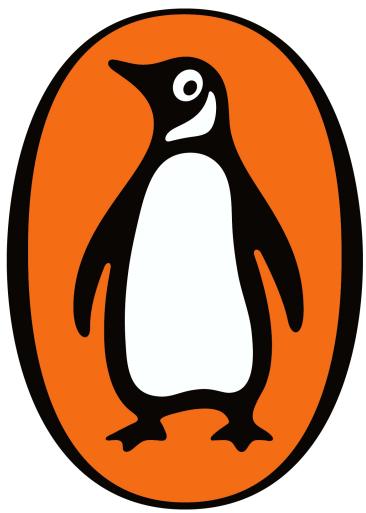


SUETONIUS
THE
LIVES
OF THE
CAESARS

TRANSLATED BY
TOM HOLLAND

PENGUIN CLASSICS



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About the Author

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Suetonius

THE LIVES OF THE CAESARS

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To Charlie Campbell,
A *princeps* among cricket captains.

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Introduction

Sometime in the early ninth century AD, a Frankish scholar named Einhard sat down to write a biography. His theme was a worthy one. Charlemagne, the greatest king of his age, had died in 814, after a reign of almost fifty years. During that time he had won many wars, sponsored numerous reforms and served as the patron of a golden age of learning. The surest measure of his achievements was that in 800, in Rome itself, he had been crowned emperor: the heir of the Caesars. Centuries might have passed since the collapse of Roman rule in western Europe, but the allure, the charisma, the prestige of the vanished empire still haunted Frankish scholars. This was why, when Einhard sought a model for his biography of Charlemagne, he turned not to a recent source, not to the life of a saint or a Christian ruler, but to an older text by far. Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus had lived some seven centuries previously, during the heyday of Roman power, and a single copy of his most famous work, a series of biographies of the Caesars, had been preserved in a Frankish monastery. This text – a precious survivor into the age of Charlemagne – constituted a great compendium of riches: details, many of them startlingly personal and intimate, of the first Roman emperors. Unsurprisingly, then, Einhard treasured it. He knew what

fortune had preserved for him: the very template of how to write about a Caesar.

Twelve lives in all featured in Suetonius' collection. The first was that of Julius Caesar, the dictator whose name had become synonymous with imperial rule; the last that of Domitian, an emperor who had come to power eighty-one years after the birth of Christ. The biography that most interested Einhard, however, was the second: the longest and most detailed in Suetonius' collection. Augustus, the adopted son of Julius Caesar, had been commemorated by the Romans as the first and greatest of their emperors: a ruler who had laid the vast edifice of Roman power on such solid and splendid foundations that still, long after its collapse in western Europe, it served the Franks as the great exemplar of an empire. To Einhard, the comparison with Charlemagne appeared obvious. Accordingly, when he wrote his biography, the Frankish scholar modelled it on Suetonius' portrait of the first Roman emperor. Just as Charlemagne had done, Augustus had fought wars, passed laws and presided over a golden age. Suetonius, however, had not rested content with detailing the emperor's achievements. 'Now, having provided a summary of his life, I will go through it detail by detail, not chronologically but ordered by theme, so that each topic can be rendered more clearly and intelligibly.'¹ He had been as good as his word. Barely an aspect of Augustus' character had been regarded by Suetonius as too trivial to merit his attention. The emperor's physical appearance, his tastes in food and drink, his sex life: all had received scrupulous attention. Einhard, studying Suetonius' method closely, had absorbed the lesson. In his own biography, narratives of Charlemagne's conquests were combined

with the most personal details. The value of Suetonius as a serviceable exemplar to Christian scholars was decisively demonstrated. His reputation as the model of how to write the biography of a great ruler was ensured. In a similar manner, the twelve Caesars whose lives constituted the theme of his collection were enshrined for medieval Europe as the very archetypes of emperors.

And so they remain to this day. That Rome tends to live more vividly in people's imaginings than other ancient empires owes an inordinate amount to Suetonius. Pharaohs and Shahs may have presided over civilizations quite as brilliant and influential, but no one ever wrote about them as Suetonius wrote about the Caesars. His subjects seem familiar to us as do few other rulers from antiquity. They wrestle with funding shortfalls, foreign policy crises and sex scandals. We are shown their tastes, their foibles, their eccentricities. We see them eat, drink, marry, divorce, get angry, make jokes, take exercise, urinate, listen to people break wind, tie up their sandals. The chilly marble of their portrait busts is transfigured into flesh and blood.

Yet just as they can seem something familiar, political figures we might almost imagine being dissected on social media, so at the same time is it a potent part of their fascination that, like long-extinct apex predators, the Caesars portrayed in Suetonius' great collection of biographies are alien, terrifying, strange. Even Augustus, the emperor who served Einhard as the model for his portrayal of Charlemagne, is described, during his rise to power, as committing acts of chilling cruelty: gouging out the eyes of a suspected spy with his thumbs, butchering 300 human victims in sacrifice.

The portrait of the imperial court that we gain from Suetonius' collection of biographies is one repeatedly blotted by perversities and crimes. If Einhard located in the life of Augustus a model that might serve a Christian king, then others have found in the lives of Caligula and Nero altogether more sinister examples. Gilles de Rais, a French knight who was hanged in 1440 for the murder of hundreds of children, was alleged to have been seduced into committing his monstrous crimes by the experience of reading Suetonius. The Marquis de Sade kept a copy in his library. Many was the translation published in the Victorian period that would replace entire paragraphs with a discreet line of asterisks. Even today, in a far more permissive age, there are passages in Suetonius' lives that retain their power to shock and appal. The court of the Caesars remains an unnerving place.

Yet to regard Suetonius merely as a purveyor of scandal and sensation, the Roman equivalent of clickbait, would be to miss entirely what Einhard had found in his extraordinary work: a portrait of power at its most imperial. That each of the twelve lives contains a great treasure trove of detail and anecdote does not render them any the less valuable as an analysis of what it meant to rule as an emperor over the Roman world. If Suetonius entertains, then so also does he educate. A remarkably well-informed scholar, whose curiosity and learning embraced an immense range of subjects, he was as fascinated by genealogy, or jury reform, or regulation of the corn supply, or military institutions, or Greek literature, or graphology as he was by more obviously lurid themes. His supreme achievement as a biographer was to demonstrate that a portrait might be drawn of a ruler in which personality and policy were so interfused as in

effect to be indistinguishable. What happened at a Caesar's table or in his bedroom, he sought to demonstrate, was bound to inform what happened across the vast expanse of the empire. The measure of Suetonius' success is that still, to this day, nothing so dominates the public perception of the period covered by his biographies as the characters of those who ruled the Roman world. He did not just stamp forever the way that posterity would remember Caligula or Nero; he also played a key role in ensuring that posterity would remember them in the first place.

Yet indelibly though the various emperors are drawn, *The Lives of the Caesars* ranks as much more than a collection of individual biographies. Read in its entirety, it furnishes a sweeping analysis of how, over the course of a century and a half, autocracy came to bed itself down in the Roman state, evolve and replicate itself. Not just a great dynastic drama, one in which the shadows of dead Caesars – Julius Caesar himself, Augustus, Nero – fall dark over their successors, it is a drama shaped as well by its interplay with a further dimension: that of the supernatural. So rooted in the diurnal realities of political life are Suetonius' biographies that the intrusions of the otherworldly, no matter how repeatedly they occur, invariably serve to deliver a jolt. Ghosts are glimpsed on lonely roads, phantoms on the banks of distant rivers, and portents everywhere. Suetonius, when he gives us the lives of the Caesars, conveys the eerie sense that many of the events he is relating had been scripted well before they occurred. To rule as the master of the world is rarely, in his biographies, to rule as the master of one's own fate. Omens of future success – altars blazing of their own accord with fire, a dog straying into a dining room with a human hand in its mouth –

alternate with prophecies of ruin. When Nero, consulting an oracle, is warned to beware the seventy-third year, he jumps to the conclusion ‘not just that he would be enjoying many more years of life, but that these would be blessed by remarkable and unbroken good fortune’.² Yet he finds himself doomed all the same, overthrown by a general – Galba – who, when he launches his coup, is in his seventy-third year. Galba’s downfall in turn is presaged by an earthquake and an ominous dream. And so it continues. Far from constituting merely an amalgam of lurid anecdotes, *The Lives of the Caesars* possesses the grandeur of a great cycle of tragedies.

This is the quality that has rendered it, over the course of the past century, perhaps the most influential of all classical texts on popular culture. When Robert Graves, writing in the early 1930s, set to fictionalizing the first half of *The Lives of the Caesars* in his novel *I, Claudius* he opened the way for Suetonius to become a presiding genius over an entire new way of producing and consuming drama. Television, it turned out, was ideally suited to dramatizing the kind of dynastic feuding that the Roman biographer had portrayed in such scrupulous and scabrous detail. In 1976, forty-two years after the publication of Graves’s novel, the BBC’s adaptation of *I, Claudius* scored a brilliant success by exploiting to the full everything that was most sensational in Suetonius. In the United States, TV drama was quick to absorb the lesson. *Dynasty*, a lip-glossed and lacquered soap opera featuring oil magnates, Joan Collins and a forty-eight-room Denver mansion, was consciously modelled on *I Claudius*. Missing, though, was any sense of menace. Then, in 1999, a decade after *Dynasty* had finally been cancelled, a new redrafting of Roman dynastic history was

commissioned by the American cable network HBO that did not hesitate to stare into the heart of its darkness. ‘It was the longest time of peace in Rome’s history. He was a fair leader and all his people loved him for that.’ Such was the praise lavished on Augustus by Tony Soprano, family man and mobster, in ‘Pax Soprana’, an episode in the first season of *The Sopranos*. Tony himself, the resentful son of a nightmarish mother named Livia, more closely resembled Augustus’ successor, Tiberius, than Augustus himself; yet for all that, he demonstrated, just as Einhard’s biography of Charlemagne had done a millennium and more before, the enduring influence of Suetonius’ portrait of the first Roman emperor. Where the Frankish scholar had seen the model of a Christian king, however, the writer of ‘Pax Soprana’ saw something very different: the extremes of intimidation and violence that had underlain the original Augustan peace. To rule is to kill; to kill is to court death. Such was the lesson that *The Lives of the Caesars* had to teach. The theme, refracted through *I, Claudius* and *The Sopranos*, joined the television of the twenty-first century to the great exemplar of dynastic biography. Poison, incest, prophecy: all were staple moves in a game of thrones.

When Augustus lay on his deathbed he asked for a mirror, ‘ordered his hair combed and his lolling jaw set straight, and then, after admitting his friends into his presence, and asking them whether they thought that he had played his part well in the comedy of life, quoted these lines:

If the play has been a good one, then please clap your hands
And let me leave the stage to the sound of your applause.³

To rule as a Caesar was to stand as an actor upon the great stage of the world. Each of the emperors portrayed by Suetonius, in varying ways and to varying effect, understood this. The fascination that Suetonius himself, throughout *The Lives of the Caesars*, displays for theatre, spectacle, the staging of beast hunts and games reflects his appreciation of Rome itself as the supreme arena, one in which an emperor has no choice but to fight, to thrill, to dazzle. The result is as influential a collection of lives as has ever been written: lives which even today continue to inform how we understand the drama of power.

A ROMAN SCHOLAR

When Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus looked back at the lives of the first Caesars, he did so from the vantage point of an age of relative calm. Born shortly after the brief period of civil war that had followed Nero's death, and which in AD 69 had seen four emperors succeed each other in quick succession, he never experienced anything remotely comparable to that brief spasm of disorder. After Domitian, the subject of his twelfth and final biography, had been assassinated in 96, Caesar succeeded Caesar in a generally smooth and uncontested manner. One of them, Trajan, was commemorated by the Romans as the *Optimus Princeps*: the best of emperors. His heir, a brilliant and restless intellectual named Hadrian, toured the empire and laboured tirelessly to keep its provinces and frontiers at peace. Suetonius, in the final line of his life of Domitian, could salute the 'happier and more prosperous times' that both emperors had presided over and not sound a shameless flatterer. Chronicler of the Caesars that he was,

he knew – none better, perhaps – that things might very easily have been worse.

Suetonius himself had been close enough to the centre of power to have made a gift to Hadrian of an old statue of Augustus, an antique which – so he proudly informs us – the emperor kept ‘in his private chamber as an object of reverence.’⁴ Intimacy of this order was, in the Roman world, an infallible marker of power. Suetonius’ career in the imperial administration had been a brilliant one, characterized by a startlingly swift series of promotions. Terms of office in charge of the imperial archives and Rome’s libraries had culminated in his appointment as Hadrian’s *ab epistulis*: the official responsible for managing the imperial correspondence. For three years, not a letter was written by the emperor but it passed through Suetonius’ hands. This made him, for the duration of his term of office, one of the most important functionaries in the entire administration of the empire. How he came to obtain such a prestigious post is a story that can be pieced together – albeit sketchily – from various scattered fragments of evidence. A key discovery, made in 1952 in the city of Hippo Regius on the coast of north Africa, was an inscription mentioning his name: this, as well as providing a list of the various posts and priesthoods he had held, seems to suggest that he had his roots in the city. If so, then he never mentions it himself. Throughout *The Lives of the Caesars*, it is Italy – and Rome especially – that constitutes the overwhelming focus of his interests. The rise of his family to influence and wealth in the capital evidently reached back generations. Suetonius himself, in his life of Caligula, informs us that his grandfather had contacts on the margins of the court.⁵ His father, who

as a young man had served in the army of Otho, an emperor whose brief term of office in the fateful year of 69 had culminated in defeat and suicide, had evidently been possessed of sufficient connections to ensure that he did not suffer unduly for having backed the wrong horse. Sufficient wealth as well to provide his son with the kind of education essential for a young man on the make.

Suetonius, however – to a degree unusual among his peers – seems to have valued scholarship for its own sake. In particular, he took an interest in what we today, perhaps, might term social anthropology: the study of customs and manners. Well before he turned his hand to imperial biography, he had already won a considerable reputation for himself as the author of a whole range of learned treatises. The themes of these studies ranged from children's games to courtesans, from insults to styles of dress, from public spectacles to methods of reckoning time. The time and effort he devoted to his researches, far from hindering his advancement in public life, had served instead to provide it with a distinctive boost. Two men in particular had been prompted by his literary talents to adopt him as a protégé. The first of these, a distinguished magistrate by the name of Pliny, had repeatedly pulled strings for Suetonius: helping him to buy a farm, granting him experience of provincial administration, even procuring him legal privileges from Trajan. Then, following Pliny's death, he seems to have come under the wing of a military official named Septicius Clarus, a friend of Pliny's who, in 119, was appointed by Hadrian to the most sensitive post in the entire empire: command of the imperial guard, the praetorians. The sense of obligation that Suetonius felt towards the new prefect can be

measured by a striking tribute: his naming of Septicius Clarus in the opening of *The Lives of the Caesars* as its dedicatee.

To rise with a patron, however, was to risk falling with him. In 122, Hadrian took ship for the most barbarous outpost of the Roman Empire: Britain. Suetonius, in his role as *ab epistulis*, took ship there too. Almost two decades previously, he had turned down an opportunity arranged for him by Pliny to serve in the province as a military officer – conceivably in Vindolanda, a fort on its northernmost limits. Certainly, the discovery there in 1973 of a letter detailing the contents of a trunk sent by someone named ‘Tranquillus’ prompted one historian who had excavated at the site to ponder – a shade wistfully, no doubt – whether ‘Suetonius had had a box of his gear, including blankets, dining outfits and vests sent ahead to Britain ...’.⁶ More definite is that Suetonius, accompanying Hadrian to the northern frontier of the province, would have been privy to the emperor’s plan to build an immense wall there along its line – and that then, shortly afterwards, both he and Septicius Clarus were abruptly removed from their posts. This, according to an ancient life of Hadrian, was because ‘they had at that time behaved in the company of his wife Sabina, in their association with her, in a more informal manner than respect for the court household demanded’.⁷ Suetonius’ downfall, however, was not to prove a fatal one. Whatever the precise nature of his relationship with Sabina might have been, it did not cause Hadrian to ruin or execute him. Presumably, deprived of office, he retreated to a country estate, there to spend more time with his researches. The date of his death is unknown.

A thing of shreds and patches it may be, but there is enough, perhaps, in this reconstruction of Suetonius' career to offer some insight into the distinctive attributes that he brought to the writing of *The Lives of the Caesars*. The habit of scholarship. A deep and learned interest in an unusual array of topics. A lack of direct military experience. A professional familiarity with imperial libraries and archives. Intimacy with the functioning of the praetorians. Service at the very heart of imperial power. Experience of a Caesar's anger.

Shadowy a figure Suetonius may be – but he is not entirely, for all that, a spectre.

ANCIENT AND MODERN

Suetonius was not, nor had any wish to be, a historian. He had no ambition, as did his great contemporary Tacitus, to portray the entire sweep of an age. He wrote the lives of the Caesars, not their lives and times. The high themes that traditionally constituted the stuff of historical narratives were notable in his work by their absence. He did not bother himself with the precise details of Caesar's conquest of Gaul, nor of the ferociously complex political machinations that had accompanied Augustus' rise to power, nor of the tortured relationship between Tiberius and his fellow aristocrats. No mention was made, in Suetonius' flamboyant description of how Nero welcomed the king of Armenia to Rome, of the five years of brutal fighting that had preceded it, and which in Tacitus' account of Nero's reign had furnished the historian with one of the principal strands of his narrative. Everything in *The Lives of the Caesars* is mediated through the lives of the

Caesars themselves. The effect of this tunnel vision, claustrophobic as it can often be, is further enhanced by a striking stylistic marker: Suetonius' reluctance, when recounting the life of a Caesar, to deploy the given Caesar's name. He rarely feels the need, when using the third person, to specify the subject. Except at the very beginning of a life, or when there may be a particular need for clarity, or when he is referring to a monument, or quoting a primary source, its identity is assumed. The less the proper name of a protagonist is mentioned, the more haunting its absence comes to seem. Like a black hole, it generates its own gravitational pull. Everything ends up absorbed into the biography of the Caesar.

This does not mean, however, that Suetonius had no concern for historical setting. Antiquarian that he was, he took a fascination in almost every aspect of the past. Indeed, it was a fundamental part of his purpose to place each Caesar in the context of the generations that had gone before. The cumulative effect was to situate the autocracy that Julius Caesar and Augustus between them had instituted against a backdrop of the immense reaches of Roman history. This would have been all the more evident had Suetonius' life of Caesar survived in its entirety. Unfortunately, however – although we know that a complete copy of *The Lives of the Caesars* still existed in the sixth century, when its dedication to Septicius Clarus was noted by a scholar in Constantinople – its opening paragraphs had been lost for good by the time that Einhard came to use it. The way in which Suetonius opens his lives of the other eleven Caesars leaves little doubt as to how he would have begun his life of Julius Caesar: by detailing his subject's ancestry. This, which purportedly reached all the way back to 'the

immortal gods’,⁸ would have enabled Suetonius to root his collection of lives in the rich soil of the ancient Roman past: the city’s founding, its rule by a succession of kings, the abolition of its monarchy. Over the course of the centuries that followed the expulsion of Rome’s last king, the commitment of the Roman people to administering their own public business – their *res publica* – had never wavered. When Caesar was born in 100 BC, it was into a city that had been a republic for four centuries. Over the course of that time, much had changed. Rome was no longer, as she had once been, a backwater. She ruled instead as the mistress of a vast empire. Rivals who thought to oppose her had been humbled and on occasion wiped off the face of the earth. No less significantly for the content of Suetonius’ biographies, however, the fabric of Roman society had taken on such deep hues, such distinct and striking patterns, that to grow up in the city was inevitably to be marked by them. Julius Caesar, for all his restlessness and daring, was no exception. Contemptuous though he might be of the republic, dismissing it towards the end of his life as ‘nothing, just a name without substance or form’,⁹ there was much that he did not think to trample down. Suetonius’ life of antiquity’s most brilliant and charismatic disrupter is a portrait as well of a profoundly conservative society: for even Caesar, in his commitment to the gradations of rank that redounded to his glory, moved to rhythms that had distant origins.

The Julians, like the Claudian family to which the emperors Tiberius and Claudius belonged, and the Ahenobarbi, from whom Nero traced his descent, were patricians: clans who in the beginning had constituted the aristocracy of Rome. Over time the legal privileges that had served to

distinguish them from the mass of the people, the ‘plebeians’, had come to be erased, and plebeian dynasties, no less contemptuous of the *plebs sordida*, the ‘great unwashed’, than their patrician counterparts, had joined the ranks of the nobility. Yet upper-class scorn for the masses was blended with a certain grudging respect. All in Rome were citizens, and all had votes in the elections that every year provided the republic with its magistrates. Even the grandest candidates for office needed to woo the voters, nor felt any embarrassment in doing so. Success in Roman public life depended on the ability to court nobility and masses alike.

Suetonius’ biography of Caesar provides an account of what this might mean in practice. Traditionally, only certain paths led to the summit. A young man with dreams of high office would do well to boast an expertise in literature and rhetoric, proficiency in the law courts, a military record. Combine these qualifications with wealth and a distinguished pedigree, and the uplands of status would then beckon. True, not everyone necessarily wished to head for them. Men with sufficient wealth and status could rest content instead with membership of an order that derived from the early days of Roman history, when those who could afford to do so would ride out to battle on horseback: that of an *eques*, a knight. Equestrians – as Suetonius, who himself ranked as one, knew full well – were hardly lacking for opportunity; but they did not, for all that, constitute the Roman elite. That honour belonged instead to the senate, an assembly of Rome’s great and good, which, since the founding of the republic, had served as the guiding intelligence of the state. Membership of this august body, rather than deriving automatically from birth, was determined instead by

achievement and reputation. To secure senatorial status, however, was merely to take the first step on an ever-tapering ladder. Many rungs waited above. Suetonius, in his account of Caesar's early career, shows just how finely graded the ascent up the ladder tended to be. Our protagonist is shown winning election to a succession of magistracies: the quaestorship, a junior office which brought with it financial responsibilities; the aedileship, which enabled him to make improvements to the fabric of Rome; the praetorship, which secured him supervision of the courts. True, not every magistracy was his to win. The tribuneship of the plebs, an office which existed to ensure that the rights of the people were upheld, was off-limits to him by virtue of his rank as a patrician. This, however, hardly held Caesar back. In 60 BC, at the age of forty, he won election to a magistracy that ever since the legendary beginnings of the city had constituted the summit of most senators' ambitions. To serve as one of the two consuls elected every year to stand at the head of the republic was to wield powers that had once been those of the king. On 1 January 59 BC, when Julius Caesar embarked on his consulship, it might have seemed, then, that he had attained the great object of his dreams.

Except that in those dreams he had been promised much more. A decade previously, as he slept, he had seen himself raping his mother. Naturally, he had been alarmed and unsettled by this – but then, ‘when the dream was interpreted, his spirits soared, for it was explained to him that his mother, whom he had seen powerless to push him aside as he raped her, was none other than the earth (held to be the parent of all) and that his dream was therefore a prophecy that he would rule the world.’¹⁰ This, to a young man

of Caesar's ambition, need not have seemed a wholly fantastical prospect. Rome's very wealth and power had opened up opportunities beyond the wildest imaginings of earlier generations. It was possible for a citizen, if he could win himself sufficient riches, if he could secure sufficient legions at his back, to put the entire republic in his shade. During Caesar's childhood, rivalry between Rome's two greatest warlords, Marius and Sulla, had plunged the city into civil war. It was Sulla's victory in this war, and Caesar's partisanship of the defeated faction, that provide the context for the passage that – at least since the time of Einhard – has constituted the opening of *The Lives of the Caesars*. Unintended by Suetonius though it may have been, it provides an ominous overture to the life that follows.

For where Sulla had led, Caesar was destined to follow. Ten years after his consulship, he stood on the banks of the Rubicon, a small river that served to mark the frontier of Italy, with a battle-hardened army at his back, and hesitated whether to cross it. Suetonius, in a particularly taut and gripping passage of narrative, describes the upshot:

Then, as he was hesitating, a wondrous thing happened: nearby him, a figure of remarkable size and beauty abruptly appeared, sitting and playing on a pipe; and when some of his soldiers – trumpeters among them – abandoned their posts to join the large number of shepherds who had run to listen to the music, the apparition snatched a trumpet from one of the trumpeters, leaped into the river, sounded the advance with a mighty blast, and crossed over to the far bank. Then Caesar spoke. ‘Let us go where we are summoned both by

divinely authored signs and by the wrongs our foes have done us.

The die is cast.'

The upshot was civil war, the establishment amid the ruins of Rome's traditional constitution of Caesar's dictatorship, and his assassination on the Ides of March. Suetonius, even while paying due credit to his many astonishing achievements, and acknowledging the remarkable qualities of restraint and clemency that he had shown his defeated adversaries, chooses nevertheless to judge him by the standards of the republic he had done so much to destroy: 'the reckoning must still be that he abused his position of power, and deserved to be slain.'¹¹ The man who had brought the republic crashing down into ruin proved incapable of fashioning an order adequate to replace it. This is why the life of the Deified Julius – although a necessary prologue to the series of biographies that follow – is at the same time anomalous. Caesar, for all that his name was destined to become a synonym for autocrat, was not – in the sense that the subjects of Suetonius' remaining biographies were – a 'Caesar'. The destroyer of the republic died as he had lived: its child.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

The Deified Augustus – the subject of Suetonius' longest, most detailed and most sophisticated biography – was born Gaius Octavius. His father was a man of sufficient standing in Rome to have won a praetorship; his mother was the niece of Julius Caesar. His birthplace, however, was not the capital but Velitrae, a dusty town some twenty miles south along the Appian Way. Suetonius, describing his background, transplants the reader from the

patrician background of Caesar to the more provincial world of the Italian aristocracy. Not that the future Augustus stayed in Velitrae for long.

Adopted by his great-uncle at the age of eighteen, he took on the name of Caesar. From that moment on he was remorseless in his pursuit of power. In the winter of 44 BC, eight months after the Ides of March, he staged an abortive military coup. Ten months after that he swept into Rome at the head of a private army and made himself consul. He had Caesar officially proclaimed a god. In alliance with Mark Antony, Caesar's most trusted lieutenant, he harried the assassins of his adoptive father to their deaths, took control of the western half of the empire, and laid the foundations for what would prove an enduring military and civil supremacy. Then, after a decade of uneasy coexistence with Antony, he declared war on his erstwhile partner, defeated him in battle and harried him to his death as well. In 27 BC, the man who by now – in the words of a contemporary historian – 'ruled over the greatest number of people within recorded history'¹² had the senate vote him a new name. To his fellow citizens, a people bloodied and exhausted by repeated civil wars, his achievement in returning Rome to peace was so miraculous as to appear something more than human. *Augustus*, they called such a quality; and 'Augustus' the erstwhile Gaius Octavius duly took as his name.

Unlike his adoptive father, he did not end up assassinated by resentful senators but died peacefully in his bed. The vengeful son of a murdered god came to be hailed by the Roman people as the 'Father of His Country'. When he stamped official documents, so Suetonius tells us, he used a seal 'decorated with a sphinx'.¹³ This was only fitting: for his ability to play a

multitude of different roles was – ambition aside – the single most consistent aspect of his personality. In a city that had always revelled in the expressions of greatness, Augustus made sure to veil the true scope of his power. He did not rule as a king. The name ‘Master’ he always loathed, Suetonius tells us, ‘as an accursed and dishonourable title’.¹⁴ The senate continued to issue edicts; ambitious young men continued to run for quaestorships, aedileships and praetorships; the years continued to be dated by the names of the consuls. Suetonius, describing the career path of Augustus’ stepson Tiberius, details the same rungs on the ladder that the young Julius Caesar had trodden: military service, public speaking, a succession of magistracies. It might have seemed that the republic was indeed – as Augustus’ propaganda liked to put it – ‘restored’.

Yet Suetonius makes clear the reality. Twice, he tells us, Augustus had contemplated giving up power. ‘But then, reflecting that it would not be without risk for him to become a private citizen, and that it would be rash to entrust Rome to the whims of public opinion, he had second thoughts, and maintained his hold on power – and whether the consequences of this decision or his motives for making it were better, it is hard to judge.’¹⁵ Suetonius is able to register this studiedly ambivalent verdict because, although Augustus did not restore the traditional republican form of government, neither – as his adoptive father had done – did he set himself to trample it down. Instead, everything that was familiar to the Roman people from their past, everything that constituted normality for them, he is shown absorbing into himself. In the life of the Deified Augustus, more than in any other of the lives of the Caesars, Suetonius’ methods as a

biographer serve to place its protagonist at the very heart of things. There is no aspect of public life – be it the staging of public spectacles or the administration of the law courts, the maintenance of the city or the provision of the corn dole – that does not have him at its centre: a spider at the heart of a web. Nor is there any class of Roman society to whom he does not serve as the patron, the instructor, the friend. He winnows the senate even as he greets individual senators by name and attends their family celebrations. He sponsors the knights to parade through the streets of Rome, in emulation of their ancestors. He shares in the pleasures of the masses, furnishes them with entertainments and – so that he can broadcast to them his role as the defender of their rights – accepts the powers of a tribune, the magistrate charged with the protection of the plebs, in perpetuity. No formal position, no official rank, could possibly have done justice to all the ambiguities and subtleties that characterized the immense range of his powers. Augustus was content instead merely to define himself as *princeps*: ‘first among citizens’. The title was no novelty, no outrage against tradition. Two of Caesar’s most formidable opponents had been hailed by their admirers as *principes*, ‘the first of men’: Pompey, the general who had commanded the senatorial armies after the crossing of the Rubicon, and Cato, a defender of tradition so obdurate that even his enemies had stood in awe of his principles. Augustus, the heir of Caesar, had come to serve as the heir of Caesar’s enemies as well.

Yet his heirs in turn inevitably had a more conflicted relationship with the title of *princeps*, as it came ever more to serve its holder as an official title. Tiberius, a man of impeccable breeding and outstanding military

achievement, could plausibly lay claim to it in the manner that a great man back in the dying days of the republic might have done; but not Caligula, nor Claudius, nor Nero. They, when they wore the title of *princeps*, did so nakedly as dynasts. Yet, still, none of them thought to make the line of inheritance something official, to transform himself from *princeps* into king. This, even for Caligula, even for Nero, was a step too far. The question, then, of how one Caesar was to succeed another defied simple resolution. No wonder that Suetonius should have found the manner in which a *princeps* acceded to power, and still more the way he departed it, themes of particular fascination. Many of the most gripping and detailed passages in *The Lives of the Caesars* serve to demonstrate this. Caligula's murder; Claudius' journey from behind a curtain to the praetorian camp; Nero's flight and suicide: here are narratives as compelling as any that Livy or Tacitus has to offer. When Suetonius claims that these momentous events had all been foretold by supernatural agency, and that the extinction of the bloodline of the Caesars which occurred with the death of Nero 'had been signalled in all kinds of ways'¹⁶ it is no effort to believe him. How could the heavens not have been shaken by the downfall of Augustus' dynasty?

Nero's death, however, did not bring the line of *principes* to an end – for a reason implicit in a second title that had come to be adopted by the Caesars. Back in 38 BC, licking his wounds after a naval defeat at the hands of Pompey's son, the future Augustus had sought to salve his injured pride by means of one of his favourite expedients: the adoption of a new name. The appeal of *imperator* – his choice – was self-evident: for the word, meaning 'general', was used by soldiers to hail a commander who had just

been victorious in battle. The name, like the title *princeps*, was one that had been inherited by Augustus' heirs. Its meaning, over time, had duly evolved. Increasingly, *imperator* had come to signify what is meant by the English word that derives from it: 'emperor'. Nevertheless, the hint of naked steel that it conveyed, the reminder to civilians of what an emperor ultimately relied upon for his power, did not entirely fade. The events that followed Nero's suicide, when four warlords – Galba, Otho, Vitellius and Vespasian – succeeded one another as *princeps* in the space of a single year, certainly served to bring it home. The system of autocracy founded by Augustus stood revealed as one that did not actually depend upon his dynasty to function. Anyone might adopt the name of Caesar. Anyone might rule as emperor.

And anyone might found a dynasty of emperors. Titus Flavius Vespasianus – Vespasian – was, as Augustus had been, a man with roots in provincial Italy, whose achievement in scaling the very summit of power and salving the wounds of civil war culminated after his death in his elevation to the ranks of the gods. The Flavians, however, were a family who lacked – as Suetonius puts it – 'the slightest distinction'.¹⁷ A series of lives that had opened with goddesses and Trojan heroes now, in the life of Vespasian, detailed the descent of a Caesar from a line of centurions and tax-collectors. Vespasian himself, who grew up in a small hamlet outside Rome, had been sufficiently far removed from the murders and machinations that were such a feature of Augustus' dynasty that Suetonius, in his account of the future emperor's upbringing, found himself able to describe something vanishingly rare in classical literature: a happy

childhood. Yet the touches of verisimilitude in his lives of the Flavians are combined with a narrative approach that transforms them almost into figures of folklore. Both Vespasian and his eldest son, Titus, once they have become emperors, seem abstracted not merely from their social background but from their very personalities. Vespasian, the shrewd, self-aware and battle-hardened general who emerges against the odds as ruler of the Roman world, is portrayed by Suetonius during his rise to power as a bizarrely passive figure, borne on the currents of other people's partisanship and the dictates of Fate; Titus, whose flaws and foibles as a princeling are chronicled in unsparing detail, is transformed, on becoming emperor, into an implausible model of a good ruler. He was, Suetonius tells us, 'adored and doted upon by the whole of humanity'¹⁸ – but no attempt is made to explain how this Prince Hal of the Roman world came to end up so intensely admired. Coming as his life does after the lives of Tiberius, Caligula and Nero, emperors whose seeming promise had dissolved into a shambles, the puzzle is rendered all the more stark. Titus, unlike Vespasian, does not quip when he falls mortally ill, 'I think I am becoming a god':¹⁹ perhaps because – as portrayed by Suetonius, at any rate – he has already entered the dimension of myth before he dies.

The Flavians, precisely because they come from nowhere, precisely because they do not have the blood of Augustus in their veins, constitute much readier role models to the *principes* who follow them than does a Julian or Claudian emperor. A much readier warning too. Such is what Suetonius provides with his life of Domitian, Vespasian's younger son and the successor to Titus. As in his lives of the first two Flavians, so in his life

of the third, he fuses the documentary and the folkloric to striking effect. Few passages in *The Lives of the Caesars* convey quite such a sense of novelistic immediacy – or indeed are quite as funny – as those which relate Domitian’s mingled envy and resentment of his elder brother; few are as psychologically subtle as those which trace how and why he came to lapse into cruelty and greed. Simultaneously, whether it is sitting alone stabbing flies with a pen, or chatting to a pin-headed boy dressed all in red, or roaming colonnades lined with reflective stone, his behaviour often seems obedient to the logic of a feverish nightmare or opium dream. When he dies, senators turn on his legacy as their forebears had turned on Julius Caesar: ‘elbowing their way into a crowded Senate House, they did not stint in unleashing on the dead man the most abusive and cutting attacks, to the degree that they actually ordered ladders brought so that his votive shields and statues might be pulled down and dashed to the ground as they looked on, before finally, by issuing a decree that his names should everywhere be erased, they sought to obliterate his very memory.’²⁰ Suetonius’ own description of their iconoclasm, however, serves as a mockery of these efforts. Domitian’s memory is far from obliterated. Instead, the life of this grandson of a tax-collector who even before he became *princeps* had been hailed as ‘Caesar’, and who – in direct contrast to Augustus – had revelled in the name of master, stands as the ominous bookend to a story that had begun before there were emperors. *The Lives of the Caesars* gives us twelve biographies in all; but Suetonius ends his life of Domitian with the assurance that there will be many more to come.

PRINCEPS AND MONSTER

‘But enough of the *princeps* – what now remains to be described is the monster.’²¹ So Suetonius, midway through the fourth of his *Lives of the Caesars*, introduces one of the most memorable pivots in the entire history of biography. Already, in his life of Augustus, he has explained his methodology: not to provide a chronological account of his subjects’ lives, but rather to sort the raw material he has assembled from his various sources into a range of categories, slicing and dicing them ‘*per species*’ – ‘by theme’. Nowhere is the resulting sense of *chiaroscuro* more dramatic than in his life of Gaius Caesar: the emperor commemorated by posterity as Caligula. The origins of that particular nickname, together with a biography of Gaius’ father, an account of Gaius’ own birth and upbringing, and the various achievements to his credit as *princeps*, are all dealt with by Suetonius with his customary brisk efficiency. Then, a mere third of the way through the life, he turns to the material that remains: the material that illustrates the theme of Gaius the monster.

Yet key to understanding what appalled Suetonius about Gaius is to recognize that it was not necessarily what appals us about the emperor. Notorious for his cruelties, his incest, his brutality towards the senate, he was notorious as well for his extravaganzas – and nothing he did was quite as extravagant as his staging near Naples of an unprecedented parody of a triumph. This, a great festival of celebration which saw a general who had been victorious in war parade through Rome with his troops, his prisoners and his booty, was a time-hallowed ritual that features repeatedly in the pages of Suetonius; but Gaius, scorning convention, laid on his own

spectacular, not in the streets of the capital but on a great bridge of boats spanning the Bay of Baiae.

Over and back again across the bridge he travelled, on two consecutive days: on the first, resplendent in a crown of oak leaves and a golden cloak, and armed with a short Spanish shield and a sword, he rode a fully caparisoned warhorse; on the second day, dressed as a charioteer, he drove a chariot pulled by two of his most recognizable horses, taking with him one of the Parthian hostages (a boy named Darius), and accompanied by an escort that consisted of the entire praetorian guard and a squadron of his friends in British war chariots.²²

To stage a triumph at sea rather than in Rome seems, to our way of thinking, so self-evidently a waste of money, so megalomaniacal a gesture, as to epitomize everything that was most grotesque and self-aggrandizing about the regime of the Caesars; but this was not quite how Suetonius saw it. The impact of Gaius' stunt on those who witnessed it can be gauged by the fact that Suetonius' grandfather, decades after it had happened, was still talking about it in evidently admiring tones; and by the fact that Suetonius himself, far from adducing it as an example of everything that had made Gaius a monster, includes it instead in the list of his accomplishments as a *princeps*.

To rule as a Caesar is to stand on the most public of stages. Some emperors, of whom Nero is the most notorious example, push their obsession with the stage to grotesque extremes; others, like Tiberius, who

ends up indulging his perversions amid the privacy of an island retreat, where no decent citizens can observe his loathsome behaviour, abhor the public gaze. Suetonius, with his specialist interest in the staging of spectacles and entertainments, is never less than expert in demonstrating just what a tightrope an emperor was constantly obliged to tread. Different segments of an audience might have different expectations; novelty might offend as well as thrill; excessive enthusiasm for bloodshed might provoke disapproval no less than displays of boredom. The margins between a *princeps* and a monster were always finer than they might have seemed.

Perhaps no dimension of a Caesar's behaviour exemplified this better than his sexual conduct. Suetonius is often condemned for his interest in this aspect of his subjects' lives; but to dismiss him as muckraker, prurient and grubby-fingered, is to overlook the degree to which, in the opinion of the Romans, privacy was something inherently unnatural. Only those with aberrant and sinister tastes were thought to have any reason to crave it. This was why, when the aged Tiberius withdrew to Capri, everyone was so ready to believe the most repellent stories of his behaviour there. Conversely, the enthusiasm of Gaius for parading his own deviancies – whether pimping out his sisters or appraising the wives of senators as though they were slaves – constituted a telling measure of his monstrousness. Nevertheless, Suetonius' assumptions about what constitute sexual crimes do not necessarily map on to our own. Frameworks for understanding sexuality that we tend to take for granted would have made little sense to him. He had no grasp of the categories we term 'heterosexuality' and 'homosexuality'. Despite noting that Claudius only ever slept with women, and that Galba preferred sex with

males, he read no particular significance into these tastes. Rather, he regarded them as interesting foibles: on a level, perhaps, with preferring brunettes or blondes. The sexual order that Suetonius portrays in *The Lives of the Caesars* was founded instead on an assumption that time has served to render very strange and unsettling to us: that a man in a position of power was entitled to exploit his inferiors as he pleased.

From this in turn two particular taboos followed – both of which Suetonius shows us Gaius flouting with imperious and flamboyant relish. By treating the wives of his dinner guests with casual disrespect, appraising them carefully, ‘much as though they were up for sale’,²³ he strikes at the bodily integrity not just of the women themselves but of their husbands too, debasing them just as slaves might be debased. Simultaneously, however, so Suetonius informs us, Gaius takes pleasure in having the inviolability of his own body desecrated: behaviour so shocking that Julius Caesar, accused as a young man of having surrendered to the advances of a foreign king, had found himself mocked for it right up to the end of his life. Gaius, far from veiling his depravities, revels in them. His taste for women’s clothing – wigs, robes made out of silk, slippers – serves to humiliate not the *princeps* himself but those who are obliged to obey him. The uses to which such transgressiveness might be put was evidently one that interested Suetonius: the only certain fragment of his work *Famous Courtesans* describes how Hercules, the strongest and most masculine of Greek heroes, was compelled by his domineering lover, Queen Omphale, to wear a diaphanous, skin-coloured dress. The hints of effeminacy that Suetonius identifies even in men of such peerless achievement as Julius Caesar and Augustus frame the

Roman people, the conquerors and masters of the world, as similarly emasculated. Gossip, when the subject is an emperor, is never merely gossip. There is no topic in *The Lives of the Caesars* so intimate, so personal, that it does not hold up a mirror to Rome itself.

FAKE NEWS?

When Suetonius mentions the scandalous detail that Augustus ‘was in the habit of singeing his legs with hot nutshells, to make the hairs grow softer’,²⁴ he does not report it as fact. The allegation, he states, was levelled by Lucius, the brother of Mark Antony and a man who – although the point is not made explicitly – had every reason to detest the future *princeps*. Elsewhere, citing Mark Antony directly, Suetonius provides direct quotations. Tracing the lineage of Augustus, he makes sure to give conflicting accounts: one, deriving from Augustus himself, which emphasizes its pedigree, and another, deriving from Antony, which casts it as something sordid and base. When Suetonius finds reason to privilege one version over the other he says so, and gives his reason; when he does not, he leaves it to his reader to adjudicate. The methodology is careful, balanced, nuanced. There is no scrabbling after sensationalism for sensationalism’s sake.

Certainly, Suetonius’ appreciation that sources can be multiple and various is one of the qualities that most distinguishes him as a biographer. When there is documentation that he can quote directly, he quotes it. Rather than write the letters that he feels his subjects should have written, as classical historians invariably did, he seeks to track down the originals. This

is most evident in the use he makes of Augustus' correspondence, which provides direct and invaluable insight into the workings of the emperor's mind. Likewise, when drawing on the transcripts of speeches, he does not rewrite them, as was the convention among historians, but makes a point of copying out the exact words: 'I quote them verbatim.'²⁵ Whether it was Suetonius' official position as an archivist that had enabled him to source such precious documentary evidence, and whether it was Hadrian's dismissal of him that explains why, relative to the lives of Julius Caesar and Augustus, the subsequent lives should feature far fewer primary sources, are much debated; but both seem possible, at the very least. That Suetonius was sensitive to the loss of archival material is evident enough from the suppressed tone of anguish with which he describes the destruction of 3,000 bronze tablets in AD 69, when fighting between supporters of Vitellius and Vespasian on the Capitol resulted in a devastating fire: 'these tablets – which covered alliances, treaties, and special privileges granted to individuals – were the oldest and most precious records of Rome's empire in existence, featuring as they did decrees of the senate and resolutions of the people that dated back almost to the foundation of the city'.²⁶ The sense of bereavement is palpable.

An absence of archival material, however, did not necessarily mean an absence of sources. Suetonius, the son of a man who had fought in Otho's army, seems to have drawn on his father's reminiscences to supplement the standard accounts of the emperor's character and career. When Otho, defeated in battle against Vitellius, resolves to kill himself rather than continue the struggle, so as to spare the Roman people the horrors of civil

war, Suetonius freely confesses himself bewildered. ‘Nothing in Otho’s appearance or lifestyle had ever suggested that he was a man of such courage.’²⁷ The contradiction between playboy and hero, between the degenerate who thinks nothing of sporting a toupee and the paragon who in death displays an exemplary selflessness, is presented by Suetonius as a psychological puzzle: one that ultimately defies explanation. What he does not ask himself is whether the contradiction, rather than lying within the unfathomable depths of Otho’s personality, might instead be explained as a tension between rival sources of evidence: between hostile propaganda and the testimony of a soldier who had served in the emperor’s ranks and come to admire him.

Not that Suetonius is oblivious to the fact that secondary sources, just like primary sources, can contradict each other. Early in his life of Gaius, posing the question of where his subject had been born, he cites the different answers provided by two distinguished authors: one a consul executed by the emperor for his role in an abortive coup, and the other Pliny’s uncle, author of antiquity’s largest encyclopaedia. Forensically, Suetonius is able to demonstrate the inadequacies of both men’s arguments; and then, with a flourish, to present his own solution to the puzzle: something he feels able to do because he has in his possession a document – one of Augustus’ letters – which constitutes a definitive source of information. It is when he lacks such certainty, when he has to rely on hearsay, or propaganda, or hostile witness, that he abandons the attempt to dig deep beneath their claims and arrive at a solid bedrock of evidence. Take, for instance, his life of Vitellius, the third of the four emperors to have ruled in 69, who, as the man deposed

by Vespasian, was an object of particular Flavian invective. Unsurprisingly, the portrait we are given of him is a highly negative one: he is represented as a pervert, a glutton, a coward. Even so, the occasional shard of light cannot help but break through the black clouds of obloquy. Describing Vitellius' career as proconsul of Africa and the supervisor of public works in Rome, Suetonius acknowledges that, 'due to the inconsistent way in which he approached these various responsibilities, his reputation was a mixed one':²⁸ in Africa he was praised as a man of integrity, whereas in Rome he was accused of pilfering from temples. The possibility that Africa, distant from the swirling of rumour and vituperation that was such a feature of life in the capital, might have preserved a more authentic memory of the man does not seem to have crossed Suetonius' mind. Yet there are moments in the life, for all that, where he does succeed in articulating a proper sense of the complexities and contradictions that were evidently features of Vitellius' character, and which, in one passage in particular – an account of the emperor's devotion to his freedman, Asiaticus – are portrayed with an almost novelistic degree of richness. Here, in this brief but astonishing tale of obsession and tempestuous passion, it is not just Vitellius who seems brought to life but the social context of an entire alien world.

The effect, then, in many of *The Lives of the Caesars*, is of a collage: the juxtaposition of different sources and perspectives which, while rarely being integrated by Suetonius into a coherent whole, nevertheless provides invaluable witness to the sheer range of attitudes that a Caesar might be capable of inspiring. Suetonius himself, in his attempt to rationalize the resulting contradictions, attempts various explanations: the obligation he

feels ‘to acknowledge all shades of opinion’,²⁹ or else conflicts within the character of his subject, or the evolution of a Caesar’s personality. Only in one life – that of Tiberius – do the tensions prove so irresolvable as to destabilize his entire portrait of the emperor. Although he does not name his sources, it is evident enough from the material he has stitched together that he is drawing on two rival traditions: one laudatory and one venomously hostile. The effect of this – more than anywhere else in *The Lives of the Caesars* – is to leave him overwhelmed by the sheer range of his material. Blatant contradictions are left unironed; anecdotes are garbled or misunderstood; Tiberius himself is portrayed as such a compound of antitheses as to baffle all attempts to render them compatible. Suetonius’ own efforts – denouncing him variously as a hypocrite or as a man who only in old age finally surrendered ‘to all the many vices which for so long he had struggled to suppress’³⁰ – are signally inadequate. Between the upstanding man of honour who twice saves Rome from ruin and the grim old pervert devoting himself in his seclusion to unspeakable lusts and crimes reconciliation proves impossible.

Yet if the life of Tiberius fails as a biography, as an exercise in myth-making it ranks as one of the supreme character assassinations in history. The details that Suetonius provides of his behaviour on Capri – ordering a lobster to be rubbed into the face of a fisherman, employing young boys to slip between his thighs as he swims in his pool – have rendered him for two millennia now the very archetype of an aged tyrant. This, although not success as a biographer today might define it, ranks nevertheless as an achievement of a definite kind. To us, with our anxieties about fake news,

our exposure to a whole babel of voices on social media feeds, our heightened understanding that information can come in many different forms and from many different sources, Suetonius' methodology is liable to seem familiar in a way that it might not have done even a few decades ago. The very shifts in his style – the way that sentences will sometimes pile subclause upon subclause, in the manner traditionally held by writers of Latin prose appropriate to high themes, and sometimes detail facts in an abbreviated, staccato fashion, rather as though they were listicles – only contribute to such a sense. If there is much in *The Lives of the Caesars* that is bound to seem disconcertingly, even frighteningly alien, then so also is there much that can strike us, even after the passage of two millennia, as not entirely strange.

All of which is to say that it remains what it has been ever since it was written: a classic, as capable of reinterpretation today as it was back in the age of Einhard. Invaluable as a source for Europe's foundational experience of autocracy, it is also one of the most gripping and readable collections of biographies ever written. Within its pages are scenes of celebrated drama: Julius Caesar standing on the banks of the Rubicon and walking into the Senate House on the Ides of March; Gaius ordering his soldiers to gather seashells in their helmets and planning to make his horse a consul; Nero ordering the murder of his mother and singing as Rome burns. There are descriptions of emperors which, once read, will never be forgotten: Augustus' yellow teeth; Claudius' shows of anger, 'which would see him drool and snort mucus';³¹ Domitian agonizing over his baldness. The descriptions of the troubled relations between Tiberius and his mother and

of how Gaius, '[t]hough he had a naturally off-putting and hideous face', 'worked diligently in front of a mirror to make it even more so, contorting it into all kinds of fearsome expressions',³² constitute passages of dark comedy worthy of Dickens. Darkness and light; the unsettling and the familiar; sweeping action and punctilious detail: all are here. *The Lives of the Caesars* are more than merely lives. They are also a part of the common stock of our imaginings: the stuff of our shared fantasies, terrors and dreams.

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Glossary

Aedileship:

A magistracy midway in rank between the praetorship and the quaestorship, and with a particular responsibility for the maintenance of public buildings and the administration of festivals.

Atellan farce:

A masked style of drama that originated in Campania and first became popular in Rome in the third century BC.

Augurs:

Diviners who interpreted the will of the gods by studying the flight and behaviour of birds.

Board of Fifteen:

Members of a college charged with responsibility for guarding and consulting the Sibylline Books.

Board of Ten:

The presidents of the centumviral court.

Centumviral court:

The court ‘of 100 men’, which heard civil cases involving inheritance, property and debt. By the time of the late republic the court actually

numbered 105 men, and by Suetonius' time totalled 180. While it was not unheard of for all the members of the court to hear a case, in general it constituted a panel from which individual courts were selected.

Cognomen:

The third component in the name of a Roman citizen. Midway between a nickname and a hereditary epithet.

Colonies:

Settlements of Roman citizens – usually retired – planted across Italy and the Mediterranean. Latin colonies were settlements of citizens with Latin rights.

Compitalia:

Games held annually in honour of the Lares of the *compitales*, the crossroads that stood at the heart of each urban district in Rome.

Conscript father:

Honorary title given to a senator.

Consulship:

The most senior magistracy in the Roman republic. Two consuls were elected annually, for a term of office limited to a single year.

Curule chair:

Seat used by magistrates. It had curved legs and no back.

Denarius:

Rome's standard silver coin.

Ducenarii:

Citizens whose wealth was valued at 200,000 sesterces or above.

Equestrian:

An *eques*, a knight, was a man who, in the early years of Rome, had ranked as a member of the city's elite by virtue of owning a horse. Under the Caesars, equestrians had come to be defined as members of the order directly below the senatorial class. Only those who met a set property threshold qualified for the rank.

Fasces:

A bundle of scourging rods that served as the emblems of a magistrate's authority.

Haruspices:

A *haruspex* – literally, ‘an inspector of guts’ – was a diviner who interpreted the will of the gods by looking at the entrails of animals. They would also divine the future from lightning strikes, strange births and other prodigies.

Ides:

The thirteenth (or fifteenth, if March, May, July or October) day of the month.

Imperator:

A word that over the course of the period covered by *The Lives of the Caesars* changed its meaning from ‘victorious general’ to ‘emperor’.

Kalends:

The first day of a month.

Lares:

Protective spirits who guarded, variously, households, urban districts and the city of Rome itself.

Latin citizenship:

A lesser form of Roman citizenship, granted under the republic to Italian allies of Rome.

Lictors:

Attendants who walked in front of a magistrate bearing the fasces.

Consuls had twelve lictors, a dictator twenty-four.

Lupercalia:

A festival staged every 15 February. *Luperci* ('brothers of the wolf') would offer a goat in sacrifice, then run naked or near-naked round the Palatine, lashing at people as they went with thongs made from the dead goat's hide.

Nones:

The ninth day before the Ides.

Optimates:

Literally 'the best ones', they were a conservative faction that privileged the authority of the senate, and stood in opposition to the more populist tradition associated with Caesar.

Ovation:

A lesser form of a triumph. The victorious general would parade through Rome on foot rather than in a chariot.

Pantomime:

A pantomime actor – literally, one who performed all the roles – was a dancer who would act out a story without recourse to the spoken word.

Pedian law:

A law introduced by Quintus Pedius, a Caesarian who became consul in 43 BC, one year after Caesar's assassination, and introduced a law condemning his murderers to death.

Penates:

Household gods particularly associated with the hearth. The temple of Rome's Penates stood on the Palatine.

Pontifex Maximus:

The chief priest of the Roman state and head of the *pontifices*, the priests who determined the dates of festivals, and the days when it was and was not permitted to conduct legal business. The *pontifices* were, with the augurs, the Board of Fifteen and the *epulones* – priests with responsibility for arranging feasts and public banquets – one of the four great colleges of priests in Rome.

Praetorians:

Every general in the late republic had a praetorian cohort – so called after the *praetorium*, the area in a military camp where his tent was pitched.

Augustus' praetorian cohort was expanded over the course of his reign to constitute a permanent bodyguard. During Tiberius' reign the strength of the praetorian guard was increased to twelve cohorts, and a permanent camp built for them on the outskirts of Rome. The praetorian prefect – until Titus took over the role – was always an equestrian.

Praetorship:

The most senior magistracy after the consulship.

Princeps:

'First citizen'. Under Augustus and his successors it became the emperor's prime title.

Propraetor:

A governor or military commander granted the rank of a praetor.

Punic Wars:

A series of three wars fought during the third and second centuries BC against the city of Carthage. Although the Second Punic War almost brought Rome to ruin, her ultimate victory established her as the premier power in the Mediterranean.

Pyrrhic dance:

A war dance performed in armour, originating in Greece.

Quaestorship:

A junior magistracy focused on financial administration, which secured the holder admission to the senate.

Quinquaria:

A festival held on 19–23 March in honour of the goddess Minerva.

Saeculum:

The span of a human lifetime – most commonly equated to 100 years.

Saepta:

The building on the Campus Martius where citizens in the republican period would gather to register the votes. Under the Caesars it became a high-end shopping centre.

Salian priests:

An ancient order of priests, much given to jumping (hence their name, from *salire*, ‘to jump’) and feasting.

Saturnalia:

A festival held in honour of the god Saturn between 17 and 23 December. It was a time to relax and have fun: gifts were given, candles lit and the law against gambling relaxed.

Secular Games:

Held – supposedly – every *saeculum*.

Sestertius:

Initially made of silver, it was reintroduced under Augustus as a large bronze coin. It provided Romans with their standard unit of account. Four sestertii were equivalent to a denarius. Half a sestertius would buy a loaf of bread.

Sibylline Books:

A collection of oracular utterances in Greek that, according to legend, had been bought – after much hesitation – by the last king of Rome. Responsibility for guarding and consulting them rested with the Board of Fifteen.

Suffect:

A consul who served for only a portion of a year. A novelty introduced by Julius Caesar, and which under Augustus and his successors became a convention.

Tarpeian Rock:

A steep promontory on the opposite side of the Capitol to the Forum, named after a treacherous Vestal whose body, after she had been crushed to death beneath shields, had been flung from the cliff.

Toga:

The formal wear of a Roman male: a long, heavy garment of fine white wool. Boys wore a toga with a purple stripe which they would replace when they came of age with a plain white toga: the toga of a man. A senator's toga had a broad purple stripe; an equestrian's a narrow purple stripe.

Tribune (military):

Six tribunes – usually young and of high birth – were posted to a legion. Five of these were customarily of equestrian rank; one, who served as second-in-command to the legion's commander, was of senatorial rank.

Tribunician power:

The battery of rights granted to the tribunes of the plebs, magistrates who served the interests of the people. These included personal inviolability while in office, and the right to veto legislation. Augustus and his heirs officially valued it second, after the rank of Pontifex Maximus, among their distinctions.

Triumvir:

A member of the triumvirate, a board of three men – Antony, Lepidus and the future Augustus – formally constituted in 43 BC to bring order to the republic in the wake of Caesar's murder.

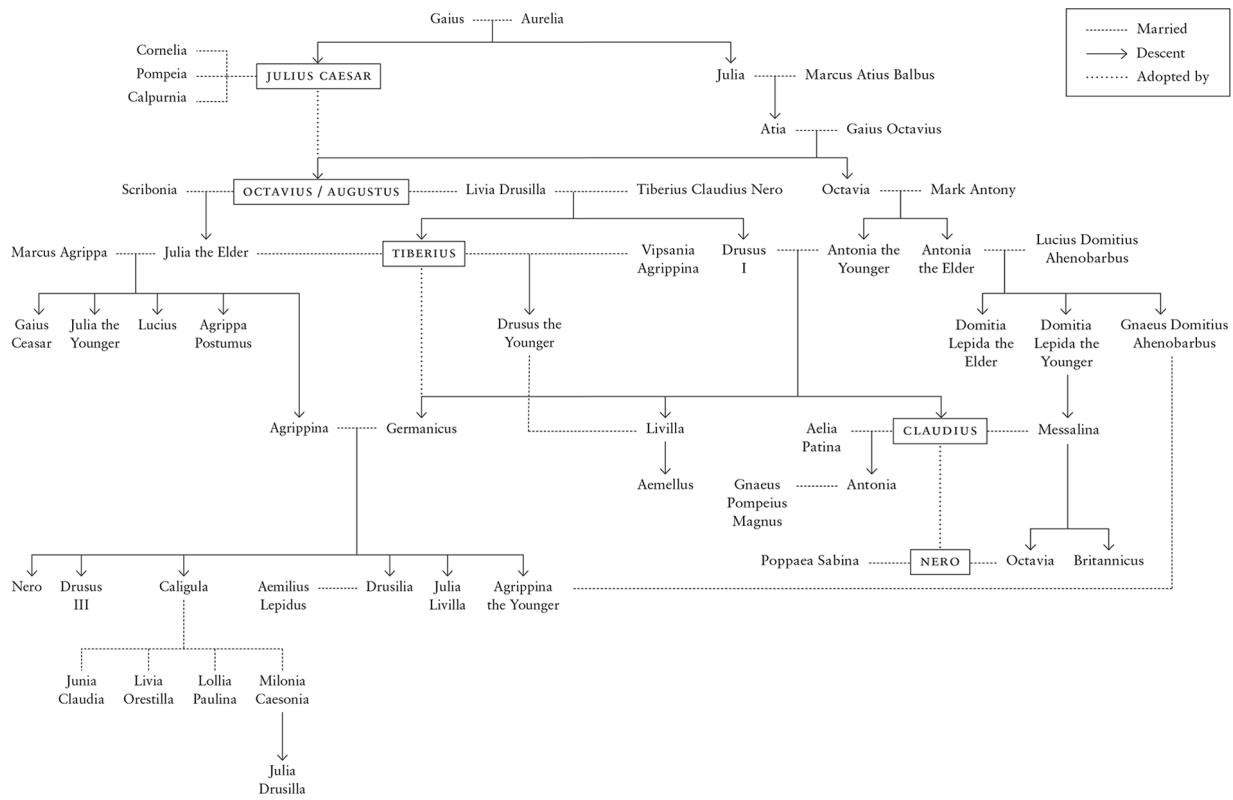
Troy Game:

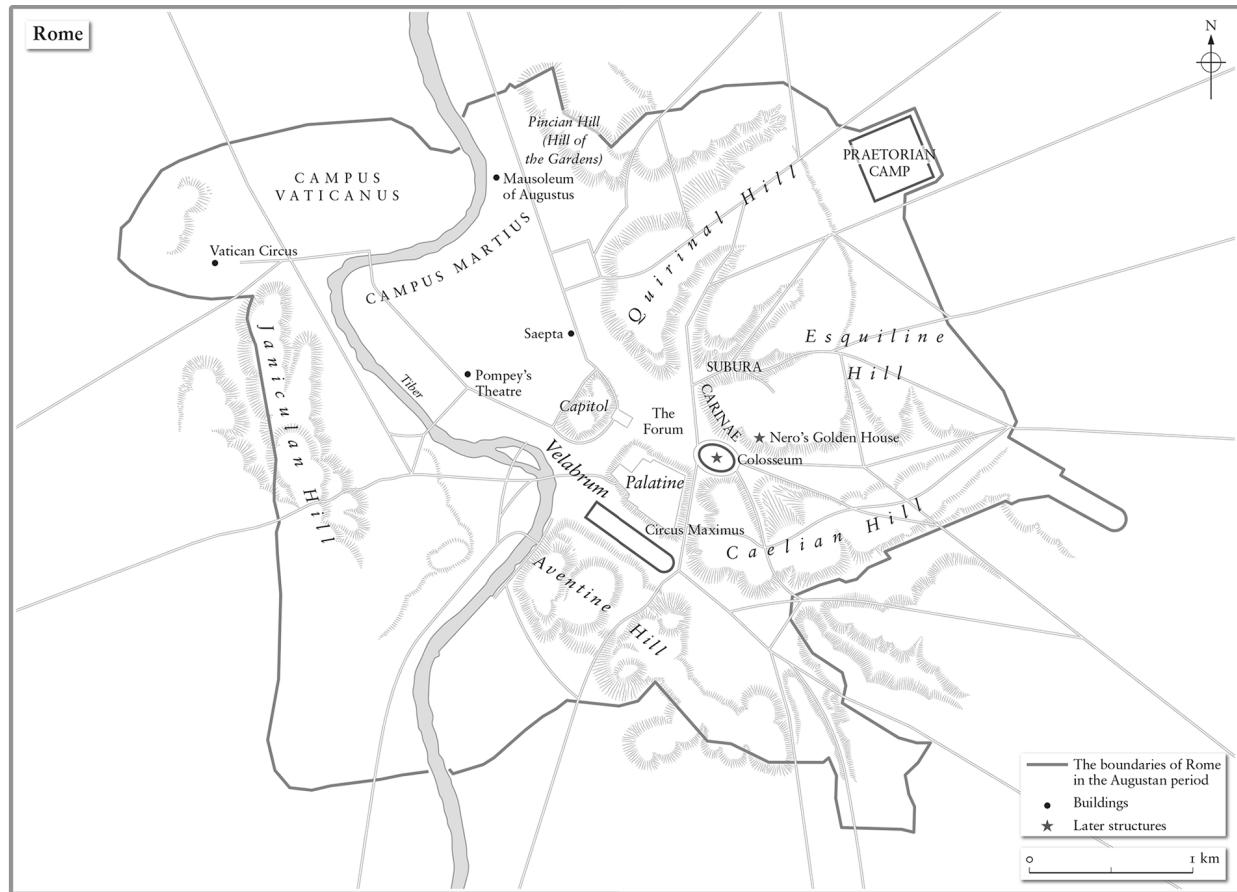
A complex and elaborate display of horsemanship performed by young members of the Roman elite. Although a backstory for it was constructed linking it to one of Caesar's legendary ancestors (who had originally come from Troy), it seems to have originated with Caesar himself.

Vestal Virgins:

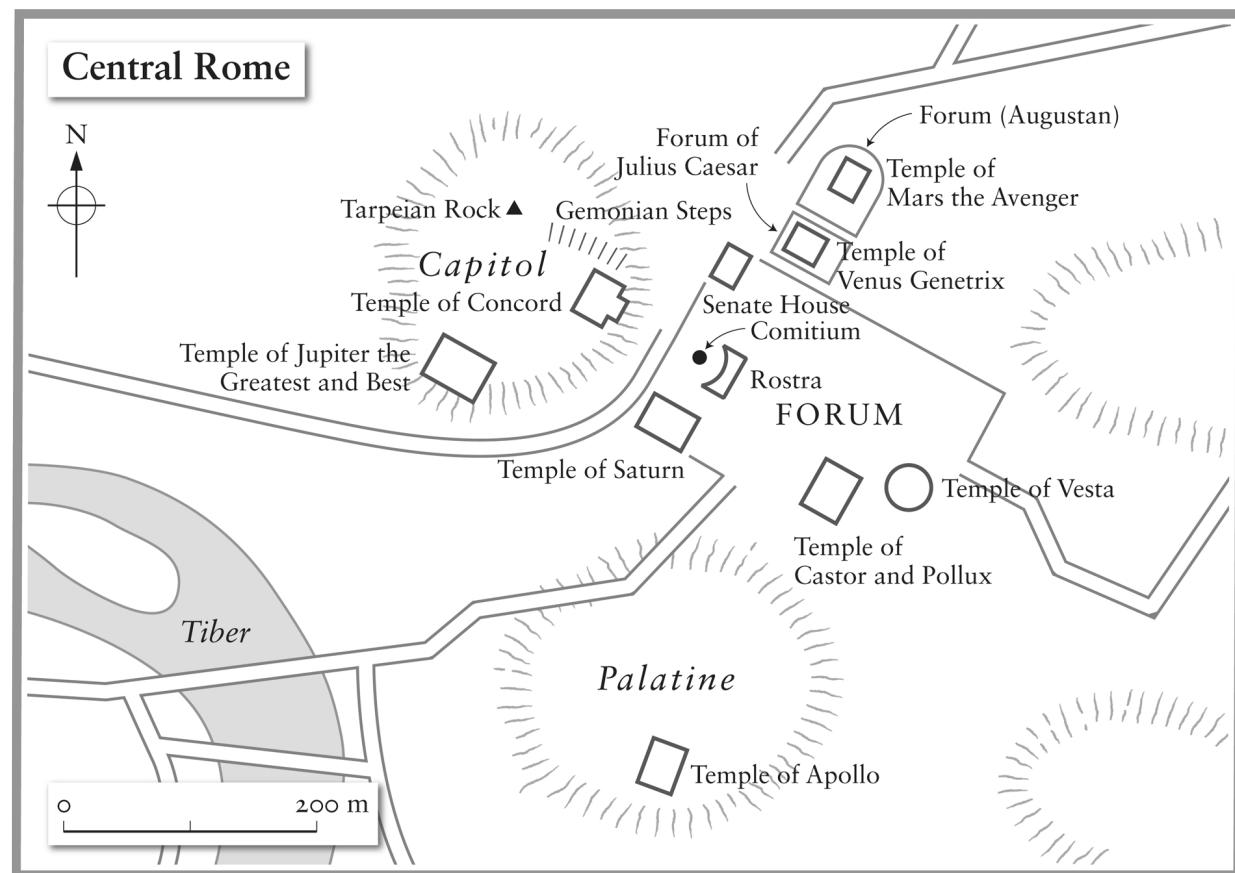
Priestesses of Vesta, the goddess of the hearth, who tended the sacred hearth fire of Rome itself. The scale and range of the privileges they enjoyed were matched by the ferocious quality of the punishments that would be inflicted on them were they to let the fire go out or betray their chastity.

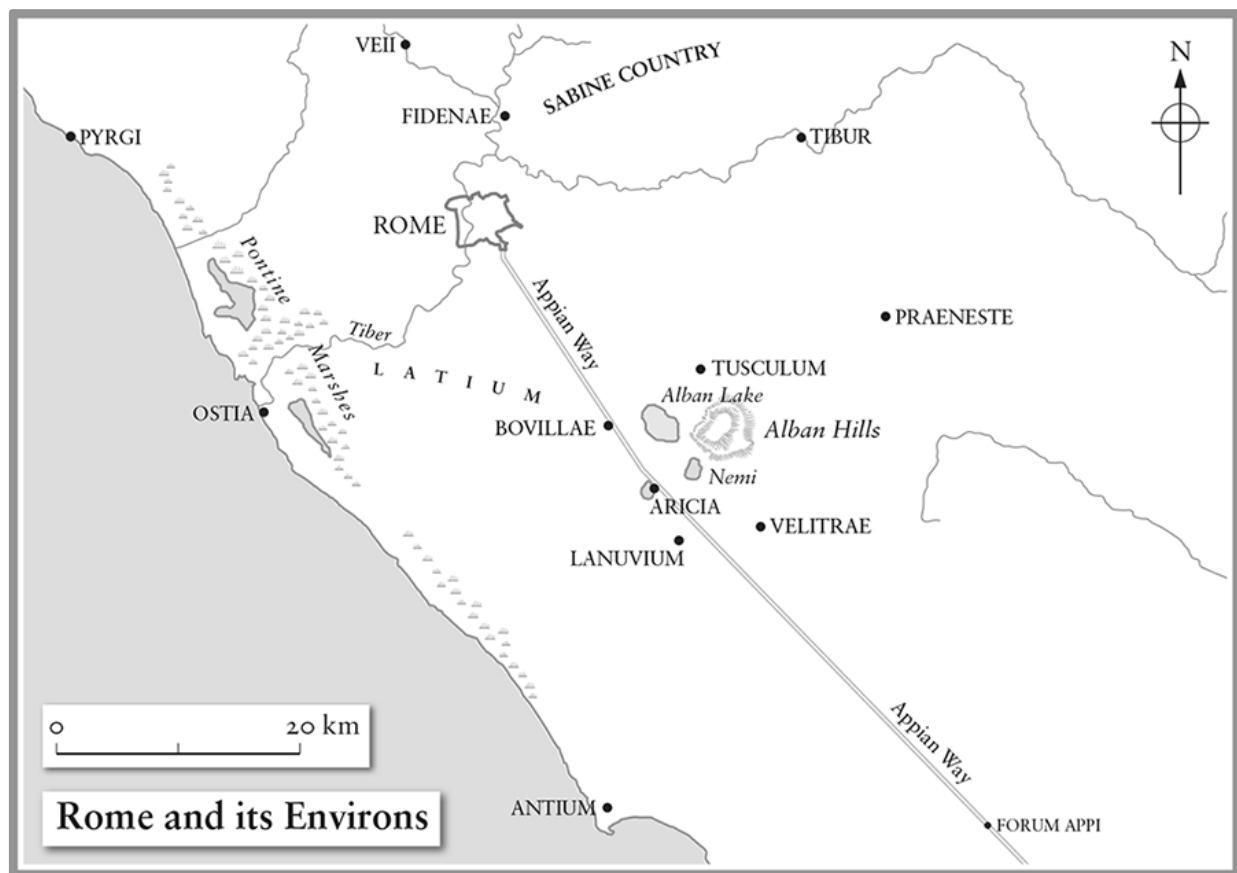
The Family of Augustus





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The Deified Julius

[1] ... He lost his father when he was still fifteen; then, in the next consular year, while he was a nominee for the post of High Priest of Jupiter,¹ he divorced Cossutia, a girl from an equestrian but exceedingly wealthy family, and to whom he had been betrothed while still a boy; instead, he married Cornelia, whose father, Cinna, had held four consulships; he soon fathered a daughter, Julia, on her, and refused – in defiance of all the pressure that Sulla, the dictator, could bring to bear – to divorce her.² As a result he was not only stripped of his priesthood, his wife's dowry and his family estates, but, fingered as a partisan of the opposing faction, had to retreat from public life; night after night, despite going down with a malarial fever, he was obliged to change his hiding place and buy off the agents on his trail; only thanks to the intervention of the Vestal Virgins and of his near relatives, Mamercus Aemilius and Aurelius Cotta, did he finally secure a pardon. When Sulla – who had persistently rejected the appeals of his closest and most distinguished adherents – at last gave way to their demands, he made a comment (prompted either by the gods or by his own foresight) that has since been much quoted: ‘Fine, you win, have him – but be warned that this man you have been so anxious to save will one day be

the ruin of the Optimates, the very grouping which you have joined with me to defend. For there is many a Marius in Caesar.'

[2] His first term of military service was spent in Asia, as an aide-de-camp to the governor, Marcus Thermus, who sent him to raise a fleet in Bithynia; there, so long did he linger at the court of Nicomedes that he was rumoured to have surrendered to the king's sexual advances. Further credibility was lent to this story by his return, a few days later, to collect money which he claimed was owed one of his clients, a freedman. The rest of his tour of service, however, redounded more favourably to his reputation – and indeed, at the capture of Mitylene, he was presented by Thermus with the civic crown.³

[3] He also served under Servilius Isauricus, but only for a short while. This was because the news of Sulla's death sent him hurrying back to Rome, where he hoped to profit from the fresh bout of civic turmoil that had been stirred up by Marcus Lepidus.⁴ Nevertheless, despite the huge inducements offered him to join Lepidus, he found the circumstances much less promising than he had anticipated, and so – because he did not have much confidence in Lepidus' abilities – declined to take his side.

[4] This, however, did not stop him – once the civil unrest had been suppressed – from bringing a charge of extortion against Cornelius Dolabella, a man who was not just a former consul but had celebrated a triumph; then, when Dolabella was acquitted, he sidestepped his resultant unpopularity by withdrawing to Rhodes, there to relax and devote his leisure time to studying under Apollonius Molo, who was at the time the leading teacher of oratory. There it was, while he was making the crossing

in winter, that he was captured by pirates near the island of Pharmacussa and, to his considerable annoyance, kept prisoner by them for forty days, together with only a single doctor and two personal attendants. The reason for this was that the moment he was captured he had sent away his companions and his other slaves to raise the money for his ransom. No sooner had fifty talents been paid and he returned to dry land than he was raising a fleet and setting off in pursuit of the departing pirates; then, once he had them in his power, he inflicted on them the punishment with which, in a bantering tone, he had repeatedly threatened them.⁵ And so he came to Rhodes; but, because Mithridates was ravaging the nearby mainland, and he was anxious not to seem idle while allies stood in peril, he crossed over to Asia, mustered a force of auxiliaries, expelled the king's prefect from the province, and thereby succeeded in confirming wavering and undecided cities in their loyalty.

[5] During his term as a military tribune (the first public office to which he was elected after his return to Rome), he enthusiastically backed the campaign to restore to the tribunes of the plebs the powers that Sulla had neutered. He also secured the recall of his brother-in-law, Lucius Cinna, and others with him who, after backing Lepidus in his agitations, had fled to Sertorius following the consul's death: this he did on the back of legislation introduced by Plotius, and by himself addressing a public meeting on the matter.

[6] When, during his quaestorship, both his aunt Julia and his wife Cornelia died, and he was delivering the traditional eulogies from the

Rostra,⁶ he gave this account, while praising his aunt, of the ancestry which she had shared on both sides of the family with his father:

On her mother's side, my aunt Julia derived from royal stock, and on her father's from the immortal gods. For the Marcius Rex clan (her mother's name was Marcia) are descended from Ancus Marcius,⁷ while the Julians, to which our family belongs, have Venus as their ancestor. As such, her pedigree combined the sacred quality of kings, who rank as the greatest of men, and the divine majesty of the gods, to whom kings themselves are subject.

In place of Cornelia he married Pompeia, the daughter of Quintus Pompeius and granddaughter of Lucius Sulla, but then subsequently divorced her on the grounds that she had committed adultery with Publius Clodius – for so persistent was the rumour that, during a state-sanctioned rite, Clodius had made approaches to her disguised as a woman that it prompted the senate to launch an inquiry into the profanation.

[7] As quaestor he was allotted Further Spain,⁸ where, on the orders of the praetor, he made a circuit of the local courts, administering justice; but when, after he had arrived in Gades, and noticed a statue of Alexander the Great in the temple of Hercules, he groaned, as though in disgust at his own lack of accomplishment, it was because, at an age when Alexander had already conquered the world, he himself had achieved nothing memorable; and so – looking to take advantage as soon as he could of the greater opportunities available to him in Rome – he asked to be excused his duties. The following night he was troubled in his sleep by a dream in which he

forced himself on his mother; but then, when the dream was interpreted, his spirits soared, for it was explained to him that his mother, whom he had seen powerless to push him aside as he raped her, was none other than the earth (held to be the parent of all) and that his dream was therefore a prophecy that he would rule the world.

[8] Accordingly, after cutting short his term of office, he made approaches to some Latin colonies that were campaigning for full citizenship,⁹ and might well have incited them to much bolder measures, had not the consuls, anticipating just such an eventuality, kept the legions raised for Cilicia on temporary standby there.

[9] Unperturbed, he was soon engaged in more ambitious schemes in Rome: at any rate, only a few days before becoming aedile, he was suspected of conspiring with Marcus Crassus, the former consul, and also with Publius Sulla and Lucius Autronius, who had jointly been convicted of electoral malpractice after winning the consulship, in a plot to attack the senate on New Year's Day, and massacre targeted senators; the plan then was for him to be named master of horse by Crassus, who was to force through a dictatorship, and for Sulla and Autronius – once the conspirators had constituted the republic to suit their purposes – to be reinstated as consuls. This conspiracy is mentioned by Tanusius Geminus in his history, by Marcus Bibulus in his edicts, and by Curio the Elder in his speeches; Cicero too seems to allude to it in the letter to Axius in which he says that Caesar the consul was making effective the one-man rule which Caesar the aedile had only contemplated. Tanusius reports that Crassus – because he had changed his mind, perhaps, or was nervous – failed to appear on the

day scheduled for the massacre, and that Caesar, as a result, did not give the prearranged signal (which, according to Curio, was to let his toga slip from his shoulder). Curio is also the source for the story – corroborated by Marcus Actorius Naso – that he was involved in another conspiracy with the young Gnaeus Piso, who, because he was suspected of stirring up trouble in Rome, had been allotted the province of Spain, irregular though this appointment was, and not one that he had requested: the agreement was, apparently, that the pair of them, Piso in his province and he in Rome, would employ the Ambrani¹⁰ and Transpadanes to help them overthrow the traditional order – a plan that was aborted by Piso’s death.¹¹

[10] During his aedileship, he not only made improvements to the Comitium¹² and the basilicas in the Forum, but fitted the Capitol with temporary arcades, in which were exhibited portions of the large amounts of stage machinery he had assembled. He put on beast hunts and games, both with a colleague and as sole promoter, with the result that what had been paid for jointly redounded to his credit alone, and prompted his colleague, Marcus Bibulus, to complain volubly that he had suffered the fate of Pollux: for just as the temple raised in the Forum to the twin brothers was known simply as the temple of Castor, so was the munificence that he and Caesar had displayed credited to Caesar alone. In addition to these entertainments, Caesar also staged a gladiatorial show, albeit with fewer pairs of fighters than he had been planning – for so alarmed were his enemies by the sheer scale and variety of the squad he had assembled that a bill was passed setting a limit on the number of gladiators which any one individual was permitted to keep in Rome.

[11] Once he had made himself popular with the masses, he then tried to have Egypt awarded him as a province by means of a plebiscite sponsored by the tribunes (the pretext for proposing this extraordinary command had been the expulsion by the Alexandrians of their king, whom the senate had named an ally and friend of Rome, and whose forcible eviction had been widely condemned); but he was blocked by opposition from the Optimates.¹³ He retaliated by trying every way he could to diminish their authority: he repaired the trophies which commemorated the victories of Gaius Marius over Jugurtha and the Cimbrians and Teutones,¹⁴ and which had been demolished by Sulla; also, when sitting as president of the court that tried murder cases, he included in his definition of ‘murderer’ all those who, during the proscriptions,¹⁵ had received payment from the state treasury for bringing in the heads of Roman citizens, and to whom the Cornelian law had granted immunity.¹⁶

[12] Additionally, he bribed someone to bring a charge of treason against Gaius Rabirius, a man who, some years earlier, had served the senate as its principal agent in its attempt to check the radical tribunate of Lucius Saturninus;¹⁷ then, when it fell to him by lot to pass sentence in the case, he pronounced Rabirius guilty with such relish that, following the defendant’s appeal to the people, nothing weighed more heavily in his favour than the harshness with which he had been dealt by his judge.

[13] Abandoning his ambition to secure a province in favour of a campaign to become Pontifex Maximus, he did not let up his lavish use of bribes; and indeed, after he had worked out the full massive scale of his debts, he is reported to have told his mother, when she kissed him as he was

leaving for the assembly on the morning of the election, ‘There will be no homecoming for me unless it is as Pontifex.’ In the event, so decisive was the margin of his victory – over two exceedingly formidable rivals, no less, both greatly his superiors in age and rank – that he received more votes from their respective tribes than did either of them overall.

[14] As praetor elect, he was alone in opposing the otherwise unanimous resolution of the senate that everyone implicated in the recently uncovered conspiracy of Catiline¹⁸ be put to death, and proposed instead that they be separated, confined in various towns and stripped of their property. Nevertheless, so alarming did the hardliners find his repeated warnings of how unpopular they would end up with the mass of the Roman people that Decimus Silanus,¹⁹ the consul designate, shamelessly sought to reframe his proposal in a more moderate way (simply to have changed it would have been going too far), on the grounds that people had understood it to be something harsher than he had intended. Many were persuaded by Caesar’s argument, including Cicero, the brother of the consul; and he would undoubtedly have got his way had not a speech by Marcus Cato stiffened the resolve of the wavering senate. Even then, he persisted in his attempt to obstruct proceedings, until a band of Roman knights who had been standing as an armed guard around the Senate House threatened to kill him if he continued pressing his case, and actually brandished their drawn swords at him; only with difficulty – after those sitting closest to him had all bolted – did a few of his friends manage to shield him with their arms and shelter him beneath their togas. By now clearly intimidated, he did not just back down, but kept well clear of the Senate House for the rest of the year.

[15] On the first day of his praetorship, he summoned Quintus Catulus to appear before a people's inquiry and update them on the restoration of the Capitol, and introduced a bill to transfer responsibility for the repairs to someone else;²⁰ but he proved no match for the united front shown him by the Optimates, and abandoned the measure when he saw that large numbers of them, rather than continue paying their respects to the new consuls, had immediately come rushing over to register the strength of their opposition.

[16] He showed himself more robust, however, in his backing for Caecilius Metellus (a tribune of the people who, ignoring his colleagues' veto, had proposed some exceedingly radical laws), and persisted in defending him until a decree of the senate suspended the pair of them from the exercise of public office. Not that this remotely cowed him into abandoning his role as a magistrate or from presiding in the courts; and only when he learned that plans were being drawn up to bar him by armed force did he dismiss his lictors, take off his toga of office and hide himself away in his house, with the aim of lying low until the situation had calmed down. Then, two days later, when a large crowd materialized quite unprompted and as though from nowhere, mobbing him, and vowing to back him after the insult done to his honour, he managed to prevent them from rioting. Since this was not at all what might have been expected, the senate (which had hurriedly assembled to deal with the crisis) had its most eminent members deliver him a vote of thanks; and then, after they had summoned him to the Senate House, praised him in the highest terms, cancelled their previous decree and restored him to office.

[17] He found himself in deep water again, however, when he was named as one of Catiline's associates: the accusation was made by an informer, Lucius Vettius, before the quaestor, Novius Nigrus, and in the senate by Quintus Curius, who – as a reward for being the first to uncover the plans of the conspirators – had been voted a grant of public money. Curius claimed that his information had come from Catiline, while Vettius went so far as to claim he had a document in Caesar's handwriting that had been given to Catiline. To Caesar, of course, this was intolerable: by appealing to Cicero as a witness, and demonstrating that he had revealed to him details of the conspiracy of his own accord, he saw to it that Curius was denied his reward; as for Vettius – whose bond was declared forfeit²¹ and his goods seized, and who was heavily fined and almost torn to pieces during a public meeting before the Rostra – he had him put in prison, and Novius the quaestor too, on the grounds that he had allowed a magistrate with powers superior to his own to be arraigned in his court.

[18] When, at the end of his praetorship, he was allotted the province of Further Spain, he shook off his creditors – who had been trying to stop him leaving – by finding backers to guarantee his debts, and then, ignoring both law and precedent, set off before the provincial appointments had been officially approved (it is unclear whether this was prompted by concern that a prosecution might be brought against him were he to forgo the immunity that public office provided him, or because he wished not to waste time in coming to the assistance of allies who were begging him for it); then, once he had brought peace to his province, he left it as hurriedly as he had arrived, not bothering to wait for his successor, to seek both a triumph and a

consulship. However, because the day of the elections had already been announced and he could not legally stand as a candidate unless he entered the city as a private citizen, and because his manoeuvres to be exempted from this law provoked widespread criticism, he had to forgo his triumph so as not to miss out on becoming consul.

[19] Faced by two rivals for the consulship, Lucius Lucceius and Marcus Bibulus, he opted to side with Lucceius, a man who made up for in wealth what he lacked in popularity, and came to an agreement with him that when Lucceius bribed the various voting blocs he would do so in both their names. When the Optimates learned this, they dreaded to think just how emboldened he might be, and how far he might go, were he to share the greatest of the magistracies with a like-minded yes-man, and so they licensed Bibulus to match his bribes; many of them contributed funds, and even Cato did not deny these donations to be for the good of the republic.

As a result, it was Bibulus who was elected alongside him as consul. The Optimates, pursuing the same strategy as before, now pulled every string to ensure that the consuls elect were allocated a provincial command of minimal importance: the supervision of forests and pastureland.²² Infuriated by this insult, he set himself by every means he could to win the friendship of Gnaeus Pompey, who was at loggerheads with the senate over its delay in ratifying the settlement he had made after defeating King Mithridates; he also reconciled Pompey with Marcus Crassus, an old enemy of Pompey's ever since the two men had spent their entire consulship at each other's throats; and so he entered into an accord with the pair of them,

that no measure should be taken in the affairs of the republic against the wishes of any one of the three.

[20] His very first act on taking up office was to ensure that a record of business conducted by the senate and the people be completed and made public on a daily basis. He also justified as the revival of an ancient custom the practice of being preceded by an official during those months when he did not have the fasces, and having the lictors follow in his wake. When, however, his consular colleague sought to obstruct his introduction of a land reform bill by announcing that the omens were bad,²³ he had him bundled out of the Forum; then, when Bibulus protested this outrage in the senate the following day, no one could be found brave enough to express an opinion on it, still less disapproval, despite the fact that far less serious cases of disorder had regularly met with official condemnation: so despondent did Bibulus become as a result that he did nothing until the end of his term of office but skulk in his house and issue proclamations about unfavourable omens.

From then on, one man had sole responsibility for all the affairs of state and the administration of justice – so much so that some wags in Rome, when they served as witnesses to a document, would give as the date, not the consulship of Caesar and Bibulus, but that of Julius and Caesar (in other words, referring to the same man twice, once by his family name, and once by his *cognomen*); and the following verses were soon on everybody's lips:

It happened, not in the year of Bibulus, but of Caesar,
For when Bibulus was consul nothing happened, as I recall.

The Stellas Plain, which our ancestors had consecrated as inviolable, and the farmland in Campania, which had been left to the republic to serve it as a source of income, he divided up between 20,000 citizens (each one the father of three children or more), and who were chosen without a ballot. When the tax-collectors petitioned him to reduce the amount they had to pay the public treasury, he cut it by a third, but publicly admonished them not to bid irresponsibly for contracts in the future. Other requests too, whatever people might want, he would grant unopposed (and such opposition as there was would be strong-armed into silence). When Marcus Cato sought to obstruct him, he ordered his lictor to drag Cato out of the Senate House and lock him up. When Lucius Lucullus – who had dared to take too public a stand – was threatened with being framed on false charges, the wretched man was so intimidated that he fell unprompted on his knees before him. And when Cicero, during the course of a trial, lamented how bad the state of things was, he arranged for Publius Clodius, Cicero's enemy, to have his status changed from patrician to plebeian (something which Clodius had long been agitating for, until then without success) that very day, at the ninth hour.²⁴ Finally, in a manoeuvre aimed at countering all his opponents in one fell swoop, he arranged that Vettius, in exchange for a bribe, would confess that various people had sought to have him murder Pompey, and then, when he was brought before the Rostra, identify those involved in the plot; but in due course, after the informer had named one or two people to no effect, and provoked suspicions of fraud, he gave up on this far-fetched scheme, and had the informer poisoned (or so it is said).

[21] Around this time he took as his wife Calpurnia, the daughter of Lucius Piso, who was due to succeed him as consul; meanwhile, his own daughter Julia he married off to Gnaeus Pompey (even though this required her to break off her prior engagement to Servilius Caepio, a man who had only recently been of particular service to him in his campaign against Bibulus). No sooner had he entered into this marriage alliance than he began to ask Pompey to give his opinion first in the senate – even though it had hitherto been his practice to ask Crassus first, and a consul was required by convention to observe throughout the entire year the precedence which he had established on the first of January.

[22] Backed now by both his father-in-law and his son-in-law, he chose out of all the provinces available to him the one which offered him the richest pickings and the best opportunity for winning triumphs: Gaul. Initially, under the provisions of a law proposed by Vatinius, he received the pairing of Cisalpine Gaul and Illyria; but it did not take long for the senate – anxious as they were to pre-empt the people from doing the same – to allocate him Long Haired Gaul as well.²⁵ So overjoyed was he by this success that he could not refrain, a few days later, from boasting to a packed Senate House that, struggle though his enemies might, he had got exactly what he wanted in face of all their gagging, and fully intended to continue forcing them to give him head; then, when someone insulted him by observing that this, as a woman, he would find tricky to do, he ran with the banter by pointing out that Semiramis had ruled over Syria, and that the Amazons had held an extensive reach of Asia.²⁶

[23] When, after he had completed his term as consul, the praetors Gaius Memmius and Lucius Domitius launched an inquiry into his activities during the preceding year, he first referred the matter to the senate, and then, after three days of fruitless wrangling – during which the senators had signally failed to get to grips with the matter – he left for his province; no sooner had he gone, however, than a number of charges were being brought against his quaestor, as a means of attacking him. Sure enough, it did not take long for Lucius Antistius, a tribune of the plebs, to launch a direct prosecution; but he managed to evade this summons by appealing to the board of tribunes as a whole, on the grounds that he was too busy in the service of the republic to attend. Resolved from that point on always to watch his back, he went to great lengths to put the annually elected magistrates in his debt, and refused to back any candidates, or permit any to win office, who did not first commit to fighting his corner while he was away; nor did he hesitate to demand of some that they swear oaths to that effect, and even put them down in writing.

[24] But then, faced by an open threat from Lucius Domitius (who was running for the consulship at the time) to do as consul what he had failed to achieve as praetor and deprive him of his military command, he summoned Crassus and Pompey to Luca, a city in his province, where he persuaded them to knock Domitius out of the race by themselves running for the consulship again, and then to fix for his command to be extended by five years. This in turn emboldened him to raise legions at his own expense and add them to those which he had been granted by the state (one of these was actually recruited in Transalpine Gaul and given a Gallic name, ‘Alauda’²⁷

– he trained and equipped it to Roman standards, and in due course granted everybody in it citizenship). From that point on he never spurned a chance to launch a military campaign, no matter how illegal or perilous it might be, and would launch unprovoked attacks on allies of Rome just as readily as on the wild tribes that were her foes – so much so, indeed, that the senate mandated the dispatch of legates to inspect the condition of the Gallic provinces, and some even reckoned that he should be handed over to the enemy. But still all his enterprises flourished; and he earned more days of supplication,²⁸ and for longer periods too, than anyone had ever done before him.

[25] In their essentials, his achievements during the nine years of his command were as follows. Excepting only some allied states which had done him good service, the whole of Gaul – everywhere, that is, bounded by the forests of the Pyrenees, the Alps and Mount Cebenna,²⁹ and by the Rivers Rhine and Rhône, a circumference of some 3,200 miles in all – he made into a province, and imposed on it an annual tribute of 40 million sesterces. He was the first Roman to build a bridge across the Rhine and attack the Germans who live on its far bank, where he inflicted a series of heavy defeats on them; he also attacked the Britons, a people about whom the Romans had previously known nothing, and was able, after a number of victories, to command tribute and hostages from them. Reverses interrupted the run of these successes only three times: in Britain, where much of his fleet was destroyed in a storm; at Gergovia in Gaul, where one of his legions was routed; and on the German frontier, where two of his legates, Titurius and Aurunculus, were killed in an ambush.

[26] It was during this period that he lost first his mother, then his daughter, and then, shortly after that, his granddaughter. Meanwhile, with the republic plunged into chaos by the murder of Publius Clodius,³⁰ and the senate, after agreeing that there should be just a single consul, nominating Gnaeus Pompey for the post, he persuaded the tribunes of the plebs – who initially had been pushing for him to be Pompey’s colleague – to propose to the people an alternative option: namely, that he be permitted to stand for a second consulship during the final stages of his term of command, while still away from Rome (this he did so that he would not be obliged to leave Gaul prematurely to run for office, before the war had been brought to an end). This object once secured, his ambitions soared higher still, and his hopes for the future too; and so he wasted no opportunity, either publicly or in a private capacity, to lavish money and assistance on everybody he could. He used the plunder from Gaul to start work on a forum, building it on a site that had cost him over 100 million sesterces.³¹ He also took the unprecedeted step of commemorating his daughter by inviting everyone in Rome to gladiatorial games and a banquet.³² Because he wanted public expectation of this raised to fever pitch, he supplemented the contract he had given to the markets for the banquet by having some of it prepared in his own kitchens. He also gave instructions that any star gladiator condemned to death by a hostile crowd should be forcibly removed and kept for his own games. He entrusted novice fighters not to the gladiatorial schools or to professional trainers but to Roman knights in their own homes, and even to senators if they had a particular expertise in armed combat; the evidence of his own letters demonstrates how intently he

implored them to give their direct attention to his rookies, and to serve them as personal trainers. He permanently doubled his legionaries' pay. Also, whenever there was a plentiful supply of grain, he would dole it out to his soldiers without limit or measure, and on occasion provide each of them with a slave from his haul of captives.

[27] Looking to maintain his marriage alliance with Pompey, and Pompey's own goodwill, he offered him the hand of Octavia, his sister's granddaughter (despite her already being married to Gaius Marcellus), and proposed himself as husband for Pompey's daughter (despite her already being promised to Faustus Sulla).³³ Everyone in Pompey's immediate circle, and a large part of the senate too, he enmeshed in loans, which he offered either at low interest or none at all; members of other orders too (both those whom he approached and those who made approaches to him), he wooed with lavish displays of generosity; these even included – proportionate always to the favour that they might enjoy with their patrons or their masters – freedmen and slaves. What is more, he was the sole source of assistance – and a ready one at that – to anyone facing trial, in debt, or young and spendthrift; the only exceptions being those so burdened by the charges against them, or by their penury, or by the recklessness of their extravagance, that even he could not come to their rescue. What these kinds of men needed, he would openly and nakedly tell them, was a civil war.

[28] He courted kings and provinces around the world with no less assiduity, offering thousands of captives as a gift to some, and to others military assistance, quite without reference to the senate and the Roman

people, whenever and wheresoever it might be required; additionally, he adorned the most important cities in Italy, in the various provinces of Gaul and Spain, and in Asia and Greece too, with magnificent public monuments. Finally, as everyone was gawping at these actions and wondering where they might be leading, the consul Marcus Claudius Marcellus issued an edict, in which he proclaimed that action had to be taken on an issue of the utmost importance to the republic; he then proposed to the senate that – since the war was over, peace had been established and there was a need to disband the victorious army – someone new should be appointed to the Gallic command before its term was due to expire; furthermore, he argued, no one absent from Rome was entitled to run for election, since Pompey, despite his subsequent legislation, had failed to annul the plebiscite. (The reason for this was that Pompey, when he legislated on the rules that were to govern magistracies, had forgotten, in the section which debarred those absent from the city from standing for office, to grant Caesar an exemption, and only subsequently corrected his error – by which time the law had already been inscribed on bronze and lodged in the treasury.)³⁴ Nor was Marcellus satisfied with depriving Caesar of his provinces and privileges; he also proposed that the colonists settled at Novum Comum³⁵ under the provisions of Vatinius' bill be deprived of their citizenship, on the grounds that it had only been done to serve his ambitions, and anyway went beyond the bounds of the law.

[29] Unsettled by this, and reckoning (a sentiment he was often heard to express) that it would be a more formidable challenge, now that he was the foremost man in the state, to demote him from first place to second than

from second to last, Caesar did everything he could to frustrate his enemies' measures: partly by getting tribunes to use their vetoes on his behalf, and partly through the agency of Servius Sulpicius, the other consul. Similarly, the following year – after Gaius Marcellus had succeeded his cousin Marcus as consul, and reintroduced the same bill – he recruited to his cause Aemilius Paulus, Marcellus' fellow consul, and Gaius Curio, the most aggressive of the tribunes, by means of massive bribes. But when he saw that all his efforts were doomed to failure, and that both the consuls due to serve the following year belonged to the faction hostile to him, he wrote letters to the senate, pleading with them not to deprive him of the special privilege granted him by the people; either that, or the senate should oblige other generals as well to divest themselves of their armies (he proposed this because he took for granted – or so it is thought – that he would find it easier to summon his veterans when the need arose than Pompey would to summon his raw recruits). Even as he was offering to disband eight of his legions and the command of Gaul north of the Alps, however, he demanded it as a condition from his enemies that he keep two legions and the province of Cisalpine Gaul, or else one legion and Illyria, until such time as he had become consul.

[30] When, however, the senate refused to engage with this proposal, and his enemies declared that they would never haggle over the security of the republic, he crossed into Nearer Gaul; there, after a circuit of the local courts, he made his base in Ravenna, with the intention of pressing his claim by armed force should the senate launch a crackdown on the tribunes of the plebs who were championing his cause. Such, at any rate, was the

pretext he gave for civil war; but others think he had different motives. Gnaeus Pompey frequently used to say of him that because, as a private citizen, his income would be insufficient to complete the projects he had embarked upon, and to satisfy the expectations which the prospect of his return had aroused among the people, his goal was upheaval and chaos. Others say that he dreaded being compelled to give an account of all the auspices he had ignored, all the laws he had broken and all the tribunician vetoes he had flouted during his consulship – for Marcus Cato had repeatedly declared, and on oath too, that he would impeach him the moment he disbanded his army, and it was popularly anticipated that, should he return as a private citizen, then he would be obliged to answer the charges against him just as Milo had done, amid a ring of armed men.³⁶ Evidence for this is provided by Asinius Pollio, who records that, as he gazed at the corpses of his enemies where they lay strewn across the battlefield of Pharsalus,³⁷ he uttered these words: ‘They were the ones who wanted this – for not all my great achievements would have prevented them from finding me, Gaius Caesar, guilty, had I not had my army to turn to for backing.’ Some think he was so seduced by the habit of command that, after weighing up his own strength against that of his enemies, he seized the opportunity to grasp after the absolute power that he had been craving since his earliest years. This, it seems, was the opinion of Cicero, who writes in the third book of *On Duties* that two lines from Euripides were forever on Caesar’s lips (the translation is Cicero’s own):

For if the law must be broken, then let it be broken

with the aim of winning a throne. Otherwise, show the law respect.³⁸

[31] So it was, the moment news reached him that the tribunes' veto had been overridden and the tribunes themselves had fled the city, he ordered his cohorts to advance, but under cover, so as not to rouse suspicion; meanwhile, keeping his own intentions disguised, he attended a public festival, inspected the plans for a gladiator school which he was planning to have built, and hosted a well-attended dinner party, as he invariably did. Then, after the sun had set, and mules taken from a nearby mill had been harnessed to his carriage, he set out in the utmost secrecy, with only a modest retinue as company; for a while – because his torches had gone out, and he had lost his way – he blundered about, until, as the sky began to lighten, he located a guide, who led him on foot to where he needed to be; catching up with his cohorts on the banks of the Rubicon, the river which marked the frontier of his province, he paused for a while, revolving in his mind the sheer enormity of what he was contemplating, before turning to those nearest to him and saying: 'Even now we could turn back. But once we have crossed that tiny bridge, everything will have to be decided by war.'

[32] Then, as he was hesitating, a wondrous thing happened: nearby him, a figure of remarkable size and beauty abruptly appeared, sitting and playing on a pipe; and when some of his soldiers – trumpeters among them – abandoned their posts to join the large number of shepherds who had run to listen to the music, the apparition snatched a trumpet from one of the trumpeters, leaped into the river, sounded the advance with a mighty blast,

and crossed over to the far bank. Then Caesar spoke. ‘Let us go where we are summoned both by divinely authored signs and by the wrongs our foes have done us. The die is cast.’³⁹

[33] And so his army crossed the Rubicon; and he welcomed the tribunes who, following their expulsion from Rome, had come to join him, summoned the soldiers to an assembly, and then, weeping and tearing the garments from his breast, called on them to pledge him their loyalty. Some have thought that he went so far as to promise each and every one of them equestrian status – but this is incorrect. What actually happened is that, while he was giving his rallying cry to the troops, he would point again and again to a finger on his left hand, insisting that he would gladly tear the ring from it if only it would provide to those who were backing him in defence of his honour commensurate reward; but because those on the margins of the assembly – who could see him better than they could hear him – based their understanding of what he was saying on his gestures rather than on his words, the story spread that he had promised them all the right to an equestrian ring, plus 400,000 sesterces each.⁴⁰

[34] Here, in the order they happened, are the most significant things he went on to do. He seized Picenum, Umbria and Etruria; he defeated and then set free Lucius Domitius, the man who, on the outbreak of civil war, had been named his successor and had garrisoned Corfinium against him; he advanced along the Adriatic coast to Brundisium, which had been serving the consuls and Pompey as their bolthole, and from where they were planning to cross to Greece. Then, after the failure of all his various stratagems to block their escape, he made his way back to Rome and

summoned the senate to discuss affairs of state, before heading for Spain, where he moved against three of Pompey's legates (Marcus Petreius, Lucius Afranius and Marcus Varro), who between them commanded a formidable army. 'First,' as he had put it to his friends before setting out, 'we will target the army without a general – and then, on our return, the general without an army.' Sure enough, although he was delayed by having to lay siege to Massilia⁴¹ when the city closed its gates against him, and by a serious shortage of grain supplies, it did not take him long to bring everywhere under his control.

[35] From Spain he returned to Rome, then crossed to Macedonia, where he blockaded Pompey for almost four months behind massive siege works, before eventually defeating him in battle at Pharsalus and pursuing his fugitive rival to Alexandria; here, learning that Pompey had been murdered,⁴² and perceiving that a similar ambush was being prepared for him, he took the fight to King Ptolemy,⁴³ despite the risks, for – trapped as he was in winter behind the walls of a numerous and subtle adversary, without any supplies, and wholly unprepared for war – both the terrain and the time of year were against him. Despite this, though, he won; then, nervous of making Egypt a province in case it provide opportunity in the future for some ambitious governor to overthrow the established order, he handed the kingdom over to Cleopatra and her younger brother. From Alexandria he crossed to Syria, and from there to Pontus, prompted by alarming news of Pharnaces, the son of Mithridates the Great, who had been taking advantage of the chaos of the times to launch a series of campaigns against his neighbours, and was becoming ever more assertive

with each success; all it took, however, was a single battle, fought five days after his arrival in Pontus, and four hours after he had first caught sight of the enemy, to crush the king – and from that point on he would often comment how fortunate Pompey had been, that he had won a great reputation for himself as a general by defeating enemies of such a feeble order. He then went on to defeat Scipio and Juba, who had been rallying what remained of their side in Africa, and Pompey's sons in Spain.⁴⁴

[36] Not once throughout the entire course of the civil wars was he defeated, and the only reverses he suffered were those inflicted on his legates: of these, Gaius Curio perished in Africa, Gaius Antonius was taken prisoner by the enemy in Illyria, Publius Dolabella lost a fleet (also during an Illyrian campaign) and Gnaeus Domitius Calvinus an army in Pontus. He himself was always supremely successful, nor was the outcome of any engagement he fought ever in doubt, except on two occasions: once at Dyrrachium, when he observed of Pompey, after his failure to capitalize on a successful attack, that he did not know how to force a victory, and a second time in Spain, in the final battle he fought there, when so desperate did the situation look that he actually contemplated suicide.

[37] When the wars were over, he staged five triumphs, four of them following his victory over Scipio, spaced out over a single month, and then a further one after his defeat of Pompey's sons. The first and most dazzling triumph celebrated Gaul, the second Alexandria, then Pontus, Africa after that, with Spain the last – and each one boasted different sets and displays of plunder. On the day of his Gallic triumph, as he was riding along the Velabrum,⁴⁵ he was almost thrown from his chariot when its axle snapped;

he went on to climb the Capitol by the light of torches borne by forty elephants to his right and left. During his Pontic triumph, one of the floats in the procession displayed a placard on which three words – ‘CAME, SAW, CONQUERED’ – were written: these alluded not to his feats during the campaign, as the other placards did, but to the speed with which it had been conducted.

[38] To all the foot soldiers in his veteran legions he gave 24,000 sesterces per head as a share of the booty (this was in addition to the 2,000 which he had given each soldier at the start of the civil wars). He also gave them plots of land (although not in a single block, so as to avoid displacing the original owners). To every citizen in Rome he gave the 300 sesterces per head that he had promised long before, plus another 100 to compensate for the delay, ten measures of corn, and the same number of pounds of oil. He also waived a year’s rent for any tenant in Rome who paid up to 2,000 sesterces, and in Italy for any who paid up to 500. He threw in as well a banquet, a meat dole and – after his victory in Spain – two dinners, all for the general public. (The reason there were two dinners was that he worried the first had been rather on the mean side, and failed to measure up to his customary standard of generosity – and so he had given a second, much more lavish one five days later.)

[39] He sponsored various kinds of entertainments: a gladiatorial show, plays performed by actors in every kind of language across all the sectors of the city, athletic contests and a sea battle. A gladiatorial show staged in the Forum saw Furius Leptinus, a man of praetorian family, fight it out with Quintus Calpenus, a one-time senator and legal advocate. A Pyrrhic dance

was performed by the children of the princes of Asia and Bithynia. In the theatre, a Roman knight named Decimus Laberius performed in a mime that he had written himself, and then, after he had been given 500,000 sesterces and a gold ring, left the stage, passed the seats reserved for the senators, and took his place in the fourteen rows allocated to members of the equestrian order.⁴⁶ The Circus, which had been extended at both ends and enclosed the whole way round by a broad canal, hosted races in which young men of the highest rank exhibited their skills by variously driving four-horse and two-horse chariots, and jumping between pairs of horses. The Troy Game was performed by two squads of boys, each one grouped by age. The wild-beast hunts went on for five days in a row; on the last day an encounter was staged between two battle-lines, each one of which consisted of 500 foot soldiers, twenty elephants and thirty horsemen. Space was made for the battle by removing the turning posts from the racetrack and pitching in their place two camps, each one facing the other. Athletes competed for three days in a temporary stadium that had been erected specially for the purpose on a stretch of the Campus Martius. The sea battle, which was staged on an artificial lake in the Lesser Codeta,⁴⁷ featured ships from the Tyrian and Egyptian fleets, some with two banks of oars, some with three, some with four, and huge forces of marines. So many came to watch all these various entertainments, and from so many directions, that not only did large numbers of the visitors to the city have to lodge in tents pitched in the streets or along the roads, but there were repeated examples of people being crushed to death in the press – two senators among them.

[40] Next, he turned to the reorganization of the state, making corrections to the calendar which, thanks to the irresponsibility of the pontiffs in arbitrarily inserting extra days and months into it, had for a long while been so hopelessly off-kilter that the harvest festival was no longer celebrated in the summer, and the festival marking the new vintage no longer celebrated in the autumn; by ordaining that each year should have 365 days,⁴⁸ abolishing the extra month that hitherto had been inserted as required, and adding an extra day every fourth year, he succeeded in synchronizing the calendar with the course of the sun. To render this new ordering of the passage of time compatible with the upcoming start of the year on the first of January, he inserted two extra months between November and January; these, added to the month that had already been inserted under the aegis of the otherwise superseded calendar, ensured that the year in which these adjustments were made lasted for fifteen months in all.

[41] He filled the vacancies in the senate, supplemented the ranks of the patricians, and increased the numbers of praetors, aediles and quaestors, not to mention the less significant magistrates; he also restored to their former rank those who had been demoted by action of the censors or because they had been convicted in court of electoral corruption. He shared the responsibility for choosing magistrates (the consuls only excepted) with the popular assemblies, so that half the posts were filled by candidates chosen by the people and half by those he had nominated: these he would make known by means of brief written notes sent to each tribe, along the lines of ‘Caesar the Dictator to such-and-such a tribe, I commend so-and-so to you. May he hold his position of responsibility sustained by your vote.’ He also

allowed the children of men who had been proscribed to run for magistracies. He limited the classes who were permitted to supply jurors to two – the senatorial and the equestrian classes – by disqualifying the tribunes of the treasury, who until then had constituted a third.⁴⁹

When he held a census of the people – not, as hitherto had been done, relying on the traditional way of registering land, but instead having officials go from street to street and take information from the landlords who owned the apartment blocks – he reduced the number of those receiving the public corn dole from 300,000 to 150,000; also, to ensure that this enrolment would not subsequently be revised by the convening of new assemblies, he fixed that every year the praetors should hold a ballot to replace those who had died with people who were not on the roll.

[42] Anxious to maintain Rome's population after he had depleted it by settling 80,000 citizens in colonies overseas, he decreed that no citizen between the ages of twenty and forty (unless he were bound by the oath of military service) should absent himself from Italy for more than three years at a time, that no son of a senator should go abroad unless it were in the train of a senior officer or magistrate, and that at least a third of the herdsmen employed by cattle ranchers should be young men of free birth; additionally, he granted citizenship to all the doctors and teachers of the liberal arts in Rome, in the hope that they would then wish to stay permanently in the city and encourage others to join them.

Although he was repeatedly lobbied to cancel all debts, he did not in the end pander to this expectation, but instead decreed that the satisfaction offered by debtors to their creditors should be proportionate to how much

their property and possessions would have brought on the eve of the civil war, minus such interest as had already been paid or pledged; by means of this policy, he reduced debts by about a quarter. All the guilds (except for the long-established ones) he dissolved.⁵⁰ He brought in stiffer penalties for crimes, and – prompted by the greater readiness of the rich, who were liable only to be exiled without loss of property if found guilty, to break the law – he decreed that anyone who murdered a close relative should be deprived of all his goods, and any other offender of one half.

[43] He was notably conscientious and strict in his administration of justice. He went so far as to expel from the senate anyone convicted of extortion, and – although there had been no suspicion of adultery in the case – annulled the marriage of a man of praetorian rank who had married a woman just two days after her divorce from her previous husband. He imposed tariffs on imported goods. He permitted only people of a particular rank and age to use litters, or to wear purple clothing and pearls – and even then only on set days. So scrupulous was he in enforcing the sumptuary laws that he employed inspectors to confiscate and bring to him such delicacies as they might find illegally for sale in the meat market, and would sometimes send his lictors and soldiers into people's dining rooms, where they would remove anything that might have escaped the notice of his inspectors even as it was being served.

[44] With each day that passed, his plans for beautifying the city and making it function more efficiently, and for securing and extending the sway of Roman power, grew ever more numerous and ambitious: first, he proposed to construct a temple to Mars on an unprecedented scale, by

filling in and levelling out the lake where he had just staged his sea battle, and to build a theatre, likewise on an immense scale, reaching up to the Tarpeian Rock; to reduce the corpus of civil law to a reasonable size, by editing the vast sprawl of legal precedents so that, assembled within as small a number of books as possible, only the best and most essential would remain; to render the classics of Greek and Latin literature as accessible to the general public as he could (the responsibility for procuring and cataloguing these collections of books he assigned to Marcus Varro); to drain the Pontine Marshes, to empty Lake Fucinus, to build a road joining the Adriatic and the Tiber along the spine of the Apennines, and to cut a canal through the Isthmus of Corinth;⁵¹ and to contain the Dacians⁵² who had overrun Pontus and Thrace, and then to launch a campaign against the Parthians through Lesser Armenia (although he intended to avoid engaging them in battle until he had first evaluated their capabilities).⁵³

But all these projects and plans were cut short by his death. I will come to that in due course; but first it may be not inappropriate to give a brief account of his personal appearance, his mode of dress, his lifestyle and his character, and also – no less importantly – his views on matters both civil and military.

[45] He is said to have been a tall man, of fair complexion, with well-shaped limbs, a somewhat full face and dark, piercing eyes; he enjoyed good health, except for a susceptibility late in life to sudden fainting fits, and to nightmares as well. He also twice suffered an epileptic fit while engaged on public business. He was very fussy when it came to his own appearance: the hair on his head was always immaculately trimmed, on his

face never less than clean-shaven and on the rest of his body – to the disapproval of some – freshly plucked; that he had lost his looks to baldness greatly upset him, and offered his detractors endless material for jokes. So it was that he fell into the habit of combing forwards the thinning hair from the top of his head – and of all the honours voted him by the senate and the people, there was none he accepted and took advantage of with more relish than the right to wear a laurel wreath at all times. It is said too that he was a very flamboyant dresser: not only did the broad-striped tunic that he was entitled to as a senator always sport fringed sleeves down to the wrists, but he would belt it on the outside, with just a hint of looseness (it was this, supposedly, which prompted Sulla repeatedly to warn the Optimates to beware ‘the badly belted boy’).⁵⁴

[46] His first house was only a modest one in the Subura, but then, after he had become Pontifex Maximus, he lived in the official residence on the Sacred Way.⁵⁵ There are many accounts of just how devoted he was to fashion and luxury: that on one occasion, while still cash-strapped and in debt, he lavished a fortune on having a villa constructed from scratch at Nemi, and then, when the completed building failed to meet all his expectations for it, had it razed to the ground; also that he would take mosaics and slabs of marble with him on campaign, so that he could have a stone floor in his tent.

[47] It is reported as well that he invaded Britain in the hope of finding pearls, which he would sometimes weigh in his own hand to get a proper estimate of their size; that he was a passionate collector of precious stones, embossed metalwork, statues and paintings by old masters; and that for

attractive and well-educated slaves he would pay such colossal sums that even he was embarrassed by the outlay, and would refuse to let it be entered in his accounts.

[48] When in a province, he would make a point of hosting banquets in two separate dining rooms: in one, his officers and the Greeks in his train would recline together, and in the other distinguished visitors from Rome and provincial dignitaries. With such an iron and rigorous discipline did he monitor the running of his household, even down to the smallest detail, that he once had a baker put in chains for serving bread to his guests different from the bread served to himself; he also executed a freedman, a particular favourite of his, who had committed adultery with the wife of a Roman knight, even though no complaint had been lodged.

[49] There was only the single blot on his reputation for sexual propriety, but this – his sharing of a bed with Nicomedes – was a lingering scandal, and one serious enough to provide material for endless taunts. I pass over the notorious lines of Licinius Calvus ('Whatever Bithynia owned, and the man who fucked Caesar up the arse ...'), not to mention the speeches made against him by Dolabella and the elder Curio (in which, respectively, Dolabella terms him 'the queen's concubine, warming the bed inside the royal litter', and Curio 'Nicomedes' brothel, the whorehouse of Bithynia'). I will not dwell either on the edicts issued by Bibulus in which he described his fellow consul as the queen of Bithynia, and alleged that the man who had once held a king in his heart had come to desire a king's power. Also during his first consulship, an incident reported by Marcus Brutus occurred: he was hailed by a man called Octavius – someone who, not being quite

right in the head, was much given to shooting his mouth off, and had just saluted Pompey as ‘king’ – as ‘queen’. Gaius Memmius went so far as to accuse him of having stood among Nicomedes’ catamites, and served as the royal cup-bearer, at a large party where the guests had included Roman businessmen (whose names Memmius lists). Cicero, not content with writing in various letters that he had been led by courtiers into the royal bedchamber, that he had reclined on a golden couch dressed all in purple, and that there, in Bithynia, this descendant of Venus had allowed his virginity to be taken, once went further still: responding to a speech he was giving to the senate in defence of Nysa, Nicomedes’ daughter, in which he was recalling the kindness that the king had shown him, Cicero told him to give no further details. ‘For we all know what he gave you – just as we all know what you gave him.’ Finally, during his triumph over Gaul, the best-known of the songs with which his men made fun of him (in the approved manner of soldiers marching behind their general in a triumph), was the following chant:

Caesar bent Gaul to his will; Nicomedes bent Caesar.
Look! Caesar, who bent Gaul to his will, now rides in triumph,
but Nicomedes, who bent Caesar to his will, has no triumph.

[50] Everyone agrees that he had a prodigious sexual appetite, which he indulged without inhibition, to the damage of the reputations of numerous distinguished women – among them Postumia, the wife of Servius Sulpicius, Lollia, the wife of Aulus Gabinius, Tertulla, the wife of Marcus Crassus, and even Mucia, the wife of Gnaeus Pompey. It is certainly the

case that both the elder and the younger Curio – and many others too – criticized Pompey for being so driven by his political ambitions that he was willing to marry the daughter of the very man whom, with deep sighs, he had been in the habit of calling ‘Aegisthus’,⁵⁶ and on whose account he had divorced a wife who had given him three children. But there was one woman Caesar loved more than any other, and that was Servilia, the mother of Marcus Brutus: during his last consulship he bought her a pearl worth 6 million sesterces, and during the civil war – among many other gifts – he sold her at auction some large estates at a price so low that it prompted widespread astonishment, and Cicero to make the witty observation: ‘You can work out the actual price by knowing that a third of it – a tertiary amount – was knocked off.’ (The point of the joke being that Servilia was supposed to have pimped Tertia, her daughter, to Caesar.)

[51] That he was equally promiscuous with married women in the provinces is evident from this, another of the chants sung by his soldiers during the Gallic triumph:

Men of Rome, watch out for your wives; the bald adulterer we bring home.
All the money you borrowed here in Rome you spaffed away in Gaul.

[52] He also had affairs with a number of queens, including Eunoë of Mauretania, who, together with her husband Bogudes, was the recipient – according to Naso – of a large number of generous gifts from him; but his greatest love was Cleopatra, with whom he regularly partied until dawn, and went on a luxury cruise up the Nile (indeed, had his army not refused to follow him, he would have sailed the whole way with her to Ethiopia). He

subsequently invited her to Rome, and would not let her leave until he had showered her with great honours and gifts, and permitted her to give his name to the son she had borne (this boy, according to various Greek authors, resembled Caesar in both his looks and his gait). Mark Antony confirmed to the senate that he had indeed acknowledged the child, and that Gaius Matius, Gaius Oppius and the rest of Caesar's friends knew it (although Gaius Oppius himself, in the manner of someone concerned to refute something and set facts straight, published a book denying 'that the boy was Caesar's son, even though Cleopatra said he was'). Helvius Cinna, the tribune of the plebs, let various people know that he had ready the text of a law, which Caesar had ordered should be passed while he was absent from Rome, allowing him to marry any woman he wanted, and in as great a number as he pleased, for the purpose of having children. And just in case anyone should still doubt the sordid reputation he had come to have for submitting to men and for seducing married women, bear in mind that the elder Curio, in one of his speeches, called him 'a man with every woman, and a woman with every man'.

[53] That he was not a heavy drinker even his enemies acknowledged. Marcus Cato put it this way: 'Caesar was the only man ever to have sought to subvert the republic while sober.' As regards food, he took no interest in it, as a story told by Gaius Oppius well illustrates: for, once, when he was staying with someone who had served rancid rather than fresh oil, he did not turn his nose up at it, as all the other guests were doing, but made a point of eating more heartily than usual, so that he should not appear to charge his host with either carelessness or rudeness.

[54] He displayed no such self-control, however, either in the field or as a magistrate. The evidence of several people's memoirs is that, while governor in Spain, he solicited money from allied states to pay off his debts, and brutally extorted money from various towns in Lusitania, even though they had never denied him anything and opened their gates to him on his approach. In Gaul, he stripped the shrines and the temples to the gods of all the offerings with which they were filled, and was likelier to sack a city for its plunder than as a punishment – with the result that he ended up so glutted with gold that he was able to offer it for sale throughout Italy and the provinces at 3,000 sesterces to the pound. During his first consulship, he stole 3,000 pounds of gold from the Capitol and replaced it with its equivalent in weight of gilded bronze. He set a price on treaties and on thrones, screwing Ptolemy⁵⁷ alone for 6,000 talents in his own name and that of Pompey. Subsequently, he funded the burdensome costs of his civil wars, his triumphs and his gladiatorial shows by the most shameless theft and looting of temples.

[55] In both his eloquence and his military prowess he was the equal of the very greatest – if not their superior. Indisputably, following his prosecution of Dolabella, he stood in the top flight of advocates. Cicero, indeed, in a survey of orators in the *Brutus*,⁵⁸ declares it impossible to think of anyone to whom he ranks second, and affirms his manner or style of speech to be simultaneously smart and vivid, but soaring too, and even at times noble; similarly, writing to Cornelius Nepos about orators who have devoted their entire lives to oratory, Cicero doubts that any of them are his equal. ‘Whose witticisms are sharper or more unfailing? Whose language is

more perfectly suited to its subject, or more elegantly crafted?’ As a young man, it seems, he modelled his style of oratory on that of Caesar Strabo, and even went so far as to include in one of his addresses to the jury some phrases lifted from a speech that Strabo had given in defence of the Sardinians. When he spoke in public, so it is reported, his voice was high-pitched, his movements and gestures emphatic, and the impression he gave a pleasing one. He left behind a number of speeches – although not all of these are attributed to him reliably. Augustus, for instance, reckoned the text of ‘In Defence of Quintus Metellus’ to have been a transcription recorded by secretaries who had failed to keep pace with him as he was delivering the speech, rather than something that he had published himself – a not unreasonable deduction, for I have looked at the editions, and on some of them the title is not even ‘In Defence of Quintus Metellus’ but rather ‘A Speech Written by Caesar for Metellus’, despite the fact that it is clearly written from Caesar’s own perspective, vindicating both Metellus and himself from the accusations laid against the pair of them by their common enemies. Augustus also doubted the attribution to him of a second speech, ‘To His Soldiers in Spain’, which has survived in two parts: the first was supposedly delivered in one battle, and the second in the battle that followed it (an engagement in which, according to Asinius Pollio, the attack of the enemy had come so fast that he had no time to address his troops).

[56] He also left commentaries on his campaigns in the Gallic War and in the civil war against Pompey. It is not clear who wrote the commentaries on the Alexandrian, African and Spanish Wars, with some claiming it was Oppius and others Hirtius (it was definitely Hirtius who completed the last

book of the Gallic War, which had been left unfinished). Cicero, again in his *Brutus*, has this to say on Caesar's commentaries:

He wrote commentaries which merit the highest praise. They are plain, direct and a pleasure to read, stripped so bare that rhetorical embellishment might almost have been a robe he had dropped on to the floor. Yet though it was his aim to provide material for those wishing to write history, it may be that his real service was to the kind of bad writer who likes to crimp his sources with a curling iron, while deterring the more sensible class of historian from tackling the subject.⁵⁹

The same commentaries are praised by Hirtius in these terms:

Such is the high regard in which they are universally held that they seem rather to have deprived writers of an opportunity than to have provided them with one. No one can feel more admiration for them, however, than I do: for while others may appreciate how well and accurately he wrote them, only I know how easily and quickly he did it.⁶⁰

Asinius Pollio, however, thought them written without due care and attention to detail (for, he says, Caesar was often too ready to credit other people's accounts of their actions, and to give inaccurate accounts of his own, either deliberately or because his memory was playing tricks on him), and reckoned that it was his intention to redraft and correct them.

He also left a work in two books called *On Analogy*, a polemic against Cato (again in two parts) and a poem titled ‘The Journey’: the first of these he wrote while he was crossing the Alps, on his way back to join his army after doing a circuit of the courts in Nearer Gaul; the second around the time of the Battle of Munda;⁶¹ and the last while on a journey which lasted twenty-four days from Rome to the outer reaches of Spain. Also extant are some letters of his to the senate, which he wrote in columns, so that they could then be bound together and preserved in the form of a small book; this was apparently an innovation of his, for until then the dispatches sent by consuls and generals had always been written across the scroll. There are also letters to Cicero, and to close friends on personal matters: in these, if he wished to communicate anything confidential, he would write in code, changing the order of the letters of the alphabet so that not a single word was comprehensible (the way to decipher the code, should anyone wish to investigate further, is to substitute a letter with the one four places behind it, so that an ‘A’, for instance, becomes a ‘D’). There are reports as well of various works he wrote during his childhood and adolescence – among them ‘Praises of Hercules’, ‘Oedipus’ (a tragedy) and a collection of observations – but Augustus, in a short, direct letter to Pompeius Macer, the man he had tasked with cataloguing his libraries, strictly prohibited their publication.

[57] He was as proficient in the use of arms and in the saddle as it is possible to be, and had unbelievable powers of endurance. On the march he would travel in front of his men, sometimes on horseback, more often on foot, and with his head uncovered come rain or shine; when travelling light,

he would cover prodigious distances – 100 miles a day in a light carriage – at an astonishing speed, swimming across rivers if they threatened to delay him, or else using inflated skins as floats, so that often he would arrive ahead of the very messengers sent to announce him.

[58] It is a moot point whether his operations in the field were characterized more by caution or by boldness, for he would never take his men along a route where they might be vulnerable to ambush unless he had first scouted the terrain, nor did he make the crossing to Britain until he had personally organized a survey of the ports, the passage and the approaches to the island. Conversely, when news arrived that his camp in Germany was under siege, he reached his men by passing through the enemy pickets disguised as a Gaul. He ran the enemy's naval blockade of the crossing from Brundisium to Dyrrachium by making it in the winter, and instructing his forces to follow him; eventually, after they had ignored his repeated summons and continued to hesitate, he pulled a cloak over his head and secretly boarded a small boat by night – and only once the violent headwinds had almost capsized him did he reveal his identity to the captain and order him to turn back.

[59] He would never abandon a venture, nor even postpone it, to propitiate the gods. When an animal that he was about to sacrifice bolted, it did not stop him setting out on his expedition against Scipio and Juba, and even when he stumbled while disembarking from his ship he turned the omen to his advantage by crying out, 'I have you, Africa, in my grasp.' He countered a prophecy that no one named Scipio would ever be defeated in the province, but would always enjoy good fortune there, by keeping with

him in his camp a particularly disreputable member of the Cornelian clan – a man so dissolute in his behaviour that he was nicknamed ‘Salvito’.⁶²

[60] Rather than always keeping to a set plan of battle he would fight when and as the opportunity arose, often directly at the end of a march, and sometimes when the weather was so foul that no one could possibly have expected him to make a move; only towards the very end of his career would he hesitate before engaging an enemy, on the grounds that the more victories he had won the less he should tempt fate, and that there was nothing to be gained by victory that could compensate him for what he would lose were he to suffer a defeat. Driving an enemy from the field of battle, he would also make a point of seizing their camp: a tactic that deprived them of any prospect of rallying. Whenever the outcome of a battle hung in the balance he would send away the horses, his own at their head, so that his men, deprived of any means of escape, would have no choice but to stand their ground.

[61] His own horse was a remarkable creature, with feet that were almost human, for its hooves were cloven in the fashion of toes – and because seers, back when it was foaled in his stables, had interpreted this to mean that whoever owned it would rule the world, he had raised it himself, and done so with such care that not only had he been the first to ride it, but no one else could ever mount it. In due course he even dedicated a statue of it in front of the temple of Venus Genetrix.⁶³

[62] When the line of battle gave way he would often rally it single-handed, planting himself in the face of those who were fleeing, grabbing hold of them one by one, twisting them round by the throat to face the

enemy – and so panic-stricken might his troops become that once, when he tried to halt a standard-bearer, the man threatened him with the spike on the bottom of the standard, and another, when he blocked him, shoved the standard into his hands.

[63] No less remarkable was his presence of mind – and the proofs of it are even more so. After the Battle of Pharsalus, when he had sent his forces ahead of him into Asia and was crossing the Hellespont in a small transport ship, he ran into a squadron of ten enemy warships under the command of Lucius Cassius; rather than turn tail, however, he drew up close beside Cassius' galley, urged him to surrender, and then, when Cassius did so, took him on board and accepted him as a suppliant.

[64] On another occasion he was attacking a bridge somewhere in Alexandria when a sudden counter-attack by the enemy forced him to take to a small boat; then, because lots of other men had followed him into the boat, he jumped into the sea and escaped by swimming 200 yards to the nearest ship, holding up his left hand as he did so to prevent the papers he was clutching from getting wet, and hauling his general's cloak behind him with his teeth so that the enemy would not be able to claim it as a trophy.⁶⁴

[65] His soldiers (whom he valued neither for their moral character nor their social standing, but solely for their prowess as fighters) he treated with equal measures of harshness and leniency. He did not insist on strict discipline at all times and in all places, but only when the enemy was near – and then such a martinet did he show himself that he would never let them know in advance whether they were to march or fight a battle, but would keep them primed for any eventuality, steeled to follow him at a moment's

notice, whenever he might wish. Often – and especially if it was raining or a feast day – he would do this without explanation; and sometimes, after warning his men to keep a close eye on him, he would slip away abruptly, by day or by night, and lead them on a much longer march than normal, so as to put the stragglers through their paces.

[66] Should his men ever begin to panic at reports of an enemy's numbers, he would neither deny nor downplay the rumours but reinforce them with exaggeration and embellishment. So it was, for instance, that the dread which Juba's approach had inspired in his troops prompted him to summon them to an assembly. 'You should know this,' he told them. 'In a few days' time the king will be turning up with ten legions, 30,000 horsemen, 100,000 lightly armed infantrymen and 300 elephants. So stop the questions. Stop the conjectures. You can rely on me to have correct intelligence – and I will order anyone who doesn't believe it to be put in a clapped-out old boat and left to be borne by the winds to whatever lands they may take him.'

[67] Not that he would search out every offence, or punish every breach of discipline as required by the rule book – for, although relentless in compiling evidence against deserters and mutineers, and merciless in dealing with them, he would turn a blind eye to other transgressions. Sometimes, too, if his troops had been victorious in a great battle he would relieve them of their duties and allow them free rein to indulge themselves, boasting that his soldiers fought just as well when soused in perfume. At meetings with his men he would address them not as 'soldiers' but by the more flattering term 'comrades'; also, in his determination that his troops

should cut a dash, he equipped them with weapons ablaze with gold and silver, not just for show, but to ensure that in battle the dread of losing them would make them that much harder to be prised from his soldiers' grasp. So deep was the love he felt for his men that news of the disaster suffered by Titurius⁶⁵ prompted him to grow out his beard and hair and refuse to cut them until he had secured his vengeance.

[68] By these means he was able to make his men both utterly devoted to him and formidably tough. When the civil war broke out, all the centurions in his army offered to fund the expenses of a horseman from their own savings, and every last soldier offered to serve for free, without rations or pay – for those who had the resources to do so pledged to take care of those who would otherwise have been in need. Not once during the entire course of the war did any of them desert him, and the vast majority of those taken prisoner, when they were offered their lives on condition that they take up arms against him, refused. Whether under siege themselves or putting others under siege, they endured hunger and other deprivations with such fortitude that Pompey, when he saw the bread made from grass on which they had been subsisting among the siegeworks at Dyrrachium, exclaimed that he was fighting wild beasts, and ordered it immediately removed and concealed from his men, so that their spirits should not be broken by the evidence of their enemy's stamina and powers of endurance.

The measure of their formidable qualities as a fighting force is provided by an incident which occurred at Dyrrachium, when, after an engagement had gone against them, they insisted that they should be disciplined for it – and their general, rather than punish them, felt called instead to offer them

consolation. In other battles, despite being greatly outnumbered, they had no problem in defeating countless forces of the enemy. Indeed, a single cohort of the Sixth Legion, charged with defending an outpost, kept four of Pompey's legions at bay for several hours, even though almost all of them suffered damage as the enemy's missiles rained down on them (130,000 arrows were subsequently found to have fallen inside the palisade). Only reflect on the deeds of individual soldiers – the centurion Cassius Scaeva, say, or the regular soldier Gaius Acilius, not to mention others – and this will hardly seem surprising. Scaeva lost an eye, was shot in his thigh and shoulder, and had his shield pierced through 120 times, but still defended the gate of the outpost which had been assigned to him as his watch. In the battle fought in the waters off Massilia, Acilius had his right hand cut off when he seized the stern of an enemy ship, but still – imitating the famous example of the Greek Cynegirus^{[66](#)} – jumped into the ship and used the boss of his shield to drive back everyone in his way.

[69] Not once in all the ten years of the Gallic War did his soldiers mutiny; even during the civil wars, when there was the occasional bout of unrest, it never took them long to return to their duties – and this not because their complaints were indulged by their commander, but due to the sheer force of his authority. For he never gave way to insubordination, instead always confronting it head on: at Placentia,^{[67](#)} for instance, at a time when Pompey's forces were still in the field, he dismissed the entire Ninth Legion in disgrace, and would only reinstate them after repeated grovelling entreaties and the punishment of the ringleaders.

[70] Similarly, when the war in Africa was at its height, and the men of the Tenth Legion, camped outside Rome, were threatening to rampage through the city if they were denied their discharge and bonuses, he did not hesitate to overrule the advice of his friends by going to meet them and disbanding the legion; all it took to bring them round, however, was his calling them ‘citizens’ rather than ‘soldiers’, since with that single word their mood was so altered that they immediately cried out to him that they were his soldiers, and – ignoring the fact that he had disbanded them – followed him to Africa. (Even then he punished the ringleaders of the mutiny by depriving them of a third of their share of the booty, and the land they had been due to receive.)

[71] From a young age, he was always highly attentive to the needs of his clients and showed them great loyalty. So spiritedly did he defend Masintha, a young man of noble birth, in his dispute with King Hiempsal that he actually pulled the beard of Juba, the king’s son;⁶⁸ then, the moment Masintha had been ordered to pay tribute to the king, he seized the young man from a group of people sent to arrest him and hid him in his house: here he kept Masintha until he had completed his praetorship and had to leave for Spain, at which point he carried the young man off in his litter, unnoticed behind all the crowds of his retainers and the lictors’ fasces.

[72] He always treated his friends with such consideration and concern that once, while he was travelling through a forest with Gaius Oppius and his companion suddenly fell ill, he gave him the sole billet that offered any shelter, and himself slept outside on the ground. Once he had come to power he promoted people of very inferior background to some of the

highest offices in the state and flatly declared, when he was criticized for this, that he would have returned muggers and murderers the same favour had they too rallied to the defence of his honour.

[73] On the other hand, he never bore a grudge against anyone so deep that he was not ready to stop nursing it should the occasion arise. That Gaius Memmius had delivered some ferocious tirades against him, to which he had responded with speeches no less cutting, did not stop him from supporting his erstwhile rival in his candidacy for the consulship. When Gaius Calvus sought through the agency of friends to be reconciled after writing some notorious epigrams against him, he it was who penned the first direct communication between them. Similarly, when Valerius Catullus – whose poems about Mamurra had done lasting damage to his reputation, as he himself freely acknowledged – apologized for writing them, he invited Catullus to supper that very day, and continued to enjoy the company of the poet's father, just as he had done for a long time.⁶⁹

[74] Even at his most vengeful he was inclined by instinct to displays of mercy – so that, for instance, when he took prisoner the pirates who had held him captive, and whom he had sworn to crucify, he ordered that their throats should first be slit before they were fastened to their crosses.⁷⁰ He could never bring himself to harm Cornelius Phagites, who had cornered him one night when he was sick and in hiding, and would have handed him over to Sulla had the payment of a bribe to the bounty-hunter not enabled him to escape by the skin of his teeth. Rather than have Philemon, his secretary, put to torture for promising to poison him on behalf of his enemies, he granted the slave a quick death. When he was summoned to

give witness against Publius Clodius, who was accused of committing adultery with Pompeia, his wife, and of profaning the rites of a festival, he denied all knowledge of the affair, even though his mother, Aurelia, and his sister, Julia, had both given a faithful account of the episode to the very same judges; and when he was asked why, if his wife were innocent, he had insisted on divorcing her, he answered, ‘Because, in my opinion, it is not enough for members of my family to be exonerated in a court of law – they must be above suspicion too.’

[75] It is certainly the case that in his conduct both during the civil wars and in the wake of his victory he showed remarkable restraint and mercy. In contrast to Pompey, who declared that he would treat as an enemy anyone who did not take up arms in the cause of the republic, he declared publicly that he would view those unable to choose between the two sides as his friends, and gave to all the centurions whom he had promoted to that rank on Pompey’s recommendation permission to go over to Pompey’s side. When, amid the frequent comings and goings that accompanied the negotiation of surrender terms at Ilerda, Afranius and Petreius had a sudden change of heart, arrested the Caesarian agents in their camp and put them to death, he could not bring himself to retaliate against this act of treachery in kind.⁷¹ During the Battle of Pharsalus he called for citizens to be spared, and when it was over allowed each of his men to nominate someone from the opposite side to be saved from execution. Indeed, it will be found that the only Pompeians who actually perished (aside from those who fell in the battle) were Afranius, Faustus and Lucius Caesar the Younger – and even these, it is thought, were put to death against his wishes, despite the fact that

the first two had taken up arms again after he had granted them a pardon, while Lucius Caesar had not only slaughtered his freedmen and slaves in the most brutal manner, hacking them to pieces and torching them, but had gone so far as to butcher the wild animals he had assembled ready for the entertainment of the people. Finally, when the war was over, he allowed everyone whom he had not previously pardoned to return to Italy, and to hold magistracies and to command armies. He even restored the statues of Lucius Sulla and Pompey that had been smashed by the people, and from then on, no matter how threatening the plots directed against him, and no matter how abusive the verbal attacks, his preference was always to check, not to punish. Accordingly, the only action he took against conspiracies and night-time meetings when they were detected was to make clear through edicts that he was aware of them; nor, when he was the subject of savage criticism, did he feel called upon to do anything more than issue a public reprimand, and warn that enough was enough. Even the savaging of his reputation by Aulus Caecina in a ferociously defamatory book and by Pitholaus in some highly abusive poems he bore with good grace.⁷²

[76] Weigh all this in the balance against the other things he did and said, however, and the reckoning must still be that he abused his position of power and deserved to be slain. Not content with accepting honours on an excessive scale (a succession of consulships,⁷³ the dictatorship in perpetuity, responsibility for regulating the public's morals, not to mention being given the right to use *Imperator* as his forename and 'Father of His Country' as his *cognomen*, to have a statue placed among those of the kings⁷⁴ and to sit on a raised dais at the theatre), he also allowed honours

to be bestowed on him far too great for any mortal to accept: a golden seat in the Senate House and in the law courts, a chariot and a litter for the Circus procession,⁷⁵ temples, altars, statues placed next to those of the gods, a couch of the kind on which statues of the gods are placed, his own priest, an extra college of the *Luperci*, a month named after him – anything, in short, that he might desire, whether for himself or as something bestowed on others.

His third and fourth consulships he held in name only, since the powers of the dictatorship which he had been granted simultaneously met all his requirements; moreover, in both these years he appointed two consuls to take his place during the final three months of his term of office, held no elections aside from ones for the tribunes of the plebs and the plebeian aediles, and gave prefects rather than praetors the responsibility for administering the city during his absence. When one of the consuls died unexpectedly the day before the Kalends of January,⁷⁶ he gave the magistracy to a man who had requested it for the few hours that it was vacant. With an equal disregard for the law and the traditions of his country, he allocated magistracies to people years in advance, bestowed the insignia of consular rank on ten former praetors, and admitted into the Senate House men who had actually been given their citizenship – some of them Gauls who had barely left barbarism behind! What is more, he put his own slaves in charge of the mint and of collecting revenues for the state, and trusted the care and command of the three legions he had left behind in Alexandria to Rufio – a man who was not just the son of one of his freedmen, but someone he had continued to use sexually well past adolescence.

[77] His public statements, as recorded by Titus Ampius, betrayed an equal arrogance: that the republic was nothing, just a name without substance or form; that Sulla had been politically illiterate to give up the dictatorship; that men were obliged now never to show him disrespect when they spoke to him, and to treat what he said as law. Indeed, to such extremes was he led by his arrogance that once, when a seer announced at a sacrifice that the entrails boded no good and the heart was lacking, he declared that everything would be fine, simply because he wished it to be, and that the lack of a heart in an animal was not to be taken as an ominous sign.

[78] There was one episode, however, which provoked particular resentment, and thereby served to doom him: his failure to rise when, as he sat in front of the temple of Venus Genetrix, the entire body of senators came into his presence, bringing with them numerous decrees conferring on him the most remarkable honours. Some think that he did try to rise, but was held back by Cornelius Balbus; others that he made no effort at all, and when Gaius Trebatius suggested that he should give him a warning glare. This behaviour seemed all the more insufferable for the indignation he had shown when, during his triumph, he had ridden past the tribunes' bench and one of the tribunes, Pontius Aquila, had failed to stand up; 'Come on, then, Aquila,' he had shouted, 'take the republic from me', and for days afterwards not a promise would he make to anyone without adding the proviso, 'just so long as it pleases Pontius Aquila'.

[79] Then, as if this insult had not made his contempt for the senate clear enough, his arrogance broke new bounds. What happened was this: as he

was returning to Rome from the Latin festival,⁷⁷ to cheering from the people wilder than any ever heard before, someone in the crowd placed a laurel wreath bound with a white ribbon⁷⁸ on his statue; and when the tribunes of the plebs Epidius Marullus and Caesetius Flavus ordered the ribbon unwound from the wreath and the man hauled off to prison, he reprimanded the tribunes severely and deprived them of their office (whether this was prompted by his frustration at the poor reception given to the floating of the idea of monarchy, or because – as he claimed – he had wanted the glory of refusing it for himself, is unclear). From that moment on he was never able to escape the fateful allegation that he aspired to the title of king, and this despite his best efforts: for when the masses hailed him as such, he replied that he was Caesar, not a king, and when, at the Lupercalia, the consul Antony⁷⁹ kept trying to place a diadem on his head as he stood before the Rostra, he pushed it away and had it sent to the temple of Jupiter the Best and the Greatest on the Capitol. And still the rumours kept swirling: that he was planning to move with all the various assets of Roman power to Alexandria or Troy, while draining Italy of her reserves of manpower and leaving Rome to be governed by his cronies; and that Lucius Cotta, at the next meeting of the senate, would propose he be given the title of king, on the grounds that the Board of Fifteen had discovered in the Sibylline Books that only a king could vanquish the Parthians. So it was that the conspirators, rather than be forced to assent to this, brought forward their designs.

[80] Rather than plot in groups of two or three, as they had previously tended to do, the conspirators now pooled all their various ideas; and even

the general public, in their dissatisfaction with the state of affairs, did not just grumble among themselves, but openly protested the autocratic character of his regime and called for champions to defend them. ‘Make refusing to show a new senator the way to the Senate House your good deed for the day,’ read one placard when foreigners were admitted to the senate, while the following chant was heard everywhere:

Caesar led the Gauls in triumph – then into the Senate House:
down the Gauls all pulled their trousers, and on they put their
senators’ stripes.

When Quintus Maximus, who had been appointed consul not for a full term but only for three months, entered the theatre and the licitor – as was the convention – summoned the audience to mark his arrival, everyone yelled out, ‘But he’s not a consul!’⁸⁰ In the first elections to be held after the removal of Caesetius and Marullus from office, lots of people were found to have voted for them as consuls.⁸¹ Someone wrote on the base of Lucius Brutus’ statue,⁸² ‘Would that you were living now!’, and on the base of Caesar’s statue,

Brutus, because he threw out the kings, was made the first consul:
This man, because he threw out the consuls, has just been made
king.

The conspiracy featured more than sixty people and was led by Gaius Cassius, Marcus Brutus and Decimus Brutus. Initially, they could not decide whether to divide themselves into two groups, with the first being

given responsibility for hurling him off the bridge as he was summoning the tribes to vote in the Campus Martius, and the second for finishing him off, or to attack him on the Sacred Way or at the entrance to the theatre; but then, when it was announced that senators would meet in Pompey's Senate House on the Ides of March,⁸³ the place and time chose themselves.

[81] The portents that should have alerted Caesar to his approaching murder were unmistakable. Just a few months beforehand, when colonists who had been settled in Capua in accordance with the Julian law⁸⁴ were clearing some ancient tombs from a site where they wished to build their villas, and setting to work with all the more relish for the discovery they had made, as they rummaged about, of some vases of antique workmanship, they came across the tomb in which Capys, the founder of Capua, was said to have been buried; and inside the tomb they found a tablet of bronze, on which the following message, inscribed in Greek words and characters, was written: ‘When the bones of Capys are disturbed, then shall one of his descendants be slain at the hands of a kinsman, and soon afterwards be avenged, at terrible cost to Italy.’ (The source for this, by the way, should anyone suppose it mere fantasy or fabrication, was Cornelius Balbus, a man who knew Caesar extremely well.) Similarly, just a few days before his assassination, he was informed that a herd of horses which he had dedicated to the Rubicon while making his crossing of the river, and turned loose to roam free, were stubbornly refusing food and shedding floods of tears; likewise, as he was performing a sacrifice, the soothsayer Spurinna warned him, ‘Beware a danger that will come no later than the Ides of March.’ Then, the day before these same Ides, a wren (or ‘king’s bird’, as it is

known) was being pursued by a flock of various other birds from a nearby grove and flew, holding a sprig of laurel in its beak, into Pompey's Senate House; and there it was torn to pieces. Finally, the very night before the day of his murder dawned, he dreamed that he was variously flying above the clouds and clasping the right hand of Jupiter with his own, while Calpurnia, his wife, imagined that she saw the pediment⁸⁵ of their house come crashing down, and her husband run through as she clasped him to her breast – and then abruptly the doors of their bedchamber were flung open, as though by an invisible hand.

For these reasons, and also because he was not feeling well, he could not make his mind up whether to leave for the senate or to postpone the business he had scheduled for it that day, but eventually, after Decimus Brutus had urged him not to disappoint the large number of senators who had been waiting for him all morning, he set out at around the fifth hour;⁸⁶ and when, on the way, somebody handed him a note giving him the details of the plot, he shoved it in among all the other papers he had in his left hand, with the aim of reading it soon afterwards. Into the Senate House he went, even though the omens in the entrails of the large numbers of animals put to sacrifice had been uniformly bad; and as he went in, scorning the need for marks of divine favour and mocking Spurinna as a false prophet, because the Ides of March had come and no harm had befallen him, Spurinna answered, ‘They have come – but they are not yet gone.’

[82] Once he was sitting down, and the conspirators, pretending to pay him their respects, had gathered in a circle around him, the lead – as it had been agreed it should – was taken by Tillius Cimber, who approached him

under the pretext of asking for a favour, and then, when he signalled with a gesture that this was a matter for another time, grabbed his toga at both shoulders; whereupon, as he cried out, ‘Why, you are using force on me!’, he was stabbed from behind by one of the Casca brothers, just below the throat. Caesar, grabbing Casca by the arm, ran him through with his pen and tried to make a break for it, but was prevented from doing so by another blow; then, as he realized that he was being struck by drawn daggers from all sides, he covered his head with his toga while also, with his left hand, drawing its folds over the length of his legs to ensure that, when he fell, the lower part of his body would be covered, and his shame would be the less. Twenty-three blows fell on him in all, and only at the first did he give a groan, but otherwise made not a sound – although it is reported by some that he did cry out in Greek, when Marcus Brutus lunged at him, ‘What, you too, my child?’⁸⁷ The chamber then emptied and his lifeless body lay there a while, until three young slaves bundled it into a litter and carried it home, one arm dangling as it went. And of all the many wounds he suffered, only the second, which he took in the chest, was mortal: such was the verdict of Antistius, the surgeon. (It had actually been the intention of the conspirators to drag his dead body into the Tiber, appropriate his goods and revoke his legislation, but they had given up on this plan because they were nervous of Mark Antony, the consul, and Lepidus, the master of horse.)

[83] It was at the request of his father-in-law, Lucius Piso, that his will – which he had made on the Ides of the previous September in his villa at Lavicum and given for safe keeping to the head of the Vestal Virgins – was

opened and read out in Antony's house. We know from Quintus Tubero that it had been his practice, from the time of his first consulship to the outbreak of the civil war, to name Gnaeus Pompey as his heir – and indeed had publicly told his troops as much. In his last will, however, he named as his heirs the three grandchildren of his sisters, with Gaius Octavius receiving three-quarters of his estate (and even, at the end of the document, being adopted into his family and given his name), and Lucius Pinarius and Quintus Pedius sharing the remaining quarter between them.⁸⁸ Many of those who had gone on to murder him had been nominated to serve as guardians to his son (if he had ever ended up having one, that was), while Decimus Brutus was actually listed among the heirs of the second rank. To the Roman people he left his gardens beside the Tiber to serve them as parks, and to each individual citizen 300 sesterces.

[84] Once the time for the funeral had been set, a pyre was built in the Campus Martius next to the tomb of Julia, and a golden shrine, modelled on the temple of Venus Genetrix, placed on the Rostra; inside it was an ivory couch with gold and purple coverings, and at its head stood a pillar hung with the robes in which he had been murdered. Because it seemed there would not be enough time in the day for all those who wished to bring funerary offerings, instructions were given that, rather than form a procession, they should instead take them from the city to the Campus by any route they liked. At his funeral games, songs adapted from Pacuvius' *Judgment of Arms* were sung, appropriate to the grief and outrage felt at his death:

Did I save these men that they might murder me?

Verses from Atilius' *Electra* expressive of similar sentiments were also sung.⁸⁹ Rather than deliver a funerary eulogy, Antony instead employed a herald to read out the decree listing every honour, both human and divine, which the senate had voted him in a single sitting, together with the oath by which all the senators had bound themselves to protect his personal safety – and then he added a few words of his own. The couch with the dead man on it was borne by magistrates and former magistrates down from the Rostra into the Forum. As some urged that he should be cremated in the temple of Jupiter on the Capitol, and others in Pompey's Senate House, all of a sudden two figures, each one with a sword at his side and brandishing a pair of javelins, set fire to the bier with blazing torches; no sooner had they done so than the crowd of bystanders began stoking it with dry branches, and with wood taken from the platform and benches on which the judges sat, together with anything else that might serve as an offering. Then the flute-players and the actors tore off the costumes which had originally been provided for them to wear during his triumphs and which they had put on again specially for the occasion, ripped them up and scattered them into the flames; his legionaries, the veterans of his wars, did the same with the weapons they had worn to the funeral as marks of respect; and even large numbers of respectable married women began hurling the jewels they had been wearing on to the fire, together with the good-luck charms and bordered togas of their children. At the height of the public mourning, large numbers of people from distant lands also joined in the lamentations, each in their own distinctive fashion – and none more so than the Judaeans, who

night after night would gather in a great crowd at the place where the body had been burned.⁹⁰

[85] The moment the funeral was over, a mob carrying torches made for the houses of Brutus and Cassius, where they were only just beaten back; then, running into Helvius Cinna, they killed him and carried his head around the city fixed on a spear (this was because they had muddled his name with that of Cornelius Cinna, who was on their hit list because of a speech he had made the previous day attacking Caesar). After this, they set up a solid column almost twenty feet high, made of Numidian stone and inscribed with these words: ‘TO THE FATHER OF HIS FATHERLAND’. There they continued for a long time to offer sacrifice, to make vows, and to settle various of their disputes by swearing oaths in the name of Caesar.

[86] Among Caesar’s associates there was a lingering suspicion that, because his health was deteriorating, he had lost the will to live, let alone to safeguard himself, and that this was why he paid no attention either to portents or to warnings from his friends. Others think that it was his confidence in the most recent decree of the senate and in the oaths sworn by the senators which prompted him to dismiss the bodyguard of armed Spanish troops who, until then, had been responsible for his security. Others still are of the opinion that, rather than forever have to worry about the plots hemming him in from every direction, he preferred instead to meet them head on; and some even go so far as to claim that he liked to comment, ‘My security is a matter of greater concern to the Republic than to myself. After all, I have long had my fill of power and glory. But what of the republic? If anything should happen to me, then it will not stay long at peace – for so

grim will things turn that it will soon be plunged into an even more terrible civil war.'

[87] On one thing, however, almost everyone concurs: that his death was such that he might almost have designed it. We know this because once, when he read in Xenophon that Cyrus,⁹¹ during his last illness, had drawn up instructions for his funeral, he expressed horror at the prospect of a drawn-out death, and hoped that his own would be sudden and swift; again, the day before he died, when he was at supper in the house of Marcus Lepidus, and conversation turned to the issue of how best one's life might come to an end, he declared, 'Abruptly and unexpectedly.'

[88] He died in his fifty-sixth year, and was entered into the roster of the gods, not just by formal decree but in the hearts of the masses – indeed, at the first games given in honour of his deification by Augustus, his heir, there was a comet which for seven days in succession rose in a great blaze at the eleventh hour,⁹² and was believed to be the soul of Caesar ascending into heaven (which is why, on his statue, a star is placed on the top of his head). It was decided that the Senate House in which he had met his death should be bricked up, and that never again would the senate meet on the Day of Parricide, as the Ides of March were renamed.

[89] Of his murderers, scarcely any outlived him more than three years or died a natural death. All were condemned, and met with a variety of fates: some died at sea, some in battle, and some, using the very daggers with which they had done such terrible violence to Caesar, killed themselves.

The Deified Augustus

[1] There are numerous indications that the Octavians were long the leading family in Velitrae. Not only did the town, back in ancient times, have an area in its busiest neighbourhood called ‘Octavius’, but one of its sights was an altar dedicated by an Octavius: he had been the leader in a war with a neighbouring town, and while making sacrifice to Mars had been informed that the enemy were launching a sudden attack; immediately, although the entrails were only half-cooked, he had snatched them from the fire and offered them up to the god, then marched out to battle before returning victorious. There was also on record a decree of the people, which stipulated that from that moment on entrails should always be offered to Mars in the same way, and that the remaining portions of the sacrificial victim should be given to the Octavii.

[2] Not long after the family had been enrolled in the senate by King Tarquinius Priscus as one of the minor families,¹ it was transferred to the patricians by King Servius Tullius; then, in due course, it reverted back to plebeian status until, after a lengthy passage of time, it was restored to the ranks of the patricians by the Divine Julius. The first member of the family to be elected to a magistracy by the vote of the people was Gaius Rufus. He reached the rank of quaestor, and fathered two sons, Gnaeus and Gaius,

from whom the two branches of the Octavian family were derived, one of them to much more prestigious effect than the other: for Gnaeus and his descendants all held the very highest magistracies, whereas Gaius and his heirs – whether by chance or by choice – remained in the equestrian order down to the time of Augustus’ father. One of Augustus’ ancestors served as a military tribune in Sicily under the command of Aemilius Papus during the Second Punic War; but his grandfather, a man of considerable wealth who was content just to hold local magistracies, lived to a ripe old age without ever having been embroiled in great events. Such, at any rate, is the general report; but Augustus himself writes merely that he was descended from a long line of wealthy equestrians, and that his father was the first in the family to become a senator. That his great-grandfather had been a former slave, a rope-maker from Thurii, and his grandfather a moneylender were taunts thrown at him by Mark Antony. This is the sum of my researches into Augustus’ ancestors on his father’s side.

[3] Since his father, Gaius Octavius, was both rich and highly respected all his life, I view as improbable claims that he too was a moneylender, and even more so that he was employed to hand out bribes and perform other duties during election time on the Campus Martius. Raised as he was in the lap of luxury, the truth is that he had no difficulty in winning magistracies, which he held with distinction. On his way to Macedonia, the province he had been allotted after his praetorship, he executed a senatorial commission by wiping out a gang of escaped slaves, survivors from the armies of Spartacus and Catiline who had seized possession of the countryside around Thurii. He governed his province with justice no less than courage: for just

as he routed the Bessi and the other Thracians in a great battle, so also did he handle relations with allied states so well that Marcus Cicero, in letters still extant, urged and admonished his brother to imitate Octavius' talent for dealing with Rome's friends (Quintus was proconsul at the time in the neighbouring province of Asia, and not making a great fist of it).

[4] Heading back from Macedonia, Octavius was planning to announce his candidacy for the consulship but died unexpectedly before he could do so, leaving behind him three children: Octavia the Elder, who was his daughter by Ancharia, and Octavia the Younger and Augustus, both by Atia. Atia was the daughter of Marcus Atius Balbus and Julia, the sister of Julius Caesar. On his father's side, Balbus' family could boast a long line of senators with roots in Aricia, while his mother was closely related to Pompey the Great; he himself held office as praetor before going on to serve as one of the twenty commissioners appointed to divide the farmland in Campania among the people in accordance with the Julian law. But here again, as he did with Augustus' paternal ancestry, Mark Antony has cast aspersions, alleging that his great-grandfather on his mother's side was of African birth, and had variously run a perfume shop and a bakery in Aricia. Cassius of Parma, in a letter, taunts Augustus for being the grandson not merely of a baker, but of a moneylender as well: 'Your mother is a lump of dough from the roughest bakery in Aricia; a moneylender from Nerulum kneaded her with fingers filthy from the fingering of coins.'

[5] Augustus was born just before sunrise on the ninth day before the Kalends of October, during the consulship of Marcus Tullius Cicero and Gaius Antonius,² at the Ox Heads in the district of the Palatine, where there

now stands a shrine to him that was built shortly after his death. Evidence for this is found in the senate records: these note how Gaius Laetorius, a young man of patrician family who, following his conviction for adultery, was attempting to mitigate his sentence by arguing that it was excessive for one of his youth and background, also alerted the senators to the fact that he was the owner – indeed, in a way, the guardian – of the very ground first touched by the Deified Augustus after his birth, and that accordingly, for the sake of the god with whom he enjoyed such a distinctive and personal relationship, he should be granted a pardon; whereupon it was decreed that the aforementioned area of the house should be consecrated as holy ground.

[6] Another place claimed to have been the site of his birth (by the locals, at any rate) is the tiny room – no bigger than a pantry, really – which served as his nursery, and can be seen to this day in his grandfather's country house outside Velitrae. No one ever enters this room without first having undergone a ritual purification, and even then only if it is strictly necessary, since people have long believed that anyone who just blunders in is bound to be gripped by convulsions and panic attacks – as was confirmed only recently. The villa had a new owner, who one night happened to go to sleep in the room (either that, or he wished to put the story to the test); barely an hour had passed when all of a sudden a mysterious force came slamming into him, and he was found semi-conscious outside the door, bedclothes and all.

[7] Either to commemorate the place of the family's origin, or because it was outside Thurii that Octavius, soon after fathering a boy, had brought the runaway slaves to defeat, his son, while still a small child, was given the

cognomen ‘Thurinus’. Should anyone want definite evidence for this – that ‘Thurinus’ was indeed his *cognomen* – I can provide it: for I obtained a small bust of him as a boy, an old bronze which had this name inscribed on it in letters of iron, albeit almost faded away. (I made a gift of this statuette to the *princeps*,³ who keeps it among the Lares in his private chamber as an object of reverence.) Replying to Mark Antony, who in his letters repeatedly called him Thurinus as a mark of contempt, he was content merely to express surprise that his former name should be flung at him as though it were an insult. In due course he took the name ‘Caesar’ and then the *cognomen* ‘Augustus’, the first by the terms of his great-uncle’s will, the second on a motion of Munatius Plancus: this had been moved after others had suggested that – since he was, in a very real sense, a second founder of the city – he should be called ‘Romulus’; but Plancus had successfully argued that he should be called ‘Augustus’, since this was not just an original *cognomen* but a much more resonant one as well, bearing in mind that places imbued with a sense of the sacred and those that have been consecrated by augury are both described as ‘august’ (the word itself derives either from ‘augmentation’ or from ‘augury’,⁴ as Ennius makes clear when he writes: ‘After illustrious Rome was founded with augury august’).⁵

[8] When he was four he lost his father, and when he was eleven he appeared before an assembly of the people to deliver a funeral oration in honour of his grandmother Julia. Four years after he had put on the toga that marked him as an adult he was awarded military decorations at Caesar’s African triumph, even though he had been too young actually to take part in

the fighting. Soon afterwards, despite having barely recovered from a serious illness, he followed his great-uncle to Spain, where the war against Pompey's sons was being prosecuted, getting there only after he had suffered a shipwreck and travelled with a bare minimum of companions along roads infested by the enemy – a feat which much impressed Caesar, whose admiration for the enterprise he had shown in making the journey was soon buttressed by the high opinion he came to form of his character. After the recovery of the Iberian provinces, he was sent ahead of Caesar (who was planning an expedition against the Dacians and the Parthians) to Apollonia, where he devoted himself to study; here, after learning of Caesar's murder and that he was Caesar's heir, he hesitated a while over whether to summon the neighbouring legions to his assistance, but eventually dismissed the plan as rash and premature. Nevertheless, he did return to Rome and take possession of his inheritance, despite his mother's doubts and the repeated attempts by his stepfather, Marcus Philippus, a man of consular rank, to dissuade him. Raising an army, he was from that point onwards always in control of the state: first in association with Mark Antony and Marcus Lepidus; then, for almost twelve years, just with Antony; and finally, for forty-four years, holding the reins of power alone.

[9] Now, having provided a summary of his life, I will go through it detail by detail, not chronologically but ordered by theme, so that each topic can be rendered more clearly and intelligibly.

He fought in a civil war five times, at Mutina,⁶ Philippi, Perusia,⁷ Sicily and Actium: in the first and the last of these engagements his adversary was Mark Antony, in the second Brutus and Cassius, in the third Lucius

Antonius (brother of the triumvir) and in the fourth Sextus Pompeius, the son of Pompey.

[10] What originally lay behind all these wars was his conviction that he had no duty more solemn than to avenge his great-uncle and safeguard his achievements: a belief that led him, the moment he had returned from Apollonia, to attempt an armed ambush of Brutus and Cassius, and then, because they had anticipated the danger and made their escape, to pursue them through the courts, laying a charge of murder against them in their absence. Also, when those charged with staging games to mark Caesar's victory were too afraid to put them on, he did so himself. Keen as he was to use his authority to pursue this and other aims, he took advantage of the death of one of the tribunes of the plebs to offer himself as a candidate, even though he was a patrician and not yet a senator.⁸ But when the consul Mark Antony, from whom he had been expecting particular support, blocked his ambitions, and would not even allow him the most basic show of justice without payment of a substantial bribe, he went over to the Optimates, whom he knew detested Antony (and all the more so for Antony's campaign to drive out Decimus Brutus – whom he had blockaded in Mutina – from the province which Caesar had conferred on Brutus, an appointment which had subsequently been confirmed by the senate). Various people encouraged him to sponsor an assassination attempt on Antony, but then, nervous following the exposure of the plot that a similar attempt might be made on him, he lavished as large a bribe as he could afford on Caesar's veterans, and thereby recruited them to his own cause and that of the republic: put in command of this army which he had

assembled, granted the rank of propraetor, and commissioned to relieve Decimus Brutus alongside Hirtius and Pansa, the new consuls, it took him two battles and three months to bring the war he had been assigned to a conclusion. In the first of these battles, so Antony writes, he ran away and only reappeared two days later, having discarded both his general's cloak and his horse; but everyone agrees that in the second battle he measured up not only as a general but as a soldier, since in the very thick of the fighting, when his legion's standard-bearer was seriously wounded, he shouldered the eagle⁹ himself and carried it for a fair amount of time.

[11] When, during this war, Hirtius died in the line of battle, and Pansa not long afterwards of a wound, the rumour began to spread that the deaths of both men were his doing, since, with Antony routed and the republic deprived of its consuls, sole command of the victorious armies was now his. (Aquilus Niger claims that he actually killed Hirtius with his own hands amid the chaos of battle, while so suspicious did the death of Pansa, the other consul, appear that Glyco, a surgeon, was arrested and charged with applying poison to the wound.)

[12] However, when he learned that Marcus Lepidus had welcomed the retreating Antony, and that all the other leaders and armies were coming to terms with the two men, he showed no hesitation in abandoning the cause of the Optimates, justifying this switch of allegiance by citing things that various of them had done and said: for some had dismissed him as a mere boy, while others had declared that he should be honoured and then dispatched, to avoid having to give him and his veterans the recompense that was their due. Leaving no one in any doubt that he regretted his

previous association with their faction, he imposed a huge fine on the people of Nursia, and then, when they were unable to pay it, expelled them from the town: this he did because they had erected a monument at public expense to those of their fellow citizens who had fallen at Mutina and inscribed on it, ‘They fell for freedom.’

[13] After joining forces with Antony and Lepidus, he brought the war at Philippi to a successful close, despite being weak with fever at the time, and again having to fight two battles (in the first of these he was driven from his camp and barely managed to escape to the wing commanded by Antony). Far from showing restraint in victory, he sent the head of Brutus to Rome, there to be dropped at the feet of Caesar’s statue, and treated the most distinguished of his prisoners with great cruelty, not hesitating to savage them in vituperative terms: it is said, for instance, that when one of them implored him as a suppliant for burial, he answered that this would be for the birds to decide; also that when two others, a father and his son, begged him for their lives, he ordered them to draw lots or play *mora* to see which of them would die, and then – when the father, who had offered to die on behalf of his son, was put to death, and his son promptly killed himself – watched them both perish. This is why Marcus Favonius, that would-be Cato, and the other prisoners, as they were being brought out in chains and respectfully saluting Antony as *imperator*, abused him to his face with the foulest insults.

After his victory, when duties were divided between Antony and him, so that Antony took responsibility for ordering the East and he was charged with returning the veterans to Italy and settling them on land in the various

municipalities, neither the veterans nor the landowners thanked him for it: for the latter objected to being evicted, while the former complained that they were not being rewarded as their service had led them to anticipate.

[14] It was at this point that he forced Lucius Antonius (who, trusting in his own authority as a consul and in his brother's power, had sought to subvert the constitutional arrangements) to take refuge in Perusia, and starved him into surrender – albeit at considerable personal risk, both prior to the war and during it. For on one occasion, when he ordered an officer to remove a common soldier who, at the games, had sat down in one of the fourteen rows reserved for senators and equestrians, and a rumour was spread by his enemies that he had subsequently had the man tortured to death, he was mobbed by a crowd of soldiers and barely escaped with his life. Indeed, the only thing that saved him was the sudden appearance of the missing man, safe and sound. Similarly, when he was making sacrifice near the walls of Perusia, he almost fell into the hands of a gang of gladiators, who had sallied out of the town.

[15] After he had captured Perusia, he imposed punishments on a large number of people – and to all who begged him for mercy or sought to make excuses he would reply with the same words: 'You must die.' It is claimed by some authors that, on the Ides of March, he selected 300 senators and knights from among those who had surrendered and had them butchered like sacrificial animals on an altar dedicated to Julius Caesar. Some claim, indeed, that he engineered the entire war with the sole purpose of smoking out his secret enemies and those who were supporting him out of fear rather than choice: for, by giving them the opportunity to follow Lucius Antonius

and then, after he had defeated them, confiscating their estates, he was able to provide his veterans with the rewards they had been promised.

[16] Although he embarked on the Sicilian War early in his career, it dragged on with frequent interruptions – on one occasion because (even though it was summer) his fleet was twice lost to storms, and therefore had to be rebuilt, and on another because, with the corn supply cut and famine tightening its grip, the Roman people demanded that he make peace; at last, though, with his ships repaired and his oars manned by 20,000 slaves freed especially for the purpose, he created a new harbour at Baiae,¹⁰ the ‘Julian’, by letting the sea into Lake Lucrinus and Lake Avernus. Here he spent the whole winter training his squadrons, before going on to defeat Sextus Pompeius between Mylae and Naulochus – although, just as this battle was about to begin, he suddenly fell so fast asleep that his friends had to rouse him, or else he would never have given the signal. It was this, I imagine, that lay behind Antony’s taunt: ‘He could not even look with a steady eye on his fleet’s battle dispositions, but lay on his back in a stupor, just gazing up at the sky – nor did he get up and show himself to his men until the enemy’s ships had been routed by Marcus Agrippa.’ Others criticize him for what he said and did after his fleets had been lost to storms: for he is reported to have declared that he would have his victory in spite of Neptune, and also, the next time the Circus Games were staged, to have removed the statue of the god from its customary place in the procession held to mark them. It is certainly the case that the perils he faced in this war were more numerous than in any other he fought, and of a greater order too. On one occasion, for instance, after transporting an army

to Sicily, he was ambushed while returning to the mainland for the rest of his forces by Sextus Pompeius' prefects, Demochares and Apollophanes, and barely managed to escape with a single ship. On another, when he was going by foot to Rhegium by way of Locri and saw some of Pompeius' biremes¹¹ tracking the coastline, he went down to the shore in the belief that they were his own, and was almost captured. Even as he was making his escape along remote footpaths, however, he was still not safe: for a slave who belonged to his companion Aemilius Paulus and was upset because some years earlier he had proscribed Paulus' father, saw this as an opportunity for revenge, and tried to kill him.

Following the flight of Pompeius, he took out the other member of the triumvirate, Marcus Lepidus (whom he had summoned to his aid from Africa, and who, with the swagger and self-assurance of a man with twenty legions behind him, had been attempting to extort and strong-arm the richest pickings the state had to offer); first he wrested command of Lepidus' army from him, and then, granting Lepidus his life when he begged for it, banished him for life to Circeii.

[17] His alliance with Mark Antony, which had always been an unconvincing and precarious one, barely kept alive by a succession of reconciliations, he finally broke off for good, and – the better to demonstrate how far his rival had degenerated from the standards expected of a citizen – had Antony's will (which had been left in Rome, and named Cleopatra's children among his heirs) opened and read out to an assembly of the Roman people. Even so, once Antony had been declared a public enemy, he still allowed all his relatives and friends to go and join him –

among them Gaius Sosius and Gnaeus Domitius, who at the time were both still the consuls. He also gave public permission to the people of Bononia¹² not to join everyone else across Italy in swearing loyalty to his cause, on the grounds that they had been clients of Antony's family since ancient times. Not long afterwards his fleet won a victory at Actium, in a battle that went on so late into the evening that the victor ended up spending all night on his ship.

From Actium he made for winter quarters in Samos, where he received alarming news of the troops whom, following his victory, he had picked from across his entire army and sent ahead to Brundisium, but now, demanding to be discharged with a lucrative retirement package, were in full mutiny; accordingly, he headed back to Italy, but twice ran into violent storms, once between the headlands of the Peloponnese and Aetolia and a second time off the Ceraunian Mountains; on both occasions he lost a number of his galleys, and even the ship on which he was travelling had its rigging torn away and its rudder snapped. Staying in Brundisium no longer than it took him to settle the demands of his soldiers – twenty-seven days in all – he left by way of Asia and Syria for Egypt: here he laid siege to Alexandria, where Antony had sought refuge with Cleopatra, and quickly made himself master of the city.

Rejecting Antony's last-minute attempt to sue for peace, he forced his adversary to commit suicide and then made an inspection of his corpse; but Cleopatra he was so desperate to keep alive for his triumph that, as she was dying from what was believed to have been the fatal bite of an asp, he had Psylli brought in to suck out the droplets of poison.¹³ He granted the pair

the dignity of a shared burial, and ordered that the tomb which they themselves had begun should be completed. Antony the Younger (who was the elder of Mark Antony's two sons by Fulvia) he had dragged from the statue of the Deified Julius, where the young man had sought sanctuary after the failure of all his many appeals for mercy, and executed; Caesarian too, whom Cleopatra claimed had been fathered by Julius Caesar, and who had made an abortive attempt at escape, he had put to death. The other children of Antony and the queen, however, he spared, and went on to provide for them and to raise them in a manner appropriate to their rank, just as though they were members of his own family.

[18] While in Alexandria, he had the sarcophagus containing the body of Alexander the Great brought out from the shrine in which it lay, and then, after he had gazed upon it a long while, paid it homage by laying a crown of gold upon it, and strewing it with flowers; when, however, he was asked if he would like to view the tombs of the Ptolemies as well, he replied that he wished to see a king, not corpses. Egypt he reduced to the status of a province, and, because he aimed to make it a more fertile and reliable source of grain for Rome, employed his soldiers to dredge all the canals which carry the Nile's floodwaters and over the years had become silted up; also, to amplify the fame of his victory at Actium and to perpetuate its memory, he founded the city of Nicopolis on the nearby shore, established games there (these to be held every five years), enlarged the venerable temple of Apollo, and finally, after he had adorned the site where his camp had stood with trophies taken from the enemy fleet, consecrated it to Neptune and Mars.

[19] In the years that followed he suppressed various insurrections and rebellions, and on a number of occasions nipped in the bud a conspiracy that had been betrayed to him before it could come to full bloom: the ringleader of one such a plot was the son of Lepidus, followed by Varro Murena and Fannius Caepio, then Marcus Egnatius, and after him Plautius Rufus and Lucius Paulus, the husband of his granddaughter; on top of these there was Lucius Audasius, a feeble old man who had been charged with forgery; Asinius Epicadus, who was half-Parthian; and last of all Telephus, a slave whose duty it was to remind his mistress of the names of the people she met. Even the dregs of society, you see, might conspire against him and threaten his life. Audasius and Epicadus had been planning to spirit away his daughter, Julia, and his grandson, Agrippa, from the islands on which they were imprisoned, and take them to the armies;¹⁴ Telephus to launch an attack against both him and the senate and then seize power, under the delusion that this was fated to happen. Indeed, on one occasion the slave of a soldier serving with the army in Illyricum managed to slip past the guards at his door by night, and was arrested outside his bedchamber armed with a hunting-knife; it is unclear whether the man was genuinely disturbed or just pretending to be mad, since even under torture he could not be brought to confess.

[20] He fought only two wars against foreign enemies in person: in Dalmatia, when he was still just a very young man, and against the Cantabrians, following his defeat of Antony. In the Dalmatian War he was actually wounded, once in a battle when he was hit on the right knee by a stone, and again when a bridge collapsed, causing serious injuries to one of

his legs and both his arms. His other wars he delegated to others, although he did intervene – or come close to intervening – during some of the campaigns in Pannonia¹⁵ and Germany, when he left Rome and travelled as far as Ravenna, Milan and Aquileia.

[21] Sometimes at the head of his troops, then, and sometimes through the agency of lieutenants, he conquered Cantabria, Aquitania, Pannonia and Dalmatia, together with the rest of Illyria, and also Raetia¹⁶ and two tribes who lived in the Alps, the Vindelicians and the Salassians. Additionally he stopped the Dacians from making raids into Roman territory, killing three of their chieftains and a large number of their men, and forced the Germans back beyond the River Elbe, only excepting the Suebi and the Sigambri: these, after they had submitted to him, were transported to Gaul and settled on lands adjoining the Rhine. He also pacified various other restive tribes.

Never, though, did he make war on a people without just and pressing cause, and so far was he from lustng after any growth of the empire or his own renown as a conqueror that he obliged some of the barbarian chieftains to swear on oath in the temple of Mars the Avenger that they would faithfully keep the peace which they themselves had requested; indeed, because he had the impression that they placed little value on the men they handed over to guarantee their good behaviour, he sought to obtain women from them (a novel kind of hostage!); always, though, upon all the tribes, he bestowed the right to redeem their hostages whenever they desired. Even the most inveterately rebellious tribes, the most treacherous, suffered nothing worse when taken prisoner by him than the punishment sanctioned by law: namely, to be enslaved, sold into lands that had no border with their

own and kept as slaves there for thirty years. Indeed, such was his reputation for moral excellence and moderation that even the Indians and the Scythians, peoples known to us only by rumour, were persuaded to send ambassadors on their own initiative to secure his friendship and that of the Roman people. The Parthians in a similar manner readily ceded him Armenia when he laid claim to it, and, as well as hostages, gave him back the eagles they had captured from Marcus Crassus and Mark Antony when he demanded their return; on one occasion, even, when various pretenders were laying claim to the Parthian throne, they would only accept the king he had nominated for them, and no other.

[22] Only twice between the founding of the city and his own lifetime had the temple of Janus Quirinus been closed;¹⁷ but now, with peace secured by land and sea, he closed it on three occasions within a much shorter period of time. Twice he entered Rome to celebrate an ovation: after the Battle of Philippi and again after the Sicilian War. He celebrated three full triumphs, one after the other on consecutive days: Dalmatia, Actium, Alexandria.

[23] Only twice did he suffer the humiliation of a serious military reverse, and both of these – the Lollian and the Varian disasters – occurred in Germany: the defeat inflicted on Lollius was more of an embarrassment than a major calamity, but the loss suffered by Varus proved almost fatal, for three legions were wiped out, together with their commander, their legates and all the auxiliaries. When the news first reached Rome, he set up watches throughout the city to check any potential disturbances, and he extended the terms of the provincial governors, so that Rome's allies could

be held to their obligations by men of experience with whom they were familiar. Also, following a precedent set during the wars against the Cimbrians and the Marsians,¹⁸ he vowed to hold major games in honour of Jupiter the Best and the Greatest, in the hope that the god would set the state back on its feet. Indeed, so great was his trauma that he is said to have let his beard and hair grow for months at an end, and would sometimes bang his head against a door, crying out, ‘Quintilius Varus, give me back my legions!’ And every year, the anniversary of the disaster would be kept by him as a day of sorrow and lamentation.

[24] He introduced numerous military reforms: most of these were innovations, but some were the revival of practices dating from ancient times. Discipline was ferociously enforced: he refused to allow even his legates to visit their wives, except in winter, and only then grudgingly; he had a Roman knight who cut off the thumbs of his two young sons to prevent them from having to swear the oath of military service put up for auction, together with his entire estate (although, when he saw that some tax-collectors were about to buy the knight, he had him knocked down cheap to one of his freedmen, on the understanding that he would be exiled to the country but live as a free man); he dismissed the entire Tenth Legion in disgrace for insubordination, and met any insolent demands for a discharge from other legions by sending them on their way without the rewards that would otherwise have been their due; he dealt with any cohort that ceded ground in battle by putting every tenth man to death and the survivors on rations of barley; he executed any centurion who left his post, just as if he were rank and file; he punished centurions who committed

other offences by imposing various kinds of humiliations on them, be it making them stand all day in front of the commander's quarters, sometimes just in their tunics, or else obliging them to hold ten-foot measuring poles, or even a lump of earth.¹⁹

[25] Once the civil wars were over he never again addressed his troops as 'comrades-in-arms', either in assemblies or in edicts, but always as 'soldiers'; nor did he permit his sons and stepsons, when they held a command, to use any other form of address, on the grounds that 'comrades-in-arms' flattered soldiers in a way inconsistent with military discipline, not to mention the peaceful nature of the times and the respect that was due to him and his house. Except on those occasions in Rome when there was a fire or he was anxious that problems with the grain supply might lead to rioting, he only twice employed freedmen as soldiers, once to protect the colonies that bordered Illyricum and once to guard the banks of the River Rhine (originally, these troops were slaves he had levied from wealthy men and women and immediately set free, then enrolled in the same unit, so that they would not get to mix with freeborn soldiers, nor carry the same weapons as them). When it came to military decorations, he was readier to award medals and collars than he was crowns for scaling ramparts or walls: for while the former might be valued for their gold and silver, the latter brought much more honour. (Indeed, he was extremely sparing with crowns, distributing them without any show of favouritism, and often even to common soldiers.) After his victory in the waters off Sicily, he presented Marcus Agrippa with a sea-green banner.²⁰ The only men he thought should never be decorated – even though they might have accompanied him

on his campaigns and shared in his victories – were those who had celebrated triumphs: this on the grounds that they themselves had the right to decorate soldiers as they chose.

He thought nothing less became a seasoned commander than dash and impetuosity. ‘Make haste slowly’; ‘Better a steady general than a headstrong one’; ‘Whatever is done well is done fast enough’: these were among his favourite sayings. He also used to insist that no one should join battle or embark on a war unless the prospect of gain was demonstrably greater than the risk of loss. ‘For those who brave great peril in pursuit of only moderate reward’, he liked to say, ‘are like those who go fishing with a golden hook, the loss of which – should the line happen to snap – can never be compensated for, no matter how many catches may be landed.’

[26] He held magistracies and was granted honours before the legally permitted age; some of the offices bestowed on him had never been held by anyone before, and were for life. He commandeered the consulship when he was nineteen, after he had marched with his legions on Rome as though on an enemy city, and sent men to demand the office for him in the name of the army; when the senate tried to play for time, the leader of the delegation – a centurion named Cornelius – threw back his cloak, pointed to the hilt of his sword and in the Senate House itself did not hesitate to say, ‘If you won’t make him consul, then this will.’ He held a second consulship nine years later, a third after a year’s interval, and then every year in succession until he had held the office eleven times; from that point on, although repeatedly offered the consulship, he always refused it until, after a long interval of seventeen years, he requested first a twelfth and then, two years later, a

thirteenth: this was so that, when he led his two sons²¹ into the Forum to embark on public life (Gaius first, and then Lucius), it might be as a man invested with the highest of magistracies. The five consulships he held between his sixth and his tenth lasted a full year, and the other ones variously nine, or six, or four, or three months – although the second he held for only a few hours. For there he was, early on the first day of January, sitting in his curule chair before the temple of Capitoline Jupiter, when he gave up his magistracy and appointed someone else to serve in his place. He did not begin all his consulships in Rome:²² the fourth he began in Asia, the fifth on the island of Samos, and the eighth and ninth in Tarraco.²³

[27] For ten years he was a member of the triumvirate appointed to set the republic back on its feet, and although, as a triumvir, he was initially more reluctant than his two colleagues to launch proscriptions,²⁴ he enforced the policy more brutally than either of them once it had been embarked upon. For while they might often be swayed by personal considerations and, in numerous cases, by entreaties, he alone insisted that no one should be spared – to the degree that he even proscribed Gaius Toranius, who had been his guardian and a colleague of his father Octavius as aedile. Julius Saturninus adds the further detail about him that, when the proscriptions were over, and Marcus Lepidus, in a speech to the senate justifying what had been done, offered hope of clemency in the future, on the grounds that quite enough punishment had been meted out, he retorted that, on the contrary, he had only consented to end the proscriptions on the proviso that all options remained open to him in the future. (In due course,

however, he came to regret this hard-line approach, and elevated Titus Vinius Philopoeman – who was said to have sheltered his patron when he was proscribed – to equestrian rank.^{[25](#)})

There were many other reasons too why he came to be deeply loathed as a triumvir. Once, for instance, when a crowd of civilians had been permitted to hear him address his soldiers, and he noticed that one of them, a Roman knight called Pinarius, was taking notes, he assumed that the man was a spy who had come to nose about and had him run through on the spot. Likewise, he issued such blood-curdling threats against Tedius Afer, a consul elect who had been criticizing him in malicious terms, that the man flung himself to his death. Finally, there was the praetor Quintus Gallius, whom he suspected, when the man came to pay his respects clutching some double-tablets under his cloak, of concealing a sword; reluctant, however, to investigate it there and then in case he might be mistaken, he instead had the praetor abducted from the tribunal soon afterwards by a squad of centurions and their men, and put to torture as though he were a slave; then, when Gallius refused to make a confession, he ordered him executed, but not before he had first gouged out the man's eyes with his thumbs. In his own account of the business, however, he writes that Gallius' request for an audience had been the front for an assassination attempt, and that he had first imprisoned the man, then released him and dispatched him into exile, where he had perished either in a shipwreck or at the hand of bandits.

He accepted the powers of a tribune in perpetuity, and on two separate occasions chose colleagues to serve with him for five-year terms; he also accepted the responsibility for supervising morals and laws in perpetuity

(although not with the official title of ‘censor’), and it was on the basis of this appointment that he three times conducted a census of the Roman people, the first and third times with a colleague, the middle time by himself.²⁶

[28] Twice he contemplated restoring the traditional republican form of government: once in the immediate wake of his defeat of Antony, mindful as he was that Antony had often criticized him for being the obstacle to just such a restoration, and the second time when, drained by a long illness, he actually summoned the magistrates and senate to his house, and gave them a detailed overview of the empire. But then, reflecting that it would not be without risk for him to become a private citizen, and that it would be rash to entrust Rome to the whims of public opinion, he had second thoughts, and maintained his hold on power – and whether the consequences of this decision or his motives for making it were better, it is hard to judge. In private conversation he would often emphasize his good intentions, but he also bore witness to them in an edict with these words: ‘May the privilege be granted me of enabling the republic to stand safe and secure, and may I reap the reward I seek – that of being hailed as the author of the best possible form of government, and of bearing with me when I die the confidence that I have laid foundations for the republic which will remain long in place.’ And this was a prayer which, by doing his utmost to prevent dissatisfaction with the new regime, he personally made come true.

As for Rome, which lacked the adornments appropriate to the majesty of its empire and was vulnerable to flooding and fire, he so improved the city that he could justifiably boast of having found it made of brick and leaving

it made of marble; also, to the degree that human planning can ever make provision for the future, he boosted its defences against natural disasters.

[29] He sponsored the building of numerous public monuments, the most notable of which were his Forum with its temple of Mars the Avenger, the temple of Apollo on the Palatine, and the temple of Jupiter the Thunderer on the Capitol. He built his Forum because it seemed to him that two forums were inadequate to the size of the city's population and the large number of judicial proceedings, necessitating a third; for this reason he hurried to open his new Forum to public use, even before the temple of Mars had been completed, and a law was passed stipulating that criminal trials and the selection of jurors by lots should be held in it, and nowhere else. The temple of Mars he had vowed to build during his campaign at Philippi to avenge his father: this was why he decreed that the senate, whenever it convened to debate declarations of war or the awarding of triumphs, should meet there; that anyone leaving to take up a provincial command should be escorted on his way from the temple; and that a commander returning victorious from a war should place the trophies of his triumph inside its walls. The temple of Apollo he erected in that part of his house on the Palatine which, according to the *haruspices*, the god had shown he wanted for his own by striking it with lightning; he then added a portico to it, complete with a library containing books in both Greek and Latin, and in his later years would often convene meetings of the senate there, and review the lists of jurors. The temple of Jupiter the Thunderer he consecrated in acknowledgement of his brush with death one night during his Cantabrian campaign, when a bolt of lightning had grazed the litter in which he was travelling, and killed the

slave who was lighting his way. He also built various monuments in the names of other people, his grandsons, his nephew and his wife among them: these included the portico and basilica of Gaius and Lucius, the porticos of Livia and of Octavia, and the theatre of Marcellus. He would also regularly encourage Rome's other leading men to spend what they could afford on beautifying the city and adding to its monuments, either by building them from scratch or by repairing and improving existing ones. As a result, a large number of men raised a large number of structures: Marcius Philippus sponsored the temple of Hercules and the Muses, Lucius Cornificius the temple of Diana, Asinius Pollio the atrium of Liberty, Munatius Plancus the temple of Saturn, Cornelius Balbus a theatre, Statilius Taurus an amphitheatre and Marcus Agrippa any number of outstanding monuments.

[30] He divided Rome's urban expanse into regions and wards, and arranged for the former to be supervised by magistrates chosen annually by lot, and the latter by officials called 'masters', chosen by the inhabitants of each district. As a fire-prevention measure he set up bodies of night watches and guards. To prevent the Tiber from flooding he widened and dredged its channel, which had become clogged up with rubbish and hemmed in by buildings along its banks. He upgraded the various approaches into the city by himself sponsoring repair work on the Flaminian Way as far as Ariminum,²⁷ and assigning responsibility for paving the other roads to men who had celebrated triumphs, with the costs being defrayed out of their war booty. He rebuilt temples which had collapsed due to old age or been damaged by fire, and adorned both them and many others with the most spectacular offerings: in the inner shrine of Jupiter's temple on the Capitol,

for instance, he placed not just 16,000 pounds of gold, but precious stones and pearls worth 50 million sesterces, all in a single deposit.

[31] Because he felt that he could not decently stop Lepidus from serving as Pontifex Maximus for as long as he remained alive, he only accepted the priesthood once Lepidus was dead; he then had as many works in Greek and Latin as were of unknown or unreliable authorship, but were popularly supposed to foretell the future (some 2,000 in all), collected from all around and burned; only the Sibylline Books – and even then edited versions of them – were spared: these he placed in Apollo’s temple on the Palatine, in a pair of golden bookcases at the base of the god’s statue. Because the revisions to the calendar made by the Deified Julius had not been followed through, he dealt with the resulting muddle and confusion by renewing the reform process. In the course of this, he gave his name, not to September, the month in which he had been born, but to Sextilis, the month in which he had first become consul and won his most brilliant victories. As well as boosting the number and the standing of the priesthoods, he also added to their privileges, and in particular those of the Vestal Virgins – and when a new one had to be chosen to take the place of one who had died, and lots of people went to great lengths to ensure that their daughters would not be included in the lottery, he solemnly swore that he would absolutely have put forward one of his own granddaughters had any of them been of the right age. He also revived various ancient ceremonies and rites that had fallen into abeyance over the course of time: these included the augury of safety, the office of the High Priest of Jupiter,²⁸ the Lupercalia, the Secular Games and the Compitalia. He banned young men whose beards were yet to grow

from running in the Lupercalia, and young people of either sex from attending the night-time entertainments at the Secular Games unless accompanied by an elder relative. He laid down that the Lares which stood at the crossroads in the heart of each district in Rome should be festooned with flowers twice a year, in spring and summer.

Next only to the immortal gods he honoured the memory of those leaders who had raised the empire of the Roman people from nothingness to greatness. So it was that he renovated the public buildings which they had sponsored, kept their inscriptions in place and placed statues of them all wearing triumphal dress in the colonnades on either side of his Forum. ‘This I have done,’ he declared in an edict, ‘that I may be required by the Roman people, for as long as I shall live, to take these men as my role models – and that all those who in future shall follow me as *princeps* may be required to do likewise.’ He also moved the statue of Pompey from the Senate House in which Caesar had been murdered, and placed it on a marble archway opposite the main entrance into Pompey’s Theatre.

[32] In all kinds of ways there had been a breakdown in public order: this was due in large part to the legacy of lawlessness which had characterized the civil wars, but also to practices which had arisen during the lengthy peace. Entire gangs of bandits went about openly sporting swords, ostensibly for their own protection; out in the countryside, these men would kidnap travellers, making no distinction between slave or free, and lock them up in the slave-barracks of large landowners; also, large numbers of associations were formed which, although they might lay claim to the title of ‘colleges’, had been organized for no purpose other than criminality.

Accordingly, he dealt with this banditry by launching a major crackdown: soldiers were posted to strategically located stations; inspections made of the slave-barracks; all associations not of ancient origin and legitimate standing dissolved. The records of old debts owed to the state treasury – which had always constituted the principal resource for blackmail – he had burned; properties in Rome to which the state had a dubious claim he ruled were to belong to those living in them; the names of people who had long been awaiting trial, and whose attempt to elicit pity by dressing in mourning served no purpose than to gratify those who, for reasons of personal enmity, had brought the prosecutions, he had struck off the lists – what is more, he stipulated that any plaintiff who wished to renew a prosecution was to incur the penalty prescribed for the offence should his suit prove unsuccessful. To ensure that no crime would escape punishment, nor any private suit collapse due to delay, he fixed for the courts to sit an additional thirty days – days which previously had been taken up with the honorary games. To the three existing divisions of juror he added a fourth, recruited from a lower census class: these jurors – the *ducenarii*, as they were called – sat in cases involving small sums. He also enrolled as jurors men aged thirty and over (that is, five years younger than had previously been the case), but reluctantly, faced by mass attempts to evade jury service, he conceded that each division should have an annual exemption, one after the other, and that the practice of holding court sessions in the months of November and December should come to an end.

[33] He himself was assiduous in the administration of justice (sometimes well into the night), and would continue even if he were

physically ailing, usually from his litter, which he would have positioned next to the tribunal, and on occasion even from a couch in his house. He was not only diligent in his administration of justice, however, but merciful in the extreme: to a defendant manifestly guilty of parricide, for instance, he is said to have asked (since the penalty for the crime – being sewn up in a sack²⁹ – is only ever imposed when someone confesses to it), ‘Surely you did not kill your father?’ In another case, in which all the signatories to a forged will were liable to be punished under the provisions of the Cornelian law,³⁰ he distributed to the jury not just two tablets – one to register guilt, the other acquittal – but a third as well, for the pardon of those shown to have been induced to sign by fraudulent means or as a result of misunderstanding. Every year he would refer appeals from litigants living in Rome to the urban praetor, and appeals from provincials to men of consular rank (each province had a former consul assigned to it specifically to deal with such matters).

[34] As well as revising existing legislation, he also enacted some new laws: these covered excessive expenditure, adultery, the boundaries of sexual inviolability, electoral improprieties, and regulations governing marriage. Because the provisions in the last of these were particularly stringent, he was prevented by a storm of protest from enacting them until he had first omitted or eased some of the penalties, agreed that there might be a three-year grace period between the ending of a marriage and the legal obligation to marry again, and increased the benefits awarded to those who took a wife. When, even so, at a public show, members of the equestrian order persisted in agitating for the law to be abolished, he sent for the

children of Germanicus, and then, after he had sat them down on his own and their father's lap and made a public fuss of them, indicated with both his gestures and his expression that the knights should not think it any imposition to follow the young man's example; also, when he learned that men were sidestepping the full impact of the law by engaging themselves to girls who were not yet of marriageable age, and by frequently changing their wives, he shortened the time allowed for engagements, and limited the number of times that a man might divorce.

[35] Because numbers in the senate had been swelled by a low-born and chaotic rabble (indeed, there were over 1,000 senators in all, some of them – men popularly known as *orcini*,³¹ who had been admitted after Caesar's death on the back of favouritism and bribes – most undeserving of the name), he restored the body to its former size and glory by means of two reviews: the first of these, in which each man chose another man, he left to the senators themselves; during the second, which he personally conducted with Agrippa, he is thought to have been protected by a breastplate under his clothing and a sword at his side, and had ten of his burliest friends from among the senatorial order stand around his chair. Even then, so Cremutius Cordus writes, senators were only allowed to approach him one by one after a frisking. Some he shamed into resigning – although he still allowed them the right to wear the distinguishing dress of a senator, to sit in the front rows at the games and to attend public banquets. To ensure that those who had passed muster would fulfil their obligations as senators with a greater sense of respect for their responsibilities, but also not be too inconvenienced by them, he prescribed that every senator, prior to taking his seat, should make

an offering of incense and wine at the altar of the god in whose temple the senate had assembled; that regular meetings should be held no more than twice a month, on the Kalends and the Ides; and that during the months of September and October only a certain number of members chosen by lot would be required to attend for decrees to rank as valid. He also established a council, the members of which were chosen by lot to serve a six-month term, and with whom he would discuss business before it was brought before the full body of the senate. When an issue was particularly pressing he would ask senators to give their opinions, not in the order dictated by convention, but as he chose: he did this to ensure that every senator, rather than just assenting to a proposal, would instead have to stay alert, in case he might be called on to make a proposal himself.

[36] He also introduced various other reforms, ordaining as follows: that the proceedings of the senate should no longer be published; that magistrates should not be sent to the provinces the moment they gave up office; that proconsuls should be granted a fixed sum of money to pay for the mules and tents that would normally have been contracted at public expense; that the management of the public treasury be transferred from the urban quaestors to former or serving praetors; and that the centumviral court, which until then had been convened by ex-quaestors, be convened by the Board of Ten.

[37] He also boosted civic engagement in the running of the state by devising various new posts: so it was that he appointed supervisors of public works, roads and aqueducts; officials to ensure the free flowing of the Tiber and the distribution of grain to the people; an urban prefect; a

board of three officials with responsibility for choosing senators and another for reviewing the companies of knights, as and when required. He revived the censorship, an office which had long been left unfilled; he increased the number of praetors;³² he even insisted that he should have two colleagues whenever the consulship was conferred on him rather than one (although on this he failed to get his way, since everyone protested that his dignity was already impaired quite enough by the fact that he did not hold the magistracy alone but shared it).

[38] He was no less generous when it came to honouring prowess in war: over thirty generals were awarded a triumph thanks to him, and even more were granted triumphal regalia. To ensure that the sons of senators were habituated to public life as young as possible, he permitted them to wear the broad stripe as soon as they began wearing an adult's toga, and to attend meetings of the senate; also, when they embarked on military service, he would give each one a cavalry division to command as well as a post in a legion as a tribune. (Indeed, to allow every young man who had just donned the broad stripe a chance to experience life in camp, he would often put a pair of them in charge of the one division.) Although the knights had long since stopped parading in companies, he revived the tradition, and would regularly hold reviews; he did not, however, oblige anyone whose status was publicly questioned during the parade to dismount, as had also been the custom, and he permitted anyone who was obviously elderly or physically impaired to send his horse ahead of him to the review, and then, when summoned to present himself, to come on foot. Subsequently, he allowed

anyone who was over thirty-five and did not wish to keep his horse to get rid of it.

[39] Helped by ten men enlisted from the senate, he obliged each knight to give an account of his life: should this provide cause for censure, he would either impose a punishment on the man, or demote him, or issue him with a warning proportionate to the offence.³³ His mildest warning he would issue by publicly handing over a tablet, to be read by the offender on the spot in silence. Some knights he demoted because they had borrowed money at a low rate of interest and then invested it at a higher rate.

[40] On those occasions when there were not enough candidates of senatorial status running for the tribunate, he would appoint Roman knights to serve as tribunes, with the stipulation that, once they had served their term of office, they might then continue as members of whichever order they preferred. When, however, large numbers of knights who had lost their ancestral fortunes in the civil wars, afraid of being punished under a provision of the theatre law,³⁴ lacked the nerve to watch the games from the fourteen rows of seats reserved for members of their order, he pronounced that the rule would no longer apply to them, should any of them or any of their forebears ever have been registered as a knight.³⁵

He held a census of the people district by district, and looked to prevent ordinary citizens from being called away too often from their work to collect their corn dole by distributing vouchers three times a year, good for four months' supply; but subsequently, at the people's request, he permitted a return to the previous arrangement, whereby each man received a voucher every month. He restored the traditional way of holding elections,³⁶

targeted electoral malpractice with various penalties, and on the day of an election would distribute to those enrolled alongside him in the Fabian and Scaptian tribes 1,000 sesterces each, to stop them looking for bribes from the candidates.³⁷ Because he viewed it as an absolute priority to keep the population pure and untainted by the blood of immigrants and slaves, he was very grudging in his grants of Roman citizenship, and set strict limits on manumissions. When Tiberius petitioned him on behalf of a Greek client, he wrote back that the grant would only be made if the man came to him in person and persuaded him that it was justified; likewise, when Livia requested citizenship for a Gaul from one of the tributary provinces, he turned her down, but did grant the Gaul immunity from taxation, since – as he observed – he would rather endure a loss of revenue than see the honour of Roman citizenship cheapened. Not content with placing many more obstacles in the path of slaves who sought their freedom (let alone freedom with civic status), by detailing with great care the precise numbers, circumstances and status of those who might receive manumission, he also stipulated that no one who had ever been chained or tortured was to be granted citizenship, no matter the terms under which they might be set free. He was an enthusiast as well for the ancient form of dress, and on one occasion, when he saw the crowd at a public assembly sporting dark cloaks, cried out in anger, ‘Behold the Romans, lords of the world, people of the toga!’³⁸ and tasked the aediles with maintaining a ban on cloaks in the Forum and its environs, and ensuring that everyone there wore a toga.

[41] All classes of society regularly benefited from his generosity, whenever the opportunity arose for him to display it. Indeed, when he

brought the contents of the royal treasury from Alexandria to Rome for his triumph, so plentiful did the supply of money become as a result that interest rates plummeted and land values soared; subsequently, whenever property confiscations supplied him with a surplus, he would loan it without interest for a set period to those who could provide security for double the sum. He increased the property qualification for senators from 800,000 sesterces to 1,200,000, and subsidized those of them who could not afford it. He regularly made gifts of varying amounts of cash to the general public, sometimes 400 sesterces, sometimes 300, occasionally 200 or 500 per citizen, with even young boys benefiting (although until then they had not usually received anything until they were ten). Whenever there were problems with the grain supply he would hand out a ration to every man at a very cheap rate, or sometimes even free, and double the number of vouchers used to pay for it.

[42] You should know, however, that he was a *princeps* who cared more for the well-being of the people than for their applause: when, for instance, they complained about the scarcity and expense of wine he sternly reproved them, declaring that Agrippa, his son-in-law, had made great efforts to ensure that no one need go thirsty by building large numbers of aqueducts. Again – in contrast to an occasion when the public agitated for a financial donative he had promised them, and he responded that he was a man of his word – his response to demands for a donative that he had never promised them was to issue an edict condemning them for their disgraceful display of insolence, and to declare that would give them nothing, even though originally he had been planning to. He displayed no less firmness and

consistency when, after promising a donative and then discovering that large numbers of slaves had been freed and added to the roster of citizens, he declared that those to whom he had promised nothing would receive nothing, and gave everyone else less than he had originally promised them, to ensure that the money he had set aside for the donative would be sufficient. On another occasion, when measures to relieve a serious famine were in trouble, he expelled from Rome every slave who was up for sale, together with gladiators from their training schools and – with the exception only of doctors, teachers and a few household slaves – all the city's immigrants; subsequently, after the grain supply had been restored, he wrote that he had been tempted to abolish the corn dole for good, since reliance on it had been damaging to agriculture, but had decided not to follow this through because he knew that the dole would inevitably be restored at some point as a crowd-pleasing measure. Nevertheless, from that point on, he made sure that the regulations governing the dole's administration addressed the interests of farmers and merchants no less than those of the urban population.

[43] In the frequency, variety and magnificence of the entertainments he provided, he excelled all his predecessors. He states that he put on games in his own name on four occasions, and in the name of others – magistrates who were either absent from Rome or could not afford them – twenty-three times; on occasion he even sponsored shows in every district of the city, featuring actors who spoke any number of languages, and on a whole variety of stages; he also sponsored gladiator fights, which were held not just in the Forum and the amphitheatre, but in the Circus and the Saepta as

well (although these were sometimes little more than wild-beast fights); he had wooden stands put up in the Campus Martius for an athletics contest, and a lake dug out near the Tiber (where the grove of the Caesars now stands) for a naval battle. Whenever entertainments were staged he would post guards around Rome, to ensure that thieves did not take advantage of the homes left empty across the city. In the Circus he staged chariot races, running competitions and fights with wild animals, often featuring young men from the highest ranks of the nobility; he also sponsored younger and older boys alike in regular performances of the Troy Game, since he believed that it was a worthy and time-hallowed custom for the flower of the nobility to come to public attention in this way. He presented Nonius Asprenas with a golden torque after the young man had been left lamed by a fall, and permitted him and his descendants to use the *cognomen* ‘Torquatus’. Not long afterwards, however, prompted by an earnest and bitter complaint in the senate from Asinius Pollio, the orator, whose grandson Aeserninus had likewise fallen and broken a leg in the Troy Game, he put an end to these performances. There were times as well when he would employ Roman knights on the stage and in gladiatorial shows, until the practice was banned by senatorial decree.³⁹ From that point on he put only one person of respectable family on the stage – a young man named Lucius – and even then just as a freak show: for Lucius, who was less than two feet and weighed seventeen pounds, had an absolutely deafening voice. One day, during the staging of gladiator fights, he led the first ever Parthian hostages sent to Rome across the middle of the arena, and sat them in the second row above his own seat. Also, on days when

there were no games, it was his practice, should anything unusual have been brought to Rome worthy of attention, to put it on public show, and in such venues as he pleased: a rhinoceros in the Saepta, for instance, or a tiger on a stage, or a serpent fifty cubits long in front of the Comitium. Once, when he was giving votive games in the Circus, he happened to fall ill, and led the procession of the statues of the gods while reclining on a litter; again, at the opening of the games with which he dedicated the theatre of Marcellus, the joints of his curule chair gave way, and he fell flat on his back. Also, when the crowds at the games held for his grandsons began to panic that their seating was about to collapse, and nothing could be done to calm them or stop them from leaving, he crossed from his own place and sat in the section that seemed most at risk.

[44] He improved the behaviour of spectators at the games, which had become very unruly and disorganized, by regulating where they were to sit: this he was prompted to do by the insult done a senator in Puteoli⁴⁰ when, at a full house for the games, not one person in the packed stands offered him a seat. Because of this he encouraged the senate to decree that, no matter the public spectacle, and no matter where it might be staged, the front row of the stands should always be reserved for senators; he also banned the ambassadors of free peoples, and of allied ones too, from sitting in the orchestra in games staged in Rome, after discovering that some of them might actually be former slaves. He sorted soldiers out from civilians, assigned married members of the plebs their own seats, gave boys who were yet to put on an adult's toga their own seating area, next to their tutors, and decreed that anyone not wearing a toga was forbidden to sit in the

central rows. Nor, unless it were from the very highest seats, did he permit women to watch gladiators, even though previously it had been the custom for them to sit wherever they pleased. Only to the Vestal Virgins did he give special seats in the theatre, opposite the praetor's tribunal; but at athletics shows the entire female sex was banned, and with such strictness that, at the games staged in honour of his appointment as Pontifex Maximus, he postponed a much-anticipated fight between two boxers until the morning of the following day, and issued a proclamation that he did not want women to come to the theatre before the fifth hour.

[45] He himself usually watched the action in the Circus from top-floor apartments belonging to his friends or freedmen, but would sometimes sit with his wife and children in the imperial box. Whenever he absented himself from the games, which he might do for hours or even days at a time, he would always make his apologies, and appoint others to preside in his place. Whenever he did attend, however, he made sure not to be distracted: this was either to avoid the criticisms which he knew had been widely directed at his father, Julius Caesar, who had spent his time at the games reading or replying to letters and petitions, or else because he was an enthusiastic fan of the games, something he never sought to conceal, but repeatedly and freely acknowledged. This was why, even if the gladiatorial shows and games were being staged by other people, he would offer trophies and prizes from his own funds, as numerous as they were splendid, nor would he ever attend contests of the Greek variety without honouring each contestant according to his merits. He particularly loved to watch boxers, Latins especially, and not just the regular professionals, whom he

would sometimes match up even against Greeks, but also inner-city gangs who, for all that they might lack training, held nothing back when they brawled in the narrow streets. In short, he honoured with his attention all the various categories of people who, no matter how, contributed to the entertainments staged for the public: he maintained and reinforced the privileges enjoyed by athletes; he decreed that gladiators could only be put to fight if they were allowed to appeal for their lives in the event of defeat; he deprived magistrates of a right, long sanctioned by law, to punish actors at any time and in any place, restricting it instead to the games and the theatre. That said, he was extremely strict in his regulation of wrestling bouts and gladiatorial combat. He was determined too to rein in the contempt for convention shown by actors: so much so that when he found out that Stephanio, an actor in Roman plays, had been using the wife of a citizen to wait on him, and had her hair cropped short to look like a boy, he ordered the man whipped through the three theatres, and then sent into exile; likewise, after a praetor had registered a complaint, he had Hylas, the pantomime actor,⁴¹ flogged before a public audience in the atrium of his own house; he also banished Pylades from Rome, and from Italy too, for gesturing with his finger at a member of the audience who had hissed him, and getting everyone in the theatre to turn and look at the man.

[46] Once he had regulated the city and sorted out the issues affecting it by means of these policies, he increased the population of Italy by personally founding twenty-eight colonies, and by endowing much of it with public works and new sources of revenue – indeed, in part and up to a point, he endowed Italy with the same rights and standing as Rome, for he

devised a new voting system, whereby the members of the senate in each colony cast their votes for magistracies in the capital, and then sent them under seal to Rome in time for the elections. To boost the numbers of people enrolled in the highest ranks of society, he would grant a commission to anyone who wished to serve in the army as a knight, provided only that he came with an official recommendation from his home town; likewise, to encourage the lower ranks to father large families, he would tour the various regions of Italy, and hand out 1,000 sesterces per child to all those who could demonstrate that they had legitimate sons or daughters.

[47] The provinces where legions were stationed, and the ones which he could not readily or safely entrust to annually elected magistrates, he took as his personal responsibility, while leaving the others to proconsuls who were chosen by lot (although, that said, he did swap things round on occasion, and would often visit both categories of province). Some of the cities bound by treaties of friendship he brought directly under Roman rule, if they had become ungovernable and were collapsing into ruin; some he relieved of a crushing burden of debt; some, if they had been destroyed by earthquakes, he rebuilt; some – those that could prove they deserved well of the Roman people – he graced with Latin or Roman citizenship.⁴² By my own reckoning, he visited every province save for Africa and Sardinia. He had actually been planning to make the crossing to both provinces from Sicily in pursuit of the fugitive Sextus Pompeius, but had been prevented by a succession of violent storms, and after that never again had either the opportunity or the motive to visit them.

[48] By and large, the kingdoms of which he had made himself the master by right of war he either restored to the rulers from whom he had taken them or merged them with other such kingdoms. He also fostered close mutual ties between the kings who were allied to Rome, and was always more than ready to encourage bonds of friendship and marriage between them and to serve as their sponsor; indeed, he treated them all with consideration as integral partners of Roman power, caring for those who were children by appointing regents until they had grown up, similarly helping any who had lost their wits until such time as they were better, and raising and educating many of their children alongside his own.

[49] As for his military forces, he distributed legions and auxiliary units across a range of provinces, stationed one fleet at Misenum and another at Ravenna to protect the upper and lower seas,⁴³ and assigned the remaining units to serve either as Rome's garrison or as his own personal guard (previously, until his defeat of Antony, he had kept a troop of Calagurritani⁴⁴ as part of his bodyguard, and then, until the calamity of Varus' defeat, a band of Germans, but had disbanded them both). Even so, he never allowed more than three cohorts in the city, nor did these have a permanent base; the other units he assigned to winter and summer quarters in nearby towns. He introduced fixed pay scales and guidelines for allocating bonuses, and applied them to soldiers across the board: these, which were determined by rank and length of service, in turn determined the rewards each man would receive on his retirement, so that veterans would not be tempted by age or a lack of means to participate in any revolutionary activity once they had been discharged. To ensure a ready and

uninterrupted supply of money to pay the soldiers, both their salaries and their pensions, he set up a military treasury, which he funded by means of new taxes. To ensure that he obtained intelligence of what was happening in the provinces faster, and could thereby evaluate it more quickly, he stationed young men at short intervals along the military roads – although in due course he replaced them with vehicles. This struck him as a more practical arrangement, since it meant that those who had brought him dispatches from a particular place could themselves be questioned, should occasion demand it.

[50] When he stamped official documents, reports and letters with his seal, he initially used one decorated with a sphinx, then with an illustration of Alexander the Great, and finally one of himself: this had been engraved by Dioscorides, and continued to be used as a seal by his successors as *princeps*. He always added the precise time to his letters – day or night, it made no difference – to indicate when they had been written.

[51] Of his mercy and moderation there are plenty of telling examples. Rather than list each and every person of the faction opposed to him who was granted pardon and immunity, and even permitted to hold high office in the state, let me instead cite Junius Novatus and Cassius Patavinus, two people of plebeian background whom he was content to let off with very mild punishments, one a fine and the other a soft form of banishment, even though the former had given wide circulation to a letter savagely critical of him, written in the name of the young Agrippa, and the latter had announced at a party heaving with guests, ‘Don’t think I’m not up for stabbing him, because I am, I want to do it badly.’ At the trial of Aemilius

Aelianus of Cordoba, in which the most serious charge levelled against the defendant was that he had repeatedly expressed negative opinions of Caesar, he turned to the man bringing the prosecution and, putting on a show of anger, said: ‘I wish you could give me proof of this. I’ll let Aelianus know that I too can give a tongue-lashing. I will be far ruder about him than he ever was about me.’ Whereupon he terminated the inquiry for good. Then, when Tiberius wrote him a letter about the case, expressing himself in much more forceful language, he replied, ‘Please, my dear Tiberius, do not get carried away, as young people are prone to do, and be angry just because someone has insulted me. If we can stop people doing us harm, we should rest content with that.’

[52] Although aware that it was usual even for proconsuls to have temples dedicated to them, he would not allow any to be dedicated to him in the provinces unless Rome as well were included in the dedication. In the capital itself, he was absolutely resolute in refusing the honour, and even had the silver statues of him that had been erected early in his career melted down, every last one, and spent the money this brought him on dedicating golden tripods to Palatine Apollo. When the people pressed him as hard as they could to accept the dictatorship, he went down on one knee, flung back his toga, and then, with his chest bared, begged them to stop.

[53] He always loathed ‘Master’ as an accursed and dishonourable title. Once at the games, when someone in a farce he was watching spoke the line ‘O Master just and good!’, and the entire audience burst into cheers, as though the reference had been to him, he immediately silenced their unseemly flattery with a frown and a gesture of his hand, and then, the

following day, sternly rebuked them in an edict; from that point on, he refused to allow his children or grandchildren to call him ‘Master’, whether seriously or as a joke, and prohibited them from using such flatterer’s language even among themselves. He would almost never leave or enter Rome or any other town except in the evening or by night, so as to spare people the need to go to any fuss. During his consulships he usually went out in public on foot, and at other times in a veiled sedan chair. He allowed anyone to attend his morning receptions, even common people, and with such good humour did he accept requests from his visitors that he once teased a particularly nervous supplicant by saying, ‘The way you hand over your petition, you might be giving a small penny to an elephant!’ On days when the senate met, he would never greet the senators anywhere except in the Senate House, addressing them all by name without prompting as they sat; and still, even as he was leaving and making his farewells, they would remain in their seats. Many he viewed as personal friends, with all the mutual obligations that brought, and he never failed to attend their family celebrations; only when he was advanced in years, and had been jostled by a crowd at a betrothal party, did he stop. Despite not knowing the man well, he went in person to console the senator Gallus Cerrinius, who had decided to starve himself to death as a result of unexpectedly going blind, and persuaded him to live.

[54] Someone might well say, as he was speaking in the senate, ‘You are not making sense’, and someone else, ‘I would argue the opposite, if only I had the chance.’ Every so often, angered by the way that a debate had degenerated into violent squabbling, he would storm out of the Senate

House – but then someone would call after him, ‘Senators have the right to speak as they please on matters of state.’ When, during the review of the senate he had commissioned that required each man to nominate another, Antistius Labeo chose an enemy of his, Marcus Lepidus, who had been sent into exile, and he asked Labeo if there were not other men more deserving, Labeo answered him, ‘Every man has his own point of view.’ No one ever got into trouble for speaking his mind freely – not even when it verged on insolence.

[55] The circulation of abusive pamphlets about him in the Senate House never unsettled him; instead, he made sure to refute them point by point, and – rather than track down the authors – merely ordained that in the future anyone who produced libellous pamphlets or poems under a pseudonym should be called to account for it.

[56] Although he was stung by some malicious and spiteful jokes told against him into issuing an official protest, he vetoed a law that would have curtailed the right of people to express themselves as they wished in their wills. Whenever he took part in the election of magistrates, he would go with the candidates he was backing around the tribes and solicit their support in the traditional manner; he would also cast his own vote with his tribe, just like one of the people. He never stood on his dignity when summoned as a witness in a trial, and would readily allow himself to be questioned and cross-examined. Rather than expropriate the houses of the people next to his Forum, he opted instead to make it narrower than he had originally intended. He never recommended his sons to the people for election without adding the words, ‘If they deserve it’; he also made his

displeasure strongly known when, at an age when they were yet to put on an adult's toga, the entire audience in the theatre rose to greet the boys, and remained on their feet to applaud them. He was keen for his friends to play a prominent and influential role in the state – but also to be as subject to the law and the jurisdiction of the courts as everyone else. When Asprenas Nonius, a close friend of his, was prosecuted by Cassius Severus on a charge of using poison, he asked the senate to advise him on his conflict of interests (for, as he put it, he could not decide whether to stand by Asprenas, and risk the charge that he was shielding him from justice, or to stay well clear, and have it seem that he was abandoning his friend, and assuming his guilt before the trial had even begun); in the event, backed unanimously in his course of action by the senate, he sat in court for several hours but without speaking, not even to provide his friend with a character witness. He did, however, appear in court to support his clients – one such being Scutarius, a former officer of his, who had been charged with defamation. Of all the many people brought to trial, the only one he ever shielded from prosecution was Castricius, the man who had alerted him to Murena's conspiracy – and even that was by force of persuasion, for he made a direct appeal to the man who was bringing the prosecution in the presence of the jurors.

[57] It is easy to imagine how this admirable behaviour made him much loved. I will pass over the decrees issued by the senate, since one could argue that these were prompted by necessity or deference. The Roman knights, quite on their own initiative, were as one in marking his birthday every year with a two-day celebration. Annually as well, people of every

class would fulfil a vow they had taken to ensure his good health by throwing a coin into the Lacus Curtius,⁴⁵ and on the Kalends of January bring New Year gifts to the Capitol, even when he was away from Rome (he used these donations to purchase some extremely expensive statues of the gods, which he then dedicated in each of the city's neighbourhoods, placing an Apollo in the street of the sandal-makers, a statue of Jupiter in the street of the tragic actors, and so on). When his house on the Palatine burned down, veterans, guilds, tribes and even individuals from a whole variety of walks of life all contributed funds to help rebuild it, each according to his means (not that he took anything more than a few coins from the various piles of money that were thereby collected, and certainly no more than a denarius from each individual). Whenever he returned from a province, the people would escort him back into the city, raising prayers and acclamations as they did so, and even singing hymns. It was also the practice, whenever he entered Rome, to pause the infliction of punishments.

[58] The *cognomen* 'Father of His Country' was bestowed on him as a result of an abrupt surge of popular enthusiasm, in which everybody shared: first the plebs sent a deputation to Antium and then, after he had turned them down, large crowds wearing laurel wreaths pressed the offer on him again as he was arriving at the games in Rome; soon afterwards the senate joined in, not by issuing a decree or a proclamation, but by mandating Valerius Messala to speak for them. 'May the blessings of good fortune, Caesar Augustus, be upon you and your house! When we raise this prayer, you see, it is our conviction that we are praying as well for the everlasting prosperity of the republic, and for its happiness. With one voice, then, the

senate and the people of Rome hail you – Father of His Country!’ Moved to tears, Augustus answered with these words (and again, I quote them verbatim, just as I did with Messala’s): ‘My highest hopes are met, conscript fathers. What is left for me to request now from the immortal gods, other than that I may be permitted to retain the goodwill of this entire house until the end of my days?’

[59] A statue of his doctor, Antonius Musa, whose talents had enabled him to survive a life-threatening illness, was raised by public subscription, and placed next to the statue of Asclepius.⁴⁶ Several heads of families specified in their wills that their heirs should drive animals up on to the Capitol, and carry a placard with them as they did so, announcing that the sacrifices were a mark of their gratitude that Augustus had outlived them. Various cities across Italy made the anniversary of his first visit to them the first day of their year. Many of the provinces, in addition to raising temples and altars to him, also began holding games in his honour every five years in the vast majority of their towns.

[60] Kings who ranked as the friends and allies of Rome each founded a city in their respective kingdoms and called it ‘Caesarea’; they also jointly agreed to share the cost of completing the temple of Olympian Zeus in Athens, which had long been left unfinished, and to dedicate it to his Genius; also, whenever they left their kingdoms – which they did often – they would put on togas, remove the emblems of their royalty and attend him as though they were his clients, not just in Rome but as he journeyed through the provinces.

[61] Now that I have described his conduct both as a commander of armies and as a holder of magistracies, and explored how, by bringing the republic under his rule, he came to sway the entire world in peace and war, it is time for me to give an account of his personal and domestic life, and of his behaviour at home, and of how he fared with his family, from his childhood through to his dying day.

His mother he lost during his first consulship, and his sister Octavia when he was fifty-three. He treated both with the utmost respect while they were alive, and then, following their deaths, bestowed the very highest honours on them.

[62] As a young man he was engaged to the daughter of Publius Servilius Isauricus, but when he mended his relations with Antony after their first falling out, and their respective armies demanded that they seal it by joining themselves in kinship, he took as his wife Antony's stepdaughter Claudia, who was Fulvia's daughter by Publius Clodius, and barely of marriageable age; when he then fell out with Fulvia, his mother-in-law, and divorced Claudia, he sent the girl home still a virgin. Soon after that he married Scribonia, who had already been wife to two men of consular rank, and even become a mother by one of them. He divorced her too, 'wearied', as he put it, 'by her impossible character', and immediately – even though she was pregnant at the time by her husband, Tiberius Nero – made off with Livia Drusilla, a woman who would prove the great love of his life, and one he esteemed above every other.

[63] By Scribonia he had a daughter, Julia, but by Livia he had no children, although he longed for it very much (she did conceive one child,

but lost it to a miscarriage early in her pregnancy). He married Julia first to Marcellus, the son of his sister Octavia, who at the time was barely more than a boy; then, when Marcellus died, to Marcus Agrippa (although he had first had to persuade his sister to cede her son-in-law to him, since Agrippa had been married at the time to the elder of the two Marcellas,⁴⁷ and had children by her). Then, when Agrippa died as well, he spent a long time mulling over a variety of matches for Julia – including even members of the equestrian order! – before finally settling on Tiberius, his stepson, whom he obliged to divorce his wife, pregnant though she was and the mother of his children. Mark Antony writes that Julia was initially engaged by her father to his own son Antonius, and subsequently to Cotiso, the king of the Getae,⁴⁸ and that he himself had sought, in a reciprocal gesture, to marry the king's daughter.

[64] Agrippa and Julia gave him three grandsons, Gaius, Lucius and Agrippa, and two granddaughters, Julia and Agrippina. Julia he married to Lucius Paulus, the son of the censor, and Agrippina to Germanicus, the grandson of his sister. Gaius and Lucius he adopted, after a private ceremony in which he made a symbolic payment to their father; he raised them from an early age in the service of the state, and sent them as consuls-designate on a tour of the provinces and the armies. Such was the upbringing he gave his daughter and granddaughters that he even had them working wool, and forbade them to say or do anything that could not publicly be reported in the daily reports on the doings of his household. So strictly did he patrol their contact with people outside the family that he once wrote to Lucius Vinicius, a respectable young man of good breeding,

charging him – because Vinicius had come to call on his daughter in Baiae – with showing him disrespect. He personally taught his grandsons to read and swim, along with various other basic skills, and had them model their handwriting on his (nothing he taught them mattered more to him than this). Whenever he dined with them they would sit with him at the foot of his couch, and he would never make a journey unless they were just ahead of him as he sat in his carriage, or riding beside him on their horses.

[65] But despite all the joy that he took in his house, all the confidence that he placed in his offspring and their upbringing, Fortune cheated him. The two Julias, his daughter and his granddaughter, he banished for being rotten to the core with vice; Gaius and Lucius were taken from him by death within the space of eighteen months, Gaius in Lycia and Lucius in Massilia. He adopted his third grandson Agrippa and his stepson Tiberius under the terms of a single law that was passed publicly by the people's assembly, but then, not long afterwards, was prompted by Agrippa's brutish and violent character to disinherit him and exile him to Surrentum.⁴⁹ Yet he found a death in his family easier to bear than a disgrace. Calamitous though the loss of Gaius and Lucius was, it never broke him; but such was the shame he felt in the case of his daughter that, rather than report it himself, he sent a quaestor with a letter to the senate, for a long while avoided all human company and even contemplated having Julia put to death. And to be sure, when one of her particular confidantes, the freedwoman Phoebe, hanged herself in the wake of the scandal, he declared that he would rather have been Phoebe's father. He banned Julia from drinking wine or enjoying any of life's other pleasures in her place of exile,

nor would he permit any man (free or slave, it made no difference) to go anywhere near her without his explicit permission – and even then he demanded to know the age and height of the man, his complexion, and any marks and scars he might have on his body. Only after she had spent five years on an island did he finally transfer her to the mainland, and subject her to a slightly less punitive regime. But that she should be recalled for good was something he absolutely could not be prevailed upon to countenance, and when the Roman people persisted in pleading her cause, and pressuring him to give way, he cursed them at a public meeting, saying, ‘I wish you all daughters and wives like Julia.’ When his granddaughter Julia, after her conviction, gave birth to a child, he refused to allow it to be acknowledged or brought up. When Agrippa, far from calming down, only became more unbalanced with each day that passed, he had him transported to an island, and posted a detachment of soldiers to stand guard over him. He even had the senate decree that the boy be confined to the island for life. And should anyone ever mention Agrippa and the Julias, he would groan and cry out, ‘I wish that I had never married, and died childless’, nor would he ever refer to them except as his ‘three boils’ or his ‘three tumours’.

[66] He did not make friends easily, but to those friends he did have he was unshakeably devoted, and no less ready to put up with their faults and misdemeanours (provided these were not excessive) than he was to set a proper value on their virtues and merits. Indeed, none of those whom he counted as his friends can be reckoned to have come to ruin, with the exception of two men, both of whom he had raised from humble beginnings: Salvidienus Rufus, whom he had advanced to the consulship,

and Cornelius Gallus, whom he had appointed prefect of Egypt. The former he handed over to the senate to receive sentence for plotting subversion of the settled order, and the latter he barred both from his house and from all the provinces he governed because he had wearied of the man's ingratitude and malicious temper. But when Gallus was driven to commit suicide by the denunciations of informers and by the decrees of the senate, he wept for his friend even as he praised the loyalty of those who had shown such indignation on his behalf, and bemoaned his lot, that he alone was unable to set limits on his anger towards his friends as he would have liked. As for the rest of his friends, they all flourished until the end of their days, and ranked in terms of power and wealth as the leading men of their respective orders – although occasionally, to be sure, there might be tensions. For instance (just to focus on a couple of his friends) there were times when he found Agrippa headstrong and Maecenas over-talkative: for when he was suspected – on the basis of very little evidence – of cooling on Agrippa, and favouring Marcellus instead, off Agrippa stormed to Mytilene, abandoning everything; in a similar manner, when Murena's plot against him was discovered, Maecenas betrayed this confidential information to his wife, Terentia. To his friends, then, he always showed great generosity – but from them in turn he expected the same, and not only while they were alive. For while he was in no sense a legacy-hunter, and indeed never accepted anything left him in the will of someone he did not know, he would always fretfully scrutinize the dying sentiments of his friends, never disguising the upset he felt if he were treated shabbily or slightly, nor the delight he took if he were acknowledged with gratitude and respect. Should anyone who had fathered

children leave him a legacy or a share in an inheritance, he would either transfer the bequest to the children immediately, or – if they were underage – return it to them when they first came to wear a man’s toga or on their wedding day.

[67] With his clients and slaves he could be quite as easy-going and forgiving as he was exacting, and held many of his freedmen – Licinus and Celadus among them – in great honour and affection. When his slave Cosmus spoke in extremely insulting terms about him, he merely had the man put in irons. When a wild boar suddenly charged him while he was out walking with his steward Diomedes, and Diomedes panicked and jumped behind him, he chose to accuse his steward of cowardice rather than anything more sinister, and as a result – since no harm had been intended – made a joke out of an incident that in truth had been not a little dangerous. Against that, he forced Polus, one of his favourite freedmen, to commit suicide after discovering that the man had been having affairs with the wives of various citizens; he had the legs of his secretary Thallus broken because he had taken 500 denarii to betray the contents of a letter; he also had the tutor and attendants of his son Gaius dropped into a river with heavy weights loaded on to their necks because, as their master lay dying, they had taken advantage of his illness to throw their weight around and extort money out of the provincials.

[68] In his early youth he was charged with various kinds of disgusting behaviour. Sextus Pompeius taunted him with effeminacy; Mark Antony accused him of having prostituted himself to his great-uncle to earn his adoption; Lucius, Antony’s brother, alleged that in Spain, for 300,000

sesterces, he had surrendered what a citizen should never surrender to none other than Aulus Hirtius – just as previously he had surrendered it to Caesar – and also that he was in the habit of singeing his legs with hot nutshells, to make the hairs grow softer. There was also an occasion when games were being staged, and the entire audience loudly cheered a line spoken on the stage (it referred to a castrated priest of the Mother Goddess⁵⁰ beating a tambourine shaped like a globe) which they interpreted as an insult directed against him: ‘Do you see how this pervert who yearns to be treated as a woman beats the globe with his finger?’

[69] Certainly, even his friends would never deny that he had numerous affairs with married women; but they do claim in extenuation that he was motivated not by his libido, but by his calculation that the easiest way for him to discover his opponents’ intentions was by sleeping with their wives. Mark Antony levelled it against him not just that he had married Livia in excessive haste, but also that he had once led the wife of a former consul to his bedchamber from the very dining room where her husband was present, and then brought her back to the dinner party with her hair dishevelled and her face bright red from ear to ear; that he had divorced Scribonia because she had given free rein to her resentment at the influence wielded over him by his mistress; that he got his friends to pimp him women, stripping both respectably married mothers of children and virgins who had just reached adulthood, and making a thorough inspection of their naked bodies, as though they had been put on the block by Toranius the slave-dealer. Antony also wrote to him, at a time when their personal relations were good, and hostilities were yet to break out between them, in very familiar terms:

What's worrying you? That I'm fucking the queen? She is my wife. Did I just start, or have I been at it for nine years now? What about you – you don't just fuck Drusilla,⁵¹ right? Since you're a man in your prime, I bet by the time you get to read this letter you'll have been fucking Tertulla, or Terentilla, or Rufilla, or Salvia Titisenia, or the whole lot of them! What does it really matter where you're sticking your hard cock and who you're fucking?

[70] There is also the story of a shadowy dinner party he threw (generally referred to as the ‘Twelve Gods’), at which the guests reclined on their couches dressed as gods and goddesses, and the host himself went as Apollo⁵² – behaviour which Antony, who named each one of the guests in his letters, was not alone in subjecting to vitriolic criticism, for there were also some notorious verses composed by an anonymous author:

No sooner had the dinner guests hired their costumes
than Mallia⁵³ beheld six gods and six goddesses,
with impious Caesar dissembling the role of Phoebus,
and dining as the gods indulged in fresh adulteries:
whereupon the deities all turned their faces from the earth,
and Jupiter himself made flight from his golden throne.

What made the scandal of this dinner party even more noxious was that Rome lay in the grip of austerity and famine at the time, and so cries went up the following day that the gods had devoured all the food, and that Caesar, if he were Apollo indeed, was Apollo the Torturer (this being the

title under which the god was worshipped in one of the city's neighbourhoods). He was notorious too for his greed in collecting expensive furnishings and works of art from Corinth, and for his love of gambling. Indeed, during the proscriptions, the phrase 'My father dealt in silver, I deal in Corinthian ware' was scrawled on one of his statues, because it was believed that he had included some men on the proscription lists simply for their Corinthian vases. Subsequently, during the Sicilian War, the following epigram was on everyone's lips:

Now that he has twice been vanquished, and lost two fleets,
He plays dice all the time, in the hope of winning something back.

[71] As for whether these accusations were merely slanders, the charge that he had submitted sexually to other men was one that a lifestyle unspotted by any such perversion, both at the time and subsequently, enabled him easily to refute; in a similar manner, when he captured Alexandria, the charge that he revelled in luxury was undermined by his refusal to take anything from the royal treasury except for a single agate goblet, and the way in which, soon afterwards, he melted down all the golden vessels intended for daily use. That said, the allegation that he had a rapacious sexual appetite was one that did stick: in his later years (or so it is claimed), he greatly enjoyed deflowering virgins, who would be procured for him from all over the place – and among the pimps was none other than his own wife. His notoriety as a gambler did not bother him in the slightest: instead, even as an old man, he played for his own amusement without pretension or embarrassment, and not just in the month of December either,

but during other holidays too, and even on days when there were no festivals.⁵⁴ There can be no doubt on this score, since we have a letter in his own handwriting in which he says: ‘I had the same guests to supper, my dear Tiberius, with Vinicius and the elder Silius joining us too.⁵⁵ We spent the whole meal gambling like old men, both yesterday and today. When the dice were thrown, whoever rolled a “dog” or a six would put in a denarius for each of the dice, and then whoever threw a “Venus” would scoop the lot.’⁵⁶ Again, in another letter he wrote:

We had a most enjoyable Quinquatria, my dear Tiberius. We gambled all day long, and made the gaming-board smoke. Your brother⁵⁷ kicked up a great fuss, although actually, in the long run, he did not fare too badly. Yes, he lost large sums – but then, little by little, and contrary to his forebodings, he clawed the situation back. As for me, I lost 20,000 sesterces, but that was because I kept splashing the cash around – as I so often do when I am playing! In fact, if I had asked people to pay back the stakes I ceded, or if I had kept the money I gave away to others, I would have ended 50,000 up. But I’m happier the way it was. My generosity, after all, will gain me glory in heaven!

To his daughter he wrote: ‘I have sent you 250 denarii. This is the sum I give to each of my guests, on the off-chance that they may wish to play dice or odds-and-evens during supper.’

[72] In other aspects of his life, however, there is a general consensus that he behaved with great moderation – so much so that he was never even

suspected of failings. Although initially he settled next to the Roman Forum, at the top of the Ringmakers' Steps, in a house that had belonged to the orator Calvus, he subsequently moved into a no less modest house on the Palatine, one that had originally been owned by Hortensius,⁵⁸ and was notable neither for its size nor for its décor: its colonnades were small, and made of stone from the Alban Hills, and its rooms lacked both marble and patterning on their floors. Winter and summer, he lived in the same room for forty years (he actually found spending winter in Rome bad for his health, but wintered there even so). For those occasions when he had things to do which required privacy and a lack of interruption, he had a study at the top of the house, which he used to call his 'Syracuse' or his 'little workshop'. This – together with a house in the suburbs owned by one of his freedmen – served him as his bolthole; but whenever he fell ill he would take to bed in Maecenas' house. His breaks from the city he generally took on the Campanian coast or on the islands just off it, or else in towns nearby to Rome: Lanuvium, Praeneste and Tibur, where he would often hear people's complaints on points of law in the portico of the temple of Hercules. He disapproved of sprawling, grandiose mansions in the country, to the degree that he had one such, which his granddaughter Julia had built on a particularly lavish scale, levelled to the ground; modest though his own country retreats were, and generally lacking in statues and paintings, he nevertheless adorned them with shady colonnades and groves, and with objects that were notable for their antiquity and rarity (on Capri, for instance, he had a collection of enormous legs and arms, said by some to be

the bones of giants, but in fact deriving from vast sea monsters and wild beasts,⁵⁹ and weapons owned by various heroes).

[73] Just how plain his furniture and furnishings were is evident even now from his surviving couches and tables, many of which a private citizen would regard as beneath him. They say that he never slept on a bed unless it was low and furnished with simple coverings. He rarely wore any clothes that had not been woven in his own household by his sister, his wife, his daughter or his granddaughters; he did not wrap his toga tightly round him, but nor did he allow it to hang loosely; his purple stripe was neither too broad nor too narrow; he wore platform shoes, to make him seem taller than he was. He always kept clothes and shoes fit for public occasions in his bedchamber, just to make sure that he was ready for any unexpected eventuality.

[74] A great giver of dinner parties, he was an absolute stickler when it came to the rank and personal qualities of his guests, and never hosted anything that might offend protocol. According to Valerius Messala, he never invited a freedman to his table, with the sole exception of Menas – and even then only after Menas had been awarded the status of a freeborn citizen for betraying Sextus Pompeius' fleet. He himself writes that he once invited a former bodyguard of his, at whose villa he was in the habit of staying. He would often come late to table and leave it early, so that his guests would already have begun supper before he arrived, and remain in their places when he left. He would serve a meal consisting of three courses or – if he was feeling particularly extravagant – six, never overdoing things, but always providing his guests with a good time. He achieved this by

making sure every time to draw into the general flow of conversation those who were tongue-tied or whispering under their breath, and provide for the entertainment of his guests jugglers, actors and even street performers from the circus (with a particular emphasis on stand-ups).

[75] He observed festivals and holidays lavishly, and would sometimes have great fun with the celebrations. On the Saturnalia – and at other times too, should the fancy take him – he would hand out gifts: sometimes clothing, gold and silver, sometimes coins of every conceivable kind, including ones that had been minted by Rome's kings and abroad, and occasionally nothing but rough blankets, sponges, pokers, tongs and other such items, complete with enigmatic and punning labels. At dinner parties it was his custom to hold blind auctions of objects of widely differing value, and of paintings shown back to front, so that the hopes of those who bid for them would be met or dashed according to the dictates of chance (also, he required every couch to join in the bidding, so that the losses and gains might be shared).

[76] He was a light eater (I mention it because even this level of information I am reluctant to omit), with simple tastes. He particularly enjoyed coarse bread, small fishes, hand-pressed runny cheese and figs harvested from the year's second crop, and would often snack between meals, whenever and wherever he might feel hungry. I quote him verbatim from one of his letters: 'We nibbled on some bread and figs in my carriage.' Again: 'Coming back home from the Regia⁶⁰ in my litter, I ate a small bit of bread and a few grapes with hard skins.' And again: 'Not even a Judaean on the Sabbath, my dear Tiberius, keeps his fast more strictly than I did

today,⁶¹ since it was only after the first hour of the night that I finally swallowed a couple of mouthfuls of bread (this I did while in the baths, prior to being oiled down).’ Indeed, so irregular were his eating habits that sometimes he would dine alone, either before his guests arrived or once the dinner party was over, while during the meal itself he would touch nothing.

[77] He had no great taste for wine. Cornelius Nepos reports that while he was camped out before Mutina he rarely had more than three glasses with his meal; even later, when he had come to drink more freely, he never had more than a pint, since he would always vomit if he exceeded that limit. His favourite vintage was Raetian, but even that he rarely had during the day. Instead, rather than drink, he would eat some bread or a bit of cucumber soaked in cold water, or the middle of a lettuce, or an apple with a flavour like wine, either fresh or dried.

[78] After his midday meal he would take a rest, just as he was, still with his clothes and shoes on, no blanket over his feet, and his hand over his eyes. After dinner he would retire to a small couch, and there, by the light of a reading lamp, he would remain for most of the night, completing what remained of the day’s business – or a large proportion of it, at any rate. From there he would retire to bed, where he would sleep for no more than seven hours, and even then not continuously, for he might wake up three or four times during the course of that period. If, as sometimes happened, he could not get back to sleep, he would summon people to read to him or tell him stories, and then nod back off, and often not wake up again until after daybreak. He would never lie awake while it was dark without having someone sit beside him. He hated getting up early in the morning, and

whenever he was obliged by some responsibility or sacred duty to rise earlier than normal he would minimize the inconvenience by spending the night near to where he had to be, in a room belonging to one of his dependants. These irregular habits meant that he was often short of sleep, and might doze off should his litter be set down because of some delay while he was being carried through the streets.

[79] He was a good-looking man, and despite never fussing over his own appearance remained easy on the eye all his life. So little bothered was he by how his hair looked that he would save time by employing various stylists simultaneously, one to give him a trim, another to shave his beard, while he would sit there reading something, or even writing. Both when he was talking and when he was silent, the look on his face was always so calm and serene that one of the leading men in Gaul, who had been admitted into his presence as he was crossing the Alps, confessed to his fellows that it had quite melted his heart, and stopped him from going through with a plan to push him over a cliff. His eyes were clear and bright (indeed, he liked it to be thought that they possessed an almost god-like potency, and was delighted whenever a person he might be staring at intently would lower his gaze, as though before the radiance of the sun), although in old age, it is true, his left eye began to fail him; his teeth, which were small and yellow, had large gaps between them; his blondish hair curled slightly; his eyebrows met in the middle; his ears were of medium size; his nose projected outwards at the top and curved in slightly at the bottom; his complexion was neither dark nor pale; his height was nothing special (although his freedman Julius Marathus, who kept his records,

reports that he was five feet nine inches tall), but so solid was his body and so well proportioned his limbs that his short stature was not immediately apparent, and would only become so if someone taller stood next to him and drew attention to their respective heights.

[80] His body is said to have been speckled with birthmarks (which in terms of the pattern they made across his chest and stomach, and their size and number too, resembled the constellation of the Great Bear), and also with various calluses that had hardened into scaly scabs: these were caused by the repeated scraping across his skin of strigils,⁶² and by the way in which he was forever scratching himself. Although his left hip, thigh and leg were not as strong as they might have been, and would often cause him to limp, he relied on a therapy of sand and reeds to strengthen them. There were times too, during cold weather, when he would find the index finger of his right hand so enfeebled by numbness and cramp that it was an effort for him to write, even with the assistance of a fingerstall fashioned out of horn. He would also complain of pain in his bladder, although this was eased in due course when he managed to pass kidney stones in his urine.

[81] He suffered serious – indeed, potentially fatal – illnesses over the entire course of his life, but particularly after his conquest of Cantabria, when he was reduced to such desperate straits by an abscess in his liver that no option was left him but to submit to an unorthodox and hazardous course of treatment: this, which was devised by Antonius Musa after hot poultices had proved ineffective, required him to submit to cold ones. There were some ailments that he succumbed to at the same time every year: so it was, for instance, that he generally fell sick around the time of his birthday; that

in early spring he suffered from an abdominal distention; and that invariably, whenever there was a southerly wind, he got a cold. His health ended up so damaged as a result that he found it hard to cope with extremes of cold and heat.

[82] During winter he would guard against the cold by wearing four tunics, a thick toga, an undershirt, a woollen vest, and strips of cloth wrapped around his thighs and shins; during summer he would keep the doors of his bedchamber open, or – as he often did – take his rest in the inner courtyard, next to bubbling fountains, and fanned by a slave. Even in winter he could not bear the sun; also, when at home, he would never go outside without a broad-brimmed hat. When travelling in a litter he would go by night, always in short bursts, never hurrying, so that the trip to Praeneste or Tibur would take him two days; if somewhere was accessible by sea, he preferred to take a boat. The state of his health being what it was, he always took great care of himself, and made a particular point of bathing only on rare occasions. He much preferred to be rubbed down with oil or work up a sweat next to a fire, and then have someone pour water over him: the water would be either tepid or warm from having stood a long time in the sun. Whenever the condition of his muscles required him to take the salt-water cure or the hot waters at the Albula springs,⁶³ he would content himself with sitting in a wooden tub (which he called, using the Spanish word for it, a *dureta*), and dipping his hands and feet in turn.

[83] The moment the civil wars were over he ended his participation in military exercises on the Campus, whether on horseback or with weapons, and took up ball games instead, playing first with a hard ball, and then with

one that was lighter and larger; it did not take him long, however, to confine himself exclusively to rides or walks, which he would then round off by sprinting or jumping while wrapped in a cloak or a small blanket. His idea of relaxation was to go fishing, or to roll dice, or to play games with marbles or nuts: his companions in these games were adorable little boys, Moors and Syrians especially, who would chatter away happily to him, and whom he had recruited from all over the place. His reason for doing this was that he detested dwarfs and disabled people, and anyone similarly grotesque, as freaks of nature, and believed that they brought bad luck.

[84] Even as a child he was devoted to eloquence and the liberal arts, and never let up his studies. During the hostilities at Mutina, he read, wrote and declaimed every day, despite the mass of responsibilities weighing him down. From that point on, indeed, he never once gave a speech to the senate, people or army without first deciding what he was going to say and rehearsing it – even though he was perfectly capable of extemporizing at short notice. To ensure that he would not risk forgetting what he wanted to say, and so waste the time required to memorize it, he laid it down as his policy to read everything from a written text. Even when addressing an individual, even Livia herself, he would never say anything important without first making notes on a tablet, which he would then have with him as he spoke (this was to ensure that he did not – as he might have done if he spoke off the top of his head – go too far or hold back). He had an attractive and highly distinctive manner of speaking, honed by assiduous study with an elocutionist – but sometimes, should he have a sore throat, he would address the people through the agency of a herald.

[85] He wrote a large number of works in prose, in a variety of genres, and read some of them – his *Reply to Brutus Concerning Cato*, for instance, his *Exhortations to Philosophy* and his autobiography, which covered his life up to the Cantabrian War, but no further – to a gathering of his close friends, much as a lecturer might do in an auditorium; he read these volumes almost the whole way through, but finally – because he was old by then, and starting to flag – handed them over to Tiberius to finish. Poetry he merely dabbled in. A single volume of his hexameters (the title of which – *Sicily* – accurately conveys its theme) has survived; so too an equally brief book of epigrams, which he largely composed in the bath. A tragedy which he had begun in a mood of great enthusiasm he destroyed when he found his ability as a writer inadequate to the task – and whenever his friends asked him how Ajax was doing, he would answer that Ajax had fallen on his sponge.⁶⁴

[86] He cultivated a precise and measured style of speaking, one that avoided the absurdity of flowery language and epigrams, and ‘the reek’, as he put it, ‘of arcane language’ – for his principal concern was to express his opinions as clearly as possible. To facilitate this, and to ensure that his readers or his listeners would not be confused and given pause, he never hesitated to put prepositions before the names of cities, nor – on those occasions when elegance of style might require the omission of conjunctions, despite a resulting risk of confusion – to deploy conjunctions repeatedly. He was critical of both those who were forever coining new phrases and those who affected an antique style, despising both equally, albeit for opposing reasons, and would sometimes attack them openly; a

particular target was his friend Maecenas, whose ‘perfumed ringlets’, as he described them, he would repeatedly make the object of his banter, and whose style he loved to parody. Nor did he spare Tiberius, whose occasional lapses into obsolete and recondite phraseology he would always pounce upon. As for Mark Antony, whom he called a madman for writing to provoke astonishment among men rather than illumination, he joked with him about the terrible quality of his speeches, and his inability to settle on a single style. ‘Are you so unsure whether to imitate Annius Cimber or Veranius Flaccus’, he added, ‘that you are actually using words that Crispus Sallustius lifted from Cato’s *Origines*?⁶⁵ Or would you rather introduce the verbose style of Asiatic orators, empty platitudes and all, into our language?’ In a letter to his granddaughter Agrippina, in which he praises her intelligence, he says, ‘But do take great care not to write and speak in an affected manner.’

[87] It is evident from letters in his own handwriting that there were certain distinctive expressions he dropped into daily conversation on a regular basis: when, for instance, he wishes to convey that certain people will never pay their debts, he invariably says, ‘They will pay on the Greek Kalends’;⁶⁶ when he urges people to put up with their current circumstances, he says, ‘Let us be satisfied with the Cato we have’; when he wishes to express the speed of something done fast, he says, ‘Quicker than you can boil asparagus’. He consistently says *baceolus* [idiotic] rather than *stultus* [stupid], *pulleiaceus* [chick] rather than *pullus* [chicken] and *vacerrosus* [blockheaded] rather than *cerritus* [mad]; he talks of feeling *vapide* [poorly] rather than *male* [ill], and says *betizare* [be limp like a beet]

rather than *languere* [be weak] or – the more colloquial word – *lachinzare* [be limp]; he uses *simus* rather than *sumus* [we are], and *domos* for the genitive singular of *domus* [house] rather than *domuos* (he deployed these last two usages consistently, to ensure that no one would mistake for errors what ranked as his settled practice). His handwriting – which I have personally inspected – also exhibits peculiarities: he does not leave gaps between his words, for instance, and, whenever he runs out of space writing a line, he does not run the letters of the word on to the next line but instead writes them directly underneath the word in a loop.

[88] He never had much time for orthography (that is, the proper framework for spelling, as laid down by grammarians), and seems instead to have been a student of those who advise writing down words as they are spoken. He frequently transposes or omits letters, and even syllables – but then again, that is the kind of slip that anybody can make. Indeed, I would not even have drawn attention to it, were it not that some have made what seems to me the astonishing claim that he replaced a governor of consular rank for a lack of breeding and education after noticing that the man had spelled *ipsi* as *ixi*. Whenever he writes in code, he substitutes ‘B’ for ‘A’, ‘C’ for ‘B’, and so on, right the way through the alphabet – though ‘X’ he replaces with a double ‘A’.

[89] He was no less interested in the teachings of the Greeks, and attained considerable proficiency in them: public speaking he was taught by Apollodorus of Pergamon, whom he took with him when, as a very young man, he left Rome for Apollonia, despite the fact that Apollodorus was by then well on in years; subsequently his appetite for various branches of

learning was satisfied by virtue of his association with the philosopher Areus and his sons Dionysius and Nicanor; even so, he never came to speak Greek fluently, nor did he venture to compose anything in it, since, whenever he had occasion to express himself in the language, he would craft his statement in Latin, then give it to others to translate. It is clear, though, that he was not unfamiliar with Greek poetry – and indeed such pleasure did he take in Old Comedy⁶⁷ that he would regularly have it staged during public entertainments.

In his reading of authors in both languages, there was nothing to which he was more attentive than precepts and models of behaviour that might be of service in both public and private life: these he would often copy out word for word, and send to members of his household, or to those in command of his armies and provinces, or to magistrates serving in Rome, as and when they needed advice. There were even times when he would read out entire books to the senate, and alert the public to them by means of proclamations: among these were the speeches given by, respectively, Quintus Metellus on the need for more children and Rutilius on limiting the height of buildings,⁶⁸ both of which he promoted with the aim of persuading people that – since the ancients too had worried about such issues – he was not the first to have bothered himself with them. To the literary greats of his own age he gave every encouragement.⁶⁹ He was a generous and patient listener to their recitations: of poetry and history, yes, but of speeches and dialogues too. That said, he took great offence at anything written about him which happened to lack gravity and the quality

that distinguished the best authors, and instructed the praetors not to permit the cheapening of his name in public-speaking contests.

[90] As for his views on the supernatural, we are told the following. His fear of thunder and lightning was sufficiently debilitating that he always carried a sealskin around with him as a keep-safe,⁷⁰ and at the least sign of a serious storm he would take refuge in a vaulted cellar (on one occasion, as I have already mentioned, lightning gave him a terrible scare while he was out travelling by night).

[91] He never dismissed dreams, whether his own or those of other people. At the Battle of Philippi, for instance, he reversed his own earlier decision not to leave his tent, due to a warning seen by a friend in a dream – and just as well he did too, since his enemies, when they attacked and took his camp, hacked and tore his bed to pieces, on the assumption that he was still lying in it. The whole way through the spring he suffered from nightmare after nightmare, but these dreams were delusory and portended nothing; at other times of the year they were less frequent but more reliable. In the wake of his dedication on the Capitol of a temple to Jupiter the Thunderer, which he was forever frequenting, Capitoline Jupiter appeared to him in a dream and complained that he had taken away his worshippers; he answered the god that he had placed the Thunderer on the Capitol to serve as a doorkeeper, and shortly afterwards, prompted by the dream, garlanded the apex of the Thunderer's temple with bells, since these are what normally hang from doors. It was similarly due to the prompting of a dream that every year on a given day he would beg coppers from the people, holding out a cupped hand to receive them.

[92] There were certain auspices and omens he always trusted. If in the morning his shoes were put on the wrong way, the left instead of the right, this presaged disaster; if, however, he was setting out by land or sea on a long journey, and it happened to be drizzling, then this was a good sign, and meant that he would make a speedy and successful return. It was in self-evident wonders, however, that he placed the greatest confidence. When a palm tree sprang up through a crack in the paving in front of his house, he moved it to the inner court where the household gods were kept, and went to great pains to ensure that it flourished there. Likewise, when he made a visit to the island of Capri, and the branches of an ancient oak tree that were decaying and had already sagged on to the ground suddenly recovered their sap, so delighted was he that he appropriated the entire island from Naples (although he did give the city Aeneria⁷¹ in exchange). He also paid close regard to particular days, never setting out on a journey the day after market day, nor embarking on any important business on the Nones (his concern in the latter case, as he writes to Tiberius, was prompted merely by the evil sound of its name).

[93] He held foreign rites that were rooted in antiquity and tradition in high reverence, but all others in contempt. Following his initiation into the mysteries at Athens, for instance, he came to preside over a case heard in Rome that concerned the privileges of the priests of the Attic Ceres – and when the proceedings began to touch on matters that only initiates should properly know, he dismissed the court and the crowds gathered around it, and heard the disputants on their own.⁷² By contrast, not only did he neglect to make a short detour to visit Apis⁷³ while he was travelling

through Egypt, but he applauded his grandson Gaius for travelling through Judaea without making prayer in Jerusalem.

[94] And now, since we have arrived at this subject, perhaps it will not be off-topic to include here an account of everything that happened prior to his birth, on the actual day of his nativity, and then subsequent to it, which served to portend his future greatness, and to offer the hope of good fortune without end.

When, back in antiquity, a stretch of the walls of Velitrae was hit by lightning, this was interpreted to mean that one of the town's citizens would come to exercise a universal sway. Such faith did the people of Velitrae place in this that they immediately went to war with the Roman people, and kept renewing hostilities until they had been brought almost to the point of ruin. Only very much later did events make clear that the sign had actually portended the rise to power of Augustus.

A few months prior to his birth, so Julius Marathus records, a prodigy alerted everyone in Rome to the fact that Nature was in labour with a child who would come to reign as a king over the Roman people; the senate, thrown into panic, duly voted that no one born that year should be allowed to live; the decree, however, failed to become law, because the senators whose wives were pregnant, and who therefore viewed the prediction in a hopeful light, ensured that it was never registered in the treasury.

In the *Theologoumena*,⁷⁴ the books written by Asclepiades of Mendes, I read that Atia, after she had come in the dead of night to a festival honouring Apollo, and had her litter set down in the temple, fell asleep amid all the other married women there; then, all of a sudden, a giant serpent

came slithering up to her, before shortly afterwards slithering away again; when Atia woke up she performed a ritual of purification, just as she would have done had she had sex with her husband, and immediately there appeared on her body a mark like the tattoo of a snake, one that proved so impossible to get rid of that shortly afterwards she gave up going to the public baths, nor ever visited them again; ten months later Augustus was born and is believed, for this reason, to have been the son of Apollo. Atia herself, before she gave birth to him, dreamed that her intestines were borne up to the stars and uncoiled across the entire span of the earth and the heavens. Octavius, his father, dreamed that the sun rose from Atia's womb.

It is well known that on the day of his actual birth, when Octavius was prevented by his wife's labour from getting on time to the Senate House for a debate on Catiline's conspiracy, Publius Nigidius – informed of the reason for Octavius' late arrival and the hour of his son's birth – declared that the master of the world had just been born. Later, when Octavius was leading his army through darkest Thrace, and sought to divine the future of his son by means of barbarous rituals practised in a grove sacred to Father Liber,⁷⁵ the priests made the same prediction: for so prodigiously did a flame spurt upwards when wine was poured on to the altar that it shot past the temple roof into the sky, an omen that had only manifested itself once before, back when Alexander the Great had made sacrifice at the same altar. What is more, the following night, Octavius dreamed that his son appeared to him immense on a scale beyond that of any mortal, with the thunderbolt, the sceptre and the attributes of Jupiter the Best and the Greatest, wearing a crown like the rays of the sun, and riding in a laurel-garlanded chariot

drawn by twelve horses of a surpassing whiteness. One evening, while he was still a baby, so Gaius Drusus records in his writings, he was put by his nurse into a cradle in a ground-floor room, but by the morning was nowhere to be seen; only after a protracted search was he finally tracked down in the highest tower in the house, lying there with his face to the sun.

When he first began to talk, he ordered the frogs who happened to be making a terrible din in his grandfather's villa at the time to be silent, and ever since – or so it is said – not a croak has been heard. One day, as he was having his lunch in a grove beside the fourth milestone to Campania, an eagle unexpectedly snatched some bread out of his hand, soared high up into the sky, and then, just as unexpectedly, swooped back down on a gentle arc and returned the bread.

After the dedication of the temple on the Capitol, Quintus Catulus had dreams on two successive nights: in the first, Jupiter the Best and the Greatest took aside one of the various boys of good family who were playing around his altar and placed in the fold of the boy's toga the image of the republic which the god had been carrying in his hand; then, the following night, when Catulus dreamed that he saw the same boy sitting on the lap of Capitoline Jupiter, and gave orders that he be removed, the god forbade it, for the boy, so he warned, was being raised to serve as the saviour of the republic. The next day, meeting with Augustus, whom he had never set eyes on before, Catulus gazed at him in astonishment and declared him the very image of the boy he had seen in his dream. Some, however, give a different account of Catulus' first dream: that when a throng of well-born children asked Jupiter for a guardian, he pointed out one of their

number, told them to address all their needs to him, and then, after he had touched the boy's mouth with his fingers, put them to his own lips.

Once, as Marcus Cicero was following Julius Caesar up to the Capitol, he happened to be telling his friends of a dream that he had had the previous night: of a boy of noble countenance lowered from the heavens on a golden chain, landing before the doors of the temple on the Capitol, and receiving from Jupiter a whip. Whereupon, all of a sudden, he saw Augustus (who at the time lacked any public profile and was only present at the sacrifice on the summons of his uncle Caesar), and declared the boy the very one whom he had seen in his dream.

When he first put on an adult's toga, his broad-striped tunic split down its seams and dropped to his feet. There were those who interpreted this to mean that the order symbolized by the broad-striped tunic would likewise come to lie prostrate before him.

At Munda, when a palm tree was found in a wood that was being chopped down to make way for a camp, the Deified Julius ordered it spared, since it was a symbol of victory. A shoot immediately sprouted from it, and grew so fast that after only a few days it had not merely equalled its parent in size, but had actually come to put it in the shade; also, a large numbers of doves built their nests in it, even though doves are the kind of bird that particularly dislikes stiff, spiky leaves. This, they say, was the sign more than any other that motivated Caesar in his desire to have as his successor the grandson of his sister, and no one else.

During his time as a student in Apollonia, he went with his friend Agrippa up to the study of the astrologer Theogenes. After Agrippa, who

was the first to have his horoscope read, had a career predicted for him so great as to be almost incredible, he did not immediately divulge the details of his own birth, but kept them to himself, since he dreaded the humiliation that would be his should his prospects turn out to be inferior to Agrippa's. Finally, though, after much coaxing and much hesitation, he did reveal them – and Theogenes, jumping up, fell to the ground before him, as though before a god. From that moment on, Augustus had such confidence in his own destiny that he made public his horoscope and had a silver coin struck with the image of Capricorn, the star sign under which he had been born.

[95] Returning from Apollonia after the death of Caesar, he approached Rome on a clear and cloudless day – and the moment he entered the city a circle like a rainbow appeared around the sun, and the tomb of Caesar's daughter Julia was struck by a sudden bolt of lightning. Additionally, as he was taking the auspices during his first consulship, twelve vultures appeared to him, as they had done to Romulus, and all the bottom lobes of the livers of the animals he had sacrificed were found to be doubled inwards on themselves: an omen, so those skilled in reading such signs unanimously agreed, that portended great and joyous things.

[96] He even knew beforehand how all his wars would turn out. When the forces of the triumvirs joined together at Bononia, an eagle perched on his tent launched an attack against two crows that were pestering it, and knocked them both to the ground: an incident which led the entire army to infer that just such a falling-out among the three colleagues as subsequently occurred was bound to happen, and, what was more, to predict the outcome. That he would triumph at Philippi was revealed to him while he was

travelling there by a Thessalian, who in turn had it on the authority of the Deified Caesar, whose ghost the Thessalian had met on a lonely road. Offering sacrifice outside Perugia, and prompted by the lack of favourable omens to order that more victims be fetched, he was ambushed by a sally of the enemy, who made off with everything required to conduct the ritual; since, however, they were now the ones in possession of the entrails, the *haruspices* were agreed that all the perils and setbacks that previously had been menacing him as the sacrificer would now recoil upon his foes – and so it came to pass. In Sicily, the day before he and his fleet joined battle, he was walking along the shore when a fish jumped out of the sea and landed at his feet. At Actium, he was going down to join his fleet when he met an ass and its driver; the man's name was Eutychus and the animal's Nicon,⁷⁶ and so, after his victory, he set up bronze statues of the pair of them in the temple that he had built on the site of his camp.

[97] His death too (which I will come to next) and the deification which followed it were presaged by unmistakable signs. As he was performing the rites which conclude the census, in a Campus heaving with people, there came an eagle which circled over him a number of times, then flew across to a nearby temple, where it perched above the first letter of Agrippa's name. Noticing this, he instructed his colleague Tiberius to recite the vows which traditionally mark the start of the period until the next census is held – for although they had been written out for him on a tablet ready to be read, he declared that he would never commit to anything that he personally would be unable to complete. At much the same time, lightning struck the inscription on one of his statues, and caused the first letter of his name to

melt. This, since the letter ‘C’ signifies 100, was understood to mean that he only had another 100 days to live, and would then come to be numbered among the gods – for *aesar*, the part of the name ‘Caesar’ that could still be read, means ‘god’ in the Etruscan language.

Then too, when litigants persisted in asking him for rulings in case after case even as he was readying himself to accompany Tiberius (whom he was sending to Illyricum) as far as Beneventum, he cried out that he would stay no longer in Rome, never mind who sought to delay him – and this as well, in due course, was interpreted as an omen of his death. So he set out on his journey, and reached Astura – and from there, because the wind was favourable, he put to sea at night (something he never normally did), and thereby succumbed to an illness, which began with diarrhoea.

[98] Then, after sailing down the Campanian coast and around the neighbouring islands, he spent four days in the seclusion of Capri, relaxing and enjoying the company of his friends to the exclusion of all else. As he passed through the Bay of Puteoli, it so happened that the passengers and crew of a ship from Alexandria which had just docked there, clad in white robes, garlanded and burning incense, hailed him in joyous tones and lavished him with fulsome praise: ‘We have our lives thanks to you, we take ship thanks to you, we enjoy freedom and good fortune thanks to you.’ Delighted by this, he distributed forty gold coins to each of his companions, and had them all promise on oath that they would spend the money on nothing save for merchandise from Alexandria. Additionally, over the course of the following days, he made gifts of various inexpensive objects, togas and Greek cloaks among them, and proposed that Romans should be

obliged to adopt the dress and language of the Greeks, and Greeks the dress and language of the Romans. He regularly came to watch the sizeable number of Greek youths on Capri who still trained in the traditional manner perform their exercises. He even hosted a banquet for them in person, at which he did not merely permit them to fool around, and to scrap over tokens that could then be redeemed for fruit, and sweets, and all kinds of things, but positively demanded it. In short, if there was fun to be had, he had it.

He nicknamed an island just off Capri ‘The City of Do-Nothings’, because those of his friends who had retreats there just lazed around on it. To one of them, a favourite of his called Masgaba, he had given the Greek name ‘Founder’, as though the man had been the first to settle the island. When he noticed from his dining room that the tomb of this Masgaba, who had died the previous year, was thronged by crowds of people all carrying torches, he composed a line of verse on the spot, and then recited it: ‘The founder’s tomb I see ablaze with fire.’ Then, turning to Tiberius’ friend Thrasyllus, who was reclining opposite him and did not know the backstory, he asked him which poet he thought had written it. When Thrasyllus hesitated, he added another line – ‘You see how Masgaba is honoured with torches?’ – and asked him what he made of that one. When Thrasyllus gave him no answer save to say that the verses were very good, whoever had written them, he burst out laughing, and made a running joke of it. Then, shortly afterwards, he crossed back to Naples, despite the fact that he still had an upset stomach. Braving repeated bouts of diarrhoea, he sat through the whole of the gymnastic contest that was held in his honour every five

years, before setting out with Tiberius for Beneventum. On the return journey, though, his condition worsened, until finally, collapsing at Nola, he summoned Tiberius back from his expedition and kept him in long and private conversation – after which his attention drifted from matters of state.

[99] On the last day of his life he kept asking whether there were disturbances out in the streets on his account; he also asked for a mirror, ordered his hair combed and his lolling jaw set straight, and then, after admitting his friends into his presence, and asking them whether they thought that he had played his part well in the comedy of life, quoted these lines:

If the play has been a good one, then please clap your hands
And let me leave the stage to the sound of your applause.⁷⁷

After he had dismissed everyone, he inquired of some people who had just come from Rome about the daughter of Drusus,⁷⁸ who was ill; suddenly, however, even as he was giving Livia a kiss, he died, saying with his last breath: ‘Always cherish the memory of our marriage, Livia, for as long as you may live – and so farewell.’ Such, then, was the death granted him by Fortune: an easy one, of the kind that he had always wanted. For invariably, whenever he heard that someone had died swiftly and without pain, he would pray that he and those he loved might enjoy a similar ‘euthanasia’ (this, a Greek word, being the very term he used). He gave only one sign before he died that his mind might be wandering, and this was when he cried out in sudden alarm that forty young men were carrying him away.

Rather than evidence of mental decline, however, even this proved a premonition: for forty was the number of praetorians who bore him to lie in state.

[100] He died in the same bedroom where his father Octavius had died, during the consulship of two men named Sextus, Pompeius and Appuleius, on the fourteenth day before the Kalends of September, at the ninth hour, thirty-five days before his seventy-sixth birthday.⁷⁹ Magistrates from the local towns and colonies carried his body from Nola as far as Bovillae, travelling by night because of the season, and the rest of the time placing it in the basilica or largest temple of whichever town they happened to have arrived at. At Bovillae it was met by the equestrian order, who bore it to Rome and placed it in the vestibule of his house. In the senate, there was intense competition to arrange a funeral for him that would pay due honour to his memory: among numerous other ideas, it was proposed that the funeral procession should pass through the triumphal gate, preceded by the statue of Victory from the Senate House, and that the hymns of lamentation be sung by the sons and daughters of Rome's most eminent citizens; others suggested that on the day of the funeral people should take off their gold rings and replace them with rings of iron; others yet that his bones be collected by the priests of the most senior colleges. There was one senator who argued that the name of the month of August should be transferred to September, since the latter was the month in which he had been born, and the former the one in which he had died; another proposed that the entire period from the day of his birth to that of his death should be termed the Augustan Age, and referred to as such in the state calendars. Although, in

the event, some limits did have to be set upon the honours paid him, he was given two eulogies (the first of which was delivered by Tiberius in front of the temple of the Deified Julius, the second by Drusus, Tiberius' son, from the old Rostra) before his body was carried on the shoulders of senators to the Campus, and there cremated. There was even one man, a former praetor, who claimed on oath to have seen his likeness ascending from the ashes of the pyre into the heavens. His remains were gathered up by the leading men of the equestrian order, who then, with their tunics unbelted and their feet bare, placed them in the Mausoleum. (This was the monument that he had built between the Flaminian Way and the bank of the Tiber during his sixth consulship, when he had also opened to the public the wooded pathways that surrounded it.)

[101] His will – which was written in two books, partly in his own hand, and partly in the hands of his freedmen Polybius and Hilarion – had been drawn up in the consulship of Lucius Plancus and Gaius Silius, three days before the Nones of April,⁸⁰ one year and four months before his death, and deposited with the Vestal Virgins; now, after the Vestals had brought them out, together with three rolls sealed in the same manner, they were all opened and read to the senate. He designated as his primary heirs Tiberius, who received two-thirds of his estate, and Livia, who received a third, and obliged them both to take his name; his secondary heirs were Drusus, Tiberius' son, who received a third, and Germanicus and his three sons, who received the remainder; in the third rank of his heirs he listed numerous relatives and friends.⁸¹ To the Roman people he left 40 million sesterces, to the tribes 3,500,000, to the soldiers of the praetorian guard 1,000 each, to

the city watch 500 and to the legionaries 300. These legacies – which he had always kept ready to hand in the treasury – he instructed to be paid out at once. He made other bequests to a variety of people, some as large as 20,000 sesterces, although these he arranged to be paid out after a year had passed, excusing himself on the grounds that his own personal resources were limited, and that even his heirs were getting no more than 150 million, despite the fact that over the past twenty years his friends had left him 1,400 million in their various wills (almost all of this, together with the patrimony left him by his two fathers, Octavius and Julius Caesar, and his other inheritances, he had spent in the service of the republic). He gave orders that the two Julias – his daughter and his granddaughter – were not to be buried in his tomb when they died. As for the three rolls, in one of them he included instructions on the arrangements for his funeral, in another an account of his achievements, which he wished to have inscribed upon bronze tablets and set up in front of the Mausoleum, and in the third a statistical overview of the entire empire: how many soldiers there were serving with the eagles across its expanse, and how much money there was in the state treasury, in his own privy purse and in outstanding taxes. In a footnote he appended the names of the freedmen and slaves from whom the full details could be demanded.

Tiberius

[1] The patrician branch of the Claudian family – for there was a plebeian branch as well, no less influential or distinguished – had its origins in Regilli, a Sabine town.¹ From there, accompanied by a large throng of dependants, the family migrated to Rome shortly after the city's founding on the invitation of Titus Tatius, Romulus' partner on the throne² (either that, or – as is more generally held – they arrived when Atta Claudius was the head of the family, some six years after the expulsion of the kings³); in Rome they were enrolled in the ranks of the patricians, and given land by the state for their dependants on the far side of the Anio,⁴ together with a burial ground for members of their own family at the foot of the Capitol. Over the course of the years they secured twenty-eight consulships, five dictatorships and seven censorships, and celebrated six triumphs and two ovations. Although the family was identified by a whole variety of forenames and *cognomina*, they were all agreed – following the conviction of two members of the family named Lucius, one for robbery and the other for murder – that this particular forename should be off-limits. To their *cognomina*, by contrast, they added Nero, which in the Sabine language means ‘strong and vigorous’.

[2] Records show that many of the Claudians rendered a large number of exceptional services to the republic – and that many did the opposite. To confine myself to listing the prime examples: Appius Caecus successfully argued that no terms should be agreed with King Pyrrhus, because of the harm it would do.⁵ Claudius Caudex was the first to take a fleet across the straits and drive the Carthaginians from Sicily.⁶ Tiberius Nero annihilated the huge force that Hasdrubal had brought with him from Spain before he could join with his brother Hannibal.⁷ Set against this, Claudius Regillianus – while he was serving as one of the ten officials appointed to draw up the code of laws – sought to rape a freeborn virgin by having her registered as a slave, and thereby precipitated a second walkout of the plebeians on the patricians.⁸ Claudius Russus set up a statue of himself sporting a diadem in Forum Appi, and sought to leverage his powers of patronage to gain control of Italy. Claudius Pulcher,⁹ while stationed with his fleet off Sicily, showed such contempt for the omens sent him by the gods that, after taking the auspices and finding that the chickens were off their food, he flung them into the sea, telling them to drink if they would not eat, and promptly attacked the enemy; then, after he had been defeated, he seemed to make light of his country's peril a second time, when he responded to instructions from the senate to appoint a dictator by naming his errand boy, Glycias.

The women likewise furnish a contradictory array of exemplars, for both the best-known Claudias were members of the family: the Claudia who, when the ship carrying objects sacred to the Idaean mother of the gods ran aground in the Tiber, raised a loud prayer that, if her reputation for chastity

were justified, she might pull it from the shallows, and then successfully hauled it after her;¹⁰ also the other Claudia, the one who was tried before the people on a charge of treason (something unheard of for a woman!) because, when her carriage was held up by the large numbers of people in its way, she openly expressed the wish that her brother Pulcher might be brought back to life and lose another fleet, so that Rome would be less crowded.

What is more, it is a well-known fact that the Claudians were Optimates to a man, and staunch defenders of patrician prestige and influence (the only exception being Publius Clodius,¹¹ who, because he wanted to have Cicero exiled from the city, had himself adopted by a man who was not just a plebeian but younger than him¹²); indeed, such was the hostility and contempt that they displayed towards the plebs that not even appearing on a capital charge before the people would induce a Claudian to put on mourning or plead for mercy, and several of them, getting into arguments and disagreements with tribunes of the plebs, actually came to blows. There was even a Vestal Virgin who climbed into the chariot of her brother while he was celebrating a triumph that the people had refused to authorize, and rode with him all the way to the Capitol, to ensure that it would be sacrilege for any of the tribunes to intercede with their veto and stop him.

[3] This was the line from which Tiberius Caesar traced his ancestry, and on both sides of his family too: for his father was descended from Tiberius Nero, and his mother from Appius Pulcher, both of whom were sons of Appius Caecus. He was also – because his mother's grandfather had been adopted into the family – a member of the Livians. Plebeian though this

family was, it could boast some remarkable achievements: it had been honoured with eight consulships, two censorships, three triumphs, and even the posts of dictator and master of horse, and was celebrated for the distinction of its men, Salinator and the Drusi especially. Salinator, as censor, had put a black mark against all the tribes, condemning them for inconstancy because, although they had hauled him into the courts after his first consulship and convicted him on a range of counts, they had then elected him consul again, and censor to boot.¹³ Drusus gained the *cognomen* by which he and his descendants would subsequently be known by slaying Drausus, an enemy chieftain, in single combat. It is even claimed – in contradiction of the traditional story that it was Camillus who seized back the gold which, in ancient times, had been given to the Senones¹⁴ as a ransom for the Capitol – that in fact it was Drusus who recovered it, during his term as a provincial propraetor in Gaul.¹⁵ His great-great-grandson led a campaign against the Gracchi so effective that he was awarded the title ‘Patron of the Senate’;¹⁶ he left a son who, in the face of a similar political crisis, was pursuing a number of policies designed to resolve it when he was treacherously murdered by his opponents.¹⁷

[4] Nero, the father of Tiberius, was quaestor under Julius Caesar during the Alexandrian War, and as the commander of Caesar’s fleet played a major role in its successful outcome. His reward was the priesthood previously held by Publius Scipio, and a mission to establish a number of colonies in Gaul – Narbo and Arelate¹⁸ among them. Nevertheless, in the wake of Caesar’s murder, when everyone else was intimidated by dread of the mob into voting for an amnesty, he went so far as to propose that the

tyrannicides be rewarded. Subsequently, when the triumvirs fell out with one another at the end of the year in which he had been serving as praetor, he kept the insignia of the office even once his term had expired, and followed Lucius Antonius, the consul and brother of the triumvir, to Perusia; from there, holding fast to the cause even after everyone else had surrendered, he made his escape first to Praeneste, and then to Naples; from there in turn – after an abortive attempt to enlist slaves by promising them their freedom – he fled to Sicily. Here, because he had been denied an immediate audience with Sextus Pompeius, and also because he was stopped from using the fasces, he was so piqued that he made the crossing to Achaea, where he joined Mark Antony. Shortly afterwards, once peace terms had been agreed by all the various parties, it was with Antony that he returned to Rome; and here, pressed by Augustus to surrender him his wife Livia Drusilla – despite the fact that she was pregnant at the time and had already borne him a son – he did so. He died not long afterwards, and was survived by two sons: Tiberius Nero and Drusus Nero.

[5] There are some who think that Tiberius was born in Fundi, based on no more solid evidence than that Livia's mother came from there, and that sometime later a statue of Good Fortune was put up in the town by order of the senate. The overwhelming witness of the most reliable sources, however, is that he was born in Rome on the Palatine Hill, on the sixteenth day before the Kalends of December, during the consulship of Marcus Aemilius Lepidus (it was his second) and Lucius Munatius Plancus, during the course of the Philippi campaign.¹⁹ Indeed, this is how it is recorded both in the official calendars and in the public records. Nevertheless, there

are still some who write that he was born in the previous year, during the consulship of Hirtius and Pansa, and others that he was born in the year that followed, during the consulship of Servilius Isauricus and Lucius Antonius.

[6] He had a troubled infancy and boyhood, marked by constant upheavals, since he had to accompany his parents as they fled this way and that: twice, in Naples, as his parents were creeping down to the docks to escape the storming of the city by the enemy, he almost gave them away by crying, once when he was removed from his nurse's breast, and a second time when he was abruptly taken from his mother's arms by people who, in their efforts to help the unhappy women caught up in the crisis, were assisting them with whatever they were carrying. After he had been taken all over Sicily and Achaea, and then entrusted to the Spartans (who were clients of the Claudians) as an official ward, he almost died when, as he and a travelling party were making their way from the city by night, they suddenly found themselves surrounded by a fire which was sweeping the wood and singed Livia's hair and clothes. The gifts which he was given in Sicily by Pompeia, the sister of Sextus Pompeius – a cloak, a brooch and some golden amulets – exist to this day on public display in Baiae. Once back in Rome, he was adopted as the heir of Marcus Gallius in the senator's will, and accepted the inheritance, only to renounce his new name soon afterwards, on the grounds that Gallius had made common cause with the enemies of Augustus. When he was nine he gave a speech from the Rostra in praise of his dead father; then, just as he was entering puberty, he accompanied Augustus during the triumph held to celebrate Actium, riding the trace-horse on the left of the chariot, while Marcellus, the son of

Octavia, rode the horse on its right. He also presided at the city festival, and during the Circus entertainments led the troop of older boys in the Troy Game.

[7] I will now give the details of what he did after putting on an adult's toga for the first time, both during his youth and during the years that followed it, right up to when he became *princeps*. He sponsored a gladiatorial show in memory of his father, and another in memory of his grandfather Drusus, on different dates and in different venues (the first of these shows was staged in the Forum, and the second in the amphitheatre, complete with discharged gladiators who had been paid 100,000 sesterces each to come out of retirement for them); he gave other games as well, funded by his mother and stepfather, and these – although he did not attend them in person – were all on a magnificent scale. As his wife he took Agrippina, the daughter of Marcus Agrippa and niece of Caecilius Atticus (the Roman knight to whom Cicero sent his letters); she bore him a son, Drusus, whom he acknowledged, but then, although the pair of them were very well matched, and she was pregnant again, he was abruptly forced to divorce her and marry Julia, the daughter of Augustus: this caused him no little emotional distress, for he was very much in love with Agrippina, and disapproved of Julia's way of life, having realized (in truth, it was common knowledge) that she had been keen to get her hands on him even while married to her former husband. He deeply mourned his loss of Agrippina following the divorce, and once, when he happened to meet her, trailed after her, his eyes so full of tears, his gaze so sorrowful, that steps were taken to ensure that he would never see her again. Even so, he lived happily enough

with Julia to begin with, and even reciprocated her affections; but it did not take long for their relations to cool, and the loss of their baby son, whose birth at Aquileia had served as an assurance of their union, left him so cold towards her that he never slept with her again. He lost his brother Drusus in Germany, and escorted the body all the way back to Rome, walking ahead of it the entire journey.

[8] He embarked on his civil career by pleading before Augustus the various cases of King Archelaus,²⁰ the citizens of Tralles and the Thessalians; by making speeches to the senate on behalf of the people of Laodicea, Thyatira and Chios, who had had their cities devastated by an earthquake, and were begging for assistance; and by arraigning on a charge of treason Fannius Caepio, the co-conspirator with Varro Murena against Augustus, and securing his conviction. He was also responsible during this period for two areas of administration: making up a shortfall in the supply of grain to Rome, and launching a thorough investigation into the slave-barracks across Italy, the owners of which had a terrible reputation for seizing and imprisoning not just travellers, but men whose fear of military service had driven them to hide out there.

[9] Following an initial spell of military service as a tribune during the Cantabrian campaign, he led an army to the East, where he restored Tigranes to the throne of Armenia, and in his role as commander crowned him with a diadem. He also recovered the standards which the Parthians had seized from Marcus Crassus. After this he served as governor of Gallia Comata for about a year, at a time when it was convulsed by barbarian incursions and disputes among its chieftains. He then fought wars against

the Raetians and the Vindelicians,²¹ then against the Pannonians and then against the Germans. In the first of these wars he subdued the Alpine tribes, in the Pannonian War the Breuci and Dalmatians, and in the German War he transported 40,000 prisoners across the Rhine into Gaul, where he settled them on lands beside the river. He was rewarded for these achievements with an ovation of an unprecedented kind: for not only did he enter Rome in a chariot,²² but prior to that (according to some) he was honoured with triumphal regalia.

He held magistracies below the legal age, serving pretty much successively as quaestor, praetor and consul, and even – in the period between his first and second consulships – received a five-year grant of tribunician power.

[10] At the high watermark of all this success, however, while he was in the prime of life and in excellent health, he abruptly decided to retire, and to withdraw as far as possible from the centre of things. Whether he was prompted to do this by loathing for his wife, whom he could neither denounce nor divorce, nor any longer endure, or was moved instead by an ambition to avoid the contempt that is bred of familiarity, and by his absence not just to maintain his authority, but perhaps, should his country ever have need of him, to boost it, is unclear; some, however, think that, since by now the sons of Augustus had reached adulthood, he was voluntarily ceding to them the rank that he had long enjoyed as the second most important man in the state, and that by doing so he was following the example of Marcus Agrippa, who had left for Mytilene when Marcus Marcellus took up public office, so as not to seem to be obstructing or

overshadowing the young man by staying in Rome. This, in fact (albeit after the event), was the reason he himself gave; at the time, though, he justified his request for a leave of absence by claiming that he was weary of honours, and needed a rest from his labours. Not even his mother's desperate entreaties nor his stepfather's complaints to the senate that he was being abandoned could persuade him to relent – and indeed, when they persisted in trying to stop him, he went on a four-day hunger strike. When at last he was given permission to leave, he left his wife and son in Rome, hurried down to Ostia, and then, without saying a word to those who had escorted him there, and embracing only a few of them, made his departure.

[11] From Ostia he sailed along the Campanian coast, pausing briefly when news reached him that Augustus had fallen ill; but then, when this gave rise to gossip that he was only lingering there because he had hopes of the ultimate prize, he continued on his way, sailing against near-constant headwinds until he reached Rhodes (he had fallen for the charms and healthy air of this island back when he had made a stop there on his return from Armenia).

Here, contenting himself with a modest town house and a villa in the country not that much larger, he led the life of a simple private citizen, and from time to time, without any lictors or slaves to do his bidding, would stroll about the gymnasium, swapping pleasantries with the common Greeks almost as though they were his equals. One morning, when he was mapping out his day, he happened to express a wish to visit those in the city who might be ill. His attendants, misunderstanding him, gave instructions that all the sick should be carried into the public portico and grouped

according to the category of their sickness. Mortified by this unexpected development, and unsure for a while what to do, he finally settled on going around them all, no matter how humble and unimportant they might be, and apologizing to each one in turn. Only on one single occasion is it recorded that he made blatant use of his tribunician power: this was when, on one of the regular visits he used to make to the schools and lecture halls where leading scholars would teach, a heated argument broke out among various rival sophists, and one of them was bold enough to abuse him because he had taken the side of the opposing faction. At this, not kicking up any fuss, he returned home; but then, surrounded by the full retinue of his lictors, he made a dramatic reappearance, had his herald summon the man who had abused him before the tribunal and ordered him taken to prison.

In due course he learned that Julia, his wife, had been convicted of sexual impropriety and adultery, and that, on the authority of Augustus, she had been served a notice of divorce in his name; delighted though he was by this news, he still saw it as his duty to write numerous letters to Augustus, pleading the cause of his daughter as best he could, and to allow her to keep everything that he had given her, no matter how little she might have merited it. When his grant of tribunician power came to an end, he finally acknowledged that his only motive for going into retirement had been to avoid the suspicion that he was a rival to Gaius and Lucius, and sought permission – now that the whole issue had been put to bed, since the pair of them had both reached adulthood, and were self-evidently Augustus' successors – to visit his relatives, whom he was missing very much. Not

only was his request denied, however, but he was sternly instructed to give up all thoughts of the family whom he had so readily abandoned.

[12] So it was that he had to stay in Rhodes against his will, and only with his mother's help was he able to disguise this humiliation by pretending that he was Augustus' legate on the island. From that point on he lived not just as a private citizen but as someone in fear for his life – so much so that he hid himself away in the rural interior of the island, and sought to avoid the embassies of those who happened to be sailing past it (and which were very frequent, since no one with a military or a provincial command, no matter where the province might lie, would fail to put in at Rhodes). But then he was given additional cause to worry: for when he crossed from Rhodes to Samos to visit his stepson Gaius, who had been given the command of the East, he sensed a definite hostility, the result of allegations that had been levelled against him by Marcus Lollius, Gaius' companion and guardian. He also came under suspicion of employing centurions who owed their advancement to him and were returning from leave to deliver coded messages to various people in Gaius' camp, with the aim – so it seemed – of inciting them to rebellion. Informed by Augustus that he had fallen under suspicion, he repeatedly demanded that someone, anyone, be sent to monitor his actions and words.

[13] He also gave up the horse-riding and weapons-training that had constituted his regular exercise, and abandoned his native dress for the cloak and sandals of a Greek; for almost two years he lived like this, becoming daily ever more an object of scorn and hatred, so that in Nemausus²³ his portraits and statues were torn down, and once, when his

name was mentioned at a dinner party hosted by Gaius, a man stood up and promised that, if the order were only given, he would set sail for Rhodes immediately, and return with the head of the ‘exile’ (for such was the nickname he had been given). No wonder, then, now that his mood of anxiety had been sharpened by an actual crisis, he should have been prompted, backed by appeals from his mother no less importunate than his own, to sue for his return – appeals that, as luck would have it, were answered positively. Augustus, you see, had resolved not to decide the matter without the agreement of his eldest son – and it so happened that Gaius, at that precise moment, had fallen out with Marcus Lollius, and was therefore ready to lend an ear to his stepfather’s requests. And so it was, on Gaius’ sufferance, that he was recalled – but on condition that he take no part in the affairs of state, nor hold any public office.

[14] Eight years after his retirement, then, he made his return, unshaken still in his strong conviction that he had a bright future, for this was what signs and portents had been suggesting since before he was born. When Livia was pregnant with him, and looking by various means of divination to find out whether she would give birth to a boy, she took an egg from under a broody hen, and from this – after she and her attendants had taken turns to warm it between their hands – there hatched a chick with a splendid crest. Again, while he was still a child, the astrologer Scribonius prophesied great things for him, and even foretold that – although he would never wear a crown – he would rule as a king (the regime of the Caesars being, of course, something that nobody could have imagined at the time). Then, during his first military campaign, as he was leading an army bound for Syria through

Macedonia, it so happened in Philippi that altars which in bygone days had been dedicated by various legions to commemorate their victories suddenly blazed of their own accord with fire; not long afterwards, while travelling to Illyricum, he paid a visit to the oracle of Geryon near Patavium, where he drew a lot which advised him, if he wished to know the future, to throw golden dice into the fountain of Aponus²⁴ – and these, when he did so, gave him the highest possible score (they can still be seen to this day beneath the water). A few days before his recall, an eagle – a bird never before seen on Rhodes – perched on the roof of his house; likewise, as he was changing his tunic the day before news of his recall arrived, it seemed that his clothes began to blaze. It was on this occasion too that Thrasyllus, the astrologer whom he had recruited to serve him as a resident intellectual, sighted a ship as the two of them were strolling together, and declared that it brought him good news: his confidence in the astrologer was thereupon justified, and just in the nick of time too, for he had decided, because things kept going wrong for him, contrary to Thrasyllus' predictions, to push the man off a cliff, as someone whom he had too hastily entrusted with his secrets.

[15] Once he was back in Rome he introduced his son Drusus to public life, and then immediately moved from the house of Pompey in Carinae to the Gardens of Maecenas on the Esquiline,²⁵ where – allowing nothing to disturb him in his seclusion – he played no part in the affairs of state, but devoted himself instead entirely to private obligations. But then, when both Gaius and Lucius died within three years of each other, he was adopted alongside their brother Marcus Agrippa by Augustus, while he himself was

required to adopt his nephew Germanicus. From that point on, he no longer acted as the head of a family, nor held on to any of the rights that he had forfeited as a result of his adoption. For he neither gave out donatives nor granted slaves their freedom, nor could he receive inheritances or legacies except by adding them to his personal allowance – which technically belonged to his father.²⁶

Nevertheless, from that time on, no opportunity was let slip to promote his greatness – and all the more so once it had become clear, after Agrippa was disowned and banished, that no one had any prospect of the succession save him.

[16] Granted another five years of tribunician power, he was assigned the task of pacifying Germany – and it was in this province that the Parthian ambassadors, after they had presented their credentials to Augustus in Rome, were ordered to attend him as well. When news came of a revolt in Illyricum, however, he was transferred to the command in this new conflict, the most serious against a foreign adversary since the wars against Carthage: three years it lasted, and required him to campaign with fifteen legions and a matching number of auxiliary forces in consistently challenging circumstances, and with a constant shortage of supplies.

Despite frequent recalls, he stuck to the task, fearful of the offensive that an enemy so formidable and close to hand might make should he cede them any ground. The rewards for his perseverance were great indeed: for he subdued the whole of Illyricum, and brought everywhere between Italy, the kingdom of Noricum,²⁷ Thrace and Macedonia – in short, the entire region between the River Danube and the Adriatic – under Roman rule.

[17] Events, however, served to add yet further lustre to the glory of this achievement. For it was at around this time that Quintilius Varus and his three legions perished in Germany, and nobody doubted that the victorious Germans, had Illyricum not been subdued by that point, would have joined forces with the Pannonians. No wonder, then, that he should have been awarded a triumph and numerous splendid honours. Some even proposed that he be given the *cognomen* ‘Pannonicus’, others ‘Invictus’, and others yet ‘Pius’ – but all three were met with a veto from Augustus, together with his own promise that he would be happy enough with the *cognomen* that would be his once Augustus himself was dead. His triumph he postponed because the city was in mourning for the calamity of Varus’ defeat; but even so, after he had made his entrance into the city wearing his bordered toga and a laurel wreath, he mounted a tribunal which had been set up in the Saepta, and there, with the senate standing in attendance and the consuls on either side, he took his seat next to Augustus, offered his greetings to the people, and then, from the tribunal, was escorted around the various temples.

[18] The following year he returned to Germany, where, realizing that it was recklessness and negligence that had led Varus to disaster, he did nothing without first taking the advice of others; even though previously he had always been happy to back his own judgement, now, contrary to his usual practice, he consulted widely on the conduct of the campaign. He was also much more attentive to detail than before: crossing the Rhine, for instance, he would set strict limits on the supplies that could be taken, and would not let the wagons go over the river until, standing on the bank, he

had inspected their loads to make sure that nothing prohibited or unnecessary was being carried. His conduct on the far side of the Rhine was as follows: he took his food sitting directly on the bare ground, and would often spend the night without a tent; also, he issued both his orders for the following day and any instructions that he might need to give at the last minute in writing, and made clear that all those unsure about their responsibilities, no matter what, should bring the issue directly to him, even if it was the dead of night.

[19] The discipline he enforced was extremely strict, for he revived methods of punishment and humiliation from the ancient past, and even went so far as to demote the commander of a legion for sending some soldiers across the river with one of his freedmen on a hunting expedition. Although he left little to fortune and chance, he would join battle with a greater sense of confidence if, as he was working by night, his light suddenly flickered and went out, as though extinguished by an invisible hand: for, as he used to observe, he could put his trust in a sign that had never failed him, nor his ancestors, in any of their commands. Even so, in the very hour of his ultimate victory, he only narrowly avoided assassination by a Bructerian²⁸ who, having wormed his way in among his attendants, was given away by nerves, and then confessed under torture to the crime that he had been plotting.

[20] He returned to Rome after two years in Germany, and celebrated the triumph which he had previously postponed; he was accompanied on it by his senior officers, for whom he had procured triumphal honours. Before he turned to climb the Capitol, he stepped out of his chariot and knelt before

his father, who was presiding. He showed his gratitude to Bato for allowing him and his army to retreat after trapping them in rough terrain by loading the Pannonian chieftain down with splendid gifts, and sending him to Ravenna.²⁹ He then feasted the people at a banquet which boasted 1,000 tables, and gave each individual a donative of 300 sesterces. He used the spoils of war to dedicate the temple of Concord, and also – in his brother's name as well as his own – the temple of Castor and Pollux.³⁰

[21] Not long afterwards a law was sponsored by the consuls decreeing that he should be jointly responsible with Augustus for the provinces and for conducting the census; then, once the purification ceremony which marked the end of the census had been completed, he set out for Illyricum. No sooner had he embarked on this journey, however, than he had to be recalled to attend Augustus, whom he found near death but still breathing, and with whom he spent a whole day closeted in private.

I know it is commonly believed that, following Tiberius' departure from this conference, the slaves who attended the bedchamber overheard Augustus cry out, 'I pity the Roman people – doomed to be ground between such slow-moving jaws!' Nor am I oblivious either to the following claims, which are often made: that Augustus never sought to disguise what was anyway evident – a distaste for the grim cast of his heir's mind so profound that sometimes, when interrupted by him while chatting in a relaxed and light-hearted manner, the *princeps* would break off the conversation; that he was only ever prevailed upon to adopt his stepson by Livia's nagging; even that Augustus was motivated by a selfish ambition to be all the more missed for the comparison that such a successor would provide. Nevertheless, I

refuse to accept that this most circumspect and thoughtful of *principes* would ever have done anything without good cause, especially with so much at stake, and believe therefore that he must have weighed up Tiberius' good and bad qualities, and decided that the good outweighed the bad – for, after all, Augustus swore before a public assembly that he was adopting him for the good of the republic, and described him in various letters as a man of formidable military talents, and the sole shield of the Roman people.

Here are a few excerpts from these letters:

‘Farewell, my dearest Tiberius, and may fortune favour you in your enterprises as you serve me and the Muses as our general. Dearest and (should this not be what you are, may I never know joy) bravest and most dutiful of generals, farewell.’

‘I do admire the way that you have conducted your campaigns this summer, my Tiberius, and truly believe – bearing in mind all the challenges you faced, and the apathy of your men – that no one could have behaved more responsibly. All those who were with you are agreed that the celebrated line describes you perfectly: “One man’s vigilance has served to set our country back on its feet.”’³¹

‘If ever anything should crop up that requires careful thought, or if ever I am put in a bad mood, then – so help me Jupiter! – do I long for my Tiberius indeed, and these lines of Homer come to mind:

Should this man only follow me, then even through blazing flames
It may be that we will get home, for he is most learned and
wise.’³²

‘When I hear and read how drained you are by all the ceaseless demands that are placed on you, the gods abandon me if I do not shudder in sympathy – and so I implore you to go easy with yourself, so that your mother and I will not be prostrated by learning that you are on your last legs, and the entire dominion of the Roman people thereby put in peril. What does it matter to me whether I am in good health or not, if you are not? I beg the gods, for all our sakes, if they care anything for the Roman people, to keep you safe and healthy, now and always.’

[22] He did not make public the death of Augustus until Agrippa Postumus had first been eliminated. The tribune appointed to serve as the young man’s gaoler killed him after receiving written instructions to that effect. It is unclear who wrote these instructions: perhaps Augustus, lying on his deathbed, had left them with the aim of removing a source of civil discord, or perhaps Livia – with or without the knowledge of Tiberius – forged them in Augustus’ name. At all events, when the tribune reported to Tiberius that his orders had been carried out, he replied that he had given no such orders, and declared that the tribune should answer for it to the senate (he said this, perhaps, with the aim of avoiding any temporary opprobrium, for he never mentioned it again, and the whole business was soon forgotten).

[23] After he had used his tribunician power to summon the senate, he began to address it; but then abruptly, as though overwhelmed by grief, he let out a groan, declared how sorry he was that the breath of his life as well as his voice had not failed him, and handed over his speech to Drusus, his son, to read on his behalf. Then, bringing in Augustus’ will (but permitting

only those witnesses who belonged to the senatorial order to be present, while the other witnesses were obliged to confirm their seals at the doors of the Senate House), he had a freedman read it out. The will began as follows: ‘Since I have been robbed by cruel fortune of my sons, Gaius and Lucius, let Tiberius Caesar be heir to two-thirds of my estate.’ These words, of course, only confirmed the suspicions of those who believed that Augustus had adopted him less out of choice than necessity, since otherwise they would surely have been omitted from the preamble.

[24] Although he did not hesitate to take up the powers of a *princeps* and begin exercising them immediately, nor to recruit, in a show of power that served simultaneously to enforce it, a squad of bodyguards, for a long time he refused the actual title, but instead, in a quite shameless display of hypocrisy, reproved those of his friends who urged him to adopt it by telling them that they had no idea what a monster the empire was. Even when senators fell to their knees before him, he kept them in a state of uncertainty by answering their importunities in a studiedly ambivalent manner, and by cleverly stringing them along, so that the patience of some was strained to breaking point. ‘Take it or leave it,’ one senator yelled at him amid the general confusion, while another told him to his face that he – unlike other people, who were slow to do what they had promised – was slow to promise what he was already doing. Finally, complaining that he had been shackled like a slave to a cruel and burdensome form of labour, he accepted the empire as though he had no choice in the matter – but not without suggesting at the same time that he hoped one day to lay it down. His exact

words were these: ‘Until the time comes when granting me in my old age some rest can seem to you the right thing to do.’

[25] The reason for his prevarication was dread of the various crises that were menacing him on all sides, which prompted him repeatedly to declare that he was holding a wolf by its ears. A slave of Agrippa named Clemens had raised a force of no small size with which to avenge his master; Lucius Scribonius Libo, a man of noble rank, was secretly fomenting rebellion; two mutinies, one in Illyricum and one in Germany, had broken out among the troops there. Both armies were demanding a number of substantial concessions (the principal one being that they should get the same pay as the praetorians), but the legions in Germany were also refusing to acknowledge as *princeps* a man who had not been their choice, and kept urging Germanicus, who was their commander at the time, to seize control of the affairs of state – despite his obdurate refusal. It was this, back in Rome, that caused his uncle the greatest alarm, and prompted him to request the senate to appoint him to any role in the state that it wished, since it was impossible for one man on his own to manage all of it, not without a colleague – or indeed several colleagues. He also pretended to be ill, so that Germanicus would be reassured that the succession – or at least a share in the rule of the empire as *princeps* – would soon be his. Then, once the mutinies had been suppressed, he deployed trickery to eliminate the threat from Clemens. Because he was anxious not to begin on a repressive note, he waited until his second year in power before arraigning Libo in front of the senate, and contented himself in the meanwhile with staying on his guard: whenever he and Libo, together with the other priests, were offering

sacrifice together, for instance, he would make sure that Libo's sacrificial knife was replaced with one of lead; likewise, he would only ever grant Libo's request for a private interview if his son Drusus were present, and for the duration of their meeting, as they walked together, he would hold fast to Libo's right arm, as if leaning on it for support.

[26] Once freed from his fears, he conducted himself much as any citizen in the days of the republic might have done – and indeed, for a while, with fewer airs. Although offered many splendid honours, he accepted only a few modest ones. Grudgingly, he permitted his birthday to be marked by the addition of a single two-horse chariot to the Plebeian Circus Games, the festival which coincided with it.³³ Not only did he refuse to allow temples or priests to be voted him, but he even required people to ask permission when setting up his statues or images, and always to set them among the temple furnishings, never among the statues of the gods. He intervened to stop the swearing of oaths to uphold his official decrees, and the month of September being renamed 'Tiberius', and October 'Livius'.³⁴ He refused to take *Imperator* as his first name and 'Father of His Country' as his *cognomen*; he did not allow his entrance hall to be adorned with the civic crown; even the name 'Augustus', which was his by right of inheritance, he only ever used in his letters when writing to kings and oriental princes. He held a mere three consulships after coming to power: one for a few days, another for three months, and laid down the third, which he held while absent from Rome, on the Ides of May.

[27] So disgusted was he by flattery that he refused to allow senators to approach his litter, be it to wish him good day or to broach some matter of

business, and once, when a man of consular rank sought to kneel down while making an apology to him, he started with such violence that he actually fell on his back; likewise, if someone referred to him in an obsequious manner during a conversation or a speech, he would not hesitate to interrupt, reprove and correct the speaker on the spot: when someone addressed him as ‘Master’, for instance, he told the man never to call him by such an insulting title again; and when someone else hailed his responsibilities as ‘sacred’, and someone else appeared before the senate saying that it was on his ‘orders’, he obliged them to correct their language by changing ‘sacred’ to ‘laborious’ and ‘orders’ to ‘urging’.

[28] Even when he and his family were being slandered and insulted, and targeted by lampoons, he kept both his temper and his patience, on the grounds that – as he would often put it – thought and speech in a free state must be free; and when on one occasion the senate sought the prosecution of those responsible for the abuse, he answered, ‘We do not have so much time on our hands that we can justify bothering ourselves with yet more matters. Go down this road, and you will never get anything done. All it will do is provide people with an excuse for bringing their private quarrels before you.’ This comment of his too, worthy of the senate in its heyday, has been preserved: ‘If someone criticizes me, I will go to the effort of providing him with an account of my words and deeds – and if he persists, well then, I will be his enemy just as he is mine.’³⁵

[29] The traditional character of his respect for the senate was all the more evident for the way in which, when he addressed either individual senators or all of them as a body, he would go almost beyond the

requirements of civility. ‘I ask you to forgive me,’ he said one day, when disagreeing with Quintus Haterius in the Senate House, ‘if in my capacity as a senator I speak too freely in opposing you.’ Then he addressed the entire senate: ‘I say now, O conscript fathers, as I have often said in the past, that a good *princeps*, one who cares for the well-being of the state, should properly be the slave of the senate (by whom, after all, he has been invested with such great power, so freely given), and frequently of the entire body of Rome’s citizens, and sometimes even of individuals. Far from regretting these sentiments, I look upon you as I have ever done – as good, just and forbearing masters.’

[30] Indeed, by upholding the traditional majesty and power of the senate and the magistrates, he introduced the semblance of a free state. There was no public or private issue – great or small, it made no difference – that he did not refer to the fathers of the senate: taxes and monopolies; the construction and repair of public infrastructure; even how soldiers were to be recruited and discharged, and the legions and auxiliary units disposed across the provinces; and finally decisions on who should have their commands extended or be appointed to fight wars as required, and what the style and content of replies to letters from kings should be. He obliged the commander of a cavalry unit who was accused of armed robbery to plead his case before the senate. He always made a point of entering the Senate House alone, and on the one occasion, when he had to be brought in a litter because of illness, dismissed his attendants.

[31] He did not complain when certain measures were passed in the teeth of his opposition to them. Although of the opinion that newly elected

magistrates should habituate themselves to their duties by remaining in Rome, he did grant one of the praetors elect permission to travel abroad with the privileges of an ambassador; and on another occasion, despite his recommendation that the people of Trebiae³⁶ should be allowed to spend on constructing a road money that had been left them to build a new theatre, he was unable to overrule the wishes of the man who had written the will. Once, when a motion put to the senate saw the house divide in two, and he crossed over to join the smaller faction, no one followed him. Other matters too were only ever dealt with according to legal convention by the magistrates, and such was the authority of the consuls that some ambassadors from Africa complained to them that the time they spent with Caesar, to whom they had been sent, was time wasted (and small wonder, since it was well known that he would rise to greet the consuls, and make way for them in the street).

[32] He would rebuke any men of consular status who, while holding a military command, neglected to send the senate a written account of their activities, and who referred the awarding of military honours to him, as though they lacked the right to award these themselves. He commended a praetor who, at the start of his term of office, revived the ancient custom of celebrating the memory of his ancestors in a speech before the people. The funeral processions of some luminaries he followed the whole way to the pyre. Even when dealing with men of lower rank and matters of less importance he never put on airs. When the magistrates of Rhodes addressed public documents to him which they had failed to sign according to the correct formula, he sent for them, did not berate them for it but merely told

them to sign the documents correctly, and then dismissed them from his presence. There was also a grammarian, Diogenes, who used to give a lecture in Rhodes every Sabbath, and who once, when Tiberius happened to come on the wrong day, refused him entrance, but sent him a message by a slave boy, telling him to return on the seventh day. When Diogenes then came to Rome, and stood at his door to greet him, he contented himself with telling the grammarian to return in seven years' time. To governors who urged him to impose a heavier tribute on the provinces he wrote back that a good shepherd should shear his flock, not skin them.

[33] Only gradually did he reveal the true character of his rule, since for a long while he would veer this way and that, albeit likelier to show himself benevolent and attentive to the people's needs than not. To begin with, if he did interfere, it was to stop abuses. This was what prompted him to rescind various decrees of the senate, and regularly to offer himself as an adviser to magistrates presiding in court, taking a seat either next to them or facing them at the end of the tribunal. At the slightest hint that a defendant had pulled strings to gain acquittal, he would immediately approach the jurors, either from the floor or from the quaestor's tribunal, and remind them of the laws, of the oaths by which they were bound, and of the nature of the crime on which they were sitting in judgment; moreover, any deterioration in public morals caused by neglect or a decline in standards he undertook to repair.

[34] He reduced the cost of games and gladiatorial shows by cutting the wages of actors and restricting the number of gladiators who could be paired with one another to a prescribed number. Prompted by how

obscenely expensive Corinthian vases had become, and by the sale of three mullets for 30,000 sesterces,³⁷ he launched a furious tirade in which he proposed that limits be set on the cost of household furniture; that the senate make annual checks on the price of goods sold in the markets; and that the aediles be given responsibility for a regulation of wine bars and cookshops³⁸ so stringent that even pastries were no longer to be offered for sale. Because he wished to set the public an example of frugality, he would often have half-eaten dishes from the previous day served at formal banquets, or half a boar, on the grounds that – in his own words – it was just as good as a whole one. He issued an edict banning people from kissing one another except on special occasions,³⁹ and another one prohibiting the exchange of New Year gifts after the Kalends of January. His practice it had been to acknowledge the receipt of a gift by giving in exchange a gift of his own that was four times more valuable – but so annoyed was he at being bothered all month by people who had failed to make contact with him on the actual day of the holiday that he put an end to this.

[35] He authorized the relatives of well-born women who had brought shame on their marriages but escaped public prosecution to convene a family council and decree punishment in the traditional manner. When a Roman knight who had sworn never to separate from his wife caught her in bed with their son-in-law, he released the man from his oath and permitted him to divorce her. Women notorious for their sexual misconduct, who had increasingly sought to escape the penalties prescribed for adultery⁴⁰ by casting aside the rights and respect due to married women, and registering themselves as prostitutes; young senators and equestrians with lifestyles so

wild that they preferred the disgrace of demotion from their rank to being bound by the senatorial decree which banned them from performing on the stage or in the amphitheatre: all such men and women he sent into exile, so that none in the future would seek to evade the law by means of subterfuge. He stripped a senator of his broad-striped tunic after learning that the man had retired to the country at the end of June, with the aim of renting a house in Rome more cheaply once the Kalends of July had passed.⁴¹ Another senator he dismissed from the quaestorship for divorcing, the day after he had been successful in the lottery for offices, the woman he had married only the previous day.⁴²

[36] He suppressed various foreign cults, including those of the Egyptians and the Judaeans, and obliged those who practised such superstitions to burn the vestments they wore for their rituals, and all their paraphernalia too. Young Judaeans he sent to a range of provinces with unhealthy climates, ostensibly to undertake military service, while the other Judaeans (and those attracted to Judaeen customs as well) he expelled from Rome, under pain of enslavement for life should they fail to comply. He also banished the city's astrologers – although he did grant an exemption to those who begged him for mercy and promised to give up their arts.

[37] A particular priority of his was to secure the public peace against banditry, brigandage and sedition. He stationed detachments of soldiers across Italy in a much greater concentration than was normal. In Rome he established a single barracks for the praetorian guard, which until then had been billeted in a variety of lodgings scattered around the city. He went to great lengths to prevent public disturbances, and dealt with such as did arise

with a very heavy hand. When rioting in a theatre resulted in casualties, he exiled both the leaders of the rival gangs and the actors who had prompted the riot, and no amount of entreaties from the public could induce him to revoke their banishment. When the people of Pollentia refused to allow the body of a high-ranking centurion to be removed from the Forum until they had extorted money from the dead man's heirs to fund gladiatorial shows, he sent one cohort from Rome and another from the kingdom of Cottius, keeping the reason for their dispatch a secret, so that when the soldiers appeared before the gates of the city, drawing their arms and sounding their trumpets, they were able to enter the city and surprise its people, large numbers of whom, magistrates included, they chained up for life. He abolished the right of asylum wherever it was the custom. When the people of Cyzicus committed violence against some Roman citizens, he deprived them of the freedom which had been their reward for the role they had played in the war against Mithridates.

Rather than continue to lead military expeditions once he had come to power, he opted instead to send legates to deal with any enemy activity, and even then only reluctantly and under sufferance. Kings whom he suspected of malign intent he preferred to keep in check by means of threats and remonstrations rather than force, and would sweet-talk some of them into coming to Rome, dangling promises before them and then refusing to let them go home: Marobodus the German was one such king, Rhascuporis of Thrace another, and Archelaus of Cappadocia a third (his kingdom was reduced to the status of a province as well).

[38] For two whole years after taking over the rule of the empire he never once set foot beyond the gates of Rome. After that, it was true, he did occasionally venture out of the city, but only to visit neighbouring towns, of which Antium was the furthest, and never for more than a few days at a time; even so, he kept announcing his intention to go on another tour of the provinces and the armies, and almost every year would make preparations for such an expedition, collecting wagons, stockpiling provisions in the free towns and colonies, and, in a culminating gesture, allowing prayers to be raised for his departure and return (this was greeted with such widespread hilarity that people nicknamed him ‘Callippides’, after the well-known athlete in the Greek proverb who kept running but never got anywhere).

[39] But then, after the loss of both his sons (Germanicus in Syria, Drusus in Rome), he sought retirement in Campania; and it was the firm opinion of pretty much everyone – and openly stated as such – that he would never return, but soon die there. Both these assumptions were proven true (or at least almost so): for he never did return to Rome, and only a few days after his departure from the city, while he was dining at a villa called the Grotto near Terracina, several of his guests and attendants were killed by a sudden avalanche, which he himself only narrowly survived.

[40] He continued on his way around Campania, heading to Capua, where he dedicated a temple to Jupiter, and to Nola, where he dedicated a temple to Augustus (this had actually been his pretext for the entire trip); then he made the crossing to Capri, an island which particularly appealed to him because, with the exception of a single narrow beach, it was rendered entirely inaccessible by rocky cliffs, which towered sheer above a deep sea.

No sooner had he arrived there, however, than he was summoned back by the ceaseless lamentations of the people over a disaster that had taken place at Fideneae, where the collapse of the amphitheatre during a gladiatorial show had left more than 20,000 spectators dead; so it was that he crossed back to the mainland, where he permitted all and sundry to approach him, a gesture the more striking for the fact that, on his departure from Rome, he had decreed that no one was to disturb him, and that, over the course of his travels, he had blocked anyone who sought to come into his presence.

[41] On his return to the island, however, so completely did he neglect the responsibilities of government that from that point on he never again filled vacancies in the equestrian jury rolls, nor did he appoint any new military tribunes, prefects or provincial governors; he also left Spain and Syria without governors of consular rank for several years, made no attempt to oppose the Parthian annexation of Armenia, and, by permitting the Dacians and the Sarmatians⁴³ to ravage Moesia,⁴⁴ and the Germans the provinces of Gaul, brought shame on the empire and – to no less an extent – endangered its future.

[42] Moreover, now that he had obtained for himself the licence that privacy affords a man, and was far removed from the gaze of the Roman people, he finally surrendered to all the many vices which for so long he had struggled to suppress – each one of which, tracing it as it evolved, I shall now describe. So fond was he of wine that even in his earliest days as a soldier he was nicknamed ‘Biberius’ (a play on Tiberius), ‘Caldius’ (Claudius) and ‘Mero’ (Nero).⁴⁵ Later, after he had become *princeps*, and was actually responsible for the regulation of public morals, he spent two

days and a night without break gorging and drinking with Pomponius Flaccus and Lucius Piso – one of whom he then promptly appointed governor of Syria and the other urban prefect, declaring them in the letters with which he gave his approval to their appointments to be the most delightful of his friends, no matter what time of the day he met them. He also accepted an invitation to supper with Cestius Gallus, a prodigal old pervert, who had once had a black mark put against his name by Augustus, and whom he himself had reprimanded in the senate only a few days earlier, on condition that Cestius behave just as he always did, changing or omitting nothing, and that the meal be served by naked girls. He overlooked various well-born candidates for the quaestorship in favour of a man who, although he lacked any pedigree at all, had successfully met his challenge at a dinner party by downing an entire amphora of wine. He awarded Asellius Sabinus 20,000 sesterces for composing a dialogue in which a truffle, a garden warbler, an oyster and a thrush all debated which of them was the most delicious delicacy. Then, to top things off, he established a new post with responsibility for pleasure, and appointed the Roman knight Titus Caesonius Priscus to it.

[43] Following his retirement to Capri, he set up a brothel⁴⁶ where he could devote himself in private to sexual activities, and in these he would watch troops of girls recruited from far and wide, male prostitutes in the full bloom of adulthood, and children whose particular talent was for fucking and getting fucked at the same time ('sphincters', he called them) all joining together in an orgy of threesomes: a spectacle sufficiently obscene to excite his flagging libido. He had large numbers of the rooms decorated with

paintings and statues that – whether in two dimensions or three – were pornographic in the extreme, and also had books by Elephantis⁴⁷ put in them, so that there would always be an illustration of a required position should anyone need it to complete a performance. He set up shrines to Venus in woods and groves across Capri, where young boys dressed as Pan and girls dressed as nymphs would solicit sex outside caves and grottoes: because of this people openly made play with the island's name, calling it 'Goat Park'.⁴⁸

[44] He became notorious, though, for even worse and more shocking deviancies, such as are hardly to be talked or heard about, and indeed strain the bounds of credibility: it is claimed, for instance, that he trained little boys (whom he called his 'minnows') to slip between his thighs as he was swimming and to tease him with the swirling of their tongues and the playfulness of their nibbling; and that babies who were yet to be weaned but could suck hard were put to his penis as though to a breast. (He was inclined by predilection as well as age to this kind of sexual gratification. When he was left a painting by Parrhasius⁴⁹ which showed Atalanta giving Meleager oral sex,⁵⁰ with the stipulation that should the subject matter be offensive to him then he could have a million sesterces instead, he not only kept the painting but had it put up in his bedroom.) It is reported as well that on one occasion, while he was offering sacrifice, he was so taken by the looks of the attendant carrying the incense that he could hardly bear to wait until the proper dues had been paid to the gods; sure enough, the moment they were done, he took both the boy and his brother, who had been the playing the flute, to one side and forced himself on the pair of them, and

then, when the boys complained about the rape they had endured, had their legs broken.

[45] That he was also in the habit of forcing women – some of them of good family – to give him head⁵¹ is perfectly clear from the fate of a woman called Mallonia who, although delivered to his bed, had persistently refused his advances, and been handed over to informers; even when she was then brought to trial, he would not leave her alone, but kept demanding to know if she was sorry, until at length, leaving the court, she rushed home and stabbed herself, loudly condemning as she did so the disgusting things done by the hairy and foul-smelling old man with his mouth. This was why, during the games that followed, a line from an Atellan play met with huge applause, and was much repeated: ‘the old billy goat is licking the private parts of female goats’.⁵²

[46] So mean was he when it came to money, so tight-fisted, that he never provided those who accompanied him on his travels or military expeditions with a salary, but only their expenses; on just one occasion (and even then only thanks to the open-handedness of his stepfather) did he serve them generously: first he divided them into three groups according to their rank, then gave the first group 600,000 sesterces, the second 400,000 and the third – whom he termed ‘Greeks’ rather than ‘friends’ – 200,000.

[47] As *princeps* he did not construct any significant monuments (for the only projects on which he did embark, the temple of Augustus and the restoration of Pompey’s theatre, he left unfinished despite years of work); he also failed to sponsor any games, and only rarely attended those given by other people, because he was nervous – particularly after he had been

pressured into granting the comic actor Actius his freedom – that people would demand favours of him. He did help out a few impoverished senators, but then, to avoid having to provide further assistance, declared that there would be no further subsidies unless those in need could prove to the senate that the reasons for it were not their fault. The result was that a sense of reticence and embarrassment deterred many from asking – among them Hortalus, the grandson of the orator Quintus Hortensius, and a man who, despite his slender means, had shown himself obedient to the prescriptions of Augustus by fathering four children.

[48] Only twice did he provide subsidies to the general public: once when he offered to lend 100 million sesterces for a term of three years without charging interest, and a second time when he compensated the owners of some apartment blocks on the Caelian Hill which had been lost to fire. The first of these policies was forced on him by demands for assistance from the people during a financial crisis, and followed the failure of a previous attempt to resolve it, when he had encouraged the senate to issue a decree that moneylenders should invest two-thirds of their funds in property, and that debtors should immediately pay off an equivalent proportion of the amount they owed – and the second policy, in a similar manner, was an attempt to alleviate a sudden crisis. Nevertheless, so highly did he rate it as a demonstration of generosity that he demanded the name of the Caelian Hill be changed to the ‘Augustan’. To the soldiers, once he had doubled the legacy left them in Augustus’ will, he made no further donatives, excepting only a grant of 1,000 denarii to each of the praetorians, as a reward for their refusal to back Sejanus, and some gifts to the legions in Syria, because they

alone had failed to show respect for Sejanus by including an image of him among their standards. Only very rarely did he allow veteran soldiers to retire, since he calculated that if they died of old age he would not then need to pay them their pensions. He also failed to offer any of the provinces relief, with the sole exception of Asia, following the devastation of its cities by an earthquake.

[49] It did not take him long to go even further, and turn his mind to expropriation. Everyone knows how he bullied and intimidated Gnaeus Lentulus Augur, a man of immense wealth, into committing suicide and leaving him as his heir; Lepida too, a woman of impeccable breeding, he condemned to death as a favour to Quirinus, a rich and childless former consul who, after divorcing her some twenty years previously, had then accused her of a plot way back in the past to poison him; he also confiscated the estates of the leading men in the Gallic and Spanish provinces, and in Syria and in Greece as well, doing so on such laughably trivial and shameless grounds that some of them were charged merely with having kept a portion of their property in ready cash; he also deprived numerous states and private individuals of their ancient immunities, and of the right to mine precious metals and raise taxes; he even cheated Vonones, king of the Parthians, of the large quantity of treasure that he had brought with him to Antioch after being forced into exile by his own subjects, and – despite the fact that Vonones had put his faith in the Roman people – had him put to death.

[50] The first time he laid bare the loathing he felt for his family was when he brought to light a letter written by Drusus, in which his brother had

discussed with him a plan to force Augustus to restore Rome's lost liberty – but other examples soon followed. Far from showing his wife Julia even a measure of respect and kindness when she was sent into exile (the least one might have expected!),⁵³ he instead tightened the restrictions imposed on her by her father, who had confined her to a single town, by banning her from leaving her house, or indeed enjoying any human contact at all. He also cheated her of the allowance granted her by her father, and of her annual income as well, on the specious legal grounds that Augustus had made no provision for them in his will.

So aggravated was he by the way in which his mother Livia seemed to be arrogating to herself a power equal to his own that he would avoid meeting her on a regular basis, and talking with her in private for any length of time, so as to avoid the impression of being governed by her advice (even though, in reality, he did sometimes rely on it and would invariably do as she suggested). A decree of the senate that his titles should include ‘son of Livia’ as well as ‘son of Augustus’ caused him great indignation.

Unsurprisingly, then, he refused to allow her to be called ‘Parent of Her Country’, or to receive any conspicuous public honour, and repeatedly warned her not to meddle in matters inappropriate for a woman (he was particularly provoked by news that, following the outbreak of a fire near the temple of Vesta, she had attended the scene in person, urging the people and soldiers to ever greater effort, just as she had done back when her husband was alive).

[51] The reason his hostility then became public was, so people say, as follows. Repeatedly pressed by Livia to add to the jury rolls the name of a

man who had just received a grant of citizenship, he retorted that he would only grant her request if she permitted it to be recorded on the roll that he had been pressured into doing it by his mother. Incensed by this, she then brought out of storage some letters that Augustus had written her complaining about her son's sour and inflexible character, and read them out. So upset in turn was he that she had preserved these letters, and was now using them against him in such a spiteful manner, that some think it was one of the factors that prompted him to go into retirement – if not the principal factor. Certainly, during the entire three-year period that she remained alive following his departure from Rome, he saw her only once, and even then just for a single day, for a few hours, nor bothered to visit her even when she fell ill shortly afterwards; then, after she had died, he ensured that her funeral was delayed for several days by constantly floating the possibility that he would attend it, so that by the time her corpse finally came to be interred it had begun to stink and decompose – nor, on the pretence that it was in obedience to her own wishes, would he permit her to be deified. He also annulled her will, and in a short space of time humbled all her friends and the members of her household into the dust, even those to whom on her deathbed she had entrusted the arrangements for her funeral. One of these, a man of equestrian rank, he actually condemned to the treadmill.

[52] Parental love was not something that he felt either for Drusus, his natural child, or for Germanicus, whom he had adopted. He was particularly exasperated by the failings of the former: for Drusus led a wild and dissolute life. This was why, when Drusus died, he was barely affected by

the loss, but instead, almost the moment the funeral was over, returned to the matters that constituted his daily business, and prohibited any longer period of mourning. Indeed, when some ambassadors from Ilium,⁵⁴ who had turned up late, offered him their condolences, he laughed and replied – as though the memory of his loss had already quite faded from his mind – ‘And may I offer you my own condolences on the death of your distinguished countryman Hector?’⁵⁵ Meanwhile, so critical was he of Germanicus that he dismissed his adoptive son’s most celebrated achievements as so much wasted effort, and condemned his most glorious victories for being ruinous to the state. He also complained to the senate when Germanicus, prompted by the unexpected onset of a terrible famine, travelled to Alexandria without his permission. He is even believed to have employed Gnaeus Piso, the governor of Syria, to murder Germanicus, and there are those who think that Piso, when he was subsequently put on trial for the crime, would have produced the documentary evidence for this, had the papers he had shown people in private not been taken from him, and he himself not been murdered. This was why there were chants of ‘Give us back Germanicus’ every night across Rome, and why the slogan appeared scrawled everywhere – nor were people’s suspicions allayed when, in due course, the wife and children of Germanicus suffered terrible persecution as well.

[53] When his daughter-in-law Agrippina, after the death of Germanicus, was a bit too free in making a complaint, he seized her by the hand and quoted her a line of Greek: ‘Do you think yourself hard done by, my little daughter, that you are not in power?’ – nor did he ever deign to speak to her

again. Another time, when they were at supper together, and she shrank from eating an apple that he had offered her, he affected outrage that she had as good as accused him of attempting to poison her, and from that moment on stopped inviting her to his table; but since she had been warned beforehand that to eat the apple would mean her certain death, and was therefore bound to refuse his offer of the fruit (which he in turn had viewed as a means of testing her), it had all been a set-up. Finally, after levelling the false accusation against her that she wished to flee him, now by taking sanctuary with a statue of Augustus, now with the armies, he banished her to Pandateria⁵⁶ – and when she cursed him had her beaten by a centurion so badly that she lost an eye. Then, when she went on hunger strike, he ordered her kept alive by having her mouth held open and food forced down her throat. Even once she had died following her refusal to abandon her hunger strike, he continued to heap abuse on her memory: as well as persuading the senate to include her birthday among the days of ill-omen, he had it credited to his mercy that he had not had her garrotted and dumped on the Gemonian Steps⁵⁷ (indeed, in acknowledgement of this, he permitted a decree to be passed thanking him for it, and consecrating an offering of gold to Capitoline Jupiter).

[54] Since Tiberius had four grandsons, three of them – Nero, Drusus and Gaius⁵⁸ – fathered by Germanicus, and one of them – Tiberius – by Drusus, he was prompted by the loss of his own sons to commend the two eldest sons of Germanicus, Nero and Drusus, to the conscript fathers of the senate, and to mark the day when each of the boys entered public life by distributing money among the people. But then, when he learned that their

names had been joined to his in the public prayers made at the start of each year, he raised the issue with the senate, declaring that such marks of respect should be paid only to men of proven experience and advanced years. From that moment on, because he had made clear his true feelings for them, he left them exposed to charges from every quarter, as well as various underhand schemes designed to provoke them into lashing out at him – which, when they did so, and were betrayed, enabled him to level such a range of lethal accusations against them that they were condemned on the basis of his letters as public enemies, whereupon he had them starved to death; Nero on the island of Pontia, and Drusus in the deepest bowels of the Palatine. It is thought that Nero was driven to commit suicide after an executioner, pretending that he had been sent by order of the senate, showed him a garrote and hooks, and that Drusus was reduced to such torments of hunger that he tried to eat the stuffing of his mattress; the remains of both were then scattered so widely that it proved very difficult to collect them together.

[55] In addition to his old friends and the members of his household, he demanded that twenty of Rome's leading citizens serve him as advisers on matters of state. Of these twenty, he suffered barely two or three to survive, striking down the rest on a variety of pretexts: among them was Aelius Sejanus, whose ruin engulfed many others as well, and whom he had promoted to a pinnacle of power, not out of any particular regard for the man, but because Sejanus was so efficient and cunning that he relied on him to ensnare the children of Germanicus, and thereby confirm his natural grandson, the child of his son Drusus, as his heir.

[56] He cut no more slack to the various Greek dependants he kept about him, and whose company he greatly enjoyed:⁵⁹ when, for instance, he asked a man called Xeno, who talked in a somewhat affected manner, what kind of ugly dialect he was speaking, and the answer came back that it was Doric, he banished the man to Cinaria, on the assumption that Xeno had been making a dig about his term of exile on Rhodes, where Doric was the dialect spoken. Similarly, when he discovered that the grammarian Seleucus was preparing for the quizzes that he liked to set every evening at supper after a day of reading by asking his attendants what books he had been studying that day, he initially banished the man from his table, and then went even further by obliging him to take his own life.

[57] Even as a boy there were glimpses to be had of his cruel and flinty nature. The first person perceptive enough to notice it seems to have been his teacher of rhetoric, Theodorus of Gadara, who – whenever he disciplined him – would employ a most pointed image, describing him (in Greek) as ‘mud mixed with blood’. It was only after he had become *princeps*, however, that it became more evident – even during the early stages of his rule, when he was trying to court popularity by a display of moderation. On one occasion, for instance, when a funeral procession was passing by and a joker shouted out to the corpse, asking it to let Augustus know that the people were yet to be paid their bequests, he ordered the man dragged before him and given the legacy promised in Augustus’ will – then, instructing the joker to tell his father the truth, had him hauled off to execution. Not long afterwards, when a certain Roman knight named Pompeius was obdurate in opposing a motion of the senate, he threatened to

load the knight down with chains, and declared that out of a Pompeius he would fashion a Pompeian: a cruel pun on the man's name and the grim fate met back in history by the Pompeian faction.

[58] At much the same time, asked by the praetor whether courts should be convened to consider cases of treason, he replied that the laws were there to be enforced – and enforce them he most certainly did, with great brutality. The case of one man who had removed the head from a statue of Augustus and replaced it with a different head was brought before the senate, where – because the evidence was not clear-cut – the witnesses were put to torture. When the defendant was then convicted, it prompted a slew of similar cases, in which ever more trivial offences were punished by death: beating a slave or changing one's clothes next to a statue of Augustus; taking a coin or a ring bearing his image into a latrine or a brothel; expressing a negative opinion about anything he had ever said or done. To such an extreme was this taken that one man perished because he allowed himself to be voted honours in his own town on the same day that they had once been voted to Augustus.

[59] So many other, similar acts of savagery did he commit – ostensibly to enforce a moral crackdown but in reality because he was pandering to his own cruel and vicious instincts – that it inspired some people to write satirical verses, reproaching him for the horrors that he had already inflicted, and warning of those yet to come:

O cruel and cold-hearted man, shall I sum you up in a single phrase?
I'll be damned if even your mother can love you.

No knight are you, and why? You lack the qualifications:
no millions, plus – truth be told – to Rhodes you were exiled.⁶⁰

The golden age of Saturn, Caesar, you have quite transmuted
into base metal. For as long as you live, the age will be one of
iron.

He has no need of wine, now that he slakes his thirst with blood:
he gulps it as greedily as in the past he downed neat wine.

Make a study of Sulla, Roman – he had the luck,⁶¹ not you;
and look, if you will, at Marius – but after his return;
and see the hands of Antony as he stirs up civil war,
hands dripping with blood, not once, but over and over again;
and say, ‘Rome is finished!: for whoever comes back from exile
to rule here as a king is bound to spill oceans of blood.’

His initial impulse was to dismiss these verses as an expression of resentment of his reforms, the work of people provoked less by any considered reflection than by anger and spite – ‘Let them hate me,’ he would often say, ‘so long as they respect me.’ But he was the one who demonstrated, and in short order too, just how accurate and well founded the verses had been.

[60] A few days after his arrival on Capri, he was enjoying his seclusion when a fisherman unexpectedly came up to him and presented him with an enormous mullet – whereupon, alarmed that someone had been able to negotiate the most inaccessible reaches of the island by climbing a pathless

cliff, he ordered that the man's face should be scrubbed with the fish. 'I only thank my lucky stars', cried out the fisherman as he was enduring this punishment, 'that I did not bring Caesar the huge lobster that I also caught' – whereupon he gave orders that the lobster should be used to grate the man's face to shreds. He executed a member of the praetorian guard who stole a peacock from his garden. Once, when the litter in which he was travelling was obstructed by brambles, he had the man responsible for plotting out his route, a centurion in the praetorians, stretched out on the ground and beaten to within an inch of his life.

[61] Soon, so numerous were the opportunities for him to satisfy his relish for cruelty of every kind that he could no longer restrain it, targeting for persecution not just the friends but even the acquaintances first of his mother, then of his grandchildren and their mother, and finally of Sejanus. That he became even more vicious once the latter was dead gives the lie to any notion that he was the puppet of Sejanus, and makes clear that his favourite had merely provided him with the opportunities that he craved – this despite the fact that in the brief account in which he summarized his life he had the nerve to write, 'I punished Sejanus after learning that he was bent upon the ruin of my son Germanicus' sons' (these being the same boys whom he had personally had put to death, one of them when Sejanus was already under suspicion, and the other after his final downfall).

Since it would be tedious to list every instance of his cruelty one by one, I will content myself with giving examples of the various ways in which it was given vent. Not a single day went by without an execution: festival or holiday, it made no difference, and some were actually put to death on New

Year's Day; many were charged and condemned alongside their own children (and some even by their own children); it was forbidden the relatives of those condemned to death to mourn them; accusers and sometimes even witnesses were voted special rewards; the word of an informer was never doubted. Every crime was treated as a capital offence, even if it were just an innocuous word or two, so that a poet was prosecuted for having insulted Agamemnon⁶² in a tragedy, and a historian because he had described Brutus and Cassius as the last of the Romans: both authors were denounced and their writings banned, despite the fact that only a few years previously their work had been favourably received by an audience that had included Augustus himself. Some were thrown in prison and denied the solace not merely of reading material, but of conversation and companionship as well. Of those who were summoned to plead their cases, some – out of a desire to avoid the misery and disgrace of what they knew was their inevitable conviction – drank poison right in the Senate House; there were others too who opened their veins at home, but these, because their wounds could be bandaged up, were still carted off to prison, albeit twitching and half-dead. All those put to death were flung down the Gemonian Steps and dragged away on a hook (there was one day when twenty people – some of them women and boys – were dumped and dragged away in this manner). Since it was strictly forbidden by tradition to strangle virgins, the executioner made sure to rape young girls before throttling them. Anyone who wished to die was forced to live. Because he thought death a light punishment, the news that one of the condemned, a certain Carnilius, had pre-empted execution prompted him to cry out,

‘Carnilius has escaped me!'; similarly, when one of the prisoners he was inspecting begged him for a speedy death, he answered, ‘No – you are not yet back in my good books.' Once, at a dinner party (this is reported in the annals of a former consul who was present at the occasion), he was suddenly asked in a loud voice by a dwarf who was standing with the clowns next to his table why Paconius, who was on trial for treason, was still alive; sure enough, although at the time he told the dwarf to hold his impudent tongue, he wrote a few days later to the senate, instructing them to decide on Paconius' punishment without delay.

[62] His shock at discovering the truth about how Drusus had died only worsened his reign of terror, and broadened its scope. After learning that his son had not, as he had thought, died of complications brought on by his dissolute lifestyle, but had in fact been the victim of the machinations of his wife Livilla and Sejanus, and their facility with poison, he spared no one torture or execution: indeed, day in, day out, so fixated on the investigation was he, to the exclusion of all else, that when the arrival was announced of a man who had hosted him in Rhodes, and whom he himself had cordially invited by letter to Rome, he ordered the man put to torture without delay, on the assumption that he was someone who had come with important information bearing on the case – and then, when he realized his mistake, had the man killed to prevent news of the outrage spreading. On Capri, the place where he used to watch executions is still pointed out: the very spot from where those found guilty after protracted and excruciating tortures would be flung on his command into the sea, down to where a band of marines would be waiting to smash the corpses with poles and oars, just on

the off-chance that any might still have the breath of life. One among the various forms of torture he practised was particularly innovative: no sooner had his victims been tricked into filling themselves to bursting with a large quantity of wine than their urethras would be bound tight, so that they would be put into agony both by the tightening of the cord and by the distending of their bladders. Indeed, it is believed that only the intervention of death and of Thrasyllus, who (deliberately, so people say) had given him sufficient hope of a long life that he was persuaded to defer some of his plans, stopped him from claiming a great many more victims – and among these victims might well have been his grandsons, for he viewed Gaius with deep suspicion, and Tiberius with hatred, as the offspring of an adulterous union.⁶³ Lending further credibility to this conjecture is the way that he would repeatedly describe Priam⁶⁴ as a lucky man for having outlived all his family.

[63] There is plenty of evidence, amid all these horrors, to show that he lived in the shadow not just of the loathing and hatred that he inspired, but of his own fears, and of the bitter insults to which he was subject. He forbade anyone to consult the *haruspices* in secret and without witnesses, for instance, and even tried to close down the oracles near Rome (it was dread of the awesome power of the Praenestine lots that induced him to abandon this plan, for although they had been sealed up in a chest and brought to Rome, he was only able to locate them after they had first been returned to the temple).⁶⁵ Terrified to let out of his sight one or two former consuls, despite having assigned them provincial commands, he detained them in Rome for so long that, after the passage of several years, he

appointed other men to succeed them; nevertheless, although he kept the consulars by his side, they retained their official titles, and he even busied them with commissions, which they were obliged to execute through legates and assistants.

[64] Following the banishment of his daughter-in-law and grandsons, he never had them transported anywhere unless they were kept chained and enclosed within a litter, and guarded by soldiers whose duty it was to prevent travellers and anyone they might pass on the way from catching a glimpse of them, or even stopping.

[65] Although perfectly aware that Sejanus' birthday was being celebrated as a public holiday, and that golden statues of his favourite were being venerated across the city, the plot by Sejanus to usurp his power still came as such a shock to him that he only managed to foil it by the very skin of his teeth – and even then more by relying on cunning and underhand methods than on his authority as *princeps*. His first step, taken with the aim of removing Sejanus from his presence while seeming to honour him, was to adopt him as his colleague in his fifth consulship: an office which he had assumed, after a lengthy gap and despite his absence from Rome, for this very purpose. Then, after dangling before his favourite the prospect of marrying into his family and of obtaining tribunician power, he denounced him in a shameful and self-pitying speech to the senate that nevertheless took Sejanus completely by surprise: ‘Send one of the consuls to bring me into your presence,’ he implored the senators, ‘and an escort of soldiers as well, to provide me with protection – lonely old man that I am.’ So despairing was he, so nervous that the city would explode into rioting, that

he actually gave orders that his grandson Drusus, who at that point was being kept imprisoned in Rome, should – if the situation so required – be set free, and impose martial law. He also had ships made ready, in the expectation that he might have to seek refuge with some or other of the legions, and kept constant watch from the highest cliff for the distant signals which he had ordered lit to keep him abreast of events as they happened, just in case messengers were delayed. Even once Sejanus' conspiracy had been suppressed he felt no more secure or confident, and never left his villa (the one he had named after Jupiter) for nine whole months.

[66] His paranoia was rendered all the more a source of torment to him by the sheer range and volume of taunts that he received, since all those condemned to death would insult him every way they could, either to his face or by means of handbills left in the front row of the theatre, where the senators sat. He reacted to this abuse in various ways: sometimes, prompted by a sense of shame, he would ignore it and cover it up, but on other occasions, making light of it, he would have it broadcast far and wide. Even Artabanus, the king of the Parthians, attacked him, charging him in a letter with the destruction of his own family and a host of other murders, together with a contemptible and dissolute lifestyle, and advised him to waste no time in taking his own life, since only this would appease the extremes of hatred, so richly merited, felt for him by his fellow citizens.

[67] Eventually he came to feel such self-disgust that he all but confessed the depths of his anguish in a letter which began as follows: ‘What am I to write to you, conscript fathers of the senate? How should I write? What at

the present juncture of time should I not be writing to you? If I know the answers to these questions, may the gods visit on me a greater agony than that from which I daily feel myself to be suffering.' There are some, however, who think that his skill in reading the future had long enabled him to know what miseries and notoriety were fated to be his, and that this was why, at the start of his reign, he had been so very obdurate in refusing the title of 'Father of His Country', and in forbidding the senate to swear on oath that they would always back his policies: to ensure that he would not suffer the disgrace of having accepted honours that soon enough he would be found not to have merited. There is clear evidence for this in a speech he delivered on the two honours offered him: when he says, for instance, that while he personally would always be himself and never change his ways for as long as he was of sound mind, nevertheless – to avoid setting a precedent – the senate should beware of committing itself to backing every policy put forward by any one person, since it was possible that the person might change. Again, he said this:

If ever you should come to doubt my character and my deep devotion to you (and I would rather, before that happens, be kept from losing your good opinion by breathing my last), then what additional honour would the appellation 'Father of His Country' bring me? None! Rather, it will serve as a reproach to you – either for being over-hasty in granting me such a *cognomen*, or for being inconsistent in changing your estimate of me.

[68] He had a large, strong physique and was above average in height; his chest and shoulders were broad, and the rest of his body, from head to toe, was similarly well proportioned; he was left-handed, with joints so strong that he could push a finger right through a firm, ripe apple, and bruise the head of a boy (or even a young man) with a single tap. He was fair-skinned, and let the hair on the back of his head grow so long that it covered his neck (this seems to have been the family fashion); although a very good-looking man, he was prone to sudden outbreaks of pimples; his eyes were very large, and – wonderful to report! – enabled him to see by night and even in the dark (this only briefly, however, when he first woke up, after which his vision would fade). When he walked he held his neck stiff and his head at an angle, and tended to frown; he generally kept silent, never talking, or – if he did – only very occasionally, even with his closest friends; his style of conversation was extremely ponderous, and he would gesture in a mildly effeminate way with his fingers as he talked. Augustus, who was fully alert to these traits, unappealing as they were and suggestive of arrogance, often sought to excuse them, insisting to the senate and the people that they were simply faults he had been born with, and not a reflection of his true character. He enjoyed excellent health, and as *princeps* hardly ever fell ill, despite the fact that from the age of thirty he had always relied on his own judgement rather than turn to doctors for help or advice.

[69] Although his fascination with astrology and his firm conviction that everything was determined by Fate led him by comparison to neglect the gods and the rituals that appease them, he was nevertheless inordinately nervous of thunder, and would always wear a laurel wreath on his head

during unsettled weather, on the grounds that (or so it is said) laurel leaves are never struck by lightning.

[70] He was passionately devoted to the study of the literary arts, in both Greek and Latin. Corvinus Messala, whom in his youth he had observed as an old man, provided him with his model for Latin oratory; nevertheless, because he pushed his taste for verbal flourishes and literary allusion to such extremes that it resulted in a very dense style, he was sometimes thought to give a better speech if he had not prepared it than if he had. He wrote a lyric poem with the title ‘Lament for the Death of Lucius Caesar’. He also wrote poetry in Greek modelled on Euphorion, Rhianus and Parthenius,⁶⁶ poets whom he so loved that he donated copies of all their works to the public libraries, and placed their busts among those of the most eminent ancient authors – for which reason large numbers of scholars competed to produce a constant stream of commentaries on their works, and dedicate them to him. The supreme object of his scholarly devotion, however, was mythology, to a degree so absurd that it became the subject of jokes. He used to set quizzes for literary scholars (a class of person whom, as I have mentioned before, he particularly liked to patronize), and would ask questions like these: ‘Who was Hecuba’s mother? What was Achilles’ name when he lived as a young girl? What songs did the Sirens usually sing?’⁶⁷ Also, on the very first day that he entered the Senate House after the death of Augustus – in the style of a man showing respect both to his father and to the gods – he made sacrifice with incense and wine but without the accompaniment of a flute-player, just as Minos back in ancient times had done to mark the death of his son.⁶⁸

[71] Although fluent in Greek, and generally happy to speak the language, there were times – most notably in the Senate House – when he refused to use it, and once, before pronouncing the word *monopolium*,⁶⁹ went so far as to beg the senators' pardon for employing a foreign term. Likewise, when he heard the Greek word *emblema*⁷⁰ feature in a senatorial decree, he recommended that it be altered by replacing a foreign word with a native one – or, if no native word could be found, that the object should be signified in a less direct manner by several words. Also, when a soldier was asked in Greek to give a statement, he forbade the man to answer unless it were in Latin.

[72] Twice only during the course of his long seclusion on Capri did he attempt a return to Rome: once when he travelled by trireme as far as the gardens next to where gladiators fight their sea battles (and even then he stationed guards along the banks of the Tiber to hold back those who came to meet him), and a second time when he journeyed up the Appian Way as far as the seventh milestone, where he caught sight of the city's walls, turned round and never came back. While it is unclear what motivated him on the first occasion, on the second it was his alarm at a portent: for when he went to feed his pet snake from his own hand, as he often did, he found that it had been devoured by ants – which he took as a warning to beware the masses. Beating a hasty retreat to Campania, he fell ill at Astura; but then, after making a partial recovery, continued on his way to Circeii. Anxious that no one should suspect him of being unwell, he did not merely attend the games held in the military base, but actually flung javelins down at a boar that had been loosed into the arena; immediately, though, he felt a

sharp pain in his side, and when exposed to a draught while still overheated from his exertions took a further turn for the worse. For a while, though, he still kept going, and even after reaching Misenum made no changes to his daily routine, but continued to attend banquets and indulge himself in other pleasures too – partly because he could not help himself, and partly to conceal his condition. Indeed, when his physician Charicles, who was taking an absence of leave, rose from a banquet and seized his hand to kiss it, so convinced was he that the doctor had been trying to take his pulse that he ordered the man to stay and return to the table, and kept the meal going all night. Even then, he held to his practice of standing in the middle of the dining room with a lictor by his side, and addressing his guests individually by name as they made their farewells.

[73] It was while he was in Misenum that he read in the senate records about the acquittal without so much as a hearing of some defendants he had listed in a short note to the senate, stating that they had been named by an informer; feeling that he had been shown disrespect, he duly went into a great rant, and resolved to return to Capri by any means possible, since he lacked the courage to embark on anything unless it was from his bolthole. Detained, though, by bad weather, and by the increasing severity of his illness, he died a short time afterwards at the villa of Lucullus, in the seventy-eighth year of his life and the twenty-third of his reign, on the seventeenth day before the Kalends of April, during the consulship of Gnaeus Acerronius Proculus and Gaius Pontius Nigrinus.⁷¹ Some think that he was given a slow-acting poison by Gaius, which progressively sapped his health, others that he was refused food after he had recovered

from a chance fever and requested it, others yet that he was smothered by a pillow when he demanded the return of a ring that had been taken from him while he was unconscious. Seneca writes that when he realized he was close to death he took off the ring as if to give it to someone, held it for a short while, and then, after slipping it back on to his finger, clenched his left hand into a fist, and lay motionless a long while; then, abruptly calling out for his attendants, he waited in vain for them to come, rose to his feet, took only a few steps before his strength failed him, and dropped down dead.

[74] On his last birthday, he dreamed that the Apollo Temenites, a statue remarkable for its size and artistry which he had brought from Syracuse to place in the library of the new temple, appeared to him and declared that he would never make the dedication. Also, a few days before he died, the lighthouse on Capri collapsed in an earthquake, while in Misenum the hot ashes and glowing charcoal which had been brought in to heat his dining room, and had long since faded and gone cold, suddenly blazed back into life as dusk came on and continued to cast a bright light until the early hours.

[75] So delighted were the people at the news of his death that when they first heard it some ran about all over the place yelling ‘To the Tiber with Tiberius!’, some prayed to Mother Earth and to the souls of the departed that the dead man be given no resting place except among the damned, and others yet threatened his corpse with the hook and the Gemonian Steps – for their memories of his previous cruelties had just been given additional edge by a fresh atrocity. By decree of the senate, you see, the execution of those condemned to death took place ten days after the sentence – and it so

happened that some were due to receive their punishment on the very day that the news of Tiberius' death arrived. These people begged various men for their protection, but in the absence of Gaius there was no one they could approach to intervene, and so the guards, afraid of doing anything contrary to regulations, strangled them and dumped their bodies on the Gemonian Steps. This made him only the more hated – for it was as though the reach of the tyrant's cruelty had outlived his death. When the funeral procession left Misenum, there were many who cried out that the body should be taken to Atella, and half-burned there in the amphitheatre; but it was borne instead by a military escort to Rome, and cremated in a state funeral.

[76] A couple of years previously he had drawn up two copies of his will, one in his own hand and the other in the hand of a freedman, both with the same content, and sealed by witnesses of very lowly rank. By the terms of this will he appointed his two grandsons – Gaius, the son of Germanicus, and Tiberius, the son of Drusus – equal heirs to his estate, and specified that in the event of one of them dying the other should inherit the lot. He also made bequests to a huge range of people, among them the Vestal Virgins, and every individual soldier and member of the Roman plebs, as well as leaving separate legacies to the magistrates who served in the various districts of Rome.

Gaius

[1] After Germanicus, the son of Drusus and the younger Antonia, and the father of Gaius Caesar, had been adopted by his paternal uncle Tiberius, he served as quaestor five years before the age prescribed by law, then immediately became consul, and then was sent to take command of the forces in Germany; when the news arrived there of Augustus' death, and the legions, as obdurate as they were unanimous in refusing to accept Tiberius as their commander-in-chief, pressed Germanicus to assume the supreme responsibility for Rome's affairs, he put down the mutiny (whether this better demonstrated his filial duty or his steadiness of purpose, it is hard to say), then briskly set to defeating the enemy and winning himself a triumph. Next, before he could take up the second consulship to which he had been appointed, he was sent to bring order to the East, where he defeated the king of Armenia and reduced Cappadocia to the status of a province, before dying at the age of thirty-three in Antioch after a long illness – indeed, he was believed to have been poisoned. This was not simply because dark blotches had appeared all over his body and he foamed at the mouth, but because, following his cremation, his heart had been found intact among his bones, and it is thought to be a characteristic of the heart that it cannot be destroyed by fire if contaminated by poison.

[2] It was generally held that Tiberius had been behind the plot to kill him, aided and abetted by Gnaeus Piso, who was governor of Syria at the time, and had been perfectly open in his conviction that he had no option but to make an enemy of either the father or the son (as though this had really been the case!); accordingly, even after Germanicus had fallen ill, he had persisted in insulting him and doing all he could to make his life a misery, and it was for this reason that Piso, when he returned to Rome, only narrowly avoided being torn to death by the people, and received a sentence of death from the senate.

[3] It is the broad consensus that no one has ever combined all the blessings of body and spirit to the degree that Germanicus did: conspicuous equally for his good looks and his courage, he was brilliant both as an orator and as a scholar, in Greek as in Latin, celebrated for his generosity of spirit, and remarkably successful in his endeavours to secure people's devotion and inspire their affection. Even his spindly legs – the one blot on the otherwise perfect proportions of his form – began to bulk up as a result of his assiduity in going for a ride after meals. He often engaged in close combat, and always got his man. He pleaded cases in court even after he had celebrated his triumph, and when he died left behind numerous testimonies to his learning – among them some comedies in Greek. Whether at home or abroad he never threw his weight around, and would enter free or allied cities without lictors. Whenever he came across the tombs of famous men, he would make offerings to their spirits. Resolved to bury in a single grave the scattered remains of those who had been slaughtered amid the calamity of Varus' defeat,¹ he was the first to start collecting the bones,

picking them up in his own hands. Even with his detractors, whoever they might be and whatever their motives, he was very easy-going, and had such a lack of malice that he only finally broke with Piso, despite that man's rescinding of his decrees and the harassment of his dependants, when he realized that he was being poisoned and targeted by spells – and even then his only step was to emulate our ancestors by renouncing Piso's friendship, and charging his household to avenge him should he meet with death.

[4] These splendid qualities reaped him rich reward, for so esteemed and loved was he by his family that Augustus instructed Tiberius to adopt him, and for a long while indeed (together with his relatives, but there is no need to dwell on them) had been pondering whether to appoint him his heir. The masses adored him too, and according to plenty of accounts he only had to arrive in a place (or leave it) for such huge crowds to come and meet him (or bid him farewell) that it might well threaten his safety: when he returned from Germany, for example, after his suppression of the mutiny there, all the cohorts of the praetorian guard came out to meet him, despite the fact that only two had been given orders to do so, while the entire Roman people – men and women, young and old, high and low – came flooding out of the city as far as the twentieth milestone.

[5] Even so, the surest and most substantial evidence for the esteem in which he was held derives from the time of his death and its aftermath. On the day he died temples were stoned and the altars of the gods toppled, while there were some householders who threw the gods who stood guard over their families out into the streets, and exposed the babies to which their wives had only just given birth. It is even reported that those barbarians

who were at war – whether embroiled in their own tribal squabbles or fighting against us – agreed to a cessation of hostilities, as though they had suffered a personal bereavement; that various princelings shaved off their beards and had their wives' heads shorn as a mark of just how deeply felt was their grief; and that even the king of kings² took a break from hunting and feasting with his magnates – which to the Parthians is what the suspension of the law courts is to us.

[6] Back in Rome, where the citizens had greeted the initial reports of his illness with shock and horror, and were waiting for further news, the sudden spread towards evening of a rumour from an unknown source that he was on the mend saw crowds immediately start running from across the city towards the Capitol, bringing torches and sacrificial victims with them as they went; indeed, so impatient were they not to be delayed in fulfilling the vows they had made for his safety that they almost tore down the doors off the temples, and such was their rejoicing, so loud the voices raised everywhere in celebration, that Tiberius was woken by their chanting, 'Rome is safe, our fatherland is safe, for Germanicus is safe!' When the confirmation of his death finally arrived, the grief of the people could be checked neither by expressions of consolation nor by official proclamations, and they continued to mourn him even through the holiday period in the month of December.³ The glorious reputation of the dead man and the love felt for him were only increased by the horrors of the times that followed, since it came universally to be held – as well it might have been – that it was only respect for him (and fear of him too) that had served to keep in check the cruelty to which Tiberius was soon giving brutal vent.

[7] He was married to Agrippina, the daughter of Marcus Agrippa and Julia, and had nine children by her. Two of these children were lost shortly after their birth, and a third, a little boy of rare charm, while still a toddler (Livia dedicated a statue of this child dressed as Cupid to Venus in her temple on the Capitol, and Augustus placed another in his bedchamber, which he used to kiss every time he entered the room); of his other children, all of whom survived their father, three – Agrippina, Drusilla and Livilla – were girls, born within a space of three years, and three – Nero, Drusus and Gaius Caesar – boys. Nero and Drusus were condemned as enemies of the state by the senate, on charges brought by Tiberius.

[8] Gaius Caesar was born on the day before the Kalends of September, during the consulship of his father and Gaius Fonteius Capito.⁴ Conflicting accounts make it impossible to know for certain where he was born. Gnaeus Lentulus Gaetulicus writes that it was in Tibur, while Pliny,⁵ who claims that he was born in Ambitarvius, a village overlooking the confluence of two rivers⁶ in the territory of the Treviri, cites as evidence the altars displayed there with the inscription: ‘For the delivery by Agrippina of a *puer*’ – a ‘boy’. Verses which were circulating soon after he came to power suggest that he was conceived in the legions’ winter quarters:

Born in an army base, raised amid troops led by his father,
Clearly he was destined to end up as *princeps*.

Checking official records, however, I find that he was born in Antium. Pliny has undermined the claim made by Gaetulicus by suggesting that he fabricated it out of a desire to flatter the young and vainglorious *princeps* by

linking him to a city sacred to Hercules, and that he was emboldened to manufacture such a fiction by the fact that around a year previously another boy named Gaius Caesar (the same whose charm and early death I mentioned earlier) had indeed been born to Germanicus in Tibur. Pliny's own claim is contradicted by the chronology of Augustus' reign, for those who have studied it are all agreed that Germanicus was sent to Gaul only once he had completed his term as consul – by which time Gaius had been born. Nor do the inscriptions on the altars help Pliny with his case, since Agrippina gave birth to two daughters in the territory of the Treviri, and the word *puer*, when used in association with the delivery of a child, can as readily refer to a girl as to a boy, due to the fact that back in ancient times girls were often called *puerae* (just as the word *puelli* might refer to boys).⁷ There also exists a letter written by Augustus to his granddaughter Agrippina a few months before he died, in which he refers to the Gaius who is the subject of this biography (he being the only young child of that name alive at the time), as follows: 'I arranged yesterday that Talarius and Asillius will serve as escorts to little Gaius – if the gods are willing! – on the fifteenth day before the Kalends of June.⁸ I am also sending with him a doctor, one of my slaves, and I have written to Germanicus telling him that he is welcome to keep the slave if he so wishes. Farewell, my Agrippina, and make sure that you reach your Germanicus safe and sound.' It goes without saying, of course, that Gaius – if he were first taken from Rome to Ambitarvius when he was two years old – could not possibly have been born there. The same consideration inevitably undermines confidence in the reliability of the verses – and all the more so because they are anonymous.

By a process of elimination, then, we are left with only the one source that we can reliably depend upon, the public record – and further weight is lent to its authority by the fact that Gaius always prized Antium above every other place of retreat, and was devoted to it in a way that people are invariably devoted to the place where they were born (indeed, it is claimed that he became so fed up with Rome that he planned to move the very seat of empire there, and make it his capital).

[9] He took the nickname of ‘Caligula’ – ‘Little Boots’ – from a joke current in the army camp where he was being reared among the troops, who would kit him out as a common soldier. A striking illustration of just how fondly they were led to treasure him as a result of his upbringing amid their ranks is that, during the mutiny which followed the death of Augustus, when their discipline seemed on the verge of utter collapse, it was undoubtedly the sight of him, and nothing else, which served to restore it. For only when the mutineers realized that their agitation was making the camp too dangerous for him to stay, and that he was being evacuated to a neighbouring town, did they calm down. Then at last they felt remorse and, grabbing hold of the wagon to stop it from leaving, begged to be spared the disgrace which would otherwise be theirs.

[10] He also accompanied his father on the posting to Syria; then, on his return from there, he lived first under the care of his mother, and in due course, when she was banished, as the ward of his great-grandmother, Livia Augusta.⁹ Following her death – which he marked by delivering her eulogy from the Rostra, despite the fact that he had still not come of age – he moved in with his grandmother Antonia, and then, when he was eighteen,

received a summons from Tiberius to Capri: here he put on the toga of a man and made a dedication of his first beard, both on the same day – although without any of the ceremony that had accompanied his brothers' coming of age. The island proved a treacherous place for him, rife with attempts either to trick or to pressure him into airing his grievances against Tiberius; refusing to take the bait, however, he behaved as though nothing had happened to his family and their ruin had quite slipped his mind, dismissed the wrongs done him with a straight face so convincing that it beggared belief, and was so ready to cringe and crawl before his grandfather and his courtiers that it has been said of him (quite justifiably) that never was there a better slave, nor a worse master.

[11] Even during this period, however, he found it impossible to keep in check his cruelty and deviant appetites: he took a keen delight in watching the agonies and torments of those condemned to torture, spent his nights disguised in a wig and the robe of a respectable matron, visiting cheap bars and sleeping with other men's wives, and was so keen a student of the arts of dancing and singing that he could not be kept away from the stage. (Tiberius for one was perfectly ready to indulge him in these activities, in the hope that they would serve to temper the wildness of his character – a character which the perspicacious old man had come to see so clearly for what it was that every so often he would predict that permitting Gaius to live would doom both himself and everyone else, and that he was rearing someone fated to prove a viper to the Roman people, and a Phaeton¹⁰ to all the world.)

[12] Not long after this he married Junia Claudilla, the daughter of Marcus Silanus, who was a man of the highest rank. Appointed next to serve as augur in place of his brother Drusus, he never took up the office, but was promoted instead (backed by strong endorsements of his sense of duty and distinction) to the pontificate – and so it was, with the imperial household deprived and denuded of its every other prop, and Sejanus already under suspicion and soon to be eliminated, that gradually, bit by bit, he came to hope that the succession might be his. To boost his chances, he took advantage of the death of Junia in childbirth to seduce Ennia Naevia, the wife of Macro, who at the time was in command of the praetorian guard; he even promised to marry her, and backed this up both by swearing it on oath and by giving her a written guarantee. Now, having learned thanks to this affair how to worm himself into Macro's good books, he poisoned Tiberius – at least, that is the theory of some – and then, while his grandfather was still breathing, gave instructions first that the signet ring should be pulled off his finger, then, when he suspected that Tiberius was trying to resist, that the old man should be smothered with a pillow; and finally, just for good measure, strangled him with his own hands (a freedman who objected to this as a monstrous crime was immediately crucified). And perhaps there is indeed something to this theory: for it is reported by some authors that he personally confessed, if not to the actual crime of parricide, then certainly to contemplating it, since it was his constant boast, whenever he spoke of his deep sense of duty to his family, that he had once entered the bedchamber of the sleeping Tiberius, dagger in hand, intent on avenging the deaths of his mother and brothers – but that

then, overcome by pity, he had flung away his weapon and beaten a retreat. He claimed as well that Tiberius, although aware of what had happened, had never dared investigate it or take the matter further.

[13] And so it was, by securing the rule of the empire in this manner, that he answered the prayer of the Roman people (or rather, I should say, the prayer of all humanity): the man whom the overwhelming majority of the provincials and of the soldiers, many of whom had known him as a child, and the entire mass of the people in Rome, who clasped the memory of his father Germanicus to their hearts and pitied him for the sufferings that had befallen his family, most longed to see as *princeps*. No wonder, then – despite the mourning he was wearing as he followed the funeral train of Tiberius from Misenum – that his journey should have taken him past altars, sacrificial victims and flaming torches, and that ecstatic crowds of well-wishers should have thronged to meet him, calling him their ‘shining light’, their ‘chick’, their ‘puppet’, their ‘baby boy’.

[14] Once he had made his entrance into Rome he was granted absolute power over the entire apparatus of the state by the senate, which did not hesitate (albeit after a mob had stormed the Senate House) to override the wishes of Tiberius, who in his will had named his other grandson, a boy yet to put on an adult’s toga, as co-heir:¹¹ so delighted by this were the people that within the space of three months – or perhaps even less – more than 160,000 animals are said to have been sacrificed in honour of their favourite. When, a few days later, he made the crossing to the islands off the Campanian coast, prayers were raised for his safe return, nor was any opportunity wasted to demonstrate just how intense was the anxiety and

concern that people felt for his well-being. Indeed, when he fell ill, they held all-night vigils around the Palatine, with some even vowing to fight as gladiators should the invalid make a recovery, and others to lay down their lives – and advertising as much on public billboards. Even those beyond the empire swelled the immense love felt for him by his fellow citizens with their own devotion. An example: Artabanus, the king of the Parthians (who had always made a great show of loathing and contempt for Tiberius), voluntarily solicited his friendship, coming to a summit with a consular legate and crossing the Euphrates to pay his respects to the Roman eagles and to the images of the Caesars on the standards.

[15] As for himself, he stoked people's enthusiasm for him by courting popularity every way he could. Having given Tiberius a public eulogy and a splendid funeral, accompanied by much extravagant sobbing, he then promptly hurried off to Pandateria and the Pontian Isles to bring back the ashes of his mother and brother to Rome: these (in a display of family piety that had been rendered all the more conspicuous by a violent storm) he approached with the utmost reverence, before scooping them up with his own hands into an urn. With no less a sense of theatre he then brought them to Ostia by ship – a standard flying from the stern of his bireme as he did so – and from there up the Tiber to Rome; here, at midday, when the city was at its very busiest, he had them borne on separate biers by the most distinguished men of the equestrian order into the Mausoleum of Augustus; furthermore, he prescribed that funerary sacrifices should be offered to them every year in a ceremony of public remembrance, and – even more splendidly – that games should be held in honour of his mother, at which

her image was to be borne in a carriage around the Circus. In commemoration of his father, he named the month of September ‘Germanicus’. After that, by means of a senatorial decree, he had all the various honours that had been bestowed upon Livia Augusta heaped as well upon his grandmother Antonia, took his paternal uncle Claudius (who until then had been merely a Roman knight) as his colleague in the consulship, and marked the day that his brother Tiberius first put on the toga of manhood by adopting him, and giving him the title ‘Prince of Rome’s Youth’.¹² As for his sisters, he prescribed that every time an oath was sworn the phrase ‘Dearer to me I shall hold Gaius and his sisters than I do myself and my children’ should be included, and that whenever one of the consuls introduced a proposal to the senate he was to say, ‘May blessings and good fortune attend Gaius Caesar and his sisters.’ His popularity was further boosted by the pardons he issued to those who had been condemned to death or sent into exile; the amnesty he granted to everyone facing trial on charges dating from the time of Tiberius; and the orders he gave that all the records in the cases of his mother and brothers were to be collected together in the Forum, where – as a reassurance to informers and witnesses that they would no longer have anything to fear – he first called upon the gods in a ringing voice to validate his claim that he had neither read nor touched any of the documents, and then had them thrown on a fire. Presented with a note warning him of danger, he refused to accept it, declaring that he had done nothing to make anyone hate him, and insisting that he never gave his ear to informers.

[16] Those monstrous perverts the ‘sphincters’¹³ – whom he was only with difficulty persuaded not to drown in the depths of the sea – he banished from Rome. He rescinded the ban decreed by the senate on obtaining, owning and reading the works of Titus Labienus, Cremutius Cordus and Cassius Severus,¹⁴ declaring it to be very much in his interest that their contents be transmitted to future generations. He made public the empire’s financial records, a practice of Augustus’ which Tiberius had discontinued. He allowed magistrates to dispense justice free from interference and any obligation to appeal to him. His survey of the Roman knights, although exacting and painstaking, was not immoderately so: while he would make a public show of depriving of their horses those who had brought dishonour or disgrace upon themselves, the names of those guilty only of minor offences he would merely have omitted from the roll as it was read out. To lighten the workload of jurors he added a fifth division to the existing four. He attempted to give back to the people their right of suffrage by reviving the tradition of elections.¹⁵ Even though Tiberius’ will had been annulled, he still paid out its requests faithfully and without quibbling, as well as those in Livia Augusta’s will, which Tiberius had sat on. He relieved Italy of the 200 per cent tax levied on sales made at auction, compensated many of those who had suffered losses as a result of fire, and reimbursed those princes whom he had restored to their thrones for such income as they might have lost in the interim, whether customs dues or revenues (to Antiochus of Commagene,¹⁶ for instance, he remitted 100 million sesterces). To raise his profile as a patron of exemplary behaviour, he gave 800,000 sesterces to a freedwoman who, even though she had been

put to the most agonizing torture by her interrogators, had refused to breathe a word about a crime committed by her former master. In recognition of these acts, he was voted – among other honours – a golden shield, which every year on a given day the colleges of the priests were to carry to the Capitol, accompanied as they did so by the senate and a chorus of nobly born boys and girls, who were to sing an ode in honour of his virtues. It was decreed as well that the day on which he came to power should be named the Parilia,¹⁷ as an acknowledgement that the city had been born again.

[17] He held four consulships: the first was a two-month term which started on the Kalends of July, the second a thirty-day term which started on the Kalends of January, the third lasted until the Ides of January, and the fourth until the seventh day before the Ides of the same month.¹⁸ Of these four only the last two were held in sequence, and his third term he began in Lugdunum¹⁹ without a colleague (not – as some think – out of arrogance or contempt for precedent, but because, due to his absence from Rome, the news that his fellow consul had died just before the Kalends had failed to reach him). Twice he made a gift of 300 sesterces per head to every citizen, and twice hosted a spectacularly lavish banquet for the senate and the equestrian order, to which even their wives and children were invited. At the second of these banquets he distributed togas to the men, and to the women and children purple and red scarves. Also, to give a permanent boost to the gaiety of the nation, he added an extra day to the Saturnalia, which he called the Festival of the Young.

[18] He sponsored a number of gladiatorial contests (although every so often, rather than preside over them in person, he would entrust the responsibility for doing so to magistrates or friends): some of these games were staged in the amphitheatre of Taurus²⁰ and some in the Saepta, and featured troops of boxers from Africa and Campania, the best that the respective regions could boast. He was tireless in promoting shows of every description on stages across Rome, and sometimes even did so by night, making the whole city blaze with light. He tossed out tokens that could be redeemed for a range of gifts into crowds and handed out baskets filled with delicacies to individuals; at one banquet, when he saw a Roman knight sitting opposite him who was stuffing his face with evident relish, he sent the man over his own portion; to a senator who was similarly enjoying himself he sent an official missive appointing the man to a guaranteed praetorship. Additionally, he sponsored a large number of shows in the Circus: these lasted from morning to evening, and the intervals between the races would sometimes feature the hunting of African big cats, and sometimes manoeuvres from the Troy Game (there were also special races, in which chariots would be driven by senators over a track decorated red and green²¹). If he happened to be watching preparations for the Circus from the Gelotiana,²² all it took was for a few people on the adjoining balconies to ask him for races to be staged, and he might sponsor them on the spur of the moment.

[19] In addition to these various spectacles, he devised one so novel as to be quite without precedent. He bridged the waters between Baiae and the mole at Puteoli – a distance of some 3,600 paces – by assembling cargo

ships from every port, anchoring them together in two rows, and then heaping earth on top of them so as to fashion a road resembling the Appian Way. Over and back again across the bridge he travelled, on two consecutive days: on the first, resplendent in a crown of oak leaves and a golden cloak, and armed with a short Spanish shield and a sword, he rode a fully caparisoned warhorse; on the second day, dressed as a charioteer, he drove a chariot pulled by two of his most recognizable horses, taking with him one of the Parthian hostages (a boy named Darius²³), and accompanied by an escort that consisted of the entire praetorian guard and a squadron of his friends in British war chariots.²⁴ The most popular theory, I know, is that Caligula came up with the idea of a bridge because he wished to emulate Xerxes, whose own bridge across the much shorter span of the Hellespont had won no little admiration;²⁵ others think that he wished to intimidate Germany and Britain, lands on which he had designs, with the report of a truly stupefying project. When I was a boy, however, I used to hear another explanation from my grandfather, who in turn had heard it from court insiders: that when Tiberius was fretting about who would succeed him, and leaning towards his natural grandson, the astrologer Thrasyllus had reassured him by declaring that Gaius had no more chance of becoming emperor than he did of riding on horseback across the Bay of Baiae.

[20] He also staged various shows abroad, among them games on the Attic model at Syracuse, and a range of different contests at Lugdunum in Gaul; in Lugdunum he also sponsored a contest in Greek and Latin eloquence, a competition in which – so they say – the losers were obliged to

give prizes to the winners and compose speeches in their praise, while those whose efforts had particularly failed to please were ordered to erase what they had written either with a sponge or by licking the ink (unless, that was, they preferred to be beaten with rods or thrown into the nearby river).

[21] He completed the building projects that Tiberius had left half-finished – namely, the temple of Augustus and Pompey's Theatre – and began work on an aqueduct near Tibur and an amphitheatre next to the Saepta (of these projects, Claudius, his successor, completed the first and abandoned the second). In Syracuse he repaired the city walls, which had begun to collapse because of old age, and the temples of the gods. He also drew up plans to renovate the palace of Polycrates²⁶ on Samos, to complete the temple to Apollo of Didyma near Miletus, to found a city high up in the Alps, and – his most ambitious project – to dig a canal through the Isthmus of Corinth (indeed, he went so far as to send a senior centurion to make a survey of the site).

[22] But enough of the *princeps* – what now remains to be described is the monster. He added various *cognomina* to his name ('Dutiful', 'Son of the Army Camp', 'Father of the Armies', 'Caesar the Best and the Greatest'²⁷) and on one occasion, at dinner, when he happened to overhear various kings who had come to Rome to pay him their respects arguing over which of them had the noblest lineage, he cried out: 'Let there be one lord, one king!'²⁸ There and then he was ready to put on the diadem of a king, and give to the semblance of a principate the contours of a monarchy. Advised, however, that in dignity he far outranked princes and kings, he began from that moment on to lay claim to majesty of a divine order: he

duly commanded that any statues of the gods particularly renowned as objects of worship or as works of arts (the statue of Jupiter at Olympia among them) should be brought from Greece to Rome, where their heads were to be removed and replaced with copies of his own; he also extended his palace on the Palatine out into the Forum, and after his conversion of the temple of Castor and Pollux into an entrance hall would often stand between the twin brothers, posing for the benefit of visitors to the temple as an object of worship; he was hailed by some as Jupiter of Latium. He also set up his own temple, in which priests made sacrifice of exotic creatures to his godhead. Inside it there stood a life-size statue of him fashioned out of gold, which every day would be dressed in exact copies of the clothing that he himself was wearing. The richest men in the city all competed to serve as his priests, either by canvassing or offering bribes. The animals offered up in sacrifice to him – a different species each day – included flamingos, peacocks, black grouse, two varieties of guinea hen, and pheasants.

Whenever the moon was full and radiant, he would spend all night pressing her to join him in his bed and be folded in his embraces; by day, he would chat in private with Capitoline Jupiter, now whispering in the god's ear and angling his own to hear the reply, now raising his voice and even losing his temper. He was overheard making this threat, for example: 'Lift me up, or I'll lift you!' Finally, the god managed to calm him down (or so he reported) by inviting him to build a bridge from the Palatine, right over the temple of the Deified Augustus, and share the Capitol with the god – which he duly did. Indeed, it did not take him long to become even more intimate with

Jupiter, by laying the foundations of a new house in the very precinct of the god's temple on the Capitol.

[23] Because of his grandfather Agrippa's humble origins, he did not care to be thought of or described as descended from him, and would grow angry if anyone, whether in a speech or a poem, included Agrippa in the Caesars' family tree. He used to claim instead that his mother had been born of an incestuous union between Augustus and his daughter Julia (also, not content with this insult to Augustus, he banned the celebration of the victories at Actium and in the waters off Sicily as official holidays, on the grounds that they had been bloodbaths disastrous for the Roman people). He regularly used to describe his great-grandmother Livia Augusta as 'Ulysses in a matron's robe', and even had the nerve to accuse her of low birth, alleging in a letter to the senate that her maternal grandfather had been a mere town councillor in Fundi (whereas in fact it is clear from public monuments that Aufidius Lurco had held a number of high offices in Rome). Rebuffing his grandmother Antonia's request for a private interview, he told her she could only see him in the presence of the prefect Macro, and by means of such indignities and vexations drove her into her grave (although some think he also had her poisoned); far from paying honour to her memory once she was dead, he watched the lighting of her funeral pyre from his dining room. He sent a military tribune to surprise and kill his unsuspecting brother Tiberius, and obliged his father-in-law Silanus to commit suicide by cutting his own throat with a razor: murders which he justified by claiming that Silanus had once failed to accompany him when he put to sea in terrible weather, in the hope that he would be able to seize

control of Rome should the storm prove fatal, and that Tiberius had stunk of an antidote taken by people who are nervous of being poisoned (whereas in fact Silanus had simply wished to avoid the discomfort of a voyage because he suffered from seasickness, while Tiberius had been taking medicine for a lingering cough that had recently taken a turn for worse). As for his uncle Claudius, him he spared to serve as a figure of fun.

[24] He made a habit of committing incest with his sisters, and at large banquets would have them take turns lying on the couch just below him, while his wife reclined just above. He is believed to have taken the virginity of one of them, Drusilla, while still a boy, and even to have been caught in bed with her by their grandmother Antonia, in whose house they were being brought up together. Subsequently, after her marriage to Cassius Longinus, a former consul, he abducted her and lived openly with her as though she were his wife, and when he fell sick appointed her heir to both his goods and the rule of the empire. When she then died he declared a period of mourning, during which he decreed it a capital offence for any man to laugh, wash, or share a meal with his parents, wife or children. So distraught with grief was he that one night he abruptly fled the city, headed off at great speed through Campania for Syracuse, and then, no sooner having arrived there, returned, unshaven and with his hair a mess – nor, from that moment on, would he ever swear an oath, even on a matter of the utmost importance, even before an assembly of the people or his soldiers, unless it were by the divine attributes of Drusilla. His other sisters he did not love with the same passion or respect, and would often pimp them out to the fully grown male whores he kept about him. This was why, during the

trial of Aemilius Lepidus, he found it that much easier to convict them of adultery and complicity in the plot against him, not only making public incriminating documents in their handwriting which he had procured by means of deception and rape, but dedicating to Mars the Avenger three swords with which they had been planning to stab him, and explaining as much in an inscription.

[25] It is no simple matter to decide whether he behaved more disgracefully when contracting or ending a marriage, or living as a husband. While a guest at the wedding of Livia Orestilla to Gaius Piso, he had the bride carried off to his own house; a few days later, however, he divorced her, and then, once a couple of years had gone by, exiled her on suspicion of having returned in the intervening period to the arms of her original husband. Others claim that at the wedding banquet he sent a message to Piso, who was reclining opposite him, saying ‘Don’t have sex with my wife’, and then all of a sudden abducted the bride; the following day he issued a proclamation declaring that he had found himself a wife by following the example of Romulus and Augustus.²⁹ When it was mentioned to him that the grandmother of Lollia Paulina had been a great beauty, he immediately summoned Lollia from the province where her husband, the former consul Gaius Memmius, was in command of the army, made her separate from Memmius, and took her as his wife; a short time later, however, he sent her packing, and gave orders that she was never again to have sex with anyone. The only wife to whom he proved both devoted and faithful was Caesonia, a woman who made up for her lack of looks and youth (not to mention the three daughters she had borne another

man) with her taste for the high life and her insatiable sexual appetite; he loved to parade her before his soldiers, dressed up in a cloak, shield and helmet and riding on a horse at his side, while to his friends he would go so far as to exhibit her naked. Not until she had given him a child did he honour her with the title of a wife, declaring that on one and the same day he had become both her husband and the father of a newborn infant. The child herself – whom he named Julia Drusilla – he carried around all the temples of the goddesses before placing her in the lap of Minerva, to whose care and instruction he commended her. There existed no surer evidence that she was indeed his child, he believed, than her temper, which was so violent that whenever she played with other little children she would scratch at their faces, and jab at their eyes with her fingers.

[26] It would be as pointless as it would be sickening to add to these details an account of how he treated relatives and friends such as Ptolemy, the son of King Juba (whose mother, Selene, was the daughter of Mark Antony,³⁰ meaning the pair of them were cousins), and even Macro and Ennia, the very people who had done most to secure him the empire: all, as reward either for their kinship to him or for their loyal service, met with a violent death.

Nor was he any more respectful of senators, or any the less brutal with them. He permitted some of them, those who had held the highest office, to run alongside his chariot in their togas for several miles, and then, dressed in the skimpy tunics of slave boys, to wait on him at table, sometimes at the head of his dining couch, sometimes at its foot; other senators he would have murdered in secret and then – once a few days had elapsed during

which he would repeatedly send them summons as though they were still alive – falsely announce that they had killed themselves. When the consuls forgot to issue official notice of his birthday he had them both removed from office, so that for three days the republic was without its most senior magistrates; also, when he had a quaestor who had been implicated in a conspiracy against him put to the lash,³¹ the soldiers giving the flogging stood on the clothes that had been stripped off the man's back so that they would have a firmer footing.

The other orders too he treated with a matching show of arrogance and cruelty. When he was disturbed in the middle of the night by the noise of people reserving the free seats in the Circus, he sent men armed with clubs to throw them out: in the resulting panic more than twenty Roman knights and an equivalent number of respectable women were crushed to death, and the total casualty figures were beyond computation. When plays were staged, he would try to get the equestrians and the common people to fight one another by opening up early a section of the theatre reserved for knights, and letting yobs from the slums take their seats. Sometimes, when gladiatorial shows were being staged and the sun was at its very fiercest, he would pull back the awnings and forbid anyone to leave; then, rather than lay on the customary fare, he would send out into the arena mangy wild animals, gladiators so decrepit that they could barely function, and – in place of exhibition fighters – heads of households who, while known to be of good standing, were also conspicuous for a range of physical disabilities. Sometimes he would shut up the granaries and condemn the masses to starve.

[27] I shall now list particular examples of the cruelty that was the essence of his character. Rather than feed cattle to the wild beasts that he had procured for his shows, he saved money by choosing criminals for them to devour: this he did, not by examining the charges against the prisoners, but by standing in the middle of a colonnade, lining them up in a row, and then, after he had looked them over, ordering all those between ‘the two slapheads’ led away. The man who had promised to fight as a gladiator if he recovered from his illness he obliged to enter the arena with a sword, in obedience to the vow – and only after the man had won his bout and begged over and over again for mercy did he finally grant it. A second man, who had hesitated to enter the arena despite having made an identical vow, he handed over to his slaves, garlanded and crowned in the manner of a sacrificial victim, to be driven through the various districts of Rome while the slaves called out for the vow to be fulfilled; then, once the procession had reached the rampart which surrounds the city, the man was thrown off it. He disfigured numerous people of honourable rank by having them branded with hot irons, after which he would condemn them either to the mines, or to the building of roads, or to be thrown to wild beasts, or to be shut up in cages on all fours like animals, or to be sawn in half.³² these punishments were inflicted not only on those guilty of serious crimes, but also on those who might merely have criticized one of his gladiatorial shows, or failed to swear by his Genius.³³ He obliged parents to attend the execution of their sons; one man who had sought to excuse himself on the grounds of ill-health he sent his own litter to fetch, and another he invited direct from witnessing his son’s execution to supper, at which, all affability,

he sought to get the wretched man to laugh and joke. He had the manager of his gladiatorial and beast shows beaten with chains day after day, while he himself watched on, and only had the man finally killed once the stench of rotting brain had begun to offend his nostrils. He had the author of an Atellan farce³⁴ burned to death in the middle of the arena for writing a line of verse with a double meaning. When a Roman knight who had been thrown to the beasts loudly protested his innocence, he had the man removed from the arena, ordered his tongue cut out, then returned him to the beasts.

[28] Once, when he asked a man back from a lengthy term of exile how he had passed the time, and the man, thinking to flatter him, answered, ‘I kept praying to the gods that Tiberius would die, and you would succeed to the empire – and so it came to pass’, he jumped to the conclusion that the people he himself had exiled were similarly praying for his death, and sent agents to go from island to island slaughtering the lot. Craving to have a senator torn to death, he induced some of the man’s colleagues to fall upon him as he entered the Senate House, charge him with being a public enemy and then, once they had stabbed him with their writing implements, hand him over to the other senators to be dismembered – nor was he content until he had watched the man’s body parts, limbs and entrails dragged through the streets and dumped in a heap before him.

[29] The enormity of his crimes was all the worse for the outrageous quality of the things he said. He used to declare that there was no aspect of his character which he found more praiseworthy or appealing than – to quote the Greek word he himself used – his *adiatrepia* (meaning

‘shamelessness’). When his grandmother Antonia sought to give him some advice, he not only ignored it but told her, ‘Remember, I am allowed to do anything to anybody.’ Just before killing his brother, whom he suspected of taking medicines to guard against being poisoned, he demanded, ‘What antidote is there for Caesar?’ When he exiled his sisters, he warned them that he had swords as well as islands. When a former praetor who had retired to Anticyra for reasons of health petitioned him once too often for an extension to his leave of absence, he ordered the man put to death, observing that anyone who had failed to be cured by such a lengthy course of hellebore needed a good bleeding.³⁵ Every tenth day, when signing off the list of those prisoners who were to be executed, he would say that he was clearing his accounts. When a number of Gauls and Greeks were condemned to death all at once, he crowed, ‘I have subdued Gallograecia!’³⁶

[30] When he had someone killed it was invariably by means of repeated, delicate incisions, so that – as he notoriously liked to express it – a man would die knowing that he was being put to the blade. When a case of mistaken identity led to the wrong man being executed, he declared that the person put to death had no less deserved to die. He liked to quote the proverbial line from the tragedy: ‘Let them hate, provided they fear.’³⁷ He would often savage the entire body of the senate as dependants of Sejanus and informers against his mother and brothers, brandishing the documents which he had pretended to have had burned, and defending Tiberius’ cruelty as something inevitable, given how many plausible accusers there had been. As for the equestrian order, he was forever railing against them for their

obsession with the stage and the arena. Angered when a crowd cheered on contestants who were competing against his own favourites, he cried out, ‘If only the Roman people had a single neck’, and when they demanded that the brigand Tetrinius be brought into the arena, he accused those making the request of themselves being like Tetrinius. On one occasion, when a squad of five gladiators armed with nets and tridents surrendered to an equal number of heavily armed opponents without putting up a fight, and he ordered them slain, one of the net-men grabbed a trident and killed all the victors: this he denounced in a proclamation as a massacre of unprecedented savagery, and expressed his disgust at anyone who had felt able to watch it.

[31] He was even in the habit of complaining publicly that the age had not been marked by any public calamity, since his own reign (unlike that of Augustus, which was memorable for the disaster of Varus’ defeat, and that of Tiberius, which could boast the collapse of the theatre at Fidenae) was at risk of being forgotten, such was the prosperity that it enjoyed; and this was why, every so often, he would express his longing for some military catastrophe, or famine, or plague, or great conflagration, or earthquake.

[32] Even when he was taking his relaxation, even when he might be amusing himself or lying at his table, everything he said or did was marked by this cruelty. At banquets and parties he would often have suspects in criminal cases put to torture, or else employ a soldier skilled in the art of decapitation to cut off the heads of assorted prisoners. At the dedication of his bridge at Puteoli³⁸ (the design of which I have already mentioned), he invited a large number of people to come out from the shore, then abruptly

had them flung overboard, and when some managed to grab hold of the ships' rudders had them pushed back into the sea with poles and oars. When a slave at a public banquet in Rome stole a strip of silver from one of the dining couches, he immediately handed the thief over to an executioner, with orders that the man's hands were to be cut off and hung in front of him from around his neck, and that he was then to be led round all the guests, preceded by a placard explaining the reason for his punishment. On another occasion, when he and a gladiator were sparring with wooden swords in the training school, and the gladiator opted to fling himself down on the ground as though defeated, he stabbed the man with a dagger of authentic steel, and then, holding a palm branch, ran a lap of honour. There was also the time when, dressed in the robes of the official who leads oxen to sacrifice, he stood at the altar, arms aloft, poised to bring down an axe on to the waiting animal – but then axed the assistant who had been holding the knife. Once, at an elegant banquet, he suddenly burst out laughing, and when the consuls, who were reclining nearby, politely inquired of him what had prompted such laughter, he answered, 'Why, only that with a single nod I could have either of your throats cut here and now!'

[33] An example of his humour: once, standing next to a statue of Jupiter, he asked the tragic actor Apelles which of the two of them was greater, and then, when Apelles hesitated, had him lashed to the bone with whips, but commended the actor for a voice that was delightful to listen to even when he was howling and begging for mercy. He only had to kiss the neck of a wife or mistress to add, 'So beautiful a neck, and yet all I have to do is give the order and it will be severed on the spot.' Every so often he would

threaten to torture his very own Caesonia on the rack, to learn from her why he loved her so.

[34] The envy and malignity which he displayed towards people of almost every bygone age were no less than his arrogance and cruelty. The statues of famous men removed by Augustus from the overcrowded Capitoline precinct to the Campus Martius he had toppled from their pedestals and shattered into so many pieces that it subsequently proved impossible to match them to their inscriptions; he also ordered that in future no statue or likeness of a living person was to be put up anywhere without his express authorization and approval. He even contemplated banning the poems of Homer: for why, he wished to know, should he not enjoy the privilege that Plato had claimed for himself, that of banning the poet from his ideal republic? He also came very close to removing the writings and images of both Virgil and Livy from every library, on the grounds that Virgil had been talentless and badly educated, while Livy's history, so he complained, was both interminable and shoddily researched. As for the jurists, he would often imply that he planned to abolish their discipline altogether, exclaiming that none of them would ever be permitted to give a ruling that contradicted his own.

[35] He deprived all the most distinguished noblemen of the venerable markers of their family's greatness: Torquatus lost his torque, Cincinnatus his curly hair³⁹ and Gnaeus Pompey the *cognomen* of 'The Great' which he had inherited from his famous ancestor. Ptolemy (whom I mentioned earlier) he invited from his kingdom and welcomed with great honour, then abruptly had executed – and for no other reason than that he had observed,

when Ptolemy joined him at a gladiatorial show he was presiding over, how all the eyes of the crowds were drawn to the splendid purple cloak that the king was sporting. Whenever he came across attractive men with a handsome head of hair, he would have the backs of their heads shaved to make them look ridiculous. He ordered a man called Aesius Proculus, the son of a senior centurion, nicknamed ‘The Great Lover Boy’ due to his impressive physique and good looks, to be dragged without warning from the stands and led into the arena, where he paired him against two gladiators in turn, one lightly armed and one in full armour, both of whom Proculus defeated; then, without so much as a pause, he had him bound in chains, led through the streets dressed in rags and made a show of to the women – after which he had the throat of ‘The Great Lover Boy’ slit. In short, there was no one whose circumstances were so mean, whose lot was so miserable, that he would not resent such advantages as the man might have. He sent a challenger strong enough to depose the king of Nemi, simply because the incumbent had held the priesthood for years.⁴⁰ One day during the games, when a gladiator named Porius, whose specialization was fighting from a British war chariot, marked a victory by setting a slave free and was loudly applauded for it, he stormed out from the amphitheatre in such a rage that he tripped on the hem of his toga and fell headlong down the steps: ‘A people who are the masters of the world’, he yelled, ‘pay more respect to a gladiator for some trifling matter than to the *principes* who have been raised up to the heavens, or to me, who is still among them.’

[36] He showed no respect for the sexual privileges of a free citizen – either his own or those of anyone else. He is said to have had affairs with

Marcus Lepidus, the actor Mnester and a number of hostages, violating them and being violated in turn. Valerius Catullus, a young man from a consular family, boasted loudly about having used him sexually as though he were a slave, and to have been left exhausted by the demands he made in bed. Quite apart from his sisters, with whom he committed incest, and the prostitute Pyrallis, with whom he had a notorious affair, there was barely any woman of rank whom he left alone. His favoured method was to invite them with their husbands to dinner, where, as they passed the foot of his couch, he would appraise them carefully, much as though they were up for sale – even going so far as to tilt their faces upwards with his hand should any of them in their shame lower their gaze. Then, whenever the fancy took him, he would send word to the woman who had particularly caught his eye and leave the dining room with her; when he returned shortly afterwards, making no attempt to disguise what he had just been up to, he would either praise the woman to the assembled guests or find fault with her, listing point by point the positive qualities of her body and performance in bed, and the negatives. He sent some women notices of divorce in the name of their absent husbands, and ordered these entered in the public records.

[37] No spendthrift has ever rivalled the sheer creativity he brought to the squandering of money, for as well as devising a wholly new way of taking a bath (one which involved soaking in hot and cold perfumed oils), he also came up with varieties of food and drink that were bizarre in the extreme: he would drink the most valuable pearls in existence dissolved in vinegar, and serve his guests loaves of bread and delicacies made out of gold, observing as he did so that a man should be either a miser or Caesar.

Indeed, for several days in a row he scattered coins of no small value out among the crowds from the roof of the Basilica Julia.⁴¹ He also commissioned the building of some Liburnian galleys:⁴² in these – which boasted decks studded with jewels, awnings of many different colours, large baths, porticos, dining rooms and all kinds of vines and fruit trees – he would pass the day lounging around, entertained by dancers and musicians, as he cruised the shores of Campania. As for palaces and villas, these he had constructed without regard for the expense, for what he most wished to achieve by commissioning them was what people said could not be achieved. So it was that he had piers built out into the hostile depths of the sea, tunnels driven through cliffs of the very hardest rock, plains heaped with earth to fashion mountains and the peaks of mountains levelled to fashion plains – and all done (for delay was punished by death) at incredible speed. Without going into the precise details, suffice to say that the sums he spent were vast: 2,700 million sesterces, his entire legacy from Tiberius Caesar, in less than a year.

[38] Short of funds now that his reserves were exhausted, he duly turned his mind to larceny, with methods – be it the bringing of false accusations against people, or auctions, or taxes – that were both varied and brilliantly ingenious. He ruled that those whose ancestors had obtained Roman citizenship for themselves and their descendants had no legal claim to it unless they were the sons of those to whom it had been granted, since the word ‘descendants’ was to be understood as signifying solely that degree of relationship – and when certificates of citizenship issued by the Deified Julius or the Deified Augustus were presented to him, he waved them aside

as old and out of date. He also ruled that census returns were invalid if those making them had subsequently added to their estates. All wills drawn up by senior centurions since the death of Augustus which failed to list either Tiberius or himself among the heirs he annulled, on the grounds that they betrayed a lack of gratitude, and he also declared as null and void the wills of anyone who, while alive, had falsely declared an intention of naming Caesar as heir. Then, when people were so alarmed by this that householders he did not know began listing him in their wills alongside the members of their family, and parents alongside their children, he would accuse them of making a joke at his expense if they remained alive once they had proclaimed him their heir, and sent many of them cakes laced with poison. Before cases he was presiding over in person came to court, he would stipulate how much money he was looking to raise from them, and only once this target had been reached would he close proceedings.

Impatient of any delay, he once delivered a single judgment on over forty people who were all standing trial on a variety of charges, then woke up the sleeping Caesonia to brag about everything he had achieved while she had been enjoying her nap. He arranged an auction at which he put up and sold everything left over from the various entertainments he had staged, soliciting bids until they reached such astronomical heights that some of the bidders, ruined by the sums they had been obliged to pay for these goods, slit their wrists. In one particularly notorious incident, he alerted the auctioneer to Aponius Saturninus, who had dozed off in his seat, telling him not to overlook the man of praetorian rank who kept nodding his head – and

only once the unwitting Saturninus had spent 9 million sesterces on acquiring thirteen gladiators was the bidding finally brought to a close.

[39] Additionally, while in Gaul, he raised immense sums by selling the jewellery, furniture, slaves and even freedmen that had belonged to his sisters before their conviction, and was so delighted by the profit he made on them that he sent to Rome for the contents of the old palace, requisitioning hire vehicles and bakers' mules to transport them (this in turn resulted in the city running short of bread, and in large numbers of litigants losing their cases, since they were unable to get to court on time and forfeited their bail in consequence). There was no limit to the cheating and smooth-talking he deployed in his effort to sell these furnishings: sometimes he would rail at individuals for their greed and their lack of shame in having more money than he did, and sometimes he would affect grief that private individuals were laying hands on the furniture of a *princeps*. When a wealthy provincial paid his secretaries a bribe of 200,000 sesterces to be added surreptitiously to the guest list for a banquet, he was by no means displeased to discover just how highly the honour of dining with him was valued; the following day, when the provincial was in attendance at his auction, he sent over some insignificant trinket for which the man was told he would have to pay 200,000 sesterces, but invited him at the same time to come and dine as the personal guest of Caesar himself.

[40] Not only were the taxes he introduced so novel as to be quite unheard of, but there was no category of object on which he failed to levy a tariff, and no class of person on whom he failed to impose a tax (initially he used tax-farmers to collect them, but they brought in so much revenue that

he ended up employing centurions and tribunes of the praetorian guard). He levied a fixed sum on all pre-cooked food sold anywhere in Rome, and on lawsuits and court cases, no matter where they might be conducted: a tax amounting to one-fortieth of the amount at stake. A penalty was also imposed on anyone shown to have settled their suit out of court or dropped it. Porters he taxed an eighth of their daily income, while from the earnings of prostitutes he took a sum equivalent to the fee they charged a single client: this tax, according to the opening paragraph of the legislation, was liable to be paid by anyone who had ever worked as a prostitute or a pimp, even if they subsequently married.

[41] Although these taxes were made law, the law itself was not published in written form, and so there were many people, ignorant of its precise stipulations, who were tripped up by it – and even when he finally responded to agitation from the public by posting the legislation, it was written in such a tiny script and placed in a location so difficult to access that no one could make a copy of it. Making sure not to leave any scheme for fleecing people untried, he set up a brothel on the Palatine by furnishing a number of cubicles in a manner appropriate to the grandeur of the location, and having respectably married women and freeborn boys stand in them,⁴³ then sending heralds round the forums and basilicas to invite young and old to come and take their pleasure; those who did were lent money at interest, and he had scribes on hand to log their names in the full view of everyone as contributors to Caesar's revenue. He also felt no qualms about boosting his income by playing dice, and by cheating and even perjuring himself while gaming was able to raise substantial sums – on

one occasion, giving up his turn in a game to the man sitting next to him, he went out into the front hall of the house, saw two wealthy Roman knights riding by, promptly ordered their arrest and the confiscation of their estates, then returned in an exultant mood to the game, where he boasted that never before had he enjoyed better luck at dice.

[42] When his daughter was born, however, he pleaded poverty in even more resentful tones, on the grounds that now he had to bear the burden not just of the empire but of being a father, and accepted contributions to the upkeep of the girl and her dowry. He also let it be known that he would be accepting New Year gifts, and on the Kalends of January duly stood on the porch of the temple, where he collected the coins which a crowd of people drawn from every background, scooping them up in handfuls from the folds of their togas, were showering on him.⁴⁴ In due course he was filled with such a burning passion actually to feel his money that he would walk up and down with bare feet over the huge piles of gold that lay scattered across the open floor, and for long periods roll across them at full stretch.

[43] Just once did he go to war and focus on military matters, and even then only on a whim: for when the oracle in Mevania which he was visiting on a trip to see the River Clitumnus and its grove advised him to expand the squad of Batavians⁴⁵ who served as his bodyguard, he decided there and then on a German campaign, summoning legions and auxiliary forces from every quarter, bringing in a draft which he enforced with great severity, collecting supplies of every kind on an scale never seen before, and then, once he had set off, sometimes making march at a pace so fast that the praetorian cohorts, as they followed him, were obliged to go against their

normal practice and load their standards on to pack animals, and sometimes dawdling in such luxurious style that the inhabitants of the towns through which he was passing, borne in a litter by eight men, were required to sweep the roads and damp down the dust with water.

[44] Once he had arrived in camp he made a show of his vigilance as a leader, and his keenness on discipline, by dismissing in disgrace those legates who had been late bringing the auxiliary forces from their various quarters. After reviewing the army he also dismissed from their posts many of the senior centurions, on the grounds of old age and infirmity (even though in truth they were battle-hardened veterans, and some were only a few days off completing their term of service); the remainder he castigated for being greedy, and cut the bonus each man was due on retirement from the army to 6,000 sesterces. The limit of his achievements was receiving the surrender of Adminius, a son of the British king Cynobellinus⁴⁶ who, after being banished by Cynobellinus, had deserted to him with a small band of followers; but the news of this, framed as though the entire island had surrendered, he announced in grandiloquent terms, and instructed the couriers bearing it to Rome to drive their carriage straight into the Forum, right the way up to the Senate House, and to deliver the message to no one save the consuls, as they sat in the temple of Mars before a crowded meeting of the senate.

[45] Soon after this, lacking opportunities to fight a war, he gave instructions that a few Germans from his bodyguard should be taken across the Rhine and hidden, and that after lunch panicked word should be brought to him that the enemy were approaching.⁴⁷ Then, once everything had been

done as he had ordered, he went rushing with his friends and some of the praetorian cavalry out into the nearby forest, where he had trees cut down and fashioned into war trophies; returning by torchlight, he berated those who had failed to follow him as cowards and skulkers, but to his companions, his partners in the victory, he presented crowns of a novel kind, complete with images of the sun, the moon and the stars, and a new name of his own devising: the ‘explorer’s crown’. In another incident, a charade which likewise displayed just how grotesquely he was capable of behaving, some hostages – young boys – were taken from where they were learning their letters and sent secretly on ahead; then, abruptly rising from his table, he hunted the children down with his cavalry as though they were on the run, and brought them back in chains. When, after returning to his meal, he was informed that a column of soldiers was at attention outside, he urged them to come in and join the banquet, dressed in their armour as they were. He also admonished them, in the famous words of Virgil, to ‘bear up and save themselves for better days’.⁴⁸ Meanwhile, in a particularly brutal edict, he savaged the absent senate and people: ‘While Caesar fights and exposes himself to a succession of dangers, you spend your days in feasting, and going to the circus and the theatre, and enjoying your scenic retreats.’

[46] Finally, as if to going to war, he drew up his battle lines on the edge of the Ocean,⁴⁹ his catapults and his other artillery positioned among them, and then, to soldiers who – to a man – had no idea what his intentions were, nor could even guess at them, abruptly issued a command that they were to gather up seashells, and fill their helmets and the folds of their tunics with

what he termed ‘the spoils owed by the Ocean to the Capitol and the Palatine’; as a monument to his victory, he built a very high tower which, like the Pharos,⁵⁰ blazed at night with a fire to guide the course of ships, and gave each man in the army a bonus of 100 denarii (announcing this, he told his troops – as though bounty of such an order were something quite unprecedented – ‘Depart happy, depart rich’).

[47] Next he turned his attention to his triumph, for which – although he did have some barbarian captives and refugees – he also selected the very tallest men in Gaul, those who were, as he himself put it in Greek, ‘worthy to walk in a triumph’: he obliged these, together with some of the Gallic princes whom he had also reserved for his triumphal procession, not just to grow out their hair and dye it red, but also to learn the language of the Germans, and to adopt barbarian names. He even ordered that the galleys in which he had embarked upon the Ocean should be transported to Rome – despite the fact that the greater part of the journey was overland. He wrote to his agents in the city, instructing them that the triumph should be arranged with as little cost to himself as possible, but simultaneously – since they had everybody else’s goods at their disposal – on a scale never witnessed before.

[48] Prior to leaving the province he devised a plan for committing a truly monstrous atrocity: the slaughter of the legions which had mutinied long previously after the death of Augustus, on the grounds that they had blocked both their general, his father Germanicus, and himself, even though he was just a young child at the time, from leaving the camp – and although (albeit with difficulty) he was dissuaded from this desperate scheme, there

was no dissuading him from his determination to decimate the legions.⁵¹ Accordingly, he summoned them to assemble unarmed, leaving even their swords behind, then surrounded them with armed cavalry. But when he saw that many of the legionaries, suspecting something was up, were slipping away to rearm themselves in case matters turned violent, he fled the assembly and immediately made for Rome, boding now all his resentment against the senate, and issuing open threats against them as a way of distracting from the gossip about the humiliations he had brought on himself (among the complaints he levelled against the senators, despite the fact that only a short time previously he had been warning them on pain of death not to bestow any honours upon him, was that they had cheated him of the triumph that was his due).

[49] So it was, when he was met on his journey home by representatives of that most distinguished of orders, and begged by them to return faster still, he bellowed at the top of his voice, ‘Oh, I shall come, I shall come’, then added, striking the hilt of the sword he was wearing at his belt repeatedly as he did so, ‘and this will be coming with me.’ He issued an official proclamation declaring that he would be returning only to those who wanted him, the equestrians and people – for no longer was he a fellow citizen of the senators, or their *princeps*. He even forbade the senators from coming to meet him. Having either cancelled or deferred his triumph, he entered the city on his birthday with an ovation, and then, four months later, met his death, even as he was contemplating crimes greater still than the monstrous ones that he had already presumed to commit: the removal of the capital first to Antium, and then to Alexandria, and prior to that the murder

of the most distinguished members of both the senatorial and the equestrian orders. There can be no doubting this, for among his private papers two lists with different headings were found, one headed ‘Sword’ and the other ‘Dagger’: both contained the names and details of the people he planned to have killed. Also found was a large chest full of various poisons, so toxic – or so it is claimed – that when they were thrown into the sea on Claudius’ orders soon afterwards they killed all the fish, which kept being washed up along the neighbouring beaches.

[50] Physically, he was tall but badly proportioned, with a thin neck, spindly legs and a pallid complexion; his eyes and temples were sunken, and his forehead prominent and forbidding; he had thinning hair on his head, with none at all on his crown, but elsewhere was very hairy. This was why anyone looking down at him from a superior vantage point as he went by, or pronouncing the word ‘goat’ for any reason whatsoever, was held guilty of a capital offence. Though he had a naturally off-putting and hideous face, he worked diligently in front of a mirror to make it even more so, contorting it into all kinds of fearsome expressions. He suffered from poor health in mind as well as body. As a boy he was prone to epileptic fits, and as a young man, although he was perfectly capable of feats of endurance, he would on occasion suddenly become so weak that he was barely able to walk, or stand, or think straight, or stop his head from lolling. He himself was well aware of the state of his mental health, and would sometimes contemplate taking a retirement break to clear his mind. It is believed that he was drugged by his wife Caesonia with what she had thought was an aphrodisiac, but which instead drove him mad. He suffered

terribly from insomnia, never sleeping more than three hours each night, and even then never soundly or calmly, for the dream he had one night in which he saw the sea take on a phantasmal form and speak to him was typical of the terrors and strange imaginings that haunted his sleep, and ensured that for most of the night, rather than endure the tedium of lying awake in bed, he would sit on his couch, or else wander the immense sweep of the colonnades, scanning the eastern sky for the dawn, and crying out every so often for daylight to come.

[51] It is my theory – and I have no doubt it is the correct one – that his mental infirmity was due to the coexistence within his personality of twin but directly contradictory flaws: extreme self-confidence and abject timidity. After all, this was the man who, despite his lack of respect for the gods, used to shut his eyes and cover his head at the slightest hint of thunder and lightning, and during a violent storm would jump out of bed and cower underneath it. Touring Sicily he was constantly poking fun at the various local wonders, until one night, terrified by the smoke and rumblings coming from the summit of Mount Etna, he abruptly fled Messina. In Germany, where he was forever issuing blood-curdling threats against the barbarians, he was travelling by chariot one day on the far side of the Rhine, and happened to be passing through a narrow defile surrounded by a dense column of men when someone observed what panic there would be were the enemy suddenly to appear: at this, he immediately jumped on to a horse and galloped back to the bridges – and when these turned out to be crowded with camp-followers and wagons he had himself passed from hand to hand over people's heads rather than suffer the least delay. Soon

afterwards, hearing that the Germans were in revolt, he made plans to escape Rome by fitting out fleets to take him from the city, and comforted himself with the reflection that, were the barbarians to come in victory and seize the alpine peaks, as the Cimbrians had done, or even Rome itself, following the example of the Senones, at least he would have the provinces across the seas left to him. It was this, I think, that subsequently gave his assassins the idea of attempting to calm the rampage of the soldiers by pretending to them that the news of a military defeat had filled him with such dread that he had killed himself.

[52] His taste in clothing, shoes and other items of wear did not conform to the standards appropriate to a Roman citizen, nor always to a male, nor even on occasion to a mortal. He often went out in public wearing an embroidered cloak set with precious stones, a long-sleeved tunic and bracelets, and sometimes in a woman's robe made out of silk, while on his feet he would sport either pumps or platform heels as worn by actors, or the kind of military boots worn by scouts, or a woman's slippers. He was often to be seen wearing a golden beard while grasping a thunderbolt, a trident or a staff with two serpents twined around it (the emblems of the gods⁵²) – and on occasion even kitted out as Venus. Well before he went on campaign he would regularly dress like a general celebrating a triumph, and sometimes he would wear the breastplate of Alexander the Great, which he had removed from Alexander's coffin.

[53] Although he had no great expertise in the liberal arts, he studied rhetoric with close attention, and was as fluent and quick-witted as one could wish, especially when pressing a charge against somebody. Words

and opinions came to him more readily when he lost his temper, and both his delivery and his voice would grow more emphatic: indeed, so animated would he become that he found it impossible to stay still, and became so loud that even those standing at a distance could hear him. When about to give a speech, he would declare menacingly that he was going to draw a sword forged by the burning of the midnight oil, while so contemptuous was he of anything slick or polished that he dismissed Seneca, then at the height of his popularity, as ‘sand without lime’, good merely for prize declamations. It was his habit to write rebuttals of speeches made by successful orators, and to compose speeches for both the prosecution and the defence when important cases were brought before the senate; he would decide either for or against the defendant based on the relative success of each speech, and would summon the equestrian order by edict to come and hear him.

[54] As for other branches of the arts, he devoted himself to a large number of these with unmatched enthusiasm. He appeared variously as a Thracian gladiator⁵³ and a charioteer, and even as a singer and a dancer: as a gladiator he would fight with real weapons, and as a charioteer drive in the circuses that had been built across Rome; as an enthusiast for song and dance, he took such pleasure in both that whenever watching a show in a theatre he found it impossible not to sing along with the tragic actors as they gave their performances, and to imitate their gestures, in such a way as to let everyone watching know whether he approved them or thought them poor. Indeed, it seems that he had no other reason for announcing an all-night festival on the same day he died than to provide himself, by virtue of

the licence that would be afforded him by the midnight hour, with a favourable opportunity to make his debut on the stage. Sometimes he danced by night as well, and on one occasion, when it was the second watch, summoned three former consuls to the Palatine, placed them on the boards of a stage, and then suddenly, as they were waiting there in mortal dread, fearing the worst, leaped out to a loud burst of music, the clacking of castanets and the piping of flutes, before dancing, dressed as he was, in a tunic that reached to his ankles and a woman's cloak, to the tune raised by the musicians – after which he left the stage. Nevertheless, accomplished though he was in all these various other skills, he never learned to swim.

[55] He displayed such favouritism towards all those he had clasped in his affections that it verged on insanity. He used to kiss Mnester the pantomime actor even in the midst of performances, and if anyone made the slightest noise while the mime was dancing would have the offender hauled out and flogged (he would personally deliver the flogging). To a Roman knight who had created a disturbance he sent a centurion bearing a message that the man was to go to Ostia without delay, set sail for Mauretania, and there deliver a handwritten letter from him to King Ptolemy, to this effect: 'Do nothing either good or bad to the man I have sent you.' He placed some Thracian gladiators in command of his bodyguard. He also reduced the armour that the *murmillones* were permitted to wear.⁵⁴ He ordered that a gladiator named Columbus who had sustained a slight nick while winning a bout should have the wound salved with a poison which from that moment on he called '*columbinum*' (that, certainly, was how he recorded it in the handwritten list he kept of his poisons). When it came to chariot-racing, he

was such a passionate fan of the Greens that he often used to dine and stay all night with them in their stables, while at the end of one particularly wild party he gave Eutychus, one of the charioteers, a gift of 2 million sesterces. It was his practice, the day before races were held in the Circus, to send soldiers round the neighbourhood to enforce silence, so that no one would disturb the horse Incitatus:⁵⁵ on this animal – in addition to a stable fashioned out of marble, an ivory manger, purple saddlecloths and collars studded with jewels – he bestowed as well a fully furnished mansion complete with slaves, so that guests invited in the horse's name might be received in a more elevated style. It is claimed as well that he intended to make Incitatus a consul.

[56] There were plenty, over the course of his wild and savage reign, who had nerve enough to plot his death. Of these conspiracies, one or two were detected and others postponed for lack of opportunity, but then two men came together to devise a plot that actually succeeded, thanks in no small part to the connivance in it of the most powerful of his freedmen – and also of the praetorian prefects, who joined it because they had already been falsely accused of involvement in a conspiracy against him, and therefore felt themselves the objects of his suspicion and hatred. (Indeed, he had been quick to stir up a good deal of hostility towards them by taking them to one side and telling them, drawn sword in hand, that he was ready to kill himself if they thought he merited death; nor, from that point on, had he stopped trying to set them at each other's throats by making accusations in turn about one to the other.) Once the decision had been made to move against him during the midday break at the Palatine Games,⁵⁶ the leading

role in the operation was claimed by a tribune of a praetorian cohort named Cassius Chaerea, a veteran of many years' service who was nevertheless perpetually being taunted by him for softness and effeminacy, and made the butt of his jokes: whenever it was Chaerea on duty, for instance, he would make 'Priapus' or 'Venus' the watchword, and sometimes, when the tribune had reason to thank him for something, Gaius would hold out his hand to be kissed, then make an obscene gesture with his fingers.

[57] His assassination was presaged by a whole range of supernatural markers. The statue of Jupiter in Olympia, which he had decided to have taken to pieces and brought to Rome, all of a sudden laughed so loudly that the scaffolding collapsed and the workmen ran away; simultaneously, a man called Cassius turned up, claiming that in a dream he had been ordered to sacrifice a bull to Jupiter. On the Ides of March, lightning struck both the Capitol in Capua and the gatekeeper's room on the Palatine in Rome: there were those who interpreted the second of these portents to mean that the master of the Palatine was at risk from his own guards, and the first that once again, as had happened years previously on the same date, a great man would be slain.⁵⁷ When he consulted the astrologer Sulla about his horoscope, he was informed that there could be no doubt: his death was imminent. When the oracle in the temple of Fortune at Antium warned him to beware of 'Cassius', he duly had Cassius Longinus, who at the time was serving as the proconsul of Asia, put to death – but quite forgot that Chaerea was also called Cassius. The day before he died he dreamed that he was standing in the heavens next to the throne of Jupiter, and the god pushed him with the big toe of his right foot so that so he was sent plummeting to

earth. There were also various incidents which preceded the murder on the fatal day itself, and were likewise viewed as omens. First, while he was making sacrifice, he was sprayed with the blood of a flamingo; then Mnester the mime artist performed the same tragedy that the tragic actor Neoptolemus had starred in during the games which witnessed the assassination of King Philip of Macedon;⁵⁸ finally, in the farce *Laurelous*, in which the lead actor falls and vomits blood as he leaves the stage, many of the supporting actors competed to display their own talents by imitating this, so that the entire stage was drowned beneath blood. Additionally, rehearsals were taking place for a show that was to be performed that very night, in which Egyptians and Ethiopians were to act out stories set in the Underworld.

[58] On the ninth day before the Kalends of February⁵⁹ he was suffering from indigestion after gorging himself the previous evening, and so he put off going to lunch; only around the seventh hour, at the urging of his friends, did he finally head out. Passing through a basement which lay along his route, he encountered some boys of noble birth who had been brought from Asia to give a theatrical entertainment and were busy rehearsing it; he paused to watch them and wish them well, and would have returned to the theatre and had them put on their show at once had the leader of the troupe not complained of feeling cold.⁶⁰ As for what happened next, there are two versions. Some report that Chaerea slashed deep across his neck with a sword from behind as he was talking to the boys and cried out, ‘Take this!’, and that the other conspirator, the tribune Cornelius Sabinus, then confronted him and stabbed him in the chest; others

that Sabinus, who had managed to isolate him from everyone else with the help of some centurions who were in on the plot, asked him, as was standard military procedure, for the password, and then, when he answered ‘Jupiter’, that Chaerea cried out, ‘So be it!’, and split his jaw with a blow of the sword as he turned to look round. Fallen to the ground, he wrapped his arms round his legs, crying out that he was still alive; but the rest of the praetorians, obedient to the watchword ‘Again!’, then finished him off, raining down thirty blows. Some even stabbed him in the genitals with their swords. Meanwhile, at the first sign of the affray, his litter-bearers had come running to help him with their litter poles, followed soon afterwards by his German bodyguards, who slew some of the assassins, together with various senators who had nothing to do with the murder.

[59] He died at the age of twenty-nine, after a reign of three years, ten months and eight days. His body was surreptitiously transported to the Lamian Gardens,⁶¹ where it was half-burned on a makeshift pyre, and then buried in a shallow grave; subsequently, when his sisters returned from exile, they had it exhumed, cremated and reinterred. It is a well-known fact that, before this happened, the caretakers of the garden were haunted by ghosts; also that in the house where he was murdered not a night passed without some terrifying phantasm making an appearance, until the house itself was burned down in the fire. His wife Caesonia was run through by a centurion’s sword, and perished by his side; his daughter was dashed against a wall.

[60] The climate prevailing at the time can be gauged from the following responses to his assassination. When the news of it broke, no one would

believe it at first, since it was suspected that Caligula himself had fabricated and broadcast the story of the murder with the aim of discovering what people thought of him. The conspirators had failed to settle on anyone to succeed to the rule of the empire; meanwhile, so united was the senate in its resolve to see liberty restored that the consuls convened its first meeting, not in the Senate House (named as it had been after Julius Caesar), but on the Capitol – indeed, some even gave it as their opinion that all memory of the Caesars should be erased, and their temples pulled down. It was observed and thought particularly worthy of comment that every Caesar whose first name was Gaius – beginning with the one murdered back in the time of Cinna⁶² – had perished by the sword.

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The Deified Claudius

[1] The father of Claudius Caesar, Drusus (who had originally had the forename of Decimus, then later that of Nero) was born less than three months after his heavily pregnant mother Livia had married Augustus, and was widely believed to have been the offspring of an adulterous affair between his mother and stepfather. It certainly did not take long for the following line to be on everybody's lips: 'The lucky ones have their children in just three months.' Both as quaestor and praetor, this same Drusus led military operations first in Raetia, then in Germany; he was also the first ever Roman commander to cross the Northern Ocean, and he had canals built on the far side of the Rhine – a massively labour-intensive project – which still bear his name to this very day. Even after he had inflicted heavy casualties on the enemy in a series of battles, and forced them back deep into the wastelands of the interior, he did not stop harrying them until an apparition, with the appearance of a barbarian woman but much larger than any human, forbade him to snatch after victory any further. These achievements earned him the right to an ovation and triumphal regalia, and no sooner had he finished his praetorship than he embarked on a consulship; but then, after he had resumed his campaign, he fell sick and died in a summer camp that has been known as the 'Accursed'

ever since. His body was borne by the leading men of the towns and colonies that lay along the road to Rome, where it was received by the quaestors' clerks and buried in the Campus Martius. Meanwhile, the army raised a great funerary monument to him, and every year on a given day soldiers would make a ceremonial circuit of it, running as they did so, and Gallic cities would offer up sacrifices and prayers.¹ Additionally, among numerous other honours, the senate voted him a marble arch adorned with trophies on the Appian Way, and bestowed the *cognomen* 'Germanicus' on him and his descendants. That he combined all the military virtues with a civic spirit is generally accepted: for just as he tried to add to his victories over the enemy the capture of their generals' armour, and would frequently risk his personal safety by pursuing his German opposite number all across the battlefield, so did he never make any secret of the fact that – were it ever in his power to do so – he would restore the republic to its original condition. This is the reason, I think, that some have been so bold as to claim that Augustus mistrusted Drusus and recalled him from his province, and then, when he dragged his feet, had him poisoned. I mention this, however, so as to acknowledge all shades of opinion rather than because I personally think it true or even plausible: for so fond of him was Augustus that while he was still alive the *princeps* always named him in his wills as co-heir alongside his sons² (and once declared as much to the senate); and then, following his death, praised him before an assembly of the people in such heartfelt terms that he prayed the gods would make his sons, his Caesars, the match of his stepson, and that he himself might be granted a death equal to Drusus' in glory. Not content with composing a eulogy in

verse which he then had inscribed on Drusus' tomb, Augustus also commemorated his life by writing a biography of him in prose. Drusus had several children by Antonia the Younger, but only three of these survived him: Germanicus, Livilla and Claudius.

[2] Claudius was born in Lugdunum during the consulship of Iullus Antonius and Fabius Africanus, on the Kalends of August³ (the very day that the altar to Augustus in the city was first consecrated), and was given the name Tiberius Claudius Drusus. Later, when his elder brother was adopted into the Julian family, he took the *cognomen* 'Germanicus'.⁴ He lost his father while still a baby, and for almost the entire length of his childhood and adolescence suffered from a range of chronic illnesses: these left him so impaired both mentally and physically that even once he had come of age he was regarded as unfitted for either public or private duties. For a long time, then, even once he had legally become an adult, he continued to be treated as though he were a child, and remained under the authority of a tutor (this prompted him to make bitter complaint in one of his writings, for the tutor was a barbarian who, as a one-time supervisor of muleteers, had been chosen deliberately as someone who would punish him brutally for the slightest misdemeanour). It was this ill-health of his that led him on one occasion – a gladiatorial contest in honour of his father, which he was presiding over with his brother – to appear wrapped up in a Greek cloak (not a style of dress ever seen before in the box!),⁵ and on another – his adoption of the toga of manhood – to be taken to the Capitol at midnight in a litter, without any of the customary ceremony.

[3] From an early age, it is true, he did apply himself with an unusual degree of application to the liberal arts, even to the extent of having his efforts in a variety of genres published on a regular basis. Still, though, he found it impossible to secure public office, or to have realistic prospects of doing any better in the future.

His mother Antonia used to describe him as a monstrosity of a human being, begun by Nature but only half-finished, and would accuse anyone whose stupidity she particularly wished to emphasize of being a bigger fool than her son Claudius. His grandmother Augusta⁶ always treated him with the utmost contempt: she used to speak to him only rarely, and would send him instructions either in the form of cold, peremptory notes, or else by means of an intermediary. His sister Livilla, on hearing that he was to have the rule of the empire, did not mince her words when she openly expressed her horror that such a cruel and unmerited fate should have befallen the Roman people. As for the opinion held of him by his great-uncle Augustus, both good and bad, I here append some extracts from his letters, so that no one be in any doubt on that score.

[4]

As you requested, my darling Livia, I have spoken to Tiberius about what is to be done with your grandson Tiberius at the Games of Mars.⁷ We are agreed that we need to decide once and for all the approach we should be taking in his case. After all, if he is essentially sound and, as it were, ‘all there’, then surely there can be no doubt that he should be promoted step by step and office by office just as his brother has been? If, on the other hand, we feel him

to be – as the Greeks might put it – a moron, and not just mentally unsound but physically so as well, then we must on no account give the kind of people who jeer and laugh at such things the chance to make him (and us!) objects of mockery. This is a quandary we are repeatedly going to find ourselves facing if, rather than deciding once and for all whether he is capable of holding public office, we do it on a case-by-case basis. Nevertheless, since the issue you have raised with me is a pressing one, I think that giving him responsibility for the priests' banquet at the Games of Mars is something I can live with – provided, that is, he is willing to be monitored by Silvanus' son, his brother-in-law,⁸ and does not do anything that will render him conspicuous or an object of laughter. What I do not think acceptable, however, is for him to watch the Circus Games from my box, since there, exposed as he will be to the gaze of everyone in the stands above, there will be no hiding him. Nor would I be happy for him to go to the Alban Mount or to remain in Rome on the day of the Latin festival.⁹ After all, if he is capable of accompanying his brother to the Alban Mount, then why should he not be made prefect of the city? So there, my darling Livia, you have my views: I want us to settle this matter once and for all, so that we are not forever veering between our hopes for the best and our fears of the worst. You may, if you wish, give this section of my letter to our Antonia to read.

Again, in a second letter, Augustus wrote:

While you are away, I shall certainly invite young Tiberius to supper every day, to ensure that he is not dining alone with his friends Sulpicius and Athenodorus. Rather than have him copy just anyone, I would like him to consider more carefully whose manners, posture and behaviour he should properly be imitating. The poor boy has been cheated by fortune – for in significant matters, when he can hold his concentration, the nobility of his spirit is evident enough.

Then, in a third letter: ‘I’ll be damned, my dear Livia, if it’s not the most surprising thing – I actually find myself admiring your grandson Tiberius’ talent for declamation! How anyone who in his conversation talks such gibberish can possibly talk such sense when giving a speech is beyond me.’

There can be no doubting, however, Augustus’ ultimate decision: for he left him with no experience of public office save for membership of the college of augurs, nor anything save for the sixth part of the estate that he shared with others named alongside him in the will as heirs in the third degree, most of whom were not even members of the family, together with a legacy amounting to no more than 800,000 sesterces.

[5] Tiberius met his request to stand for public office by granting him the insignia of a consul, but subsequently, when he pressed his uncle for permission to run for the office itself, all he got in reply was a short note: ‘You have already had your gift of forty gold pieces to mark the Saturnalia and Sigillaria.’¹⁰ This, in terms of his hopes of winning public office, was the breaking point: retreating into private life, sometimes in his gardens and his country house, sometimes in Campania, he closeted himself away, passing his time in the company of some exceedingly disreputable people,

and supplementing the reputation he already had for dullness by becoming notorious too as a drunkard and a gambler. Nevertheless, despite his lifestyle during this period, he never lacked for the dues of courtesy from individuals, nor the respect of the general public.¹¹

[6] The equestrian order twice chose him to represent their interests at the head of a delegation – once when they made a request to the consuls that they be allowed to carry the body of Augustus to Rome on their shoulders, and again when they offered their congratulations on the overthrow of Sejanus – and would always rise and take off their cloaks whenever he arrived at the games. The senate too voted to appoint him by special dispensation one of the priests of Augustus,¹² even though normally people were appointed to these priesthoods by lot; then, when his house burned down, that it should be rebuilt at public expense, and that he should be legally entitled to express his opinion as though he were a man who had held consular rank. This second decree was rescinded by Tiberius, who declared him too much of an imbecile to merit it, and promised to make good the loss of his house himself. In his will, Tiberius named him as an heir only to a third part of his estate, as one of the heirs in the third degree, but did leave him a legacy of some 2 million sesterces, and expressly included his name in the list of family members commended to the armies, and to the senate and the people of Rome.

[7] Only under his brother's son Gaius, who had come to power resolved to court popularity in every way possible, did he finally embark on a public career, serving as his nephew's colleague in the consulship for a couple of months – and indeed, the first time he entered the Forum accompanied by

the fasces, an eagle happened to land on his right shoulder. He also secured a second consulship four years later by lot, and sometimes, when Gaius was absent, would get to preside over the games: on these occasions he would be cheered by the people, some of whom would yell ‘Long live the emperor’s uncle!’, while others would cry ‘Long live the brother of Germanicus!’

[8] Not that this spared him from constant bullying. All he had to do was turn up a few minutes late for supper, and he would have to make an entire tour of the dining room before someone would grudgingly make space for him; likewise, should he ever doze off after dinner – something he was quite prone to doing – he would be pelted with olive and date stones, and on occasion a joker might lash him with a rod or a whip (‘just for the banter’ was the excuse). Also popular was putting slippers on his hands as he lay snoring, so that if he suddenly started awake he would rub his face with them.

[9] Nor was he spared the threat of much worse. His first brush with danger occurred during his consulship, when he was almost removed from office for being slow to commission and then set up twin statues of Caesar’s brothers, Nero and Drusus; many more followed, however, for people of every kind (and not just strangers either, but even members of his own household) were constantly informing against him. His closest shave occurred on a mission to Germany, when he went as part of a delegation to offer congratulations to Gaius following the exposure of the conspiracy of Lepidus and Gaetulicus, and Gaius, massively offended, raged that his uncle had been purposely chosen in the manner of a tutor being sent to

discipline a boy (indeed, there are some who claim things were so bad that he was actually pushed into the river just as he had come, fully clothed). From that moment on, there was never a debate in the senate but he was the last of the consulars to give his opinion: for Gaius would deliberately humiliate him by always calling him after everyone else had spoken. Also, a case involving a forged will to which he had been a witness was allowed to come to court. Finally, he was forced to pay 8 million sesterces as an admittance fee to a new priesthood:¹³ this left him in such straitened circumstances that he was unable to pay his dues to the state treasury, and so the prefects ordered his property put on the market to make up the shortfall.

[10] These, then, were the circumstances in which he spent the greater part of his life – until, in his fiftieth year, he ascended to the rule of the empire as the result of a miraculous turn of fortune. When the conspirators who were lurking in wait for Gaius moved everyone else along, on the grounds that the emperor wished to be alone, he retreated to a wing of the palace known as the Hermaeum; and not long afterwards, alarmed by the distant shouts of ‘murder’, crept away to a nearby balcony, where he hid himself behind the curtains hanging in front of the door. There he cowered – and as he did so, a soldier who happened to be wandering past noticed his feet and dragged him out, intending to ask him who he was; but then, as he sank to his knees in terror, recognized him and hailed him as emperor. The soldier then led him away to where the other praetorians were all milling around, uncertain what to do. The soldiers put him in a litter and, because his own attendants had run away, took it in turns to carry the unhappy and

fearful man on their shoulders to their camp¹⁴ – and all the crowds they passed on the way pitied him, on the assumption that he was an innocent being bundled off to execution. Received within the ramparts, he spent the night under the protection of the praetorians, but in a mood of relief rather than of any great expectation. This was because the consuls, backed by the senate and the urban cohorts, had seized control of the Forum and the Capitol, with the aim of restoring civic freedom, and had ordered him, through the tribunes of the plebs, to attend the senate and advise them on what he thought should be done – but to this summons he replied by claiming that he was being held against his will. A day went by, however, and the senate, rather than put their plans into effect, persisted in squabbling over what course of action they should be pursuing; meanwhile, as large crowds of people stood around, agitating for a single man to be given rule and calling for him by name, he permitted an armed assembly of the praetorians to swear allegiance to him, and promised each one of them 15,000 sesterces – thereby becoming the first of the Caesars to win the loyalty of the military by paying them a bribe.

[11] Now, with his power consolidated, his most urgent priority was to erase the memory of the two days when the possibility of restoring the republic had hung in the balance. So it was that he issued an amnesty covering everything said or done during that period of time, and a decree burying the memory of it in perpetual oblivion; and although he did put to death the tribunes and a few of the centurions who had been involved in the conspiracy against Gaius (both as an example and because he learned that they had been planning to kill him as well), he otherwise left the

conspirators alone and kept his word. This sorted, he then turned to the dues of loyalty owed his family, and stipulated that no oath would be sworn by him more frequently, nor bind him more solemnly, than ‘By Augustus’. To his grandmother Livia he had divine honours voted, together with a chariot drawn by elephants for parading her image around the Circus, just as Augustus had; to the shades of his parents he made public funerary offerings; additionally, he marked his father’s birthday with games in the Circus, and gave his mother a ceremonial carriage in which her image could be led around the Circus, together with the *cognomen* ‘Augusta’, which she had always refused while alive. In memory of his brother, whom he honoured at every opportunity, he staged a Greek comedy in the competition at Naples, and backed the verdict of the judges by awarding it the crown.¹⁵ Even Mark Antony was not overlooked, for in one of his decrees he paid honour to his grandfather by declaring that he was all the more anxious to see the birthday of his father Drusus celebrated because it was Antony’s birthday as well. He completed the marble arch next to Pompey’s Theatre which, although voted by the senate to Tiberius, had long been left unfinished. Also, despite his revocation of the entirety of Gaius’ acts, he refused to allow the anniversary of his predecessor’s assassination to be listed as a day of celebration, even though it marked the day on which he himself had become *princeps*.

[12] When it came to self-promotion, however, his approach was both modest and bound by civic proprieties: he declined to call himself ‘Emperor’, refused excessive honours and, while marking both his daughter’s engagement and the birth of his grandson with the appropriate

domestic rituals, otherwise let them pass by in silence. He allowed no one to return from exile without the approval of the senate. He made sure, before bringing the prefect of the praetorians and the military tribunes with him into the Senate House, to obtain the senators' permission, and also sought their ratification of the judicial rulings made by his procurators. He asked the consuls for the right to hold markets on his private estates. He regularly attended the magistrates as an adviser when they heard court cases, and would rise to his feet when they sponsored public entertainments, cheering and applauding them along with the rest of the crowd. When the tribunes of the plebs approached him on the tribunal, he apologized for making them stand, explaining that he would be unable to hear them otherwise, owing to the lack of space. Behaviour like this fast won him such popularity and goodwill that when a report came in that he had been murdered in an ambush on the way to Ostia it was greeted with consternation by the masses, who cursed the soldiers as traitors and the senators as parricides, and did not stop abusing them until first one man, and then another, and finally a whole load of witnesses had been produced by the magistrates on the Rostra, to reassure the people that he was not only alive but heading back to the city.

[13] Not that his period of rule was entirely free of insurrectionary activity, for he was beset variously by individuals, by factional groupings and in due course by civil war. A plebeian armed with a dagger was found in the middle of the night next to his bedchamber, and twice a man of the equestrian order was apprehended while lying in wait for him in a public place: the first of these would-be assassins had been planning to attack him

with an iron pike as he was leaving the theatre, and the second to strike at him with a hunting knife as he was making sacrifice in the temple of Mars. Additionally, Asinius Gallus and Statilius Corvinus, the grandsons of the orators Pollio and Messala respectively, plotted to overthrow him, and recruited a large number of his own freedmen and slaves to their conspiracy. Furius Camillus Scribonianus, the governor of Dalmatia, persuaded a number of legions to abandon their oath of loyalty and commit themselves to civil war; but then, only five days later, when Camillus gave them orders as their new emperor to come and join him, they were brought to change their minds by dread of offending the gods, for the garlands, as though by a divine hand, kept falling from the eagles, nor could the standards be pulled up from the ground and removed.

[14] He held four consulships in addition to his original one, the first two consecutively, the last two after four-year intervals, and all for two months, excepting only the final consulship, which he held for six months (the third time, in a first for a *princeps*, he served as suffect consul in place of a man who had died).

Both as consul and when not holding a magistracy he would go to great efforts to administer justice, even on the days which he and his family celebrated privately as festivals, sometimes too on long-established feast days, and on days of ill-omen. Rather than always sticking to the letter of the law, he would moderate many of its provisions, applying them either more leniently or more severely as seemed to him right and proper: he permitted those who had lost their suits by asking for too much in cases heard by private judges to take them to court a second time, and he imposed

a punishment graver than that demanded by the law when he condemned to the beasts those convicted of particularly serious crimes.

[15] Even so, the inconsistency of temperament he displayed when hearing cases and delivering judgments was remarkable: sometimes he would be measured and shrewd, sometimes badly prepared and hasty, and sometimes so giddy as to verge on the deranged. While in the process of revising the jury rolls, he dismissed someone who, despite having fathered enough children to be exempt from jury duty,¹⁶ had kept this hidden so as to be available for service, on the grounds that the man was altogether too eager to sit in judgment on people. He forced another man – who had sought to frustrate a counter-suit brought by the accused in the initial case by claiming that it should be heard, not in a special hearing, but by the jury courts – to make a defence before him then and there, on the grounds that there was nothing quite like obliging someone to defend his own interests for testing how fair a juror was likely to be when sitting in judgment on others. Since the evidence in the case of a woman who refused to acknowledge someone claiming to be her son was inconclusive, he got the woman to admit the truth by demanding that she marry the young man. He was always inclined, whenever one side in a dispute was absent from court, to rule in favour of those who were present, regardless of whether their opponents were deliberately skipping the trial or had been unavoidably detained. When someone shouted out that a man convicted of forgery should have his hands chopped off, he demanded that an executioner be sent for immediately to bring a cleaver and a chopping-block. When, in a case about disputed citizenship, a trivial dispute arose among the advocates

about whether the defendant should plead his case dressed in a toga or a Greek cloak, he made a show of his impartiality by obliging the man repeatedly to change his clothes, depending on whether it was he or his accusers who were speaking. In one case, he is even said to have read out a judgment that he had written down beforehand on a tablet: ‘I decide in favour of those who have told the truth.’

The consequence of episodes like these was to undermine respect for him across the board, and render him an open laughing stock. On one occasion, when he had summoned a certain individual from the provinces to give evidence, and someone else kept making excuses for the witness, insisting that there was a good reason for the man’s absence but hesitating to be specific, it was only after lengthy questioning that he finally managed to get a clear answer: ‘The witness is dead – which I think is a fair enough excuse.’ Another man, thanking him for allowing a man accused of a crime to be defended in court, then added, ‘Although it is standard procedure, of course.’ With my own ears I have heard it reported by people well advanced in years that advocates were so ready to take advantage of his good nature that they would not just shout at him to come back as he was leaving the tribunal, but even try to detain him by grabbing the hem of his toga or taking him by the foot. In case this should raise eyebrows, let me add that one litigant, a Greek quite without social standing, was once having a heated exchange with him in court, and let slip the following: ‘You are an old man and a moron.’ Then there is the well-known story of the Roman knight who was brought to trial by powerful adversaries on a trumped-up charge of sexually abusing women and who, observing that common

prostitutes were being summoned as witnesses by the prosecution and having their evidence allowed,¹⁷ picked up some writing tablets and a stylus and threw them in his face, cutting him badly on his cheek, while berating him loudly for his stupidity and cruelty.

[16] He also served as censor, an office that no one had held since the censorship of Plancus and Paulus;¹⁸ but again, both in his understanding of what the office involved and in the way he put it into practice, he was erratic and unpredictable. During his review of the equestrian order, for instance, he gave a clean bill of health to a young man who, despite a terrible reputation, had been vouched for by his father, on the grounds that the young man already had a censor; another knight, notorious for corrupt practices and adulterous affairs, he let off with the admonishment that wild oats should be sown sparingly (or carefully, at any rate), before adding, ‘But what business is it of mine what girlfriend you have?’; there was also a third case, which saw him remove the black mark he had placed against a knight’s name after entreaties from the man’s friends, but with the comment, ‘Let the erasure stand.’ He did not merely strike from the list of jurors a provincial from Greece who, despite his eminence as a leading figure in the province, spoke no Latin, but demoted the man as well to the rank of an alien; he also obliged all those he was reviewing to give an account of their lives as best they could, not by employing an advocate but in their own words. When the large numbers of people who had left Italy without informing him and gaining his permission to be absent discovered that he viewed this as reason enough to demote them, it came as a shock to many, for no censor had ever done anything comparable. (The demotion of

one man, simply for having accompanied a king around a province, he justified by citing the precedent of Rabirius Postumus, who a century earlier had been charged with treason for following Ptolemy to Alexandria to recover a loan.¹⁹) When he was led by the incompetence of his investigators to attempt the blacklisting of large numbers whom he subsequently discovered to be innocent, the shame of it redounded all the more on him: there were people he had accused of lacking a wife, or children, or financial means who had no problem in demonstrating that they were in fact married, or fathers, or extremely wealthy, while one man, who had been charged with stabbing himself, actually stripped naked to demonstrate the absence of scars. Other notable features of his censorship included his purchase of a sumptuously decorated chariot made of silver, which he then had brought into his presence from the Sigillaria²⁰ (where it had been on sale) and destroyed, and his issuing of twenty edicts in a single day: in one of these he advised owners of vineyards that in the event of a bountiful harvest they should be sure to seal their wine jars with pitch, and in a second declared that there existed no surer antidote for snake venom than the sap of a yew tree.

[17] He undertook only a solitary campaign, and even that was of limited duration. Judging the triumphal regalia voted him by the senate an honour inadequate to the dignity of a *princeps*, and longing for the glory of a legitimate triumph, he settled on Britain as the place which promised him the best chance of securing it: for not since the time of the Deified Julius had anyone sought to conquer an island that, because of some fugitives to whom he had granted asylum, was even then in a state of turmoil. Taking

ship for Britain from Ostia, he was twice almost sunk by violent north-westerly winds, once off Liguria and again near the Stoechades islands.²¹ For this reason he travelled onwards from Massilia by land, and crossed the Channel from Gesoriacum;²² it then took him only a few days – and no battles or bloodshed at all – to secure the surrender of a whole chunk of the island, so that a mere six months after setting out from Rome he was back in the city, where he celebrated a triumph amid the greatest possible splendour. It was not only provincial governors whom he permitted to return to the city to gawp at the spectacle, but even some of those who had been exiled; and among the tokens of his victory was a naval crown, which he had fixed to the gable of his house on the Palatine next to the civic crown, to signify that he had crossed the Ocean and – in a manner of speaking, at least – subdued it. Following his chariot in the procession was his wife, Messalina, who rode in a ceremonial carriage, and veterans of the campaign who had been awarded triumphal regalia for their feats: these men went on foot and wore purple-bordered togas, all except Marcus Crassus Frugi, who, because it was the second time he had been awarded the honour, rode a splendidly caparisoned horse and wore a tunic embroidered with palms.

[18] He always went to the greatest lengths possible to ensure the security of both Rome and the city's grain supply. When there was a fire in the Aemilian district²³ that proved exceedingly difficult to bring under control, he stayed for two nights in the Diribitorium;²⁴ and when the assistance furnished by troops of soldiers and his own slaves proved insufficient, he had the magistrates summon people from every quarter of

the city and urged them to help, paying each man on the spot from the chests full of money that he had in front of him a reward proportionate to the labour provided. On one occasion, when protracted drought had come to strangle the grain supply, he was cornered in the middle of the Forum by a mob that hurled abuse and crusts of bread at him, and only just managed to escape the rioters by slipping through a back door into his palace: an experience that brought him from that point on to leave no stone unturned in his efforts to ensure adequate supplies, even during winter. So it was that he guaranteed merchants a definite profit by promising to indemnify them for any losses they might suffer as a result of storms, and offered substantial incentives to those who built merchant ships, appropriate to their rank and status.

[19] To a citizen, for instance, he offered exemption from Augustus' marriage law; to someone with the rights of a Latin full Roman citizenship; and to a woman the privileges that otherwise were granted exclusively to those who had borne four children – all of which provisions remain in force today.

[20] He undertook a few major infrastructure projects that made up for in utility what they lacked in quantity: of these the most significant were the completion of an aqueduct begun by Gaius, the draining of the Fucine Lake, and the construction of a harbour at Ostia (he embarked on these last two projects in the full awareness that Augustus, ignoring the frequent appeals of the Marsians, had refused to undertake the second one, and that the Deified Julius, even though he had repeatedly commissioned plans for the third, had abandoned them all as overly ambitious). He brought the cool and

flowing waters of two springs, one called the Caeruleus, the other the Curtius and Albusignus,²⁵ into the heart of the city by means of a stone-built aqueduct which he named the ‘Claudian’, and siphoned off their flow (together with that of the waters brought to Rome by means of a similar aqueduct, the ‘New Anio’) into a large number of beautifully ornamented basins. The Fucine project he embarked upon in expectation of profit as much as of glory, since there were people who had contracted to drain the lake at their own expense, in exchange for the agricultural land that would be reclaimed as a result. The project, which was an immensely challenging one, and required a three-mile canal to be variously tunnelled and cut through a mountain, employed 30,000 men who worked on it without interruption day and night – and still it took eleven years to complete. At Ostia he deepened the harbour, surrounded it with sea walls both on the left and on the right, and constructed an artificial island at the entry point to the port where the shallows deepen; he did this first by laying secure foundations for the island by sinking the ship on which the giant obelisk had been transported from Egypt,²⁶ then by laying piles over it, and finally by building on top of them a very high tower modelled on the Pharos at Alexandria, so that ships sailing by night might be guided by the blaze of its fire.

[21] He regularly handed out gifts of money to the masses, and provided them as well with a wide array of magnificent entertainments – not just the usual variety either, the ones held on regular dates, but also some of a wholly novel order and others which drew on ancient tradition, and both kinds staged in places that had never hosted shows before. The games held

to celebrate the dedication of Pompey's Theatre, which he had repaired following a fire, he opened from a raised seat in the orchestra; but only after he had first made offerings to the gods in the temples at the top of the seating area, and then walked down through the midst of the spectators as they all sat in silence. He also held games to mark the turning of the *saeculum*,²⁷ on the grounds that Augustus, rather than waiting to hold them in the correct year, had staged them too early (in claiming this, he was directly contradicting his own *Histories*, in which he had written that the games had long been in abeyance prior to their revival by Augustus, who in reality had been very precise in calculating when they should be staged). Unsurprisingly, then, the summons to the games issued by the herald with the traditional formula, 'Games that no one living has seen, nor will ever see again' was greeted with hilarity, since not only were there plenty of people who had seen them before, but there were also some actors who, having trod the boards during Augustus' games, were now returning to the stage during his.

He also sponsored games in the Vatican Circus: these would often feature a beast hunt after every fifth race. He gave the Circus Maximus a makeover by installing marble starting-gates and gilded turning-posts (both of which features had previously been made out of tufa and wood), and provided reserved seating for senators, who until then had been accustomed to sit among all the various other spectators. In addition to chariot races he staged the Troy Game; a panther hunt which featured a troop of praetorian cavalry led by the tribunes and the prefect himself; and an exhibition by Thessalian horsemen, whose practice it is to drive wild bulls around an enclosed space,

and then, when the beasts tire, to jump on to their backs and wrestle them to the ground by their horns.

He staged a large number of gladiatorial contests, in a broad range of locations: every year, for instance, on the anniversary of his accession, he would put on a show in the praetorian camp (albeit without wild beasts or extravagant props), while in the Saepta, as well as the normal, conventional kind of games, he would stage a more unexpected order of entertainment, one that lasted only a few days (this he began to call a *sportula*, after the gifts given at the end of a dinner party by a patron to his clients, because, prior to holding it for the first time, he had proclaimed that he was issuing an invitation to people as though to a dinner party, ‘just a little, spur-of-the-moment thing’). He was never more amiable or relaxed than at this kind of event: he would join the masses in extending his left hand from under his toga,²⁸ and counting out loud on his fingers the gold coins as they were presented to the victors in the games; he would also spend a lot of time working up the crowds, encouraging and inviting them to enjoy themselves, sometimes calling them ‘masters’, and throwing in a scattering of feeble jokes as well (to illustrate just how strained these jokes were, there was the time when the spectators demanded a gladiator known as ‘The Dove’, and he promised that they should have him, ‘if he could be caught’). Then there was the time when he seized the perfect opportunity to do something admirable: for after he had presented the wooden sword to a gladiator whose four sons had been interceding on their father’s behalf, he followed up the universal applause which greeted this gesture by immediately sending round a placard on which he admonished the people to ‘learn from

a gladiator just how eager you should be to father children – for what greater source of assistance, what greater source of backing, could any man have?’

Dressed in his field uniform he presided over the re-enactment on the Campus Martius of scenes from the war in Britain: the siege and storming of a town, and the surrender of some British kings. He also arranged for a sea battle to be fought on the Fucine Lake just before it was drained, but then, when those who were due to fight cried out from their ships, ‘Hail, emperor, we who are about to die salute you!’, and he answered, ‘Or not’, the gladiators all downed their weapons, on the grounds that he had granted them a pardon; faced by this defiance, he pondered for a while whether just to torch their ships and have them all put to the sword, but at length, rising from his seat and hobbling grotesquely as he went, he ran round the lake and induced them, by means of a judicious mix of the carrot and stick, to take up their weapons again. The resulting spectacle saw a Sicilian fleet fight a Rhodian one, twelve triremes against twelve, and the signal for them to join battle was sounded on a horn by a silver Triton, which rose from the middle of the lake by means of a mechanical device.

[22] As for the conduct of sacred rituals, the customs governing both the civic and military realms, and the proper standing of the various social orders, abroad as well as at home, some practices he reformed, others which had fallen into disuse he reinstated, and others yet he went so far as to introduce from scratch. When appointing priests to the colleges, he would never nominate anyone unless it were under oath; he made sure, whenever Rome was shaken by an earthquake, to uphold the custom that the praetor

should summon a public assembly and proclaim a holiday; similarly, after any sighting of a bird of ill-omen on the Capitol, he was always scrupulous in raising a supplication to the gods – a supplication that he himself, in his role as Pontifex Maximus, would recite according to the set formula from the Rostra before the people, but only once all the throngs of workmen and slaves had first been sent away.²⁹

[23] The conduct of legal business, which previously had been divided into winter and summer terms, he ran together so that they formed a single term. He assigned the judicial oversight of cases involving trust, which previously had been the exclusive responsibility of magistrates elected annually to serve in Rome, to officials who were henceforward to exercise it on a permanent basis – as too were governors out in the provinces. He annulled a clause added to Augustus' marriage legislation by Tiberius Caesar which implied that men over sixty could not father children. He decreed, in a revision of standard procedure, that orphans might have guardians allocated to them by the consuls, and that anyone banished from a province by its magistrates was barred as well from entering Rome and Italy. He himself introduced a novel form of banishment, by the terms of which those sentenced to it were forbidden to go further from Rome than the third milestone. Whenever there was particularly important business to be conducted in the Senate House, he would sit between the chairs of the consuls or on the tribunes' bench. The granting of permission to travel abroad, which previously had been the senate's responsibility, he reserved to himself.³⁰

[24] He granted consular regalia even to middle-grade procurators. He deprived those who refused a senatorial dignity of their equestrian rank as well. Although when he first came to power he had committed himself to nominating no one for the senate who was not the great-great-grandson of a Roman citizen, he then bestowed the right to wear the broad stripe upon the son of an actual freedman – and although he did this on condition that the man first be adopted by a Roman knight, he remained sufficiently nervous of criticism that he cited Appius Claudius the censor, an ancestor of his family, as an example of someone who had similarly appointed the sons of freedmen to the senate (although, in fact, what he had not appreciated was that back in Appius Claudius' day, and for a while afterwards too, the word 'freedman' had signified not a slave who had been given his liberty but a freed slave's freeborn son). He obliged the board of quaestors to fund a gladiatorial show rather than the paving of roads; similarly, even as he deprived them of their responsibilities at Ostia and in Gaul, he put them back in charge of the state treasury in the temple of Saturn, which for a while had been supervised by praetors or (as it is in our own time) by former praetors.

He granted triumphal regalia to Silanus, who although just a boy was also engaged to his daughter, as well as to so many men of adult age, and in such an indiscriminate manner that a petition was circulated in the joint names of the legions, requesting that triumphal regalia be bestowed as well upon legates of consular rank the moment they took command of their armies, so that they would not then feel a need to go trumping up pretexts for war. He also granted Aulus Plautius an ovation, not merely going out to meet the

general as he entered the city, but also walking with him on his left side as he went to the Capitol, and then again as he came back.³¹ Additionally, he permitted Gabinius Secundus, the conqueror of the Cauchi, a tribe in Germany, to take the *cognomen* ‘Cauchius’.

[25] He reformed the army’s command structure so that an equestrian would first have charge of an auxiliary cohort, then of a troop of cavalry, and finally serve as the tribune of a legion; he also instituted various military posts which did not require actual service (‘supernumerary’, he termed them), but could be held in name only by absentees.³² He also had the senate pass a decree banning soldiers from entering a senator’s house to pay their respects. He confiscated the estates of freedmen who passed themselves off as Roman knights, called back into slavery those who, by shows of ingratitude, had rendered themselves a cause of complaint to their former owners, and informed such advocates as represented them that he would refuse to hear any cases brought against their own freedmen. The trend among some people for exposing on the island of Aesculapius³³ slaves who had become too sick to work, so as to avoid the bother of giving them medical treatment, he dealt with by decreeing that all the slaves left there to die were to have their freedom, and that any who made a recovery did not have to return under a master’s authority; he also decreed that anyone who opted to kill a slave rather than abandon him would be liable to a murder charge. He published an edict admonishing travellers that they were not to pass through towns in Italy except on foot or in a chair or litter. He stationed one cohort at Puteoli and another at Ostia as a fire-prevention measure.

He banned people who were not of citizen status from using Roman names (or, to be precise, Roman clan names), and had those whose Roman citizenship was bogus beheaded in the Esquiline Field. The provinces of Achaea and Macedonia, responsibility for which Tiberius had taken over, he returned to the senate. He deprived the Lycians of the right to self-rule as a punishment for their inveterate factionalism, and restored it to the Rhodians because they had displayed regret for their previous offences. He granted a permanent exemption from tribute to the people of Ilium, on the grounds that they were the ancestors of the Roman race – a move which he justified by reading out an ancient letter written in Greek to King Seleucus,³⁴ in which the senate and the people of Rome had promised him friendship and alliance, but only on condition that he lifted the burden of taxation from their kinsmen, the citizens of Ilium, for good. The Judaeans, who had been whipped up by Chrestus into a chronic state of disorder, he banished from Rome.³⁵ So charmed was he by the lack of pretension shown by the German envoys, and by their swagger, that he permitted them to sit in the orchestra: for when, after they had been led to the common seating area, they observed that the Parthians and Armenians were sitting with the senators, they immediately crossed over to join them, on the grounds that – as they themselves put it – their qualities and rank were not a whit inferior to those of some Parthian or Armenian.³⁶ He extended the prohibition on practising as a druid that Augustus had imposed on Roman citizens to everyone in Gaul, so that the ban on these hideous and inhuman rites was rendered total; against that, he sought to have the sacred mysteries of Eleusis imported from Attica to Rome, and was responsible for having the

temple of Venus Erycina in Sicily rebuilt at the expense of the Roman people after it had collapsed from age. He sealed his treaties with foreign princes by sacrificing a sow in the Forum and reciting the ancient formula of the fetial priests.³⁷

These measures, however – and indeed all his others, and pretty much everything he did over the course of his principate – were dictated less by his own judgement than by that of his wives and freedmen, since it was vanishingly rare that he ever undertook any policy that was not in obedience to their interests or whims.

[26] While still barely out of childhood he was engaged on two occasions: once to Aemilia Lepida, the great-granddaughter of Augustus, and the second time to Livia Medullina, who also had the *cognomen* ‘Camilla’ and was descended from the ancient family of Camillus the dictator. The first engagement he broke off before the marriage could be celebrated because the parents had given offence to Augustus; the second ended when his betrothed was lost to illness on the very day they were due to be married. He then took two wives in succession: Plautia Urgulanilla, the daughter of a man who had celebrated a triumph, and Aelia Paetina, the daughter of a former consul. He divorced both women: Aelia Paetina for trivial offences, but Urgulanilla due to her scandalous sexual misbehaviour and because she was suspected of murder.³⁸ After this he married Valeria Messalina, the daughter of his cousin Messala Barbatus. When, however, he learned that, among numerous other shocking and monstrous misdemeanours, she had actually married Gaius Silius (and even signed a dowry agreement with him in front of witnesses), he had her executed, and

declared before an assembly of the praetorians that he would never again take a wife, so terrible was his record of marriages: ‘And should I go back on my word, I will not object if you kill me with your bare hands.’ Even so, he could not help himself, and immediately set to planning a new marriage: first to Paetina of all women (he had already divorced her once!), and then to Lollia Paulina, who had been married to Gaius Caesar. In the event, however, he was ensnared by the charms of Agrippina, the daughter of his brother Germanicus, who took advantage of the licence provided by their close relationship to give him lots of kisses and to flatter him; sure enough, at the next meeting of the senate, he leaned on various senators to propose that he be obliged to marry his niece, for the good of the republic, and also that others too should be permitted to contract such marriages, which from that moment on were no longer to be regarded as incestuous. Barely a day later they were married; but even so no one could be found to follow his example, with the exceptions of a freedman and a senior centurion, both of whose weddings he attended in person, accompanied by Agrippina.

[27] He had children by three of his wives: by Urgulanilla he had Drusus and Claudia, by Paetina Antonia, and by Messalina Octavia and Germanicus (or Britannicus, as he soon came to be called). He lost Drusus just on the verge of adulthood, when the boy choked on a pear which, as a party trick, he had thrown up in the air and caught in his open mouth (since this happened only a few days after Drusus had been betrothed to the daughter of Sejanus, it leaves me all the more bewildered that some should seriously attribute the boy’s death to Sejanus’ scheming). Claudia, although born five months before he divorced Urgulanilla, and despite the fact that

he had initially accepted her as his own, he disowned and ordered to be left to die at her mother's door without anything to indicate who she was, on the grounds that she had actually been fathered by his freedman Boter. He gave Antonia in marriage first to Gnaeus Pompeius Magnus and then to Faustus Sulla (both young men of the very highest rank), and married off Octavia – who initially had been betrothed to Silanus – to his stepson Nero.

Britannicus was born during his second consulship, twenty-two days after his ascension to the rule of the empire;³⁹ when the boy was still a baby he would take him in his arms and commend him to the care of his assembled soldiers; likewise, if he were at the games, he would hold the boy on his lap or else up high before the gaze of the masses – and as he prayed that his son's future might be a happy one, so all the crowds would cheer. Nero was the only one of his sons-in-law he took as his son;⁴⁰ Pompeius and Silanus he not only refused to adopt, but actually had put to death.

[28] Among his freedmen, he particularly valued the eunuch Posides, and even went so far as to award him the Spear Without Iron⁴¹ on the occasion of his British triumph, alongside men who had done actual military service; Felix, whom he held in no less high regard, and entrusted with auxiliary units, squadrons of cavalry and the province of Judaea, not to mention three queens in marriage;⁴² Harpocras, to whom he granted a legal right to be carried through Rome in a litter, and to put on games for the entertainment of the public; Polybius, a particular favourite, who served him as his adviser on literary matters, and often walked between the two consuls; and finally – the two freedmen to whom he was devoted above all others – Narcissus, his secretary, and Pallas, his accountant, both of whom he readily allowed to be

granted by decree of the senate not just enormous gifts, but also the insignia of quaestors and praetors (on top of which he also permitted them to misappropriate and embezzle so much money that on one occasion, when he complained about how short he was of funds, someone wittily retorted that he would have more than enough if only his two freedmen would take him into partnership).

[29] Under the thumb as he was of these men, and – as I have already mentioned – of his wives too, he played the part not of a *princeps* but of a flunkey, dispensing magistracies here and military commands there, pardoning and punishing people, largely oblivious to how much he was the creature of this favourite's interests or that wife's (not to mention their whims and lusts): for indeed the possibility that he might be barely crossed his mind. To highlight the most egregious cases (time is too short to list all the gifts he recalled, the judgments he revoked and the letters of appointment he either abrogated or else openly altered), let me name the most prominent people he had put to death: Appius Silanus, his father-in-law,⁴³ the two Julias, one the daughter of Drusus⁴⁴ and the other the daughter of Germanicus,⁴⁵ both on unspecified charges which they were forbidden to defend themselves against; Gnaeus Pompeius, the husband of his elder daughter; and Lucius Silanus, who was engaged to his younger daughter. Pompeius was stabbed while in bed with a young boy for whom he had a particular passion, while Silanus was first obliged to resign his praetorship four days before the Kalends of January,⁴⁶ and then to kill himself at the beginning of the New Year, on the same day that Claudius married Agrippina. He had thirty-five senators and over 300 Roman knights

put to death, and on such a casual basis that when a centurion, reporting the death of a former consul, declared that it had been done at his command, he replied that, while the order had most certainly not come from him, he approved it nevertheless, since it had been pointed out to him by his freedmen that the soldiers had merely been quick to do their duty by avenging the emperor without having to be given the order. That said, one anecdote does seem to me implausible: that at the marriage between Messalina and her lover Silius, he personally signed the contract which specified the dowry, having been led to believe that the marriage was a charade designed to avert the danger which, according to various portents, threatened ‘the husband of Messalina’, by deflecting it on to someone else.

[30] While standing or sitting, and especially while lying down, he did not fail to give an impression of majesty and dignity. Nevertheless, despite the fact that he was a tall man and not remotely scrawny, possessed of good looks, a handsome shock of white hair and a thick neck, his knees were not as strong as they might have been, and would fail him whenever he walked. He also had various off-putting mannerisms which would afflict him whether he was off-duty or engaging in business: his laughter, for instance, was an unbecoming bray; his shows of anger, which would see him drool and snort mucus, were even more a source of embarrassment; he had a stammer; and whenever he made even the slightest movement, so the twitching of his head (which was habitual) would become even more violent.

[31] Although as a young man he had been sickly, as *princeps* he enjoyed good health, except for stomach cramps so painful that whenever he

suffered from them he would actually contemplate suicide – or so he claimed.

[32] He loved to give lavish dinner parties, which he generally hosted in locations sufficiently spacious for 600 guests to recline together at table. He even held a banquet next to the channel which led from the Fucine Lake, and was almost drowned when the water came surging out in a great rush and overflowed its banks. He always invited his children to dine with him together with boys and girls of noble birth, and would have them sit at the end of the couches as they ate, in the time-honoured manner. Once, when one of his guests was suspected of having stolen a golden goblet, he invited the man back the following day and had an earthenware cup laid out for him. There is also the story that, after learning of a man whose embarrassment at breaking wind had led to medical complications, he contemplated issuing a decree pardoning anyone who farted – even someone who really let rip.

[33] No matter where he was, and no matter the occasion, he would never let anything come between him and food and wine – so much so, indeed, that once, while he was hearing a case in the Forum of Augustus, it happened that a meal was being prepared for the Salian priests in the adjoining temple of Mars, and so terribly did it make his mouth water that he abruptly abandoned the tribunal, climbed the steps to where the priests were, and lay down with them to eat. He rarely ever left the table unless his belly was bulging and his pores were oozing wine; and because he would then immediately fall asleep, lying on his back with his mouth wide open, he could be brought to vomit, and thereby ease the pressure on his stomach,

by tickling the back of his throat with a feather. He was neither a heavy sleeper (indeed, he often woke up while it was still the middle of the night, although admittedly, during the daytime, he would sometimes doze off while holding court, and continue to slumber no matter how much the advocates tried to wake him by raising their voices), nor did he ever sleep with men (although his appetites, when it came to women, were voracious). Such was his enthusiasm for playing dice that he actually published a book on the subject, and even had his carriage fitted with a special board so that he could continue gaming while out on his travels without the dice constantly being jolted.

[34] It is evident from a number of incidents both great and small that he was a man instinctively cruel and bloodthirsty. He would never brook any delay in the use of torture during interrogations or the execution of parricides, and insisted on personally supervising them. Once, when he was at Tibur and wished to see an execution done in the ancient manner,⁴⁷ he had some criminals bound to stakes, and then, rather than letting the absence of an executioner put him off, sent to Rome for one, and waited until nightfall for the man to arrive. Whenever he attended a gladiatorial show, either his own or someone else's, he would always command that fighters who fell to the ground (even if they had slipped) be killed, and took a particular delight in watching the net-men, because he could actually see their faces as their throats were slit.⁴⁸ When a pair of gladiators killed each other with simultaneous thrusts of their swords, he ordered that the two weapons should be made into small knives for his own use without delay.⁴⁹ Such was the pleasure he took in the beast fights and the midday butcheries

that he would head down to the arena at dawn, and even after dismissing the masses to go and have their lunch break would remain seated where he was;⁵⁰ in addition to those already slated to fight he would also condemn men on the spur of moment for trivial reasons, even carpenters, or attendants, or men of that kind, should a piece of stage machinery malfunction, or the scaffolding collapse, or something similar go wrong. He even sent one of his own personal aides out into the arena, just as he was, dressed in a toga.

[35] Nothing, however, was more surely his defining characteristic than a paranoid sense of suspicion. Although when he first came to power he liked to boast (as we have seen) of behaving like a normal citizen, he did not dare attend a banquet unless a ring of guards armed with spears kept watch, and soldiers waited on him in place of servants, nor would he ever visit anyone who was sick unless the bedroom had first been searched, and all the pillows and covers checked over and shaken out. Later in his reign he had officials frisk everyone who came to pay him their respects – and do so with extreme thoroughness, what was more. It took a while for him to agree, very reluctantly, that women and young boys and girls might be spared this body search, and that styluses and the boxes in which they were kept did not have to be confiscated from his visitors' attendants or scribes. When Camillus rebelled against him, and – in the conviction that he was such a coward there would be no need for war – sent him an insulting letter written in threatening and abusive tones, ordering him to surrender the empire and retire to enjoy the life of a private citizen, he did indeed waver, and sought the advice of leading men as to what he should do.

[36] So alarmed was he by unfounded reports of conspiracies that he actually sought to abdicate. When (as I noted above) a man with a sword was arrested close to where he was making sacrifice, he immediately sent heralds to summon the senate, and then, sobbing and snivelling as he did so, lamented his circumstances, complaining that he was in danger wherever he went, and for a long time afterwards refused to appear in public. The intensity of his love for Messalina was extinguished less by the deep sense of humiliation she had inflicted on him than by alarm at the crisis he found threatening him, for he believed that she was attempting to seize the rule of the empire for her lover, Silius. This was the moment when, shamefully, he fled in terror to the praetorians' camp, doing nothing the whole way there except bleat, 'Am I still emperor?'

[37] There was no suspicion so far-fetched, no story so implausible, that it would fail to plant a seed of suspicion in his mind, and prompt him to take both precautions and pre-emptive measures. One morning when he was receiving well-wishers, for instance, a man embroiled in a lawsuit took him aside, and solemnly warned him of a dream in which he had seen him murdered; then, shortly afterwards, the litigant pointed to his opponent as he was handing over a petition, denouncing him as the very murderer he had seen in the dream, whereupon, then and there, just as though the murder had actually been attempted, the wretched man was hauled away to execution. Appius Silanus, they say, was dispatched in a similar manner: for when Messalina and Narcissus conspired to eliminate him, they arranged things between them so that Narcissus, in a feigned state of shock, came bursting into his patron's bedroom before sunrise, warning him of a dream

in which Appius had violently assaulted him – whereupon Messalina, all wide-eyed astonishment, informed her husband that she too had witnessed the very same thing in her dreams several nights in a row. Meanwhile, they had arranged for Appius to receive instructions as though from the *princeps*, telling him to pay a call shortly afterwards – and so when Appius duly tried to force his way in, and thereby seemed to demonstrate the accuracy of the dream, the order was immediately given that he should be arrested and put to death. Nor, the following day, did Claudius hesitate to give the senate a full account of what had happened, and to thank his freedman for keeping watch over him even while asleep.

[38] Conscious that he was prone to anger and irritability, he published an edict in which he made apologies for both, distinguishing between them and promising that while his irritability was mere sound and fury, and rapidly burned itself out, his anger was not unjustified. He was furious with the people of Ostia because they had not sent boats to meet him when he entered the Tiber, and raged that they had treated him as though he were merely some common citizen – but it did not take him long to forgive them, almost to the point of apologizing. When people approached him in public at inappropriate times he would push them aside with his own hand. He banished two perfectly innocent men, a quaestor's scribe and a senator of praetorian rank, without even allowing them a hearing: the scribe for having been a bit pushy while appearing on the opposite side of a court case to him back when he had been a private citizen, and the senator for having fined tenants on his estates who had been selling cooked food illegally, and for whipping a bailiff who had attempted to intervene. (This was also the

reason he took away the responsibility for supervising cookshops from the aediles.)

Even the topic of his own stupidity was something that, rather than keeping quiet about, he addressed in several short speeches, insisting that under Gaius he had deliberately pretended to be stupid, and that had he not done so he would never have survived to become emperor. Not that anyone was persuaded by this, however: for shortly afterwards a book appeared called (in Greek) *The Elevation of Morons*, which made the point that no one ever pretends to be an idiot.

[39] Among various characteristics of his that caused people to marvel were his forgetfulness and his tactlessness (or, to use the Greek words, his *meteoria* and *ablepsia*). Taking his place at table shortly after he had put Messalina to death, he demanded to know why the mistress of the house had not appeared. Repeatedly, the day after having people executed, he would summon them either to ask their advice or to play dice with him, and then, as though they were late, send messengers to scold them for having a lie-in. As he was getting ready to marry Agrippina, in defiance of all morality, he kept describing her in every speech he gave as his daughter, his ward, born and raised in his loving embrace. Similarly, while preparing to bestow his name on Nero, he swelled the criticism of him for adopting a stepson when he already had a fully grown son of his own⁵¹ by repeatedly informing everyone that no one before had ever been adopted into the Claudian family.

[40] Indeed, so inappropriately was he given to talking and behaving that people thought him oblivious to – or perhaps heedless of – both his

audience and those who might be speaking alongside him, not to mention the occasion and the setting. Once, when butchers and vintners were being discussed in the Senate House, he bellowed out, ‘I ask you! Who can possibly live without a little nibble?’, then fell to reminiscing about the abundant provisions that had been a feature of the taverns from which, back in the old days, he had been in the habit of sourcing his wine. One of the reasons he gave for backing a particular candidate for the quaestorship was that the man’s father had once given him a drink of cold water when he was sick and in need of it. Then there was the occasion when a woman was brought into the Senate House to give testimony, and he declared, ‘This person, although she was my mother’s freedwoman, and as a slave had dressed her hair, always looked on me as her patron. I say this because there are those in my own household who do not think of me as their patron.’ When the people of Ostia publicly addressed him with a petition, he went puce with anger, and there and then on the tribunal bawled out that he was under no obligation to do them a favour – ‘for if anyone is free to do as he pleases, it is me!’ There were certain catchphrases that he would repeat daily, hourly, by the minute even: ‘What, do you take me for Telegenius?’⁵² for instance, and ‘Talk but don’t touch’, which he would say in Greek, and a host of other such expressions, all of them well beneath the dignity of a private citizen, let alone a *princeps* (and a *princeps*, what was more, who was neither inarticulate nor uneducated, but had always devoted himself with the utmost application to the liberal arts).

[41] As a young man he was encouraged by Livy to embark on a history, and received the active assistance of Sulpicius Flavus⁵³ in writing it. The

first time he read from it was to a crowded hall, but he kept breaking off from his own reading, and as a result found it hard to finish. This was because, at the start of the event, a great gust of laughter had swept the audience when a bench broke under the weight of an enormously fat man, and even after everybody else had calmed down he found it impossible to put the incident from his mind, and would periodically collapse into fits of giggles. He continued to work on this history as *princeps*, and regularly had extracts from it performed by a professional reader. Although he had begun his narrative with the assassination of the dictator Caesar, he was regularly criticized by his mother and grandmother for covering the events that followed the murder, and so, because he felt unable to write about them frankly or truthfully, skipped to the subsequent period of peace which followed the civil wars.⁵⁴ He left two volumes covering the earlier period, and forty-one covering the later one. Additionally, he composed an autobiography in eight volumes, which was as elegant in style as it was vulgar in content, together with a work of considerable scholarship, ‘A Defence of Cicero against the Writings of Asinius Gallus’. He also devised three new letters and added them to the existing letters of the alphabet, on the grounds that there was a clear need for them. He had already spelled out his reasoning in a book that he had published as a private citizen, and found it a simple matter, once he had become *princeps*, to bring them into common usage. Examples of writing which features these letters are to be found in a large number of books, in the daily record and in various inscriptions on public monuments.

[42] He displayed no less commitment to his studies in Greek, and took every opportunity to insist upon the pre-eminence of the language, and his own love for it. To a barbarian who was speaking in Greek and Latin he said, ‘Since you are fluent in both our tongues ...’; to the conscript fathers of the senate, while commanding Achaea to them, he declared, ‘The province is dear to me because of the common culture we share’; to Greeks who came as ambassadors he would regularly respond with a formal speech delivered in their own language. Even on the tribunal he was forever quoting lines from Homer. Whenever he dealt vengeance on an enemy of the state or a conspirator against his own person, and was asked as custom required for a password, he would invariably give the tribune in command of his bodyguard the following line: ‘Parry the blow from the man who is first to make an attack.’⁵⁵ Furthermore, he wrote histories in Greek: a twenty-book study of Etruscan history, and eight books on the history of Carthage. It was these works that prompted the addition to the venerable shrine of the Muses in Alexandria of a new museum bearing his name, and the addition to the institution’s annual calendar of a set day on which his books were read out in their entirety by various people who would take turns as though at a public recital, the book on the Etruscans in one of the museums, that on the Carthaginians in the other.

[43] Towards the end of his life, he did not bother to conceal from people that he regretted both his marriage to Agrippina and his adoption of Nero: for when his freedmen were going over a case that had taken place the previous day, and praising him for having convicted a woman who was on trial for adultery, he answered them that his fate too it had always been to

have adulterous wives – but never to see them punished. Shortly afterwards, running into Britannicus, he hugged the boy, and assured him that once he had grown up he would receive a full explanation for all his father's actions, before adding in Greek, 'He who dealt the blow will heal it'; furthermore, when he expressed his intention of giving his son the toga of manhood (for Britannicus, although still a boy, was tall for his age), he added, 'And as a result the Roman people will have a true Caesar at last.'

[44] Not long after this he wrote his will and had it sealed with the stamps of all the magistrates. Before he could take any further steps, however, he was stopped in his tracks by Agrippina, whose sense of alarm was all the greater for the prickings of her own conscience: for this had joined with informers in accusing her of a whole multitude of crimes. Although there is a broad consensus that he died of poison, people disagree as to where and by whom it was given. Some claim that his taster, the eunuch Halotus, slipped it to him while he was dining with the priests on the citadel, others that it was given to him at a family dinner by Agrippina herself, who had it served up in a dish of mushrooms – a food of which he was particularly fond. There are conflicting accounts as well of what happened next. Many claim that he lost the power of speech the moment he took the poison, and that after suffering excruciating pain all night long died shortly before daybreak; according to some, however, he had gorged himself so fully that after initially falling into a stupor he then vomited up the entire contents of his stomach, and had to be given a second dose of poison (whether this was added to a bowl of gruel, which was then spoon-fed to him with the explanation that he needed food if he were to recover

from his weakened state, or whether it was administered when he was given an enema, as a way of relieving the pressure on his groaning bowels, is unclear).

[45] His death was kept secret until everything had been fixed to ensure the succession. So it was that people raised prayers for his recovery, as though he were still ill, and actors, adding substance to the charade, were brought in to provide him with entertainment, at what was claimed to be his own request. He died three days before the Ides of October, during the consulship of Asinius Marcellus and Acilius Aviola,⁵⁶ in the fourteenth year of his reign, at the age of sixty-three, and after a funeral celebrated with all the pomp appropriate to an emperor he was enrolled among the gods: an honour first ignored by Nero and then rescinded, but which was subsequently restored to him by Vespasian.

[46] Among various omens presaging his death, the principal ones were the appearance of a star with hair (or a ‘comet’, as it is called), the lightning bolt that struck the tomb of his father Drusus, and the deaths in the same year of a large number of magistrates of every rank. There are various indications too that he himself was not oblivious to the fact that his life was nearing its close, and made no effort to hide it. When he appointed the consuls, you see, he named them only for terms that finished in the month he died; during his last appearance in the senate, he strongly urged his sons to be at peace with one another, and then begged the senators to keep them both, young as they were, in their care; and when he appeared for the last time on the tribunal as a judge, he declared that he had reached the end of

his mortal life, and then, when those who had heard him prayed that it might not be so, made the same declaration again.

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Nero

[1] Two branches of the Domitian family have made a name for themselves: the Calvini and the Ahenobarbi. The Ahenobarbi trace both their origins and their *cognomen* back to Lucius Domitius, who once, so tradition has it, was returning from the country when two young men, twins possessed of a seemingly divine beauty,¹ appeared to him, and ordered him to announce to the senate and people the news of a victory that no one back in Rome as yet knew had been won; then, as a token that they were indeed more than mortal, they stroked his cheeks, and turned his beard from black to a ruddy colour like bronze.² This characteristic was something that Domitius passed down to his descendants, many of whom had red beards. All the while, even as between them they were winning seven consulships, a triumph, two censorships and elevation to the ranks of the patricians, they continued to use the same *cognomen*, and only ever to call themselves Gnaeus and Lucius – forenames which they allocated according to a constantly shifting pattern, initially giving one or other of the names to three generations of sons in a row, and then alternating one name with the other. So it is, we are told, that the first three Ahenobarbi were called Lucius, the next three were all called Gnaeus, and those that followed were alternately called Lucius and Gnaeus. The best course at this point, it seems

to me, would be to give portraits of various members of the family, so as to highlight the way in which Nero, even as he embodied an absolute decline from the virtues possessed by his forebears, nevertheless perpetuated all their vices – these in effect being all that he inherited from his ancestors.

[2] To begin, then, back in the distant past, with his great-grandfather's grandfather, Gnaeus Domitius: this man, while serving as tribune, failed to be nominated by the priests to fill a position that his father had held, and so, stung by this, had the responsibility for choosing priests transferred from the colleges to the people. Then, during his consulship, following his victory over the Allobroges and Averni,³ he travelled through the province on an elephant, accompanied by a great throng of soldiers, as though celebrating a triumph. This was the same man of whom the orator Licinius Crassus said, 'No wonder he has a beard of bronze, when his face is made of iron and his heart of lead.'⁴ His son, when he was praetor and Julius Caesar was consul, summoned Caesar to answer before the senate for his behaviour during his consulship; then, soon afterwards, when he himself was consul, he sought to strip Caesar of the command of the armies in Gaul, and was actually named by those on his side of the political divide as Caesar's successor, but then, when the civil war broke out, was taken prisoner at Corfinium. Given his freedom, he travelled to Massilia, where his arrival during the brutal siege of that city served to stiffen the morale of its inhabitants; but then all of a sudden he abandoned them, and finally met his end at the Battle of Pharsalus. An irresolute man for all the violence of his temper, he was at one point driven by despair of his fortunes to attempt suicide, but then, terrified at the prospect of dying, repented what he had

done, vomited up the poison, and bestowed a grant of freedom on his doctor (this on the grounds that the slave, knowing his master well, had made sure to mix a less than fatal dose). He was the only man who, when Pompey was taking soundings on how to deal with those who refused to take a side in the civil war, recommended that they should be treated as enemies of the state.

[3] He left behind a son who, without a shadow of a doubt, stood head and shoulders above all the rest of his family. Wrongly condemned to death under the Pedian law as one of the conspirators responsible for Caesar's murder, he duly rallied to the cause of his close relatives, Cassius and Brutus, and was entrusted by them with command of their fleet; then, following their deaths, he not only held the fleet together but actually added to it, and when, after his side had at last been brought to defeat in every theatre of war, he handed it over to Mark Antony – he did so entirely on his own initiative, and as though doing Antony a great favour; he alone, of all those condemned under the Pedian law, had his rights as a citizen restored to him, after which, enjoying a meteoric rise through the ranks of the various magistracies, he reached the very summit. When civil war broke out again, and he was serving Antony as legate, he had the supreme command offered to him by those who were ashamed of Antony's relationship with Cleopatra, but dared neither accept it nor reject it, because he had unexpectedly fallen ill; going over to Augustus, he was dead within a few days, but even so did not manage to leave his reputation entirely spotless. This was because of a story put about by Antony, that he had only changed sides because he had wanted to be with his mistress Servilia Nais.

[4] This Domitius was the father of the man who subsequently became famous as the executor of Augustus' will, and who was as celebrated in his youth for his skill in driving chariots as he was in adulthood for the triumphal regalia that he won in Germany. Even so, he was an arrogant man, extravagant and cruel: when a mere aedile he forced the censor Lucius Plancus to make way for him on the street, and when serving first as praetor and then as consul he staged farces in which the parts were played by Roman knights and respectably married women. He sponsored beast hunts in the Circus and in all the various districts of the city, together with a gladiatorial show of such savagery that Augustus, after failing to rein him by having a private word in his ear, was obliged to issue a public edict.

[5] He and the elder Antonia⁵ were the parents of Nero's father, a man detestable in every way it is possible to be detestable: when he travelled with the young Gaius Caesar to the East, for instance, he killed one of his own freedmen for refusing to drink as much as he had ordered the man to drink; then, far from mending his ways following his dismissal for this from Caesar's entourage, there was the time when he whipped up his horses while driving a chariot through a village on the Appian Way and deliberately ran over a boy, crushing him to death; then, in Rome, right in the middle of the Forum, he gouged out the eye of a Roman knight who in an argument with him had spoken his mind too freely; additionally, he was so dishonest that not only did he cheat some silversmiths of the commission on goods he had purchased through their agency, but even, while serving as praetor, defrauded the chariooteers of their prize money – and when, after his own sister had made this public this by telling a joke about it, the team

managers complained, he issued an edict decreeing that in future prizes were to be paid on the spot. Shortly before Tiberius died, he was prosecuted on charges of treason, adultery and incest with his sister Lepida, but these, with the change of regime, were dropped; he subsequently died of dropsy at Pyrgi, but this was well after he had acknowledged as his son Nero, to whom Agrippina, the daughter of Germanicus, had given birth.

[6] Nero was born at Antium nine months after the death of Tiberius, on the eighteenth day before the Kalends of January,⁶ just as dawn was breaking, so that almost before he was touched by the earth he was touched by the rays of the sun. People were immediately inspired by the details of his horoscope to issue a whole range of blood-curdling predictions – and even his own father Domitius, replying to the congratulations of friends, observed that no child born of himself and Agrippina could be anything other than detestable and a menace to the public good. Another sign of the boy's unhappy future was provided at the purification ceremony held nine days after his birth: for when Agrippina asked her brother to give the child whatever name he pleased, Gaius Caesar⁷ glanced at his uncle Claudius – the very man who, as *princeps*, would adopt Nero – and said 'Claudius' (not that he meant this seriously, however, and so Agrippina, because her brother had been joking, rejected his suggestion, since Claudius was at the time the court laughing stock).

He lost his father when he was three years old, and also the third of the estate which constituted his inheritance, since Gaius, who was his co-heir, appropriated the lot. Then, when his mother was sent into exile, he was left almost penniless, and had to be brought up by his aunt Lepida, who placed

him in the charge of two tutors, one a dancer, the other a barber. When Claudius succeeded to the rule of the empire, however, he not only recovered his father's property but became richer still following a bequest from his stepfather Crispus Passienus. Indeed, thanks to the influence of his mother, who had been recalled from exile and restored to her former position, his prospects grew so rosy that, according to a popular rumour, Claudius' wife Messalina sent men to strangle him while he was enjoying a midday nap, because she saw him as a rival to Britannicus – a tall story rendered taller still by the claim that his would-be murderers fled in terror when they saw a snake glide out from under his pillow. (That the only basis for this story was the discovery of some skin shed by a snake next to the pillow on his bed did not stop Agrippina from setting the skin in a golden bracelet and pressing him to wear it, which he did, on his right arm – and although in due course, fed up with being reminded of his mother, he threw the bracelet away, he was brought by the climactic crisis of his reign to search it out again, but in vain.)

[7] While a boy he took part in the Troy Game at the Circus, and despite not being fully grown performed with great coolness and success. Claudius adopted him when he was ten and put him into the hands of Annaeus Seneca, who by then was already a senator, for his education. The following night, so the story goes, it seemed to Seneca that he was teaching Gaius Caesar: a dream which his student was quick to demonstrate had been more than just a dream by providing examples of his monstrous character as soon he possibly could. There was the period after his adoption, for instance, when his brother Britannicus, out of sheer force of habit, continued to greet

him as ‘Ahenobarbus’,⁸ and so he tried to persuade his father that Britannicus was not actually Claudius’ child; similarly, when his aunt Lepida was on trial, he bore public witness against her to please his mother, who was out to ruin Lepida.

He marked his first public appearance in the Forum by announcing gifts of money for the masses and a bonus for the soldiers, led the praetorians in a drill, holding a shield as he did so, and then went to the senate, where he offered thanks to his father. He addressed various speeches to Claudius during his father’s consulship: one in Latin on behalf of the people of Bononia, another in Greek on behalf of the people of Rhodes and a third (also in Greek) on behalf of the people of Ilium. He heard his first legal cases while serving as urban prefect during the Latin festival:⁹ these were not, as Claudius had instructed they should be, the customary brief appeals relating to insignificant matters, but a whole series of petitions on highly weighty topics, which the most celebrated advocates in Rome competed to present before him. Not long after this he married Octavia, and sponsored various games in the Circus and a beast hunt in honour of Claudius.

[8] He was seventeen years old when the death of Claudius was made public, on a day so hedged about with bad omens that, due to the lack of any earlier moment sufficiently auspicious for him to start his reign, he ended up inspecting the duty guard between the sixth and seventh hours; hailed by them as emperor on the steps leading to the Palatine, he was then taken in a litter to the praetorian camp, where he gave a short speech to the soldiers, and from there headed to the Senate House: here he stayed until evening, accepting all the vast numbers of prestigious honours heaped upon

him by the senate (all, that is, save the title ‘Father of His Country’, which he turned down due to his youth).

[9] He began by making a great show of his filial piety: he gave Claudius a most splendid funeral, delivered his eulogy and proclaimed him a god,¹⁰ showered the highest honours possible on the memory of his father Domitius, and allowed his mother to have responsibility for all his affairs, both private and public. Indeed, the password he gave to the tribune of his bodyguard on his very first day as emperor was ‘best of mothers’, and in the months that followed he often had himself borne through the streets beside her in her litter. At Antium he founded a colony, which he settled with veterans of the praetorian guard and the wealthiest of the chief centurions, all of whom were obliged to move there, and a harbour, which he had built at great expense.

[10] Just to make sure that no one would be left in any doubt as to his good intentions, he announced that he would be guided in his rule of the empire by the prescriptions of Augustus, and took every opportunity to flaunt his generosity, his mercy and his approachability. He lowered or abolished altogether the more oppressive taxes, reduced by three-quarters the rewards given to informers under the terms of the Papian law,¹¹ lavished money on the people (400 sesterces to every man), granted annual salaries of up to 500,000 sesterces to senators from particularly noble families who had lost their ancestral fortunes, and granted a monthly supply of corn to the praetorian cohorts free of charge. Asked to sign the death warrant of a man convicted of a capital offence, as required by custom, he sighed, ‘How I wish that I had never learned to write!’ He greeted people

from every class of society whenever he met them without need of prompting. To senatorial votes of thanks he would answer, ‘When I get to merit them.’ He allowed the masses to watch his exercise regime on the Campus, and often gave speeches in public. His recitation of poems in the theatre as well as in his own house was greeted with such widespread enthusiasm that a day of thanksgiving was decreed to mark it,¹² and various passages from the poems he had read out were inscribed in golden lettering and dedicated to Capitoline Jupiter.

[11] He sponsored a large number of different forms of entertainment: games held to celebrate the shaving of his first beard, games held in the Circus, theatrical entertainments, gladiator shows. At the first of these he invited old men of consular rank and elderly women of respectable standing to participate; at the second he provided allocated seating for Roman knights, and also staged races between chariots drawn by teams of four camels. At the games undertaken to ensure the eternity of the empire and which were called – in obedience to his wishes – the ‘Greatest’, several parts in the plays were taken by men and women of both senatorial and equestrian rank; a Roman knight well known by everybody crossed a tightrope on the back of an elephant; a comedy by Afranius, set in Rome and called *The Fire*, was staged, in which the actors were allowed to remove furniture from the burning house and keep it for themselves;¹³ also, an immense array of gifts were daily showered on the people: 1,000 birds of every different kind each day, food of all sorts, tokens which could be redeemed for doles of grain, or clothes, or gold, or silver, or jewels, or

pearls, or fine art, or slaves, or mules, or even domesticated wild animals, or – last of all – ships, or apartment blocks, or farms.

[12] These shows he watched from the top of the proscenium. He staged gladiator shows in a wooden amphitheatre which had been built in less than a year in the district of the city covering the Campus Martius, but had no one killed in them, not even criminals. He did, however, stage fights in which the combatants consisted of 400 senators and 600 Roman knights (some of them wealthy men of excellent reputation), and even those who fought with wild beasts or worked as stagehands in the arena were drawn from the senatorial and equestrian orders. He also presented a naval battle, fought on salt water that had sea monsters swimming in it, and displays of Pyrrhic dancing: these starred young men from Greece, all of whom were granted diplomas of Roman citizenship by him once their performances were done. Among the themes dramatized by the Pyrrhic dancers was that of the mounting by a bull of Pasiphae,¹⁴ who was hidden inside a wooden model of a heifer – or so many of the spectators thought. As for Icarus,¹⁵ no sooner had he made his first attempt to fly than he fell and landed next to the imperial couch, splattering the emperor himself with blood. (He rarely presided formally at the games, you see, preferring instead to watch them while reclining on a couch on his balcony, initially through gaps in the hangings, but subsequently with the hangings pulled fully back.)

He was the first to institute a five-yearly competition on the Greek model in Rome (this, which he called the ‘Neronia’, consisted of musical, gymnastic and equestrian events), and he made gifts of oil to the senators and knights when dedicating his baths and gymnasium. He assigned

responsibility for the competition to magistrates of consular rank, who were chosen by lot and took their places where the praetors normally sit. Then he went down into the orchestra, where the senators have their seats, and received the crown for the best oratory and verse in Latin, which he was awarded by the unanimous consent of all the highly distinguished men who had been competing with him for the prize; he would also have been crowned with the prize for playing the lyre, except that when the judges offered it to him he knelt down before it, then ordered it taken to the statue of Augustus. During the gymnastic events, which he staged in the Saepta, he had his first beard shaved as a sacrifice of oxen was being made, placed the hairs in a golden casket adorned with fabulously precious pearls and dedicated it on the Capitol. He even invited the Vestal Virgins to come and watch the athletic contests – this on the grounds that the priestesses of Ceres were permitted to watch the Olympic Games.

[13] I am not unjustified, I think, in listing among the spectacles he sponsored the entry of Tiridates into Rome. Tiridates was the king of Armenia, whom he had induced to visit by means of lavish promises – and although he was prevented by bad weather from parading his visitor in front of the masses on the day that he had specified by edict, he still made sure to produce the king at the earliest possible opportunity, an occasion which he marked by stationing armed cohorts around the temples in the Forum and sitting in a curule chair on the Rostra, dressed like a general celebrating a triumph, and surrounded by military standards and banners. When his visitor approached him up a sloping platform, he initially let the king kneel down at his feet before raising him by his right hand and giving him a kiss;

then, as Tiridates paid obeisance to him (in words that were translated and relayed to the crowd by a man of praetorian rank), he removed the headdress traditionally worn by Armenian kings and replaced it with a diadem. From the Forum he then led Tiridates to the theatre, where again the king paid him obeisance, before being sat at his right side. Not only was this sufficient to win him the acclamation traditionally given to a general triumphant in war, but also, after he had taken laurel up to the Capitol,¹⁶ he closed the twin gates of the temple of Janus, thereby signalling that there were no more wars being fought anywhere.

[14] He held four consulships: the first for two months, the second and last for six months and the third for four months. The middle two consulships, which he held in consecutive years, were separated from the other two by an interval of a year.

[15] As for his approach to dispensing justice, he was not given to handing down decisions to plaintiffs except in writing and on the day after the hearing. Rather than rely on a continuous legal process, he would get to grips with a case by having each party present points in turn. Similarly, whenever he retired to take soundings, he would not discuss matters collectively with his advisers, in the open, but instead request each one to give him a written briefing: these he would then read quietly in private, before delivering a verdict that, although presented as a consensus decision, was in fact entirely his own. For a long time he refused the sons of freedmen admittance into the Senate House, and refused to allow those who had been admitted by his predecessors to hold office. Senators who were blocked from taking up a magistracy by a surfeit of candidates were

compensated for the postponement and delay by being given the command of a legion. He generally appointed men to serve as consuls for six-month terms, and when one of them died just before the Kalends of January cited with disapproval the one-day consulship of Caninus Rebilis as a precedent justifying his refusal to appoint a replacement.¹⁷ He awarded triumphal regalia to men who ranked merely as quaestors, and in a few cases to members of the equestrian order as well – nor did he award it exclusively to mark military achievement. Usually, when he sent a speech on some matter or other to the senate, he would bypass the quaestors, whose responsibility it normally was to read them, and have it presented instead by a consul.

[16] It was thanks to him that a new style of building was developed in Rome, personally funded by him, and necessitating the construction of arcades in front of apartment blocks and houses, so that fires might more readily be fought from their terraces. He planned as well to extend the city walls as far as Ostia, and to bring the sea from there to the old city by means of a canal.

Numerous practices were either criminalized or regulated under his rule, and much new legislation passed.¹⁸ Sumptuary laws were introduced; public banquets replaced by food handouts; cooked dishes (all except for beans and vegetables) banned from being sold in taverns, even though previously all kinds of delicacies had been for sale; the Christians, a sect of people adhering to a novel and sinister superstition, rendered subject to punishment; charioteers, who had long exploited their licence to roam around the city cheating people and stealing from them, and doing it as

though having a laugh, barred from running wild; the fans of pantomime actors banished, together with the pantomime actors themselves.

[17] At the same time, a novel measure was introduced to counter forgery, when it was stipulated that no tablets were to be sealed unless they had first had holes bored through them and then been bound by a cord threaded through the holes three times; similarly, when it came to wills, it was stipulated that the first two pages were to be shown to the witnesses for signing blank save for the name of the testator, and that no one writing a will for another person was to include himself in it as a beneficiary; it was also prescribed that litigants, although they were to pay those who represented them a fixed and reasonable fee, were not to be liable for court costs, which instead were to be covered by the public treasury free of charge; it was also decreed that cases involving the public treasury were to be transferred to the Forum and a board of assessors, and that all appeals from the juries were to be made to the senate.

[18] Far from nurturing so much as the slightest wish or ambition to increase the empire and expand its borders, he actually weighed up whether to withdraw the army from Britain, and was only dissuaded from doing so by the humiliation he would have felt at seeming to diminish the glory of his father.¹⁹ That said, he did add two new provinces: Pontus, a kingdom ceded to him by Polemon, and the Alpine lands ruled by Cottius, which passed to him on Cottius' death.

[19] He embarked on only a couple of foreign tours, one to Alexandria and one to Greece, but abandoned the one to Alexandria on the very day that had been set for his departure, unsettled not just by the inherent perils

of the trip but by his anxiety that the gods did not approve it. This was because, when he rose from his seat in the temple of Vesta after a tour of the city's temples, first the fringe of his toga got snagged, and then a mist came over his eyes so thick that he could make nothing out. In Greece he attempted to cut a canal through the Isthmus:²⁰ summoning the praetorians on to the parade ground, he urged them to start work on the project, and then, when a trumpet gave the signal, was himself the first to break the ground with a pickaxe, and carry off the earth in a basket on his shoulders. He also made preparations for an expedition to the Caspian Gates²¹ by conscripting a legion of recruits from Italy, all of them six feet tall, which he called the 'phalanx' of Alexander the Great.

So much for the things he did that rank either as unexceptionable or, in certain cases, as positively commendable, and which I have compiled into a single list, so as to create a clear dividing line between them and all the various deviancies and crimes which shall be my subject from this point on.

[20] The moment he came to power he summoned Terpnus, the greatest lyre-player of the age, and after every supper, for days on end, would sit into the early hours listening to the master play – and although, back when he was a boy, music was one of the subjects he had been taught, now, bit by bit, he began to teach himself, practising on the instrument while simultaneously nurturing and strengthening his voice by omitting none of the exercises standard among musicians (these included lying on his back with a lead weight on his chest, cleaning out his system by means of vomiting and enemas, and abstaining from fruit and other kinds of food harmful to the vocal chords), until in due course, delighted with the

progress he had made despite a voice that was reedy and indistinct, it became his ambition to go on the stage, on the grounds that, to quote a Greek proverb he would often throw out among his friends, ‘No one admires a musician who veils his talent.’ He gave his first public performance in Naples, and did not break off even when an earthquake suddenly made the theatre shake, but instead continued to the end of his song. His residency in Naples saw him sing repeatedly for several days in a row. Even when he took a short break to rest his voice, he could not bear to be deprived of his public, but instead went to the baths and from there to the theatre, where he dined in the orchestra and, addressing the crowds who had gathered there in Greek, promised them that once he had only had a drop to drink he would give them a number that would make the venue ring. So delighted was he by the rhythmic applause from a large contingent of Alexandrians who had just arrived on a convoy of ships in Naples that he sent for more people to come from Alexandria. Not content with this, however, he also selected some young men from the equestrian order and over 5,000 strapping lads drawn from across the slums, who were divided into separate groups, so that they could be taught different styles of clapping – named respectively ‘bees’, ‘tiles’ and ‘bricks’ – and then employed them vigorously when he sang (the leaders of these cheerleaders, who were all conspicuous for the remarkable glossiness of their hair, the snappiness of their dress sense and the fact that their left hands were bare, without rings, were each paid 400,000 sesterces).

[21] Since it mattered terribly to him that he should get to sing in Rome as well, he brought forward the contests which constituted the ‘Neronia’;

and although initially, when everyone clamoured to be graced by his ‘heavenly voice’, he declared that those who wished to hear him would get their chance in the gardens, soon enough, when even the soldiers on sentry duty began lending their voices to the entreaties of the crowds, he happily agreed to put on a show there and then – which was why, without further delay, he ordered his name added to the list of musicians who were competing in the lyre-playing contest, had the token with his name on it placed in the urn alongside all the other tokens, and in due course, when his turn came, made his entrance escorted by the praetorian prefects (they carried his lyre for him too), and with the military tribunes and his closest friends following close behind. Once he had taken up position, introduced himself, and had the former consul Cluvius Rufus announce that he would be singing the role of Niobe,²² he then held the stage until the tenth hour, before announcing that the rest of the competition, and the awarding of the crown with it, would be postponed until the following year, so that he would have the opportunity to sing some more. When that came to seem too long to wait, however, he did not hesitate to fill up the gap by staging additional public performances. He was even prompted by the offer of a million sesterces from one of the praetors to contemplate taking part in a private performance with actual actors. He also sang a range of tragic roles – not just heroes and gods, but heroines and goddesses too – from behind masks which had been fashioned to resemble either his own features or those of whichever woman he happened to desire at the time. Along with various other roles, he played Canace in childbirth, Orestes killing his mother, Oedipus being blinded and Hercules going insane²³ (during this

last performance, so the story goes, the sight of him bound in chains – as required by the plot – prompted a young soldier who was standing guard at the theatre gate to come dashing forwards to his rescue).

[22] From the earliest days of his childhood he was obsessed by horses, and all he would ever talk about – despite being ordered not to – were the races in the Circus (indeed, on one occasion, when he and his fellow pupils were scolded by their teacher for lamenting that a charioteer with the Greens²⁴ had been dragged around the arena, he pretended that they had actually been talking about Hector²⁵). When he first came to power he would play a board game with ivory chariots, and abandon his countryside retreat for even the most minor event in the Circus, discreetly at first, but then with such abandon that nobody ever doubted that on a race day he was bound to be in Rome. He made no secret of wishing to see the total of prizes increased, and when, as a result of the swollen number of races, the entertainment came to stretch out until late into the evening, the managers of the various stables no longer thought it worth their while to put out a team unless it were for a full day of racing. Soon enough he was wanting to drive a chariot himself, all the time, and in public too; and so it was, once he had practised in his own gardens watched by slaves and stinking plebeians, that he went on to make a spectacle of himself before the gaze of everyone in the Circus Maximus, and even had a freedman stand in for the magistrate who customarily drops the handkerchief to start the race. Not content with treating Rome to the display of his talents, he also – as we have already mentioned – made for Greece, motivated by one particular consideration. The cities with a tradition of staging musical competitions,

you see, had decided that all the prizes for playing the lyre should be awarded to him. So delighted was he to receive these that he not only gave precedence to the envoys who had brought them, but even invited them to his private table. When some of the envoys asked him to give them an after-dinner recital, and greeted his performance with extravagant applause, he declared that only the Greeks had an ear for music, and they alone were deserving of him and his talents. Setting off from Rome immediately, he gave his first performance the moment he had docked in Cassiope²⁶ by singing in front of the altar of Jupiter Cassius,²⁷ before continuing on a tour of all the contests.

[23] This he was only able to do by commanding that all the various festivals be crammed into a single year,²⁸ even those that were normally held at very different times to each other or had already been recently staged, while also, just for good measure, introducing a musical contest to the Olympic Games – something never done before. So determined was he not to be distracted or diverted from all this that a letter from his freedman Helius, warning him that matters back in Rome required his presence, prompted him to write back, ‘No matter how much you may long for me, and no matter how quickly you may think I should get back, your wishes and admonitions should still have this as their focus – to see me make a return worthy of Nero.’

No one was permitted to leave the theatre while he was singing, not even for the most urgent of reasons. So it was – allegedly – that women went into labour during his recitals, and many people, fed up with having to listen to him and applaud him, got round the fact that the gates to the theatre were

locked by surreptitiously leaping down from the wall, or else pretending to be dead and having themselves carried out as though to a funeral. It is barely to be credited how nervous and twitchy he got while competing, how jealous of his rivals and how fearful before the judges. He would watch his opponents through narrowed eyes, just as though they were in a competition for real, and suck up to them, then bitch about them behind their backs (although some he would insult to their faces, and those who were particularly talented he would actually bribe). Before beginning his performance, he would always address the judges in tones of the utmost reverence, telling them that, although he had done all that could be done, the result still lay in the hands of Fortune, and that they, as wise and learned men, had a duty to disregard her whims and ways – but even when they encouraged him to take heart, and he withdrew from them in a better mood, his anxieties were never entirely allayed, for he would interpret the silence and self-restraint shown by some of the judges as surliness and malice, and insist that he did not trust them.

[24] When taking part in a contest he would follow the rules so attentively that he never dared so much as to clear his throat, and would always use his arm to wipe the sweat from his brow (indeed, on one occasion, while he was acting out a scene from a tragedy and happened to pick up a sceptre that he had just dropped, he was so nervous that he might be disqualified for this slip-up that he began to tremble, and only calmed down when reassured by his accompanist that, amid all the cheering and applause of the people, nobody had noticed it). He always made sure to proclaim his victories himself – which was why he entered the contests for

heralds, no matter where they were held. Rather than permit so much as a trace of the memorials that had been raised to other victors in the sacred games to remain anywhere, he ordered all their statues and portrait busts toppled, hauled away with hooks and dumped in public toilets. He also drove a chariot in a large number of different races, and even drove a ten-horse team at Olympia, despite having criticized King Mithridates²⁹ in one of his poems for having done the very same thing. Twice he was thrown from his chariot, and the second time, unable to stay the course, abandoned the race before reaching the finish – but even so was still crowned the victor. On his departure he granted the entire province its liberty, while simultaneously bestowing Roman citizenship and substantial grants of money on the judges: perks which he announced in person at the Isthmian Games,³⁰ standing in the middle of the stadium.

[25] He returned from Greece to Naples, and there – since it was the city where he had first performed publicly as a musician – he made his entrance drawn by white horses through a section of the wall that had been torn down, as it was traditional for victors in the sacred games of Greece to do, before going on to make a similar entry into Antium, then Albanum and finally Rome: in Rome, however, he rode in the very chariot used by Augustus to celebrate his triumphs, dressed in a purple robe and a Greek cloak adorned with golden stars, with the Olympic crown on his head, the Pythian crown³¹ in his right hand and the remaining crowns borne in procession before him (complete with placards detailing where he had won them, whom he had vanquished and what songs or dramas he had performed), while behind his chariot, as though they were the escorts of a

general celebrating a triumph, came his cheerleaders, chanting as they marched that they were the Augustiani, the soldiers of his triumph. On they went through the Circus Maximus (which they were only able to access because its archway had been torn down), the Velabrum and the Forum, before winding up the Palatine to the temple of Apollo. The whole way along the route animals were sacrificed, perfumes scattered over the streets, and songbirds, garlands and sweets showered on him. The sacred crowns he placed in his bedchambers around the couches, together with statues of himself dressed as a lyre-player – an image which he also had struck on a coin. Far from reining in his commitment to music after returning from Greece, or relaxing it, so concerned did he remain to preserve his voice that he would only ever communicate with his soldiers by letter or by employing someone to deliver his speeches for him; nor would he ever undertake anything, either for the good of the state or for his own amusement, without having beside him a voice-coach, who would warn him against putting his vocal chords under strain and admonish him to hold a piece of cloth to his mouth; and many were those on whom he bestowed his friendship, and many those whom he denounced as his enemies, based purely on whether they had been profuse in giving him praise, or grudging.

[26] Insolence, an uninhibited sexual appetite, dissipation, greed, cruelty: these were the vices which, to begin with – because he gave expression to them only secretly and incrementally – might well have been chalked up as the excesses of youth, had it not been manifest to everyone even at the time that they were failings not of age but of character. No sooner had twilight faded into night than he would grab a freedman's cap or a wig and head out

into the streets, making the rounds of the cookshops – but this was no harmless fun, for he liked to mug people as they made their way back from dinner (and to stab them too if they fought back, and dump their bodies in a sewer), and to break into taverns, and then, after he had looted them, to set up a market in his house, divide up and auction off his spoils, and blow the proceeds. This brawling was not without risk to him as well, for his victims would often try to gouge out his eyes, and on one occasion, when a senator whose wife he had assaulted beat him almost to a pulp, he was actually in danger of his life. After this particular incident he never again headed out by night into the streets without having tribunes follow him at a discreet distance. By day he would have himself carried secretly in a sedan chair to the theatre, where from the upper part of the proscenium he would watch the scrapping between the partisans of different actors and egg them on; and then, should a full-blown riot break out, he would add to the stones and fragments of benches flying through the air by hurling things at the people below himself (once he even cracked a praetor's skull).

[27] Gradually, the more he succumbed to his moral failings, so the more he stopped pretending that it was all a joke – and the more he flaunted his crimes openly rather than trying to keep them a secret, so the more serious they became. He would feast from midday to midnight, with regular immersions in a warm bath (or, if it were summer, in a bath cooled with snow) to refresh himself; sometimes he would dine in public, in what originally – until he had it drained – was the lake used to stage naval battles, or on the Campus Martius, or in the Circus Maximus, and would employ common prostitutes, both male and female, to wait at his table.

Whenever he went gliding down the Tiber as it flowed to Ostia, or cruising around the Bay of Baiae, he would arrange to have taverns which doubled as brothels set up along the banks or the shore, notable not just for the dissipations they promised, but for the women who were staffing them and beckoning to him from either side of the river to join them: for these, although they had the appearance of bargirls, were in fact respectably married women.³² He was also in the habit of inviting himself to dinner with friends – one of whom spent 4 million sesterces on a banquet at which the guests all wore silk headdresses, while a second blew even more on a feast at which the guests were rained on by roses.

[28] In addition to forcing himself on freeborn boys as though they were young slaves and bedding other men's brides, he also raped the Vestal Virgin Rubria.³³ He came very close to making a legal marriage out of his relationship with the freedwoman Acte, after bribing some former consuls to perjure themselves by swearing that she was of royal birth. Not content with castrating Sporus, he tried to transform the boy into a woman for real, marrying him with all the traditional ceremonies (dowry and bridal veil included!) before leading his new 'bride' to his house and using the eunuch as a wife: a marriage which prompted someone to joke that it would have been better for humanity had his father Domitius only married such a woman – a witticism still repeated today. This Sporus, dolled up in the finery of an empress and borne in a litter, he took with him around all the public spaces and marketplaces of Greece, and then soon afterwards, in Rome, around the Sigillaria, planting kisses on the eunuch as he went. Nobody doubted that he had also wanted to take his mother to bed, but had

been warned off doing so by those who mistrusted her, and dreaded the additional influence that a relationship of this kind would have enabled a woman of such unbridled savagery to wield – an anxiety compounded by the subsequent addition to his roster of concubines of a prostitute rumoured to look exactly like Agrippina. (It is also alleged that at the start of his reign, when he was being carried around in a litter with his mother, stains on his clothing betrayed the fact that he had been having an incestuous affair with her.)

[29] With such relish did he allow his body to be used as though it were a prostitute's that, after virtually every inch of it had been polluted, he devised an entirely novel style of sex game, one in which, dressed up as a wild animal and kept in a cage, he would be set free to fall upon the genitals of men and women who had been fastened to stakes, and then, once he had given full vent to his savagery, have his freedman Doryphorus finish him off with a deep thrust: for just as Sporus had played the part of a bride with him, so did he with Doryphorus, even going so far as to moan and scream like a virgin being raped. The impression I get from various sources is that he scorned the very idea that people might never have been molested or had every reach of their anatomy dirtied, and that most of those who claimed not to be perverts were merely frauds with a talent for deception (this was why, whenever people confessed to him their sexual misdemeanours, he would readily pardon them all their misdeeds).

[30] He thought the only point in having wealth and riches was to squander them: people who kept a track of their expenses, he believed, were contemptible misers, whereas those who blew their money and frittered it

away were truly magnificent, and models of sophistication. He praised Gaius, and stood in awe of him, for one simple reason: that his uncle had exhausted the vast fortune left behind by Tiberius in an impressively short time. No wonder, then, that he too should have been unstinting in his largesse and extravagance. On Tiridates he lavished the scarcely believable sum of 800,000 sesterces in a single day, and then, when his royal visitor departed, gave him more than 100 million. To Menecrates, a lyre-player, and Spiculus, a gladiator, he made a grant of fortunes and properties that would have constituted a fit reward for a general awarded a triumph. He gave Paneros, a moneylender with a face like a monkey and an extensive portfolio of properties both in Rome and in the countryside, a funeral of almost regal splendour. He never wore the same item of clothing twice. When playing dice he would wager 400,000 sesterces on a single throw. When fishing he would use a net of gold braided with purple and scarlet thread. It is said that he never made a journey unless accompanied by at least 1,000 carriages, that the mules in his train were shod with silver and the mule-drivers clothed in wool from Canusium,³⁴ and that he was escorted by couriers and cavalry from Mauretania, who wore bracelets on their arms and rode on splendidly caparisoned horses.

[31] Nothing, however, proved a more ruinous waste of money than his construction of a house that stretched from the Palatine to the Esquiline: initially he called this the ‘Passageway House’, but then, when it was rebuilt after burning down in the fire, he renamed it the ‘Golden House’.³⁵ The following details should be sufficient to convey a sense of its scale and splendour. It had an entrance hall so high that a colossal statue of the

emperor himself, 120 feet tall, stood in it, and it was so long that its triple colonnade stretched for a mile; it also had a lake like a sea, together with structures built to convey a sense of cities along its shore, and a park which featured a range of fields and vineyards, pastureland and woods, and large numbers of every kind of animal, both domestic and wild. In the rest of the house everything was overlaid with gold and decorated with jewels and mother-of-pearl; the banqueting halls had coffered ceilings with panels made of ivory that could be made to rotate and drop flowers, and spray guests with perfume from pipes; the main banqueting hall had a dome which revolved continuously day and night, like the cosmos itself; the baths were supplied with running water both from the sea and a sulphur spring. Once the entire house had been brought to completion in this style, and he had dedicated it, his only expression of approval was to declare: ‘Now at last I have begun to live like a human being.’

In addition to the Golden House, he began work on an indoor swimming pool which was to stretch from Misenum to Lake Avernus,³⁶ boast a colonnade, and be heated by water channelled from all the hot springs in Baiae; also a canal from Avernus the whole way to Ostia, 160 miles long and wide enough to permit two quinqueremes to pass each other, so that ships would no longer be obliged to make the journey by sea. In order to procure a workforce sufficient to these projects he gave orders that prisoners were to be transported from across the entire empire to Italy, and that even those guilty of the most heinous crimes should be sentenced to work on them, and not be put to death.

He was motivated to squander money in this lunatic manner not only by the confidence he placed in the revenues to be had from the empire, but also by the unexpected prospect of finding an enormous trove of buried treasure, a wealth of fabulously ancient riches that originally had been brought from Tyre by Queen Dido³⁷ when she fled the city, and which now – or so, at any rate, a Roman knight informed him in a tone of utter assurance – lay hidden in some vast caves in Africa, just waiting to be brought to light.

[32] But when the dashing of this hope left him with coffers still to fill, and he found himself so impoverished and short of resources that he was obliged to defer paying even his soldiers what they were owed, and to postpone giving the veterans their pensions, he turned his attention instead to laying false accusations against people, and to robbing them.

The first thing he did was to decree that, if a deceased freedman had without good reason adopted the name of a family to which he himself was related, then five-sixths of the man's property should pass to him, rather than merely half; additionally, that the estates of those who had failed to display due gratitude to the *princeps* in their wills be forfeit to the imperial treasury, and that any lawyer responsible either for writing or for dictating such a will not go unpunished either; finally, that anyone who said or did anything that rendered him liable to prosecution under the treason law was to be punished, provided only that there was no informer lacking as a witness. He demanded the return of the gifts that he had presented as tokens of his appreciation to the various cities that had awarded him crowns in their respective contests, and sent an agent undercover on market day to sell small quantities of amethystine and Tyrian purples (dyes which he had

previously banned), then used it as an excuse to close down all the stalls. It is even said that on one occasion, when he was singing in a public show, he noticed a citizen's wife who was illegally wearing purple and pointed her out to his agents, who promptly dragged the woman outside and stripped her not just of her clothes but of all her property as well. He never entrusted a task to anyone without saying, 'You know what I need' and 'What we are to do is leave no one with anything.' Finally, he stripped numerous temples of their endowments, and melted down various statues made of gold and silver (among them the statues of the Penates, which Galba restored soon afterwards).

[33] The first of the many members of his own family killed over the course of his career of murder was Claudius: for even if he was not the actual instigator of the assassination he certainly knew what was going on, and did not bother to hide it (in due course, quoting the words of the Greek proverb, he would praise mushrooms, a dish of which had been laced with poison and then consumed by Claudius, as 'the food of the gods'). He certainly directed all manner of insult at his predecessor, attacking him and mocking him, and would harp on now about how stupid Claudius had been, and now how cruel. A favourite joke of his was to declare that Claudius had stopped 'lingering' among mortals (by lengthening the first syllable of the Latin word *morari*, you see, he was able to pun on the near-identical Greek word for 'playing the idiot'); he also held that very few of the decrees and policies of his predecessor should be upheld, on the grounds that they had been authored by a raving lunatic; nor, finally, did he bother to enclose the

place where Claudius had been cremated with anything more substantial than a low and flimsy wall.

His motive for poisoning Britannicus was at least as much envy of his brother's superior singing voice as it was his anxiety that Britannicus would one day come to enjoy higher favour with the people thanks to their regard for his father's memory.³⁸ He procured the poison from a certain Lucusta, who was immensely skilled in its use, and when its effects proved slower than he had been expecting, and Britannicus seemed to have suffered no ill-effects from it beyond a bout of vomiting, he summoned the woman and personally beat her, accusing her of having given him an antidote, not a poison; then, when she justified herself by saying that she had supplied him with a dose weak enough to ensure that the crime, by remaining secret, would not become a cause of unpopularity for him, he retorted, 'Oh right, as if the Julian law worries me',³⁹ and forced her into his bedroom, there to mix the fastest-acting poison that she possibly could as he watched on. When he experimented with it on a young goat, and the animal lasted five hours before dying, he had her brew a stronger dose, then tried it on a pig. This time the animal died immediately, and so he ordered the concoction brought into the dining room and given to Britannicus, who was dining with him – and when his brother, at the very first taste of it, dropped dead on the spot, he lied to his other dining companions, assuring them that the boy was merely suffering from one of his periodic epileptic fits, and then, the following day, had Britannicus buried with unceremonious speed in driving rain. He rewarded Lucusta by granting her immunity from prosecution and a large estate in the country, and even sent her students to teach.

[34] So aggravating did he find his mother, who was forever poking her nose into what he was doing and saying, and scolding him for it, that at first he tried to dent her popularity by threatening to give up the rule of the empire and retire to Rhodes; not long after that he stripped her of all her rank and power, deprived her of her bodyguard of legionaries and German mercenaries, and banished her from the Palatine; then, letting slip no opportunity to harass her, he bribed people to persecute her with lawsuits whenever she was in Rome, and to stop her from enjoying the calm of retirement whenever she was in the countryside by yelling taunts and rude jokes at her as they went past her estate, whether by land or by sea.

Eventually, however, alarmed by the violent threats that she was levelling against him, he decided to finish her off once and for all – first with poison, and then, after the failure of three attempts to kill her in this way made him realize that she must have inoculated herself against it, by introducing a mechanism into the panelled ceiling of her bedroom which, when activated, would make the panels drop on to her while she was asleep at night. When those who were in on this plan let slip the details, however, he followed it up by commissioning a ship that was engineered to fall to pieces, and kill her either by having her drowned or brained by the collapse of her cabin; then, pretending to kiss and make up, he wrote her an exceedingly affectionate letter in which he invited her to come to Baiae and celebrate the four-day festival of Minerva with him. Once she had arrived there, he had her galley disabled by the captains of his triremes, who had been instructed to make the crash seem an accident, so that when the time came for her to return to Bauli, following a banquet that he had made last into the early

hours, he was able to offer her, in place of her own incapacitated vessel, the collapsible ship: to this he escorted her, swapping jokes with her as he went, then bade her farewell by kissing her on her breasts. The rest of the night he lay awake in a state of high tension, waiting to see how his scheme would turn out. But when he learned that things had not gone according to plan, and that his mother had managed to swim to land, so stuck was he for any other course of action that he surreptitiously dropped a dagger next to Lucius Agermus, the freedman of hers who had arrived and reported in joyous tones that she was safe and sound, then had the man seized and bound on a charge of attempted murder, and ordered that Agrippina, whom he accused of having planned his assassination, be murdered herself – but in such a way as to make it look like she had committed suicide rather than face arrest for her crime. Even more repellent details are to be found in sources that cannot merely be dismissed: that he rushed to inspect his murdered mother's corpse, that he drew his fingers over her body, criticizing those features he disliked and praising those he found attractive, and that he was gripped by a sudden thirst while doing so, and began drinking. Despite the reassurance provided him by the soldiers, the senate and the people, all of whom offered him their congratulations, neither in the immediate wake of his crime nor ever afterwards could he bear his feelings of guilt, but would often confess that he was hounded by the ghost of his mother and by the whips and the blazing torches of the Furies⁴⁰ – and even had Persian priests perform a rite designed to summon her shade and appease it. While on his tour of Greece he dared not appear at the

Eleusinian mysteries: for these begin with a proclamation by a herald warning away all criminals who have offended against the gods.

As well as killing his mother he was also responsible for the death of his aunt.⁴¹ When he visited her sickbed, to which she had been confined by constipation, and she, stroking his cheek as she had always done and finding there the soft down of someone almost a man, happened to murmur affectionately, ‘The moment you give me this, I can die happy’, he turned to his companions and said, as if joking, ‘Then I will shave it off at once’ – whereupon he instructed her doctors to force-feed the ailing woman laxatives. He seized her property even before she had died, and suppressed her will so as to ensure that everything would come to him.

[35] After Octavia he had two more wives: Poppaea Sabina, the daughter of a quaestor who had previously been married to a Roman knight, and then, after her, Statilia Messalina, who was the great-great-granddaughter of a two-times consul and winner of a triumph named Taurus, and whose original husband, Atticus Vestinus, he had disposed of by having him put to death while the man was actually consul. He had soon grown bored of sleeping with Octavia, and when his friends criticized him for this he answered them that, like a general granted the insignia of a triumph but not the triumph itself, she should be satisfied with the trappings of a wife. It did not take him long, however – after several failed attempts to strangle her – first to divorce her on the grounds that she was barren, and then, when mass protests left him in no doubt as to the scale of popular disapproval of his divorce, to banish her; finally he had her executed on a charge of adultery so shamelessly trumped up that nobody could be found to confirm it, and so

he had to get Anicetus, his old tutor, to stand witness and falsely confess to having tricked her into illicit sex. Poppaea, whom he married twelve days after divorcing Octavia, he dearly loved – and yet he killed her as well, by kicking her in the stomach when she was pregnant and sick, after she had scolded him for coming home late from the chariot races. The daughter he had by her, Claudia Augusta, died while a baby.

No relation of his, no matter how distant, could evade the reach of his criminality. When, after the death of Poppaea, Claudius' daughter Antonia refused to marry him, he had her put to death on a charge of involvement in subversive activity, a fate which he similarly visited on all those related to him either by blood or by marriage (among them Aulus Plautius,⁴² whom he forced to give him oral sex before having the young man put to death with the comment, ‘Now let my mother come and kiss my successor’ – for he alleged that Plautius had been seduced by hopes of becoming emperor into having an affair with Agrippina). He had the slaves of his stepson Rufrius Crispinus, who was Poppaea’s child, and still very young, drown the boy at sea while on a fishing trip, on the grounds that Crispinus – allegedly – had been playing at being an emperor in command of an army. Because Tuscus, the son of his nurse, and whom he had appointed procurator of Egypt, used the baths built there for his visit, he sent him into exile. He forced Seneca to commit suicide, even though, when his one-time teacher had asked permission to retire and offered to surrender all his estates, he had solemnly sworn that the old man’s suspicions were unfounded, and that he would rather die than do him any harm. To Burrus, the prefect of the praetorians, he sent poison rather than the cough mixture

that he had promised. He also poisoned the wealthy and aged freedmen who had backed his adoption and facilitated his rise to supreme power, some with food, some with drink.

[36] Nor was it just members of his own household who were the objects of his brutality, for he targeted many beyond it as well. A comet – which is commonly held to presage the death of great rulers – began to appear night after night. So alarmed was he by this that when he learned from the astrologer Balbillus that it was standard practice for a king to counter a portent like this by having some important figure killed, thereby diverting the danger from the king's own head on to that of someone else high-ranking, he decided that he would have the leading nobles in Rome put to death: a resolution that he was able to act upon all the more vigorously – and with apparent justification too – thanks to the discovery of two conspiracies, the first and most important of which (Piso's) was centred in Rome, and the second of which (Vinicius') was hatched and uncovered in Beneventum.⁴³ The conspirators made their defence bound three times over in chains: some readily confessed their own guilt, and some actually insisted that they had been doing him a favour, on the grounds that they could do nothing for a man so rotten through with every kind of criminality except to put him out of his misery. The children of those found guilty were either banished from Rome, or poisoned, or starved to death; there are reports of some being killed together with their tutors and attendants at a single meal, and of others being prevented from earning the bare minimum they needed to stay alive.

[37] From that moment on he set no limits on his readiness to kill anyone indiscriminately, and to justify doing so any way he pleased. To give only a few examples: Salvidienus Orfitus was condemned because he had rented three rooms in his house near the Forum to serve some cities as their headquarters in Rome; Cassius Longinus, the blind jurist, because he had not removed from his family tree (one that reached back a long way) the portrait busts of Gaius Cassius, Caesar's assassin; Thrasea Paetus for having a lugubrious expression, like that of a teacher. He never allowed those ordered to kill themselves more than an hour's grace, and to ensure there was no delay sent doctors with orders immediately to 'take care of' anyone who tried to prevaricate ('take care of' being his euphemism for having people die by opening their veins). It is even claimed that he wished to throw people to a notorious glutton who had been born in Egypt and would chomp on raw flesh and anything else that might be served up, to be ripped apart by this monster and devoured while they were still alive. Elated by these successes, as he saw them, and puffed up with self-satisfaction, he declared that none of his predecessors had properly understood just what a *princeps* might be able to get away with (indeed, he often used to drop clear hints that even those senators left alive would not be spared, but would perish along with their entire order, to be replaced as governors and generals by Roman knights and by his freedmen). It is certainly the case that he never exchanged kisses with a senator, whether setting out from Rome or returning there, nor ever swapped greetings with them, and that at the formal inauguration of work on the Isthmus canal, where he ringingly expressed before a huge crowd his hope that the project would redound to

the profit of himself and the Roman people, he scorned to mention the senate.

[38] Nevertheless, he showed no mercy either to the people or the walls of his native city. When someone in the course of a conversation quoted him the line, ‘When I am dead, let Mother Earth go up in flames’, he replied, ‘No, let it happen while I am still alive’ – words that he then more than put into action. He set fire to the city, you see, as though the sheer ugliness of the old buildings and the narrow, winding streets had left him with no alternative, and so brazenly too that several former consuls, when they found his personal attendants on their property armed with kindling and torches, held back from arresting them (he also employed military technology to knock down and burn some granaries on land near the Golden House that he particularly coveted, because their walls were made of stone). For six days and seven nights the conflagration raged, and with such ferocity that the masses were forced to take shelter in monuments and tombs. During this period it was not just vast numbers of apartment blocks that went up in flames, but also the houses of generals from the very earliest days of Rome, together with all the spoils of war that had been preserved in them, and the temples promised and dedicated to the gods by the kings, and later in the Punic and Gallic Wars too, and every other sight worthy of commemoration that had been preserved from ancient times. Watching the fire from the Tower of Maecenas,⁴⁴ he thrilled to what he termed ‘the beauty of the flames’ and sang – dressed in the costume he wore when performing on stage – ‘The Fall of Troy’. Furthermore, so that he would miss no opportunity to obtain from this calamity the spoils that were his due

as emperor, he committed to having the corpses and the rubble cleared at his own expense, and forbade all those who had lost their homes to search what remained of them; similarly, he did not just receive contributions but actively extorted them, and thereby came close to bleeding both the provinces and private individuals dry.

[39] There were other, chance evils too in addition to the terrible ones for which the *princeps* himself was responsible: 30,000 people had their names entered in the register of the temple of Libitina after dying of a plague;⁴⁵ disaster struck in Britain when two important towns were plundered and large numbers of Roman citizens and their allies butchered;⁴⁶ in the East, the legions in Armenia met with humiliation when they were forced to go under the yoke,⁴⁷ while Syria was almost lost to Roman rule.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, even in the midst of all this, it is a striking fact (indeed, a remarkable one) that he never showed himself more forbearing than when being cursed and mocked, nor more tolerant of people than of those who were verbally abusing him or attacking him in verse. Many of these lampoons, written in Greek as well as Latin, were either posted around the city or else circulated by word of mouth:

Nero, Orestes, Alcmaeon.⁴⁹ matricides.

The numbers prove it: Nero killed his mother.⁵⁰

Who would dispute that Nero is of the line of great Aeneas?

The one carried off his mother, the other his father bore.⁵¹

While our leader plucks his lyre, the Parthian plucks his bow.

Ours is the Apollo who sings, theirs the one who kills from afar.

Rome becomes one immense house. Go live in Veii, Romans –

if, that is, the house does not cover Veii as well.⁵²

But he never tried to track down the authors, and when some of them were reported to the senate by an informer he gave instructions that they were not to be harshly punished. Once, when he was out in public, the philosopher Isidorus, a Cynic,⁵³ criticized him in a loud voice for being good at singing the ills of Nauplius⁵⁴ but ill at looking after his goods; meanwhile Datus, an Atellan actor, mimed drinking and swimming while chanting the line ‘Goodbye father, goodbye mother’ (an obvious allusion to the deaths respectively of Claudius and Agrippina), and then, coming to the final line of the song, ‘Orcus⁵⁵ guides your steps’, pointed at the senate. Nero, however, sentenced the actor and the philosopher to no worse punishment than banishment from Rome and Italy – either because he was impervious to all insult, or else to avoid provoking further such sallies by betraying his annoyance.

[40] This, then, was the kind of *princeps* under which the world was made to suffer; until, after almost fourteen years, a revolt in Gaul led by Julius Vindex – ‘The Defender’ – (he was propraetor of the province at the time) set in train a sequence of events that enabled the globe to cast him off.

Astrologers had informed Nero long previously that he was destined to be removed from power, and this in turn had prompted his much-quoted comment, ‘Art offers us a living’: for by making it he had doubtless been hoping to encourage people to look more favourably on his skill with the

lyre, on the grounds that what constituted a hobby for him as *princeps* would provide him, as a private citizen, with the necessities of life. Some astrologers, however, told him that after he had lost power in Rome he would rule supreme over the East, with quite a few specifying that he would become the king of Jerusalem, and various others assuring him that all the fortune he had previously enjoyed would end up restored to him.⁵⁶ Inclined as he was to trust in this final prophecy, the recovery of both Britain and Armenia after they had initially seemed lost prompted him to imagine that the evils foretold him had now come and gone. Indeed, when he consulted the oracle of Apollo at Delphi, and heard back from it that he should beware the seventy-third year, he jumped to the conclusion that seventy-three, rather than alluding to Galba's age, was instead the age at which he would die; so confident did this leave him, not just that he would be enjoying many more years of life, but that these would be blessed by remarkable and unbroken good fortune, that when he lost possessions of great value in a shipwreck, he did not hesitate to assure his friends that the fish would bring them back to him.

After receiving the news of the Gallic revolt – which reached him on the anniversary of his mother's murder, while he was in Naples, and which he greeted with such calmness and self-assurance that people suspected he was actually delighted by it (since he would now be licensed, under the rules of war, to plunder some of the empire's wealthiest provinces) – he promptly went to the gymnasium, where he watched the athletes in competition with particular enthusiasm. Later, interrupted at dinner by a far more alarming communication, he did betray anger, but only to the degree that he

threatened the rebels with an awful vengeance. Eight days went by, and still he made no attempt to reply to letters or to give anyone commissions or commands, but instead drew a veil of silence over the whole business.

[41] Eventually, however, he was provoked by a stream of abusive edicts from Vindex into sending a letter to the senate urging them to avenge both him and the republic, and apologizing for his failure to attend the Senate House in person, which he blamed on a sore throat. What really infuriated him, however, was that Vindex slated his ability on the lyre, and called him Ahenobarbus rather than Nero: to this he responded by declaring that, since the name he had been born with was being used as a reproach, he would make it his own again, and drop his adoptive name; as for the rest of the abuse, he dismissed it, but the only grounds he offered for doing so was to marvel that he could possibly be accused of lacking skill in an art which he had taken such pains to refine and perfect, and would keep asking people one by one whether they knew of anyone who surpassed him. But then, once the urgent messages had begun to pile up, he returned to Rome in a state of panic (although, on the way there, he did have his spirits raised by seeing a monument decorated with a carving of a Gaul being trampled down by a Roman cavalryman, who was dragging the warrior by the hair – a slight and hardly telling omen, but one that made him jump for joy and give thanks to the heavens). Even then, however, he failed to address the senate and the people in person, but instead summoned some of Rome's leading men to his house, where, after a brief conference, he spent the rest of the day showing off some water organs that had been built to a revolutionary new design, pointing out the features of each one in turn,

explaining their workings and drawbacks, and promising to exhibit them all in the theatre – ‘If, that is,’ he added, ‘Vindex allows me.’

[42] But then he learned that Galba and the Spanish provinces had also declared against him, news which hit him so hard that he collapsed and lay for a long while unable to utter a word, as though he were on his deathbed – after which, coming to his senses, he tore his clothing and beat his head, declared that he was finished, and to his nurse, who had sought to comfort him by reminding him that his predecessors as *princeps* had experienced similar calamities, replied that there was no comparison, for he was suffering something unheard of and quite without precedent: the loss of the empire while he was still alive. Even so, he did not give up any of his habitual extravagances or indulgences, but carried on exactly as before. Indeed, whenever he received any good news from the provinces, he would host a spectacularly extravagant banquet, and mock the rebel leaders by singing rude songs about them, which he would accompany with obscene gestures (these songs ended up notorious); also, during the games, he would make secret visits to the theatre, and on one occasion, to an actor who had enjoyed a particular success, he sent the message, ‘You profit from the fact that I am too busy for the stage.’

[43] In the early days of the revolt he is believed to have formulated a large number of monstrous schemes (although nothing that would have qualified as out of character for him): to send new appointees to head the armies and govern the provinces, and to have the men they were replacing all murdered, on the grounds that they were joined in a single conspiracy against him; to massacre every exile across the entire span of the empire, to

prevent them from joining the rebels, and to butcher all the men of Gallic extraction in Rome, whom he suspected of backing their countrymen and of being in league with them; to have his armies lay waste the provinces of Gaul; to poison the entire senate at a series of banquets; and to unleash wild animals on the people of Rome, so that they would find it more difficult to defend themselves when in due course he set fire to the city. In the event, however, he was deterred from putting these plans into action, less because of any change of heart than because he despaired of making them work, and instead, in the conviction that he had no choice but to embark on a military campaign, took the place of the consuls by ousting them from office before their terms were complete and serving without a colleague: this because – so it was said – the provinces of Gaul were fated never to be brought to submission except by a consul. So he took up consular office, and as he was leaving the dining room after a banquet, leaning on the shoulders of his friends, declared that as soon as he had arrived in the province he would appear before the armies without weapons, and do nothing but weep, and then the following day, after the rebels had been brought to repent their mutiny, he would rejoice with them just as they were rejoicing, and sing them a victory ode – ‘a hymn which I really should be composing now’.

[44] His overriding concern, when preparing for his campaign, was to source wagons capable of transporting his stage machinery, to arm the prostitutes who were accompanying him with the axes and shields of Amazons, and to have their hair cut short like men’s. Next, he summoned the urban tribes to take the military oath of service – and when no one eligible reported for duty, he obliged slave-owners to supply a set number

of slaves, accepting only the best that each household had to offer and permitting no exemption even for stewards or secretaries.⁵⁷ He ordered people across the entire range of the classes recorded in the census to hand over a proportion of their wealth, obliged tenants in private houses and apartments to pay a year's rent, not to their landlords, but to the imperial treasury, and strictly upheld an obligation on people to pay in freshly minted coins of pure silver and certified gold, scorning to cut people any slack (this last stipulation provoked such a backlash that many openly refused to make any contribution at all, and instead demanded that informers be obliged to pay back whatever rewards they might have been given).

[45] He provoked even more hostility by exploiting the infrastructure for transporting grain to Rome in his own interests: for it so happened that, at a time when the masses were going hungry, a ship was reported to have come from Alexandria with a cargo of sand for the court wrestlers.

Unsurprisingly, then, he ended up arousing such universal detestation that there was no insult to which he was not subjected. A lock of hair⁵⁸ was placed on the head of a statue of his with a note in Greek: ‘Now at last you are facing a real contest – one you are bound to lose.’ A sack was tied round the neck of another of his statues, with this note attached to it: ““What else could I do?” “You deserve the sack.””⁵⁹ Graffiti scrawled on columns accused him of having woken up even the Gauls with his singing.⁶⁰ During the nights many people would pretend to be in a fight with their slaves, and keep shouting out that they needed a ‘Defender’ – which was what ‘Vindex’ meant.

[46] He was terrified as well by clear portents that he had been sent in the past, and continued to be sent: dreams, auguries, omens. He never used to dream until he killed his mother, but from the moment of her murder he would see himself, as he slept, steering a ship across a calm sea, and then abruptly the tiller would be wrenched from him; one night his wife Octavia dragged him into the most oppressive darkness imaginable, and a mass of flying ants submerged him beneath their swarming; another night, the representations of the various peoples conquered by Rome that stood in Pompey's Theatre surrounded him and stopped him in his tracks, and an Asturian horse, a particular favourite of his, was transformed into a monkey, all except for its head, and whinnied beautifully as though singing a song. The doors of the Mausoleum flew open of their own accord, and a voice was heard coming from its depths, summoning him by name. On the Kalends of January the Lares – which had been decorated in readiness for the sacrifice – toppled over. As he was taking the auspices, Sporus made him a gift of a ring that had carved on to its gemstone an image of the rape of Prosperina.⁶¹ When the vows for the safety of the emperor and the state were due to be taken, and a large crowd drawn from all the orders had assembled on the Capitol, the keys to the temple of Jupiter were found only after a frantic search. When a speech of his in which he condemned Vindex was being read out to the senate, everyone responded to his declaration that criminals would soon be made to pay, and get to meet their just deserts, by yelling out, ‘Yes, Augustus – you will do it!’ It was even noted that the theme of the song he had most recently sung in public was the exile of

Oedipus, and that its last line had been this: ‘Drive me to my death, wife, mother, father.’

[47] Meanwhile, when news reached him as he was having his lunch that other armies too had defected, he tore up the dispatches, overturned the table, and smashed to the ground two goblets of which he was particularly fond and which he called his ‘Homerics’, after the scenes from Homer’s poems that were engraved on them; then, having obtained from Lucusta a dose of poison which he placed in a small golden box, he sent his most trusted freedman to Ostia to ready his fleet, while he himself, going to the Servilian Gardens, tried to persuade the tribunes and centurions of the praetorian guard to join him in the evacuation. But when some equivocated, and some flatly refused, with one of them actually shouting at him, ‘Is it so very hard to die?’, he could not decide what to do next: whether to present himself as a suppliant to the Parthians, or perhaps to Galba,⁶² or to appear before the people on the Rostra dressed in mourning, and implore them in as piteous a manner as he could to forgive him his past offences, or perhaps – should he fail to change their minds – to beg them if he might not at least serve as the governor of Egypt. (A speech he had written in which he made his case was subsequently found in his writing desk, but it is believed that he was too scared of being torn to pieces before he could reach the Forum to deliver it.)

So he decided to postpone making a decision until the following day, but that night, waking up around midnight and realizing that his bodyguard of soldiers had abandoned him, he jumped out of bed and sent for his friends; then, when he got no reply from any of them, he went in person with a few

attendants to their quarters. The doors, though, were all locked, and no one answered him – so back he went to his own bedroom, where he discovered that now even the watchmen had fled and taken with them his bedclothes, which they had stripped from his bed, and removed the small box of poison. This prompted him immediately to try to track down the gladiator Spiculus, or indeed anyone else trained in giving a quick death; but then, unable to find anyone, he exclaimed, ‘So, I am a man who has neither friend nor foe, am I?’ and ran out, as though to hurl himself into the Tiber.

[48] Again, though, he changed his mind, and when, after he had decided that his best option would be to squirrel himself away in some bolthole where he could collect his thoughts, his freedman Phaon offered him the use of his villa, which stood between the Salarian Way⁶³ and the Nomentan Way some four miles outside Rome, he wrapped himself up in a faded cloak, and then, just as he was, barefoot and wearing nothing but a tunic, pulled the hood over his head, held a piece of cloth over his face and climbed on to his horse, accompanied only by four attendants, one of whom was Sporus. Struck with terror by a sudden earthquake and a flash of lightning full in his face, he heard soldiers shouting in the nearby camp that his own overthrow and Galba’s triumph were now inevitable; also, meeting with travellers on the road, he heard one of them say, ‘These men are after Nero’, while another asked them, ‘What news in Rome of Nero?’; then, when he let slip the piece of cloth from his face after his horse had started at the stench of a corpse left abandoned in the road, he was recognized by a retired praetorian, who gave him a salute. When they came to the lane that led to the villa, they let their horses go, and he followed a path overgrown

with reeds, struggling as he went to pick his way past bushes and brambles even when a cloak was laid out for him, until they reached a wall at the back of the house. Here there was a pit from which sand had been excavated, but when Phaon, the owner of the villa, urged him to shelter in it, he refused to do so, declaring that he would not go down into the earth while he remained alive; instead, as he waited for his companions to find a way inside that would enable him to enter unobserved, he scooped up a handful of water from a nearby pond and drank it, saying, ‘Yes, this is the signature drink of Nero.’⁶⁴ Then, after he had picked out the thorns from his cloak, which had been torn by the brambles, and crawled on all fours through the narrow passageway that had been dug out for him, he made his way into the villa, where, in the very first room he came to, he slumped down on a couch that had a thin pillow and an old cloak flung over it: here, despite his hunger, he spurned the coarse bread that was offered him, but did assuage his renewed thirst by sipping a little warm water.

[49] As one now, all his attendants urged him to place himself beyond the reach of the indignities that were closing in on him, and so he ordered them, as he watched, to dig a hole the size of his body, and at the same time to collect such fragments of marble as could be found, and to bring water and firewood ready for the disposal of what would very soon be his corpse; and as these things were being done so he wept, and cried repeatedly, ‘That I should die a mere artisan!’⁶⁵

When, during the delay caused by these preparations, a letter was brought to Phaon by courier, he snatched it from his freedman and learned by reading it that the senate had proclaimed him a public enemy, and ordered a

search made for him, so that he might be punished according to ‘the ancestral fashion’; and when, after asking what this punishment might be, he learned that a man put to it would be stripped naked, have his neck put into a fork and then be beaten to death with rods, so terror-stricken was he that he grabbed two daggers he had brought with him and tested the blades of both – after which, on the grounds that the fatal hour had not yet arrived, he put them away again. One moment he was urging Sporus to embark on lamentations and beatings of the breast, and the next begging someone to help him commit suicide by demonstrating to him how it was done – and all the while, reproaching himself for his slowness to act, he would mutter, saying these words: ‘The more I shame myself by staying alive, the more squalid will be my death. This is not worthy of Nero, not worthy at all – self-control in a situation like this is what it is all about – come on, then, be brave!’ And now the horsemen who had been commissioned to bring him back alive were drawing near. When he heard their approach, he said in a shaking voice, ‘The thundering of swift-footed horses echoes in my ears’⁶⁶ – whereupon, with the assistance of his secretary, Epaphroditus, he slit his throat. Although still on the margins of consciousness when a centurion came bursting in and, pretending to have come with the aim of helping him, held a cloak up to staunch his wound, he only muttered, ‘Too late!’ and ‘Such loyalty!’ With these words he died; and so fixedly did his eyeballs bulge from their sockets that onlookers were filled with horror and dread. The one promise above all others that he had extracted from his companions was that they would let no one behead him, but would find some way to ensure that his body, when it was cremated, was intact. To this

request Icelus, a freedman of Galba who had just been freed from the chains in which he had been bound at the start of the revolt, gave his assent.

[50] At his funeral, which cost 200,000 sesterces, his body was arrayed in the white robe embroidered with gold that he had worn to celebrate New Year. His ashes were placed in the ancestral tomb of the Domitians (which is located on the Hill of the Gardens,⁶⁷ and can be seen from the Campus Martius) by his two childhood nurses, Egloge and Alexandria, accompanied by his lover Acte. The sarcophagus inside the tomb is made of porphyry, the altar which stands above it is made of marble from Luna, and the wall surrounding it is made of stone from Thasos.

[51] He was a man of average height; his body was covered in spots, he suffered from poor personal hygiene and his hair was light blond; he was good-looking without exactly being handsome; his eyes were a greyish-blue, and lacked any sparkle; he had a fat neck, a protruding stomach and skinny legs; his health was good. (Indeed, despite the wild extravagance of his ways, he fell ill only three times in fourteen years – and even then not so badly as to lead him to give up wine or any other of his habits.) So shameless was he in his obsession with his own grooming and dress that he always had his hair teased into banks of curls, and on his tour of Greece actually sported a mullet; he was often seen in public with his tunic unbelted and his feet bare, dressed in the kind of robe that a woman might wear to dinner, and with a piece of cloth tied round his neck.

[52] As a boy he dabbled in almost all the liberal arts, but was steered away from the study of philosophy by his mother, who admonished him that it was incompatible with the exercise of power, and from any close

reading of the orators of old by Seneca, whose aim it was to ensure that he would remain an admirer of his teacher's own style of oratory for as long as possible. This is why he turned to poetry, which he wrote so fluently and effortlessly that some think – incorrectly – that he passed off other people's work as his own. Notebooks and papers of his have come into my possession that contain some of his best-known poems, are written in his own hand and clearly demonstrate that he was neither copying them nor having them dictated to him, for they very much bear the stamp of someone who was thinking as he wrote them, and exercising his own creativity: words variously crossed out, inserted and over-written. He also had no lack of enthusiasm for painting and sculpture.

[53] More than anything, however, he craved popularity, and viewed anyone who succeeded in arousing the enthusiasm of the masses, no matter how, as a rival. It is generally believed that, following his victories on the stage, he would – the next time the Olympic Games were held – have competed against the athletes: for, assiduous as he was in putting in the necessary training as a wrestler, he had made sure as well to watch athletics contests across the whole of Greece from the vantage point of the judges, sitting on the ground in the stadium, and pushing forwards with his own hands such pairs of wrestlers as might move too far away. Now that his singing had been compared to that of Apollo, and his skill with a chariot to that of the Sun, he felt that he was destined as well to emulate the exploits of Hercules (indeed, it is reported that a tame lion had been readied to appear with him before the gaze of the people in the amphitheatre, where,

fully nude, he would either have clubbed the beast to death or throttled it with his bare hands).

[54] Shortly before his death he made a public vow that, were he to keep his hold on power, he would perform in the games held to celebrate his victory on the water organ, the flute and the bagpipes, and that on the last day of the games he would appear as an actor, and tell the story of Virgil's Turnus⁶⁸ through the medium of dance. Some say that he had the actor Paris put to death as a dangerous rival.

[55] His ambition was for immortality and undying fame, but he pursued them in a most ill-advised manner, by depriving numerous things and places of their old names and giving them new ones derived from his own: so it was, for instance, that he called the month of April 'Neroneus'. He was also planning to rename Rome 'Neropolis'.

[56] He held the cults of the gods in contempt, all except that of the Syrian goddess,⁶⁹ and even hers he soon came to despise (so much so, indeed, that he defiled her statue by urinating on it): this he was prompted to do by his obsession with another superstition, the only one to which he clung through thick and thin, namely his conviction that a certain statuette of a girl would indeed, as the unknown plebeian who had pressed it on him claimed that it would, always keep him safe from plots (for no sooner had he been given it than a plot had been uncovered); as a result, he never ceased to revere the statuette as the very greatest of divinities, and as well as offering it three sacrifices a day wished people to believe that by its advice he was enabled to know the future. A few months before he died he

did attend an examination of entrails, but was unable to obtain a favourable reading from them.

[57] He died aged thirty-one, on the anniversary of Octavia's death, and such was the public rejoicing that the plebs ran all about the city wearing caps of the kind that are given to slaves when they are granted their freedom. Nevertheless, for a long time, there was no lack of people to decorate his tomb with spring and summer flowers, and sometimes they would bring a statue of him out on to the Rostra arrayed in a toga, and sometimes post his edicts as though he were still alive, and would be returning imminently to visit an awful vengeance on his foes. Even the ambassadors of Vologases, the king of the Parthians, when they appeared before the senate to renew their alliance, made an earnest request as well that the memory of Nero be honoured. In fact, twenty years later, when I myself was a young man, a person emerged from nowhere to claim, with much song and dance, that he was Nero: a name that still had such a resonance among the Parthians that they gave the imposter their enthusiastic backing, and could only with difficulty be persuaded to surrender him.

Galba

[1] That the bloodline of the Caesars was destined to be extinguished (as indeed it was with the death of Nero) had been signalled in all kinds of ways – and in two ways particularly. Years before, directly after Livia's marriage to Augustus, as she was returning to her villa near Veii, an eagle picked up a white hen that had a sprig of laurel in its beak, then dropped it (still holding the laurel) into her lap: this hen, after Livia had decided to rear it, and to plant the laurel, hatched such an immense brood of chicks that the villa today is known as ‘The Henhouse’; meanwhile the laurel tree not only grew large enough to supply the Caesars, on the occasion of their triumphs, with branches, but also inspired them, once each triumph was done, to plant another sprig of laurel in the same spot – and whenever a Caesar died, it was noted, the laurel tree that he had planted would lose its sap. Then, in the final year of Nero’s life, the entire grove withered right the way down to the roots, and the hens all died; meanwhile, at much the same time, the temple of the Caesars¹ was struck by lightning, all the statues instantaneously lost their heads, and the sceptre was dashed from Augustus’ hands.

[2] Galba, who succeeded Nero, was not even distantly related to the house of the Caesars, but there can be no question that he was a man of impeccably noble breeding, descended from a family so old and

distinguished that he always made sure to include in the inscriptions on his statues the fact that he was the great-grandson of Quintus Catulus Capitolinus, and that, once he had become emperor, he displayed in his entrance hall a family tree which traced his father's ancestry back to Jupiter and his mother's to Pasiphae, the wife of Minos.

[3] To provide sketches of all the people who featured on this family tree would take far too long, so I shall confine myself instead to giving a brief account of his immediate family. The identity of the first Sulpicius to have used 'Galba' as his *cognomen* is unclear – so too why or how he acquired it. Some think it derives from the way in which, after a protracted siege, he finally succeeded in capturing a town in Spain by setting fire to it with torches that had been smeared in the resin of a Syrian plant called *galbanum*; others from the repeated use he made during a lengthy illness of a *galbeus*, a woollen bandage containing medicines; others from the Gallic word *galba*, which means 'fat' (because – supposedly – he was overweight); and others yet from *galbae*, insects that live in oak trees (because – on the contrary – he was skinny). The consul Servius Galba, who was the most brilliant orator of his day, brought great distinction to his family – even though, during his term as governor of Spain following his praetorship, he is said to have provoked Viriathus into going to war by treacherously massacring 30,000 Lusitanians.² His grandson served in Gaul as one of Julius Caesar's officers, but then, incensed by Caesar's failure to help him secure the consulship, joined the conspiracy led by Cassius and Brutus, for which he was condemned by the Pedian law. His son was the emperor Galba's grandfather, and his grandson the emperor's

father. The grandfather, a man who failed to rise beyond the rank of praetor but did publish a voluminous and carefully researched history, was more distinguished as a scholar than as a holder of public office; but the father, as well as becoming consul, was also – despite being only an average orator, and a hunchback of diminutive stature to boot – a fixture in the law courts. He was married twice: first to Mummia Achaica, the granddaughter of Catulus and great-granddaughter of Lucius Mummius, the man who destroyed Corinth;³ then to Livia Ocellina, a woman of great wealth and beauty, but who is believed, for all that, to have been prompted by his noble birth into taking the initiative in proposing marriage (indeed, she is said, when he responded to her advances by stripping in private for her and showing her his deformity, so that no one could ever accuse him of having kept her in the dark about it, to have pursued him only the more). He had two sons by Achaica, Gaius and Servius: the elder of these, Gaius, left Rome after having squandered the greater part of his inheritance, and then, when Tiberius prevented his name from being added to the draw in the year that he was due to hold a proconsulship, killed himself.

[4] The emperor Servius Galba was born nine days before the Kalends of January, during the consulship of Marcus Valerius Messala and Gnaeus Lentulus,⁴ in a villa near Terracina, on top of the hill which rises to the left of the road that leads to Fundi: here he was adopted by his stepmother Livia, whose name he took, together with the *cognomen* Ocella, and a new first name, Lucius, which he used instead of Servius from that time onwards until he usurped the rule of the empire. Everybody knows the story of how, when he was still a boy and went with his peers to pay his respects to

Augustus, the *princeps* pinched his cheek and said in Greek, ‘You too, my child, will have a little taste of this power I wield.’ Tiberius, however, on learning that he would become emperor but only in old age, commented, ‘Well, then, why should I worry? Let him live.’ Similarly, when his grandfather was performing an expiatory sacrifice following a strike by lightning, and an eagle happened to snatch the entrails out of the old man’s hands and carry them to an oak festooned with acorns, the response of his grandfather to those who interpreted this as a portent that the family would attain the summit of power (but late) was to laugh and say, ‘No doubt – when a mule has a foal!’⁵ Later on, when Galba was weighing up whether to rebel or not, nothing did more to sway him than the fact that a mule had just given birth: for whereas others were appalled by what they saw as a terrible omen, he alone – remembering his grandfather’s comment at the sacrifice – interpreted it as propitious.

When he first put on an adult’s toga, he dreamed that Fortune told him how weary she was of standing at his door, and that unless he quickly let her in she would fall prey to the first person who happened to come along; accordingly, when he woke, opened the front door and found there next to the threshold a bronze statue of the goddess, more than a cubit tall, he carried it in his arms to the villa in Tusculum where he spent his summers: here he converted one of the rooms into a shrine to the goddess, and honoured it from that moment on with a monthly sacrifice, and an annual all-night vigil. Even as a young man, he sternly upheld a custom originating so far back in Rome’s past that it had fallen out of use everywhere except in his house, whereby his freedmen and slaves were obliged, twice a day, to

attend him in a group, and one by one to offer him their best wishes every morning, and to bid him good night every evening.

[5] Among the liberal studies to which he applied himself was the law. He also fathered a family, as was his duty, although after losing his wife Lepida and their two sons he remained single, and nothing could tempt him into marrying again (not even the importunities of Agrippina,⁶ who had no sooner been left a widow by the death of Domitius than she began to pursue the still-married Galba with such transparent determination that on one occasion, when the wives of various distinguished men had met up, Lepida's mother not only rebuked her sharply, but actually gave her a slap). There was no one for whom he felt a greater respect than Livia Augusta: he profited immensely from her favour while she was still alive, and then, when she died, almost inherited a fortune by the terms of her will. Indeed, the sum of 50,000 sesterces that she left him was her single largest bequest, but Tiberius, who was her heir, reduced it to 5,000, on the grounds that the sum had not been written out but expressed as numerals – and even then, he never received the 5,000.

[6] He first held public office before he was legally licensed to do so, and as praetor introduced to the games held in honour of the goddess Flora – for which he had responsibility – the novel spectacle of elephants walking a tightrope; next he governed the province of Aquitania for almost a year; then, soon afterwards, he served for six months as one of the two consuls who gave their names to the year⁷ (by coincidence, his predecessor as consul had been Lucius Domitius, the father of Nero, and his successor was Salvius Otho, the father of Otho: a portent – or at least so it seemed – of

what would happen years later, when his reign as emperor would be flanked by the reigns of the respective sons of these two men). Appointed governor of Upper Germany by Gaius Caesar in place of Gaetulicus, and arriving to take command of the legions, he had been there only a day when he banned the soldiers from applauding at the games that happened to be on at the time: this he did by issuing them with written instructions to keep their hands beneath their cloaks, a measure which immediately prompted everyone in the camp to chant, ‘Soldiers, learn to be soldiers! This is Galba, not Gaetulicus!’ He was equally stern-faced when it came to requests for leave of absence. He toughened up both veterans and raw recruits by putting them through intensive training, wasted no time in beating back some barbarians whose incursions had taken them as far as Gaul, and made such a good impression on Gaius when the *princeps* visited Germany that, of all the countless troops assembled from across every province, there was no army more highly commended or lavishly rewarded than his (he also won particular distinction by holding a shield while directing a military drill, and then running alongside the emperor’s chariot for twenty miles).

[7] Although there were many, when the news of Caligula’s assassination arrived, who urged him to capitalize on the crisis, he opted instead to sit it out. As a result he stood in such high favour with Claudius that he became part of the emperor’s innermost circle, and was held in great respect: so much so, indeed, that when he took unexpectedly to his sickbed just as the invasion of Britain was due to be launched, it was postponed to a later date, even though he was really not very ill at all. He served two years as proconsul of Africa, a post to which he was appointed, not by lot, but with a

specific mandate to bring order to a province that was convulsed by internal dissension and barbarian raids – order which he duly secured by combining strict discipline with a concern for providing justice even in the most insignificant matters. During one campaign, when provisions were very short, and a soldier was accused of having sold for 100 denarii a measure of wheat hoarded from the allotted ration, he instructed that no one was to help the soldier when his own food ran short, and so the man ended up starving to death. On another occasion, when he was asked to adjudicate in court on the disputed ownership of a draught animal, and both the arguments and the witnesses on either side were so unreliable that he found it difficult to arrive at the truth, he decreed that the beast should be blindfolded and taken to where it was normally watered, and then, once it had drunk and the blindfold been removed, be given to whichever of the two plaintiffs it followed.

[8] Thanks to his achievements both in Africa during this period and previously in Germany, he was awarded triumphal regalia and promoted to membership of three priesthoods, the Board of Fifteen and the colleges of Titius⁸ and Augustus; from then on he spent most of his time in retirement, never setting out on a journey (not even for recreational purposes) unless accompanied by a second vehicle loaded down with a million sesterces in gold, until, roughly midway through Nero's principate, at a time when he was kicking his heels in Fundi, he was offered the governorship of Nearer Spain. Here, following his arrival in the province, it so happened that he was making sacrifice in a temple before the full gaze of the public, and the hair of one of the attendants, a young boy who was holding an incense box,

suddenly turned white all over: an incident interpreted by not a few people to signify that a change of regime was at hand, with an older man (Galba) destined to replace a younger one (Nero). Then, not long afterwards, a thunderbolt hit the Lake of Cantabria and twelve axes were found in its waters: unmistakable tokens of supreme rule over the empire.

[9] He governed the province for eight years, in a manner that was both inconsistent and capricious – and initially so intent was he on punishing certain offences that his energies could verge on the excessive. He cut off the hands of a fraudulent money changer, for instance, and nailed them to the man's counting table; he also sentenced a second person, a guardian who, standing to inherit a ward's property, had poisoned the boy, to crucifixion – and when the man sought the protection of the law by providing proof of Roman citizenship, he pretended that by ordering one cross to be raised higher than all the others, and having it painted white, he was granting the wretch a measure of dignity that would serve to ease and mitigate the punishment.⁹ Over time, however, because he was anxious not to give Nero any grounds for suspicion, he lapsed into idleness and torpor: for, as he used to observe, 'No one is obliged to give an account of himself when he has been doing nothing.'

It was in New Carthage, where he was holding the assizes, that he learned of the uprising in the Gallic provinces, and received the appeal for assistance from the governor of Aquitania. Then came letters from Vindex, calling upon him to shoulder the role of the defender and champion of the human race. He barely hesitated before accepting the invitation, prompted by a mixture of dread and hope. On the one hand, you see, he had

intercepted the orders sent by Nero to his procurators, instructing them to assassinate him; equally, his confidence in some highly favourable portents and omens was further boosted by the predictions of a well-bred young virgin: predictions which in turn were lent even greater credibility when the priest of Jupiter in Clunia, prompted by a dream, unearthed in the temple's innermost shrine identical verses, delivered two centuries previously by a girl with a similar gift for prophecy, in which it was signified that in time to come a *princeps* would rise in Spain and rule as master of the world.

[10] So it was that, in the way a governor does when manumitting a slave, he climbed the tribunal, where laid out before him were as many portrait busts as could be found of those whom Nero had convicted and executed, while standing by his side was a boy of noble birth whom he had summoned specifically for the purpose from the nearby Balearic Isles, to which the child had been exiled; then, after he had lambasted the evils of the age, and been hailed as emperor, he professed himself merely the legate of the senate and people of Rome. Next, once he had declared the suspension of public business, he augmented his standing army (which consisted of a legion, two units of cavalry and three cohorts) by conscripting provincials from the lower orders to serve in additional legionary and auxiliary units, and recruiting the oldest and most experienced of the leading provincials to a kind of senate, which he then consulted on matters of importance whenever the situation might require it. He also chose young men of equestrian status to serve him as guards in his private quarters in place of soldiers: these, whom he termed 'volunteers', he permitted to keep the gold rings which were the symbols of their rank and

were customarily surrendered when entering military service. He also had edicts proclaimed throughout the province, exhorting individuals and communities to join the insurrection as one, and to aid the common cause in whatever way they could. At much the same time, while the town which he had chosen as his military headquarters was being fortified, the discovery was made of a ring of ancient workmanship, with a carving on its gemstone of the goddess Victory holding a trophy; then, no sooner had this been found than a ship from Alexandria docked at Dertosa, empty of captain, crew or passengers but loaded with arms, thereby leaving no one in any doubt that the projected war was a just one, and that those taking part in it were doing their duty as required by the gods – except that then, all of a sudden, the entire undertaking came unexpectedly almost to grief.

First, one of the two units of cavalry, repenting its change of allegiance, attempted to desert him as he was approaching the camp, and was only with difficulty won back to his cause; additionally, some slaves who had been given to him by one of Nero's freedmen, but were in fact double agents, would surely have succeeded in their plot to assassinate him as he was going along a narrow passageway to the baths, but gave the game away when they were overheard urging one another not to let the opportunity slip, and then, when asked what precisely they had meant by 'opportunity', were put to torture and brought to confess everything.

[11] The mood of crisis was further exacerbated by the death of Vindex,¹⁰ which he found the most unsettling blow of all, and plunged him into such depths of despair that he almost took his own life. When, however, messengers arrived from Rome with the news that Nero was dead

and that everyone in the city had sworn allegiance to him, he resigned the title of ‘legate’, adopted that of ‘Caesar’, and then, arrayed in a general’s cloak and with a dagger slung like a necklace from his neck, embarked on the journey back. Indeed, he did not resume wearing a toga until he had successfully crushed all those agitating against him: in Rome, the praetorian prefect Nymphidius Sabinus; in Germany the governor Fonteius Capito; and in Africa the governor Clodius Macer.

[12] He was preceded by a reputation for cruelty and greed: he was said to have imposed a swingeing tribute on those communities in the provinces of Spain and Gaul which had hesitated before backing him, and even, in some cases, to have torn down their walls, and to have condemned their governors and the resident imperial officials, together with their wives and children, to capital punishment; it was claimed as well that when the people of Tarragonensis presented him with a fifteen-pound golden crown from the ancient temple of Jupiter, and he discovered, after having had it melted down, that it was three ounces short, he demanded they make up the shortfall. No sooner had he arrived in Rome than this reputation of his was confirmed and consolidated. For example: when he ordered some marines promoted by Nero to serve as sworn soldiers back to the rowing benches, and they refused, taking their obstinacy so far as to demand an eagle and military standards, he not only sent in the cavalry to break them up, but actually had them decimated; similarly, he disbanded the cohort of Germans that had long served the Caesars as a bodyguard with immense and repeatedly proven loyalty, and sent them back to their native land without any bonus (this he did because he believed they had been siding with

Gnaeus Dolabella, whose gardens lay adjacent to their camp). Other stories too – which may or may not have been true, but made him seem ridiculous – were bandied about: that when a particularly sumptuous meal was laid before him, he audibly groaned; that when the steward he had appointed to draw up his accounts presented him with the figures, he rewarded the man for his conscientiousness and attention to detail by offering him a plate of beans; and that when Canus the flute-player delighted him with a stunning recital, he personally opened his own cash box and handed the musician five denarii.

[13] For these reasons people did not particularly welcome him: something made clear when, at the first games to be staged in the city following his arrival in Rome, at an Atellan farce, everyone in the audience greeted the well-known chorus ‘Onesimus is coming from his country estate’¹¹ by singing along to the rest of the verse, complete with appropriate gestures, and then repeating it several times over, starting from the opening line.

[14] His popularity and prestige were greater when he was winning power than when he was wielding it – although he did give numerous indications that he was likely to prove an outstanding *princeps*.¹² These, however, failed to win him approval sufficient to outweigh the hostility which he provoked by actions of an opposite order.

He was very much under the thumb of three men, who lived with him on the Palatine, and therefore, because he was never seen without them, and was always swayed by their opinion, were popularly nicknamed his tutors. These three were: Titus Vinius, who had served with him as an officer in

Spain, and was a man of inordinate greed; Cornelius Laco, who had risen from serving as an assistant in the law courts to become prefect of the praetorian guard, and whose arrogance and indolence were insufferable; and Icelus, a freedman of his who had only recently been honoured with promotion to equestrian rank and the *cognomen* Marcianus, but was already eyeing up the highest office permitted an equestrian to hold.¹³ It was the measure of how badly he allowed himself to be manipulated and abused by these men, each with their own distinctive flaws, that his own behaviour lost all consistency, so that sometimes he would be stricter and more tight-fisted than was appropriate to a *princeps* such as himself, who had been chosen by the people and was very old, and sometimes easier-going and more spendthrift.

He condemned without a hearing, and on minimal suspicion, distinguished men of both the senatorial and the equestrian orders. He rarely made grants of Roman citizenship, and hardly ever bestowed the privileges that were the legal right of every citizen who had fathered three children – once or twice at most, and even then only for a limited and specified time. When the five panels of judges begged him to appoint a sixth panel, he not only refused but revoked the privilege granted them by Claudius of not being summoned to serve as judges during the winter and at the beginning of the year.¹⁴

[15] It is reckoned too that he planned to limit the term of a senator or equestrian in office to a couple of years, and only to bestow posts on people who were either reluctant to accept them or had explicitly turned them down. He revoked nine-tenths of the gifts handed out by Nero, and

appointed a panel of fifty Roman knights to help him reclaim them: should any actor or athlete have sold a gift and spent the proceeds, and prove unable to make up the shortfall, then – so he specified – it was to be confiscated from the person who had bought the gift. Conversely, however, there was nothing he would not allow his associates and freedmen either to sell for financial gain or to dispose of as a favour: immunity from taxation, punishments imposed on the innocent, free passes issued to the guilty. Indeed, when the Roman people demanded that Halotus and Tigellinus, the most malign of all Nero's creatures, be made to pay for their crimes, not only did he leave them unpunished, but he actually honoured Halotus with an extremely prestigious financial posting and issued an edict on behalf of Tigellinus, condemning the people for their harassment of the man.

[16] Measures like these led to his becoming unpopular with every level of society – but especially with the military. The reason for this was that, although the soldiers had been promised by their officers a larger donative than usual if they swore allegiance to him, he had been absent from Rome at the time, and rather than ratify the promise he had instead kept insisting that it was his habit to levy men, not to buy them: behaviour which lost him the support of soldiers everywhere across the empire. Additionally, he provoked particular alarm and indignation among the praetorians by periodically disbanding large numbers of them on suspicion of being partisans of Nymphidius. Loudest of all, however, were the complaints of the army in Upper Germany, which felt that it had been cheated of the rewards that were its due for its service against the Gauls and Vindex. Its soldiers, then, were the first to break out into open mutiny, which they did

by refusing to take the oath of allegiance on the Kalends of January to anyone except the senate, and by sending an immediate delegation to the praetorians with the message that, since they had no liking for the emperor who had been made in Spain, the praetorians themselves should choose another one whom all the armies could back.

[17] This news reaching him, he jumped to the conclusion that it was his childlessness rather than his old age that was being held against him, and so immediately picked out from the crowd of people who came to pay him their respects every morning Piso Frugi Licinianus, a distinguished young nobleman whom he had long held in such respect that, every time he made his will, he would designate the young man as heir both to his estate and to his name – and yet even now, despite addressing Piso as his son and escorting him to the praetorian camp, where he adopted the young man before the assembled ranks of the guard, he still he made no mention to the soldiers of any bonus for them. This, of course, six days after the adoption, only made it easier for Marcus Salvius Otho to succeed in his bid for power.

[18] Terrible and numerous were the signs which, right from the beginning of his principate, had served to presage how he would die. On his way to Rome, as animals were being sacrificed in towns to the left and right of the road he was taking, a bull, struck by an axe, was so maddened by the blow that it broke free of its chains, charged his chariot and then, rising up on its hind legs, spattered him all over with blood; similarly, when he stepped down from the vehicle, one of his bodyguards was jostled by the crowd, so that he was almost skewered by the man's lance. Also, as he made his way into Rome and then again on to the Palatine, he was greeted

by an earthquake and a sound like lowing cattle. Even clearer portents then followed. When he decided, on the spur of the moment, that a necklace fashioned out of pearls and precious stones, which he had picked out from the imperial treasury specifically as something with which to adorn his statue of Fortune at Tusculum, deserved instead to be presented to Venus, on the grounds that her temple on the Capitol was an altogether more august location, he dreamed the very next night that the statue of Fortune appeared to him, complaining that she had been cheated of a gift that was properly hers, and threatening in turn to take back what she had given to him; terrified by this dream, he sent servants ahead of him to Tusculum to make preparations for a sacrifice, and then, at first light, hurried there himself at top speed, desperate to avert the curse – but he found nothing on the altar save for some warm ashes, and next to it an old man dressed in black, holding incense in a glass dish and wine in an earthenware bowl. It was also observed how the wreath fell from his head as he was making sacrifice on the Kalends of January, and how the sacred chickens flew away as he was taking the auspices;¹⁵ additionally, when his attendants were readying the tribunal for his address to the soldiers on the day of Piso's adoption, they forgot to place his camp chair there in its customary position, while in the senate his curule chair was set up facing the wrong way. On the morning of his murder, as he was making sacrifice, a soothsayer repeatedly warned him to be on his guard, since his assassins were not far off.

[19] Not long after this he was informed that Otho had gained control of the praetorian camp, but although there were plenty who sought to persuade him to head there as fast as he could (on the grounds that, his prestige being

what it was, he had a good chance of success were he to be physically present) he took no measures beyond holding his position and reinforcing it by assembling from the various barracks that were scattered across the city a garrison of legionaries. He also put on a cuirass – although, since it was only a linen one, he did not bother to pretend that this would offer him much protection against any rain of swords. He was lured out, however, by false reports purposely circulated by the conspirators to persuade him to appear in public (indeed, a few among his own partisans likewise insisted that the matter had been settled and the rebels crushed); and so, confident that the people bearing down on him were not mutineers, but were instead coming to offer him both their congratulations and their complete obedience, he not only went forwards to meet them but actually reproved a soldier who had boasted of killing Otho by demanding to know on whose authority this had been done, before continuing on his way as far as the Forum. There, the horsemen who had been charged with killing him and had been galloping through the crowded streets of the city, sending civilians scattering, caught sight of him in the distance, and briefly reined in their horses; then, making speed to where he stood abandoned by his friends, they hacked him down.

[20] Some report that, at their first approach, he cried out, ‘What are you doing, my brothers-in-arms? I am yours, and you are mine’, and even promised them a bonus. The general consensus, however, is that he put up no resistance but instead bared his throat and encouraged them to do their worst: ‘Strike, if you think you must.’ It has to be acknowledged as a very curious fact that no one in his escort sought to help their emperor, and that

of all those called to his rescue the only ones who did not scorn the summons were a detachment of soldiers from one of the German legions. These, out of gratitude to him for the immense concern he had shown them when they were sick and wounded, came flying to his assistance, but were led by their unfamiliarity with the streets to take a roundabout route and arrived too late.

He was killed next to the Lacus Curtius and left lying there just as he had fallen, until a common soldier, returning from the distribution of corn doles, lowered his sack of grain and cut off the head from the corpse: this, because it had no hair for him to hold on to, the soldier initially hid under his cloak, but it did not take him long to insert his thumb into the mouth and carry it by that means to Otho. Otho then gave it to his servants and camp-followers, who stuck it on a spear and paraded it around the camp, jeering and chanting repeatedly, ‘Galba, you pretty boy, you must find it hot being so young!’ (This joke made mocking play with an anecdote that had been circulating for several days, namely that, when someone had praised him for his good looks, and insisted that he appeared still to be in the bloom of youth, he had answered, ‘My strength as yet is unimpaired.’¹⁶) A freedman of Patrobius Neronianus¹⁷ then bought the head from them for 100 gold pieces and flung it on to the place where his master, on Galba’s orders, had been put to death. Finally, late that night, Argivus, the dead man’s steward, gave both his head and the rest of his body burial in his private gardens next to the Aurelian Way.

[21] He was a man of medium height, almost totally bald, with blue eyes and a hooked nose, and suffered so badly from arthritis in both his hands

and his feet that he could not bear to wear shoes for any length of time, nor to unroll a book, nor even to hold one. Also, he had a fleshy growth on the right side of his body which hung down so far that he found it hard to keep contained within a bandage.

[22] He is said to have been a heavy eater (so much so, indeed, that in winter he would actually breakfast before it was light, while at dinner his plate would be piled so high that he would have his leftovers carried around in large handfuls and distributed among the attendants who had been waiting on him at table), and to have preferred sex with males (although only with fully grown, well-muscled ones). People claim that when Icelus, one of his long-term favourites, brought the news of Nero's death to Spain, he not only rained kisses upon the man in the full view of everyone, but begged him to have his body hair plucked at once, then took him to one side.

[23] He died in his seventy-third year, seven months after becoming *princeps*. The senate, as soon as it was safe to do so, voted him a statue, which was intended to stand on top of a column decorated with ships' beaks marking the spot in the Forum where he had been murdered – but this decree was countermanded by Vespasian, who believed that he had sent assassins from Spain to Judaea to murder him.

Otho

[1] The ancestors of Otho came from the town of Ferentium, and belonged to an ancient and illustrious family, although his grandfather, Marcus Salvius Otho – who was the son of a Roman knight and a mother whose background was so humble that it is possible she was not even freeborn – only became a senator thanks to the patronage of Livia Augusta, in whose household he had been raised (and even then he failed to rise beyond the rank of praetor). His father, Lucius Otho, was descended on his mother's side from some very distinguished forebears, and was extremely well connected – indeed, so fond of him was Tiberius, and so alike were the two men in appearance, that many believed him to be the *princeps'* son. Whether serving as a magistrate in Rome, or as the proconsul of Africa, or in the various extraordinary commands to which he was appointed, he discharged his responsibilities with an exacting degree of rigour. In Illyricum he even went so far as to execute some soldiers who, repenting their disloyalty during the attempt made by Camillus to topple Claudius, had killed their officers to punish them for their role (as the soldiers saw it) in instigating the rebellion – and this he did not only in front of his own headquarters, but in the full knowledge that Claudius had promoted the men for the very same reason that he was having them put to death. This action

served simultaneously to boost his reputation and to diminish his standing at court – but it did not take him long to be restored to Claudius’ favour, for it was thanks to him that the treachery of a Roman knight, who had been plotting to murder the emperor, was exposed, when the scheme was betrayed to him by the indiscretion of the man’s slaves. Because of this he was granted by the senate that rarest of honours, a statue on the Palatine, and was enrolled as a patrician by Claudius, who praised him in the most effusive terms – indeed, the emperor rounded off the speech by declaring, ‘It is more than I dare dream that my own children should prove better than this man.’ By Albia Terentia, a woman with a very distinguished pedigree, he had two sons, Lucius Titianus (who was the elder) and Marcus (to whom he gave his own *cognomen*); he also had a daughter, whom he betrothed the moment she came of age to Drusus, the son of Germanicus.

[2] The emperor Otho was born four days before the Kalends of May, in the consulship of Camillus Arruntius and Domitius Ahenobarbus.¹ Right from his earliest youth he was ill-disciplined and rowdy: so much so, indeed, that his father would regularly whip him much as a slave might be whipped, for report has it that he would roam the streets by night, not just beating up those he ran into who might be too puny or drunk to put up a fight, but humiliating them as well. Subsequently, following his father’s death, he wormed his way into the favour of a freedwoman who, although so old as virtually to be decrepit, nevertheless wielded great influence at the court: all the incentive he needed to pretend to be in love with her. Then, once he had exploited his relationship with the freedwoman to ingratiate himself with Nero, he found it a simple matter to become the emperor’s best

friend: partly because they were so similar in character, but also, it is alleged, because they were in the habit of abusing each other sexually. Such power did he end up wielding at court that on one occasion, after pocketing a bribe to intercede on behalf of a former consul who had been convicted of extortion, he did not even bother to wait for the man's senatorial status to be restored to him before bringing him into the Senate House to give thanks to Nero.

[3] He was privy to all Nero's schemes and secrets: on the day appointed for the murder of Agrippina, for instance, he invited both mother and son to a splendidly lavish dinner party, so that Agrippina would not suspect what was being planned; also, he took part in a sham marriage to Poppaea Sabina, who had been obliged to separate from her husband by Nero, her lover, and entrusted to him for safe keeping – but then, not only did he seduce Poppaea himself, but fell so madly in love with her that he could not bear the thought that even Nero might get to sleep with her as well.² Beyond doubt, it is also widely believed that, as well as refusing entry to the messengers who had been sent to fetch her, he also on one occasion actually barred Nero himself, who was left to stand at the front door alternately threatening and imploring him to no effect, and demanding back the prize which had been given to him in trust. This was why, once the marriage had been annulled, Nero disposed of him by packing him off to govern Lusitania: a punishment with which the emperor had to be content, since anything harsher would have risked making the whole ludicrous display public, even though, as it happened, the following couplet did serve to broadcast it:

Why, you ask, is Otho packed off to take up a bogus post?

Because he embarked on an affair with his own wife.

For ten years he governed his province, despite never having held any office higher than that of quaestor: a term during which he displayed great moderation and restraint.

[4] When the opportunity came for him at last to get his own back, he was the first to rally to Galba's cause, even though, at the same time, he was coming to nurture high hopes of winning the empire himself, prompted both by the circumstances of the times and more particularly by assurances given to him by Seleucus, an astrologer who, having already foretold him that he would outlive Nero, now turned up unexpectedly and without invitation to promise him something more: that in a short while he would become emperor. This was why he let slip no opportunity to flatter or to curry popularity with everyone he could, handing out a gold coin to each member of the cohort that stood guard whenever he invited the *princeps* to supper, and going to great efforts to ensure that every soldier was in some way or other placed in his debt. (On one occasion, for instance, he was asked to adjudicate in a legal dispute between a soldier and the soldier's neighbour over a particular plot of land, and he bought up the entire property so that he could make a gift of it to the soldier.) The result was that very few in the ranks of the military did not inwardly feel and openly declare that he and he alone deserved to succeed to the empire.

[5] He daily waited for news that his hopes of being adopted by Galba were met. But when the elevation of Piso served instead to dash them, his feelings of resentment combined with the scale of his debts to turn his

thoughts to armed insurrection. Certainly, he did not disguise the fact that he had no chance of remaining on his own two feet unless he became *princeps*, and that it made no difference to him whether he fell in battle at the hands of an enemy or in the Forum at the hands of his creditors. Just a few days previously he had managed to squeeze a million sesterces out of a slave in the imperial household by procuring the man a stewardship – and it was this sum that he used to fund his great undertaking.³ Initially, he entrusted preparations for the coup to five members of his bodyguard, and then, when each of these had nominated two further conspirators, amounting to ten in all, he gave each one 10,000 sesterces in ready cash, together with a promise of 50,000 more. These were the men who served in turn to recruit further conspirators (although not an excessive number, since he never doubted that he would win plenty of backing once matters came to a head).

[6] His plan in the wake of Piso's adoption had been to seize control of the praetorian camp immediately, and to attack Galba as the emperor was dining on the Palatine; but he decided against this out of consideration for the cohort that was on guard at the time, and which – because it had also been on duty when Gaius was assassinated and Nero deserted – would have suffered a further blackening of its reputation had he gone ahead. The intervening period as well was ruled out by unfavourable omens, and on the advice of Seleucus. Accordingly, on the chosen day, after telling his co-conspirators to wait for him in the Forum, by the Golden Milestone⁴ next to the temple of Saturn, he went to pay his morning respects to Galba: here, after he had been greeted with the customary kiss, he attended on the

emperor as sacrifice was being made before listening to the predictions of the soothsayer. Then, when a freedman delivered him the message that had been agreed upon as a signal ('the architects are waiting'), he withdrew, giving as his excuse that he had to inspect a house that was up for sale, and hurried out of the palace through a back door to the agreed meeting place. (Others, however, say that he pretended to have a fever, and asked those standing next to him to give this as his excuse, should anyone ask where he was.) He promptly hid in a woman's litter and had himself carried at top speed to the praetorian camp, before climbing out when the bearers began to flag, and starting to run – but then, the moment he paused to tie his shoelace, he was lifted up by his companions on to their shoulders, hailed by them as emperor, and brought by them amid cheers, cries of 'Good luck!' and drawn swords to the camp headquarters, followed by all the people who had met him on the way and joined the cavalcade as though, all along, they had been accomplices in the conspiracy and now were doing their bit. While in the camp he sent a death squad to dispose of Galba and Piso, and summoned the soldiers on to the parade ground, where he won their backing by means of just a single promise: that he would keep for himself only what they left him.

[7] It was already late in the day by the time he entered the Senate House and delivered a short speech in which, giving his account of what had happened, he explained that he had been snatched from the streets and forced to take over the rule of the empire; then, having assured the senate that he planned to be guided in his rule of the empire by the broadest possible spread of opinion, he headed to the Palatine. When, on top of all

the other congratulations and compliments with which he was being hailed by assorted flatterers, he was called ‘Nero’ by the dregs of the underclass, he gave no evidence of disapproval, but quite the contrary, went so far as to include it as a *cognomen* both on the commissions issued under his name and on the initial letters that he sent out to various provincial governors – or so at any rate people report. It is certainly the case that he allowed busts and statues of Nero to be put back up, restored to their posts the financial officials and freedmen who had been appointed by the dead emperor, and allocated 50,000 sesterces – the first expenditure he authorized as emperor – to complete the Golden House.

That very night, it is said, he had a dream so terrifying that his screams brought attendants running to his bedroom, where he was found lying on the floor trying to propitiate with every rite he could the shade of Galba, who in his dream he had seen overthrow him and drive him from power; also, the following day, when a storm blew up as he was taking the auspices and he suffered a bad fall, he kept muttering to himself, ‘What business of mine are long pipes?’⁵

[8] Meanwhile, at much the same time, the army in Germany was swearing allegiance to Vitellius. When he learned this, he had the senate send a delegation to the mutineers informing them that a *princeps* had already been chosen, and to urge on them a spirit of calm and unity; nevertheless, he simultaneously sent agents to Vitellius with letters in which he proposed to divide the empire between them, and to marry Vitellius’ daughter. There was to be no stemming the onset of war, however – and as the advance guard dispatched by Vitellius under their various commanders

drew near, so the praetorians demonstrated their devotion and loyalty to him in a manner that almost culminated in the massacre of the senate. One nightfall, you see, when a band of marines began removing a stash of weapons that it had been agreed was to be transferred from the praetorian camp and transported by sea, and some of the soldiers, suspecting treachery, began to riot, it needed no ringleaders to emerge among the praetorians for all of them to start demanding the heads of the senators and surging towards the Palatine: there they variously killed or put to flight some tribunes who had sought to block their way, with the result that by the time they came bursting into the dining room, crying out for the emperor, and refusing to leave until they had seen him with their own eyes, they were spattered with blood.

So energetic was he when embarking on his campaign that he quite neglected the dimension of the supernatural, with the result that ‘energetic’ ended up as ‘headstrong’: he ignored something viewed as inauspicious from time immemorial, namely that the sacred shields had been brought out from the temple of Mars but not yet returned there;⁶ likewise, he set out from Rome on the very day that the priests of the Mother of the Gods⁷ start to wail and beat their heads in grief, and at a time when the auspices were truly terrible. Even when he did read favourable omens in the entrails of an animal, the sacrifice was one that he had made to the lord of the Underworld,⁸ meaning that the favourable omens were in fact unfavourable; also, his initial departure from the city was hindered when the Tiber burst its banks, while at the twentieth milestone he found his passage blocked by the rubble of some toppled buildings.

[9] It was with a similar degree of impetuosity – even though nobody doubted that the wisest strategy, since the enemy⁹ were boxed in and hard-pressed by a shortage of supplies, was to stretch the war out – that he resolved to force a battle as fast as possible: either because he could not bear the continued uncertainty and hoped to win a decisive victory before Vitellius could arrive, or because he found himself unable to resist the enthusiasm of his men, who were clamouring for a fight. He himself did not take part in the battles, but stayed behind at Brixellum.¹⁰

He won three victories, even though none of them were much more than skirmishes – one in the foothills of the Alps, one near Placentia and one at Castor's, as the place is known¹¹ – but then, in the final and decisive battle, which was fought at Betriacum,¹² he was brought to defeat by underhand means: for when it seemed that peace negotiations might seriously be in the offing, and his men, taking the field on the assumption that it was to hear the terms that were being offered, begun to shout out greetings to their adversaries, the enemy suddenly attacked them. Immediately he resolved to die: this, in the (correct) opinion of many, was prompted by a sense of shame, and his reluctance to persevere in a power struggle that threatened such damage and loss of life, rather than because he had despaired of success or come to doubt his men – for not only had the troops he had kept with him in reserve in case there was a need for a second campaign sustained no casualties at all, but there were other forces due to arrive from Dalmatia, Pannonia and Moesia, while even those defeated at Betriacum were not so scarred by their defeat that they would have shrunk from

joining with the enemy again, unrequested and unsupported, as a way of obtaining vengeance.

[10] My father, Suetonius Laetus, took part in this war, serving with the Thirteenth Legion as an equestrian tribune. He often used to say in later life that even as a private citizen Otho felt such horror for civil war that someone had only to mention the deaths of Cassius and Brutus at table for him to shudder, and added that he would never have launched his coup against Galba had he not been confident that there would be no need for him to go to war; also, that he was inspired to hold his life cheaply by the example of the common soldier who had brought him news of the defeat at Betriacum, and had not just been disbelieved but scorned as a liar and a coward who had fled the line of battle – whereupon the soldier had drawn a sword and committed suicide at his feet. My father used to say that, at the sight of this, he had declared, ‘I will no longer risk the lives of such men, who deserve so well.’

So it was that he spoke words of encouragement to his brother, to his brother’s son, and to each of his friends in turn, telling them to look after themselves as best they could, and then, after he had embraced and kissed them, he sent them away and retired to his private quarters: here he wrote two notes, one a letter of consolation to his sister, and a second to Nero’s widow Messalina,¹³ whom he had been intending to marry, commending to her both his remains and his posthumous reputation. All such other papers as he had with him he burned, so that they would not put anyone in danger or harm’s way by falling into the hands of the conqueror. He also divided up his ready cash between his household slaves.

[11] But then, having made these preparations and braced himself for death, he was distracted from his purpose by a sudden disturbance in the camp, where soldiers who had begun abandoning it and taking to the road were being arrested as deserters and detained – whereupon, once he had realized what was happening, he said, ‘We might as well have one more night of life’, (I quote him word for word), and not only forbade the use of violence against anyone, but threw the doors of his bedchamber open and made himself available to all those who might wish to see him until late into the night. Then, once he had quenched his thirst with a cooling drink of water, he picked up a couple of daggers, tested the points of both, and placed one of them under his pillow – after which, having had the doors to his chamber closed, he fell into a deep slumber. At last, around first light, he woke up and ran himself through beneath his left breast with a single thrust, covering the wound even as those who had heard his first groan came bursting in; then, after he had uncovered the wound again, he died and – in obedience to his own instructions – was given his funeral rites without delay, in the thirty-eighth year of his life, and on the ninety-fifth day of his reign as emperor.

[12] Nothing in Otho’s appearance or lifestyle had ever suggested that he was a man of such courage. He was supposedly of only modest stature, after all, with splayed feet and bandy legs, and in matters of personal grooming fastidious to an almost feminine degree: he depilated himself across his body, and wore a hairpiece so skilfully fitted that no one would ever have known that he was going bald; every day since the first appearance of down on his cheeks he been shaving and covering his stubble in wet bread, so as

to ensure that he would never grow a beard; he was even a regular celebrant at the rites of Isis, and would openly sport the linen robes worn by those who follow her cult.¹⁴ It was for these reasons, I think, that his death startled people so much more than it would otherwise have done: the fact that it was so at odds with his life. Many of the soldiers present in the camp, their faces wet with tears, rained kisses on his hands and feet as he lay before them, crying out that he was the bravest of men, their one true emperor, before promptly immolating themselves next to his funeral pyre – and even among those who were not on the scene there were many who, grief-stricken by the news, took up arms and fought each other to the death. In short, the majority of those who had loathed him with such bitterness while he was alive sang his praises now that he was dead – and indeed the assertion was commonly thrown around that he had toppled Galba not to win power for himself but in order to give back Rome her freedom, and to restore the republic.

Vitellius

[1] The origins of the Vitellians are traced by various authorities to a range of different sources: some claim that the family was an ancient and distinguished one, others that it was upstart and obscure, and some even that it derived from the very dregs of society. I would have been inclined to attribute these disagreements over the standing of the family to the fact that the emperor Vitellius had both flatterers and detractors, save that the controversy long preceded him. There exists, for instance, a short memoir written by Quintus Elogius and dedicated to Quintus Vitellius,¹ who was a quaestor back in the time of the Deified Augustus, which contains a number of details about the Vitellians: that they were descended from Faunus,² who was the king of the original inhabitants of Italy, and Vitellia, who was widely worshipped there as a goddess; that they once ruled the whole of Latium; that the surviving members of the family emigrated from Sabine territory to Rome, where they were registered as patricians. Monuments to this family history, so the memoir claims, were preserved in the form of the Vitellian Way, which led from the Janiculum³ to the sea, and the colony of the same name, which back in ancient times the Vitellians had requested they be allowed to defend against the Aequiculi⁴ with troops drawn from

their own clan; it is claimed as well in the memoir that when, during the Samnite War,⁵ a garrison was sent to Apulia, various members of the Vitellians settled in Nuceria,⁶ and that their descendants, many years later, returned to Rome, there to take up again their places in the senatorial order. Most people who have written about it, however, express a different opinion: namely that the founder of the family was a freedman, a man whom Cassius Severus (and not just Cassius Severus) specified had been a cobbler, and whose son had made a fortune from auctioning off confiscated estates and recovering debts owed the state, and in his turn – after marrying a woman from the slums, the daughter of a man called Antiochus who had owned a bakery – had fathered a son who ended up a Roman knight. But these are disagreements that we must accept are impossible to settle.

[2] What we know for sure is that Publius Vitellius did come from Nuceria (perhaps sprung of ancient stock, perhaps of parents and ancestors who caused him nothing but mortification), that he was both a Roman knight and a financial agent in the service of Augustus, and that he left four sons who enjoyed highly successful careers, all of whom had the same *cognomen* and were distinguished only by their forenames: Aulus, Quintus, Publius and Lucius. Aulus, who was a man of great sophistication and celebrated for the magnificence of his dinner parties, died during his consulship, which he had embarked upon as the colleague of Domitius, the father of Nero Caesar. Quintus lost his senatorial status when, following a proposal moved by Tiberius, underqualified senators were disenfranchised and expelled from the senate. Publius, who had served on Germanicus' staff, prosecuted and secured the conviction of Gnaeus Piso (who had

loathed and murdered Germanicus), but then, having served as a praetor, was arrested as an accomplice of Sejanus, and given to his own brother to be held in confinement; first he slit his veins with a penknife, and then – having allowed the bleeding to be staunched and tended to, not because he had regretted his decision to commit suicide but in response to the appeals of his family and friends – he fell sick and died while still in custody.

Lucius, after his term as consul, went on to serve as governor of Syria, where with a consummate display of diplomatic skill he induced Artabanus, the king of the Parthians, not merely to enter into talks with him, but to reverence the legionary standards. Soon afterwards, together with Claudius (who by now was *princeps*), he held two further consulships, to both of which he gave his name, and a censorship; he also administered the empire on Claudius' behalf while the emperor was away on campaign in Britain. An honest and hard-working man, he was nevertheless notorious for his particular devotion to a freedwoman, whose saliva he would mix with honey, and then – not privately or occasionally, but daily in the full view of everyone – rub over his throat and jaws as a salve. His talent for flattery was a thing of wonder: he was, for instance, the first to worship Gaius Caesar as a god, and on his return from Syria would never venture into the emperor's presence without veiling his head, averting his gaze and then prostrating himself. Anxious likewise not to miss any opportunity to get into the good books of Claudius (who was, of course, the puppet of his wives and freedmen), he requested Messalina to do him the great favour of permitting him to take off her shoes, and then, once he had removed them, would devotedly carry around her right slipper nestled between his toga and

his tunic, and kiss it from time to time. He also set up golden images of Narcissus and Pallas alongside his household gods, and worshipped them. He it was who paid Claudius the notorious compliment on the occasion of the Secular Games: ‘May you do this often!'

[3] He died one day after suffering a stroke, having fathered two sons by his wife, Sextilia – a woman of great virtue and not undistinguished pedigree – and lived to see them both become consuls (and in the very same year, what was more, since the younger had directly followed the elder in serving a six-month term). The senate honoured him when he died with a public funeral, together with a statue on the Rostra with this inscription: ‘UNWAVERING IN HIS LOYALTY TO THE PRINCEPS’.

The emperor Aulus Vitellius, Lucius' son, was born on the eighth day before the Kalends of October (or, according to some, the seventh before the Ides of September), during the consulship of Drusus Caesar and Norbanus Flaccus.⁷ So appalled were his parents by the horoscope cast for him by astrologers that his father, while still alive, consistently went to every effort to ensure that he was not assigned a province, while his mother, when he was hailed as emperor by the legions he had been sent to command, immediately lamented that he was doomed. He spent his boyhood and early youth on Capri as a participant in Tiberius' sex games (for which reason he was ever after stuck with the nickname ‘Sphincter’), and it was the uses to which his body was put – or so it is alleged – that underpinned his father’s rise and gave it a head start.

[4] As time went by, and he came to wallow in every kind of vice, so he enjoyed an ever more prominent role at court, racing chariots with Caligula

and rolling dice with Claudius, although it was Nero with whom he had the most in common, and who was the fondest of him in return, not just because of the chariot-racing and the gambling, but thanks to a particular service he did the emperor: for when he was presiding at the ‘Neronia’, and Nero himself, although itching to take part in the contest to crown the best lyre-player, did not dare take the stage despite everyone in the audience begging him to do so, he waited until the emperor had left the theatre and then called him back, acting as the spokesman of an insistent people, and thereby enabling Nero to agree to their demands.

[5] So it was, then, that this favourite of three emperors enjoyed a high-flying career, not only as a magistrate and a man appointed to the highest priesthoods, but also, in due course, as proconsul of Africa and the supervisor of public works – although, due to the inconsistent way in which he approached these various responsibilities, his reputation was a mixed one. During his entire two-year term as a provincial governor, for instance, he displayed a rare degree of integrity, and then, when his brother succeeded him to the post, stayed on to assist him. Contrastingly, while fulfilling his duties in Rome, he is alleged to have pilfered some of the gifts and fittings presented to the temples, and to have appropriated others by substituting tin and brass for gold and silver.

[6] His wife, Petronia, was the daughter of a former consul and bore him a son, Petronianus, who was blind in one eye. He agreed to emancipate this child of theirs from his own authority as a father, since otherwise Petronia would have refused to name Petronianus as her heir;⁸ but then, shortly after the manumission had been completed, he murdered his son (or at any rate is

believed to have done), after which he alleged that it was actually Petronianus who had been plotting to murder him, but then, overwhelmed by guilt, had drunk the poison readied specially for the crime. Not long after this he married Galeria Fundana, whose father was a man of praetorian rank, and by whom he had a son and daughter – although the son, who had a terrible stammer, found conversation a great challenge, and might as well have been a mute.

[7] Galba, to widespread surprise, sent him to govern Lower Germany. Some think that he secured this appointment thanks to the backing of Titus Vinius, who at the time wielded great influence, and whose favour he had long enjoyed due to their shared support for the Blues⁹ – except that Galba had openly observed of him (on the grounds that no man was less to be feared than the kind who thought only of his stomach) that even he would find enough in the province to keep his insatiable appetite satisfied, making it perfectly evident that his appointment had owed more to the contempt in which he was held than to any regard. It is well known that he lacked the resources to pay his own travel expenses: for so straitened were his domestic circumstances that his wife and children, whom he left in Rome, were obliged to move into a poky attic so that he could let out their house for the rest of the year, and ultimately he had to pawn one of his mother's pearl earrings to fund the journey to his province. Even then a throng of creditors – among them people from Sinuessa and Formia, whose tax revenues he had embezzled – lay in wait for him to prevent his departure, and only by intimidating them with the threat of trumped-up prosecutions was he able to get them off his back (this he did by suing a freedman who

had been particularly insistent in demanding the repayment of a debt, on the grounds that the man had once given him a kick, and refused to let the proceedings drop until he had screwed out fifty sesterces in damages).

When he arrived in Germany, the army – which was ill-disposed towards Galba and on the verge of open mutiny – welcomed him by raising their arms to the heavens: for to the soldiers this man who was the son of a three-times consul, in the prime of his life and of a relaxed and generous disposition seemed a gift sent by the gods. The good opinion they had long held of him had been further boosted by more recent examples of his behaviour: for during the course of his journey he had greeted all the common soldiers he met with a kiss, and shown himself so companionable in the stables and inns that every morning he had made sure to ask the mule-drivers and travellers whether they had enjoyed a good breakfast, and then belched to demonstrate that he had.

[8] What is more, once he had made it to the camp, he refused no request that was put to him, and on his own initiative relieved those in disgrace of the humiliations imposed on them, removed the threat of court martial from those who had been facing trial and pardoned those who had been convicted. So it was, barely a month after his arrival, and without regard either for the inauspiciousness of the date¹⁰ or for the lateness of the hour (it was already evening), that the soldiers burst into his sleeping quarters and removed him just as he was, dressed in the clothes he wore off-duty; then, hailing him as emperor, they carried him around the most crowded quarters of the town while he waved in his hand the drawn sword of the Deified Julius, which a soldier had removed from the nearby temple of

Mars and presented to him amid the initial outpouring of congratulations. By the time he finally made it back to his headquarters, the chimney had caught fire and set the dining room ablaze, but rather than panicking, as everyone else was doing, and fretting that this was a bad omen, he merely urged them to be of good spirits, with the assurance, ‘It will light our way!’ (this was the entirety of his address to the soldiers). When he then also secured the backing of the legions in Upper Germany, which earlier had defected from Galba to the senate and now joined with all the other legions in pressing the *cognomen* of ‘Germanicus’ on him, he readily accepted it (although he did postpone taking the name ‘Augustus’, and refused the name ‘Caesar’ point-blank).

[9] The moment the news of Galba’s murder reached him he made sure that everything in Germany was properly in order, then divided his forces in two: one half to serve as an advance guard against Otho, the other to follow under his own command. As the first column to leave began its march, so it was graced by a propitious omen: for an eagle suddenly flew towards the soldiers from their right-hand side, circled the standards, and then flew just in front of them as they continued on their way. When he began his own advance, by contrast, the equestrian statues of him that were being put up in towns everywhere suddenly developed cracks in their legs and came crashing down all as one, while the laurel wreath which he had placed on his head as a token of divine favour fell into a river and was swept away on the currents; also, not long afterwards, while he was sitting on the tribunal at Vienna¹¹ and dispensing justice, a cock perched on his shoulder, and then on his head. These omens corresponded precisely to how things turned

out: for it proved beyond his abilities to keep the empire which his subordinates had won for him.

[10] He heard about the victory at Betriacum and the death of Otho while he was still in Gaul, and without delay issued a single edict disbanding all the cohorts of the praetorian guard, to punish them for the appalling example they had set, and instructing them to hand over their arms to their tribunes. He also ordered that 120 of them, men whose petitions to Otho requesting a reward for their part in murdering Galba had fallen into his hands, should be tracked down and executed: admirable and praiseworthy measures, to be sure, and which might have seemed to bode well for his prospects as *princeps*, were it not for the fact that his behaviour in other respects was altogether more consistent with his natural disposition and pre-existing lifestyle than with the majesty of an emperor. Embarking on his journey to Rome, for instance, he had himself borne right the way through towns as though he were celebrating a triumph, sailed down rivers on exquisitely furnished boats that had been decked out with every kind of garland and furnished with lavish amounts of food, and cut both his household and his soldiers such slack that the various depredations and displays of insolence they all indulged in he viewed as a joke – despite the fact that, not content with gorging themselves everywhere they went at public expense, they would also set free slaves when and as they pleased, and deal with those who objected by whipping them and beating them up, sometimes very badly, and on occasion to the point of death. When he came to the fields where the battle had been fought, and some of those with him shuddered in horror at the rotting corpses, he actually presumed to offer

them reassurance by making a truly repellent statement: ‘A dead enemy smells sweet, and an enemy slain in a civil war sweeter still.’ Even so, this did not stop him from trying to dull the stench by downing a large amount of unmixed wine in full view of everyone, and then sharing it around. He was equally arrogant when he came to inspect the stone on which the inscription to Otho’s memory had been carved, and sneered at it as the Mausoleum that his rival merited; he also sent the dagger with which Otho had committed suicide to Colonia Agrippinensis,¹² there to be dedicated to Mars, and threw an all-night party on the heights of the Apennines.

[11] He finally made his entrance into Rome to a great blast of trumpets and with standards and banners massed all around him, wearing a general’s cloak and a sword at his side, while behind him came his staff officers likewise dressed in their military cloaks, and with their swords unsheathed. Then – displaying an increasing disregard for every law of gods and men alike – he took up office as Pontifex Maximus on the very anniversary of the Allia,¹³ prescribed who was to win the elections ten years in advance and appointed himself consul for life. Also, just in case there were any doubt as to his choice of role model as ruler of the empire, he made offerings to the shade of Nero in the middle of the Campus Martius, surrounded by a great throng of priests, while at the banquet held afterwards to mark the occasion he publicly urged a lyre-player whose music had delighted him to perform something from ‘the song book of our Master’ – and when the man then began to sing some of Nero’s compositions, he was the first to jump up and applaud.

[12] Having embarked on his principate in this manner, he was then guided for most of his reign in his opinions and whims by the very lowest class of actor and charioteer – and in particular by his freedman Asiaticus. While young, he and Asiaticus had used each other sexually as though both of them might have been slaves; but then, when Asiaticus wearied of this and ran away to work in a cheap bar in Puteoli, he had no sooner apprehended the boy and had him put in chains than he was setting him free again, and returning him to his stable of favourites. In due course, exasperated by Asiaticus' remarkable record of insolence and larceny, he sold him to an itinerant gladiator-trainer, until, attending a show in which his former favourite was due to fight in the final bout, he unexpectedly spirited him away; finally, having first set his slave free when he himself was allocated his province, he then marked his first day as emperor by presenting Asiaticus with the golden rings of an equestrian at dinner (and this despite the fact that when everyone that same morning had pressed him to give Asiaticus the rings he had rounded on them furiously, and declared himself appalled at the very prospect of such a blot on the equestrian order).

[13] As a man whose passion was principally for dissipation and cruelty, he always had three, and sometimes four, meals a day (breakfast, lunch, dinner and a liquid dinner), and easily found room for this volume of consumption by making sure to vomit regularly. On any given day, he would have himself invited to each of these meals in turn by a different person, and would expect his host to spend not less than 400,000 sesterces on it. The most notorious feast of the lot was the one hosted by his brother to celebrate his entry into Rome, at which it is claimed that 2,000 of the

choicest fish and 7,000 birds were served. Even this, however, he personally trumped when, as though it were a sacred object, he presented to his guests an enormous dish which, because of its size, he used to call the shield of Minerva the Protectress. Mixed together on this dish were the livers of parrotfish, the brains of pheasants and peacocks, the tongues of flamingos, and the entrails of lampreys which had been sourced for him by various trireme captains from as far afield as Parthia and the Spanish straits. What is more, because he was a man whose appetites were not merely limitless, but induced him as well to devour the most revolting things, and at the most inappropriate moments too, he could never refrain, while making sacrifice, from grabbing morsels of meat and sacrificial cake from the very flames and gobbling them down there and then, among all the altars; or, were he on a journey, and passing cookshops along the way, from snatching dishes that might be either scalding hot or else half-eaten leftovers from the day before.

[14] He delighted in putting people to torture or death, without regard for who they might be or what the justification: among the people he killed, on a variety of fabricated charges, were men of noble birth, and old schoolfriends of his, peers whom he had previously been sweet-talking so smoothly that he might as well have been offering them a share in the rule of the empire (there was even one man who was suffering from a fever, and asked him for a cup of cold water, to whom he personally handed poison instead). He spared barely any of the moneylenders, creditors and tax-collectors who, whether in Rome or out on the roads, might once have demanded debts or tolls from him. One of these functionaries, who had made a morning call on him and immediately been hauled off to be

executed, he did call back; but then, as everyone was praising him for his mercy, he ordered the man killed right in front of him, because, as he put it, ‘I want to give my eyes some sustenance.’ There was also a Roman knight whom he obliged, after the man had shouted at him, ‘But you are my heir!’ while being rushed away to execution, to show him the tablet on which the will was written – and then, when he read in it that a freedman had been named alongside him as joint heir, ordered that the freedman as well as the knight be put to death. He even executed some people from the slums merely for shouting abuse at the Blues (this on the assumption that they had actually been targeting him, and were hoping for a change of regime). The objects of his particular fury, however, were stand-up comedians and astrologers, who only had to have a sniff of a charge brought against them for him to have them put to death without granting them so much as a hearing. (The reason for this hostility was a notice that had been posted immediately after his issuing of an edict ordering astrologers to leave Rome and Italy before the Kalends of October, and which had read, ‘Here is the edict of the astrologers: that the state may flourish, may Vitellius Germanicus be no more by the same date.’) He was also suspected of having refused to allow his mother food when she was sick, and thereby contributing to her death: he had been prompted to do this by a warning given him by a woman of the Chatti¹⁴ – a prophetess whom he trusted as he would an oracle – that his rule as emperor would only rest on secure and enduring foundations were he to survive his parent. Others record that she was so depressed at the state things had come to, and so anxious about how

matters might turn out, that she asked her son for poison: a request which he readily granted her.

[15] In the eighth month of his rule as emperor the armies stationed in Moesia and Pannonia defected to Vespasian, although – unlike those overseas in Judaea and Syria, who likewise abandoned him – they were unable to swear their new allegiance in person. Such was his desperation not to lose the backing and goodwill of the rest that there was nothing he would not lavish on people, either publicly or privately. He also levied troops in Rome, and promised those who volunteered for service that he would grant them not only their discharge once victory had been secured, but also the rewards and privileges that were due to veterans who had completed a full term of military service. Then, as his enemies put him under pressure by both sea and land, he sent his brother with a fleet manned by raw recruits and gladiators to block one advance, and the generals who had won at Betriacum, together with the forces they had led in that battle, to block another. Having met everywhere, however, with defeat or betrayal, he negotiated with Flavius Sabinus, Vespasian's brother, an amnesty for himself together with a sum of 100 million sesterces, after which he immediately announced to a large assembly of his soldiers from the steps of the Palatine that he was abdicating the rule of the empire (a rule that, he added, had been forced on him against his will) – but then, when his statement was greeted by general uproar, he postponed a final decision, slept on it and at first light, garbed in mourning, went down to the Rostra, where he delivered the same statement, but this time from a written text and with tears streaming down his face. When again he was interrupted by the

soldiers and the common people, who kept urging him not to give up, and competed with one another in promising him their full support, his spirits so revived that he launched a surprise attack against Sabinus and the rest of the Flavians, who, because they had dropped their guard, were forced back on to the Capitol and into the temple of Jupiter the Best and the Greatest: this he then had torched, so that they were burned to death, and watched the entire spectacle – battle, fire and all – while dining in the house of Tiberius. It did not take him long, however, to repent of what he had done, and so, laying the blame on others, he summoned a public meeting at which he swore on oath – and obliged others to swear it too – that nothing mattered more to him than the public peace. Then, drawing the dagger he wore at his side to symbolize the powers of life and death which he exercised over the people, he offered it first to the consul; then – once the consul had refused it – to the magistrates; then to each senator in turn; and finally, when still no one would take it, headed off as though to place it in the temple of Concord. But when someone yelled after him that he was Concord himself, he returned, and declared that not only would he keep the weapon, but he would actually adopt the *cognomen* ‘Concordia’; he also persuaded the senate to send delegates, accompanied by the Vestal Virgins, to sue for peace (or at the very least to set a date for discussing peace).

[16] The next day, while waiting for an answer, news was brought by a scout that the enemy were closing in. Alarmed by this, and accompanied by only two companions, a baker and a cook, he climbed into a litter, drew the curtains and made his way secretly to his family home on the Aventine,¹⁵ from where he was intending to escape to Campania – but then, on the basis

of a vague and ill-founded rumour that peace terms had been agreed, he allowed himself to be taken back to the Palatine. Everyone, however, turned out to have fled the palace – and when he discovered this, and that even those who had come with him were all slipping away, he strapped on a money belt full of gold coins and hid himself in the porter’s lodge, where he chained up a dog next to the entranceway, and barricaded himself inside the room with a bed and a mattress.

[17] Meanwhile, the advance guard of the enemy – who had already broken into the palace and found nobody there – were busy, not surprisingly, searching it high and low. Dragging him out from his bolthole, and having no idea who he was, the soldiers demanded his name, and where Vitellius might be: questions which he wormed out of answering by lying. Then, when he was identified, he kept asking if he could be kept under guard, even if it were in the prison, on the grounds that he had (or so he claimed) information relating to the security of Vespasian, but instead the soldiers tied his hands behind his back, slung a noose round his neck and ripped off his clothes, before dragging him half-naked past people who amused themselves by raining down blows and jeers on him, along the entire length of the Sacred Way and into the Forum – and as he went, so one soldier pulled back his head by the hair, as is done with convicted criminals, while another actually held the tip of a sword to his chin, to ensure that he could not lower his gaze but was obliged to show his face to the crowds, some of whom pelted him with dung and filth, while others abused him as an arsonist and a glutton, and some – the commonest sort – mocked him for his physical defects. (He was an enormously tall man, you see, with a face

that was invariably bright red from all his heavy drinking, a pot belly and an injury to his thigh which he had sustained long before when, while serving Gaius as an attendant during a chariot race, he had been involved in a crash.) Finally, he was tortured to death by having his flesh delicately and methodically sliced from his body on the Gemonian Steps, from where his corpse was then dragged on a hook to the Tiber.

[18] So he perished, alongside his brother and his nephew, in his fifty-seventh year, and in a manner which demonstrated just how right were those who had insisted that the premonitory episode in Vienna (which I mentioned earlier) could only mean that he was destined to fall into the power of a man from Gaul, and nothing else: for he was dispatched by Antonius Primus, a general on the opposite side in the civil war, whose birthplace was Tolosa,¹⁶ and whose nickname as a boy had been ‘Becco’, meaning a rooster’s beak.

The Deified Vespasian

[1] The empire, destabilized as it had been by the insurgencies and violent deaths of three *principes*, had for a long while been like a ship adrift, until finally it was taken over and set securely at anchor by the Flavians, a family which, despite lacking the slightest distinction, let alone ancestral portrait busts in their hall, gave the Roman state no cause to regret its coming to power (although I grant that Domitian, a man as grasping as he was cruel, is generally reckoned to have received his just deserts).

Titus Flavius Petro, who came from the town of Reate,¹ served in Pompey's army as a centurion during the civil war (or perhaps simply as a veteran recalled to the standards), but deserted after the Battle of Pharsalus and returned home: here, in due course, he obtained both a pardon and an honourable discharge, and went into business as a debt-collector for auctioneers. His son, whose *cognomen* was 'Sabinus', did not serve in the army (despite the claims of some that he was a senior centurion, and others that he was commanding a cohort when he had to be released from his oath of service due to ill-health), but was rather a collector of duties on imports and exports in Asia, where there long stood statues of him erected by the civic communities of the province, and inscribed, 'TO AN HONEST TAX-COLLECTOR'. He then moved on to become a moneylender in the Helvetian

region of Gaul,² where he died, leaving behind him a wife, Vespasia Polla, and their two children: the elder of these, Sabinus, ended up as urban prefect, and the younger, Vespasian, as *princeps*. Polla came from Nursia, and was of good family: her father, Vespasius Pollio, served three times as a military tribune and camp prefect, and her brother as a senator of praetorian rank. Six miles outside Nursia, on the way to Spoletum, there is a place on a hilltop which is actually called Vespasiae, where there still stand to this day numerous monuments built by the Vespasii: evidence enough of the renown and ancient origins of the family. (I should also acknowledge a widespread report that Petro's father came from the far side of the River Po, and was a contractor who annually supplied labourers from Umbria to work the fields of Sabine farms, and then settled in the town of Reate, where he took a wife. Speaking personally, however, I have found no evidence for this, despite having looked into the matter in quite some detail.)

[2] Vespasian was born in a small Sabine hamlet just beyond Reate, Falacrina by name, on the evening of the fifteenth day before the Kalends of December, during the consulship of Quintus Sulpicius Camerinus and Gaius Poppeus Sabinus,³ five years before the death of Augustus, and was brought up by his paternal grandmother Tertulla on her estate at Cosa. He so cherished this childhood home of his that even as *princeps* he would frequently pay visits to it (the house kept just as it was, so that nothing he was used to seeing there would ever be out of place), and was so devoted to the memory of his grandmother that on festivals and annual days of commemoration he always made sure to drink from a little silver cup that had belonged to her. For a long while after first putting on an adult's toga he

scorned to follow in his brother's footsteps and earn the right to wear the broad-striped tunic of a senator – and ultimately he could only be brought to apply for it by the nagging of his mother. That she finally got her way owed less to any importunities on her part or to an insistence on her dignity as his parent than to her constant teasing of him: for she would refer to him as a lackey, appointed to clear the path of his brother.

He served as a military tribune in Thrace, and then, as quaestor, drew the province of Crete and Cyrene by lot; shortly afterwards he stood as a candidate for the aedileship (a post which he won at the second attempt, having failed when he first stood for election, and even then coming only sixth), and for the praetorship (which, by contrast, he not only won at his first attempt, but as one of those at the head of the list). So anxious was he as praetor to win the good opinion of Gaius, that great foe of the senate, that he called for the emperor's victories in Germany to be marked by the staging of special games, and recommended that, in addition to the other punishments inflicted on the conspirators, their corpses should be tossed out unburied. Also, in the very presence of the senate, that most illustrious of orders, he paid thanks to Gaius for having honoured him with the distinction of an invitation to dinner.

[3] At much the same time he took as his wife Flavia Domitilla, who had previously been the mistress of Statilius Capella, a Roman knight from Sabrata in Africa (originally of Latin status, she had been declared freeborn and a Roman citizen at a judicial hearing convened at the prompting of her father, Flavius Liberalis, a native of Ferentium who had never been anything more than a quaestor's secretary). He had three children by her:

Titus, Domitian and Domitilla. He outlived both his wife and his daughter, whom he lost while still a private citizen. Following his wife's death he asked his former mistress, a freedwoman called Caenis who had been Antonia's secretary, to come and live with him again, and even once he had become emperor he treated her almost as though she were his lawful wife.

[4] When Claudius became *princeps*, Narcissus pulled strings to ensure that he was sent to command a legion in Germany, from where he was then transferred to Britain, where he fought the enemy in thirty engagements. Serving some of the time under Aulus Plautius, the former consul, and some of the time directly under Claudius himself, he brought two very strong tribes under Roman rule, together with over twenty large settlements and Vectis, an island just off Britain.⁴ In recognition of this he was granted triumphal regalia and then, a short time afterwards, a couple of priesthoods and a consulship, which he held for the last two months of the year. The period between this and his proconsulship, however, he spent in retirement, since he was too afraid of Agrippina's continuing influence over her son, and her hatred of Narcissus' friends (even after Narcissus himself had died), to participate in public life.

In due course he was allotted the province of Africa, where he governed with such impressive honesty that it burnished his reputation not a little (the only blot being a riot at Hadrumetum, during which he was pelted with turnips). It is certainly the case that he returned to Rome no richer than when he had left it, for so exhausted was his credit that he was obliged to mortgage all his property to his brother, and was only able to earn the income required to maintain his senatorial status by going into the mule-

trading business: a humiliation that led everyone to nickname him ‘The Muleteer’. Additionally, he is said to have been convicted of extorting 200,000 sesterces from a young man for whom, against the wishes of the young man’s father, he had obtained senatorial status, and to have been severely reprimanded for it.

While touring Greece as part of Nero’s entourage, he caused serious offence by constantly walking out on the emperor mid-song, or else staying in his seat but dozing off, and when this resulted in his banishment not merely from Nero’s inner circle but from the emperor’s public audiences as well, he beat a retreat to a small, out-of-the-way town: here, fearing the worst, he hunkered down, until the offer came to him of a province that was simultaneously the command of a military campaign.

The time had arrived, according to a belief as venerable as it was well established, and which had become general across the East, when men were fated to come from Judaea to rule the world. This prophecy – which subsequent events would reveal to have been foretelling the emergence of a Roman emperor – was interpreted by the Judaeans as referring to themselves, and in the revolt that was the consequence of this conviction they killed a legionary commander, routed the governor of Syria – a former consul – as he was bringing reinforcements, and captured one of his eagles. Since there was no prospect of suppressing this insurgency without a larger army under the command of a man who could be trusted to conduct a campaign on such an immense scale responsibly, but also not just sit around, the commission was given to him: partly because he was a man of proven energy, and partly because his background and family name were of

such a humble order that no one could possibly view him as a threat. So it was that the forces under his command were reinforced by two legions, eight divisions of cavalry and ten cohorts; he also recruited his elder son to the ranks of his legates, and had no sooner arrived in his province than he was making himself the focus of attention in neighbouring provinces as well, for he briskly restored discipline in the camps, and twice engaged the enemy with such ardour that in one of the battles, an attack on a fortress, he was hit on the knee by a stone and his shield was feathered by arrows.

[5] Meanwhile, with Nero and Galba both dead, and Otho and Vitellius fighting over which of them should be *princeps*, he began to take seriously the hope of winning the empire that a range of signs had long since served to nurture in him.

Here are some examples of these signs. On the estate owned by the Flavians just outside Rome there was an ancient oak sacred to Mars, and whenever Vespasia gave birth – as she did three times – so would this tree sprout a branch that provided an unmistakable indication of what the fate of each child was to be: the first branch, which sprouted when her daughter was born, was so stunted that it withered quickly, and sure enough the girl was dead within the year; the second was strong and luxuriant, portending great good fortune; the third was less a branch than a tree in its own right. It was this, they say, that had prompted their father Sabinus to seek confirmation of the omen in the entrails of a sacrificial victim, and then, once he had received it, to announce to his mother that a grandson had been born to her who would become a Caesar. (Her reaction to this, however, had

been merely to laugh, and marvel that she should still have her wits about her when her son had gone quite mad.)

Later, when he was serving as aedile, and had failed in his duty to keep the streets clean, Gaius Caesar was so enraged that soldiers were ordered to cover him with filth, which they did by heaping mud into the fold of his purple-bordered toga: this episode, so some argued, was to be interpreted as portending a time when the Roman state, abandoned and trampled underfoot during a period of civil war, would be brought under his protection and folded, as it were, in his embrace.

Once, when he was having lunch, a stray dog brought in a human hand⁵ from the crossroads and dropped it under the table. Another time, again when he was dining, an ox at plough shook off its yoke, came bursting into the dining room and sent all the servants scattering – but then, as though suddenly exhausted, the creature knelt down at his feet where he lay reclining and bowed its neck. Additionally, there was a cypress tree on his grandfather's estate which, despite the lack of any violent wind, was all of a sudden torn up by its roots and hurled down on to the ground, before coming back to life the following day, stronger and with even greener shoots than before.

While in Greece he dreamed that fortune would start to smile on him the moment that Nero had a tooth extracted – and sure enough, the very next day, a doctor happened to come into the hall and show him one of the emperor's teeth, which had just that moment been pulled out.

In Judaea he consulted the oracle of the god of Carmel⁶ to highly encouraging effect, for its responses served to assure him that no matter

how ambitious his plans, no matter how soaring his hopes, still they would meet with success; also, there was a Judaeon called Josephus, one of the high-ranking prisoners, who declared in a tone of supreme confidence, even as the chains were going on, that they would soon be struck off on the orders of this same man – who by then would have become emperor.⁷ Portents were reported from Rome as well: it was said that Nero, shortly before he died, had been advised in a dream to take the chariot of Jupiter the Best and Greatest out from its sanctuary to the house of Vespasian, and from there into the Circus; that not long after this, when Galba was heading to the assembly to be elected to his second consulship, a statue of the Deified Julius had turned of its own accord to face the East; and that at the field of Betriacum, before the two sides actually met in battle, a pair of eagles had fought in the full view of everyone, after which, once one of them had been vanquished, a third had come from the direction of the rising sun and driven off the victor.

[6] Nevertheless, despite the enthusiasm of his men, some of whom even tried to put pressure on him, still he hesitated, until he was prompted to make his move by a stroke of luck, when an army that had never met him, and was many miles away, decided to give him its backing. Two thousand men, drawn from the three legions which constituted the garrison of Moesia, had been sent to reinforce Otho, but even when word reached them while they were still on the road that he had lost and taken his own life they refused to believe it, and pressed onwards to Aquileia. There they took advantage of the prevailing chaos to go on the rampage and pillage the entire city – after which, nervous that if they went back they would have to

account for their actions and suffer the consequences, they came up with the idea of choosing a candidate of their own to be emperor, in the conviction that they were no less formidable than the Spanish army that had made an emperor out of Galba, or the praetorians who had made one out of Otho, or the German legions that had made one out of Vitellius. So it was that they went through the list of all the various governors of consular rank who were then in office, and when, after all the others had been rejected for a variety of reasons, and some men from the Third Legion (which had been transferred from Syria to Moesia just before Nero's death) put in a good word for Vespasian, all the other soldiers concurred, and inscribed his name without delay on every banner. Admittedly, no sooner had they come up with their plan than it was blocked, and for a short while the soldiers themselves were recalled to their duties. Even so, the news of it encouraged Tiberius Alexander, the prefect of Egypt, to be the first to have his legions swear allegiance to Vespasian, and the day on which this oath was taken – the Kalends of July – was later celebrated as the beginning of his principate; then, on the fifth day before the Ides of July,⁸ the army in Judaea swore an oath of loyalty to him as well, in his physical presence.

The progress of this undertaking was much assisted by the circulation of a letter supposedly written by Otho to Vespasian, in which the deceased emperor had begged him from the depths of his heart to serve as an agent of vengeance, and to come to the rescue of the republic; also by the simultaneous spread of a rumour that it was Vitellius' intention, once victory had been secured, to swap around the winter quarters used by the various legions, so that those in Germany would win a transfer to the East,

where the terms of service were more comfortable and less dangerous. Additionally, he secured assistance from one of the provincial governors, Licinius Mucianus, and from a king, Vologases of Parthia (Licinius, whose jealousy of him had hitherto been very evident, set aside all feelings of resentment, and promised him the backing of the army stationed in Syria, while Vologases promised him 40,000 archers).

[7] So it was that he took the plunge into civil war, dispatching an advance guard of troops under various generals to Italy while he made the crossing to Alexandria and secured the gateway to Egypt. Here, ambitious to learn by consulting the auspices just how enduring his rule of the empire would be, he dismissed all his attendants and went alone into the temple of Serapis,⁹ where, after he had made numerous propitiatory offerings to the god, he finally turned round and saw there (or at least thought he saw there) his freedman Basilides, who had brought him, as was the custom in Alexandria, sacred fronds and garlands, and sacrificial cakes – and yet he knew full well that no one had admitted Basilides, who had long suffered so badly from rheumatism that the poor man was barely able to walk, and besides was far away. And right at that very moment letters came informing him that Vitellius' troops had been routed at Cremona and Vitellius himself put to death in Rome.

In the early days of this, his unexpected principate, he still lacked the authority that derives from prestige, not to mention a certain quality of majesty: but these too he managed to obtain. A pair of common citizens, one of them a man who had gone blind and the other a cripple, approached him together as he was sitting on the tribunal, and begged him to heal them

of their respective infirmities: for Serapis had appeared to them both in dreams, and revealed that if he were to spit on the eyes of the blind man, then sight would be restored to them, and that if he deigned to touch the leg of the cripple with his heel, then the leg would be made whole. Although his confidence that this could possibly succeed was so low that he shrank from putting it to the test, he was eventually persuaded to give it a go by his friends – and sure enough, when he sought to cure both men before the gaze of a large assembly, he met with success. At the same time, in Arcadia, where supernatural promptings had led to the excavation of a holy spot at Tegea, some vases of ancient workmanship were found decorated with faces that closely resembled Vespasian's.

[8] Marked by the favour of the heavens, then, and by the fame that he had won, he returned to Rome, where, after celebrating his triumph over the Judaeans, he added eight consulships to the one he had previously held; he also took on the censorship, and for the entire length of his reign viewed as his principal objective the stabilization of the republic – tottering and on the verge of collapse as it was – and then, once that was done, its improvement.

Not only were soldiers – some of them emboldened by victory, others smarting with the shame of defeat – running riot in a display of reckless abandon, but the provinces, the independent cities and even some of the client kingdoms were similarly convulsed by internal disorder. He dealt with this by discharging large numbers of Vitellius' troops and punishing them, but also by refusing to indulge those who had contributed to his victory: a policy he upheld with such rigour that he was actually late in paying them the bonus to which they were legally entitled. Indeed, so set

was he on not letting slip any opportunity to uphold standards of discipline that on one occasion, when a young man soused in perfume was thanking him for a much-sought-after military commission, he wrinkled his nose in disgust, issued a stern reprimand by declaring, ‘I had rather you stank of garlic’, and then stripped the young man of his commission. When he received a request from the marines stationed in Ostia and Puteoli, men who take it in turns to go on foot to Rome, for a special ‘shoe fund’ (as they termed it), he did not just send them packing without an answer, as he might well have done, but gave orders that from that moment on they were all to run barefoot – as they have done ever since.

He deprived Achaea, Lycia, Rhodes, Byzantium and Samos of their freedom, deposed the kings of Trachian Cilicia and Commagene,¹⁰ and made all these various territories into provinces. He posted additional legions to Cappadocia to counter incursions that were being made there by barbarians, and assigned it a consular rather than an equestrian governor.

Rome had been left badly scarred by past fires and collapsed buildings. Accordingly, wherever there were vacant stretches of land, he allowed people to occupy and build on them, provided that the original owners were failing to do so. He himself embarked on the redevelopment of the Capitol, beginning the clearance work by picking up the first lump of rubble with his own hands and carrying away a load of it on his back, while also taking responsibility for the replacement of 3,000 bronze tablets that had been lost in the same fire, which he did by hunting high and low for copies (these tablets – which covered alliances, treaties, and special privileges granted to individuals – were the oldest and most precious records of Rome’s empire

in existence, featuring as they did decrees of the senate and resolutions of the people that dated back almost to the foundation of the city).

[9] He also raised monuments of his own: the temple of Peace next to the Forum, the temple of the Deified Claudius on the Caelian Hill (granted, this had actually been begun by Agrippina, but Nero had then razed it pretty much to the ground), and an amphitheatre right in the middle of the city¹¹ (this because he had learned that Augustus had wanted to build one there).

The two most distinguished orders, which had been depleted by various murders and executions, and debased by protracted neglect, he revised and strengthened: this he did by expelling those senators and knights who, after a review, he had decided were unworthy of their rank, and by enrolling in the two orders the best-qualified Italians and provincials. Additionally, so as to make clear that senators were distinguished from knights less by their privileges than by the respect that was due them, he ruled in the case of an altercation between a senator and a knight that it was unacceptable to insult a senator (although it was perfectly legitimate, and indeed an obligation, to return an insult).

[10] An immense backlog of court cases had built up right across the board, since just as the interruption to judicial proceedings had left long-standing cases unresolved, so had the chaos of recent events given rise to new ones. Accordingly, he selected people by lot to supervise the restoration of property that had been seized during the war, and also to sit in judgment on cases in the centumviral court that were to be heard in addition to its regular sittings: this he did with the aim of reducing the backlog of pending cases to a reasonable number, since it seemed improbable, were the

customary procedures to be left in place, that any of the litigants would live long enough to see them resolved.

[11] Free of anyone to keep them in check, sexual misbehaviour and extravagance had flourished. So it was that the senate passed an edict which he himself had authored, decreeing that any woman who slept with someone else's slave was to be treated as a slave herself, and also that moneylenders were never to be permitted to enforce the payment of a loan should the creditor have been under the authority of his father at the time that it was made (in other words, it was to remain unenforceable even once the creditor's father had died).

[12] When it came to other matters he was courteous and quick to forgive from the start of his principate up to his death, and far from trying to disguise his humble background would often draw attention to it. Indeed, when attempts were made to trace the origins of the Flavian family back to the founders of Reate, and to a companion of Hercules whose tomb stands on the Salarian Way, he burst out laughing at the very idea. Far from hankering after the trappings of power, he was so bored on the day of his triumph, and left so exhausted by the slowness of the procession, that he did not hesitate to comment, 'It serves me right for having been foolish enough to want a triumph at my age – as if it were something that I owed my ancestors, or had ever been a particular ambition of mine.' Initially, he refused the grant of tribunician power, and only accepted the title 'Father of His Country' late in his reign. Indeed, he had dropped the standard practice of having people frisked when they came to pay him their respects even while the civil war was still going on.

[13] He bore the liberties taken by his friends, the jibes of advocates and the grandstanding of philosophers alike with great forbearance. When Licinius Mucianus, someone who was notoriously given to being used sexually by other men but had nevertheless done him good service, presumed on this, and treated him with disrespect, he could not bring himself to criticize the man except once, when he grumbled about it privately to a friend, then added, ‘But at least I am a man.’ When Salvius Liberalis, defending a wealthy client in court, had the nerve to say, ‘What is it to Caesar that Hipparchus has 100 million sesterces?’,¹² he personally praised the advocate. And when Demetrius the Cynic, who had been sent into exile, met him on his travels, and rather than deigning to rise and greet him instead barked out some insult or other, he was content merely to call the man a cur.

[14] He was not a man to nurse a grudge against those who had wronged or opposed him: far from pursuing a vendetta against Vitellius, for instance, he arranged a truly splendid marriage for his rival’s daughter, and even provided her with a dowry and household furnishings. Back in Nero’s time, when he had been banned from the court, and his nerves were so on edge that he kept asking what he should be doing and where he should be going, one of the gatekeepers on the Palatine had shoved him away and told him to go to hell. When the same gatekeeper subsequently begged his forgiveness, he contented himself with throwing the man’s own words back in his face. So reluctant was he to bring people to ruin on the basis of his own suspicions or anxieties that on one occasion, when his friends advised him to beware of Mettius Pompusianus (who was commonly believed to have

the horoscope of someone destined to become emperor), he actually made the man consul, assuring his friends as he did so, ‘He will not forget the favour.’

[15] The only definite examples of an innocent person suffering punishment are those imposed when he was absent and unaware of what was happening, or else – at worst – on those occasions when he had been misinformed and given his approval reluctantly. Even Helvidius Priscus, the one man to have greeted him on his return from Syria as ‘Vespasian’ rather than as ‘Caesar’, and who, as praetor, issued edicts from which all mention of him (name, titles and all) had been omitted, only finally provoked him to anger by subjecting him to such abuse as to treat him, in effect, as a private citizen. Even then, although he did follow up an initial sentence of banishment by sentencing Helvidius to death, he was so anxious to issue a pardon that he sent messengers to recall the executioners, and indeed would have managed to save Helvidius had he not been erroneously informed that the execution had already gone ahead. Certainly, he never took pleasure in anyone’s death, and even when sentencing people to entirely merited punishment would sigh and weep.

[16] The only aspect of his character for which he may justly be censured was his love of money. Not content with reinstating the taxes abolished by Galba, he added some new and burdensome ones of his own, raised the tribute levelled on the provinces (doubling it in certain cases), and also quite openly bought goods for no reason other than to sell them at a profit at some later juncture:¹³ a business practice that would have brought shame even on a private citizen. He did not hesitate to sell magistracies to

candidates running for election, or acquittals to people on trial, no matter whether the defendants themselves might be innocent or guilty. He is even believed to have been in the habit of promoting the most grasping of his financial officials to high-ranking posts, so that he when he subsequently had them brought to trial and convicted they would have all the more money about them. He used these officials like sponges, people said: soaking them, as it were, when they were dry, and then squeezing them when they were wet. Some claim that these extremes of greed came naturally to him: something for which he was upbraided by an old herdsman of his, who, having humbly petitioned him when he became emperor to be set free, and had his request denied, declared, ‘The fox changes its fur, but not its habits.’ Others, by contrast, argue that the exhausted state of the treasury and the imperial purse left him with no choice but to loot and thieve, and as evidence for this cite a declaration of his at the very start of his principate that 40,000 million sesterces were needed to set the republic back on its feet. This explanation – bearing in mind that however illegitimately he may have raised money, at least he spent it well – does seem the most plausible.

[17] He showed great generosity to men of every class: he helped senators maintain the property qualification required for them to uphold their rank, supported former consuls who had fallen on hard times with annual grants of 500,000 sesterces a year, funded a globe-spanning programme of renovation for cities damaged by earthquakes or fire, and provided particular sponsorship for men of talent and the arts.

[18] He was the first to make an annual grant of 100,000 sesterces to teachers of Latin and Greek rhetoric, funded out of the imperial purse. He lavished gifts and large rewards on leading poets, and on artists too, including the restorers of the Venus of Cos and the Colossus.¹⁴ He gave an engineer who had promised to transport some huge columns up to the Capitol at minimal cost a reward for his invention that was by no means to be sniffed at – but even so, commenting that he had a duty to keep the masses fed, declined to use the device.

[19] At the games held to celebrate the dedication of the new stage in the theatre of Marcellus he revived the traditional style of musical entertainment. He gave Apelles the tragic actor 400,000 sesterces, the lyre-players Terpnus and Diodorus 200,000 each and 100,000 to various other performers (the smallest individual sum he gave was 40,000, and he also handed out numerous golden crowns). He was forever giving dinner parties, usually on a grand and formal scale, with the aim of keeping market traders in business. Just as he would hand out gifts to men during the Saturnalia, so in similar fashion would he hand out gifts to women on the Kalends of March.¹⁵ Even so, he could never shake off the terrible reputation that he had long had for avarice. The Alexandrians always called him ‘Salt Fish Salesman’, after the nickname they had given a king of theirs notorious for stinginess. Even at his funeral, the leading mime artist Favor – who was there to give the customary impersonation of the dead man, complete with matching mask and the kind of words and gestures that had characterized him during his lifetime – asked the financial officials in a loud voice how much was being spent on the funeral and the procession; and when he heard

that the cost was 10 million sesterces cried out, ‘Then give me 100,000, and just chuck me in the Tiber!’

[20] He was a well-proportioned man, with strong, muscular limbs and an expression that made him look like he was straining: something that on one occasion, when he asked a certain wit to tell a joke about him, prompted the amusing retort, ‘Sure – but only when you’ve finished having your shit.’ He enjoyed excellent health, although he did nothing to maintain it except to massage his jaws and the rest of his body a set number of times in the ball courts, and to fast one day every month.

[21] His daily routine was generally as follows. Throughout his principate he would always get up early, while it was still dark, and then, once he had read his correspondence and the reports of all his officials, would admit his friends and allow them to pay him their respects even as he put on his own shoes and cloak; after this, once he had dealt with any outstanding matters, he would go for a ride and then – lying down with one of the numerous concubines with whom he had replaced Caenis, who had died – take things easy. When he left his private quarters he would head first to the bath, then to dinner, and at no other time of the day, so it is reported, was he more approachable or open-handed: something that members of his household would always go to great lengths to capitalize upon, were they ever after something.

[22] It was not only at dinner, however, but at other times as well that he could be relied upon to get on well with people, and to settle matters with a joke. This reflected the fact that he had an excellent sense of humour – albeit one that sometimes would lapse so far into vulgarity and crudeness as

to verge on the juvenile. Many of his wittiest comments are still commemorated, and I give them here. Once, when Mestrius Florus, a former consul, admonished him for having mispronounced *plausta* as *plostra*, he greeted the man the next day as Flaurus.¹⁶ Stalked by a woman who claimed that she was dying of love for him, he took her to bed, gave her 400,000 sesterces and then, when asked by his steward how he wanted the expense recorded in his accounts, replied, ‘An obsession with Vespasian.’

[23] He had a great talent for matching Greek poetry to the moment: mentioning a tall man who was exceptionally well endowed, for instance, he quoted the line, ‘Taking long strides, bearing a spear that casts a lengthy shadow’;¹⁷ similarly, with reference to Cerylus, a wealthy freedman who had changed his name to Laches and begun to pass himself off as freeborn so as to cheat the imperial purse of its dues, he quoted:

O Laches, Laches,
When you are dead, you'll go back at once
To being Cerylus.¹⁸

The principal theme of his wit, however, was the ugly way in which he was forever grasping after money: for by making jokes about it he sought to make it less unpopular, and convert it into a source of amusement.

On one occasion, stonewalling one of his favourite attendants who had asked him to give a position as steward to someone who was claimed by the attendant to be his brother, he summoned the candidate himself, extracted from the man the sum that the attendant had been demanding for serving as

an intermediary, and confirmed the appointment without further delay; then, when the attendant brought the matter up again shortly afterwards, he quipped, ‘You had better find yourself another brother. That one you think is yours is actually mine.’ Another time, when he was making a journey and suspected the muleteer of having got down to shoe the mules solely to create a delay and thereby enable a plaintiff in a lawsuit to approach him, he asked the muleteer what he had been paid to do the shoeing, and demanded a share of the fee. When Titus reproached him for having gone so far as to put a tax on urine, he held up one of the first coins to have been raised by the tax, held it to his son’s nose and demanded to know if it stank; then, when Titus shook his head, he replied, ‘But it comes from piss, all the same.’ When a delegation brought him news that a colossal statue had been voted him by the public, costing no small sum, he ordered the statue set up at once, and then, holding out his empty hand, said, ‘Imagine this is the base I’ve readied for the statue.’ Even when he stood in mortal danger, he did not let any fear of death stop him from cracking jokes. When, for instance – alongside various other portents – the doors of the Mausoleum suddenly flew open and a comet trailing a long fiery tail like hair appeared in the sky, he interpreted the first prodigy as a warning served to Junia Calvina (because she was descended from Augustus), and the second as pertaining to the king of the Parthians (who had long hair). ‘Poor me,’ he murmured at the first onset of his illness, ‘I think I am becoming a god.’

[24] It was during his ninth consulship, while he was in Campania, that he went down with the fever, just lightly at first; returning immediately to Rome, he headed on to Cutilae and the countryside around Reate, where he

liked to pass every summer. Here, although his condition had been exacerbated by an intestinal complaint brought on by drinking too much cold water, he continued to perform his duties as emperor much as he had always done, and even received embassies while lying in bed, until, during an attack of diarrhoea so bad that it almost made him faint, he declared that an emperor should die on his feet, struggled to stand up and died in the arms of those who had been helping him to get out of bed: it was the ninth day before the Kalends of July,¹⁹ and he had lived for sixty-nine years, seven months and seven days.

[25] Everyone concurs that his confidence in the astrological predictions made for him and his sons was such that even after repeated conspiracies against him he still presumed to tell the senate that either his sons would succeed him or no one would. It is also said that once, in a dream, he saw a set of scales set up in the middle of the entrance hall in his house on the Palatine, and that these scales had Claudius and Nero in one pan, him and his sons in the other, and both pans in a perfect state of equilibrium. Nor was the dream a false one: for he and his sons spent exactly the same time in power, and the same number of years, as Claudius and Nero had done.²⁰

The Deified Titus

[1] Titus, who bore the same *cognomen* as his father,¹ and was adored and doted upon by the whole of humanity – for although, as a private citizen, and even during his father’s principate, he had not avoided the hatred of others, let alone public censure, nevertheless as emperor he managed to win universal approval, something so difficult to achieve that only his innate disposition, or else his aptitude for rule, or perhaps just plain good fortune, can explain it – was born three days before the Kalends of January, in the year memorable for Gaius’ assassination,² in a dark and tiny room in a shabby building near the Septizonium³ (the room is still there, and open to visitors).

[2] He was brought up with Britannicus at court, where they were taught the same subjects by the same teachers. During this period, so the story goes, Claudius’ freedman Narcissus brought in a physiognomist, who inspected Britannicus and then declared in no uncertain terms that while Claudius’ son might have no prospect of becoming emperor, Titus (who was standing nearby) most certainly did. This did not prevent the two of them from being such good friends that Titus, when Britannicus was poisoned, is believed to have been reclining on the same couch, to have drunk from the same cup and to have been dangerously ill for a long time as a result. In due

course, to commemorate his friend, he put up a statue of Britannicus made out of gold on the Palatine, and dedicated a second one, complete with horse and fashioned out of ivory, which he escorted in person when it made its first appearance and is to this day carried at the head of the Circus procession.

[3] He was conspicuous for his qualities of mind and body even in childhood, but became all the more so as he reached maturity: his good looks, while certainly a sight for sore eyes, in no way subtracted from the sense of authority that they equally conveyed; although he was not a tall man, and had a slight pot belly, his physical strength was immense; he also had an exceptional memory, and an aptitude for almost all the arts of war and peace. Practised in horsemanship and the use of weapons, he was an accomplished orator and poet in Greek as well as Latin, possessed of such a command of the two languages that he could extemporize in them at will, and even had a certain talent for music (indeed, as a singer he was both proficient and pleasant on the ear, likewise as a lyre-player). A number of sources have informed me that he used to write shorthand so fast that, just for fun, he would challenge his secretaries to do it faster, and that he often used to confess, never having seen an example of handwriting that he could not imitate, that he had it in him to have become a master-forger.

[4] He served as a military tribune in both Germany and Britain, where the good name he won as a responsible officer was no less than the reputation he secured as a hard-working one (this is evident enough from the great multitude of statues and busts of him that were put up across both provinces, and from the inscriptions too). His service with the legions once

done, he worked as an advocate in the Forum, making up for in plaudits what he lacked in commitment; he also married Arrecina Tertulla, whose father – although admittedly just a Roman knight – had been prefect of the praetorian guard (when she died he replaced her with Marcia Furnilla, a woman whose own breeding was impeccable, but whom he divorced after having first acknowledged the daughter she had borne him). Then, after serving a term as quaestor, he was given command of a legion: not only did he lead it to victory over two formidably well-defended Judaean cities, Taricheae and Gamala, but also, when his horse was killed under him in the middle of a battle, he climbed on to another, whose rider had fallen fighting by his side.

[5] Soon afterwards he was sent to congratulate Galba, who had just taken power, and who people assumed had summoned him for the purposes of adoption – with the result that wherever he went people would turn to gawp at him. When he realized that civil war still threatened, however, he retraced his steps and headed for the oracle of Venus of Paphos, where, although his motive for making the journey had been to ask advice about his onward voyage, the goddess served as well to boost his hopes of becoming emperor. Then, when these hopes were quickly put on an even more solid basis, and he was left behind in Judaea to complete the conquest of the province, he slew twelve defenders with as many arrows during the final assault on Jerusalem, which he captured on his daughter's birthday: so delighted were his troops by this victory, and so devoted to him, that they hailed him as a general might have been hailed before the rise to power of the Caesars, and then, when he sought to leave the province, kept stopping

him from leaving, praying and sometimes even issuing threats to make him stay, or else to take them all with him. This it was that gave rise to a suspicion that he was attempting to usurp the rule of the East from his father, and make himself its king. This suspicion was given a further boost when, on his way to Alexandria, he wore a diadem to the consecration of the Apis bull at Memphis: something he did only to show his respect for the traditional rites of this ancient cult, but which was viewed by some in a more sinister light. So it was that he made all speed for Italy, putting in at Rhegium, travelling on by merchant ship to Puteoli, and from there heading as fast as he could to Rome, where – as though to demonstrate that all the rumours about him were quite without foundation – he took his father by surprise by declaring, ‘I have come, Father, I have come!'

[6] From that moment on he never ceased to serve as the partner and even the protector of the emperor. He celebrated a triumph and held office as censor alongside his father; he was Vespasian's colleague in the holding of tribunician power and in seven consulships; he shouldered almost all the responsibilities of the imperial office, dictating letters, signing edicts and even (rather than leaving a quaestor to do it) delivering speeches in the senate, all in his father's name; he also became the first man of non-equestrian rank to serve as prefect of the praetorian guard, a command which he exercised in a fairly high-handed and brutal manner – for when faced by people he particularly suspected, rather than allow the process of dealing with them to be dragged out, he preferred instead to send agents around the theatres and military camps to stir up demands for their punishment, so that he might then seem to be acting in obedience to the will

of the people. Among his victims was Aulus Caecina, a former consul whom he invited to dinner and then arranged to have run through barely the moment the consular had left the dining room (admittedly, the danger in this case really was pressing, since a speech that Caecina was planning to give to an assembly of soldiers had been found in the man's own handwriting). These measures, although they served the cause of his future security well, rendered him exceedingly unpopular in the short term, and ensured that hardly anyone had become *princeps* with such a terrible reputation, and in the teeth of such widespread opposition.

[7] In addition to cruelty, he was suspected as well – because he liked to stay up into the middle of the night playing drinking games with his most dissolute friends – of a taste for overindulgence; also – because of the troupes of male prostitutes and eunuchs he kept, as well as the notorious affair he conducted with Queen Berenice,⁴ whom he is actually reported to have promised to marry – of wallowing in sexual excess; also – because everyone knew that he was in the habit of selling his influence and taking bribes during court cases heard by his father – of rapacity: all of which led people to think of him as a second Nero, and to say so in public, what was more. This notoriety, however, turned out to be to his advantage: for when he was discovered to be a man of the highest quality, quite without flaw, the praise he received was all the greater.

He threw banquets that were convivial rather than debauched. He chose as his friends men whom his successors as *princeps* also found indispensable and kept in their own circles: advisers whose use both to them and to the state was considerable. He sent Berenice away from Rome

the moment he became emperor: something that caused him no less pain than it did her. He stopped lavishing favours on the boys whom he had always particularly adored, dancers whose talent was such that in due course they took to the stage, and even stopped watching them perform in public altogether.

If ever there was anyone who showed respect for private property, it was him: there was not a citizen he ever robbed, and even conventional gifts – the kind that it was perfectly legal for him to accept – he turned down. Even so, he was no less munificent than any of his predecessors: at the dedication of the amphitheatre⁵ and the baths that had been built very rapidly next door to it, he put on the most lavish and spectacular display of gladiatorial games. He also sponsored a sea battle in the basin that had been built long previously to stage naval extravaganzas, and also, in the same venue, a gladiatorial show that featured 5,000 wild animals of every kind on a single day.

[8] By disposition a most obliging man, he was the first to break with the precedent set by Tiberius (who had refused simply to wave through the privileges granted people by Augustus, but had insisted that they would all require individual confirmation): instead, he confirmed all the privileges granted by his various predecessors with a single edict, and did so without even being asked. When it came to other requests made of him, he went to great lengths never to send anyone away with their hopes dashed completely. Even when his household officials admonished him for promising more than he could deliver, he replied that no one should ever leave a conversation with the *princeps* downhearted, and on one occasion,

when it suddenly struck him while at dinner that he had done nothing all day to benefit anyone, he came out with a comment that has since been widely repeated and justly praised: ‘My friends, I have wasted a day.’

Above all, so determined was he never to betray snobbery towards the masses that on one occasion, when announcing a gladiator show, he declared that he would stage it in accordance with their tastes, rather than his own – which he then did. Indeed, rather than deny people what they wanted he encouraged them to put in requests. He made much of his own enthusiasm for Thracian gladiators, bantering with the crowds by chanting and gesturing just as any fan might – although never at the expense of his own dignity or sense of fair play. Rather than let slip any chance to show himself a man of the people, he would sometimes visit the baths he had built at the same time as the plebs were using them.

Some appalling disasters took place during his principate: among them the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in Campania,⁶ a fire in Rome which lasted for three days and nights, and a plague of a severity rarely witnessed before. In the face of calamities on such a terrible scale he showed not only the concern proper to a *princeps* but the devotion that a father uniquely can provide: now furnishing consolation by means of his edicts, and now straining his resources to their absolute limits so as to provide aid. He appointed officials chosen by lot from among former consuls to lead the reconstruction of Campania, and allocated the property of those who had lost their lives in the Vesuvius disaster and had no surviving heirs to the reconstruction of the damaged cities. He made no public pronouncement on the fire at Rome, beyond declaring that the loss was all his own: in proof of

which he set aside the ornaments from his country estates to assist with the public monuments and temples, and put a number of men from the equestrian order in charge of the work to ensure that it would be completed faster. As for the plague, he spared no resource, either divine or human, in his attempt to counter its impact and to nurse people back to health: every kind of sacrifice, every kind of medicine was tried.

Among the evils of the age were informers and their employers, who had long been given free rein. He had these men beaten in the Forum with whips and cudgels, and then, when this had been done repeatedly, led in procession across the sands of the amphitheatre: some of them he ordered put on the block and sold, others he banished to particularly inhospitable islands, and to ensure that no one would ever again dare attempt anything similar in the future he made it illegal for a person to be tried for the same offence under different laws, and also – among various other measures – forbade inquiries into the legal status of anyone deceased⁷ once a certain number of years had passed.

[9] He stated as his reason for accepting the office of Pontifex Maximus a desire to keep his hands unpolluted by blood, and proved as good as his word: for from that moment on no one was executed on his orders, nor was he complicit in anybody's death (even though he hardly lacked justification for seeking to be avenged on certain people), since his solemn oath it was that he would rather die himself than be the cause of anyone else dying. When two men from patrician families were found guilty of aspiring to rule the empire, for instance, he did nothing more than admonish them to desist, lecturing them on how the principate was a gift bestowed by fate, and

promising them that if there was anything else they might desire then he would give them that instead. He also sent messengers there and then to the mother of one of the patricians, who lived a long distance away, to set her mind at rest by letting her know that her son was safe; as for the men themselves, he not only invited them to a private dinner party, but the following day, at a gladiator show, deliberately had them seated next to him, and when the gladiators' weapons were brought to him for inspection handed them over to the patricians so that they too could test the blades.⁸ It is even claimed that he had both their horoscopes cast, then informed them that danger, while it certainly threatened, was not imminent, and nothing to do with him – and so it proved. When Domitian persisted in plotting against him, and was meditating a flight from Rome to join the armies, after an attempt to suborn them that had been almost naked, he could not bear to have his brother executed, or sent into exile, or even held in less honour, but instead – as he had done since first coming to power – continued to hail him as his colleague and his successor, and sometimes, when they were alone together, beg him with prayers and tears to show a readiness to return his love.

[10] In the midst of this he was cut off by death, leaving humanity rather than himself the loser. At the closing ceremony to mark the end of the games he wept copiously in full view of the people, after which he made for his Sabine estate, more downcast than he might otherwise have been because, while he was offering sacrifice, one of the victims had broken free, and thunder had sounded from a clear blue sky. Then, at the very first stopping place, he was struck down by fever, and had to be carried onwards

in a litter; and as he was being carried, so he is said to have parted the curtains, gazed up at the sky and lamented loudly that he did not deserve to have his life taken from him, for he had never done anything that he had cause to regret – save for one thing only. What this might have been he kept to himself, nor has anyone since ever come up with a ready explanation. Although there are those who think that he was alluding to an affair he had conducted with his brother's wife, Domitia swore on everything sacred that no such affair had ever taken place, and she would hardly have done so had there been even an element of truth to the story (indeed – since she was never a woman to keep quiet about the details of her outrageous sex life – she would have made a great song and dance about it).

[11] He died on the Ides of September in the same villa as his father, two years, two months and twenty days after succeeding him,⁹ at the age of forty-one. When the news of his death was made public, the people all mourned him as though it were one of their own who had died, and the senators, even before a meeting had been officially convened and the doors of the Senate House unlocked, all hurried there at a run; then, once the doors had been opened, they offered him thanks and showered praises on him more profusely even than they had done when he was alive and in their midst.

Domitian

[1] Domitian was born on the ninth day before the Kalends of November, in the year that his father, a month before he was actually due to enter office, was still consul designate,¹ in the sixth region of the city,² the Pomegranate, in a house that he subsequently had converted into a temple to the Flavian dynasty. It is said that he passed his youth and his early adulthood in such poverty that he lacked the use of even a single silver dish; it is also well accepted that Clodius Pollio, the man of praetorian rank attacked by Nero in the poem ‘The One-Eyed Man’, kept and would on occasion display a letter in his handwriting in which he promised to spend the night with Pollio (some claim that Domitian was also corrupted by Nerva, the man who would succeed him as emperor).

During the war against Vitellius, he took refuge on the Capitol with his uncle Sabinus and some of the troops they had with them at the time, but after the enemy had stormed their position and torched the temple he spent the night under cover with the temple warden until, when morning came, he disguised himself as a devotee of Isis, mingled with the priests of that disreputable superstition, and then, with a single companion, crossed the Tiber to where the mother of one of his schoolfriends lived: here, by lying low, he managed to shake off the men who had been hot on his heels and

avoid capture. Only once victory had been secured did he emerge again, to be greeted as Caesar³ and given both the powers of a consul and the office of urban praetor – and even though he took on the praetorship in name only, ceding the judicial responsibilities that came with it to his nearest colleague, he exploited the power that his dominant role in Rome had bestowed upon him so fully, and showed such little respect for the law, that even then it was perfectly clear what kind of man he would become. Without going into the precise details, suffice it to say that, after he had sexually assaulted a large number of married women, he not only abducted Domitia Longina, the wife of Aelius Lamia, but actually married her, while in a single day he handed out more than twenty official posts, both in Rome and in the provinces – which prompted Vespasian, on a number of occasions, to exclaim, ‘I am only surprised that he did not send me my successor as well!’

[2] He also launched a wholly unnecessary military campaign in Gaul and the German provinces, in the teeth of opposition from his father’s friends, solely so that he might emulate the wealth and reputation won by his brother Titus. For this he was hauled over the coals and – to ensure that he would not forget his age and place in the pecking order – obliged to live with his father: whenever Vespasian and Titus went out in public in their sedan chairs, he would trail them in a litter, and at the triumph they both celebrated over the Judaeans he rode alongside them on a white horse. Indeed, in only one of his six consulships did he actually give his name to the year⁴ – and even that one had been ceded him by his brother, who had recommended him as a replacement. He himself affected a quite startling show of modesty, and in particular a passion for poetry, which he would

actually recite in public, despite the fact that up until then he had been wholly uninterested in it, and in due course would come to regard it with such contempt that he had nothing do with it at all. Even so, when King Vologases requested military assistance in the Parthians' war against the Alans,⁵ and asked specifically for one of Vespasian's sons to lead the reinforcements, he went to every length possible to ensure that he was the one chosen – and then, when this came to nothing, sought to induce other eastern kings by a mixture of bribery and promises to make the same request.

Having hesitated a long time when his father died whether to give the soldiers a donative twice the size his brother had given them, he had no compunction about claiming that he had been left a share in the rule of the empire but had been cheated of it by a forged will, and was forever plotting against his brother, both secretly and openly, until finally, when the emperor was seriously ill but yet to breathe his last, he ordered him left for dead – and even though he did have his brother deified, he offered Titus no other honours, and would regularly make veiled criticisms of him in both his speeches and his edicts.

[3] When he first became *princeps* it was his habit to spend hours every day on his own, during which time he would do nothing but catch flies and stab them with a well-sharpened pen – so that once, when someone asked if there was anyone inside with Caesar, Vibius Crispus wittily replied, ‘No, not even a fly.’ He granted the name ‘Augusta’ to his wife Domitia, who during his second consulship had given him a son (he then lost the boy two years after coming to power). When she fell desperately in love with the

actor Paris he divorced her, but could not endure the separation, and so, after a short while, took her back on the pretext that the people were demanding it. His record in administering the empire was a variable one, showcasing as it did a mixture of flaws and positive qualities, until in due course his positive qualities so deteriorated that they too became flaws: for (so far as one can tell), it seems that he was neither rapacious nor cruel by inclination, but became so due to poverty and fear respectively.

[4] He was forever hosting spectacles on a most splendid and lavish scale, not just in the amphitheatre but also in the Circus, where – in addition to the customary races between two-horse and four-horse chariots – he staged a pair of battles, one featuring cavalry, the other infantry (he also staged a naval battle in the amphitheatre, and beast hunts and gladiator shows which were held at night by torchlight, and featured female as well as male combatants). Additionally, because he always made sure to attend the games sponsored by the quaestors (which he had revived following their abolition sometime previously), he was able to grant the people the privilege of calling for two pairs of gladiators from his training school, and would always present them, decked out in finery appropriate to the court, as the climax of the show. For the duration of every gladiatorial spectacular he would have a small boy dressed in scarlet and possessed of an abnormally tiny head stand at his feet, to whom he would chat away, often in a tone of great seriousness. He was certainly heard on one occasion asking the boy if he knew why, among his most recent appointments, he had opted to put Mettius Rufus in charge of Egypt. He used a lake which he had excavated next to the Tiber and ringed with seats to stage naval clashes on such a scale

that the fleets might almost have been engaging in authentic warfare, and would sit there watching the entirety of the action even through the heaviest downpours.

He held the Secular Games based on calculations that derived the date not from the year in which Claudius had recently held them, but from the one in which Augustus had held them long before. On the day during the games when the chariot races were scheduled to be held in the Circus, he shortened each race from seven laps to five so that it would be easier to fit in 100 races. He also established a contest in honour of Capitoline Jupiter: this was held every five years, featured three categories (music, riding and gymnastics), and offered a considerably broader range of prizes than are awarded today. Contestants took part in prose declamations, Greek as well as Latin, and in addition to individuals singing to the accompaniment of the lyre there were also contests in which choirs would accompany the lyre, and others in which the lyre was played without accompaniment at all; meanwhile, in the stadium, races were held in which even girls would run. He presided over these contests dressed in thick-soled sandals and a purple toga of Greek design, while on his head he wore a golden crown with images of Jupiter, Juno and Minerva; by his side sat various priests – the priest of Jupiter and the college of the priests who tended to the cult of the Flavian dynasty – all of whom were dressed just as he was, except that on their crowns they had images not only of the gods but of him. He also celebrated the Quinquatria of Minerva⁶ every year at his villa on the Alban Hills, and established a college of priests for the goddess, whose members would then choose officers by lot: these sponsored some excellent animal

fights and theatrical entertainments, as well as contests in oratory and poetry.

Three times he made a gift to the people of 300 sesterces each, and on one occasion, during gladiatorial games held to celebrate the procession around Rome's seven hills, he laid on a banquet on a colossal scale, at which he himself was the first to eat: baskets full of delicacies – large ones for the senators and equestrians, smaller ones for the common people – were handed out, and then, the following day, tokens for all kinds of gifts were tossed out into the crowds (most of them, however, fell where the common people were sitting, and so he announced that another 500 tokens would be flung into each of the sections occupied by the equestrian and senatorial orders respectively).

[5] He restored a large number of particularly impressive monuments that had been destroyed by fire, among them the temple of Jupiter on the Capitol, which had burned down a second time (although on all these buildings the only name inscribed was his own, without any mention of their original founders). He also built a new temple on the Capitol, to Jupiter the Guardian, as well as the Forum which now bears the name of Nerva, a temple to the Flavian dynasty, a stadium, a venue for musical performances and an artificial lake for the staging of naval battles (stonework from which was subsequently used to rebuild the Circus Maximus after its two side sections had gone up in a blaze).

[6] He undertook a number of campaigns, some on his own initiative, some because he had no option: the war against the Chatti, for instance, was one that he chose to embark upon, but that against the Sarmatians was

forced on him by the loss of an entire legion together with its commander – just as the two campaigns he led against the Dacians were the result of twin defeats, the first that of Oppius Sabinus, a former consul, and the second that of the praetorian prefect Cornelius Fuscus, whom he had appointed to overall command of the war. He celebrated the various battles he fought against the Chatti and the Dacians with a double triumph, but his victory over the Sarmatians he marked merely by bringing a laurel wreath to the temple of Jupiter on the Capitol. A revolt launched by Lucius Antonius, the governor of Upper Germany, was put down in his absence when, by a remarkable stroke of luck, the Rhine happened to thaw just as battle was about to be joined, and prevented the barbarian hordes from crossing the river to fight on Antonius' side. Various portents served to inform him of this victory before messengers could arrive with the news of it: for on the very day of the battle a magnificent eagle folded its wings round his statue and cried out in the most joyous tones, while soon afterwards a rumour that Antonius had fallen spread so fast across the city that many swore they had seen the rebel's head.

[7] He also introduced a large number of reforms on the domestic front. He abolished the distribution of food baskets to the people, but reinstated the custom of holding formal banquets for them. He added two new teams – one dressed in gold, the other in purple – to the four that were already competing in the Circus. He banned actors from the stage (although he did allow them to perform in private homes). He made it illegal for males to be castrated, and obliged slave-dealers who still had eunuchs in stock to sell them cheaply. On one occasion, when a glut of wine coincided with a

shortage of grain, he drew the conclusion from this that an obsession with viticulture was leading to the neglect of arable farming, and duly issued an edict banning any more vines from being planted in Italy, stipulating as well that in the provinces at least half were to be dug up (this policy, however, was one he did not follow through). He opened up some of the most significant positions in the state to freedmen and equestrians. He banned two legions from sharing a single camp, and any soldier from depositing more than 1,000 sesterces in the camp's headquarters for safe keeping:⁷ for it seemed that Lucius Antonius had been encouraged in his revolt by the large sum of money deposited in a camp where a pair of legions had been billeted for the winter. He also added three gold pieces to the soldiers' annual pay, increasing it by a quarter.

[8] He was both diligent and conscientious when it came to the administration of justice: he regularly held additional hearings on the tribunal in the Forum, overturned rulings given by the centumviral courts if they betrayed clear bias, admonished assessors again and again not to ratify unsubstantiated claims to free status, and dealt with jurors who accepted bribes by degrading them, together with all who sat alongside them on the bench. He was also responsible for inducing the tribunes of the plebs to prosecute a corrupt aedile for extortion and request the senate to supply judges for the case, and made sure to keep both magistrates in Rome and governors in the provinces on such a tight leash that they were brought to uphold unprecedented standards of integrity and justice (nor have these standards been emulated since, for nowadays we look on as large numbers of magistrates and governors commit every kind of crime). As part of the

reform of public morals that he undertook as censor, he put a stop to members of the general public ignoring the regulation which banned them from sitting in the seats reserved for equestrians in the theatre, destroyed various writings then in wide circulation that unfairly traduced prominent men and women, and punished their authors by degrading them in the census. He removed from the senate a former quaestor who was forever aping the gestures and dance routines of a mime artist, deprived women with a shameful reputation of the right to use litters or to receive legacies and inheritances, and struck off a Roman knight from the juror list for having remarried a woman whom the man had previously divorced on a charge of adultery. He convicted various men from both the senatorial and equestrian orders under the terms of the Scantinian law,⁸ and punished Vestal Virgins who had stained their chastity (something that both his father and brother had turned a blind eye to) with the utmost severity: initially by having them beheaded, then later on in the traditional manner. For whereas he allowed the Oculata sisters and Varronilla to choose their own manner of death and merely sent the men who had seduced them into exile, he later sentenced Cornelia, the chief Vestal – a woman who had already been charged and cleared sometime previously, but now, charged a second time, had been found guilty – to be buried alive, and the men who had defiled her to be beaten to death with rods in the Comitium. (The only one of these culprits he spared was a man of praetorian rank who, because he had confessed at a time when the outcome of the trial was still uncertain, and the examination and torture of witnesses had failed to provide clinching evidence, he sent into exile.) Also, when a freedman raised a funerary

monument to his sons using stones intended for the temple of Jupiter on the Capitol, he had his soldiers tear it down, and ordered the bones and ashes contained within the monument flung into the sea – thereby demonstrating that no insult to the proper worship of the gods would go unpunished.

[9] Early on, at a time when his father was still absent from the city, he found bloodshed of every kind so upsetting that his intention was – recalling Virgil’s line, ‘before a wicked race came to slaughter and feast on bullocks’⁹ – to issue an edict forbidding the sacrifice of oxen. Likewise, for as long as he remained a private citizen and then for a good while after becoming *princeps* too, he gave scarcely a hint of greed or avarice, but on the contrary repeatedly suggested himself to be someone who combined a sensible attitude to money with a willingness to spend it on others. He treated everyone in his circle with great generosity, and was always at his most enthusiastic when pressing on them what he saw as his most important piece of advice: never to be mean. He did not accept inheritances left by people who had children. He even annulled a detail in the will of Rustus Caepio specifying that every year the legatee was to give a set sum of money to all the various senators as they entered the Senate House. He dismissed the cases again all those debtors whose names had remained posted on the treasury for more than five years, nor would he allow them to be reopened unless it were done within the year – and even then with the proviso that anyone unsuccessful in bringing a prosecution was himself to be punished with exile. He gave a pardon to the quaestors’ scribes for their long-time engagement in business which, although perfectly compatible with tradition, was nevertheless in breach of the Clodian law.¹⁰ He

assigned to their original owners, by right of possession, isolated plots left over after the bulk of farmland had been divided up between veterans. He brought an end to false accusations designed to benefit the imperial treasury by imposing severe penalties on anyone who brought them, and was heard to observe, ‘The *princeps* who fails to punish informers is only spurring them on.’

[10] This course of mercy and continence was not one, however, that he kept to for long – although his plunge into cruelty occurred much faster than his descent into avarice. He put to death a pupil of the actor Paris, a young boy who at the time was very ill, on the grounds that the student, in terms of both appearance and talent, bore a certain resemblance to the teacher; similarly, he executed Hermogenes of Tarsus for innuendos made in a history, and actually went so far as to crucify the slaves who had copied them out. When a perfectly respectable householder commented that one of the Thracian gladiators, although a match for a *murmillo*, had no chance against the sponsor of the games, he had the man dragged from the crowd and flung to dogs in the arena, wearing a placard that read, ‘A fan of the Thracians who spoke out of turn’.

He put to death a large number of senators, some of them former consuls, and although three of these – Civica Cerialis, who was the proconsul of Asia at the time, and Salvidienus Orfitus and Acilius Glabrio, both of whom were in exile – were framed by him as would-be rebels, most of his victims were executed for a range of trivial offences: Aelius Lamia, for instance, because of some jokes that, although certainly pointed, were also harmless enough, and which he had originally made many years earlier, after losing

his wife to the future *princeps* (to give a couple of examples, he had answered a man who praised him for his speaking voice by saying, ‘Oh, it’s only because I’m not getting any sex’, while to Titus, who had been pressing him to marry again, he replied in Greek, ‘Why, do you want to get married too?’); *Salvius Cocceianus*, because he had celebrated the birthday of his uncle, the emperor Otho; *Mettius Pompusianus*, because his horoscope was commonly believed to predict that he would become emperor, and also because he carried around a map of the world drawn on parchment and copies of various speeches of kings and military leaders taken from Livy, and had named two of his slaves *Mago* and *Hannibal*; ¹¹ *Sallustius Lucullus*, the governor of Britain, because he had allowed a new kind of spear to be named after him; and *Junius Rusticus*, because he had written in praise of *Thrarea Paetus* and *Helvidius Priscus*, and hailed them as men worthy of the utmost respect. The *princeps*, at the same time as he brought this last prosecution, also banished every philosopher from Rome and Italy. Similarly, he put to death the younger *Helvidius* for having written a play in which, so he claimed, the characters of *Paris* and *Oenone*¹² had been portrayed in such a way as to constitute a criticism of him for having divorced his wife, together with *Flavius Sabinus*, one of his cousins, because on the day of the consular elections the herald had mistakenly announced *Sabinus* to the people not as consul, but as emperor.

After the suppression of Antonius’ revolt he grew even more brutal, and was so determined to smoke out those involved in the conspiracy from their hiding places that he had many of the faction opposed to him put to torture: this he did by jabbing burning splints into their genitals (a form of

interrogation never practised before), and cutting off their hands. It is a settled fact that of the more prominent people to be charged he pardoned only two, a tribune of senatorial rank and a centurion: these, to demonstrate all the more conclusively that they had taken no part in the conspiracy, provided evidence that they liked to be used sexually as women, and therefore were viewed as undeserving of attention both by the man in command of them and by the soldiers under their own command.

[11] While his cruelty might certainly be brutal, however, so also might it operate with subtlety and from the shadows. The day before he crucified his steward he invited the man to his bedchamber, insisted that he sit beside him on his couch, and then, having honoured the wretch by going so far as to share his dinner with him, sent him away in a confident and happy mood. Similarly, when he was on the verge of condemning to death the former consul Arrecinus Clemens, a friend and particular agent of his, he showed him just as much favour as he had ever done (if not more), until finally, when the pair of them were out together, he spied the man who had informed against Clemens and said, ‘Tell me, tomorrow, shall we listen to what this miserable slave has to say?’

To turn the screws yet further on those obliged to endure his cruelty, he would never sentence a man to a particularly cruel form of capital punishment without first hinting at clemency – so that nothing signalled the approach of a horrible death quite so surely as a mild preamble. On one occasion, after bringing various men accused of treason into the Senate House, he announced that the day had come for him to test the quality of the senate’s love for him – with the result that he found it a simple matter to

secure the men's conviction, and even to have them condemned to the traditional manner of punishment.¹³ Then, unsettled by the cruel nature of the penalty, and anxious to lessen the opprobrium it threatened, he interceded with these words (it is useful, I think, at this point, to know precisely what he said): 'Allow me, conscript fathers, so far to prevail upon your devotion to me – for I know I am asking no simple favour from you – that you will permit these condemned men the freedom to choose the manner of their own deaths. By doing so, not only will you spare yourselves an unpleasant sight, but you will ensure that everyone will understand you mitigated their sentence because I interceded on their behalf.'

[12] When he found himself short of funds due to all his building projects and gladiatorial entertainments, as well as the pay rise he had given the soldiers, he attempted to rein in his military expenditure by reducing the number of legions; but then, when he realized that this had left him exposed to incursions by barbarians while doing nothing to ease the financial burden, he showed no hesitation in resorting to robbery of every kind. He seized people's property wherever he could, no matter the informer, no matter the charge, no matter whether the victim was living or dead. All it took was some allegation of treasonous behaviour or language against the *princeps*. The estates of people who had no link to him at all would be confiscated if so much as a single person could be found to testify that a deceased person had, while still alive, nominated Caesar as heir. As with all the other taxes, so with the tax levied on the Judaeans,¹⁴ he enforced it with the utmost stringency, and made sure to harry both those who lived a Judaean lifestyle but did not profess themselves Judaeans,¹⁵ and those who

were Judaeans but pretended not to be in an attempt to avoid paying the tribute levied on their nation. (Indeed, I remember as a young man being present in a very crowded court when an old man who was ninety years old had his penis inspected by a financial official to see if he had been circumcised.)

Never a civil man, even as a youth, his behaviour and language could be so rude, so lacking in any sense of propriety, that once, when Caenis, his father's mistress, returned from a trip to Istria and went to kiss him as was her custom, he offered her his hand. Indignant that the husband of his brother's daughter had attendants dressed in white, just as he did, he proclaimed, 'It is not good to have many rulers.'¹⁶

[13] When he became *princeps*, he did not hesitate to boast to the senate that his father and his brother – since, as he put it, they had received the empire as a gift from his hands¹⁷ – had merely returned to him what was his own; nor to proclaim, when he took his wife back after their divorce, that she had been recalled to the consecrated bed. He was delighted, at a banquet he hosted in the amphitheatre, to hear the cry go up, 'Blessings on our master and mistress!';¹⁸ conversely, when the crowds that had gathered for the contests on the Capitol asked him with one accord to restore to Palfurius Sura, who had just won the crown for oratory, the senatorial status of which the orator had been stripped sometime before, he did not deign so much as to give them an answer, but had a herald command them to hold their tongues. With matching arrogance, whenever dictating a formal letter in the name of his financial officials, he would begin it by saying, 'Our master and god commands this done' – a formula that thereby became

established as one that everyone, whether writing or speaking to him, was expected to use. He refused to allow statues of himself to be set up on the Capitol unless they were made of gold or silver, and of a set weight. He erected so many vaulted passageways and arches across the city, and on such a scale, complete with four-horse chariots and markers of his triumphs, that on one of them somebody wrote in Greek lettering *arci* ['arches'] – because in Greek *arci* means 'enough'. He held seventeen consulships, something no one had ever done before, and of these the seven middle consulships were held one after the other. Almost all of them he held in name only, in general only up to the Ides of January, and never beyond the Kalends of May. In the wake of his two triumphs he took on the *cognomen* 'Germanicus', and renamed the months of September and October 'Germanicus' and 'Domitianus', after his own names: this on the grounds that he had become emperor in the first month and been born in the second.

[14] So it was that he became an object of universal fear and loathing, until eventually a conspiracy of his friends and most trusted freedmen, in which his wife too participated, brought an end to his rule. He had long had forewarnings of the year and the day of his death, and even of the very hour, and of the manner in which he would perish. Astrologers had predicted it all when he was still a young man, so that once, when he was at dinner and refused some mushrooms, his father had laughed, and asked him whether he was so forgetful of his fate that he was more afraid of the dish that had killed Claudius than of a sword. This is why he was always so paranoid, so jumpy, and would take excessive alarm whenever he had even the slightest cause for suspicion. It is believed that nothing influenced him more in

deciding not to follow through his edict on the cutting down of vines than some pamphlets that circulated widely, and featured these lines:

Gnaw through me to the very roots, but still I shall yield grapes enough

To provide the libation, O goat, when you are slain in sacrifice.¹⁹

It was the same sense of anxiety that led him – despite his inordinate craving for all such honours – to reject a novel distinction devised for him by the senate, which had decreed that, whenever he was consul, Roman knights chosen by lot were to precede him together with his lictors and entourage, dressed in the togas that were the markers of their equestrian status, and bearing spears. Even so, as each day passed, and what he had been led to dread as the hour of danger drew nearer, so it came to prey ever more on his mind – to the degree that he had the walls of the colonnades where he liked to stroll lined with phengite,²⁰ so that he would then be able to see reflected in its gleaming surface everything that might be happening behind his back. In a similar manner, he would rarely grant a hearing to a prisoner unless it was private and held in secret, and he held the chains that bound the prisoner in his own hand; also, to impress upon his servants that the murder of a patron – even though there might be good grounds for it – was never worth the risk, he condemned to death Epaphroditus, the secretary responsible for handling petitions, because the freedman was believed to have given personal assistance to Nero in committing suicide, after the emperor had lost all support.

[15] His cousin Flavius Clemens – a man whose laziness was beneath contempt²¹ and whose young sons he had publicly marked out as his heirs by replacing their given names with the names ‘Vespasian’ and ‘Domitian’ respectively – was his final victim: a man who had only just finished a term as consul, and who, on the very flimsiest of grounds, was put to death quite without warning. It was this deed, more than any other, that served to precipitate his assassination.

For eight months in a row there were so many bolts of lightning, and so many reports of them, that he was brought to cry out, ‘Come, Jupiter, it is time for you to strike the man you wish to strike!’ The god’s temple on the Capitol was hit by lightning, and the temple to the Flavian dynasty, as too was his house on the Palatine and his very bedchamber; also, during a violent storm, the inscription was torn from a statue portraying him as he had looked during his triumph, and dropped on to a nearby tomb. At the same time, the tree which had been flung to the ground when Vespasian was still a private citizen, and then sprouted back to life again, was abruptly toppled a second time. The oracle of Fortuna at Praeneste, which every New Year, right from the beginning of his reign, had responded favourably to his request for a blessing from the goddess, and always in the same way, now for the first time replied in the most baleful terms, nor did it fail to hint at blood.

He dreamed that Minerva, a goddess whom he had always served with a particular devotion, emerged from her shrine and declared that she could no longer stand guard over him, since Jupiter had deprived her of her arms. Nothing, however, did more to unsettle him than the reply he received from

the astrologer Ascletarion, and what then befell the man. Because, after being denounced by informers, Ascletarion did not deny having mentioned to all kinds of people what the astrological arts had revealed of the future, he demanded of the astrologer, ‘How are you going to die yourself?’; and then, when Ascletarion answered him by saying, ‘In a short time I will be ripped apart by dogs’, he gave orders that the astrologer was to be executed without delay, after which – so as to demonstrate the worthlessness of the prediction – every pain was to be taken to ensure the cremation of the body. Just as this was being done, however, it happened that the pyre was overturned by a sudden storm, and the corpse, which had been only half-burned, was torn to pieces by dogs: this was then reported to him at dinner, together with the other stories of the day, by the actor Latinus, who had chanced to observe the incident while walking past.

[16] The day before he died he gave instructions that some apples which had been brought to the table be served the following day, then added, ‘Assuming, that is, I get the chance to eat them’; then, turning to his companions, he declared that the next day, when the moon was in Aquarius, it would turn the colour of blood, presaging a deed of such note that people would talk of it across the entire world. By midnight he had become so terror-struck that he jumped out of his bed. In the morning he heard the case of a soothsayer sent from Germany who, asked about a lightning strike, had predicted a change of regime, and ruled the soothsayer guilty. When he scratched an inflamed spot on his forehead so hard that it began to bleed, he exclaimed, ‘I hope that is all the blood that flows.’ Then, when he demanded to know if it was the fifth hour, the very hour that he feared, he

was purposely told that the hour was the sixth. Overjoyed by this information – since he now believed that the danger was past – he was heading off briskly to the baths when Parthenius, his personal attendant, diverted him from his purpose by informing him that someone had come on a matter of the utmost importance, which could not be postponed. So it was that he dismissed his attendants, went into his bedroom and there was killed.

[17] The principal details of the plot and the assassination that have come to light are as follows. With the conspirators undecided as to when and how to attack him – whether in the bath or at table – a plan of action was recommended by Stephanus, Domitilla's steward (who at the time was facing a charge of embezzlement): he offered to help the conspirators by keeping his left arm swathed in woollen bandages for a number of days as though he had suffered an injury to it, which enabled him, when the hour appointed for the murder drew near, to secrete a dagger inside the bandages so that no one would suspect its presence; then, gaining admittance to the *princeps* by claiming to have evidence of a conspiracy, and handing him a document which he duly began to read, the steward was able to take him by surprise and stab him in the groin. When, despite this wound, he attempted to fight back, he was set upon by four other assailants – Clodianus, an adjutant, Maximus, one of Parthenius' freedmen, Satur, one of his senior chamberlains, together with a gladiator from the training school – who rained down blows on him, seven in all. A boy whose regular duty it was to tend to the Lares in his bedroom, and who as a result was a witness to his murder, has supplied some additional details: that no sooner had Domitian

been dealt his first wound than he was ordering the boy to bring him a dagger from underneath his pillow, and to summon his servants; that despite his instructions there had been nothing to find at the top of the bed save for a bladeless hilt, and that all the doors had been locked; that meanwhile, as the slave was searching, he had grabbed Stephanus, wrestled him to the ground and engaged in a protracted struggle with the steward, trying now to wrest the dagger away, now to gouge out his assailant's eyes, despite the fact that his own fingers had been cut to ribbons.

He was murdered on the fourteenth day before the Kalends of October, in his forty-fifth year, and his fifteenth as emperor.²² His body was removed on a cheap bier by pallbearers more accustomed to carrying the corpses of the poor, and his funeral was conducted by his old nurse Phyllis, at her villa on the outskirts of Rome beside the Latin Way; when the funeral was done, however, she secretly took his ashes to the temple to the Flavian dynasty, where she mixed them with those of Julia, Titus' daughter, to whom she had also served as nurse.

[18] He was a tall man, and had the appearance of a modest one, prone as he was to blushing; his eyes were large but his vision was poor; additionally, although very good-looking and well proportioned, especially when young, he was let down by his feet, which had toes that curled in a bit – nor, as he grew older, did this remain his only physical defect, for he also lost his hair and sprouted a protruding belly, while his legs, which had weakened over the course of a lengthy illness, were spindly. So alert was he to the advantages that accrued to him from his natural modesty of expression that he once boasted to the senate, ‘Up until now, at any rate,

there can be no doubting that you have thought well of both my character and my looks.' So sensitive was he about his baldness that he would take it as a personal insult should anyone else who had lost his hair be mocked or jeered for it – although, in a small book he wrote for a friend on the theme of hair and its maintenance, he did attempt to console both himself and his friend by including the following passage: “Do you not see how handsome I am too, and tall?”²³ Young though I am, yet I bear with fortitude the thinning of my hair: for I know the fate it suffers is the fate that awaits me too. Know, then, that there is nothing more delightful than beauty – and nothing more fleeting either.'

[19] He was not a great one for exercise: in Rome he rarely went anywhere on foot, while in the field, whether on the march or fighting a battle, he much preferred being carried in a litter to sitting in the saddle. He had no interest in practising with the weapons used by regular soldiers, but was a great enthusiast for archery. Indeed, at his retreat among the Alban Hills, large numbers of people would gather to watch him fell 100 animals of every kind – and sometimes, targeting the heads of his victims with a pair of arrows, he would make it seem that the creatures had sprouted horns. Sometimes as well he would have a slave boy stand at a distance holding up a right hand with the fingers outspread to serve him as a target, and so skilfully could he fire his arrows that they would pass safely through the gaps between the fingers.

[20] He had no time for the liberal arts when he first became emperor, although he did take care to restore at enormous expense some libraries that had been destroyed in a fire, searching for copies of the lost works all over

the place, and sending agents to Alexandria to transcribe those texts that had gone up in flames and to correct the damaged ones. Even so, he never made any effort to familiarize himself with the basics of written style required of an emperor, let alone history or poetry; nor – with the sole exception of the memoirs and decrees of Tiberius Caesar – did he ever read anything more than once, and always, if he had letters, or speeches, or edicts that needed writing, would rely on the talents of others. That said, his conversation did not lack for a certain elegance, and on occasion he might even say something memorable: ‘I only wish that I were as handsome as Maecius thinks he is’, for instance, or the time he described the head of a man whose reddish hair was turning white as resembling ‘mead poured out on to snow’. ‘How wretched’, he used to say, ‘is the lot of a *princeps*, for the only time that people believe him when he reports the uncovering of a conspiracy is if he ends up actually murdered!'

[21] Whenever he had the time he would amuse himself by playing dice (even if it was a normal working day or in the early hours of the morning); baths he would take during the course of the day, and lunches he would enjoy until his stomach was full, so that often, at dinner, he would have nothing more than a Matian apple²⁴ and a drink of wine from a tiny flask. He regularly hosted lavish dinner parties, but these rarely went on late (certainly never past sunset), nor were they followed by drinking games. Instead, you see, he never did anything before retiring to bed except walk in some secluded spot, alone.

[22] A man of strong sexual appetites, he was always taking people to bed with him (something he termed ‘bed-wrestling’, as though it were a

form of exercise), and was rumoured both to depilate his concubines with his own hand, and to go swimming with the very commonest prostitutes. After stubbornly refusing the offer of marriage to his niece while she was still a young girl, because he was head over heels in love with Domitia at the time, she had no sooner been married off to someone else than he was seducing her – even though Titus at this point was still alive. Then, when she lost both her father and her husband shortly afterwards, he fell madly in love with her, conducting the affair quite openly, and even causing her death by forcing her to have an abortion after he had got her pregnant.

[23] Unlike the people, who were left cold by his murder, the soldiers took it very badly: they immediately started calling for him to be deified, and would have sought to avenge him had they only had leaders (indeed, a short while later, their insistent demands for payback did succeed in securing the punishment of those responsible for the assassination). The senators, by contrast, were overjoyed: elbowing their way into a crowded Senate House, they did not stint in unleashing on the dead man the most abusive and cutting attacks, to the degree that they actually ordered ladders brought so that his votive shields and statues might be pulled down and dashed to the ground as they looked on, before finally, by issuing a decree that his names should everywhere be erased, they sought to obliterate his very memory.

A few months before he was killed, when a raven on the Capitol cried out in Greek ‘All will be well’, the omen was given this gloss by someone:

A raven sitting on the Tarpeian heights just now
Could not say ‘Things are well’ – only that they will be well.

Even Domitian himself, they say, when he dreamed that a hump of gold sprouted out of his back, interpreted this as a sure sign that the republic was destined to enjoy happier and more prosperous times once he had gone – and sure enough, thanks to the measured and moderate behaviour displayed by the *principes* who followed him, so it rapidly came to pass.

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Appendix I: Names and Dates

NAMES

The name of a Roman citizen consisted of three components: the *praenomen*, the *nomen* and the *cognomen*. *Praenomina* were personal names chosen for children by their parents. The names on offer for a boy in particular were strikingly limited: Gnaeus, Lucius, Marcus, and so on. The *nomen* was the family name. The *cognomen* originated as a nickname applied to individual aristocrats in the early days of the republic, but increasingly, as the centuries passed and distinguished families split into various branches, became a hereditary marker of identity. By the time of Augustus, the *cognomen* had come to be adopted by citizens of every class, although there remained many, even of noble status, who did not have one (Marcus Antonius – Mark Antony – being the most notable). Today, it is by his *cognomen* that a Roman is likeliest to be known: Caesar, Cicero, Augustus. This is not, however, a hard-and-fast rule. Suetonius himself – whose *praenomen* was Gaius and had the *cognomen* Tranquillus – is remembered by his *nomen*. Various of the twelve Caesars in his collection of lives – Tiberius, Gaius, Titus – are commemorated by their *praenomina*. Emperors, in contrast to most citizens, but following the trend-setting

example of Augustus, had a long and complex array of names. *Imperator* was invariably adopted as a *praenomen* and Augustus as a *cognomen*, while Caesar came to be used by emperors who were not descended from the Julian family as a *nomen*. So it was that Vespasian – Titus Flavius Vespasianus – could also be hailed as *Imperator Caesar Augustus*.

A woman, in contrast to men, traditionally had only the one name: the feminine form of her father's *nomen*. In the late republic, it became the practice for a high-born woman to take a second name derived from her father's *cognomen*: thus, the daughter of Marcus Livius Drusus, who went on to marry Augustus and become the great matriarch of the Julio-Claudian dynasty, was called Livia Drusilla. Increasingly, however, as the generations went by, girls were given names that did not derive from their father's (or, indeed, adoptive father's) family. So it was, for instance, that Caligula's sisters were called Agrippina, Drusilla and Livilla, rather than all being named Julia.

Slaves had only one name. If freed, a male slave tended to adopt his former owner's *praenomen* and *nomen*, and keep the name he had been given by his master as a *cognomen*.

DATES

Days of the month were expressed in relation to three specific days: the Kalends, the Ides and the Nones. The Kalends was the first day of the month. The Ides was the thirteenth day of January, April, June, August, September, November and December, all months that had 29 days, and of February, a month that had 28; in March, May, July and October – all

months that had thirty-one days – it was the fifteenth day. The Nones was the ninth day before the Ides.

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Appendix II: Principal Characters

Acte (*Nero* 28, 50): A Syrian freedwoman much loved by Nero.

Actorius Naso, Marcus (*Julius* 9, 52): Biographer of Julius Caesar.

Suetonius is the only extant Roman author to mention him.

Aelia Paetina (*Claudius* 26–7): Claudius' second wife.

Aelius Lamia, Lucius (*Domitian* 1, 10): First husband of Domitia Longina.

Possessed of a sense of humour. Executed by Domitian. Consul in AD 80.

Aemilia Lepida (*Claudius* 26): Daughter of Julia the Younger. Her betrothal to Claudius was broken off when her mother was disgraced and banished to Planasia.

Aemilius, Mamercus (*Julius* 1): Relative of Caesar, married to Sulla's daughter. Consul in 77 BC.

Aemilius Paulus (*Julius* 29; *Augustus* 16): Consul in 50 BC, bribed by Caesar. Brother of Lepidus the triumvir.

Aemilius Paulus (*Augustus* 16): Son of the above. Consul in 34 BC.

Afranius, Lucius (*Julius* 34, 75): Pompeian general.

Agrippa, Marcus (*Augustus* 16, 25, 29, 35, 42, 63–4, 66, 94; *Tiberius* 7, 10; *Gaius* 7, 23): Of plebeian Italian stock, he served as Augustus' *consigliere*, masterminding the defeats of Sextus Pompeius and Antony, and taking a lead role in the improvement of Rome's urban fabric. In 21

BC he married Augustus' daughter Julia, and in 18 was given a grant of tribunician power. He died in 12 BC.

Agrippa Postumus (*Augustus* 19, 51, 64–5; *Tiberius* 15, 22, 25): Youngest son of Agrippa and Julia. Disinherited and exiled by Augustus, he was murdered on Tiberius' accession – although on whose orders remains unclear.

Agrippina, Vipsania (*Tiberius* 7): Daughter of Agrippa, married to Tiberius, who was obliged by Augustus to divorce her – despite loving her very much – and marry Julia. Mother of Drusus [2].

Agrippina the Elder (*Augustus* 64, 86; *Tiberius* 53, 64; *Gaius* 7–8, 15): Daughter of Agrippa and Julia, wife of Germanicus, mother of Gaius, grandmother of Nero. Exiled by Tiberius to Pandateria, the island to which her mother had been banished, where she starved to death.

Agrippina the Younger (*Gaius* 7, 24, 29, 39; *Claudius* 26, 39, 43–4; *Nero* 5–6, 9, 28, 34–5, 40, 46, 52; *Galba* 5; *Otho* 3; *Vespasian* 4, 9): Sister of Gaius, wife of Claudius, mother of Nero.

Ampius Titus (*Julius* 77): Historian and Pompeian, recalled from exile in 46 BC.

Antonia (*Gaius* 1, 10, 15, 23–4, 29; *Claudius* 1, 3–4, 11, 41; *Vespasian* 3): Daughter of Mark Antony and Octavia [1]. Mother of Germanicus, Livilla and Claudius.

Antonius, Lucius (*Augustus* 9, 14–15, 68; *Tiberius* 4): Younger brother of Mark Antony.

Antonius Saturninus, Lucius (*Domitian* 6–7, 10): Governor of Upper Germany who launched an abortive rebellion against Domitian in AD 89.

Antony, Mark (*Julius* 52, 79, 82, 84; *Augustus* 2, 4, 7–14, 16, 17 20–21, 28, 49, 63, 68–70, 86; *Tiberius* 4, 59; *Gaius* 26; *Claudius* 11; *Nero* 3): Close ally of Caesar, and consul when Caesar was assassinated. He formed a triumvirate with the future Augustus and Lepidus, and brought the army of Caesar's assassins to decisive defeat at the Battle of Philippi. He then became the effective ruler of the eastern half of the Roman Empire, while the future Augustus ruled the western half. He allied himself with Cleopatra, was defeated by his erstwhile colleague at the Battle of Actium in 31 BC, and committed suicide in Alexandria a few months later. Married (among other women) to Octavia [1], the sister of Augustus, he was the father of Antonia the Elder and Younger.

Apelles (*Gaius* 33; *Vespasian* 19): Tragic actor.

Apollonius Molo (*Julius* 4): Greek teacher of rhetoric on Rhodes. Cicero and Caesar both studied under him.

Artabanus II (*Tiberius* 66; *Gaius* 14; *Vitellius* 2): King of Parthia from AD 12 to 41.

Asinius Pollio (*Julius* 30, 55–56; *Augustus* 29, 43; *Claudius* 13): Historian, reluctant partisan of Caesar and patron of Virgil.

Atia (*Augustus* 4, 61, 94): Niece of Julius Caesar, wife of Gaius Octavius, mother of Augustus.

Aulus Plautius (*Claudius* 24; *Vespasian* 4): Commander of the invasion of Britain in AD 43. Consul in 29.

Aurelia (*Julius* 7, 13, 74): Caesar's mother.

Balbus, Cornelius: (*Julius* 78, 81; *Augustus* 29): Close friend and agent of Caesar. Consul in 40 BC.

Balbus, Marcus Atius (*Augustus* 4): A cousin of Pompey, the grandfather of Augustus.

Bato (*Tiberius* 20): An Illyrian chieftain who fought the Romans for three years, and then, after surrendering to Tiberius, was sent to Ravenna.

Berenice (*Titus* 7): Judaean queen. Mistress of Titus.

Bibulus, Marcus (*Julius* 9, 10, 19–21, 49): Aedile alongside Caesar in 65 BC and consul alongside him in 59, he was fated always to exist in his rival's shadow.

Britannicus (*Claudius* 27, 39, 43, 46; *Nero* 6–7, 33; *Titus* 2): Claudius' son by Messalina. Murdered by Nero.

Brutus, Decimus (*Julius* 80–81, 83; *Augustus* 10): Caesarian turned tyrannicide. After Caesar's murder he was besieged by Antony in Mutina; the future Augustus marched with the two consuls, Hirtius and Pansa, to his relief. He then sought to join Brutus and Cassius in Macedonia, but was captured and executed by one of Antony's partisans.

Brutus, Marcus (*Julius* 49–50, 80, 82, 85; *Augustus* 9–10, 13, 85; *Nero* 3; *Galba* 3; *Otho* 10): A descendant of the Brutus who expelled the last king of Rome in 509, he fought on Pompey's side at Pharsalus. Caesar, who was devoted to his mother, pardoned him, and held him in such evident esteem that he was rumoured to be Caesar's son. Caesar's most famous assassin.

Caenis (*Vespasian* 3, 21; *Domitian* 12): Antonia's secretary. Vespasian's mistress.

Caepio, Rustius: (*Domitian* 9): Senator with an ancestor mentioned approvingly by Cicero, and who had a detail in his will annulled by

Domitian.

Caesar, Lucius (*Julius* 75): Distant relative of Caesar, fought with Pompey at Pharsalus.

Caesar Strabo (*Julius* 55; *Gaius* 60): A distinguished orator and man of letters who exercised a strong stylistic influence on Caesar, his distant relative. Murdered in a street brawl in 87 BC.

Caesarion (*Julius* 52; *Augustus* 17): The son of Cleopatra and (supposedly) Caesar.

Caesonia (*Gaius* 25, 33, 38, 50, 59): Gaius' fourth and favourite wife.

Calpurnia (*Julius* 21, 81): Caesar's last wife.

Calpurnius Piso, Gaius (*Gaius* 25; *Nero* 36): Husband of Livia Orestilla, until Gaius took a fancy to her. Leader in AD 65 of the most serious conspiracy against Nero. Consul in 41.

Calpurnius Piso, Gnaeus (*Tiberius* 52; *Gaius* 2–3; *Vitellius* 2): Governor of Syria. Close associate of Tiberius and enemy of Germanicus.

Calpurnius Piso, Lucius (*Tiberius* 42): Drinking companion of Tiberius and city prefect.

Camillus (*Tiberius* 3; *Claudius* 26): A hero of early Roman history, who served as dictator four times and refounded the city after its sack by the Gauls in 390 BC.

Camillus Scribonianus, Furius (*Claudius* 13, 35; *Otho* 1): Governor of Dalmatia who rebelled against Claudius in AD 42. Consul in 32.

Cassius Chaerea (*Gaius* 56; *Claudius* 11): Tribune in the praetorians who played a leading role in the assassination of Gaius.

Cassius, Gaius (*Julius* 80, 85; *Augustus* 9–10; *Nero* 3, 37; *Galba* 3; *Otho* 10): With Marcus Brutus, the leader of the conspiracy to murder Caesar.

Cassius of Parma (*Augustus* 4): A poet and virulent anti-Caesarian, he was the last of Caesar's assassins to be tracked down and murdered.

Cassius Severus (*Vitellius* 1): A notoriously vituperative historian who lived during Augustus' reign.

Catiline (*Julius* 14, 17): Impecunious aristocrat whose attempted coup in 63 BC provided Cicero, who foiled it, with a theme that he never tired of amplifying.

Cato, Marcus (*Julius* 14, 19, 20, 30, 53, 56; *Augustus* 13, 85): Inveterate opponent of Caesar whose principles were so stern as to verge on the rigid.

Catulus Capitolinus, Quintus (*Julius* 15; *Augustus* 94; *Galba* 2, 3): Distinguished Optimate who defeated the attempted putsch of Marcus Lepidus in 77 BC, after having served as consul with him the previous year. He was responsible for rebuilding the temple of Jupiter on the Capitol.

Cicero (*Julius* 9, 14, 17, 20, 30, 49, 55–6; *Augustus* 3, 94; *Claudius* 41): Rome's greatest orator. Consul in 63 BC.

Cicero, Quintus (*Augustus* 3): Younger brother of Cicero.

Cinna (*Julius* 1; *Gaius* 60): Consul for four years in a row between 87 and 84 BC, he was the effective master of Rome until his murder by mutinous troops in 84. His younger daughter married Caesar.

Clemens (*Tiberius* 25): Slave of Agrippa Postumus, rebel against Tiberius.

Cleopatra (*Julius* 35, 52; *Augustus* 17; *Nero* 3): Queen of Egypt, lover of both Caesar and Antony.

Clodius, Publius (*Julius* 6, 20, 26, 74; *Tiberius* 2): A political agitator flamboyant even by the standards of the late republic, in 62 BC he gatecrashed Caesar's residence where a women-only festival was being celebrated. A bitter enemy of Cicero, he harried him into exile after renouncing his patrician status and becoming a tribune. He was murdered in 52 on the Appian Way.

Cornelia (*Julius* 1, 6): Daughter of Cinna, wife of Caesar, mother of Julia.

Cornelius Nepos (*Julius* 55; *Augustus* 77): Roman biographer.

Cossutia (*Julius* 1): Her engagement (or perhaps marriage) to the young Caesar was terminated in 84 BC, when Caesar married Cornelia instead.

Cotta, Aurelius: (*Julius* 1): Uncle of Caesar, partisan of Sulla. Consul in 75 BC.

Cotta, Lucius (*Julius* 79): A relative of Caesar's on his mother's side. Consul in 65 BC.

Cottius (*Nero* 18): The last of a line of client kings who ruled a stretch of the Alps.

Crassus Frugi, Marcus (*Claudius* 17): Grandson of Marcus Crassus the triumvir, who was twice awarded triumphal honours: once for service in Mauretania, once for service in Britain. Consul in AD 27.

Crassus, Marcus (*Julius* 9, 19, 24, 50; *Augustus* 21): Lieutenant of Sulla who rose to become one of the richest and most powerful men in Rome. Hostile to Pompey, he nevertheless entered into a triumvirate – an informal alliance – in 60 BC with his great rival and Caesar. His death in

battle against the Parthians in 53 BC fatally weakened the alliance between Pompey and Caesar.

Cremutius Cordus (*Augustus* 35; *Gaius* 16): Historian of the civil wars and the rule of Augustus, he committed suicide in AD 25 after a charge of treason was brought against him by Sejanus.

Crispus Passienus (*Nero* 6): Husband of Lepida the Elder, whom he divorced at the request of Claudius, who wanted him to marry Agrippina the Younger. He thereby became the stepfather of the young Nero. Consul twice, in AD 27 and 44.

Curio the Elder (*Julius* 9, 49, 52): Lieutenant of Sulla, friend of Cicero, enemy of Caesar.

Curio the Younger (*Julius* 29, 36): Son of Curio the Elder, he swung from opposing Caesar to becoming one of his most flamboyant partisans.

Dolabella (*Julius* 4, 49, 55): A prominent supporter of Sulla, he was consul in 81 BC. He was acquitted in 76 of a charge of extortion brought against him by Caesar.

Domitia Longina (*Domitian* 1, 3, 12–13, 22): Niece of Caesonia. Wife of Domitian.

Domitilla (*Domitian* 17): The daughter of Domitian's sister.

Domitius Ahenobarbus, Gnaeus [1] (*Augustus* 17; *Nero* 3): Son of Lucius Domitius Ahenobarbus [1] and father of Lucius Domitius Ahenobarbus [2]. Like his father, he was a committed anti-Caesarian, but in the wake of Philippi moved to become a supporter of Antony, whose cause he then abandoned in the wake of Actium. The great-grandfather of Nero. He features in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* as Enobarbus.

Domitius Ahenobarbus, Gnaeus [2] (*Nero* 5–6, 9; *Galba* 5–6; *Otho* 2; *Vitellius* 2): Father of Nero, husband of Agrippina the Younger; ‘a man detestable in every way it is possible to be detestable’. Consul in AD 32.

Domitius Ahenobarbus, Lucius [1] (*Julius* 23–4, 34–5; *Nero* 2): Diehard opponent of Caesar and ancestor of Nero. Consul in 54 BC.

Domitius Ahenobarbus, Lucius [2] (*Nero* 4–5): Grandfather of Nero.

Married Antonia, the daughter of Mark Antony and Octavia [1] and elder sister of the mother of Germanicus and Claudius. A fast driver. Consul in 16 BC. Campaigned successfully in Germany.

Drusilla (*Gaius* 24): Gaius’ favourite sister.

Drusus [1] (*Augustus* 71, 99–101; *Tiberius* 4, 7, 50; *Gaius* 1; *Claudius* 1–2, 11, 46): Younger son of Tiberius Nero and Livia, brother of Tiberius, father of Claudius. He led a Roman army as far as the Elbe, and died – to widespread grief – in 9 BC.

Drusus [2] (*Tiberius* 7, 15, 23, 25, 39, 52, 54–5, 62, 76; *Claudius* 29; *Vitellius* 3): Son of Tiberius and Vipsania Agrippina. Father of Gemellus. Died in suspicious circumstances in AD 23.

Drusus [3] (*Tiberius* 54, 61, 64–5; *Gaius* 7, 12, 15; *Claudius* 9; *Otho* 1): Son of Germanicus and Agrippina the Elder. Put to death by Tiberius.

Epaphroditus (*Nero* 49; *Domitian* 14): Imperial freedman. Secretary to both Nero and Domitian.

Faustus Sulla (*Julius* 27, 75): Son of Sulla the dictator. He sided with Pompey in the civil war and was killed after the Battle of Thapsus.

Favonius, Marcus (*Augustus* 13): Admirer of Cato who fought with the tyrannicides at Philippi and was executed after the battle.

Flavius Sabinus, Titus [1] (*Vespasian* 1, 5): Father of Vespasian. Customs official and banker.

Flavius Sabinus, Titus [2] (*Vitellius* 15; *Vespasian* 1, 5; *Domitian* 1): Elder brother of Vespasian.

Fulvia (*Augustus* 17, 62): Wife first of Clodius, then of Curio the Younger, then of Mark Antony. Mother by Clodius of Augustus' first wife, Claudia. She died in 40 BC.

Gaius Caesar (*Augustus* 26, 29, 43, 56, 64–5, 67, 93; *Tiberius* 10–13, 15, 23; *Claudius* 1; *Nero* 5): The eldest son of Agrippa and Julia, and therefore the grandson of Augustus, who adopted him. Died in AD 4 in Lycia.

Gallius, Marcus (*Tiberius* 6): Partisan of Antony who adopted the young Tiberius and left him a substantial legacy.

Germanicus (*Augustus* 34, 101; *Tiberius* 15, 25, 39, 52, 54–5, 76; *Gaius* 1–8, 10, 15; *Claudius* 1, 7, 11, 26, 29; *Nero* 5; *Otho* 1; *Vitellius* 2): The elder son of Drusus and Antonia the Younger, brother of Claudius, father of Gaius. A war hero and popular idol whose early death under suspicious circumstances in Syria prompted widespread public grieving.

Halotus (*Claudius* 44; *Galba* 15): Taster for and possible poisoner of Claudius.

Haterius, Quintus (*Tiberius* 29): Orator and statesman. Consul 5 BC.

Helvidius Priscus (*Vespasian* 15; *Domitian* 10): Son-in-law of Thraesa Paetus. Philosopher and enthusiast for Rome's traditional republican freedoms.

Helvius Cinna (*Julius* 52, 85): Tribune, poet and Caesarian, who was accidentally lynched after being mistaken for one of Caesar's assassins.

Hirtius, Aulus (*Julius* 56; *Augustus* 10–11, 68; *Tiberius* 5): Accompanied Caesar across the Rubicon. Supplemented Caesar's *Commentaries*. Consul in 43 BC.

Hortensius, Quintus (*Augustus* 72; *Tiberius* 47): An orator celebrated as Cicero's only true rival.

Icelus (*Nero* 49; *Galba* 14, 22): Freedman and favourite of Galba.

Juba (*Julius* 35, 59, 66, 71): King of Numidia. He committed suicide (or had himself killed) after the Battle of Thapsus.

Julia [1] (*Julius* 21, 26, 50, 84; *Augustus* 95): Daughter of Caesar, wife of Pompey. Died in 54 BC.

Julia [2] (*Domitian* 17, 22): Daughter of Titus, seduced by Domitian.

Julia the Elder (*Augustus* 19, 63–5, 71, 101; *Tiberius* 7, 10–11, 50; *Gaius* 7, 23): Only child of Augustus and wife successively of Marcellus, Agrippa and Tiberius. In 2 BC she was banished by her father to the island of Pandateria on a charge of adultery. She died – still in exile – in AD 14.

Julia the Younger (*Augustus* 64–5, 72, 101): Daughter of Agrippa and Julia the Elder, she took after her mother in being convicted of adultery and dying in exile on Planasia, an island off the Italian coast.

Julia Drusilla (*Gaius* 25, 42, 59): Gaius' daughter by Caesonia.

Julius Marathas (*Augustus* 79, 94): Freedman of Augustus who wrote a life of his master.

Lentulus Gaetulicus, Gnaeus (*Gaius* 8; *Claudius* 9; *Galba* 6): An aristocratic associate of Sejanus who survived the prefect's downfall to

serve both Tiberius and Gaius as governor of Germany. In AD 39 he joined a conspiracy with Gaius' sisters Agrippina and Livilla, which resulted in his being put to death.

Lepida the Elder (*Nero* 6, 34): Daughter of Lucius Domitius Ahenobarbus [2]. Nero's aunt.

Lepida the Younger (*Nero* 5, 7): Younger sister of Lepida the Elder. Nero's aunt, Messalina's mother, wife of Appius Silanus. Executed shortly before Claudius died at the behest of Agrippina the Younger.

Lepidus (*Julius* 82, 87; *Augustus* 8, 12–13, 16, 19, 27, 31, 54): Close ally of Caesar, and – with Antony and the future Augustus – a member of the second triumvirate. Marginalized by his colleagues, he was forced into retirement, but kept the post of Pontifex Maximus until his death in 13 BC: the last man to hold it who was not an emperor.

Lepidus, Aemilius (*Gaius* 25; *Claudius* 9): Husband of Drusilla and erstwhile favourite of Gaius, until his conviction in AD 39 of involvement in the same plot that led to the execution of Gaetulicus and the exile of Agrippina the Younger and Julia Livilla.

Lepidus, Marcus (*Julius* 3, 5): Consul in 78 BC with Catulus, who defeated his anti-Sullan coup the following year at a battle on the banks of the Tiber.

Licinius Calvus (*Julius* 49, 73): Orator and poet.

Licinius Mucianus (*Vespasian* 6, 13): Governor of Syria during the Judaean revolt. A reluctant convert to the cause of Vespasian, whom he then served loyally. Consul in AD 63.

Livia Drusilla (*Augustus* 29, 40, 62–3, 69, 84, 99, 101; *Tiberius* 3–6, 12, 14, 21–2, 26, 50–51, 61; *Gaius* 7, 10, 15–16, 23; *Claudius* 3–4, 11, 41; *Galba* 1, 5; *Otho* 1): Mother of Tiberius and Drusus [1], with whom she was pregnant when she married Augustus.

Livilla (*Tiberius* 62; *Claudius* 1, 3): The daughter of Drusus [1] and Antonia, the sister of Germanicus and Claudius, the wife of Drusus [2], the lover of Sejanus.

Livilla, Julia (*Gaius* 7, 24, 29, 39): Daughter of Germanicus and Agrippina the Elder, sister of Gaius.

Livy (*Gaius* 34; *Claudius* 41; *Domitian* 10): Historian during the reign of Augustus who wrote a massive history of Rome.

Lollia Paulina (*Gaius* 25; *Claudius* 26): Gaius' third wife, and very nearly Claudius' fourth.

Lollius, Marcus (*Tiberius* 12–13): Friend of Augustus, enemy of Tiberius, guardian of Gaius. Consul in 21 BC.

Lucceius, Lucius (*Julius* 19): Defeated candidate in the consular election of 60 BC who subsequently devoted himself to the writing of history.

Lucius Caesar (*Augustus* 26, 29, 43, 56, 64–5; *Tiberius* 10–11, 15, 23, 70; *Claudius* 1): The second son of Agrippa and Julia, and therefore the grandson of Augustus, who adopted him alongside his elder brother, Gaius. He died in AD 2 in Massilia.

Lucullus (*Julius* 20; *Tiberius* 73): General and gourmand, he introduced the cherry to Rome and built a celebrated villa outside Naples.

Lucusta (*Nero* 33, 47): A practised poisoner.

Macro (*Gaius* 12, 23, 26): Praetorian prefect in succession to Sejanus.

Cuckolded by Gaius.

Maecenas (*Augustus* 66, 72, 86; *Tiberius* 15; *Nero* 38): Descendant of Etruscan kings (reputedly), friend and adviser to Augustus, patron to Virgil, Horace and Propertius.

Marcellus (*Augustus* 29, 43, 63, 66; *Tiberius* 6, 10; *Vespasian* 19): The son of Octavia [1] by her first marriage, he was the first husband of Augustus' daughter Julia and had been groomed by Augustus as his heir. Died in 23 BC.

Marcellus, Gaius (*Julius* 29): Consul in 50 BC. Although married to Octavia [1], Caesar's great-niece, he was a constant opponent of Caesar. Grandfather of Quinctilius Varus.

Marcellus, Marcus Claudius (*Julius* 28–9): Consul in 51 BC.

Marius (*Julius* 1, 11; *Tiberius* 59): The greatest general of his day, he found himself increasingly put in the shade by Sulla, who had originally been one of his officers. The rivalry between the two men exploded into civil war in 88 BC. Marius fled into exile, but returned to Rome in alliance with Cinna. Elected to his seventh consulship in 87 BC, he died in January 86.

Maximus, Quintus (*Julius* 80): A Caesarian general, appointed by Caesar to serve as suffect consul for the last three months of 45 BC. He died on the last day of his term of office, necessitating a replacement whose term of office lasted only a few hours.

Memmius, Gaius (*Julius* 23, 49, 73): Orator and poet: the dedicatee of Lucretius' poem *On the Nature of Things*.

Menas (*Augustus* 74): Freedman who served as an admiral in Sextus Pompeius' fleet and betrayed it to Augustus.

Messalina (*Claudius* 17, 26–7, 36–7, 39; *Nero* 6; *Vitellius* 2): A great-grandniece of Augustus, Claudius' third wife, executed amid scandalous circumstances.

Mettius Pompusianus (*Vespasian* 14; *Domitian* 10): Born – supposedly – under a lucky star.

Milo (*Julius* 30): Clodius' great rival as a political agitator, he was charged with Clodius' murder in 52 BC and sent into exile after being found guilty.

Mithridates (*Julius* 4, 19, 35; *Tiberius* 37; *Nero* 24): King of Pontus and one of Rome's bitterest and most formidable enemies.

Mnester (*Gaius* 36, 55, 57): Pantomime actor.

Munatius Plancus, Lucius (*Augustus* 7, 29; *Nero* 4): A skilled and slippery political operator, who in 27 BC proposed that Caesar's victorious heir be given the name 'Augustus', and in 22 BC served as censor. This was the last date that anyone held the office until AD 48, when Claudius resurrected the censorship.

Musa, Antonius (*Augustus* 59, 81): Augustus' doctor.

Narcissus (*Claudius* 28, 37; *Vitellius* 2; *Vespasian* 4; *Titus* 2): Claudius' secretary.

Nero (*Tiberius* 54, 61, 64; *Gaius* 7, 15; *Claudius* 9): Eldest son of Germanicus and Agrippina the Elder. Put to death by Tiberius.

Nicomedes (*Julius* 2, 49): King of Bithynia. Notorious for his supposed relationship with the young Caesar.

Nigidius, Publius (*Augustus* 94): Scholar and friend of Cicero, to whom he gave strong backing during Catiline's conspiracy in 63 BC.

Nymphidius Sabinus (*Galba* 11, 16): With Tigellinus, he served as praetorian prefect during the last years of Nero's reign. Backed the coup against Nero, and sought to become emperor, but was murdered by his own soldiers before Galba arrived in Rome.

Octavia [1] (*Julius* 27; *Augustus* 4, 61, 63; *Tiberius* 6): Caesar's great-niece, sister of Augustus and wife of Mark Antony.

Octavia [2] (*Claudius* 27; *Nero* 7, 35, 46, 57): Claudius' daughter by Messalina. Married to Nero, who ignored, then divorced, then murdered her.

Octavius, Gaius (*Augustus* 3, 7, 27, 94, 100–101): Father of Augustus.

Oppius, Gaius (*Julius* 52–3, 56, 72): Close friend and ally of Caesar who crossed the Rubicon with him and wrote his life.

Otho, Salvius (*Galba* 6): Father of Otho. Consul in AD 33, in July.

Pallas (*Claudius* 28; *Vitellius* 2): Claudius' accountant.

Pansa (*Augustus* 10–11; *Tiberius* 5): Consul in 43 BC. Died of his wounds in battle.

Paris (*Domitian* 3, 10): An actor. Lover of Domitian's wife, Domitia Longina.

Parthenius (*Domitian* 16–17): Domitian's personal attendant.

Petreius, Marcus (*Julius* 34, 75): Pompeian general.

Phaon (*Nero* 48–9): Freedman of Nero. Owner of a suburban property.

Pharnaces (*Julius* 35): Son of Mithridates, who seized the opportunity presented by the war between Caesar and Pompey to carve out a series of

conquests in Anatolia, until his defeat by Caesar in 47 BC.

Piso Frugi Licinianus (*Galba* 17–18; *Otho* 5–6): Son of Marcus Crassus Frugi and brother of Gnaeus Pompeius Magnus. Adopted by Galba.

Piso, Gnaeus (*Julius* 9): A junior senator whose wild ways were so alarming to the senate that he was sent in 64 BC to govern Spain, where he was murdered by his own troops.

Piso, Lucius (*Julius* 21, 83): Father of Calpurnia, father-in-law of Caesar.

Polemon (*Nero* 18): Descendant of Mark Antony and client king of Pontus.

Pompeia (*Julius* 6, 74): Granddaughter of Sulla and wife of Caesar until he divorced her after Clodius' gatecrashing of the festival she had been hosting in 62 BC.

Pompeius Macer (*Julius* 56): Librarian employed by Augustus.

Pompeius Magnus, Gnaeus (*Gaius* 35; *Claudius* 27, 29): Son of Marcus Crassus Frugi. Married to Claudius' daughter Antonia. Murdered in sordid circumstances in AD 47.

Pompeius, Sextus (*Julius* 35; *Augustus* 9, 16, 47, 68, 74; *Tiberius* 4, 6): Son of Pompey. Following his father's death he sought to continue the struggle against Caesar in both Africa and Spain, and then, after the Ides of March, against the second triumvirate. From his base in Sicily he fought a protracted and often successful war against the future Augustus, but eventually lost his fleet to Agrippa in 36 BC and had to flee to Asia Minor. Here, the following year, he was captured and executed.

Pompey (*Julius* 19, 20–21, 24, 26–30, 34–7, 49–50, 54, 56, 68–9, 75, 80–81, 83–4; *Augustus* 4, 8–9, 31; *Tiberius* 15, 47; *Claudius* 11, 21; *Nero* 2, 46; *Vespasian* 1): A partisan of Sulla, who awarded him the *cognomen*

Magnus – ‘Great’ – when he was still only very young. His career as a general and politician consistently skirted the border between legitimacy and autocracy, and for a long while put the entire functioning of the republic in his shade. In the end, forced to choose between the Optimates and his erstwhile ally and father-in-law Caesar, he chose the side of senatorial legitimacy. Following his defeat by Caesar at the Battle of Pharsalus in 48 BC he fled to Egypt, where he was murdered.

Pomponius Flaccus, Lucius (*Tiberius* 42): Drinking companion of Tiberius and governor of Syria from AD 32 to 33. Consul in AD 17.

Pontius Aquila (*Julius* 78): Tribune in 45 BC. One of the conspirators who murdered Caesar. His estate in Naples was sold by Caesar to Servilia at a knock-down price (*Julius* 50).

Poppaea Sabina (*Nero* 35; *Otho* 3): Nero’s second wife.

Ptolemy XIII (*Julius* 35): King of Egypt and younger brother of Cleopatra, with whom he fought a war which Cleopatra – thanks to the backing she received from Caesar – won. Ptolemy then drowned in the Nile while fleeing Alexandria.

Ptolemy of Mauretania (*Gaius* 26, 35, 55): Grandson of Antony and Cleopatra, he ruled Mauretania for twenty years, until his murder by Gaius in AD 40.

Quintilius Varus (*Augustus* 23, 49; *Tiberius* 17–18; *Gaius* 3, 31): Governor of Germany who in AD 9 perished along with three legions in the worst military disaster of Augustus’ reign.

Rabirius, Gaius (*Julius* 12): Senator whose involvement in a murder in 100 BC, the year of Caesar’s birth, was raked up by Caesar years later,

with the aim of intimidating his Optimates opponents in the senate. Despite being defended by Cicero, Rabirius was convicted and sentenced; but then, following an appeal to the people, the case was temporarily halted on a technicality. Caesar – his point made – was content to let the matter drop.

Romulus (*Augustus* 7, 95; *Tiberius* 1, 25; *Gaius* 25): The founder and first king of Rome.

Scipio, Publius (*Julius* 35, 37, 59; *Tiberius* 4): Heir to a famous family name, notorious pornographer and consul with Pompey in 52 BC, he carried on the fight against Caesar after Pompey's death. Defeated at Thapsus in 46 BC, he committed suicide a few months later after one final defeat.

Scribonia (*Augustus* 62–3, 69): Second wife of Augustus, the mother of Julia.

Scribonius Libo, Lucius (*Tiberius* 25): Nephew of Scribonia, conspirator against Tiberius.

Sejanus (*Tiberius* 48, 55, 61–2, 65; *Gaius* 12, 30; *Claudius* 6, 27; *Vitellius* 2): Praetorian prefect under Tiberius, and – once the emperor had removed himself to Capri – the effective ruler of Rome. Liquidated in AD 31, after Tiberius had grown alarmed that his *consigliere* was aiming too high.

Seleucus (*Otho* 4, 6): Astrologer and adviser to Otho.

Seneca (*Tiberius* 73; *Gaius* 53; *Nero* 7, 35, 52): Philosopher, rhetorician and writer. Exiled by Caligula but recalled to Rome by Claudius to serve

Nero as his tutor. Obliged to commit suicide after being implicated in Piso's conspiracy.

Sertorius (*Julius* 5): Roman general who led a revolt against Sulla in Spain and remained undefeated until his murder in 73 BC.

Servilius Isauricus (*Julius* 3): Consul in 79 BC, and proconsul of Cilicia between 78 and 74. Caesar, who served under him during this period, subsequently defeated him in the election to become Pontifex Maximus.

Servilius Isauricus, Publius (*Augustus* 62; *Tiberius* 5): Son of the above. His daughter was abortively engaged to the future Augustus. Consul in 48 BC with Julius Caesar, and again in 41 with Lucius Antonius.

Servius Tullius (*Augustus* 2): Sixth king of Rome.

Silanus, Appius (*Claudius* 29, 37): Husband of Lepida the Younger, the mother of Messalina. Reputedly, he turned down Messalina's advances and paid the price.

Silanus, Decimus (*Julius* 14): Consul designate in 63 BC, the year of Catiline's conspiracy. He was the stepfather of Marcus Brutus.

Silanus, Marcus (*Gaius* 12, 23): The father of Junia Claudilla, Gaius' first wife. A sufferer from seasickness. Consul in AD 15.

Silanus Torquatus, Lucius (*Claudius* 24, 27, 29): Great-grandson of Augustus. His betrothal to Claudius' daughter Octavia [2] was broken off thanks to the manoeuvring of Agrippina the Younger. He committed suicide on the same day that Claudius and Agrippina married.

Silius, Gaius (*Claudius* 26, 29, 36): Lover of Claudius' wife Messalina. Came to a sticky end.

Spartacus (*Augustus* 3): Gladiator who led a slave revolt 73–71 BC.

Sporus (*Nero* 28–9, 46, 48–9): A boy remarkable for his resemblance to Poppaea Sabina, he was castrated on Nero's orders and obliged to play the part of the dead empress. ‘Sporus’ meant ‘spunk’ in Greek: a typically Neronian joke.

Spurinna (*Julius* 81): Soothsayer.

Statilia Messalina (*Nero* 35; *Otho* 10): Nero's third wife.

Sulla, Lucius (*Julius* 1, 3, 5, 6, 11, 45, 14–5, 77; *Tiberius* 59): A charismatic and dandyish military genius, he was the first Roman general to march on the capital. Following this, he left Italy for Greece, which had been invaded by Mithridates. Returning victorious to Rome in 83 BC, five years after his initial march on Rome, he defeated his enemies in pitched battle outside the walls of the capital, launched a violent purge and restructured the constitution in favour of the Optimates. After three years as dictator he laid down his powers and retired to Naples, where he died in 78.

Sulla, Publius (*Julius* 9): Nephew of the dictator.

Sulpicius, Servius (*Julius* 29, 50): Orator and jurist. Consul in 51 BC.

Tanusius Geminus (*Julius* 9): Senator and historian.

Tarquinius Priscus (*Augustus* 2): Fifth king of Rome.

Terpnus (*Nero* 20; *Vespasian* 19): ‘The greatest lyre-player of the age’ and Nero's tutor.

Thermus, Marcus (*Julius* 2): Governor of Asia when Caesar embarked on his military career.

Thraesa Paetus (*Nero* 37; *Domitian* 10): A senator celebrated for his rectitude and devotion to philosophy who was obliged to commit suicide

by Nero.

Thrasyllus (*Augustus* 98; *Tiberius* 14, 62; *Gaius* 19): Tiberius' astrologer.

Tiberius Gemellus (*Tiberius* 54–5, 62, 76; *Gaius* 14–15, 23, 29): Grandson of the emperor Tiberius. Put to death by the emperor Gaius.

Tiberius Nero (*Augustus* 62; *Tiberius* 4, 6): First husband of Livia, father of Tiberius and Drusus [1].

Tigellinus (*Galba* 15): Notoriously brutal praetorian prefect during the last four years of Nero's reign.

Tigranes III (*Tiberius* 9): King of Armenia from 20 to 8 BC.

Tiridates (*Nero* 13, 30): King of Armenia, and brother of Vologases, the king of Parthia. His journey to Rome in AD 66 to be crowned by Nero enabled him to serve the Romans as well as the Parthians as a satisfactory compromise candidate on the Armenian throne.

Titurius (*Julius* 25, 67): Legate of Caesar in Gaul who was wiped out with a legion and five cohorts in 54 BC.

Trebatius, Gaius (*Julius* 78): Jurist. Friend of Cicero and legal adviser to Caesar.

Tubero, Quintus (*Julius* 83): Pompeian jurist and historian.

Urgulanilla (*Claudius* 26–7): Claudius' first wife. He divorced her on suspicion of adultery and murder.

Valerius Messala Corvinus (*Augustus* 58, 74; *Tiberius* 70; *Claudius* 13): A principled republican who nevertheless ended up serving first Antony and then Augustus, he was responsible in 2 BC for being the first to hail Augustus as the 'Father of His Country'. Consul in 31 BC.

Varro, Marcus (*Julius* 34, 44): Celebrated scholar who, despite fighting on the Pompeian side at Pharsalus, was appointed by Caesar to oversee Rome's public library; subsequently, after losing much of his property to Antony, he gained the favour of Augustus, and wrote a much-admired series of scholarly volumes.

Varro Murena (*Augustus* 19, 56, 66; *Tiberius* 8): A former governor of Syria who in 22 BC was accused of a conspiracy against Augustus. He fled and was executed without ever having been brought to court.

Vatinius (*Julius* 22, 28): Enthusiastic and consistent partisan of Caesar.

Vespasia Polla (*Vespasian* 1, 5): Vespasian's mother.

Vindex, Julius (*Nero* 40–41, 45–6; *Galba* 9, 11, 16): A Gallic senator of royal descent who in the spring of 68 – when he was the governor of Gallia Lugdunensis, a province administered from Lugdunum and which included northern Gaul – rebelled against Nero. He pledged his support to Nerva. That May he was defeated in battle by troops from the Upper Rhine and committed suicide.

Vinius, Titus (*Galba* 14; *Vitellius* 7): Ambitious aide of Galba. Murdered alongside him.

Virgil (*Augustus* 40; *Gaius* 34, 45; *Nero* 54; *Domitian* 9): Rome's most celebrated poet. Author of the *Aeneid*.

Vitellius, Lucius (*Vitellius* 2–3): Vitellius' father. A smooth and efficient operator, with a talent for flattery, he was highly valued by Tiberius, Gaius and Claudius in succession. He achieved the startling feat – for someone who did not belong to the imperial family – of holding the consulship three times.

Vitellius, Publius (*Vitellius* 2): Vitellius' grandfather.

Vologases (*Nero* 57; *Vespasian* 6; *Domitian* 2): King of Parthia from AD 51 to 78.

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Notes

INTRODUCTION

¹ *Augustus* 9.

² *Nero* 40.

³ *Augustus* 99.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁵ *Gaius* 19.

⁶ Anthony Birley, *Garrison Life at Vindolanda: A Band of Brothers* (Tempus: Stroud, 2020), p. 139.

⁷ *Lives of the Later Caesars*, transl. Anthony Birley (Penguin Classics: London, 1976), p. 36.

⁸ *Julius* 6.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 77.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 76.

¹² Nicolaus of Damascus, *Life of Augustus* 1.

¹³ *Augustus* 50.

[14](#) Ibid., 53.

[15](#) Ibid., 28.

[16](#) *Galba* 1.

[17](#) *Vespasian* 1.

[18](#) *Titus* 1.

[19](#) *Vespasian* 23.

[20](#) *Domitian* 23.

[21](#) *Gaius* 22.

[22](#) Ibid., 19.

[23](#) Ibid., 36.

[24](#) *Augustus* 68.

[25](#) Ibid., 58.

[26](#) *Vespasian* 8.

[27](#) *Otho* 12.

[28](#) *Vitellius* 5.

[29](#) *Claudius* 1.

[30](#) *Tiberius* 42.

[31](#) *Claudius* 30.

[32](#) *Gaius* 50.

THE DEIFIED JULIUS

- ¹ The High Priest of Jupiter was hedged about with so many taboos that Caesar, had he been confirmed in the post, would never have been able to ride a horse, witness an army on campaign, or leave Rome for more than three days at a time.
- ² In the civil war that erupted in 88 BC, Cinna allied himself with Marius against Sulla, and then, after Marius' death, established himself as the effective master of Rome. He was killed in a mutiny in 84 BC, a year before Sulla returned to Italy from a campaign in Greece, defeated the Marians in battle outside Rome and established his own supremacy. To render this dominance constitutional, Sulla obliged an intimidated senate to appoint him to an antiquated office named the dictatorship. This magistracy – which by tradition was only ever invoked at moments of particular crisis, and for a few months at a stretch – permitted a single citizen to have complete control of the state. Sulla ruled as dictator from 82 to 79 BC, then retired to Naples, where he died a year later.
- ³ A military decoration awarded to a citizen who had saved the life of a fellow citizen. The crown was made from oak leaves.
- ⁴ This followed the death of Sulla, when Lepidus, who had served as consul in 78 BC, led an abortive anti-Sullan reaction the following year.
- ⁵ Crucifixion.

- 6 Platform in the Forum from which orators would address the people.
The *rostra* were the rams of captured warships which adorned it.
- 7 The fourth king of Rome.
- 8 The province of Further Spain extended from present-day Almeria to Faro and inland to central Spain.
- 9 These were cities in northern Italy, beyond the Po ('Transpadane').
- 10 A tribe who lived in north-west Italy.
- 11 He was murdered in his province by his own soldiers.
- 12 The open-air space in the Forum, literally meaning 'Assembly', where public meetings were held and which constituted the focus of political and judicial activity in the city.
- 13 The sheer wealth of Egypt, an independent kingdom, meant that any proposal by a Roman statesman to annex it tended to be viewed by his peers with deep suspicion.
- 14 Jugurtha had been the king of Numidia in Africa; the Cimbrians and Teutones were barbarian tribes from the north.
- 15 The proscriptions were lists of aristocrats whose lives and property were forfeit. They were posted in the Forum on Sulla's orders following his victory in the civil war in 82 BC.
- 16 The Cornelian law (Sulla's full name was Lucius Cornelius Sulla) had granted immunity from prosecution to the dictator's agents.

- 17 The crime of which Rabirius was accused had taken place thirty-seven years previously, in the year of Caesar's birth. Caesar's aim in sponsoring the prosecution was to fire a warning shot across the bows of the Optimates. Cicero spoke in Rabirius' defence, and the speech is still extant.
- 18 A plot organized by a bankrupt aristocrat which aimed at the overthrow of the elected consuls and mass debt relief, it was exposed by Cicero, one of the two consuls, in November 63 BC. Catiline himself fled Rome and was killed in battle in January 62.
- 19 As consul designate, he had been asked to give his opinion at the start of the debate.
- 20 The temple of Jupiter on the Capitol had been incinerated by lightning in 83 BC. Catulus, one of the grandest of the Optimates, had been given responsibility for its restoration, which was finally completed in 69. The 'someone else' was Pompey.
- 21 Plaintiffs were required to post bonds: a measure designed to prevent frivolous lawsuits.
- 22 The aim was to deny Caesar a province with legions.
- 23 A report from a magistrate that sinister omens had been seen in the sky was sufficient to have public business put on pause.
- 24 As a plebeian, Clodius was able to secure election as a tribune and use the powers this brought him to drive Cicero into exile.

- [25](#) By ‘Long Haired Gaul’ Suetonius means the barbarous stretches beyond the Alps, as opposed to Cisalpine Gaul (literally, ‘Gaul on this side of the Alps’).
- [26](#) Semiramis was a legendary queen of Assyria, the Amazons an equally legendary race of female warriors associated with the Black Sea. Doubtless Caesar was responding to the familiar taunt about his youthful relationship with King Nicomedes.
- [27](#) Meaning ‘Lark’.
- [28](#) These were decreed by the consuls and approved by the senate as an expression of gratitude to the gods, and featured public thanksgivings in Rome’s temples.
- [29](#) The Cévennes.
- [30](#) Following the murder of Clodius in a brawl on the Appian Way in early 52 BC, his supporters rioted and burned down the Senate House.
- [31](#) This, the Julian Forum, was adjacent to the original Forum.
- [32](#) ‘Unprecedented’ because Julia was a woman.
- [33](#) These proposals were rejected.
- [34](#) Caesar’s aim was to win a consulship, and thereby secure immunity from prosecution, before giving up the governorship of Gaul, which likewise kept him safe from prosecution by his many enemies.
- [35](#) Novum Comum was a colony that Caesar had established during his consulship. It was located in Cisalpine Gaul, one of the two provinces

allocated to him following his consulship by the terms of Vatinius' bill.

- [36](#) Milo had led the gang which killed Clodius. When he was brought to trial, Pompey ringed the Forum with troops. This so intimidated Cicero – who was appearing in Milo's defence – that he stumbled over his speech, and Milo was duly convicted.
- [37](#) The decisive battle in central Greece where Caesar met with Pompey and defeated him.
- [38](#) The quotation is from *Phoenician Women* (524–5).
- [39](#) In Latin, *iacta alea est*. According to Plutarch, in his life of Pompey, the phrase was 'Let the die be cast' (*aneriphtho kybos*): a quotation in Greek from the comic playwright Menander. Some editions of Suetonius, following this, accordingly amend Caesar's famous saying to *iacta alea esto*.
- [40](#) Only senators and equestrians were permitted to wear a gold ring; and only a man worth 400,000 sesterces could rank as an equestrian.
- [41](#) Present-day Marseille.
- [42](#) On the orders of a cabal of the Egyptian king's ministers.
- [43](#) Specifically, Ptolemy XIII, the younger brother of Cleopatra. The Macedonian dynasty that ruled Egypt following the death of Alexander the Great in 323 BC was founded by one of Alexander's generals, Ptolemy I, and featured fifteen kings who bore the name (the last of these being Cleopatra's son by Julius Caesar, also known as Caesarion).

- 44 One of them was Sextus, the future adversary of Augustus.
- 45 The passage into the Forum between the Capitol and the Palatine.
- 46 Since gladiators and actors ranked among the lowest of the low in Roman society, senators and equestrians who performed in the arena or on the stage were consciously behaving in a manner so scandalous that they risked the loss of their official status. Decimus Laberius, by performing in his own mime, ceded his equestrian rank; then, by virtue of the gold ring and the 500,000 sesterces he was awarded for his performance, promptly won it back.
- 47 A marshy area in the Campus Martius next to the Tiber
- 48 Previously the year had consisted of 355 days.
- 49 It is not clear what had qualified men to serve as tribunes of the treasury. Evidently, they were of lesser rank than senators and equestrians.
- 50 Guilds were local associations centred on the various crossroads across the city. They had provided Clodius with the mainstay of his support, and were widely associated with displays of political violence.
- 51 These were engineering projects on such a notoriously challenging scale as almost to be bywords. Claudius would subsequently succeed in draining Lake Fucinus. Caligula and Nero both sought to dig a canal through the Isthmus of Corinth, but failed.

- [52](#) The Dacians were a formidable people who lived beyond the Danube, and would not be subdued by Roman arms until the beginning of the second century AD.
- [53](#) The Parthians, an Iranian people who ruled an empire that spanned Persia and Mesopotamia, were Rome's most formidable adversaries. Crassus, who with Pompey had joined with Caesar in the triumvirate of 59 BC, had perished in battle against them in 53, together with most of his legions. The loss of the legions' eagles was felt in Rome as an enduring cause of shame. It would be left to Augustus to recover them.
- [54](#) All these sartorial flourishes were regarded by the sterner breed of Roman moralist as shameless markers of effeminacy.
- [55](#) The Subura, a low-lying slum to the north of the Forum, was a notoriously *déclassé* district of the city. The house of the Pontifex Maximus adjoined the temple of Vesta in the Forum, and as such – when Caesar moved there after his election to the priesthood – had provided him with a considerable upgrade.
- [56](#) In Greek mythology, Aegisthus became the lover of Clytaemnestra, while her husband, Agamemnon, was absent in command of the Greeks at Troy.
- [57](#) Ptolemy XII, the father of Ptolemy XIII and Cleopatra.
- [58](#) A dialogue also known as 'On Famous Orators'. It was written in the immediate aftermath of Caesar's victory in the civil war.
- [59](#) *Brutus*: 262.

[60](#) *Gallic War*: Book 8, Preface (5–6).

[61](#) Caesar’s final victory over the Pompeians in Spain (45 BC).

[62](#) According to Pliny’s uncle, the encyclopaedist, this particular Scipio had been named after an actor: a sure marker of his dissolute character.

[63](#) This stood in the Julian Forum.

[64](#) A general’s cloak was dyed crimson.

[65](#) See *Julius* 25.

[66](#) An Athenian who lost his hand at the Battle of Marathon in 490 BC. As the Persians sought to escape the victorious Athenians, Cynegirus ‘had reached up to grab the stern ornament of one of the ships and had had his hand chopped off by an axe’ (Herodotus: 6.114).

[67](#) Modern-day Piacenza.

[68](#) Hiempsal was the father of Juba, the Numidian king who in 46 BC joined Scipio in resisting Caesar’s invasion of Africa. The pair of them were defeated by Caesar at the Battle of Thapsus. The identity of Masintha is uncertain, but he may have been the son of a Numidian king deposed by Pompey on Sulla’s orders in favour of Hiempsal some decades before.

[69](#) Mamurra was an aide of Caesar’s notorious for his profligacy and vulgarity. Catullus savaged him in two of his poems: 29 and 57. In the second of these, he alleged that Caesar had been sexually submissive to Mamurra.

- 70 Crucifixion was viewed by the Romans as the most degrading of punishments because it was protracted as well as public.
- 71 This was during Caesar's first campaign against the Pompeians in Spain, in 49 BC. See *Julius* 34.
- 72 Both men were partisans of Pompey. Aulus Caecina was a close friend of Cicero, who interceded with Caesar to secure him a pardon. Pitholaus was one of Pompey's freedmen.
- 73 Caesar was consul in 59 and 48 BC, and from 46 to 44, the year of his death.
- 74 These statues, together with one of Brutus, the man who had taken the lead in the expulsion of the monarchy, stood on the Capitol.
- 75 The Circus procession went from the Capitol via the Velabrum to the Circus Maximus, and included the statues of gods borne on litters.
- 76 1 January: the first day of the political year.
- 77 The Latin festival, which had originated in ancient times as an assembly of the various communities scattered across Latium, was celebrated in the Alban Hills, to the south of Rome.
- 78 The symbol of a king.
- 79 Mark Antony's appointment as consul had reflected the trust that Caesar put in him.
- 80 The appointment of a consul to serve only a portion of a year (a 'suffect' consul) was a novelty that Caesar's contemporaries found

shocking. Under Augustus and his successors the practice would become a convention.

- [81](#) The tribunes removed from office on Caesar's orders after the Latin festival. The votes they received were all the more impressive for the fact that they were not even on the ballot.
- [82](#) Lucius Junius Brutus: the man who had expelled the last king of Rome in 509. Marcus Junius Brutus the tyrannicide was his heir.
- [83](#) The senate was meeting in a chamber of the great stone theatre built by Pompey on the Campus Martius. This was because the Senate House in the Forum had been burned down in the riots that followed the murder of Clodius (see *Julius* 26).
- [84](#) Passed during Caesar's consulship of 59.
- [85](#) A pediment, an architectural feature usually only seen on a temple, was one of the honours voted to Caesar.
- [86](#) Mid-morning.
- [87](#) James Russell, in his article 'Julius Caesar's Last Words: A Reinterpretation', in *Vindex Humanitatis: Essays in Honour of John Huntly Bishop*, ed. B. Marshall (The University of New England: Armidale, NSW, 1980), makes the intriguing suggestion that the phrase 'And you' – *Kai su* in the original Greek – was one that Caesar might have picked up as a student in the Greek East, where it meant 'to hell with you'.

- [88](#) Gaius Octavius, the future Augustus, was the grandson of Caesar's younger sister; Lucius Pinarius and Quintus Pedius the grandsons of his elder sister.
- [89](#) Pacuvius and Atilius were both early Roman playwrights.
- [90](#) Caesar's ancestral home in the Subura had stood near to Rome's synagogue, and he had always served the Judaeans of the city as their particular patron.
- [91](#) Cyrus was the founder of the Persian Empire, and the hero of a fictionalized biography by Xenophon, the Athenian historian and soldier.
- [92](#) Shortly before sunset.

THE DEIFIED AUGUSTUS

- [1](#) Presumably by 'minor families' Suetonius means plebeian senators – despite the fact that according to other sources only patricians were senators during the earliest days of Rome.
- [2](#) 23 September 63 BC.
- [3](#) Hadrian.
- [4](#) Literally, from 'the movement or the feeding of birds'.
- [5](#) Quintus Ennius (c.239–169 BC) was the father of Roman epic poetry. The line Suetonius quotes refers to the twelve vultures seen by

Romulus as he stood on the Palatine: a sign from the gods that he should found Rome.

[6](#) Modern-day Modena.

[7](#) Modern-day Perugia.

[8](#) Legally, patricians could not become tribunes.

[9](#) Every legion had an eagle as its standard. To lose it was the worst disgrace imaginable.

[10](#) A notorious party town on the Bay of Naples.

[11](#) Warships with two rows of oars on each side.

[12](#) Modern-day Bologna.

[13](#) The Psylli were an African tribe famed for their ability as snake-handlers, and were believed to be immune to snake poison.

[14](#) Suetonius possibly means Julia's daughter, the granddaughter of Augustus, who was also called Julia. Like her mother, she had been exiled to an island off the Italian mainland on a charge of adultery.

[15](#) A region in the north-west Balkans, south of the Danube.

[16](#) An Alpine region covering parts of what are now Switzerland, Germany and Austria.

[17](#) The doors of the temple were only ever closed when Rome was at peace.

- [18](#) The Marsians were an Italian people who rose in rebellion against Rome in 91 BC and were only finally defeated by Sulla in 89.
- [19](#) Measuring and digging fortifications was for legionaries to do, not centurions.
- [20](#) Against Sextus Pompeius in 36 BC.
- [21](#) Gaius and Lucius were Augustus' sons by adoption. The sons of Agrippa and Julia, they were also his grandsons.
- [22](#) This was a radical break with tradition.
- [23](#) Modern-day Tarragona.
- [24](#) As a young man, Augustus – together with Mark Antony and Lepidus – had followed the example of Sulla by posting proscription lists. Their most famous victim was Cicero.
- [25](#) Suetonius regards this as worthy of note because Philopoeman was a freedman.
- [26](#) Both times the two colleagues were, respectively, Agrippa and Tiberius.
- [27](#) Modern-day Rimini.
- [28](#) The augury of safety was taken to determine whether prayers should be offered for the security of the state; the High Priest of Jupiter, the *flamen Dialis*, was the office with which our surviving text of *The Lives of the Caesars* opens.

- 29 Parricides were sewn into a sack with a dog, a cock, a snake and a monkey, then thrown into the Tiber.
- 30 This law prescribed that witnesses to a forged will were liable to the same punishment as the forger himself.
- 31 *Orcini* was the name given to slaves freed by their master's will.
- 32 From eight to ten.
- 33 It was the opinion of the Romans that 'even personal tastes and appetites should be subject to surveillance and review' (Plutarch, *Cato the Elder* 16).
- 34 The Julian law on the theatre, passed by Augustus most likely in 18 BC, prescribed where the different classes of Roman society were to sit while watching the games.
- 35 To rank as a knight, which in turn brought the right to sit in the front fourteen rows at the theatre, a citizen needed 400,000 sesterces.
- 36 Reversing the reforms introduced by Julius Caesar (*Julius* 41).
- 37 Augustus belonged to the Fabian tribe by virtue of his adoption by Julius Caesar, and to the Scaptian tribe as the son of Gaius Octavius.
- 38 A quotation from Virgil: *Aeneid* 1.282.
- 39 In social terms, gladiators ranked alongside actors and prostitutes as the lowest of the low. In the long run, Augustus' concern for social proprieties led him to regard the appearance of knights on the stage or in the arena as unacceptable.

[40](#) Modern-day Pozzuoli.

[41](#) A pantomime actor – literally, one who performed all the roles – was a dancer who would act out a story without recourse to the spoken word.

[42](#) Latin citizenship was a limited version of Roman citizenship.

[43](#) i.e. the seas on either side of Italy: the Tyrrhenian and Adriatic respectively.

[44](#) A Spanish tribe who lived along the northern reaches of the Ebro.

[45](#) A pool in the centre of the Forum that progressively shrank over the course of the centuries, it was the subject of a bewildering assortment of legends.

[46](#) The god of healing.

[47](#) Octavia's first husband, before she married Mark Antony, was called Marcellus.

[48](#) The Getae lived beyond the mouth of the Danube, in what is now Romania.

[49](#) Modern-day Sorrento.

[50](#) The priests of Cybele, the Mother Goddess, were in the habit of castrating themselves in her honour.

[51](#) i.e. Livia.

[52](#) Augustus closely identified with Apollo – so much so that the temple to the god which he built on the Palatine directly abutted his own

house.

- 53 The identity of Mallia is a puzzle. Perhaps she was the host of the dinner party, perhaps a goddess.
- 54 Legal proscriptions against gambling seem to have been relaxed in December, the month when the festival of Saturnalia was held.
- 55 Both men were consulars: Vinicius in 19 BC and Silius in 20.
- 56 A ‘dog’ was the lowest throw, a ‘Venus’ the highest.
- 57 i.e. Tiberius’ younger brother, Drusus.
- 58 An orator so talented that he had represented Cicero’s only real rival.
- 59 Fascinating evidence for Augustus’ interest in giant fossils.
- 60 The office of the Pontifex Maximus in the Forum.
- 61 Augustus evidently misunderstood the Sabbath to mean a fast.
- 62 Implements used to scrape the body clean of oil and sweat.
- 63 Sulphur springs between Rome and Tibur that were believed to have curative effects.
- 64 Ajax was a Greek hero at the Trojan War who died by falling on his sword. Sponges were used to erase ink or the wax of a writing tablet.
- 65 Annius Cimber was an adherent of Antony notorious for the florid character of his oratory; Crispus Sallustius – ‘Sallust’ – was a historian who wrote about both Marius and Catiline, and whose style regularly featured archaisms; Cato, the great-grandfather of the Cato who was

such an inveterate opponent of Caesar, was a moralist and statesman who lived in the first half of the second century BC. Veranius Flaccus, otherwise unknown, was presumably celebrated for the brevity of his style.

[66](#) No such date existed.

[67](#) The comedy written in fifth-century BC Athens, of which Aristophanes' was the exemplar.

[68](#) Consulars of the late second century BC.

[69](#) Most famously Virgil and Horace. Suetonius wrote lives of both poets.

[70](#) Seals, the Romans believed, were never struck by lightning.

[71](#) An island for an island. Aeneria is modern-day Ischia.

[72](#) The mysteries of the Attic Ceres – Demeter, as the Greeks called her – took place at Eleusis, outside Athens.

[73](#) The sacred bull at Memphis. See also *Titus* 5.

[74](#) Literally, ‘Conversations of the Gods’.

[75](#) Bacchus, the god of wine, who was particularly associated with Thrace.

[76](#) *Eutychus* meant ‘fortunate’ in Greek, *Nicon* ‘victor’.

[77](#) The lines were from the ending of a comedy by the Greek playwright Menander.

[78](#) The younger brother of Tiberius, and father of the emperor Claudius.

[79](#) 19 August AD 14.

[80](#) 3 April AD 13.

[81](#) Secondary heirs received the legacies that primary heirs refused; heirs of the third rank received the legacies refused by secondary heirs.

TIBERIUS

[1](#) Otherwise unknown. The Sabines lived north of Rome.

[2](#) According to tradition, Titus Tatius joined Romulus on the throne of Rome after the Roman abduction of Sabine women had led first to war between the two peoples, and then to a union between them.

[3](#) 504 BC.

[4](#) A tributary of the Tiber.

[5](#) In 279 BC, following the invasion of Italy by Pyrrhus of Epirus: the king whose victories over the Romans cost him so many men that they inspired the word ‘pyrrhic’.

[6](#) In 264 BC, during the First Punic War.

[7](#) At the Battle of the River Metaurus in 207 BC, during the Second Punic War. Hannibal had invaded Italy and won a series of stunning victories over the Romans; the defeat of Hasdrubal was a key turning point in the war.

[8](#) The girl’s father stabbed her rather than allow her to be raped. The episode is traditionally dated to 451 BC.

- ⁹ Claudius Pulcher was the son of Appius Caecus, and the first of his family to be given the *cognomen Pulcher* – ‘Handsome’. The incident narrated by Suetonius took place when he was consul in 249 BC, during the First Punic War.
- ¹⁰ The cult of the Mother Goddess, Cybele, was introduced to Rome in 204 BC, during the Second Punic War, on the advice of the Sibylline Books.
- ¹¹ ‘Clodius’, the name by which he was best known, was the plebeian form of Claudius.
- ¹² Only a plebeian could become a tribune, which is why Clodius – whose plan it was to deploy the powers of a tribune against Cicero, a particularly bitter enemy of his – first had to forgo his patrician status.
- ¹³ Marcus Livius Salinator was consul in 219 BC, and then again – despite his conviction for appropriating war booty – in 207. He was censor in 204.
- ¹⁴ A Gallic tribe that in 390 BC wiped out a Roman army at the Battle of the Allia and captured Rome itself.
- ¹⁵ In the late fourth century BC.
- ¹⁶ The Gracchi brothers were populist reformers who sought a more equitable division of public land than the Optimates were prepared to allow. Both ended up murdered, one in 133 BC, the other in 121. Marcus Livius Drusus was tribune in 122.

- [17](#) In 91 BC. His murder helped precipitate a revolt against Roman rule by all the various Italian peoples who had been denied full citizenship of Rome. It was only finally suppressed by Sulla in 87.
- [18](#) Modern-day Narbonne and Arles.
- [19](#) 16 November 42 BC.
- [20](#) The king of Cappadocia in central Anatolia.
- [21](#) The Vindelicians inhabited Raetia.
- [22](#) i.e. he celebrated a triumph.
- [23](#) A town in Gallia Comata where Tiberius had served as governor. Modern Nîmes.
- [24](#) A medicinal spring outside Patavium (modern-day Padua).
- [25](#) This was a move from the centre of things (Carinae was an upmarket area next to the Forum) to the outskirts.
- [26](#) A father's power over his children was such that no son was permitted, while his father was still alive, to own property or funds, and had to rely instead on an allowance.
- [27](#) Noricum included what today is Austria and western Slovenia.
- [28](#) The Bructerians were a tribe in north-western Germany.
- [29](#) By sending Bato to Ravenna Tiberius spared him the humiliation of having to walk through the streets of Rome in a triumph.

[30](#) Both these temples were in the Forum. The temple of Castor and Pollux had been badly damaged by fire in 14 BC. The temple of Concord, which had been reconstructed in the wake of Gaius Gracchus' murder in 121 BC, and long left unfinished, was associated with the Optimates: the faction in Roman politics with which Tiberius particularly identified.

[31](#) A quotation (slightly adapted) from Ennius.

[32](#) *Iliad*: 10.246–7.

[33](#) According to Cicero, the oldest games celebrated in Rome. They ran from 4 to 17 November; Tiberius was born on 16 November.

[34](#) After his mother, Livia.

[35](#) In other words, the enmity would be one appropriate to fellow citizens, not that of a master towards an inferior.

[36](#) Modern-day Trevi.

[37](#) This would have been 10,000 times the average daily wage paid to a labourer.

[38](#) The Roman equivalent of burger vans.

[39](#) This was a measure aimed at controlling a disease that spread a scale over the face and upper body. Tiberius named it ‘gout of the chin’.

[40](#) Augustus, back in 18 BC, had brought in sweeping legislation aimed at regulating sexual behaviour, and made adultery a criminal offence.

- [41](#) Rental contracts began on 1 July.
- [42](#) Married men had preference in the lottery held to determine offices.
- [43](#) A migratory confederation of Iranian tribes who ranged from the Volga to the Danube.
- [44](#) A province in the north-western reaches of the Balkans, south of the Danube.
- [45](#) Nicknames that made punning play with the Latin words for drink, hot and unmixed wine respectively.
- [46](#) The Latin plural word *sellaria* – which Tiberius seems to have coined – derives from *sella*, a seat, and most likely refers to the chairs on which prostitutes would sit when advertising themselves to potential clients.
- [47](#) Author of a notorious sex manual.
- [48](#) The Latin for goat was *caper*.
- [49](#) A celebrated painter from Ephesus who settled in Athens during its golden age.
- [50](#) In Greek mythology, Atalanta was a virgin huntress. Meleager fell in love with her during a celebrated boar hunt and presented her with the hide of the boar after he had killed it.
- [51](#) Literally, ‘he insulted the heads of women’. Julius Caesar is quoted by Suetonius using a similar phrase (*Julius* 22).

- [52](#) It was a staple of comedies that goats like to lick their own genitals; Tiberius, so it is implied, preferred to lick the genitals of women. The anecdote, which begins with Tiberius forcing women to give him oral sex and ends with him giving it, is as confusing as the Latin of this particular passage.
- [53](#) This strikingly contradicts the account given earlier (*Tiberius* 11), and which was presumably derived from an alternative source, of Tiberius' behaviour towards Julia at this time.
- [54](#) Another name for Troy.
- [55](#) Hector was the great Trojan hero whose death and funeral provide Homer's *Iliad* with its climax.
- [56](#) The same island to which her mother, Julia, had been exiled by Augustus.
- [57](#) The flight of steps that led from the Forum past the city prison to the Capitol. Bodies of executed criminals would be exposed to the public gaze on them.
- [58](#) The future emperor, aka Caligula.
- [59](#) See *Tiberius* 46.
- [60](#) An allusion to his status as Augustus' adopted son, which meant that – as a dependant of his adoptive father – he lacked the 400,000 sesterces required to qualify as an equestrian.
- [61](#) Sulla's *cognomen* was *Felix*: ‘Lucky’.

- [62](#) The king of Mycenae who commanded the Greeks in the Trojan War.
- [63](#) Supposedly between Sejanus and Livilla.
- [64](#) The king of Troy, who lived to see his many children perish before his own death at the hands of the victorious Greeks.
- [65](#) The ‘lots’ were oracular responses written on blocks of wood and kept in the temple of Fortuna in Praeneste (modern-day Palestrina).
- [66](#) Alexandrian poets. The first two wrote in the third century BC; Parthenius in the first century BC.
- [67](#) Hecuba was the wife of Priam; Achilles the greatest Greek warrior in the Trojan War, and the central protagonist of Homer’s *Iliad*; the Sirens mythical monsters, half-bird, half-woman, whose song was famously irresistible.
- [68](#) Minos was the legendary king of Crete who built the Labyrinth and became a judge in the Underworld.
- [69](#) The word from which the English ‘monopoly’ derives.
- [70](#) *Emblema* in Greek were inlaid figures and designs.
- [71](#) 16 March AD 37.

GAIUS

[1](#) See *Augustus* 23 and *Tiberius* 17.

[2](#) The title originally worn by the kings of Persia, and which the Parthians, as their self-proclaimed successors, had adopted in turn.

³ I.e. the Saturnalia.

⁴ 31 August AD 12.

⁵ Pliny the Elder, the encyclopaedist and uncle of Suetonius' friend and patron Pliny the Younger.

⁶ The Rhine and the Moselle.

⁷ In Suetonius' own time, *puer* was the Latin for boy and *puella* for girl.

⁸ 18 May.

⁹ Livia took the name 'Augusta' by the terms of Augustus' will.

¹⁰ The son of Helios, the sun god, who was allowed by his father to drive the chariot of the sun as a one-off treat. Taking the chariot for a spin, however, Phaeton found himself unable to control the horses, and plunged to his death after he had first scorched the earth.

¹¹ Tiberius Gemellus, the son of Drusus and Livilla.

¹² This was the title that Augustus had given to his grandsons (and adopted sons) Gaius and Lucius, to signify their status as his heirs. Strictly speaking, Tiberius Gemellus was Gaius' cousin, not his brother.

¹³ See *Tiberius* 43.

¹⁴ Writers under Augustus who had been critical of his regime.

¹⁵ The right of the people to vote for magistrates had been abolished by Tiberius.

- [16](#) Commagene, which had been a client kingdom under Augustus, had been turned into a Roman province by Tiberius in AD 18. Gaius restored it to its former status in 37.
- [17](#) The Parilia, a festival that had always been celebrated on 21 April, marked the birthday of Rome.
- [18](#) Respectively, 1 July AD 37; 1 January 39; 13 January 40; and 7 January 41.
- [19](#) Modern-day Lyon.
- [20](#) This had been built on the Campus Martius by Titus Statilius Taurus, a general who had fought alongside the future Augustus in the Dalmatian campaign and commanded his land forces at the Battle of Actium. The amphitheatre had been completed in 29 BC, and was destroyed in the Great Fire of Rome in AD 64.
- [21](#) Green and red were the colours of the racing teams in the Circus favoured by Gaius. The other colours were blue and white.
- [22](#) A house on the Palatine, overlooking the Circus, that by Gaius' time had been absorbed into the palace complex.
- [23](#) Darius was the name of Xerxes' father, the Persian king whose army was defeated at Marathon in 490 BC.
- [24](#) Chariots – which had ceased to be used for warfare in the civilized world centuries before – were a notorious marker of British backwardness.

- 25 Xerxes had led an invasion of Greece in 480 BC. His army had crossed the Hellespont on twin pontoon bridges.
- 26 A celebrated Greek tyrant who had lived in the sixth century BC.
- 27 Echoing the title of Jupiter: ‘The Best and the Greatest’.
- 28 Homer: *Iliad* 2.204.
- 29 Romulus had led the rape of the Sabine women. Augustus had stolen Livia from Tiberius Nero.
- 30 By Cleopatra.
- 31 Only slaves were supposed to be put to the lash.
- 32 The punishments of slaves.
- 33 His protective spirit.
- 34 See *Tiberius* 45.
- 35 A port on the Gulf of Corinth celebrated for the black and white hellebore that grew outside its walls, and which were believed to cure epilepsy, insanity and constipation.
- 36 Another name for Galatia, a region in central Anatolia that had been settled in the third century BC by Gauls.
- 37 Accius, a Roman tragedian who lived in the second century BC.
- 38 The same bridge built out of ships that, on the opposite side of the bay to Puteoli, began at Baiae.

- ³⁹ The *cognomen* of Cincinnatus, a legendary hero from the early days of the republic, meant ‘curly-haired’. Gaius – as Suetonius goes on to point out – was sensitive about his own baldness.
- ⁴⁰ Nemi was a grove south of Rome whose ‘king’ – a priest of the goddess Diana – was a fugitive slave who could only be deposed from his position by another runaway slave, who first had to kill him. Gaius built two huge pleasure boats which he floated on the neighbouring lake. These ended up sixty feet under water, where they were inspected in 1535 by an adventurous military engineer wearing a diving helmet. The boats were finally salvaged under Mussolini, only to be destroyed by fire in the Second World War.
- ⁴¹ This – begun by Julius Caesar and completed by Augustus – stood on the south side of the Forum.
- ⁴² Small galleys, named after a tribe of pirates in Dalmatia.
- ⁴³ Evidently a reprise of the *sellaria* that Tiberius had set up on Capri (*Tiberius* 43).
- ⁴⁴ A typical inversion of the norm, whereby it was the *princeps* who would bestow gifts upon the people.
- ⁴⁵ Batavia was the region around the mouth of the Rhine.
- ⁴⁶ Shakespeare’s *Cymbeline*.
- ⁴⁷ The two episodes related in this paragraph appear to be garbled accounts of the same incident.

[48](#) *Aeneid* 1.207.

[49](#) The Romans thought there was just the single Ocean, which surrounded the world.

[50](#) The lighthouse of Alexandria.

[51](#) A traditional military punishment. Every tenth man would be put to death.

[52](#) Jupiter, Neptune and Mercury respectively.

[53](#) A Thracian gladiator – a *Thrax* – wore a helmet and greaves, and was armed with a small shield and a sword with a curved blade. Gaius was a particular fan of Thracians.

[54](#) *Murmillones*, heavily armoured gladiators who in the arena were typically made to fight Thracians.

[55](#) A horse swift by name and swift by nature.

[56](#) These had been instituted in AD 14 by Livia in honour of the Deified Augustus, and were held annually on the Palatine beginning on 17 January: the anniversary of their wedding.

[57](#) Julius Caesar – assassinated on the Ides of March – had also been called Gaius.

[58](#) The father of Alexander the Great, murdered in 336 BC.

[59](#) 24 January AD 41.

[60](#) A glimpse of a side of Gaius' character that Suetonius nowhere else hints at.

[61](#) An imperial estate on the Esquiline.

[62](#) Caesar Strabo, murdered in 87 BC.

THE DEIFIED CLAUDIUS

- [1](#) The monument – the *Drususstein* – was raised in Mogontiacum, modern-day Mainz, and still stands.
- [2](#) Gaius and Lucius, the sons of Agrippa and Julia, adopted by Augustus.
- [3](#) 1 August 10 BC.
- [4](#) Although historians refer to the ‘Julio-Claudians’, this would have made no sense to the Romans themselves: a Claudian adopted by a Julian himself became a Julian.
- [5](#) Wearing a Greek cloak rather than a toga to the games marked him out as an invalid.

[6](#) i.e. Livia.

[7](#) The first Tiberius is the future emperor Tiberius, the second the future emperor Claudius. The Games of Mars were celebrated in the spring of AD 12.

[8](#) Marcus Silvanus was the brother of Urgulanilla, Claudius’ first wife.

[9](#) The festival – which honoured the commonality of those who lived in Latium – was celebrated in April, and supposedly predated the

founding of Rome. All the city's magistrates would leave for the temple of Jupiter on the highest peak of the Alban Hills, some fifteen miles south of Rome, and a young man – usually from the imperial family – would be appointed in their absence to serve as urban prefect. Augustus frets that Claudius is unfitted either to join the procession or to take responsibility for the city in the magistrates' absence.

- [10](#) Like the Saturnalia, the Sigillaria was a festival when superiors bestowed gifts upon their inferiors.
- [11](#) The tension between what were evidently rival traditions about Claudius during this period – one claiming that he was despised and one that he was respected – is left unresolved by Suetonius.
- [12](#) A college of priests established by Tiberius.
- [13](#) Devoted to the cult of Gaius himself (see *Gaius* 22).
- [14](#) This had been built by Sejanus on the north-eastern outskirts of Rome.
- [15](#) Presumably the comedy had been written by Germanicus himself (see *Gaius* 3).
- [16](#) Exemption from jury duty was one of the privileges that Augustus' marriage law of 18 BC had granted men who fathered large numbers of children.
- [17](#) Prostitutes – on the grounds of their disreputability – were proscribed from giving evidence in court cases.
- [18](#) In 22 BC. Claudius held the office in AD 48.

- 19 Ptolemy XII, the father of Ptolemy XIII and Cleopatra. Rabirius Postumus, an equestrian banker, had funded Ptolemy's restoration to the Egyptian throne in 55 BC following a three-year period of exile in Rome; Ptolemy, unable to pay the debt, had then appointed Rabirius minister of finance. Rabirius' brief period of office provoked such hostility in Alexandria that he was forced to turn tail and return to Rome, where he was prosecuted and defended (probably successfully) by Cicero.
- 20 A high-end shopping area – probably in the vicinity of the Saepta – where expensive gifts could be bought appropriate to the Sigillaria, the final stretch of the Saturnalia.
- 21 The present-day Îles d'Hyères, off the south-eastern coast of France.
- 22 Present-day Boulogne.
- 23 A district in the southern Campus Martius.
- 24 A large building next to the Saepta, conveniently located for fighting the fire in the Campus Martius.
- 25 Both springs rose north-east of Rome.
- 26 The obelisk had been brought to Rome by Caligula in AD 37 and used to decorate a circus built in the Vatican district of the city. Today it stands in the centre of St Peter's Square.
- 27 The Secular Games, traditionally held every 100 years. Augustus had held them in 17 BC (see *Augustus* 31) – a mere sixty-four years before

Claudius revived them. He claimed, in justification of this, that he was marking the 800th anniversary of the founding of Rome.

- [28](#) Decorum obliged the left hand to be kept within the toga.
- [29](#) The sacral quality of the formula required that it be kept secret from those unqualified to hear it.
- [30](#) Senators were not permitted to travel beyond a certain distance from Rome without explicit permission.
- [31](#) Aulus Plautius had led the invasion of Britain. To walk on a man's left side was a mark of respect.
- [32](#) Suetonius is consistently more interested in the organization of the Roman army than in the campaigns that it fights.
- [33](#) The island stood in the Tiber.
- [34](#) Seleucus II, the Macedonian king of Syria and Anatolia, r. 246–225 BC.
- [35](#) This is probably the single most debated line in the whole of Suetonius. Is ‘Chrestus’ to be identified with ‘Christ’, and is the ‘chronic state of disorder’ referred to by Suetonius an account of tensions between Judaeans and early Christians? Opinion is sharply divided, but the balance of probability – since there are extant spellings of ‘Chrestos’ in Greek inscriptions from Syria which date well into the sixth century, and we know of no other ‘Chrestus’ from the Julio-Claudian period well enough known by the time Suetonius

was writing not to have needed a qualifier – is that ‘Chrestus’ is indeed to be identified with Jesus.

- [36](#) Augustus had banned foreign envoys – with the exception of the Parthian and Armenian ambassadors – from sitting in the seats reserved for senators.
- [37](#) Fetial priests were responsible for advising the senate on foreign affairs and making formal proclamations of peace and war. Their origins reached back to the time of the kings. Claudius’ revival of ancient formulae and rituals – despite what Suetonius goes on to claim – reflected his deep personal interest in Rome’s archaic history.
- [38](#) Urgulanilla was suspected – almost certainly unjustly – of conspiring with her brother to murder his wife by throwing her out of a window.
- [39](#) Britannicus was actually born in AD 41, the year before Claudius’ second consulship.
- [40](#) Suetonius’ commentary here on Britannicus and Nero is a classic illustration of his understated control of irony.
- [41](#) A military decoration awarded for merit.
- [42](#) Felix, the younger brother of Claudius’ most valued freedman, Pallas, was the procurator of Judaea who in Acts of the Apostles (24) is described as listening with his Judaean wife to the imprisoned Paul (24:24–5).
- [43](#) By marriage to the mother of Claudius’ wife third wife, Messalina.

- [44](#) i.e. Drusus the son of Tiberius and Vipsania Agrippina.
- [45](#) Julia Livilla, the younger sister of Drusilla and Agrippina the Younger.
- [46](#) 29 December.
- [47](#) A man put to death in the ancient manner ‘would be stripped naked, have his neck put into a fork and then be beaten to death with rods’ (*Nero* 49).
- [48](#) Net-men did not wear helmets.
- [49](#) The blade of a sword used to kill a gladiator was believed to bring good luck.
- [50](#) Executions that were in effect raw butchery took place in the middle of the day, and provided spectators with a chance to take their lunch break. Seneca (*Letters* 7.4) noted that the arena would invariably empty as they began.
- [51](#) An unfair criticism. Britannicus was yet to come of age.
- [52](#) Otherwise unknown.
- [53](#) Perhaps the same Sulpicius mentioned in a letter by Augustus (*Claudius* 4) as a regular dining companion of the young Claudius.
- [54](#) Livia, as the wife of Augustus, and Antonia, the daughter of Mark Antony, had no wish to see Claudius raking over the coals of the most recent civil war.

[55](#) A line that appears in both the *Iliad* (24.369) and the *Odyssey* (21.133).

[56](#) 13 October AD 54.

NERO

[1](#) Castor and Pollux, whose temple stood in the Forum. The victory they announced was secured against the Latins at Lake Regillus in 496 BC.

[2](#) ‘Ahenobarbus’ means ‘bronze beard’.

[3](#) Tribes beyond the Alps in southern Gaul.

[4](#) Throughout this account of Nero’s ancestors, Suetonius foreshadows the crimes and depravities that will blot his reign.

[5](#) The elder daughter of Mark Antony and Octavia, sister of Claudius’ mother.

[6](#) 15 December AD 37.

[7](#) The emperor Gaius (Caligula).

[8](#) Nero took on the name by which he is remembered on 25 February AD 50, when Claudius formally adopted him and he became Tiberius Claudius Nero Caesar.

[9](#) This was the office that Augustus had refused to allow Claudius to hold (*Claudius* 4).

[10](#) As Suetonius has already noted (*Claudius* 45), Nero was soon distancing himself from this elevation of Claudius to the heavens.

- 11 A law passed by Augustus in 9 BC that served to reinforce his marriage legislation.
- 12 Days of thanksgiving had previously only ever been held to mark military victories.
- 13 An ominous portent of events to come. Afranius was a dramatist who had lived in the second century BC.
- 14 The wife of King Minos of Crete, who was impregnated by a bull and gave birth to the Minotaur.
- 15 Son of Daedalus, who devised wings made out of wax and feathers that enabled the pair of them to fly. Icarus flew too close to the sun and plunged to his death when the wax duly melted. The attempt to emulate this airborne feat was an appropriately fatal one.
- 16 This was deliberately to echo a general celebrating a triumph – despite the fact that Nero himself had not done any of the fighting in what, between AD 58 and 63, had been a gruelling Armenian War.
- 17 Caninus Rebilis was the man appointed by Julius Caesar as consul on the last day of 45 BC (*Julius* 76).
- 18 The use of the passive here hints at how legislation in the early years of Nero's reign was the work of Nero's principal advisers: Seneca and Burrus, the praetorian prefect.
- 19 i.e. Claudius, on whose orders Britain had been invaded.
- 20 The Isthmus of Corinth.

- [21](#) A pass in the Caucasus Mountains, also known as the Gates of Alexander.
- [22](#) The mythological mother of twelve children, who mocked Leto, the mother of Apollo and Diana, for only having two. Apollo and Diana shot all Niobe's children dead. Niobe herself was turned to stone by her grief, but continued to weep.
- [23](#) Four notorious scenes from mythology: Canace had committed incest with her brother; Orestes murdered his mother, Clytemnestra, to avenge her murder of his father, Agamemnon; Oedipus blinded himself after having discovered that he had murdered his father and married his mother; Hercules was driven mad by the goddess Juno and killed his own children. The echoes of notorious events in Nero's own life were plainly deliberate.
- [24](#) Like Gaius, Nero was a passionate fan of the Greens.
- [25](#) After Achilles had killed Hector before the gates of Troy, he tied his dead enemy's corpse to the back of his chariot then rode round and round the city.
- [26](#) On Corcyra, modern-day Corfu.
- [27](#) i.e. in the temple of Jupiter that stood in Cassiope.
- [28](#) The major games in Greece – as today with the Olympic Games – were normally staged at intervals of four years.

- 29 Probably but not definitely the notorious King Mithridates – there were numerous kings of that name.
- 30 Staged in Corinth.
- 31 The Pythian Games were held at Delphi.
- 32 As with Caligula's establishment of a brothel on the Palatine, the echo is of Tiberius' *sellaria* on Capri.
- 33 A crime all the more shocking for the fact that Rome's security was widely held to be dependent on the virginity of the Vestals.
- 34 A town famous for its wool.
- 35 The Golden House is estimated to have covered up to 300 acres of the most expensive real estate in central Rome.
- 36 A distance of four miles.
- 37 Dido was a Phoenician queen who founded Carthage. Her doomed love for Aeneas in Virgil's *Aeneid* is one of the great themes of the poem.
- 38 A glancing tribute to Claudius' popularity.
- 39 This law evidently proscribed the use of poison.
- 40 Goddesses of vengeance with a particular penchant for pursuing matricides.
- 41 Domitia: the elder sister of Nero's other aunt, Lepida (*Nero* 7).

- [42](#) Possibly the son or nephew of the Aulus Plautius who led the invasion of Britain.
- [43](#) While a detailed account of Piso's conspiracy is provided by Tacitus, we have no other information about Vinicius' conspiracy.
- [44](#) Located in the Gardens of Maecenas on the Esquiline.
- [45](#) The goddess of corpses, in whose temple a register of the dead was kept.
- [46](#) Boudicca's revolt. Three cities, not two – the ones known today as Colchester, London and St Albans – were plundered.
- [47](#) A ritual acknowledgement by captive soldiers of their defeat.
- [48](#) During the war that preceded the settlement which brought Tiridates to Rome in 66.
- [49](#) Alcmaeon, like Orestes, was a figure from myth who murdered his mother and was pursued by the Furies.
- [50](#) In Greek, numbers were expressed by letters: the numerical value of Nero's name (1,005) was equivalent to the sum of the letters that make up the rest of the line.
- [51](#) Aeneas, the legendary ancestor of the Julian line, carried his father Anchises on his back when escaping the sack of Troy.
- [52](#) An allusion to the Golden House. Veii lay some ten miles north of Rome.

- 53 Cynics were philosophers famed for their asceticism and rudeness, whose name derived from the Greek word for dog.
- 54 The father of Palamedes, who was killed in the Trojan War by his fellow Greeks as the result of Odysseus' treachery.
- 55 A demonic god of the Underworld.
- 56 The same swirl of Judaean prophecies would be capitalized upon by Vespasian's propagandists.
- 57 Arming slaves was a sure sign of desperation.
- 58 Nero's hairstyle was notoriously a mullet.
- 59 The sack to which parricides were condemned.
- 60 *Galli* – ‘Gauls’ – could also mean ‘cocks’.
- 61 Proserpina, the daughter of Ceres, the goddess of the harvest, was abducted to the Underworld by Pluto, the god of the dead. Nero, who had played Pluto to Sporus himself, was destined, like Prosperina, to be dragged down to the realm of the dead.
- 62 Galba, who would succeed Nero as emperor, had already emerged by this point as a much greater menace than Vindex.
- 63 The road that leads from Rome to Reate.
- 64 ‘It was the emperor Nero who came up with the idea of boiling water, then cooling it by putting it in a glass vessel and thrusting it into snow.

In this way it became pleasantly cool, but with none of the disadvantages of snow' – Pliny the Elder: *Natural History* 31.40.

- ⁶⁵ For the reasons why the traditional translation of *Qualis artifex pereo* – 'What an artist perishes with me!' – is unsatisfactory, see *Nero* by Edward Champlin (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press., 2003), pp. 49–51.

- ⁶⁶ Homer: *Iliad* 10.535.

- ⁶⁷ The Pincian Hill.

- ⁶⁸ An Italian king who dies at the hands of Aeneas in Virgil's great epic, the *Aeneid*.

- ⁶⁹ Atargatis, a Syrian goddess closely associated with Cybele, the Mother Goddess.

GALBA

- ¹ It is unclear where this stood.

- ² 'The War of Fire', as it was called by the Greek historian Polybius, raged from 155 to 133 BC. Galba's massacre of the Lusitanians took place in 150, and prompted Viriathus – who was one of the few survivors – to lead the fight against Rome. He was murdered in 140 by associates who had been suborned by Roman gold. He remains to this day an icon of Portuguese independence.

- ³ In 146 BC.

⁴ 24 December 3 BC.

⁵ i.e. never.

⁶ i.e. Nero's mother.

⁷ By this point in Roman history, more than two men might serve as consuls in a year – but it was the pair who gave their names to the year, to be immortalized in the city's annals, who ranked as the senior consuls.

⁸ A priesthood of ancient but unknown origin.

⁹ Crucifixion was a punishment pre-eminently for slaves.

¹⁰ Vindex committed suicide in May 68 after his defeat by an army recruited from the legions of the Rhine.

¹¹ Onesimus was presumably a harsh and parsimonious householder, and the chorus one that was sung by his household at the news that he was coming to Rome.

¹² What these indications might have been Suetonius does not reveal.

¹³ Praetorian prefect.

¹⁴ See *Claudius* 23.

¹⁵ Not a good sign.

¹⁶ Homer: *Iliad* 5.254; *Odyssey* 21.426.

¹⁷ A man who was himself – as indicated by his name – a freedman of Nero's.

OTHO

- [1](#) 28 April AD 32. Domitius Ahenobarbus was Nero's father.
- [2](#) Tacitus, in one of the two accounts he gives of the triangular relationship between Otho, Nero and Poppaea (in the *Annals*), claims that Nero only fell in love with Poppaea when Otho, who had married her, boasted about her beauty. The account that Suetonius gives is evidently much embroidered.
- [3](#) A striking example of how wealthy slaves in the imperial civil service could become.
- [4](#) The milestone in the Forum from which distances in the empire were measured.
- [5](#) A proverbial phrase, used to describe a project for which one is not suited.
- [6](#) A ritual performed by the Salian priests every March.
- [7](#) Cybele. The Day of Blood, staged every 24 March, commemorated the death of the goddess' beloved son and consort, Attis.
- [8](#) Pluto.
- [9](#) The Vitellian vanguard, which had advanced from the Rhine in two separate columns ahead of Vitellius himself.
- [10](#) Modern-day Brescello.
- [11](#) A shrine outside Placentia dedicated to Castor and Pollux.

[12](#) Modern-day Calvatone.

[13](#) Statilia Messalina.

[14](#) Traditionalists in Rome viewed the cultists of the Egyptian goddess Isis as sinister and effeminate.

VITELLIUS

[1](#) Probably the great-grandfather of the emperor.

[2](#) A rustic deity whose son, Latinus, gave his name to the Latins.

[3](#) A hill just to the west of Rome's ancient boundary.

[4](#) The Aequiculi were a Latin tribe who lived next to the foothills of the Apennines, and only finally came to identify fully as Romans in the first century BC.

[5](#) A succession of conflicts in the second half of the fourth century and first decade of the third century BC. The Samnites lived in the Apennines south of Rome.

[6](#) Suetonius presumably means Luceria, a town in Apulia, not Nuceria, which stood in Etruria.

[7](#) 24 (or 7) September AD 15.

[8](#) This arrangement was agreed to after Vitellius' divorce of Petronia.

[9](#) The principal rival faction in the Circus – there were four in all – to the Greens.

[10](#) 2 January AD 69. It was considered unlucky to embark on anything on the second day of a month.

[11](#) Modern-day Vienne.

[12](#) Modern-day Cologne.

[13](#) 18 July: the calamitous defeat in 390 BC that enabled the Gauls to capture Rome.

[14](#) A tribe from northern Germany celebrated for their female prophets.

[15](#) The hill on the far side of the Circus Maximus from the Palatine.

[16](#) Modern-day Toulouse.

THE DEIFIED VESPASIAN

[1](#) Modern-day Rieti, in the Sabine region north of Rome. Vespasian's roots in Sabine soil reached deep.

[2](#) What is now Switzerland.

[3](#) 17 November AD 9.

[4](#) The Isle of Wight.

[5](#) *Manus*, the Latin word for hand, could also mean 'power'.

[6](#) Mount Carmel was where Elijah – according to the Book of Kings – confronted the priests of Baal, and where, according to Pythagorean tradition, Pythagoras had once lived in solitude.

⁷ Josephus ended up a client of the Flavians in Rome, where he wrote the key surviving account of the Judaean Revolt.

⁸ 11 July.

⁹ The patron god of Alexandria.

¹⁰ Both were kingdoms in south-eastern Anatolia.

¹¹ The amphitheatre that would come to be known as the Colosseum.

¹² Making impudent play with Vespasian's reputation for avarice, which Suetonius covers in §16.

¹³ A senator was supposed to be above such base practices.

¹⁴ The giant statue commissioned by Nero to adorn the entrance to the Golden House and which gave its name to the Colosseum.

¹⁵ The Matronalia, a festival held in honour of Juno Lucina, the goddess of childbirth, was marked by giving gifts to women.

¹⁶ Florus was criticizing Vespasian for his rustic Sabine accent. *Flauros* in Greek meant 'petty, paltry, trivial'.

¹⁷ Homer: *Iliad* 7.213.

¹⁸ Lines from a play by Menander. A freedman was obliged to leave his property – or at least a substantial portion of it – to his former owner. Cerylus had evidently been an imperial slave before his manumission.

¹⁹ 23 June AD 79.

- ²⁰ Claudius and Nero reigned thirteen and fourteen years respectively; Vespasian reigned for ten years, Titus for two and Domitian fifteen.

THE DEIFIED TITUS

¹ ‘Vespasianus’.

² 30 December AD 41.

³ A seven-storey building on the Quirinal Hill.

⁴ Berenice was the sister of Herod Agrippa II, a Judaean client king who sided with the Romans during the revolt by their compatriots that culminated in Titus’ destruction of Jerusalem. The affair was widely disapproved of in Rome, where it was felt that a Caesar had no business consorting with a foreign queen. Titus, eager to give the Roman people a statement of intent after succeeding his father as emperor, duly sent his mistress packing.

⁵ The Colosseum, which was built where the lake in the middle of Nero’s Golden House had once stood.

⁶ In 79, destroying the cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum.

⁷ i.e. as to whether they were free or a slave.

⁸ It was the custom for the man giving a gladiatorial display to test the sharpness of the fighters’ weapons.

⁹ 13 September AD 81.

DOMITIAN

[1](#) 24 October AD 51.

[2](#) Centred on the Quirinal Hill.

[3](#) ‘Caesar’, having evolved to become a synonym for ‘emperor’, is now being given as a title to the son of an emperor.

[4](#) It was a marker of status and prestige, in a calendar year which featured multiple consuls, to be one of the two recorded officially in the annals.

[5](#) A nomadic steppe people.

[6](#) The same festival in honour of Minerva, celebrated on 19–23 March, that was referenced by Augustus in his letter to Tiberius (*Augustus* 71).

[7](#) Soldiers could deposit money in a vault beneath the shrine in which the legion’s standards were kept.

[8](#) The precise terms of the law are unclear, but it aimed at regulating male sexual behaviour, with what seems to have been a particular focus on ensuring that citizens were not penetrated or sexually abused.

[9](#) *Georgics* 2.537.

[10](#) Evidently the law sought to regulate the activities of quaestors’ scribes.

[11](#) Hannibal, the Carthaginian general who launched the Second Punic War by invading Italy in 218 BC, and his brother Mago were the archetypal enemies of Rome.

[12](#) Paris deserted Oenone, his first love, for Helen.

[13](#) See *Nero* 49.

[14](#) Imposed by Vespasian in the wake of the capture of Jerusalem by Titus in AD 70, it directed the two-drachma tax that Judaeans had paid to the temple of Jerusalem to Rome, where it was used to fund the restoration of the temple of Jupiter on the Capitol.

[15](#) A reference either to *theosebeis*, ‘God-fearers’ – Gentiles attracted to Judaean practice, but who shrank from becoming Judaeans themselves – or to Christians.

[16](#) Homer: *Iliad* 2.204.

[17](#) Unlike Domitian, who had been in Rome, Vespasian and Titus had both been in the East during the events that culminated in the toppling of Vitellius.

[18](#) The contrast with Augustus is pointed (*Augustus* 53).

[19](#) A Greek epigram.

[20](#) A white translucent stone.

[21](#) Flavius Clemens – according to Cassius Dio in his *History of Rome* – was executed on a charge of ‘atheism’, following a drift into ‘Judaean ways’ (67.14). It is possible that this is a reference to Christianity, but is likelier to imply that he had become a fully practising Jew – in which case the charge of laziness may be an allusion to his keeping the Sabbath.

22 18 September AD 96.

23 Homer: *Iliad* 21.108.

24 Named after Gaius Matius, a celebrated horticulturalist.



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