IV

Suetonius and his Influence

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BY A.D. 120 Classical Latin literature was near its close. Of the major authors of the school and University syllabus, the historian Tacitus must have just about completed his *Annals* and was perhaps dead; Juvenal, the last of the satirists, was well advanced in his literary career, as the last representative of that elaborate and rhetorical style which we recognize as Silver Latin. The new emperor, Hadrian (117–138), was himself a keen poet and patron of poets; but during his reign literature was to lose almost all distinction until the dubious revival in the middle of the fourth century, falling for the most part into the hands of such scholars and pedants as Fronto and Aulus Gellius, whose interest harked back to the earliest age of Roman letters.

The transition from the Classical period to this age of scholarship is marked by the climax, such as it is, of Roman biography. Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus at once says the last word on the rulers of Rome during the first century after Christ and provides the pattern of the bookish writers of the Antonine age. He was born of an equestrian family about A.D. 70, perhaps at Hippo Regius in North Africa, perhaps in Italy—Ostia, Pisaurum, and Rome have all been tentatively suggested.[1] Educated partly in the capital, he became a *grammaticus*, or teacher of literature, before embarking on the public career open to men of his rank. He secured a posting to Britain as military tribune, as his father had been before him; but, although this was normally essential for the equestrian *cursus honorum*, he had it transferred to a relative and evidently confined his career to more sedentary offices.[2] From a fragmentary inscription found at Hippo (Bône) in 1952,[3] we know that he held a succession of posts at court: *a studiis* to the emperor (a scholarly appointment of uncertain scope),[4] *a bibliothecis*, in charge of imperial libraries in Rome; and

ab epistulis, in charge of the emperor's correspondence. The last of these, which developed during the second century into a major civil service appointment in the increasingly centralized bureaucracy, he held under Hadrian; the two former seem, on grounds of both chronological probability and inscriptional evidence, to have fallen in the last years of Trajan's reign; and a lacuna in the inscription, which cannot now be filled, must have contained the titles of one or two earlier posts, perhaps of the same type, so that altogether Suetonius' employment in the palace will have occupied the better part of the second decade of the century. The next datable event in his career is the dedication of his main work of biography, the *Caesars*, to the praetorian prefect, Septicius Clarus,[5] who held office from 119 to 122; and finally a passage in the Augustan *Life of Hadrian*[6] states that Suetonius was dismissed, together with Septicius, for lack of respect towards the empress. After this we hear nothing of Suetonius' career: a reference towards the end of the imperial *Lives*[7] suggests that he was still writing after A.D. 130, and some such period as this seems essential to allow for the completion of his multifarious writings, of which little but the titles are now known. There is some plausibility in the suggestion that the lost work *On Public Offices* should be referred to this period,[8] when the majority of Hadrian's reforms in the imperial bureaucracy are probably to be placed; and this might indicate some return of Suetonius to favour. Other works[9] of a predominantly linguistic nature, such as the treatise on the correct names of articles of clothing or that on Greek terms of abuse, may well belong to his early career as a *grammaticus* or the years immediately following. But generally we must be content with the picture of the scholar extending his interests into all sorts of obscure branches of knowledge over a very long period, interrupted only to a limited extent by the loss of favour in 122. The particular ways in which he was able to take advantage of his position as head of the imperial archives will be considered below.

Suetonius' first work of biography, *On Illustrious Men*, has come down to us only in a mutilated form.[10] Of the various sections, we have that on *grammatici* more or less complete; and with it, in the same manuscript, the preface and the first five *Lives* from the *Rhetoricians*—all on a very small scale, and lacking any developed biographical plan. From the *Poets*, *Lives* of Terence, Virgil, Horace, and Lucan have come down to us, attached to MSS. of the authors'

poems, though in variously abbreviated or expanded forms; and the brief extant *Lives* of Tibullus and Persius may be due to Suetonius in part or in whole. Fragmentary *Lives* of a single Orator and a single Historian survive from their respective sections. The work as a whole was used by St. Jerome to provide items for his chronological table of history; and from this a number of isolated sentences can be attributed to Suetonian *Lives*. We can hardly judge of the quality of the work as a whole from these odd fragments: only that the biographer was ready to quote literary works and other documents to establish controversial points or to illustrate such matters as the relationship of Horace and Maecenas. The literary biographies are almost certainly earlier and less developed than the *Caesars*, from which conclusions may more satisfactorily be drawn; but a remarkable proportion of our knowledge of Roman literary history today is derived from this ill-fated work.

The original model for a series of *Lives* of Roman emperors may have been some such Greek author as the obscure Phaenias of Eresus,[11] who wrote *Lives* not only of poets and philosophers but of the tyrants of Sicily. The latter appear not to have fallen under the category of panegyrics, to which so many of our extant biographies properly belong—the Greek *Lives* of Agesilaus by Xenophon and of Evagoras by Isocrates, as well as much of Nepos and the *Agricola* of Tacitus. Even Plutarch, writing during Suetonius' own time, partakes largely of the manner of panegyric. Whether or not Phaenias had shown the way, in writing *Lives* that were objective, or actually critical, Suetonius was presumably prompted to adopt this sort of attitude by the fashion of the time. Tacitus, in his preliminary remarks both to the *Histories* and to the *Annals*,[12] drew attention to the way in which earlier writers on the imperial period had tended to be either flatterers, writing to please the reigning monarch, or traducers, exploiting the reaction after a bad emperor's death; and had set out to combine elements from the two types into a coherent and objective whole. We may form our own opinions of Tacitus' success. But writers in the reign of Trajan or Hadrian were at last far enough removed in time from the Julio-Claudian emperors to make a critical assessment possible as well as necessary.

Suetonius could hardly contemplate rivalling Tacitus in writing history in the ordinary sense, a type of literature which required the stylistic artistry and grasp of major issues which the older man had

recently demonstrated so notoriously. But even in Tacitus history continually threatened to become little more than the history of the emperor rather than the empire, for all that he still observed the rules of annalistic writing, with a year-by-year framework and occasional attention to provincial affairs. True biography, if it was to get away from Tacitean history, had to take an entirely different line of approach, and to abandon chronology almost entirely. It could be assumed that the main narrative of events would be known well enough from Tacitus or from earlier and fuller annalists. The pattern for the alternative analytic scheme was already provided to some extent by panegyric, which had dealt with the hero's virtues in succession, each with one or more anecdotes to illustrate it (this is clearly seen in Xenophon, or in Nepos' *Epaminondas*), and the inscriptions of Roman epitaphs had followed something of the same line.[13] None of these, however, appears to have developed the analytic method to the extent which we find in Suetonius.

The pattern may be seen clearly in the *Julius*, the first of the twelve *Caesars*. Family and birth, with accompanying omens, are now lost, apart from a stray fragment; then the career, up to the final victory and accession to supreme power—this section being far more protracted than in the following *Caesars*, for whom accession comes relatively soon and early life is less eventful. Next the celebrations of the victory, including public games (a subject which always interested Suetonius deeply, being dealt with in one of his lost works); then his reforms, and his plans for further projects. At this point (45.3) comes the first of those passages in which Suetonius explains his programme for the following sections—though it seems probable that in this, the first of the *Caesars*, the first half of the *Life* may originally have opened with a similar statement of headings. Here he says: 'As he acted and planned in this way, he was cut short by death. Before I describe this, it will not be irrelevant to set forth in outline details concerning his appearance and bearing, his personal habits and his character, and also his practices in civil and military life.' After these topics have in turn been dealt with in their respective ways, and with no regard for chronology, he proceeds to a discussion of Julius' dictatorial ways, and so on to the conspiracy against him, his death, will, and funeral, and the public reactions which followed. In this *Life* the analytic sections occupy a relatively small position, but the principle is the same. Although the pattern is reproduced more or less closely in all the following *Lives*, there is

no fixed list of headings. Even the sequence Family—Father—Birth—Early life till accession—is varied in different ways. In *Augustus* the fourth of these rubrics includes a long section on the civil wars, in approximately chronological order; in *Tiberius* a long account of the exile in Rhodes. In *Caligula*, there is nothing to be said of his family, already dealt with at the beginning of Tiberius; but his father, Germanicus, rates a short biography on his own, constructed on something like the standard pattern. Again, the characteristics discussed vary according to the individual: the really villainous emperors have no virtues at all (except in so far as a display of piety towards relatives regularly follows close on accession), but a large catalogue of vices; others have a mixture of both. Then the sections of personal appearance and habits come in different positions: sometimes at the beginning of the character as a whole, sometimes at the end; after the death in others; early on in boyhood in the single case of *Titus*. This degree of elasticity makes the scheme much more tolerable, though it is difficult to assert that the variations are really the result of careful calculation. There is certainly little evidence of conscious effort to build up a coherent character, such as one finds in Plutarch. This is largely because Suetonius avoids generalizations, preferring a list of disconnected items which the reader must add up for himself. As an example of this sort of passage, the following chapter describes the stupidity of Claudius:

> When Messalina had been executed, shortly after sitting down to dinner he enquired, why the mistress did not appear? Many of those whom he had condemned on capital charges, on the very next day he ordered to be summoned to council or to play dice, and, as if they were slow in coming, sent a messenger to rebuke their laziness. When he was about to marry Agrippina, contrary to the laws of relationship, he did not refrain from referring to her in every speech he made as 'my daughter, my foster-child, born and brought up in the bosom of my family'. When he was about to adopt Nero, as if it were not enough that he was being criticized for adopting a stepson when he had a grown son of his own, he repeatedly announced that this was the first time anyone had been adopted into the Claudian family. (*Cl.* 39)

In this paragraph the majority of the incidents described refer to well-known persons, and can be dated precisely by anyone who knows the main outlines of the reign. The second anecdote, of the unnamed councillors, is typical of all too many pieces of information

which modern historians would like to be able to place in a satisfactory context; though there is some likelihood that it belongs shortly after Messalina's death. From this point of view Suetonius can be infuriating. Again and again he passes over some interesting topic with an oblique reference, as the expulsion of the Jews under 'Chrestus' in *Cl.* 25.4, or the Vinician conspiracy in *Nero* 36.1, of which we happen to have no other direct source of information. Again and again he quotes a story of dubious veracity, with no better authority than 'it is commonly said' or 'the tradition is'. In this latter respect he is no worse than other Roman writers, who realized that nothing so defaces the written page as the constant citation of earlier writers' names—and the footnote, of course, had not been invented; but the deficiency is the clearer in Suetonius simply because he so patently draws on a variety of inconsistent sources and makes no attempt to reconcile them. But if Suetonius irritates modern readers in this way, it is because they are hoping to use him as an historical source, to provide a factual account of the events of such-and-such an emperor's reign. This is not, of course, how Suetonius intended his *Lives* to be read. He could hardly have dreamed that an age would come when readers lacked even certain books of Tacitus' *Annals* and *Histories*, not to mention the less-brilliant historical works of Aufidius Bassus and the elder Pliny. His concern is deliberately withdrawn from topics other than the character and career of the central figure, and this meant that he was bound to follow what it is convenient to term the Law of Biographical Relevance.[14] Public affairs do not interest the biographer, except in so far as they reflect the emperor's position; provincial developments, wars, and disasters can be ignored almost completely; ministers and generals, even when as prominent as Aulus Plautius or Corbulo or Agricola, may not merit even a single reference. Modern prosopographers may believe that an emperor's choice of administrators throws much light on his character, but this is a very recent idea, and Suetonius can hardly be blamed for leaving these personages on one side.

Another feature of the *Caesars* (of which incidentally there seems to be no trace in the literary *Lives*) arises naturally from the method of arrangement *per species*: the announcement of a series of topics to be dealt with in order, followed by sections on the said topics. We have noted one such statement of programme in the *Life of Julius*; another appears in *Aug.* 61.1, summing up the previous material

and introducing what follows: 'Since I have now described his behaviour in his commands and offices and in administering the state throughout the world in peace and in war, I shall go on to discuss his personal and private life, and the nature of his character and fortune at home and among his intimates from his youth until the end of his life.' This is in effect a device of rhetoric, called in Latin *partitio* or *divisio*, introduced to Roman oratory by Cicero's older contemporary Hortensius,[15] who earned ridicule by ticking off items on his fingers as he announced the plan of his speech. Cicero himself certainly employed such *divisiones* in the interests of clarity, and they are to be found in almost all Latin prose writers, and even some poets. In biography, they occur in the earliest extant Greek examples, as in Xenophon's *Cyropedia* (i. 1.6) and Isocrates' *Evagoras* (22); and there are a few examples in Cornelius Nepos, particularly in *Epaminondas* (1.4), the *Life* which most closely approximates to the Suetonian pattern. In Suetonius himself the precedent of these earlier *Lives*, all mainly panegyrical in tone, may have been reinforced by the grammarian's practice of classification. From his book *on Clothing* a simple example survives,[16] in which he first named the three types of priestly hat, and then dealt with them in the same order. At all events, having adopted *divisio* in order to make clear the scheme of his arrangement *per species*, he soon begins to use it more and more, until it becomes a positive mannerism and often tends to confuse the reader instead of assisting him. This is largely because once he has announced the topics to be dealt with he is likely to proceed from one to the next without repeating the key word or marking the transition in any way. For example, in *Aug.* 51.1 we have: 'There are many major proofs of his mercy and restraint.' The experienced reader can recognize at once that the following section, covering the rest of 51, consists of instances of mercy: the opening words of 52, 'He accepted no temples in any province . . .' contain no overt indication that they are the beginning of a long series of anecdotes on Augustus' restraint. Likewise in *Nero* 26.1 five major vices are listed; but when the first anecdote follows, it may not be clear that this illustrates Nero's violence, the first of the five, and the names of the other four are not set clearly at the opening of the sections in which they are in turn illustrated. There can be no doubt that much greater clarity would have been achieved if, instead of the introductory *divisio*, we had simply a reference to each quality at the beginning of its own section. Often,

indeed, it is extremely difficult, even for the reader with his eye open for this particular feature of arrangement, to decide how the material is intended to be classified. This is especially true in *Nero* 33.1, where a long series of parricides is introduced by the *divisio* 'He began his parricides and murders with Claudius'. The list of deaths which follows continues down into 37, but it is far from clear whether Nero's aunt, wives, stepsister, and stepson are still under the heading of parricides or are ordinary murders, along with Seneca and others. And sometimes the actual meaning is lost altogether. In *Claud.* 21.1, Suetonius says: 'He also presented numerous magnificent games, not only the usual ones and in the normal places, but new inventions and ones revived from antiquity, and some where no one had previously held any'. This can only be a *divisio*, although the reader would hardly notice it unless he were deliberately watching out for this type of expression. Only then will he realize that the statement a little farther on 'He frequently held circus-games in the Vatican' picks up the item in the heading 'where no one had previously held any'; so that he eventually extracts the information (not known from any other source) that Claudius was the first to use Caligula's new circus in the Vatican gardens for shows of this sort.[17] This may be only one of a number of similar pieces of information which have escaped readers in the past. There can be no doubt that the abuse of *divisio* is a characteristic of Suetonius which must be borne in mind in reading and translating the *Caesars*. No other feature, perhaps, displays so clearly the method of the *grammaticus* turned biographer.[18]

Now, as I have remarked, Suetonius' exploitation of *divisio* begins only with the *Caesars*, not in the literary biographies. Likewise it is only in the first two *Lives* that we find the large-scale *divisiones* announcing the arrangement of major parts of the works. Comparable indications in *Cal.* 22.1 ('Thus far concerning him as emperor: the rest is to be related of him as a monster') and *Nero* 19.3 ('I have assembled this material partly as meriting no criticism, partly even as deserving considerable approval: this I have done in order to separate it from his weaknesses and crimes, to which I shall now turn') do not indicate subsequent topics in the same way—the simple *divisio* between *probra* and *scelera* in the latter passage, followed out in 20–25 and 26–37 or 38, is very minor and unobtrusive. The writer has evidently assumed that the reader will not need constant reminding of the regular scheme. At the same time it is in

the later lives that *divisio* begins to be pushed to the point of obscurity. This links up with another very noticeable weakness of the later *Lives*: the tendency to omit actual names of persons featuring in anecdotes and to refer either to *quidam* (singular and plural alike) or to vague descriptions, often arbitrarily multiplied into the plural. Examples are the *immaturae puellae* in *Tib.* 61.5 (the daughter of Sejanus, as Suetonius must have known), the aged matrons in *Nero* 11.1 (simply Aelia Catella), *quidam tradunt* in *Otho* 7.1 (the historian Cluvius Rufus); but all too often the real individuals can no longer be identified, although their names were surely available in Suetonius' sources. In *Julius* and *Augustus* there are hardly any example of this deliberate anonymity and exaggeration. This seems to be a further example of a decline in Suetonius' care and precision, beginning apparently with the *Tiberius*.

In one further respect the biographer's method suffers a severe setback at virtually the same point. In addition to his readiness to quote verbatim from sources of all sorts, in prose or in verse, in Latin or in Greek, as no reputable writer of formal prose appears to have done before,[19] he makes particularly effective use of extracts from letters of Augustus, sometimes of considerable length, to illustrate questions which arouse his particular interest. There seems no good reason to doubt[20] Suetonius' own assertion that he studied the autograph version of most of these letters, evidently while he was head of one of the imperial bureaux, as *a studiis, a bibliothecis*, or *ab epistulis*—we do not know under which functionary such a collection would come, but in any case any one of them would presumably have been allowed access to his colleagues' material. What is striking is the nature of the selection. Letters of Augustus are quoted in the Donatus *Life of Virgil* (31), extensively in the *Life of Horace* and in Augustus' own *Life*; after that, in *Tib.* 21.4 in *Cal.* 8.4, and in *Claud.* 4. All these quotations are apt and revealing, adding immensely to the value of the passages in which they appear. But they are all from letters by Augustus, and all cover problems arising during Augustus' own reign, even when they occur in the *Life* of an emperor who succeeded twenty-five years after Augustus' death. It is extraordinary that Suetonius does not quote a single letter, with the exception of *Nero* 23.1 (which is not claimed to be, and probably was not, taken directly from the original) from any emperor after A.D. 14. It is conceivable that certain of the emperors did not have their correspondence preserved in the

palace archives: it is not to be imagined that no letters at all were to be found, particularly ones to implement the rather thin material available on the last six Caesars dealt with. Two explanations present themselves: either that the use of the Augustan material displeased Hadrian, who put a ban on further exploitation of the archives; or that Suetonius was no longer able to consult the archives, because he was no longer employed in the palace. The fact that in the *Tiberius* the biographer was still able to use the Augustan letters in his published work, but was not able to draw on Tiberius' own letters, favours the latter explanation, which is supported by other indications.

In any case, there is evidence here as elsewhere of a distinct break between the *Augustus* and the *Tiberius*, for which Suetonius' dismissal in A.D. 122 is the best explanation. The main objection to this is that we know, on the authority of Johannes Lydus (*de Magist.* ii. 6), that the *Caesars* were dedicated to Septicius Clarus as praetorian prefect—an office which he ceased to hold when he and Suetonius both fell from favour. Thus 122 has normally been accepted as the date of publication of the *Caesars* as a whole. But *Julius* and *Augustus* together form a respectable book for publication on its own, even if as just the first instalment of a longer series; and the dedication may perfectly well have been attached to them alone. Among contemporary writers, both Tacitus and Juvenal are agreed to have published their works in successive parts,[21] and not many years earlier the books of Statius' *Silvae* and Martial's *Epigrams* had unquestionably appeared in this way, with the addition of dedications to a number of different patrons. Indeed, it is highly unlikely that the different parts of Suetonius' own *Lives* of literary men were published at one and the same time, so different is the scale and treatment of the *Grammatici* and *Rhetores* from that of the poets which have come down to us. There is a further consideration. Suetonius' first two *Lives* do not encourage comparison with the *Annals* of Tacitus, which had appeared at some time during the previous decade and begin with the accession of Tiberius. When the biographer came to the period dealt with so impressively by Tacitus, he may well have felt hesitant over publication, especially as he was notoriously dilatory in this respect (Plin. *Epp.* v. 10.2).

At the same time, there is reason to suspect that his reading of the *Annals* prompted some of the most interesting passages in the next group of *Lives*. It is most unlikely that Suetonius used Tacitus

as an historical source,[22] for which purpose he was hardly suitable, especially when his own sources were still available; and where the two writers display close verbal similarities it is evident that both are echoing an earlier writer. But once in each of the next two *Lives* Suetonius exceptionally finds it necessary to refer to documentary evidence to settle a controversial point: in *Tib.* 21.2 he discusses Augustus' attitude to Tiberius, and quotes from Augustus' letters to disprove the view that he had deliberately selected Tiberius as his successor to show off his own good qualities; and in *Cal.* 8 he quotes another letter of Augustus to show the correctness of the public *Acta* in attributing Caligula's birth to the town of Antium. These are the only two problems tackled in this way in these two *Lives*, and there is no apparent reason within the *Lives* why these two should have been chosen. But in *Ann.* i. 10.6 Tacitus had suggested with some force the theory about the succession which Suetonius attacks; in i. 41.3 he casually mentions Caligula as 'born in the camp' (that is to say, on the Rhine). Without openly crossing swords with the older writer, Suetonius appears to have noted these errors, and searched for evidence to refute them: in both cases masking his criticism of Tacitus by going back to earlier writers who had put forward the same views and arguing from the original evidence. It is unfortunate that we have lost the book of the *Annals* in which Tacitus surveyed the early life of Claudius; but it may be inferred that Suetonius' references to Augustus' letters about the young prince's character (*Claud.* 4) were likewise stimulated by something in the historian's writings. However, the *Nero* provides certain confirmation concerning his use of the *Annals*. The only passage in which he quotes an actual document is where (52) he refutes the allegation that Nero's poems were not his own works by referring to an autograph copy of some of the best known poems, which could only have been written by a man actually in the process of composition. Here, in fact, he is not directly answering the view which Tacitus had propounded, which is rather that the poems were the results of a sort of combined operation over dinner (*Ann.* xiv. 16.2); but since it is the only use of documentary evidence in this life, or indeed in any of the later *Lives*, and is also the only passage in which Suetonius defends Nero against a current charge, it looks as if he was reminded generally of Tacitus' allegation when he came across the copy of the poems, but did not check the actual context in the *Annals*.

The conclusion that emerges is accordingly that, while still working on the records of Augustus' reign, Suetonius began noting details which would prove useful for the following *Lives*, where he could discreetly correct the misstatements of Tacitus. The next stage of research, in which he would have begun work on the archives for Tiberius' own reign, including that emperor's own correspondence, never took place. The only post-Augustan document, the text of Nero's poems, may have been noticed at any time: 'It came into my hands', is all Suetonius says. It would not be in the files of the *ab epistulis*, and did not need to be copied out, as the actual letters did.

Now although Suetonius seldom obtrudes himself into his works (only on the rare occasions when he can himself testify to the truth of some assertion, as in the *Lucan* or *Dom.* 12.2), there are certain indications[23] in the later *Lives* of a marked decline in the discretion and tactfulness *vis-à-vis* the emperor which had marked the original publication. In *Claud.* 44.2 he virtually invites comparison between the concealment of that emperor's death and of Trajan's, whereby Hadrian's accession had been facilitated; whereas he had been discretion itself in passing over similar accounts of the death of Augustus (*Aug.* 98.5, *Tib.* 21.1). In *Titus* 6.1 he refers gratuitiously to the unpopularity of Titus on his accession, as a result of arbitrary executions of distinguished citizens, in such a way as to suggest the notorious case which had disfigured the first year of Hadrian's reign. And in *Nero* 18 he criticizes that emperor for not extending the empire and nearly surrendering Britain, as if with deliberate reference to Hadrian's abandonment of Trajan's conquests across the Euphrates.

None of these passages can be taken as an overt attack on the reigning emperor, any more than the criticism of Tacitus had been obvious. But the discerning reader must have observed them with interest at the time.

Thus we have a fairly clear picture of the decline in Suetonius' biographical method as shown in the *Lives* from *Tiberius* onwards. Removed from the archives, of which he had just begun to make such significant use, generally embittered against the emperor, apparently deprived of much of his initial enthusiasm for the whole project, he may even have let the work lie for some years. Thus the later *Lives* are disappointingly short, even those of the three Flavian emperors, for whom oral material should still have been available

in abundance (if Suetonius was still in Rome, and not perhaps at Hippo),[24] and on whom he might have written considerably more freely than Tacitus had done when he wrote the *Histories* some twenty years earlier. At the same time there is a deliberate affectation of vagueness and generalization, strongly contrasting with the detailed precision of the first two *Lives*; and there is no reference to documents later than Augustus, apart from the fortuitous mention of Nero's poems. It is tantalizing to conjecture how our knowledge of the Flavian period might have been improved if Suetonius had applied himself with the same thoroughness to the last of the *Lives* as he did to the first.

In assessing the value of the *Caesars* it is important to remember that many of the least favourable verdicts passed on them come from historians who are disappointed that Suetonius was not an historian, far less a source-book for later historians. But even judging the *Lives* as what they are, certain criticisms are hard to refute. The writer is far too quick to accept incredible or scandalous stories, even when we can tell that his sources included more plausible versions. Thus, while he knows two distinct and incompatible stories of the murder of Claudius (*Claud.* 44.2), he is prepared to quote anecdotes connected with each (*Nero* 33.1, based on the poisoned mushrooms, and 40.3, on the poisoned drink), both of which could not be true.[25] Again, he asserts flatly that Nero was responsible for the great fire of Rome (*Nero* 38.1); yet shows that he was aware of the alternative version, of an accidental outbreak (acknowledged in Tac. *Ann.* xv. 38.1), by a reference (43.1) to the account in which the worst charge that could be made was that four years later he *planned* to set fire to the city.[26] He blackens Tiberius' character by a tale of prolonged drinking (*Tib.* 42.1), which involves chronological confusions that he could easily have checked; and gives extraordinarily incomplete versions of prosecutions (e.g. *Tib.* 49.1, *Nero* 37.1) in a way calculated to throw the worst possible light on the emperor concerned. And the lack of authenticity of such unlikely scandals as those related of Galba (22) is demonstrated by the silence of other authorities. This tendency to believe, or at least to write down, the worst is apparent even in the earliest *Lives* (e.g. *Jul.* 49, *Aug.* 68); but at least it is clear that these were only a few of the large number of stories circulated at the time. In fact, there is little to the discredit of Tiberius or of Nero which is not similarly asserted by Tacitus, or at least quoted in such a way as

to make the reader incline to believe it. In general it appears that, as both Tacitus and Josephus indicate,[27] every emperor attracted slander as soon as he was dead, and there is some indication that the most malicious of these writers were such impressive figures as the ex-consuls Servilius Nonianus and Cluvius Rufus, whose authority might override doubts of their credibility.[28] For the most part Suetonius seems to have decided that it was not his part to assess the validity of these stories, nor even to aim at a consistent character; but rather to report succinctly what the authorities alleged, and to leave it to the reader to draw his own conclusions. It remains true that he was seldom able to resist a scabrous anecdote, any more than the Greek Cassius Dio could. It is to be noted that when Tacitus (*Ann.* xiv. 2) rejects the story found in *Nero* 28.2, that Nero attempted to seduce his mother, he replaces it with an alternative considerably more salacious.

More serious, perhaps, is the charge that the *Caesars* lack the artistry and structure of Plutarch, as well as the Greek biographer's moral standpoint. Neither writer has much pretension to style as such, though the disjointed and staccato language of Suetonius is often displeasing and sometimes actually incomprehensible to the modern reader, when so much of an anecdote has been pared away that the point is lost. It is, of course, true that Plutarch has much greater appeal to those who admire noble sentiments and improving generalizations: that he has that combination of oratory and morality which is characteristic of so much inferior literature of the Classical period, especially of the Roman empire.[29] The modern age may have more sympathy with the attitude of that later biographer who applauded Suetonius, in contrast to the three great names of Latin historiography, Sallust, Livy, and Tacitus, for writing 'not so much eloquently as accurately' (*Script. Hist. Aug., Prob.* 2.7); for what Suetonius does is to edit and adapt far less than the major historians do, in their insistence on dignity of style and sentiment. He leaves it open to us to judge for ourselves, in a way that the eloquence of Tacitus seldom permits, as he constrains our agreement by the subtlety and force of his language. Indeed, one of the main criticisms of Tacitus' portraits of the Julio-Claudians is that he has prejudged the character, especially of Tiberius, and insists on his interpretation of it even when the facts that he relates fail to support it.[30] With Suetonius, the opposite failing is rather apparent: that he never makes up his mind about the true nature of his subject,

nor seeks to give a consistent account, even by the simple expedient of recognizing that there could be a change for the worse as the result of circumstances. To some extent an initial judgement has determined the selection of anecdotes he makes, as when he virtually ignores the possibility that Nero might have been innocent of setting fire to Rome; but even this tendency is probably to be put down to the specious nature of the more scandalous authorities, who could claim inside information about the wickedness of court life. Especially when documentary evidence was not to hand. Suetonius could hardly make a valid choice between discrepant sources. But where the modern reader is continually aware that the subtle complexities of Tacitus present a work of art rather than the truth, and that the gallery of noble Greeks and Romans presented by Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* could never quite have existed in that way, there is something solidly authentic about Suetonius' emperors, even if individual stories remain suspect. He allows us to construct our own figures from his materials, and we feel that the results are real.

The final proof of Suetonius' success must be that he is intensely readable. Some readers may have treasured him for the obscenity of some of his anecdotes; but many more have read him again and again for the way in which he makes the Rome of the early emperors come to life, full of vital characters and utterly convincing detail. The very dignity of Tacitus and Plutarch, as of Livy in his great history of the Roman republic, makes them avoid the trivial and commonplace, the cheap and sordid details of life which are to be found so abundantly in Suetonius. To illustrate this, I quote from a well-known passage, perhaps the most successful piece of continuous narrative in the *Caesars*, describing the last hours of Nero, after he had sacrificed the support of every class in Rome (*Nero* 47.3–49.1).

> Thus he put off his deliberation till the next day. He was roused about midnight, and when he learnt that the troops on guard-duty had vanished, he leapt out of bed and sent round to his friends; and because he received no reply from any of them, he visited their lodgings in turn, with a few attendants. But all their doors were closed and no one answered. He returned to his room, to find his bodyguards had also fled, having plundered his bedclothes and removed his box of poison as well. At once he asked for Spiculus the gladiator, or someone else who would kill him. When he could

find no one, he said, 'Have I neither a friend nor an enemy?' and rushed out, as if to throw himself into the Tiber.

So far, although the translation cannot reproduce the economy and speed of the Latin, the sheer amount of information contained in one short paragraph is manifest, as events follow one another in quick succession.

But recovering his spirit, he wanted some more secret hiding-place to collect his thoughts; and when his freedman Phaon offered him his suburban residence between the Salarian and Nomentan roads, about four miles out, just as he was, with one foot bare and wearing a tunic, he threw on a cloak of faded colour and mounted a horse, holding a handkerchief in front of his face, with only four companions, including Sporus. At once he was thrown into panic by an earthquake and a flash of lightning, and heard from the camp nearby the shouts of the soldiers, promising trouble to him and success to Galba. He also heard a traveller who met them saying, 'These fellows are after Nero', and another asking, 'Anything new about Nero in the city?' Moreover, his horse reared at the smell of a corpse lying by the road, so that his face was uncovered and he was recognised and saluted by a retired guardsman.

When they reached the side turning, he sent the horses away and made his way with difficulty among the bushes and brambles along a path in the reeds, having a coat thrown down for him to walk on, until he reached the rear of the house. There, when Phaon urged him to withdraw for the moment into a cave where sand had been dug, he said he was not going to be buried alive. He waited a little while, until a concealed entrance to the house should be made; and, wishing to drink some water from a pool close at hand he took some in the hollow of his hand and said 'So this is the water Nero drinks.' Then tearing his cloak on the brambles, he pushed himself through the twigs across his path and crawled through a narrow tunnel into a cellar which had been dug out and lay down in the adjoining store-room on a bed fitted with a moderate mattress and an old robe laid on it. And feeling hungry and thirsty again, he refused to touch some grimy bread that was offered him, but drank a little lukewarm water. Then as each of his attendants in turn pressed him to save himself as soon as possible from the impending disgrace, he ordered a grave to be made in his presence, measuring it by his own body, and some bits of marble to be arranged, if they were to be found, and water and firewood for dealing with his corpse forthwith, weeping at every juncture and repeating over and over again, 'What an artist perishes in me!'

Probably the most striking feature of this passage is the amount of vivid detail, including Nero's clothing, the exact position of the villa and the fact that the direct way (through the Colline Gate) would pass close to the praetorian camp; and then the exact description of the approach to the villa and the arrangements made for the emperor's reception. It is certain that a formal historian such as Tacitus would not have condescended to mention the presence of a dead body by the roadside, or have quoted the actual words of passers-by, or remarked on the brambles and reeds along the path to the house. Suetonius gains immensely from this lack of refinement. But at the same time his account leaves endless questions unanswered. Why did the party have to approach the villa surreptitiously? Why could he not have slipped into the house by a side-door, and, if the idea was to conceal his entry from Phaon's servants, how could they hope that no one would notice a tunnel being dug into the cellar? Why could Phaon not lay hands on some more palatable refreshments? Why did they so quickly decide that concealment was impossible, and urge Nero to commit suicide? Was Nero intending to be buried or cremated? Lastly, why, after all these precautions, were praetorian cavalry able to find their way directly to the villa and discover the dying emperor immediately, as the next paragraph shows? The whole course of events smells of treachery, which is never explicitly hinted at. In addition, there are phrases in the original which are almost incomprehensible: in particular, *traiectos surculos rasit* can only mean something like 'pushed his way through the twigs', but it is very difficult to see how the Latin words give this or any other precise sense. Most of these problems can be set aside, if not solved, by the recognition that Suetonius has organized his narrative entirely in accordance with his law of biographical relevance.[31] Every detail is given from Nero's own point of view, with sights, sounds, smells, taste, and feelings all contributing to reproducing the fugitive's feelings to a remarkable extent. In this way it is at least implied that the reasons for all the precautions barely entered Nero's consciousness; and if there was treachery he knew nothing of it.

At the same time Suetonius refuses, as always, to enter into his character's actual thoughts. One has only to contrast the later Greek historian, Cassius Dio, describing the same events (lxiii. 27–28); in particular, 'Everyone who passed he suspected had come for him; he started at every voice, thinking it to be that of someone

searching for him; if a dog barked anywhere or a bird chirped, or a bush or branch was shaken by the breeze, he was greatly excited'—and so on. Dio's version, which proceeds to develop moral commonplaces and paradoxes, is little more than cheap rhetoric. Suetonius has avoided this pitfall altogether, with the possible exception of the earthquake, which is at least much less prominent than Dio's is.

By and large, Suetonius' narrative here is immensely telling. Admittedly it is his finest consecutive section of narrative, and also we have not got Tacitus' description of Nero's fall to provide a really challenging contrast. But we can contrast the two writers' versions of a similar episode, the panic and death of Vitellius, in *Vit.* 16 and Tac. *Hist.* iii. 84, where again Suetonius' richness in factual details makes him score several points against the historian's greater dramatic power. However, it is clear in those passages, as it is in the account of Nero's fall, that underlying all our extant versions is at least one earlier written source containing all Suetonius' details, and perhaps all Dio's rhetoric as well; and all that Suetonius has done is to select those parts which he thought relevant to Nero's predicament. We cannot judge his success properly without this earlier source or sources, now hopelessly lost. But, although we are bound to criticize Suetonius for sacrificing quite so much, we must admire the mastery of compression and concentration which makes the passage permanently readable and permanently vivid. It may, after all, be significant that posterity thought Suetonius worth preserving while it allowed his richer and more authentic sources to perish completely. Suetonius' main claim to importance is not as an original literary artist: he deserves our gratitude and our attention for the way in which he has selected and preserved what he regarded as most significant from the immense quantity of written material which the late empire and the Dark Ages were to discard.

THE THIRTEENTH CAESAR

For all his shortcomings, there is no doubt that Suetonius set the fashion for imperial biography during the following centuries. The series of *Caesars* was continued a century later by Marius Maximus; but his work is lost, and we cannot judge how closely he followed his model. His name is sometimes linked with that of Suetonius by the *Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, who profess to use him as a major

source; but the contrast is made that, while Suetonius loved brevity, Marius Maximus was *homo omnium verbosissimus* (*Firmus* 1.1), and he seems to have quoted documents at excessive length (cf. *S.H.A. Comm.* 18.1, *Pert.* 15.8). The Augustan writers themselves are indebted to Suetonius in various respects; but the best among the *Lives* are arranged on a basically chronological plan, and the arrangement *per species* is seldom consistently or clearly carried out. An occasional *divisio* announces a seemingly Suetonian scheme, as in *Sev. Alex.* 29.1: 'Before I speak of his wars and expeditions and victories, I shall say a few words of his daily and domestic life.' But it is harder even than in Suetonius to follow up the sections promised. In *Max. et Balb.* 4. a direct appeal is made to Suetonius, as to other models apparently fictitious; and the following sketches resemble the *Caesars* fairly closely. Also considerable use is made of documents, especially letters and speeches, allegedly from the public records, though they are more likely pure forgeries. For the most part, the Augustan *Lives* lack all the tautness and richness of detail of Suetonius himself. Similarly the brief sections on the various emperors in the fourth-century compilers, Eutropius, Aurelius Victor, and the *Epitome* also attributed to the latter, owe something of their arrangement to Suetonius, as they apparently owe a good deal of their material; but the scale is so small that there can be no close similarity.

After this, signs of Suetonius' influence in biography are very slight. *Lives* of saints, which grow increasingly popular, could not well be fitted to the same sort of rubrics as the *Lives* of emperors, and mainly corrupt emperors at that. The *Life of St. Ambrose*, written early in the fifth century by his follower, Paulinus of Milan, has been claimed for the Suetonian school;[32] but, in fact, apart from a turgid section on the saint's character, it possesses not one of the characteristics of that manner. The arrangement is almost entirely chronological, there are no sections of illustrative anecdotes, no *divisiones*, no quotations from documents. But at least Paulinus is mainly factual, in contrast to the numerous hagiographers who do little but assemble a series of stock miracles, which appear in *Life* after *Life*, with the sole intention of edifying the faithful.

In Constantinople, where Suetonius was certainly known for a long time (for much of our information concerning his lost works is derived from the Byzantine encyclopedia known as Suidas, or the Suda), he might be expected to have influenced the *Lives* of emperors

which were produced from time to time in Greek. Arrangement *per species* is noticeable in one of the best of these in particular,[33] the *Life of the Emperor Basil* written in the tenth century by his grandson Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus, which contains sections in order on Ancestry, Boyhood, Early Career, and then, after a digression on his predecessor, on Finance, Judicial Affairs, and so on, concluding with Basil's death and the succession. But nothing in this *Life* directly recalls Suetonius, and the work is rather to be attributed to the tradition of Greek panegyric, in which these sections had been usual as far back as Xenophon's time. The objective standpoint is lacking, and a section is devoted to attacking the memory of a previous emperor, exactly as in the *Panegyric of Trajan* written in Latin by Suetonius' friend, the younger Pliny. If Suetonius, or one of his imitators, suggested the idea of imperial *Lives* to the Byzantines, the old rhetorical patterns proved too attractive for a dispassionate school of biography to develop.

Meanwhile the library of the monastery of Fulda in Germany contained a copy of the *Caesars* (perhaps the only one surviving in western Europe) from which all our existing manuscripts are directly or indirectly derived.[34] More significant for the history of biography, it was read and studied by Einhard, a Frankish scholar attached to Alcuin, the English leader in the Carolingian revival of scholarship. Within twenty years of Charlemagne's death in A.D. 814, Einhard composed the *Vita Karoli*, the biography in which the model of Suetonius is most closely followed.[35] The reasons for his choice were undoubtedly complex.[36] In the first place, precedents for secular biography were not abundant, and the accepted framework used for the *Lives* of saints was totally inappropriate. Secondly, Einhard was evidently immensely impressed by his reading of Suetonius, whom he knew almost by heart by the time he began to write his own biography. And thirdly, Charlemagne had taken pains to ensure, especially by his coronation at Rome in the year 800, that he was to be accepted as the successor of the old Caesars of the Roman Empire, in at least as valid a sense as were the contemporary Greek emperors at Constantinople, whose succession from Augustus by way of Constantine I was vitiated mainly by their loss of contact with the heartlands of the original empire. Charlemagne's heirs, under whom Einhard was now living, were no less concerned to establish their position as genuine (and indeed holy) Roman emperors. From all these points of view, it is not surprising

that Einhard decided to represent Charlemagne as the second Augustus, at once the subject of Suetonius' finest and most finished biography, the most reputable of the twelve Caesars, and the founder of the original line of emperors as Charlemagne was of the second, although the emperor himself looked rather to the model of Constantine and Theodosius, as Christians. It was an additional advantage that the Latin of Suetonius is simple and unpretentious, much closer to the common learned Latin of the Middle Ages than the splendours of Ciceronian oratory or the subtle complexities of Tacitus. Einhard could never have attempted to reproduce the effect of a Tacitean style: he makes a very convincing adaptation of the Suetonian, without ever allowing his actual borrowing of Suetonian words and phrases to stand out as intrusions into his usual manner.

In general arrangement, Einhard does his best to follow Suetonius, especially in respect of abandoning chronological narrative, such as was available especially in the various contemporary *Annals*, which some have claimed also as a work of Einhard and on which he certainly draws for a great deal of his material.[37] Thus he begins with an account of the rise of the Carolingian family to power (including a description of the Merovingian kingship, a digression which Suetonius would not have admitted), the accession of Charles and his brother, and the removal of the latter. At this point he turns tardily to Charles's birth, boyhood, and youth, only to report that he knows nothing whatever about them—a surprising admission, when he emphasizes in his preface that he was himself a witness of much that he recorded, and when much living tradition on Charles's early life should have been still available. However, as if to insist on his adherence to the Suetonian plan as far as possible, he follows up with a good *divisio*: 'I have decided to pass on to explain and illustrate his acts and character and the other parts of his life, omitting what is unknown: in such a way that, in narrating first his campaigns (*res gestas*) at home and abroad, then his character and interests, then his government and death, I shall pass over nothing worthy or necessary to be learnt' (4.2). The influence of the *Julius* and *Augustus* is here especially evident, since in those two *Lives* a long series of campaigns appears early on, because in both cases they led directly to the seizure of supreme power and accordingly fall under the rubric of Early Life. In Einhard, the wars which all come during Charles's reign become a separate section, and are

dealt with considerably more diffusely than in Suetonius, as if to give a survey of the wars in themselves, and not merely as items in the emperor's career.[38] In particular, there is a general description of the Saxons and the difficulties of overcoming them, which is hardly related to Charles at all, although their defeat naturally adds to his glory; and the disaster at Roncesvalles is described in some detail, although Charles was not personally involved. Despite occasional echoes of Suetonius, this whole section depends less on the biographical pattern, and contains rhetorical elements more proper to panegyric, such as 'Tota in hoc bello Hunorum nobilitas periit, tota gloria decidit' (13.2).

The list of wars leads on to a summary of the countries conquered, the treaties with foreign monarchs, and a list of major buildings, the latter a prominent feature in *Augustus* (28.3–30). There follows a further *divisio*, repeating in greater detail the second half of the earlier programme, and recalling in language the *divisio* in *Jul.* 44.4: 'It is agreed that this was his nature in protecting and increasing the kingdom, and at the same time adorning it. I shall now begin to describe his mental powers, his great constancy [consistency? fortitude?] in all circumstances, fortunate and unfortunate, and other things concerning his personal and domestic life' (18.1). In fact, these topics are not dealt with as promised. After a single reference to his patience in face of his brother's provocation, Einhard proceeds to a detailed account of Charles's wives and children, with details on their upbringing closely modelled on the similar section in *Aug.* 64.3, and his friendliness to strangers; then his personal appearance and way of life, the most Suetonian section of the whole work; a greatly extended section on religion (which certainly appears in many of the *Caesars*, but rather as a survey of superstitious observances, such as dreams); and the *Life* concludes much on the Suetonian pattern, with a description of Charles's tomb, including the epitaph (a detail never, in fact, found in Suetonius), suitable omens of his death (which are not listed before the actual death, but after, as in *Tib.* 74, *Claud.* 46, etc.), and the full text of his will, whereas Suetonius merely gives a paraphrase of the main points (*Jul.* 83, *Aug.* 101.). Einhard's reason for giving the entire document may be simply a reluctance to attempt the task of abbreviation; but there may well have been some factor in the contemporary political situation which encouraged him to quote it in full.

So far as the general layout is concerned, the *Vita Karoli* diverges from its main model, the *Augustus*, little more than do many of Suetonius' own *Lives*. But there is one important difference. Although reasonably objective, the work is still primarily panegyrical, lacking even the small element of scandal which appears in *Aug.* 68–70, not to mention the large sections on vices on most of the emperors. Indeed, one characteristic that Einhard has failed to borrow from Suetonius at all is the discussion of *mores* under separate headings. Despite the promise in the first *divisio* of an account of Charles's *mores*, and of his *constantia* in the second, no virtues are discussed as such, and he has no vices at all. Certain leading qualities, especially magnanimity, simply emerge from the tone of the work as a whole, which is warmer and more approving than in any of the Caesars.[39]

Moreover, Einhard is patently partial towards Charlemagne, in a way that Suetonius never is to his subjects; and his partiality is almost certainly his own, since he is close to the events described and does not so much copy already partial literary sources, as Suetonius did, as pervert the existing *Annals* to his own purposes.[40] Criticisms have been levelled at him for glossing over such features in Charles's life as his treatment of his brother Carloman and his family, or his frequent changes of wives and concubines. To some extent the explanation may be that Einhard simply did not regard these matters as meriting criticism; alternatively we must accept the fact that he was writing under Charlemagne's son, where hostile criticism might be unwelcome, while when Suetonius wrote the most recent of the Caesars had been dead for a score of years and was universally accepted as a tyrant. As for the alleged misrepresentation of Charlemagne's attitude to the papal crowning in Rome, it may be untrue that he was unaware of the Pope's intention when he entered the Church; but Einhard asserts only that this is what Charlemagne declared (28.2), and this may well have been the case.[41]

More alarming is the possibility that Einhard may have extended his borrowings from Suetonius from the use of words and phrases to the attribution to Charles of details which belong only to Augustus. Since the majority of close similarities belong to the account of personal appearance and private life, for which Einhard is our only authority, it is impossible to confirm or refute this suspicion. Halphen (p. 93) points out that the statement (19.4) that Charles never travelled without his children, his sons riding at his side and

his daughters following behind, copied closely from *Aug.* 64.3, is demonstrably untrue, on the evidence we have of the occasions when the family were not in the same part of the kingdom as their father. Of course, it can hardly be true of Augustus either, on grounds of sheer probability; yet it certainly looks as if Einhard has asserted it simply because it was found in Suetonius. In the same way, the totally untrue assertion that the Byzantine emperors sent envoys on their own initiative (*ultro*) to request Charlemagne's friendship (16.4) owes at least its form of words to a similar claim in *Aug.* 21.3, where the word *ultro* appears justified. It is more hazardous to guess that Pepin (3.1) is stated to have died of a dropsy (*morbo aquae intercutis*) simply because Nero's father had done so (*Nero* 5.2)—at least this time there was no glory to be borrowed from either the person or the ailment. This last item may rather fall into the category of things in the *Vita Karoli* that are there because something in the *Caesars* suggested them; yet there was presumably something in the first place which warranted Einhard in selecting these rather than other possible details. One clear case of perversion of evidence is to be seen in 32, the list of portents before Charles's death. The eclipses given first in this list are real enough, but occurred not in the last three years of the reign, but in 807–810, according to the contemporary *Annals*, which from their nature are likely to be more reliable on chronology; and the portico at Aachen, whose collapse is stated to have foreshadowed his death, apparently fell in 817, three years later.[42] The other items in this list are harder to date or authenticate; but the general impression is that Charlemagne had to have as impressive a list of portents as Julius or Augustus, and that items have been amassed rather ruthlessly for the purpose.

The section which above all depends on Suetonius is that in which Einhard describes Charles's appearance, health, and ways of taking exercise (22). From the opening words—'Corpore fuit amplo atque robusto, statura eminenti, quae tamen iustam non excederet'—the reader's attention is called to the similar opening to *Tib.* 68: 'corpore fuit amplo atque robusto, statura quae iustam excederet;' while the 'statura eminenti' comes from *Cal.* 50.1. Almost every item has a Suetonian model in the same way. The eyes are a mixture of Julius' and Tiberius'; the beauty of his grey hair comes from Claudius; he has authority and dignity standing or sitting, like Claudius (who possessed these qualities also while lying down);

his fat neck is Nero's, his somewhat projecting belly is both Nero's and Titus'; his good health comes from Julius, Tiberius, and Nero, but his limp is from Augustus; and his avoidance of medical advice is fairly closely copied from Tiberius. The first impression from these and other minor verbal similarities is that Einhard was incapable of physical descriptions at all, and that his emperor is entirely composed of fragments from the twelve Caesars; but a closer examination reveals that whenever necessary he can produce entirely satisfactory descriptions for features which Charlemagne did did not share with his Roman predecessors. None of the Caesars possesses a rounded top to his head, nor enjoys a general 'corporis habitudine virili'. And Tiberius' avoidance of doctors does not share Charlemagne's particular reason for 'almost hating them because they urged him to give up roast meat, to which he was accustomed, and stick to boiled'. In particular, where Augustus' height is given exactly, on the authority of a confidential freedman (*Aug.* 79.2), Charlemagne's is calculated as equal to seven of his own feet—a sensible adjustment necessary in a society where a standard measurement was not in use. Again, in the second half of the chapter, his diversions include a taste for riding, like Julius and Titus, but hunting is peculiar to him, even if the phrase explaining that this was a characteristic of his race is taken almost exactly from one dealing with Tiberius' hair style (Tib. 68.2). But what Charles really enjoyed was bathing, which takes up the greater part of the paragraph and has no parallel among the Caesars.

Einhard's method over these details is thus not easy to define with precision. He has clearly welcomed the idea of a detailed physical description, and decided to employ Suetonian phrases where appropriate, while implementing with his own vocabulary in such a way that there are no glaring discrepancies of style. There is no reason to suggest that he has any intention of using Suetonian features in an attempt to make Charlemagne resemble any of the Caesars as a model; for it is noticeable that he has borrowed nothing from Augustus but his limp, and many more features come from the later Julio-Claudians, who were not particularly admirable either physically or morally. There would be no point in taking items from them if the idea was to glorify Charlemagne.[43]

It is perhaps not too fanciful to compare Einhard's borrowings for this biography to the methods employed by Charlemagne's architects in building the Palatine Chapel at Aachen, which now

forms the core of the cathedral. Here the overall octagonal plan of the building closely recalls Justinian's S. Vitale at Ravenna, the seat of Roman imperial power most familiar to the Franks; and the porphyry pillars incorporated inside the building were actually brought from Ravenna, as Einhard expressly admits in 26.1. But one striking feature of the chapel, the external niche at first-floor level, is derived from the façade of the so-called Palace of Theoderic at Ravenna.[44] Ravenna perhaps more even than Rome was deliberately exploited as a source of imperial precedents, as it also provided Charlemagne with a type of imperial title which he found especially to his liking.[45] In a very similar way, Einhard has exploited the plan and materials of Suetonius' *Caesars* to construct a memorial to his former master.

But the Palatine Chapel is not S. Vitale, nor could it be mistaken for a building at Ravenna. So Einhard, for all his debt to Suetonius, never comes near to emulating him. Not merely has he no vivid narrative passages which might be compared to Suetonius' account of the crossing of the Rubicon (*Jul.* 31–33) or the flight of Nero (*Nero* 47–49); he never gives life to his subject by quoting Charlemagne's actual words or letters. At first sight this seems surprising, when many of the emperor's *ipsissima verba* should have been available from witnesses still alive, if Einhard could not recall them himself, and when he was himself secretary to Louis, as Suetonius had been to Hadrian.[46] But, as E. Auerbach points out,[47] the biographer had cut himself off from this resource by choosing Suetonian Latin as the vehicle for his expression. Charlemagne and his contemporaries did not use classical Latin, even as basic as that of Suetonius, for their normal conversation; and any notable *dicta* in which the mind of the emperor might have been revealed would be in Frankish. It is true that some of the more famous of the utterances of the Twelve Caesars were originally in Greek, but appear in Suetonius in Latin ('alea iacta est<o>' is the most famous example). But normally the original language is preserved, even in the original of 'Et tu, Brute?' which was not Latinized until the sixteenth century; and even where translation has taken place, it is the work of writers to whom Greek and Latin were parallel and interchangeable—Suetonius himself wrote works in both. For all Einhard's facility, and despite the wide knowledge of Latin in learned Carolingian circles, Charlemagne was essentially a Germanic figure and could not fully reveal himself in the words of first-century Rome.

There could be no better example of the impossibility of transposing a style from one epoch to another. Einhard has enough ingenuity to find appropriate Latin words and phrases for whatever he wishes to express; but, apart from the fact that his choice of topic is initially limited by the vocabulary at his disposal, all too often the form of expression adopted is derivative, and makes true authenticity impossible. For example, when Charlemagne is stated (24.2) to have listened over dinner to 'aliquod acroama aut lectorem' the whole phrase is borrowed from *Aug.* 74, a context in which 'acroama' is perfectly natural, to signify an 'entertainment'. To Einhard, we cannot tell what the word may have meant: Garrod and Mowat opine that it may be 'a singer or court-jester', Halphen prefers not to guess. It clearly is not the word that Charlemagne would normally have used, nor Einhard himself. The whole picture immediately becomes second-hand and antiquarian in tone. Perhaps worse than anything, Einhard cannot rely on a body of readers with a large fund of common knowledge of the circumstances of the world he describes. He is writing rather for the literate class of posterity, who can indeed understand the *Vita Karoli* well enough, as far as it goes; but these are readers with whom the writer is not in direct touch, and the spark of communication is quenched. The succinct telling of a story in a few words has become impossible, and the language has become, as Auerbach says, 'lame and weak'.

There is one further respect in which Einhard may have drawn upon Suetonius to some purpose. This is in his preface, written in some of his most fluent Latin. Halphen in his edition (p. 3, n. 2) infers that some classical model underlies this passage, perhaps the original preface of Suetonius, which is now lost almost without trace. The indications are not very convincing. In the first place, Suetonius' preface included a dedication to his patron, Septicius Clarus; Einhard's mentions no recipient, even if at the same time it perhaps contains a trace of a model in which someone was so addressed, in the phrase 'en tibi librum . . .' Secondly, Einhard appeals to the value of the present age as worthy of record; Suetonius could not claim to be describing the present, or even the recent past, except in so far as even the Augustan age ranked as modern in the eyes of the archaizing school at the court of Hadrian. Thirdly, Einhard refers to himself as a witness of what he relates, as Suetonius could for only a very small part of the period. And fourthly, he mentions his debt of gratitude as a reason for undertaking the

task—a consideration which could not conceivably have carried weight with Suetonius nor have produced such a work as the *Caesars*. It is true that we have no evidence when the opening pages of Suetonius were lost, so that Einhard may have read them in Fulda and derived thence a certain number of phrases. It would, on the other hand, be attractive to guess that the readiness with which he allows all Charlemagne's early life to go unrecorded was due to the model of *Julius*, which lost its opening at the same time as the preface perished. The discussion in section 4 will then be a subsequent addition based on a tardy realization that all the other *Caesars* contained this sort of information in full. On the whole, it is perilous to assume that Einhard had access to any more of Suetonius than we now possess.

In general, the *Vita Karoli*, thought historically not very reliable, is a biography of unusual interest and is almost the sole attempt during the Middle Ages to portray any individual, ecclesiastical or lay, as a whole, as opposed to the pious or panegyrical *Lives* of saints and kings which were produced in such abundance. Yet the idea of copying Suetonius seems never to have been repeated. Einhard himself was copied to a minor extent by the Frank Thegan, who within a few years composed a *Life of Louis the Pious*.[48] The degree of imitation of Suetonius, however, is far less than is claimed by. W. Schmidt:[49] the arrangement is almost entirely chronological, sections beginning regularly with 'eodem tempore', 'alio anno', 'sequenti anno', with no attempt at the Suetonian manner. Only in section 19, at the beginning of Louis's reign, has Thegan taken a hint from Einhard, with a full account of personal characteristics and customs, starting with 'erat enim statura mediocri, oculis magnis et claris, vultu lucido, naso longo et recto', and so on, with details of Louis's learning, piety, generosity, clothing, humour, and diversions. There are no illustrative anecdotes, and it is interesting to observe that Thegan has not thought of borrowing phrases or even words from his model. The converse is true of the notorious pillaging by the monk of Caen,[50] who described the last days of William the Conqueror and included a sketch of his appearance and character, which consists entirely of isolated sentences taken from *Vita Karoli* 22 to 26. Suetonius appears here at third hand, in the same combination of *Tiberius* and *Caligula* already quoted: 'corpore fuit amplo atque robusto . . .' The only divergencies from Einhard appear to be simple errors of copying or transmission.

On the other hand, a direct but sporadic use of Suetonius himself can hardly be denied for William of Malmesbury; who in his *Gesta Regum* IV, describing the life of William Rufus, has details which are not found in Einhard. A highly Suetonian section on physical appearance (321) contains items derived from the lives of Augustus, Claudius, Vespasian and Titus—including the *venter proiectior* of the last which is also ascribed to Charlemagne, but also additional features from the same sentence in *Tit.* 3.1—and a subsequent section on prophetic dreams combines *pridie quam excederet vita*, virtually as in *Jul.* 87, and *vidit per quietem*, as in *Nero* 46.1. Moreover, as M. Schütt points out,[51] Malmesbury has allowed his whole treatment of Rufus's reign to be affected by the Suetonian model, producing an uncomfortable blend of chronicle and biography; though the influence is felt only in odd passages, and Sallust is perhaps an equally important source for his treatment.[52]

With the coming of the Renaissance[53] and the great increase in the study of Suetonius and other classical writers, it might have been expected that he would again be imitated by biographers, especially when humanists were looking to the Classics for models of every type of literature. Despite the popularity of the *Caesars*, this seems never to have happened. For a writer like Petrarch, composing in the middle of the fourteenth century *Latin Lives of the Illustrious Romans*,[54] and of Julius Caesar in particular, Suetonius is a major source, but rather in the way that he is to a modern scholar: he never becomes a model, except in so far as Petrarch imitates him very relevantly in quoting extant letters of Caesar to illustrate his real intentions in the Civil War, and borrows from him a section on Caesar's appearance and habits, which he incorporates somewhat awkwardly into what is fundamentally a straightforward narrative. Indeed, Petrarch, who claims in his preface 'It is my purpose to write history', shows little sign of a true biographical pattern. As the Renaissance advanced, and more and more elaborate lives were composed, both in Latin and in the vernaculars, the influence of Suetonius becomes increasingly indirect.

In the sixteenth century, at Milan, we find what appears to be the last direct appeal to the Suetonian mode. Gerolamo Cardano, the doctor and scientist, wrote in 1576 an account of his own life in Latin,[55] which has often been compared with the more exciting and imaginative Italian autobiography of his contemporary, Benvenuto Cellini. But, perhaps because the analytic nature of his own studies

so inclined him, Cardano chose to write almost entirely *per species*, rather than in the continuous narrative which was normal and which the popularity of Plutarch had tended to encourage. He begins with his place of origin and his ancestors; then his birth, with the addition of details of his horoscope, which his age regarded as very significant; then his parents. At this point (4) he departs from the Suetonian model in a way which emphasizes his general acceptance of it; by giving a brief chronological summary of the main phases of his life, with precise dates (this last an amenity which the wide acceptance of the Christian era had made far easier than it was in antiquity); and he remarks: 'Perhaps if Suetonius had observed this, he might have increased the convenience of his readers; for, as philosophers say, there is nothing which is not a unity.' This is an extraordinarily sensible modification of the pattern. What he has failed to note is that Suetonius could safely assume in his readers a general knowledge of the history of the period, which would include the main events in the imperial biographies. For Cardano himself, in no sense a public figure, the chronological framework was essential. With this established, he reverts to Suetonian rubrics: appearance (dealt with much as in Suetonius, though with no actual borrowings), illnesses, clothing, diet, and so forth, with long sections on various mental characteristics. A typical section, recalling *Vesp* 22–23, is that on *dicta familiaria* (50), a collection of his own sayings, often with the occasion on which they were made. The work as a whole naturally differs from Suetonius in fundamental respects: it is written in the first person and is essentially subjective, though to nothing like the extent of Cellini's or Rousseau's; there is a good deal of polemic, as Cardano takes issue with enemies and rivals, of whom he seems to have an inordinate number; and he is uncontrollably diffuse, with no desire or ability to restrict the scope of anecdotes to the demands of the context, and is always prepared to insert a fresh rubric for the sake of discoursing on some topic which interests his curious mind. The conciseness and the avoidance of moralizing and conjecture which Suetonius might have bequeathed to modern biography were already too remote for Cardano to revive them; and only in the more objective of newspaper obituaries is anything like them to be found today.

NOTES

[1] R. Syme, *Tacitus* (Oxford, 1958), pp. 778–81; A. Macé, *Essai sur Suétone* (Paris, 1900), pp. 31–84.

[2] Plin. *Epp.* iii. 8. There is no need to assume, with F. Della Corte, *Suetonio, eques Romanus* (Milan, 1958), p. 12, that he must have held a tribuneship subsequently.

[3] *Ann. Ep.* (1953), no. 73: fully discussed in *Historia* x (1961), pp. 99–109.

[4] A handy discussion in Della Corte, pp. 19–20.

[5] Johannes Lydus, *de Mag.* ii. 6.

[6] *S.H.A.Hadr.* 11.3.

[7] *Titus* 10.2; Syme, *op. cit.*, p. 780.

[8] Macé, *op. cit.*, pp. 106–7.

[9] For a list of titles and fragments, see Roth's edition, pp. 275–306, and Reifferscheid, *Suetonii Reliquiae* (Leipzig, 1860).

[10] Roth, *op. cit.*, pp. 287–301; Reifferscheid, *op. cit.*, pp. 3–104.

[11] D. R. Stuart, *Epochs of Greek and Roman Biography* (Berkeley, 1928), pp. 132–4, etc.; fragments in Müller, *Frag. Hist. Graec.* ii. 293–301.

[12] *Hist.* I, 1; *Ann.* I. 1.

[13] Cf. W. Steidle, *Sueton und die antike Biographie* (Munich, 1951), pp. 114 ff, and *passim* on the origins of Suetonian biography.

[14] Stuart, *op. cit.*, p. 78, on the same principle in Greek biography.

[15] *Brutus* 302; *Div. in Caec.* 45; *Inv.* I. 31.

[16] Reifferscheid, *op. cit.*, p. 268; Roth, *op. cit.*, p. 282.

[17] *A.J.A.* lxii (1958), p. 216.

[18] Unless it be the closing words of the life of Vitellius, with a philological explanation of a Gallic nickname (*Vit.* 18).

[19] Cf. *Hermes* lxxxviii (1960), pp. 98–99.

[20] So M. A. Levi, *Divus Augustus* (Florence, 1951), pp. xliv ff; Della Corte, *op. cit.*, pp. 168–9, for an uneasy compromise. Cf. *C.Q., N.S.* ix (1959), pp. 286 ff.

[21] e.g. Syme, *Tacitus*, pp. 471, 776–7; Highet, *Juvenal the Satirist* (Oxford, 1954), pp. 10–16; Macé, *op. cit.*, p. 209, not accepting the same possibility for Suetonius.

[22] Syme, *op. cit.*, pp. 502, 781–2; Macé, *opl cit.*, pp. 206–7.

[23] Fully discussed in *C.Q., N.S.* ix (1959), pp. 290–3.

[24] The opening of *Vespasian* suggests personal investigations in central Italy for the specific purposes of this Life: especially 1.4: 'I did not find a trace of this, although I enquired with considerable care.' If *Titus* 4, on the evidence of statues and busts in Germany and Britain (*sicut apparet*), indicates personal observation, as suggested by Syme, *op. cit.*, p. 779, it may be from a tour with Hadrian in 121–122, immediately before his dismissal. But the observation need not be Suetonius' own, and is singularly lacking in archaeological confirmation.

[25] For the full implications, see *Hermes* lxxxviii (1960), pp. 109–11.

[26] *Ibid.*, pp. 111–12. The alternative version, not connecting Nero with the fire at all, is echoed in Aurelius Victor, *Caes.* 5.13.

[27] *Ann.* I. 1.5; *Hist.* I. 1.1–2; *Ant.* XX. 154.

[28] *A.J.P.* lxxxv (1964), pp. 337 ff; Syme in *Hermes* xcii (1964), pp. 419–20.

[20] Cf. the comparison in J. A. Garraty, *The Nature of Biography* (1958), pp. 55–57, largely missing the point.

[30] e.g. B. Walker, *Annals of Tacitus* (Manchester, 1951), pp. 82 ff.

[31] *N.B.* how the four freedmen are introduced: Phaon is named twice, as owner of the villa; Epaphroditus at the end, where he assists his master's suicide; Neophytus is not named at all by Suetonius, although the common source certainly mentioned him. Sporus alone is specified initially (48.1: quattuor solis comitantibus, inter quos et Sporus erat), being a regular symbol throughout the *Life* of Nero's degeneracy, named more often than even Agrippina or Seneca.

[32] Originally by W. Schmidt, *de Romanorum . . . arte biographica* (Marburg, 1891), p. 66, repeated uncritically by numerous subsequent scholars. For the text, see Migne, *Patrol. Lat.* xiv, pp. 28–50.

[33] P. J. Alexander, in *Speculum* xv (1940), pp. 194–209.

[34] Cf. E. K. Rand, in *Harv. Stud. in Class. Phil.* xxxvii (1926), pp. 1–48.

[35] Most easily accessible in editions by H. W. Garrod and R. B. Mowat (Oxford, 1915); L. Halphen (Paris, 1938, with French translation); S. Painter (paperback, Ann Arbor, 1960, English translation alone).

[36] Cf. S. Hellman, *Ausgewählte Abhandlungen* (Darmstadt, 1961), pp. 168 ff.

[37] L. Halphen, *Etudes Critiques* (Paris, 1921), pp. 78 ff.

[38] He claims, however: 'I should describe at this point the difficulties he had to face . . . were not my purpose in the present work to record the manner of his life rather than the event of the wars which he fought' (6.3)—a straightforward statement of the divorce of biography from history, which he does not altogether succeed in establishing.

[39] Cf. H. Löwe, in Wattenbach-Levison, *Deutschlands Geschichtsquellen im Mittelalter* (Weimar, 1952), p. 276.

[40] Halphen, *op. cit.*, pp. 82–98.

[41] *Ibid.*, pp. 95, 223.

[42] *Ibid.*, pp. 95–96.

[43] E. K. Rand, *op. cit.*, pp. 43–48, suggests that many of the closer similarities to Augustus, especially in Charlemagne's way of life, may be the result of a genuine imitation of that emperor, as a result of hearing a reading of Suetonius at table. It is difficult to find a single example which carries conviction.

[44] These parallels were brought to my notice by Dr. R. A. Markus, of Liverpool University. Cf. J. Beckwith, *Early Medieval Art* (1964), for a simple exposition, with illustrations; though he prefers to regard Justin II's Chrysotriclinion at Constantinople as the main influence.

[45] Cf. H. Löwe, in *Deutsches Archiv für Erforschung des Mittelalters* ix (1952), pp. 393–4.

[46] Halphen, *op. cit.*, p. 77.

[47] *Literatursprache und Publikum in der lateinischen Spätantike* (Bern, 1958), pp. 86–87.

[48] Published in *Mon. Germ. Hist., Scriptores in Folio* ii, pp. 589–604.

[49] *Op. cit.*, pp. 67–68.

[50] Published in T. D. Hardy, *Catalogue of Materials* ii (1865), p. 15; and in an English translation in Douglas-Greenaway, *English Historical Documents* ii (1961), pp. 279–80.

[51] In *Eng. Hist. Rev.* xlvi (1931), 255–260; quoted by R. W. Southern, 'Saint Anselm and his Biographer' (1963), 325–326.

[52] e.g. the clear echo in 305 of Sall.*Cat.*54.4–6.

[53] For the influence of Suetonius in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, cf. ch. VI and VII.

[54] Published as vol. ii of *Edizione Nazionale delle Opere di F. Petrarca*, ed. G. Martellotti (Florence, 1964). Part ii, containing *de Gestis Cesaris*, is apparently to appear shortly.

[55] Published in Cardano's Complete Works (Lyon, 1663), and in an English translation by J. Stoner (1931).

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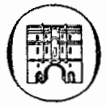

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