horis quiescebat ac ne iis quidem placida quiete, sed pavida miris rerum imaginibus, ut qui inter ceteras pelagi quondam speciem conloquentem secum videre visus sit. ideoque magna parte noctis vigiliae cubandique taedio nunc toro residens, nunc per longissimas porticus vagus invocare identidem atque expectare lucem consuerat.
>
> (*Cal.* 50.3)

There is nothing here of the overwhelming emotional impression which Tacitus controls. But it has its own eerie remembrance; there is the evocative *pelagi species*; and the image of the tormented prince wandering down the enormous porticoes, calling for the dawn, is not easily forgotten.

CLADES VARIANA

The disaster suffered by Varus and his legions, as recounted by Suetonius in his life of Augustus (it is mentioned in passing elsewhere) is a brisk deployment of *res voces actus* (23). Its importance is stated at once: *Varianam paene exitiabilem tribus legionibus cum duce legatisque et auxiliis omnibus caesis*, its polysyndetic length unusual and so the more remarkable. Then the *actus* of Augustus are recounted, and these progress in personal and in vivid detail: first his precautions in the city, then in the provinces; his vows of games to Jupiter in return for improvement in the Roman power, *quod factum Cimbrico Marsicoque bello erat* (an economical addition to reinforce the gravity of the disaster); finally, his own private distress. The particulars are now charged with image and

feeling: *per continuos menses barba capilloque summisso caput interdum foribus illideret*, great violence; the verb is used twice more by Suetonius, to denote the murder of Caligula's daughter, and Nero's smashing his favorite goblets upon hearing of the army revolts (*Cal.* 59; *Nero* 47.1). Now comes the famous *vox*: *Quintili Vare, legiones redde* and the account closes with two adjectives to define the whole: *lugubris*, found only here in Suetonius; and *maestus*, twice elsewhere: the *civitas* is *maesta* at the death of Germanicus and, again, at the *clades Variana* (*Cal.* 6.1; *Tib.* 17.2).

Like Suetonius, Tacitus sets down at once the importance of the *clades*, also building along its length: *permoto ad miserationem omni qui aderat exercitu ob propinquos, amicos, denique ob casus bellorum et sortem hominum* (*Ann.* 1.61–62). It is a portentous atmosphere, Vergilian, steeped in "mystery, majesty, and compassion" if one esteems it; if one does not, a regrettable lapse into horrific and melodramatic fantasies that characterized and marred the literature of the early empire.[19] *Incedunt maestos locos visuque ac memoria deformis*. Throughout the passage details are remote, rich in emotional evocation, and, more, enriched by memory: Tacitus describes the past of a great event, can profit from the omnipresent aura of death and silence, again the romance of ruin.

Far the grandest ambition, far the most dismal failure, belongs to the *exaedificatio* which Velleius Paterculus works up of the *clades Variana* (2.117–20).[20] It is mounted upon the *sugkrisis* of two character sketches, of Varus and Arminius, which will send the reader back to Tacitus with a new admiration for his. A further principle of organization is upon abstractions—*marcor ducis, perfidia hostis, iniquitas fortunae*—which can be easily inflated with commonplaces. *Nunc summa deflenda est*: Velleius is not reticent with his emotional appeal. What follows is, while not useless (one or two peculiar images can be pried out, perhaps), closely akin to a declaimer's *res*, such as Quintilian's *urbs capta*, here *exercitus trucidatus*, and riddled with the author's comments tricked out in turn by figures. If Phylarchus wrote much like this, the wrath of Polybius cannot be excessive; and, as Dionysius said of Duris and the rest, a striving for pathetic or dramatic effects is no guarantee of any vigor or freshness of language and style. Within a paragraph there is polyptoton (*desertis, desertor*), *commoratio* and antithesis (*trucidatus, trucidarat*, bad enough, but paling before *quam pauper divitem ingressus dives pauperem reliquit*, earlier), clanging antithesis (*plus ad moriendum quam ad pugnandum; supplicio quam proelio*), and metonymy (*feritas hostium*). This offensive passage (119) cannot be indicted for rhetoric; the use of

any rhetorical device, in whatever frequency, is a neutral critical fact. Offense rises from the absence of any vigor and subtlety in Velleius, any perception that he has sought the flexibility and the opportunity of rhetoric because only they are worthy to express what his mind has to offer. There is no detail which the reader can take away, neither an image of movement nor a static flash, nor yet an imposing richness springing directly from the author's intellect rather than by means of detail. Hence the gory close (120.6) is symptomatic of the Velleian failure: without the exuberance of Lucan or the grim moral tone of Tacitus, it is mere tabloid trashiness.

Suetonius is not vulnerable to such blame—and this despite his vulgar reputation as a gossip. Unless one believes that certain information presented in a biography, however disposed and observed to work in the whole, is by its nature gossipy, Suetonius must be acquitted of that charge also. For entirely wanting in his *vitae* is that gaudy and laxative prose which is the proper vehicle, unrestrained, ill-ordered, ephemeral, for that salacious and malignant material which we enjoy and call gossip. This is not to argue that the Suetonian prose is without rhetoric, an impossibility, or even without some of the more frequent figures which it was a portion of rhetoric's task to tabulate.[21] Often they will appear for emphasis, at the heading of a rubric for instance, or to ease a transition; on occasion Suetonius will adopt one for a certain neatness, as when, in the section cited earlier on Caligula's insomnia, he combines paronomasia and antithesis: *ne iis quidem placida quiete, sed pavida miris rerum imaginibus*. But the very rarity of these devices demonstrates that they are not, as by Velleius, necessary to confer meaning on matter. Although to the *oratio subtilis* Cicero would permit a sparing use of figures—*ille tenuis orator, modo sit elegans, nec in faciendis verbis erit audax et in transferendis verecundus et parcus in priscis in reliquisque ornamentis et verborum et sententiarum demissior* (*Or.* 24.81)—yet it is assembly and disposition of materials whereby it distinguishes itself. The Suetonian skill with the single detail would, alone, be insufficient.

For Suetonius, craftsmanship with the period[22] had to deal with two adversary pressures, of looseness and of solidity. On the one hand, the *genus subtile* was *solutum, continuationem verborum relaxans et dividens* (Cic. *Or.* 23.77; 25.85.) More than that, in history *placet omnia dici Isocrateo Theopompeoque more illa circumscriptione ambituque, ut tanquam in orbe inclusa currat oratio, quoad insistat in singulis perfectis absolutisque sententiis*, a stipulation having itself a milky expansiveness (Cic. *Or.* 61.207). This Quintilian took up, relaxing history from the rhythmic requirements of the forensic period, but not relaxing too much:

omnia eius membra conexa sunt, . . . ut homines, qui manibus invicem adprehensis gradum firmant, continent et continentur (9.4.129). However, it was little to abandon the period altogether, except for occasional effects, as did Sallust; and even the Ciceronian descendant, Livy, was heretic often.[23] The period proper to history was a fluid creation, in theory as much as (if not more) in fact. Demetrius adopted a middle course, according to which perfect finish and easy relaxation were equally to be shunned, in favor of that simplicity which lent dignity to historical exposition (*Eloc.* 1.19).

Against this general cluster of admonitions, Suetonius laid his peculiar requirements. The essential mark of the period is subordination of the secondary, by which differentiated materials are united within the syntactic complex to produce a complete comprehension of a single, presiding fact or effect. So far, this was to suit the biographer, who, lacking a scheme of chronology in which events could accumulate through the narrative to explain each event added to it, had to assemble again and again, from paragraph to paragraph and, more often still, from sentence to sentence, all the relevant attendant information for his multiplied, discrete narratives. But this need ran against the usual demand that the period should obey the Law of Increasing Members: the suspense built up through the subordinate particulars, is released in the most capacious member, stating the main import of the linguistic structure. Suetonius will play with this law within a small compass, as in pairs: *oblivionem et inconsiderantiam*; *irae atque iracundiae conscius sibi*; *nulla adeo suspicio, nullus auctor tam levis exstiterit* (also anaphora); *saevum et sanguinarium natura fuisse, magnisque minimisque apparuit rebus* (*DCl* 39.1; 38.1; 37.1; 34.1)—in which paronomasia and alliteration may be added for neatness of effect. There may be a tricolon of adjectival phrases:

> gens Flavia
> obscura illa quidem
> ac sine ullis maiorum imaginibus
> sed tamen rei publicae nequaquam paenitenda
> (*Vesp.* 1.1)

or through an entire sentence:

> praesagia mortis eius praecipua fuerunt:
> exortus crinitae stellae
> tactumque de caelo monumentum Drusi patris
> et quod eodem anno ex omnium magistratuum genere
> plerique mortem obierant.
> (*DCl* 46)

wherein there is *variatio* within the members also (noun; participle and noun; relative clause). But this technique is rare in Suetonius; only the last example can be said to be a part of a narrative unit.

For the task of Suetonius is not to build to an effect, but to reduce a mass of historical information to a hierarchy of detail, without the aid of any but the most immediate context. It will follow that, for the most part—exceptions, as shall be demonstrated, tend to appear where the narrative is continuous over several sentences—the final member containing the principle of the period will be the shortest. Vigor accrues to the reduction. Demetrius compared the members of a periodic style to the stones soaring into a vault (*Eloc.* 1.13); a second useful image is of the mailed cavalry called *clibanarii, quos laminarum circuli tenues, apti corporis flexibus ambiebant, per omnia membra diducti, ut quocumque artus necessitas commovisset, vestitus congrueret, iunctura cohaerenter aptata*. Claudian like Ammianus was struck by this sight: the combination of gleaming polish and living moment was dramatic and provocative.[24]

The Suetonian period is individual. What it achieves, however, has forbears. An exception to the Law of Increasing Members is that an apodosis should be shorter than a protasis. It is no harsh twisting of categories to see the Suetonian period in this light, the preliminary matter, of which the elucidated and clinching principle is the apodosis, being the protasis. Nor is it irrelevant that the period in its beginnings was understood to have a dualistic structure at base, later developed:[25] a foundation of many of Suetonius' periods is that of two principal verbs, around which are superimposed, or into which issue, subordinate assemblies of detail. It might be called the AB structure.

> cubicula plurifariam disposita
> tabellis ac sigillis lascivissimarum picturarum et figurarum
> adornavit
> librisque Elephantidis
> instruxit,
> ne cui in opera edenda exemplar impetratae schemae
> deesset.
> (*Tib.* 43.2)

This, being fairly evenly balanced between the burdens upon the A and the B verb, is rather atypical. More often, a preponderance on one or the other is found. When on the second, the sentence usually is part of a larger narrative sequence, as that devoted to the relations between Tiberius and his mother:

ac mox neque aegrae adesse
curavit
defunctamque
et, dum adventus sui spem facit,
complurium dierum mora
corrupto demum et tabido corpore
funeratam
prohibuit
consecrari,
quasi id ipsa mandasset.

(*Tib.* 51.2)

Or during Otho's conspiracy:

tunc
abditus propere muliebri sella
in castra
contendit
ac
deficientibus lecticariis
cum descendisset cursumque cepisset,
laxato calceo
restitit,
donec
omissa mora succollatus
et a praesente comitatu imperator consalutatus
inter faustas adclamationes strictosque gladios
ad principia
devenit,
obvio quoque
non aliter ac si conscius et particeps foret
adhaerente.

(*Otho* 6.3)

Otherwise, the A verb holds the mass of subordinating constructions, with the B verb, frequently, to round off the meaning:

nepotum quoque suorum munere
cum consternatum ruinae metu populum
retinere et confirmare nullo modo posset,
transiit e loco suo
atque in ea parte

consedit,
quae suspecta maxime erat.

(*DA* 43.5)

item cum
soleret ex lectione cotidiana quaestiones
super cenam proponere
comperissetque
Seleucum grammaticum a ministris suis
perquirere
quos quoque tempore tractaret auctores,
atque ita praeparatum
venire
primum a contubernio
removit,
deinde etiam ad mortem
compulit.

(*Tib.* 56)

nam Chariclen medicum,
quod commeatu afuturus
e convivio egrediens
manum sibi osculandi causa apprehendisset,
existimans temptatas ab eo venas,
remanere ac recumbere
hortatus est
cenamque
protraxit.

(*Tib.*72.3)[26]

Within this structure Suetonius can discover much room, enough for the last days and death of Vespasian:

hic cum super urgentem valitudinem
creberrimo frigidae aquae usu etiam intestina
vitiasset
nec eo minus muneribus imperatoriis
ex consuetudine
fungeretur
ut etiam legationes audiret cubans,
alvo repente usque ad defectionem soluto,
imperatorem

ait
stantem mori opertere
dumque consurgit ac nititur,
inter manus sublevantium
extinctus est
VIIII Kal. Iul.
annum agens aetatis
sexagensimum ac nonum
superque mensem ac diem septimum.

(*Vesp.* 24)

The compression is patent. Often, further, Suetonius strives for a certain neatness, also attained by joining the A and B verbs together. In these cases, there is the same variation among B verb with preponderant subordination, a fair balance, and A verb governing more.

quam (Messalinam) cum comperisset
super cetera flagitia atque dedecora C. Silio etiam nupsisse
dote inter auspices consignata
supplicio
adfecit
confirmavitque
pro contione apud praetorianos,
quatenus sibi matrimonia male cederent,
permansurum se in caelibatu,
ac nisi permansisset,
non recusaturum confodi manibus ipsorum.

(*DCl* 26.2)

non multo post paenitens facti
et in alios culpam conferens
vocata contione
iuravit
coegitque
iurare et ceteros
nihil sibi antiquius quiete publica fore.

(*Vit.* 15.3)

verum postero die
et senatu segniore in exequendis conatibus
per taedium ac dissensionem diversa censentium

et multitudine, quae circumstabat, unum rectorem iam
et nominatim exposcente
armatos pro contione iurare in nomen suum
passus est
promisitque
singulis quina dena sestertia,
primus Caesarum fidem militis etiam praemio
pigneratus.

(*DCl* 10.4)

The following aids the speed of Otho's plot:

deinde
liberto adesse architectos nuntiante
quod signum convenerat,
quasi venalem domum inspecturus
abscessit
proripuitque
se postica parte Palati ad constitutum.

(*Otho* 6.2)

An elaboration is an ABC structure. The next case shows the C verb joined closely to the B in having the same object:

rursus interpellante milite
ac populo et ne deficeret hortante
omnemque operam suam certatim pollicente,
animum
resumpsit
Sabinumque et reliquos Flavianos
nihil iam metuentis
vi subita in Capitolium
compulit
succensoque templo Iovis Optimi Maximi
oppressit,
cum et proelium et incendium
e Tiberiana prospiceret domo
inter epulas.

(*Vit.* 15.3)

In the following, the B and C verbs are more closely linked: the B matching the A in carrying the weight of data, the C rounding off the whole:

quare a Massilia Gesoriacum usque
pedestri itinere confecto inde
transmisit
ac sine ullo proelio aut sanguine
intra paucissimos dies
parte insulae in deditionem recepta,
sexto quam profectus erat mense
Romam
rediit
triumphavitque
maximo apparatu.

(*DCl* 17.2)

More tightness comes of all three verbs governing the same object:

atque ex eo patefacta interiore animi sui nota
omnium criminationibus obnoxios
reddidit
variaque fraude inductos, ut
et concitarentur ad convicia
et concitati proderentur,
accusavit
per litteras amarissime congestis etiam probris
et iudicatos hostis fame
necavit,
Neronem in insula Pontia,
Drusum in ima parte Palatii.

(*Tib.* 54.2)

Loosening this structure, Suetonius need not sacrifice speed: the ABC period, elongated, produces an effect of panic and confusion:

sed revocato rursus impetu
aliquid secretioris latebrae
ad colligendum animum
desideravit,
et offerente Phaonte liberto suburbanum suum
inter Salariam et Nomentanam viam
circa quartum miliarium,
ut erat nudo pede atque tunicatus,
paenulam obsoleti coloris
superinduit

adopertoque capite et ante faciem optento sudario
equum
inscendit,
quattuor solis comitantibus,
inter quos et Sporus erat.

(*Nero* 48.1)

Looser still, more elongated, more panic:

Inter moras perlatos a cursore Phaonti codicillos
praeripuit
legitque
se hostem a senatu iudicatum
et quaeri, ut puniatur more maiorum,
interrogavitque
quale id genus esset poenae;
et cum comperisset
nudi hominis cervicem inseri furcae,
corpus virgis ad necem caedi,
conterritus
duos pugiones, quos secum extulerat,
arripuit
temptataque utriusque acie rursus
condidit,
causatus nondum adesse fatalem horam.

(*Nero* 49.2)

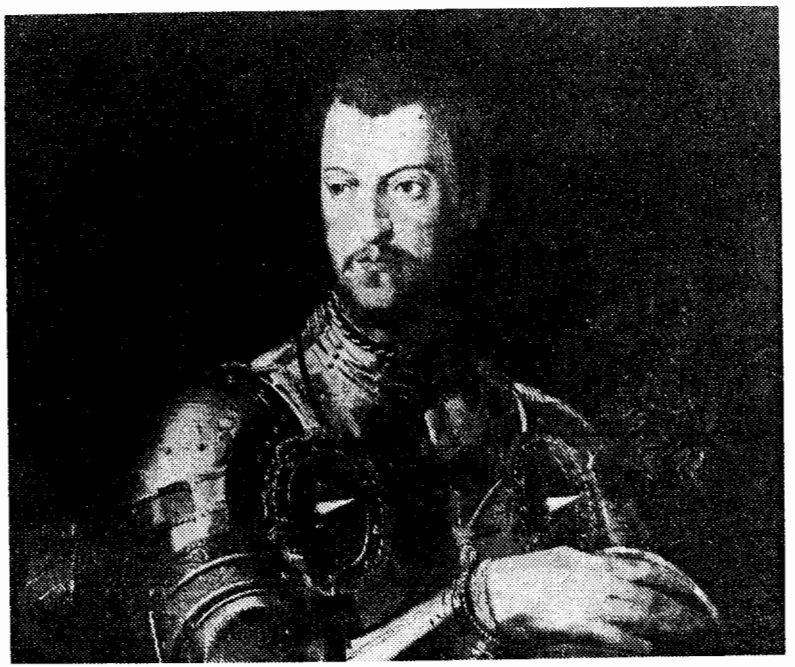
Haste of style copies haste of action. It copies also haste of material. Suetonius is able to carry Germanicus from birth to death in two sentences, the first an ABC collocation, the second, after two participial phrases (past), two asyndetic clauses after *cum*, and one participial phrase (present), having but one verb, *obiit* (*Cal.* 1.1). He can load the envy and cunning of Tiberius into one participle: *ad componendum Orientis statum expulsus*—not many are expelled into such impressive exile. Suetonius, it seems, resents to waste words. Here it will be recalled that the *Historia Augusta*, as elsewhere a profligate heir, speaks of him: *cui familiare fuit amare brevitatem* (*Quad. Tyr.* 1.2).

The age was captivated by *brevitas*. A capacious concept, it was a virtue, or a fault, of style and of matter: it embraced, or was related to, rapidity, haste, compression, density: it allowed, it could encourage,

ingenious amplification of the whole through a steely and pointed brevity in each part.[27] So Suetonius can sketch, hundreds of times, backgrounds of a particular, can send action scurrying, can press the attention of his audience against a single detail, can elaborate an imperial life, circling, from every vantage. *Brevitas* was a *virtus narrandi*, long pondered.[28] There were two levels of compression, according to Cicero (*de Or.* 2.80.326ff.): *cum verbum nullum redundat*, that brevity was desirable, suitable; but if the concept was taken to designate *cum tantum verborum est quantum necesse est*, Cicero warned that there were risks, better avoided: the result was obscurity, and the sacrifice of charm and persuasiveness. The author *Ad Herennium* disagreed in part, according to whom the precepts of brevity were those of clarity also, and *quo brevior, dilucidior et cognitu facilior narratio fiet* (1.9.15). When he spoke of style, Cicero himself united the two: *brevitas autem conficitur simplicibus verbis semel una quaque re dicenda, nulli rei nisi ut dilucide dicas serviendo* (*Part. Or.* 6.19). It is reasonably clear—for the ancient rhetorics have no absolutely fixed and assured theory of brevity in form and in matter and their relation—that the difficulty and challenge lay in allying proper facts to proper brevity. Suetonius aimed consistently at the second and more intensified category defined by Cicero; he met the challenge by *enargeia*.

Cicero's fear of obscurity could be dissolved by the supernal clarity which, it has been observed, *enargeia* conferred. Detail was visible and visual. Nor need the persuasive and the charming be given up: to see was to be persuaded, and not everyone subscribed to Cicero's uberant estimation of what charm is. Brevity itself was pleasing, in the judgment of one against whom Pliny marshalled the forces of magnitude (*Ep.* 1.20); it was the finish of the Sallustian brevity that delighted the learned reader (*Quint.* 10.1.32; cf. 4.2.45). The refining of the *nuda rerum cognitio* was the achievement of the Suetonian compression. "It fareth with Sentences as with coynes"—this the judgment of Lancelot Andrewes, an expert witness—"In coines, they that in smallest compasse conteine greatest value, are best esteemed: and, in sentences, those that in fewest words comprise most matter, are most praised."[29] The sentences minted by Suetonius were each engraved with a weight, delicacy, density, a frequent and brilliant detail. They are brief, because vivid; vivid, brief.

They are the brush strokes making up a portrait, effective because of a multiplicity of line fixed into an irreducible order, both several and a whole. The Latin style which Suetonius controls can be compared with the medium of tempera which—as when put to use by Andrew Wyeth in his *Snow Flurries*, painted in 1953—is patient, exacting, a weaving



Agnolo Bronzino: *Cosimo de' Medici*, courtesy of ALINARI/ART RESOURCE

together of closely observed and perfected particularities without merging them. "I enjoy having a picture in my studio that I can nibble on, and feel that I can come close to the essential. The thing that makes me hang on to tempera is that if a picture does come off, it has a power and a solidity nothing else has; and there's a schematic quality about tempera that I like. . . . it's not spontaneous, it doesn't shine like oil, it has a dry substance." Then, catching sight of a blue jacket against plaster: "Nothing else can do the air within that shadow so well as tempera."[30]

Another artist comes to mind. Agnolo Bronzino—"tutti furono naturalissimi," writes Vasari of his portraits, "fatti con incredibile diligenza, et di maniera finiti, che più non si può desiderare"—was painter to the court of Cosimo I de' Medici.[31] Bronzino having executed a commission of decorations to a ducal chapel, Cosimo caused himself (probably in 1545) to be painted in white armor, his hand on a helmet. The nicety of detail,

the restless, irresistible apprehension of each feature, seems to solidify the personality; yet its power is no less, it is more, immanent in the whole. The armor is lucid; the flesh of the negligent hand startles against the polish of the helmet; above, the dark gaze of the Duke acquires disquieting force next the inanimate vitality of the steel. As with the excesses of Caligula, the opulent and savage caprice of Domitian, told in the imperturbable clarity of Suetonian Latin, so with this portrait of Cosimo, there is a contradiction of matter and method that is both unacceptable and memorable: we can the less easily forget the chill, impersonal vividness by which we are troubled.

The fame of the portrait of Cosimo's duchess, Eleonora of Toledo, might by an easy flippancy be assigned to her dressmaker than to her painter, for the dress is a marvellous tribute to detail. Bronzino's near lubricious fascination with particularity, the supernal realism so often commended by Vasari, threaten to overcome the sitter. Yet they match her: the brocade becomes the personality, not merely because—albeit among a self-conscious and circumspect nobility, intent upon *maniera*, this was important[32]—Eleonora herself chose the dress to represent her nature, and in it is known, her tomb opened in 1857, to have been buried, but also because the passionate detachment of the painter has imposed upon the woman, set forth so splendidly, an enigma: she has been fashioned as still life, but is not lifeless; that fantastic dress seems itself to take breath from her.[33]

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

Rebus ipsis data omnia. The verdict of Politian might seem to prophesy the modern Suetonius, whether the industrious compiler or the directed organ of equestrian and Septician propaganda. But it does not. Embedded in a laudation and invocation of *fides*, a conception of artistry and persuasion, it rather appeals to the ordering of matter assembled, to the cohesion, density, clarity compelling and embodying that order. Attention to the matter is not inimical to design and craftsmanship: without it, the best tools are useless or wasted; to profit from it, only the best tools will do. It may be surprising, but it is certainly fitting, that the exponent of history written "wie es eigentlich gewesen" was a dramatist both in his work and by conviction: the human past is the drama of God, which the historian, in order to explicate, must explicate dramatically.[1] Some may judge Ranke's own standards of value to be disreputable, even toxic. That does not nullify the value of standards.

Art, artisan, artifact, artistry—the Suetonian achievement has not of late been appraised according to these categories, either sufficiently or with generous expectation of the result. The essays here are (their first claim) beginnings to the enterprise. But the enterprise is itself a beginning. Suetonius labored to represent the life and lives of the past: correct care of that representation presumes the same care of that past. So long ignored as an artist, Suetonius must not now be shaped anew into an artist alone—or, more accurately, into a creator of objects separated from their intent. The temptation is patent to prefer texts that can offer, or be made to offer, discrete literary opportunities. Tacitus becomes such a text, to be worked for themes, structures, narratives. Suetonius, for the worst of reasons, has eluded that fate. Yet both sought to make an order and a monument of their past, however unfriendly and disbelieving our assessment of them; besides, Pyrrhonism is skeptical, not nihilistic.

If we strive to recover Suetonius as an artist, it is an artist of the past; if to elevate him alongside Tacitus, not for merit (it is not a contest) but as worthy of critical attention, it is to secure both in the necessarily consequent project: judging the intellect

American University Studies

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The Arts of Suetonius

An Introduction

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