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STRUCTURE AND PERSUASION IN SUETONIUS' *DE VITA CAESARVM*

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At the sentence level Suetonius often appears to be neutral,[1] but I argue here that the persuasive force in the arrangement of his material creates a portrait that is absolutely not neutral. As David Wardle put it in a 2016 review, 'Anyone who reads Suetonius without regard to the careful structures within which the biographer places his material can produce almost any picture.'[2] Yet these 'careful structures' are a mystery known only to the initiated. This paper lays out the complex and varied ways in which Suetonius uses structure, specifically the 'rubric system' of arranging his material under subheadings and those subheadings in sequences, in the hope that with this knowledge we see more accurately what 'picture' the biographer creates.

Suetonian scholars, especially over the last fifty years, have often taken just one rubric (category) to compare that section across various *Lives*.[3] Studies of marriages and public games put the emperors on a level to compare how Suetonius deals with sometimes similar material to create different portraits. This allows us to see what a specific rubric, traced across the *Lives*, is telling us about what Suetonius thinks is positive or negative in 'an emperor' rather than a specific one: that is, what Bradley calls an 'imperial ideal'. For instance, several scholars have considered Suetonius' various entries on physical appearance and argued that this—a section we might expect to be quite objective and only minimally influenced by rhetoric and persuasion—is linked with physiognomic literature of the same time. We should be reading more into Suetonius'

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1. Scholars who have claimed Suetonius' impartiality include Grant (1954), 119: 'Nevertheless, here at last is a "historical" writer who makes no effort to present a rhetorically or morally preconceived version'; Townend (1967), 83, who argued for the importance of rubric but also that we are being left to make up our own minds, and even Wallace-Hadrill (1995), 24f. On the other side, e.g. Steidle (1963), Dubuisson (2003), Power (2014a).

2. Wardle (2016), lxxv.

3. E.g. Couissin (1953) on physical appearance; Bradley (1981) on spectacles and (1985) on marriages; Huet (2008) on clothing in the first six *Lives*; Gladhill (2012) on physical appearance.

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account of physical appearance than a mere description.[4] An analysis of the ancestry sections across the *Lives* shows that they are foreshadowing character traits in a distinctively Suetonian way across the board, and that those sections are not impartially constructed.[5] Because rubrics are a popular way to approach Suetonius, it is important to set out what the rubric system does, and why it is important.

Various scholars have already commented on the structure of Suetonius' work and its importance.[6] Hurley, in particular, discussed the rubric in her study of the tripartite arrangement of many of Suetonius' *Lives*.[7] I will show here in more depth the function of the rubrics and the rubric system, and the importance, both for people interested in Latin literature and for Roman historians who use Suetonius, of the persuasion inherent in the structure. We are missing things or even mistaking Suetonius' implication when we use just one sentence of Suetonius without looking around that anecdote for what that story demonstrates.[8]

I am in effect expanding on Keith Bradley's brief comment that arrangement shows Suetonius' 'independence of mind' as a writer, his ability to persuade:

> Artistry has at times been detected, or at least asserted, in *The Lives of the Caesars*, either on a low estimate of art or with an excess of analytical zeal that in concentrating on verbal disposition has obscured the substance of Suetonius' biographies. On any estimate Suetonius is a writer who can effectively persuade. But it is in the arrangement of content, the careful ordering of individual details of historical record, and the very choice of subject matter that Suetonius' independence of mind as a writer is most evident.[9]

I wonder about the 'but' when in fact it is precisely in the arrangement that Suetonius 'effectively persuade[s].' I will show that the curious judgement of Bradley, who denies artistry of 'verbal disposition' but insists on 'independence of mind', is worth adding to. Two decades after Bradley, especially with Power and Gibson's 2014 volume *Suetonius the Biographer,* it is hardly necessary to argue that Suetonius *is* persuasive, but it is certainly necessary to continue showing precisely *how* he is persuasive. It is essential that we read Suetonius with a view to catching the organizational divisions and persuasion inherent in the subtle ways Suetonius has structured his work if we are to read and use his text effectively.

4. Evans (1935), (1941), (1969); Couissin (1953); Gladhill (2012); this view not always accepted: Baldwin (1983), 500f.; Gascou (1984), 597.

5. Garrett (2013) and (2015).

6. Authors who have already observed the importance of structure in Suetonius and in particular the rubric method include Townend (1967); Lewis (1991); Hurley (2014); Tatum (2014). The importance of reading more than the one sentence in Valerius Maximus has been recently argued by Lawrence (2015).

7. Hurley (2014); see also Power (2014a).

8. An example of too little regard for rubrics: Reekmans (1977), even to the point of calling Suetonius' arrangement 'incorrect' (*incorrecte* and *fautif*, 289).

9. Bradley (1998), 13.

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The Rubric System

The 'rubric system' is Suetonius' signature method of arrangement by category, rather than chronology. Suetonius himself describes the method as *per species*:

> Proposita uitae eius uelut summa partes singillatim neque per tempora sed per species exequar, quo distinctius demonstrari cognoscique possint. (*Aug*. 9.1)
>
> Now that I have set out the main parts of his life, I will set out one thing after another, not by time, but by category, to make it simpler to be shown and to be understood.

Now that he has given us the roughly chronological summary of Augustus' career (*Aug*. 8.1–3), Suetonius will be continuing not by time but by *species*: that is, by category or subdivision. This is meant to make things easier to understand. Suetonius' *species* is our 'rubric', named for the 'red' pigment with which we might pick out the headword. Stuart used 'rubric', presumably from Leo's *Rubrik*,[10] in his description of the method, and 'rubric' is now the common way of describing either the headword, i.e. the *partitio*, or the whole paragraph, or both.

Rubrics were already apparent in Suetonius' *De uiris illustribus* and in the other fragments, on topics such as types of dress, insults, and a work on *uerborum differentiae*.[11] Other Romans also used a similar method of organization. Compare, for instance, Augustus' *Res Gestae*, Pliny the Younger's *Panegyric*, death notices in historiography and letters, and Varro's *De lingua Latina*.[12] The rubric system was taken up after Suetonius by his heirs, such as Einhard in the *Life of Charlemagne*.[13] These authors can be compared to those who do not use categories, such as Cornelius Nepos and Plutarch.[14]

Many of the *Lives* have a tripartite structure: a roughly chronological section from birth until *imperium*, followed by a section arranged by rubric rather than chronology, then at the end another chronological section, leading up to death and final summary. The way whole *Lives* are organized with the rubric section

10. German for 'title' or 'heading'. Used by Leo (1901); Stuart (1928), 229.

11. The fragments were edited by Reifferscheid (1860); see Power (2014b) on the 'Famous Courtesans'; on the *DVI*, see Kaster (1995) and (2016) and Gibson (2014). For rubric in the fragments, see Townend (1967), 85.

12. Pliny in the *Panegyricus* uses the virtue headings traditional in panegyric but within a basically chronological structure, Innes (2011), 77f.; on death notices see Pomeroy (1991), with a brief mention of structure at 246, and Borg (2013); on structure in Varro *De lingua Latina*, see Taylor (1996) and (2015); and on Varro and alternative methods of arrangement, see Glinister (2007), 22f.

13. On Einhard and Suetonius, see Townend (1967), 98f.

14. On the structure of Nepos, see Milne (1994). Plutarch does use topical arrangement in the opening parts of *Lives*, rather than in the main part (the opposite of Suetonius): Duff (2008), 190. On structure in Plutarch's *Parallel Lives*, also see Duff (1999) and (2011).

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in the middle has been described as 'parenthesis', more recently by Donna Hurley as a 'rubric sandwich'.[15] Some of the chronological parts at the beginning and end are also laid out as rubrics, with a headline, a topic sentence, and a careful arrangement of information. For instance, at the beginning of many *Lives* the ancestry section has the hallmarks of a rubric; towards the end we often find the *personalia*, with physical appearance and pastimes. It is the middle section that concerns us here: the rubric section, sandwiched by the two chronological sections, which describes the character of the man during his *imperium*, by means of laying out various anecdotes organized into categories. Very often (but not always) the categories are arranged under headings of virtues and vices, such as *liberalitas* and *crudelitas*. Aspects of the *princeps*' job, such as public works and games, very often receive their own rubrics.[16] Each heading is demonstrated by anecdotes. The rubrics are usually not arranged chronologically, although in the longer *Lives*, in particular *Tiberius*, there is a tendency to cluster rubrics into 'phases', such as Tiberius' time on Rhodes, his time on Capri, the early part of his reign with Sejanus, the post-Sejanus period, and so forth.[17] But even in the shorter *Lives* we can sometimes detect signs of chronological order, especially within a rubric, and very occasionally we see cause and effect from one rubric to the next (e.g. *Nero* 32f., *Caligula* 38.1).

As an example of an individual rubric and how it works, we can take the *liberalitas* rubric from *Augustus* 41 and consider how carefully the paragraph has been arranged to demonstrate that headword:

> **liberalitatem** *omnibus ordinibus* per occasiones frequenter exhibuit. nam et inuecta urbi Alexandrino triumpho regia gaza tantam copiam nummariae rei effecit ut faenore deminuto plurimum agrorum pretiis accesserit, et postea quotiens ex damnatorum bonis pecunia superflueret usum eius gratuitum iis qui cauere in duplum possent ad certum tempus indulsit. *senatorum* censum ampliauit ac pro octingentorum milium summa duodecies sestertium taxauit suppleuitque non habentibus. [41.2] congiaria *populo* frequenter dedit, sed diuersae fere summae—modo quadringenos, modo trecenos, nonnumquam ducenos quinquagenosque nummos—ac ne minores quidem pueros praeteriit, quamuis non nisi ab undecimo aetatis anno accipere consuessent. frumentum quoque in annonae difficultatibus saepe leuissimo, interdum nullo pretio uiritim admensus est tesserasque nummarias duplicauit.
>
> (*Aug.* 41)

> He often showed generosity to all classes at favourable opportunities. For instance, he made the money supply so abundant by bringing the royal

15. Stuart (1928), 185; Hurley (2014).
16. On the 'job' of the Caesars, in Suetonius, see Wallace-Hadrill (1995), 119–41.
17. On the 'phases', see Pelling (1997).

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> treasures to Rome in his Alexandrian triumph that the rate of interest fell and the price of real estate rose. Afterwards, whenever there was money left over from the property of the condemned, he lent it for a fixed term without interest to those who could give security of twice the amount. For the senators, he increased the census, requiring 1.2 million sesterces instead of 800,000, but he paid the difference for those who could not afford the increase. To the people, he often gave distributions, but often of different amounts—sometimes 400, or 300, often 250 sesterces each—and even to the young men, still boys, although it had not been customary for them to receive anything until their eleventh year. In grain shortages, he also often gave out grain cheaply, or even free of charge, to each man, and he doubled the number of money tokens.

liberalitatem is the headword or lemma: the *partitio*, the word that you might actually print in red. As here, the headword often appears in an emphatic position, either first or last in the opening sentence. In this case it is immediately followed by a specifying phrase, *omnibus ordinibus* ('to all the orders') and those *ordines* will be more specifically addressed later in the paragraph, flagged by the words *senatorum* ('of the senators') and *populo* ('to the people').[18] In the first line the keywords *liberalitas* and *omnes ordines* are marking very clearly where this paragraph is going and how it will be arranged. There is no explicit value judgement, no word that tells us that Suetonius approves of this behaviour, and therefore this kind of information has often been taken to be neutral. For this reason Townend, for example, thought Suetonius was actually leaving us to make our own decisions.[19] But in fact the choice of headword (*liberalitas*, 'generosity', when it might have been *impensae* or *nepotatus*, 'expenses' or 'extravagant living', for instance) makes it clear that we are dealing with something of which Suetonius approves, and this will become clearer as we discuss the way individual rubrics are themselves arranged carefully into sequences.

What the Rubric System Does

The rubric system, the organization of material by *species* with subheadings, gives an impression of a filing-cabinet or card-index system. This system has been criticized.[20] Suetonius has been variously thought to be too structured or even 'formless'—both extremes of the one spectrum.[21] The arrangement by

18. On *liberalitas*, see Kloft (1970).
19. Townend (1967), 83.
20. E.g. Townend (1967), 85; Bringmann (1971), Flach (1972).
21. Too dependent on structure: Wallace-Hadrill (1995), 19; 'formless', Ogilvie and Richmond (1967), 12.

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category rather than time certainly does make it difficult for historians to find cause and effect, long-term trends, or character revelation over the lifetime.

The system also has virtues, especially for creating a vivid and rounded characterization. First, it allows Suetonius to divide his material into large sections, such as virtues and vices, and then to divide again, and second, to classify anecdotes in whatever way he sees fit (but not always where we would put them).[22] By assigning anecdotes to specific virtues and vices, Suetonius exaggerates the frequency and extremeness of these anecdotes by making them seem to be ongoing, repeated behaviours. Third, the rubric system allows the biographer to signpost very clearly within the structure of the *Life* and within individual rubrics what he will include and where this is all heading, and finally, it allows him to create the impression that these Caesars are directly comparable. We, as readers, get the idea that we could actually compare the Caesars with each other, and judge them as more or less successful than the others, on the basis of the common categories with which Suetonius has provided us. Cizek was lulled into this unfortunate illusion when he tallied up a score for each of the Caesars based on how many virtues and vices each had.[23] These are the four functions of the rubric system that I will be dealing with for the rest of this study.

Divide and Conquer

First, the rubric system allows Suetonius to divide the *Life* into large sections. He might organize a whole *Life* into public and private, with a heading in between the two sections to alert us that we are going from the career to the character (*Diuus Iulius* 44, *Diuus Augustus* 69.1). Some sense of chronology remains within each of the two sections. Within the last section of *Diuus Iulius* there is also a transition from good to bad, at 76. In fact, the good/bad division is much more common across the *Lives* than private/public. Suetonius perceived that after Augustus the *princeps* no longer had a 'private' life.

In the *Lives* that show more blame than praise, the arrangement is often a few sections of virtues, a strong statement (such as *Nero* 19.3, *Caligula* 22.1, *Domitianus* 10.1, *Vitellius* 10) that now we are moving onto vice, and then a long sequence of vices. The statement in *Caligula* that from here on we are dealing with the *monstrum* (22.1) is very strong and direct, but even without it we would understand that we are dealing with a blameworthy subject, because the main impact of the characterization is in the arrangement. It is not a slow

22. Jones disagreed with Suetonius' match of heading with anecdote, e.g. Jones (1996), 75: 'At last, Suetonius has included an exemplum under the correct heading.' See also Reekmans (1977) for the thought that Suetonius was actually wrong in his allocation of anecdote to rubric. In my opinion these 'mistakes' are in fact signs that we are witnessing Suetonius' persuasion at work, catching him in his game.

23. Cizek (1977); Cizek's method was thought (in my view rightly) to be oversimplistic, e.g. Knecht (1979), 319; Wallace-Hadrill (1995), 114 n.18.

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transition from good to very bad, but a sudden one, from good (13–21, without an announcement at 13) to very bad at 22 (the *diuisio* and shift to vice), starting with the very loaded vices of incest and cruelty, and moving along through the vices towards the assassination. The climaxes at 22 and 49 bracket the less serious vices, but by section 49 we have duly forgotten whatever good there was before 22.

For the *Lives* that confer praise rather than blame, the arrangement is the other way around: vices, then virtues (as happens in *Diuus Augustus* and *Diuus Titus*) but without the strong statement of division announcing the vices, which would properly appear at *Diuus Augustus* 27 and *Diuus Titus* 6. Vices are buried at the beginning, and then forgotten under the sheer weight of the praise that comes afterwards. In the case of *Diuus Augustus* the vices are associated with the triumvir Octavian, and can be left behind with him; for *Titus* most of the vices are not even real.[24]

This kind of arrangement does have the effect of papering over any actual change of behaviour. For instance, other sources give us the impression that Caligula started well but, early in the reign, around the time of his illness, his behaviour changed.[25] That is lost in the Suetonian structure, probably deliberately. Suetonius does not attribute to Caligula's illness what others do; in fact he hardly even mentions it. At 50.2, very near the end of the *Life*, he gives the responsibility for Caligula's madness (*furor*) to Caesonia and her love potion. Suetonius' Caligula goes straight from love potion to madness, whereas in Dio and especially in Philo it is the illness early in the reign (mentioned at *Caligula* 14.2 without a sense of significance) that precipitates the madness. Even if Suetonius thinks the love potion is what changed things, in the *Life* there is not this chronological break: the shift at 22.1 is structural in the organization of the *Life,* rather than temporal in Caligula's behaviour.[26] Similarly, Suetonius' method makes it difficult for us to tell whether Tiberius' behaviour actually changed at some point. The material in *Tiberius*, as in the other long *Lives* (especially *Diuus Iulius* and *Diuus Augustus*) does appear to retain a vaguely chronological disposition, with two judgemental *diuisiones*: the first, to good (*princeps*) at 33; then later, to *uitia* at 42.

24. On Titus' vices, see Tatum (2014).

25. Dio 59.8.1 and Philo *Embassy* 14; on the change in Caligula, see also Josephus 18.7; on his *insania*, see Sen. *De constantia* 18.1; *dementia* in Sen. *De Ira* 1.20.8f.

26. Hurley (1993), 83, pointed out that 'most, but not all' of the good deeds of Caligula's reign do appear to occur at the beginning of the reign, so it would be almost possible to argue that the break at 22 is chronological. Whatever the historical cause of the 'change' in Caligula, perceived in the other sources, I absolutely agree with Hurley that, for Suetonius, the *princeps*/*monstrum* break is 'the result of his organizational imperatives' ([1993], 83). Unfortunately I do not think we can take seriously Ferguson's (2014) suggestion that this is really a divide between public and private.

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Partitio and Classification

The second virtue of the rubric system is that it allows Suetonius to classify his anecdotes under vice and virtue headings, such as cruelty or generosity. As well as making things more manageable, being able to choose which heading to use gives Suetonius considerable power of characterization. For instance, a story about money might be classified under any of the vastly different headings *auaritia, parsimonia, largitio, munificentia, liberalitas, rapinae, cupiditas, innocentia,* or *abstinentia*.[27] Augustus spends generously (*liberalitas*, 41), and that is positive, but only because he does not support it by fleecing Romans (which would make it *rapinae*). Vespasian is accused of taking money unreasonably (16) but Suetonius can argue that he was driven *ad manubias et rapinas*, 'to robbery and plunder', by 'necessity'—*necessitate*—which justifies it in Suetonius' eyes because he spent the money wisely. On the other hand, Caligula (38) and Nero (30–2) are both generous, but they each spend so much that they then have to recoup it from citizens, their lavishness becoming *rapinae* rather than *liberalitas*. Other examples of the flexibility of the rubric system and its capacity for characterization through any item are marriages and public works. Marriages might be placed neutrally in 'private life' (*Diuus Augustus* 62), among crimes for Nero (35), under cruelty for Caligula (25).[28] *Spectacula*, obviously important to Suetonius, always appear in the good section;[29] public works usually do, although not in *Tiberius*, and in *Caligula* they straddle the transition at 22, with some in the *princeps* and others in the *monstrum* sections.[30] Even something as universal as sleep can be put to good use, as Wallace-Hadrill noticed:[31] Augustus was industrious and never slept more than seven hours, and of course that is to his credit; Claudius did not sleep well at night and allowed sleep to interrupt his duties; Caligula hardly slept, but only because of insomnia (*Diuus Augustus* 78; *Diuus Claudius* 33.2; *Caligula* 50.3). Where Suetonius puts the story depends on how he perceives it—and that determines how we perceive it.

Bringing together anecdotes under individual vices exaggerates the monstrosity of these items. Francis Bacon thought that because the information was 'gathered into tytles and bundles, and not in order of time, they seeme more monstrous and incredible' than the same material appears in Tacitus.[32] I think Bacon was correct. Certainly, one of the effects of collecting these items together from a period spanning decades is to exaggerate how often such events occurred. It has been noticed that Suetonius will sometimes generalize from one example,

27. On money in Suetonius and these headings, see Lewis (1991).
28. On marriages in Suetonius, see Bradley (1985).
29. Bradley (1981), 132.
30. On Suetonius and *spectacula*, see Bradley (1981); on public works, see Elsner (1994).
31. Wallace-Hadrill (1995), 173.
32. Bacon (2000), 92: section 2I3R of Kiernan's edition.

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making it seem that an event (which probably happened only once) was in fact a pattern of behaviour. For instance, Wallace-Hadrill points out that the daughter of Sejanus was the young girl violated by the executioner, which Suetonius makes into the plural and very non-specific *immaturae puellae* (*Tib.* 61.5).[33] The event, perhaps one-off, does indeed appear more monstrous for being collected together with similar examples and generalized into a pattern. However, both Bacon and Wallace-Hadrill appear to have seen this as a problem rather than a deliberate literary device. This collection under rubrics is what Wallace-Hadrill thought showed that Suetonius was no artist, but I would argue that it is only what makes him no historian.[34] Certainly it irritates those looking for character development and the long arc of historical narrative, even simple chronology. But despite appearances, in making these same events seem 'more monstrous and incredible' Suetonius shows his artistry. This rubric system is where Suetonius' freedom and creativity come into play.

Sequence is important. Rubrics often appear in a long sequence of related topics such as money or carnal vices. At *Caligula* 23–5, there is a particularly clever segue from family relationships, to incest with his sisters, to his marriages. His incest with his sisters falls uncomfortably but also naturally between 'family' and 'marriage' and forms a bridge between the two concepts. Public works, games, and *liberalitas* are often connected. *Augustus* has a long section on *urbs*; at *Nero* 10.1 there is an announcement of Nero's three priorities on coming to power, which are then described in sequence: *liberalitas*, *clementia*, and *comitas* ('obligingness').[35] After a few more things Nero did that were not to be criticized, or even praiseworthy (*partim nulla reprehensione, partim etiam non mediocri laude digna*, 19.3), at 19.3 the narrative shifts into the sequence of 'shameful and criminal deeds' (*probris ac sceleribus*). As promised, the *probra*—the merely shameful—come first: music and musical contests interspersed with horse racing (20–5). Following these we have the 'criminal deeds', the *scelera*, although the word *scelus* is only mentioned again at the murder of Agrippina (34.4), perhaps the peak of Nero's criminal career. At 26, after the *probra*, comes a long contents list for the next dozen sections: *petulantia, libido, luxuria, auaritia, crudelitas*. Only the careful reader—or the reader reading in sequence and context—notices that this heading actually picks up 19.3's *scelera*, and the same will happen again with the paragraphs illustrating *petulantia, libido*, and so on. In this long sequence of Nero's *scelera* we are supposed to remember that these are examples of those things mentioned at the headline at 26. This habit of not naming things again was what Townend found confusing in the rubric system,[36] and it is confusing when we open Suetonius for a single reference and close it again. In fact, *petulantia* might be the

33. Wallace-Hadrill (1995), 161.
34. Wallace-Hadrill (1995), 19. Reekmans (1977) had also seen this as a problem.
35. A sequence noticed by Reekmans (1977), 277 n.72.
36. Townend (1967), 85f.

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heading for chapters 26f. although the word does not appear there. Then, as we should be expecting by now, the next paragraphs in the sequence describe, one after another, the items catalogued at 26: *libido* (28f.), *luxuria* (30f.), with an unusually smooth segue into 32 for the *auaritia* that follows upon the extravagance of Nero's spending habits; finally, at 33–9, *crudelitas* takes us all the way up to 40, where the narrative shifts to the *exitus* narrative. The final category, *crudelitas*, shows a particular interest in logical sequence, the anecdotes forming a sequence of concentric circles, beginning with those nearest the *princeps*: relatives, then friends, and then outwards until the *crudelitas* of the heading encompasses even cruelty to the city. We will see the same concern for logic appear at *Diuus Vespasianus* 13 and *Caligula* 26.

The context of these anecdotes in their sequence is important when we as historians go in and pick things out. Perhaps it is often obvious that a rubric is either critical or not, based on its headword. However, there are times when the headword would not be enough. For example *Tiberius* 54, the three sons of Germanicus:

> cum ex Germanico tres nepotes, Neronem et Drusum et Gaium, ex Druso unum Tiberium haberet, destitutus morte liberorum maximos natu de Germanici filiis, Neronem et Drusum, patribus conscriptis commendauit diemque utriusque tirocinii congiario plebei dato celebrauit. sed…
>
> (*Tib*. 54)

> When by Germanicus he had three grandsons, Nero, Drusus, and Gaius, and by Drusus one, called Tiberius, and he had lost his own children to death, he recommended to the senate Nero and Drusus, the elder sons of Germanicus, and celebrated the day when each of them came to his majority by giving largess to the commons. But…

This item, cited out of context like this, seems neutral unless we remember that it goes back to the heading at 50: *odium aduersus necessitudines* ('hatred for family members'). It is especially easy to misread the sequence in the *personalia*, as I believe Williams did when he looked to *Galba* 22 for evidence of Roman opinions of male–male sexuality. The paragraph in context is as follows:

> statura fuit iusta, capite praecaluo, oculis caeruleis, aduncо naso, manibus pedibusque articulari morbo distortissimis, ut neque calceum perpeti neque libellos euoluere aut tenere omnino ualeret. excreuerat etiam in dexteriore latere eius caro praependebatque adeo ut aegre fascia substringeretur. [22] cibi plurimi traditur, quem tempore hiberno etiam ante lucem capere consuerat, inter cenam uero usque eo abundantis ut congestas super manus reliquias circumferri iuberet spargique ad pedes stantibus, *libidinis in mares pronioris et eos non nisi praeduros exoletosque. ferebant in Hispania Icelum e ueteribus concubinis de Neronis exitu*

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> *nuntiantem non modo artissimis osculis palam exceptum ab eo sed ut sine mora uelleretur oratum atque seductum*. [23] periit tertio et septuagesimo aetatis anno…
>
> (*Gal*. 21–3)

> He was of a normal height, with a very bald head, blueish eyes, a hooked nose, and with hands and feet so misshapen by gout that he was not strong enough to bear a shoe, or unroll or even hold a book. He had swollen on his right side and the swelling hung down so much that it had to be uncomfortably fastened with a bandage. It is said that he ate many meals, which he was accustomed to take even before daylight in winter, and indeed, at meals to take food so greedily that whatever was left he ordered to be given to bystanders. *He was more inclined in sexual preference towards men, and really only to hard and mature men. They say that in Spain, Icelus, one of Galba's long-standing lovers, brought him the news of Nero's death, and was not only welcomed with fond kisses by Galba, but was even begged to freshen up without delay, and taken aside.* He died in his seventy-third year of age…

Williams is discussing relationships between mature men as opposed to young men, so his attention here is on *praeduros exoletosque*, 'hard and mature.' He says:

> It is worth noting that Galba's fondness for mature men seems to have caused no eyebrows to rise, presumably because he was observing the two basic protocols of masculine sexual comportment: maintaining the appearance of an appropriately dominant stance with his partners and keeping himself to his own slaves and to prostitutes.[37]

He appears to be arguing that Galba must have been the 'dominant' partner in his relationship with Icelus, based on what he perceives to be a lack of criticism from Suetonius.[38]

I question whether there is in fact no criticism here. Certainly, at the sentence level it does appear to be neutral (although the specific part about the death of Nero does seem to be rather unbefitting, as Williams recognizes). The word *exoletus,* as Williams himself points out, may be used of both dominant and passive partners.[39] So if we want to assume Galba is dominant in his relationships the only support for this in the text is the fact that it is Icelus, not Galba, who is

37. Williams (2010), 88.

38. Contra Williams (2010), 88, Chong-Gossard (2010), 298 n.2, suggests it is Galba's preference for older men that is deviant. On Galba's sexual preferences, see Van Wassenhove (2008), Charles and Anagnostou-Laoutides (2012), Wardle (2015).

39. Williams (2010), 90–3.

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oratum atque seductum ('begged and taken aside'). In fact, in its sequence, this information about Galba's preference for men looks fairly negative. It comes between an unflattering description of his *forma* and a vivid account of his gluttony, and the incident with Icelus, in which Williams does see 'an implied tone of reproach'. Gluttony is a tyrannical trait, and gluttony and sexual depravity are tropes often connected.[40] In fact at *Vitellius* 12f. the memorable scene of his banquet also comes up against Vitellius' questionable sexual practices, which in *Vitellius* leave no room for thinking that Suetonius might be at ease with this behaviour. I believe that Williams would not have drawn his conclusion that this 'caused no eyebrows to rise' if he had been reading the sequence of rubrics together.

Suetonius is not restricted, as he would be by a chronological arrangement, to laying out a whole *Life* according to long-term character development or a gradual revelation of character. Consequently he is also *unlikely* to show any such long-term development. This is perhaps a downside of the method. But if he does not build a character over the lifetime, that is not to say that he does not build up a character over the *Life*. It is this very method of burying the good under the bad (or vice versa), of piling all these vices on top of each other, that in the end brings us to a vivid, rounded picture of the Caesar as Suetonius depicts him.

Signposting within the Rubric

Third, the rubric system allows Suetonius to signpost his direction, sometimes with a *diuisio* dividing the whole *Life* such as *Caligula* 22.1 or *Nero* 19.3, but also within the rubric, with a topic sentence and key words.

The public works, for instance, might be in chronological order within the rubric, as they are for *Diuus Augustus* 29, with a topic sentence listing the items in the order in which they will appear in the paragraph.[41] The ancestry section, too, usually runs in chronological order from the first named ancestor, either the first to have had the name or the first to have become consul. For example, in *Nero*'s ancestry section, the list begins with the first ancestor who had the name Ahenobarbus, skips forward a few generations, then his descendants are listed in order by generation, progressing towards Nero himself.[42]

Careful attention to chronological order marks the list of omens of Augustus' future greatness, which unusually falls at the end of the *Life* (94). The topic

40. The connection between gluttony and sexual transgression is clear from Martial and Catullus: see Watson and Watson (2003), 284–6. I thank Lindsay Watson for discussion of the connection.

41. The public works of Augustus are listed in the order not of completion but in order of the events that caused them to be built: Wardle (2014), 224.

42. This method of listing in chronological order is not followed in *Tiberius*, where the ancestry section is unusual in several respects: Garrett (2013), 115–41.

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sentence refers to the omens that occurred 'before he was born, on the very day of his birth, and afterwards', and the omens will come in the list in this order. 'Afterwards' includes things that happened when Augustus was an infant, a small child, and an adult.

When the examples do not appear in chronological order, the order of the topic sentence is usually the order of appearance in the text, for example *Diuus Vespasianus* 13, 'he bore with the greatest patience':

> *amicorum* libertatem, *causidicorum* figuras ac *philosophorum* contumaciam **lenissime tulit**. Licinium Mucianum notae impudicitiae sed meritorum fiducia minus sui reuerentem numquam nisi clam et hactenus retaxare sustinuit, ut apud communem aliquem amicum querens adderet clausulam, 'ego tamen uir sum'. Saluium Liberalem in defensione diuitis rei ausum dicere, 'quid ad Caesarem, si Hipparchus sestertium milies habet?', et ipse laudauit. Demetrium Cynicum in itinere obuium sibi post damnationem ac neque assurgere neque salutare se dignantem, oblatrantem etiam nescio quid satis habuit canem appellare.
>
> (*Vesp*. 13)

> He bore good-naturedly the licence of his friends, the innuendoes of the pleaders, and the stubbornness of the philosophers. When Licinius Mucianus, well known for his shameless lifestyle, used the excuse of services rendered to treat Vespasian with less reverence than he should have, Vespasian only took him to task for it in private and only as far as to add a phrase to something said by their mutual friend: 'At least I am a man.' Salvius Liberalis dared to say, in the course of defending a rich client, 'What does it matter to Caesar, if Hipparchus has 100 million?' and Vespasian praised him. Demetrius the Cynic, who met Vespasian while away from the city after his condemnation, did not deign to rise or even to greet him, even barking something at him, but Vespasian thought it sufficient to call him a mongrel.

lenissime tulit is the lemma, although it comes at the end of the sentence. The three elements in the sentence come in internal order. Note that the three elements (very often the elements number three) are like concentric circles radiating away from Vespasian: his friends, then moving away from himself, 'pleaders', and 'philosophers'. This technique is even clearer in examples such as the 'cruelty' of Caligula (*uiolentia*, 26.4). The first examples (beginning at 23) are of those closest to him: relatives, then friends, then the Senate, the 'other orders', and, within 'other orders', first equestrians then the people. This same method of arrangement appears in *Nero* 33–9. In *Diuus Augustus* 21, the list of the regions he conquered is arranged in groups that are logical geographically rather than chronologically.

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Caligula's marriages appear within the *monstrum* section as part of a long sequence on despicable treatment of his family (following incest with his sisters):

> **matrimonia** *contraxerit* turpius an *dimiserit* an *tenuerit* non est facile discernere. Liuiam Orestillam C. Pisoni nubentem, cum ad officium et ipse uenisset, ad se deduci imperauit intraque paucos dies repudiatam biennio post relegauit quod repetisse usum prioris mariti tempore medio uidebatur. alii tradunt adhibitum cenae nuptiali mandasse ad Pisonem contra accumbentem, 'noli uxorem meam premere', statimque e conuiuio abduxisse secum ac proximo die edixisse matrimonium sibi repertum exemplo Romuli et Augusti. [25.2] Lolliam Paulinam C. Memmio consulari exercitus regenti nuptam, facta mentione auiae eius ut quondam pulcherrimae, subito ex prouincia euocauit ac perductam a marito coniunxit sibi breuique missam fecit interdicto cuiusquam in perpetuum coitu. [25.3] Caesoniam neque facie insigni neque aetate integra matremque iam ex alio uiro trium filiarum, sed luxuriae ac lasciuiae perditae, et ardentius et constantius amauit, ut saepe chlamyde peltaque et galea ornatam ac iuxta adequitantem militibus ostenderit, amicis uero etiam nudam. quam enixam uxorio nomine dignatus est, uno atque eodem die professus et maritum se eius et patrem infantis ex ea natae. [25.4] infantem autem, Iuliam Drusillam appellatam, per omnium dearum templa circumferens Mineruae gremio imposuit alendamque et instituendam commendauit. nec ullo firmiore indicio sui seminis esse credebat quam feritate, quae illi quoque tanta iam tunc erat ut infestis digitis ora et oculos simul ludentium infantium incesseret.
>
> (*Cal.* 25)

> It is not easy to tell whether he acted more shamefully in contracting, in ending, or in carrying out his marriages. When Livia Orestilla was marrying C. Piso, Caligula attended the wedding himself, and he ordered that Livia be brought to him, and within a few days he rejected her, and two years later he exiled her because she seemed to have taken up again with her former husband in the meantime. Others say that, lying down at the wedding dinner, he had ordered Piso, reclining across from him, 'Don't try it on with my wife!' and at once he swept her away from the party with him and on the following day he put out an edict that he had found himself a wife after the manner of Romulus and Augustus. When mention was made that the grandmother of Lollia Paulina, the wife of the consular C. Memmius, ruler of armies, had been a great beauty, he suddenly called her back from the province and married her, but soon sent her away, and he forbade her ever to have sex with anyone. Caesonia was neither beautiful nor young, and already the mother of three daughters by someone else, but abandoned to luxury and wantonness. Despite all this he loved her both passionately and devotedly, so much that he

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> often showed her off to the soldiers, riding beside him and dressed up in cloak and shield and helmet, and he even presented her naked to his friends. He honoured her with the title of 'wife' only on the very day he acknowledged their child, and he declared himself both married and the father of a child born from her. The child was called Julia Drusilla, and he carried her around the temples of all the goddesses, and put her on the lap of Minerva, commending to the goddess the child's raising and education. There was to his mind no firmer evidence that he was her father than the child's savagery, which was already so obvious in her that she used to scratch the faces of the little children playing with her.

The word for marriages, *matrimonia* (our *partitio* or lemma), comes at the beginning, along with the three ways Caligula dealt with them disgustingly (*turpius*): in contracting (*contraho*), annulling (*dimitto*), and carrying out (*teneo*). Then the anecdotes to demonstrate these three aspects appear in that order (although contracting and annulling are mixed together), with his marriage to Caesonia, and a brief analysis of their daughter, demonstrating the final item, 'carrying out'.

Our final example of signposting within the rubric also shows evidence of careful arrangement, but this time we are surprised by the biographer's departure from his usual method. Nero's wives (*uxores* is the headword, rather than *matrimonia*) are listed by name in chronological order: Octavia, Poppaea Sabina, Statilia Messalina. An unusual feature of this particular paragraph is that, although all three names appear in the topic sentence, their vital statistics do not quite follow in that same order, as we would expect:

> **uxores** praeter *Octauiam* duas postea duxit, *Poppaeam Sabinam* quaestorio patre natam et equiti R. antea nuptam, deinde *Statiliam Messalinam* Tauri bis consulis ac triumphalis abneptem, *qua* ut poteretur uirum eius Atticum Vestinum consulem in honore ipso trucidauit. *Octauiae* consuetudinem cito aspernatus corripientibus amicis sufficere illi debere respondit uxoria ornamenta. [35.2] eandem mox saepe frustra strangulare meditatus dimisit ut sterilem, sed improbante diuortium populo nec parcente conuiciis etiam relegauit, denique occidit sub crimine adulteriorum adeo inpudenti falsoque ut in quaestione pernegantibus cunctis Anicetum paedagogum suum indicem subiecerit qui fingeret et dolo stupratam a se fateretur. [35.3] *Poppaeam* duodecimo die post diuortium Octauiae in matrimonium acceptam dilexit unice, et tamen ipsam quoque ictu calcis occidit quod se ex aurigatione sero reuersum grauida et aegra conuiciis incesserat. ex hac filiam tulit Claudiam Augustam amisitque admodum infantem.
>
> (*Nero* 35.1–3)

> Apart from Octavia, he took two wives: Poppaea Sabina, born from a quaestorian father and previously married to a Roman knight, and Statilia

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> Messalina, descendant of Taurus, twice consul and triumphator. In order to marry her he killed her husband, Atticus Vestinus, in his very consulship. He quickly got sick of living with Octavia, and when his friends criticized this, he responded that she ought to be happy with the trappings of a wife. Soon, when he had often tried in vain to strangle her, he divorced her on the grounds that she was barren. But when the people did not approve of the divorce, and were abusing him over it, he even banished her. Finally he killed her on the charge of adultery, a charge so obviously falsified that, when everyone who was questioned over it was denying the charge, he arranged it so that Anicetus, who had been his own tutor, confessed that she had slept with him through some sort of a trick. He especially loved Poppaea, and he took her in marriage on the twelfth day after the divorce from Octavia, and yet even her he kicked to death when she was heavily pregnant and unwell, because she had criticized him when he came home late from the races. She was the mother of his daughter Claudia Augusta, whom he lost when she was still a baby.

Usually the names, once mentioned, would not appear again—but the names must recur throughout this passage because their stories do not appear in the chronological order in which their names appeared at the beginning, but in ascending order of how badly Nero treated them. At 35.1, Messalina's name comes last in the list, appropriately to the chronology. But it is then that the story of Messalina appears, perhaps in order that Suetonius does not have to mention the name again, only connecting with *qua*. We might perhaps have expected then for Suetonius to go on in reverse order, with Poppaea and Octavia, but in fact he goes back to Octavia to allow an ascending tricolon. This is a caution to us that the rubrics are not always arranged in a straightforward manner.

Comparison

Fourth, the rubric system, with its recurring headings across the *Lives*, allows the reader to make a comparison with other emperors, or at least to think we can, perhaps a bit dangerously. Although Suetonius does not ever say which emperor is best or worst, the repetition of categories gives us the feeling that we have enough information to make a proper comparison. Their performance seems to be on a level playing field, so we think that we could actually compare, for example, Julius Caesar and Domitian.

The rubric of public works demonstrates that Suetonius is absolutely biased. Augustus, of whom Suetonius approves, has the heading *publica opera plurima extruxit*, 'he built many public works', at 29 (immediately after the unstated climax, the transition from bad triumvir to good *princeps*), with a list of buildings and then their details in the same order. The section appears in a sequence of positive changes he made in the city. However, when we come to *Tiberius* 47, in a long

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sequence of Tiberius' vices, Suetonius clearly wants to downplay any praise that might come from public works, and to do so he changes the headline: *princeps neque opera ulla magnifica fecit* ('while emperor he constructed no magnificent public works'), except finishing those that Augustus left, then leaving his own unfinished.[43] Note the *magnifica.* The list given for Augustus was *opera,* not *magnifica opera*, and so gave more space for praise. It would appear that Tiberius is being judged on deliberately different standards. Even Caligula does better on this count than Tiberius, with what appears to be a record no better than Tiberius': Caligula finished Tiberius' works and started a few of his own. But then, at the climax of Caligula's good offices, comes the transition to monster (22.1), and the list of public works continues after the *diuisio* into the wasteful and prodigal. A performance indicator that would seem to be so measurable shows how much control Suetonius has over how he presents his Caesars.

Conclusion

Although it has often been claimed that Suetonius' language and message is neutral or impartial, the opposite is true: he has an opinion, and he will make sure we know what that is even if he does not always put it so bluntly. That opinion comes through from selection and arrangement of the rubrics.

By reading Suetonius only at the sentence level without necessarily reading even the whole paragraph, let alone the whole *Life*, we are neglecting important nuances, transitional statements, *diuisiones*, and the greater effect of the graduated sequence of material that is in fact how Suetonius is persuading his readers. This study has shown that Suetonius' persuasion is more sophisticated than we thought, and for those who already saw his persuasion, it has demonstrated it more fully.

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43. On the obvious bias of this section, Bringmann (1971), 280–2; Reekmans (1977), 279, 302.

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