

## ANCESTRY AND FAMILY IDENTITY IN SUETONIUS' *CAESARS*\*

### ABSTRACT

*Suetonius' Lives of the Caesars usually begin with a family tree. These family trees are often rhetorical, foreshadowing in the ancestors character traits that will be themes of the rest of the Life. This particular rhetorical strategy relies upon an older phenomenon of 'family identity'—namely, the literary application of similar characteristics to people in the same family—such as the one that tells us that the Claudii are proud and the Domitii Ahenobarbi are ferocious. Gary Farney studied 'family identity' as a phenomenon of the Republic. There, it was the association of a family with a certain characteristic, a kind of 'branding'. It would be perfectly obvious for Suetonius to use the family identities already in use for well-known families, but, as I show here, Suetonius' selection of ancestors creates different family identities rather than simply using the traditional ones he would have found in other sources. In this study I concentrate on Nero and Tiberius. I focus on these two emperors because they are individuals where there is a known family identity in other sources and they also have the most detailed and elaborate ancestry sections in Suetonius' Caesars. Family identity seems to be most interesting to Suetonius when it goes against expectations, and that is when Suetonius' family trees are most elaborate.*

**Keywords:** Suetonius; emperors; ancestors; family; characterization; Claudius; Ahenobarbus; virtues; vices; biography; Tiberius; Nero

Suetonius' *Lives of the Caesars* usually begin with a family tree.<sup>1</sup> Scholars are divided on whether these ancestry sections are simply introductory or 'obviously' rhetorical.<sup>2</sup>

\* This research has been a long time in gestation. For its beginnings, I thank the people of the University of Newcastle, Australia, especially Hugh Lindsay, Jane Bellemore and Kristin Heineman; for its completion, I am grateful for research support from the Australian National University. The article has been improved by an audience at the University of Reading and by suggestions from Indigo Holcombe-James, Bruce Gibson and an anonymous reader for *CQ*. I also thank David Wardle for help with bibliography.

<sup>1</sup> Translations are from the Loeb Classical Library volumes, J.C. Rolfe, *Suetonius*, 2 vols. (vol. 2, first published in 1914, revised by D.W. Hurley in 1997 [Cambridge, MA, 1997] and vol. 1, first published in 1913, revised in 1951, revised by D.W. Hurley in 1998 [Cambridge, MA, 1998]), unless stated otherwise. Some changes have been made to the translations to reflect the new text: R.A. Kaster, *C. Suetonii Tranquilli De uita Caesarum libros VIII et De Grammaticis et Rhetoribus librum* (Oxford, 2016).

<sup>2</sup> E. Cizek, *Structures et idéologie dans "Les Vies des Douze Césars" de Suétone* (Bucharest, 1977) implicitly denies relevance by leaving these sections out of his count; M.J. Du Four, 'C. Suetonii Tranquilli Vita Tiberii: Chapters I to XXIII', in M.J. Du Four and J.R. Rieta (edd.), *Suetonius on the Life of Tiberius* (New York, 1941), 1–118, who is less interested in structure, explicitly denies the relevance of the ancestry sections to her historical commentary, except where they 'help explain the attitude or characteristics of Tiberius' (5). Some scholars have observed that Suetonius' ancestry sections do appear to be rhetorically interesting—most pertinently J. Gascou, *Suétone historien* (Paris, 1984), 691–5, followed by T.S. Barton, 'The *inventio* of Nero: Suetonius', in J. Elsner and J. Masters (edd.), *Reflections of Nero: Culture, History and Representation* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1994), 48–63, who drew attention to the role of rhetoric in Suetonius' *Lives*, and in particular to the importance of the ancestors at the beginning of Suetonius' *Nero*. At 51 she comments that the ancestors of Nero 'set the tone for the *Life* to follow' and that a similar effect is achieved in *Tiberius*. See D. Sansone, 'Atticus, Suetonius and Nero's ancestors', in C. Deroux (ed.), *Studies in Latin Literature and Roman History 4* (Brussels, 1986), 267–77 for a study of Nero's ancestors but with an interest in

On the rhetorical side, Tomas Hägg said that the ancestry section in *Nero* had an ‘obvious’ anticipatory function, and pointed out that similar things are happening with *Augustus* and *Tiberius*.<sup>3</sup> It is worth noticing that this particular rhetorical strategy relies upon an older phenomenon of ‘family identity’—namely, the literary application of similar characteristics to people in the same family—such as the one that tells us that the Claudii are proud and the Domitii Ahenobarbi are ferocious. ‘Family identity’ is a phrase and a concept I borrow from Gary Farney, who studied it as a phenomenon of the Republic.<sup>4</sup> In the Republic, it was the association of a family with a certain characteristic, a kind of ‘branding’, that was encouraged with advertisement and made it easier for a person to win elections. Family identity also made it easier for historians to characterize a person of a certain family, by making them behave in the way that we would expect of someone of that family. It would be perfectly straightforward for Suetonius to use the family identities already in circulation for well-known families, but, as I show here, Suetonius selects ancestors to create different family identities rather than simply using the traditional ones he would have found in other sources.<sup>5</sup> In this study I concentrate on *Nero* and *Tiberius*. I focus on these two emperors because they are two individuals who have a known ‘family identity’ in other literature, and their *Lives* also have the most detailed and elaborate ancestry sections in Suetonius’ series. *Nero* uses the ancestors selectively to foreshadow very specific vices, such as incest and attention-seeking behaviour; *Tiberius* is a very good case-study in the difference between the usual family identity and the one Suetonius has constructed. I contend that Suetonius has not only used family identity as a characterizing tool but also invented a new family identity from a large pool of available options rather than using the ready-made version of the family. A family identity can be used ironically, and that is when Suetonius’ family trees are most elaborate.

correctness rather than in presentation. See also W. Steidle, *Sueton und die antike Biographie* (Munich, 1963<sup>2</sup>), 111; T. Hägg, *The Art of Biography in Antiquity* (Cambridge, 2012), 220. Commentaries (especially on *Tiberius*, *Caligula* and *Nero*) have noted some of the parallels. See for examples E.S. Shuckburgh, *C. Suetoni Tranquilli Divus Augustus* (Cambridge, 1896), 1–9; K. R. Bradley, *Suetonius’ Life of Nero: An Historical Commentary* (Brussels, 1978), 29; C.L. Murison, *Suetonius: Galba, Otho, Vitellius* (London, 1992), 28–32; H. Lindsay, *Suetonius: Tiberius* (London, 1995), 53–69; B.H. Warmington, *Suetonius: Nero* (Bristol, 1999<sup>2</sup>), 22–5; B. Jones, *Suetonius: Vespasian* (London, 2000), 10–15; D.W. Hurley, *Suetonius: Diuus Claudius* (Cambridge, 2001), 55–67; B. Jones and R. Milns, *Suetonius: The Flavian Emperors* (London, 2002), 42–6. The *Caligula* has a very prominent foil in Germanicus at the beginning of the *Life*, discussed by H.W. Bird, ‘Germanicus mytheroicus’, *EMC* 17 (1973), 94–101; D.W. Hurley, *An Historical and Historiographical Commentary on Suetonius’ Life of C. Caligula* (Atlanta, 1993), 1–18; H. Lindsay, *Suetonius: Caligula* (London, 1993), 48–61; D. Wardle, *Suetonius’ Life of Caligula: A Commentary* (Brussels, 1994), 96–127. See now R.J. Penella, ‘The fathers of the emperors Caligula and Claudius in Suetonius’ *Lives of the Caesars*’, *Phoenix* 72 (2018), 161–5. On ancestry and Roman emperors, with an emphasis on official advertisement/claims to ancestry and on a later period of the Empire, see O. Hekster, *Emperors and Ancestors: Roman Rulers and the Constraints of Tradition* (Oxford, 2015).

<sup>3</sup> Hägg (n. 2), 219–20.

<sup>4</sup> G.D. Farney, ‘Aristocratic family identity in the Roman Republic’ (Diss., Bryn Mawr College, 1999).

<sup>5</sup> P. Garrett, ‘Ancestry and Suetonius’ *De Vita Caesarum*’ (Diss., University of Newcastle, 2013) gives what we know about each ancestor from other historical sources.

## ANCESTRY SECTIONS

Ancestry sections appear in nine of Suetonius' twelve *Caesars*. They do not appear in *Diuus Iulius*, *Titus* or *Domitian*: in the first case the beginning is almost certainly missing;<sup>6</sup> in the last two their father, Vespasian, supplies such information (and, as Hägg puts it,<sup>7</sup> in *Titus* and *Domitian* the author goes for a 'less sophisticated' introductory strategy of stating character directly).

The basic structure of the ancestry for a Caesar of noble family is as follows: the *nomen* of the father's family, including other branches of the family and the story behind the *cognomen*, and often including the *origo* of the family; the first of the family to achieve fame or office, thus ennobling the line; in generational order, the significant moments in the paternal line, and then the name and general importance of the mother's family. The focus is on the paternal line, but the mother is also usually named, or at least her father is. The family tree usually proceeds in chronological order, beginning with the first important member of the family, such as the first consul with the same *cognomen*, moving towards the father of the Caesar as the last item in the list. These extensive family trees are unusual in ancient biography for their depth and detail. Pauline Duchêne has adduced the family tree of Vespasian as an example of Suetonius' tendency to assert his 'authority' from the very beginning of a *Life* by demonstrating his careful research,<sup>8</sup> and certainly family trees do fulfil this function. In fact, these family trees are sometimes thought to do no more than 'show off' Suetonius' careful research, to be artefacts of a pedantic and peculiar mind (which seems to be what Syme meant when he said that family history is where Suetonius 'seems at his best').<sup>9</sup>

## CHARACTERIZATION THROUGH LINEAGE

Suetonius' own statement of what he is doing with the ancestors appears at the beginning of *Nero* (1.2):

pluris e familia cognosci referre arbitror quo facilius appareat ita degenerasse a suorum uirtutibus Nero ut tamen uitia cuiusque quasi tradita et ingenita rettulerit.

I think it is a good idea for a number of members of the family to be examined, so that it might more easily appear that Nero degenerated so far from the virtues of his ancestors that he revived only vices, as if they were hereditary and innate.<sup>10</sup>

As a rhetorical strategy, the use of the ancestors as a tool of characterization is far from original. It was a recommendation of the rhetorical manuals, including the first-century

<sup>6</sup> On the lost beginning of *Diuus Iulius*, see J. Lundon, 'P.Köln XIII 499 and the (in)completeness of Plutarch's *Caesar*', *ZPE* 185 (2013), 107–10 and P. Garrett, 'Reconstructing the lost beginning of Suetonius' *Divus Iulius*', *Antichthon* 49 (2015), 110–34.

<sup>7</sup> Hägg (n. 2), 219–20.

<sup>8</sup> P. Duchêne, 'Suetonius' construction of his historical *auctoritas*', in V. Liotsakis and S. Farrington (edd.), *The Art of History: Literary Perspectives on Greek and Roman Historiography* (Berlin, 2016), 271–88, at 275.

<sup>9</sup> 'Yet error or inadvertence occurs even where the author seems at his best, on family history', in keeping with his usual sense of disappointment with Suetonius: R. Syme, 'Biographers of the Caesars', *MH* 37 (1980), 104–28, at 125 = R. Syme, *Roman Papers* (Oxford, 1984), 3.1251–75, at 3.1272.

<sup>10</sup> My translation. The *quasi* has produced a range of translations in published editions.

B.C.E. *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, where the unidentified author advises that in an epideictic argument, whether in attack or in defence, a man's descent can and should be used, and any kind of descent can be made to prove either side of the argument (*Rhet. Her.* 3.7.13). An orator must make something of the subject's ancestry, and the perceived quality of the ancestry is of little consequence, since the author will make it work to his advantage whether it be the lowliest or the loftiest. A similar prescription appears in Quintilian (*Inst.* 3.7.10–11, 3.7.19), whose work appeared within Suetonius' lifetime. Cicero and Plutarch also use ancestors (amongst other non-ancestors) as foils and paradigms.<sup>11</sup> The 'anticipatory' nature Hägg passingly mentions is thus a demonstration of rhetoric, and in Suetonius' *Lives* it is certainly strongest in *Nero* but I would argue that it appears in most of the *Lives*. What I want to add to the debate on this is to argue that for *Nero* and *Tiberius* the historiography already supplied a family identity for the relevant family, which in both cases Suetonius could have worked with, but he does not fit his Caesar around the existing identity or find an unrelated paradigm instead. Rather, he selects and arranges his ancestors to change the narrative, building a new 'identity' that works for the Caesar, and suits himself.

To briefly state the parallels between Nero and his ancestors, the most memorable character traits that appear in Nero himself—*petulantia*, *libido*, *luxuria*, *avaritia*, *crudelitas* (*Ner.* 26.1)<sup>12</sup>—are each foreshadowed in an ancestor, and as the family tree approaches Nero the ancestors become more and more like him, even down to specific interests such as chariot racing. We are in a good position to comment on Suetonius' use of these ancestors because the Domitii Ahenobarbi were plentiful and famous, appear in lots of sources and have a clear 'family identity' outside Suetonius. In sources outside Suetonius (such as Livy, Caesar, Plutarch) the Domitii Ahenobarbi were well known and stereotyped to be 'sharp and rude' and 'ferocious'.<sup>13</sup> The trouble is, those are not really the qualities Suetonius needs for Nero.

Instead, he wants a Nero whose main characteristics are *petulantia*, *libido*, *luxuria*, *avaritia*, *crudelitas* 'wantonness, lust, extravagance, avarice, cruelty' (*Ner.* 26.1). It is less the 'sharp and rude' or 'ferocious' aspects of Nero that Suetonius will emphasize, but more the cruelty, sexual transgression and luxury, so that is what we need in the ancestors. There is of course some overlap between the family identity of the Ahenobarbi and those characteristics, and Suetonius selects his anecdotes to maximize that overlap. Building his own family from a large pool of options allows Suetonius to bring out something that is slightly contrary to expectations to someone who has been reading the Republican sources on the Ahenobarbi, but hardly surprising to someone thinking about Nero already. By a careful selection from the available options, Suetonius creates his own 'family identity' that overlaps but does not quite line up

<sup>11</sup> Cicero uses ancestors extensively in *In Pisonem* (comparing Piso unfavourably with both high- and low-born ancestors) (*Cic. Pis.* fr. 12–15; *Pis.* 1–2, 53). T.E. Duff, *Plutarch's Lives: Exploring Virtue and Vice* (Oxford, 1999), 310–11 has shown that Plutarch often uses ancestors (but he also uses non-ancestors, something Suetonius does not do) as paradigms.

<sup>12</sup> On this list of vices as a 'contents list' for the rest of the rubrics in the *Life*, see P. Garrett, 'Structure and persuasion in Suetonius' *De Vita Caesarum*', *Ramus* 47 (2018), 197–215, at 205.

<sup>13</sup> L. Domitius Ahenobarbus (cos. 54) as 'sharp and rude' comes from T.R.S. Broughton, *The Magistrates of the Roman Republic*, 3 vols. (Chico, CA, 1952), 2.277, citing Cicero, Caesar, Plutarch, Appian and Suetonius; the Ahenobarbi as 'ferocious' comes from J. Griffin, 'The creation of characters in the *Aeneid*', in B.K. Gold (ed.), *Literary and Artistic Patronage in Ancient Rome* (Austin, 1982), 118–34, at 124. Of the Domitii Ahenobarbi as a 'proud and contentious family', and on the 'ruthless ferocity of the family', see R. Syme, *The Crisis of 2 B.C.* (Munich, 1974), 27 = R. Syme, *Roman Papers* (Oxford, 1984), 3.912–36, at 3.930–1.

with the one we see in other sources. This is something we will also see in relation to the Claudii, the ancestors of Tiberius.

Suetonius' interest in the Ahenobarbi purports (*Ner.* 1.2) to take in ancestral virtues *and* vices, so we may assume that he is happy to admit that they had both. We also know, from the evidence of other sources, that in the historical Ahenobarbi both virtues and vices were well documented. However, while he is dealing with historical figures, Suetonius is not here to write a completionist history. His account of these ancestors is designed for impact and as such it is restricted to vices. His usual list of consulships and military victories supplies the requisite information about the long-held high status of the family and their success in elections, as well as proof of the most general kind of *uirtus*: military effectiveness. He does not sell the Ahenobarbi short on all counts. But, as we will see, there are moral virtues that do arise in other sources that do not come into Suetonius' portrait of the Ahenobarbi.

As for the ancestors themselves, the first item on this family tree (*Ner.* 2.1), which purports to describe Nero's *atauus*, conflates two people: the one who triumphed (cos. 122 B.C.E.) and his son, who was upset not to be elected to the pontificate (cos. 96 B.C.E.) (*Ner.* 2.1–2):

atauus eius Cn. Domitius in tribunatu pontificibus offensior quod alium quam se in patris sui locum cooptassent ius sacerdotum subrogandorum a collegiis ad populum transtulit. at in consulatu Allobrogibus Aruernisque superatis elephanto per prouinciam uectus est turba militum quasi inter sollemnia triumphi prosequente. [2.2] in hunc dixit Licinius Crassus orator non esse mirandum quod aeneam barbam haberet cui os ferreum, cor plumbeum esset.

His great-grandfather's grandfather, Gnaeus Domitius, when tribune of the commons, was enraged at the pontiffs for choosing another than himself in his father's place among them, and transferred the right of filling vacancies in the priesthoods from the colleges themselves to the people. Then having vanquished the Allobroges and the Arverni in his consulship, he rode through the province on an elephant, attended by a throng of soldiers, in a kind of triumphal procession. He it was of whom the orator Licinius Crassus said that it was not surprising that he had a brazen beard, since he had a face of iron and a heart of lead.

Of the three things Suetonius reports about the *atauus*—the lost priesthood, the triumph on an elephant, the heart of lead—the first and third belong to the consul of 96 and the second to his father (cos. 122).<sup>14</sup> In my view this conflation is probably a mistake, rather than deliberate artistry (although it could be that). We will begin in the middle, with the *triumphator*.

During his proconsulship in Gaul, he and his colleague earned triumphs and, in addition to a real triumph in Rome, Ahenobarbus held a symbolic triumph in Gaul on an elephant.<sup>15</sup> Suetonius is interested in the quasi-triumph and not in the real one, since Nero has only a quasi-triumph himself. He returns victorious from a tour of the singing contests of Greece, entering Rome with an ostentatious procession

<sup>14</sup> On the conflation, see Bradley (n. 2), 30.

<sup>15</sup> M. Meulder, 'Histoire et mythe dans la *Vita Neronis* de Suétone', *Latomus* 61 (2002), 362–87, at 365 thinks that the elephant in the triumph recalls the significance of elephants in the battle, but J. Carlsen, *The Rise and Fall of a Roman Noble Family: The Domiti Ahenobarbi 196 BC–AD 68* (Odense, 2006), 39 prefers to interpret the elephant not as a link to the role of elephants in the battle but as a reference to the famous Indian triumph of Dionysus. For Suetonius' version of events they are probably important only as an example of showing off. On this 'triumph', and on elephants in triumphs in general, see also I. Östenberg, *Staging the World: Spoils, Captives, and Representations in the Roman Triumphal Procession* (New York, 2009), 181.

(*Ner.* 25.1–2). This faux triumph is all the sillier since Nero celebrates no actual military victories.

The stories Suetonius tells about this man's son bracket this story, so we must retreat backwards in the text to go down the family tree to the Gnaeus who was annoyed about not being made a priest. As the first anecdote Suetonius tells about the Ahenobarbi, this story of childishness is in an emphatic position, and Ahenobarbus' petty jealousy is reminiscent of Nero's envy of his rival, Britannicus (*Ner.* 33.2), and, later, of the actor Paris (*Ner.* 54). We know that Suetonius is selecting carefully here because there is also evidence for this ancestor behaving decently. Ahenobarbus earned a reputation for rising above petty rivalries in a lawsuit against M. Aemilius Scaurus (cos. 115 B.C.E.): one of Scaurus' slaves is reported to have come to Ahenobarbus offering evidence against his master, and Ahenobarbus gallantly sent him back to Scaurus without listening to his claims (Cic. *Deiot.* 31; Val. Max. 6.5.5). Valerius Maximus records the incident as a triumph of justice over personal profit. Here is a concrete virtue unconnected with the military that Suetonius might include but he omits.

The next Ahenobarbus on Suetonius' list is Lucius (cos. 54 B.C.E.). The usual sources would make this Ahenobarbus 'sharp and rude'.<sup>16</sup> But the usual stereotype of the Ahenobarbi is not our main interest here. Of several options in a full career, the story that Suetonius gives to demonstrate this ancestor's character is not to do with his rudeness but with his ill-considered suicide attempt. This is no doubt a strategic choice. There were lots of ways in which this story could be told and in this version it certainly is relevant to Nero and his hesitant suicide. Before the surrender at Corfinium in 49 B.C.E. Ahenobarbus supposedly had his slave-physician give him poison to assist his suicide. The physician gave him only a sleeping potion, and was vindicated when Ahenobarbus later changed his mind about the suicide (*Ner.* 2.3):

uir neque satis constans et ingenio truci in desperatione rerum mortem temere appetitam ita expauit ut haustum uenenum paenitentia euomuerit medicumque manumiserit quod sibi prudens ac sciens minus noxium temperasset ...

He was a man of no great resolution, though he had a violent temper, and when he once attempted rashly to kill himself in a fit of despair, he so shrank from the thought of death that he changed his mind and vomited up the poison, conferring freedom on his physician, since, knowing his master, he had purposely given him what was not a fatal dose.<sup>17</sup>

Suetonius' Lucius is a paradigm for Nero's fear and (eventual) suicide in the *exitus* sections. The obvious parallel is Nero's ambivalence about suicide.<sup>18</sup> Lucius is always changing his mind (*uir neque satis constans*, *Ner.* 2.3); Nero also changes his mind, or puts off making a decision, about whether or not to commit suicide (*uarie agitauit ... an ... an ...*, 47.2; *in posterum diem dilata*, 47.3; *reuocato rursus*, 48.1; *inter moras*, 49.2; *ac modo ... modo*, 49.3). Lucius' despair (*desperatio*, 2.3) is a briefer version of Nero's in the same sections, where Nero is constantly afraid: *terrebat* (46.1), *pauefactus* (48.2), *conterritus* (49.2), *segnities* (49.3). Nero, like his ancestor, needs an assistant of lower station (a slave for the ancestor, a freedman for Nero) to kill himself.

<sup>16</sup> Suet. *Ner.* 2.3; Caes. *BCiu.* 2.82; Plut. *Pomp.* 67.2, *Caes.* 47; 'sharp and rude' is from Broughton (n. 13), 2.277.

<sup>17</sup> Transl. Rolfé (n. 1), adapted according to the new text: Kaster (with Bentley's reading) has *temere*, where it had been *timore* in the manuscripts. On this part of the text, see R.A. Kaster, *Studies on the text of Suetonius' De uita Caesarum* (Oxford, 2016), 201–2.

<sup>18</sup> On Nero's 'vacillation between resolve and cowardice', see Hägg (n. 2), 225.



The reception of this story betrays a difference between the Neronian and the post-Neronian authors. Before Nero's suicide of 68, Seneca includes the anecdote in a list of loyal slaves (Sen. *Ben.* 3.24); later authors, writing after the death of Nero, put the spotlight on Ahenobarbus instead of the slave, drawing portraits of a coward (Plin. *HN* 7.186; Suet. *Ner.* 2.3; Plut. *Caes.* 34.6–8). Suetonius had options for the way in which he presented this ancestor (other versions are more laudatory),<sup>19</sup> and it appears that he is using him here to foreshadow a later episode.

Suetonius' picture of a quickly degenerating line, each worse than the last as they head towards Nero, has a temporary diversion with Cn. Domitius Ahenobarbus (cos. 32 B.C.E.), damned with faint praise as 'better than the rest of the family' (*Ner.* 3.1).<sup>20</sup> Suetonius makes him a competent naval commander and possessor of 'all the highest offices' (*Ner.* 3.2) but with no specific virtues. Even our author's favourite Ahenobarbus 'does not escape unblemished' (*Ner.* 3.2) from Antonius' slurs on his reputation for unseemly devotion to his mistress. We know from *Augustus* (2–4) that Suetonius does not blindly accept Antonius' aspersions, but where he is quick to deny them for Augustus' ancestors, he does not leap to Ahenobarbus' defence here. In fact, this anecdote only strengthens Suetonius' portrait of Nero: letting love affairs get in the way of serious things is a Neronian habit, even if it is not a standard Ahenobarban characteristic.

As we approach Nero, the similarities between ancestor and Caesar become more and more obvious. Nero's grandfather, L. Domitius Ahenobarbus (cos. 16 B.C.E.), had a strong military career, but he is more useful as an excellent illustration of the vices Nero is supposed to have inherited. He is emphatically like Nero, *arrogans, profusus, immitis* (*Ner.* 4):

ex hoc Domitius nascitur quem emptorem familiae pecuniaeque in testamento Augusti fuisse mox uulgo notatum est, non minus aurigandi arte in adulescentia clarus quam deinde ornamentis triumphalibus ex Germanico bello. uerum arrogans, profusus, immitis censorem L. Plancum uia sibi decedere aedilis coegit, praeturae consulatusque honore equites R. matronasque ad agendum minum produxit in scaenam. uenationes et in circo et in omnibus urbis regionibus dedit, munus etiam gladiatorium, sed tanta saeuitia ut necesse fuerit Augusto clam frustra monitum edicto coercere.

He was the father of the Domitius who was later well known from being named in Augustus' will as the purchaser of his goods and chattels, a man no less famous in his youth for his skill in driving than he was later for winning the insignia of a triumph in the war in Germany. But he was haughty, extravagant and cruel [*arrogans, profusus, immitis*], and when he was only an aedile, forced the censor Lucius Plancus to make way for him on the street. While holding the offices of praetor and consul, he brought Roman knights and matrons on the stage to act a

<sup>19</sup> Tac. *Ann.* 4.44; Caes. *BCiu.* 3.99.5; Cic. *Phil.* 2.71. Lucan is the only source to glorify Ahenobarbus' death: Luc. 7.599–616, on which the bibliography is extensive: e.g. B.M. Marti, 'The meaning of the *Pharsalia*', *AJPh* 66 (1945), 352–76; P. McCloskey and E. Phinney Jr., 'Ptolemaeus tyrannus: the typification of Nero in the *Pharsalia*', *Hermes* 96 (1968), 80–7, at 80–1; F.M. Ahl, 'Lucan's *De Incendio Urbis, Epistulae ex Campania* and Nero's ban', *TAPhA* 102 (1971), 1–27; R.C. Lounsbury, 'The death of Domitius in the *Pharsalia*', *TAPhA* 105 (1975), 209–12; R. Mayer, 'On Lucan and Nero', *BICS* 25 (1978), 85–8, at 86. Lucan's portrayal is probably exaggerated—Carlsen (n. 15), 66 n. 167 suggests that it is 'fictitious'—but to what end is unclear. On the glorification of Ahenobarbus for Nero's sake, see R.C. Lounsbury, 'History and motive in Book Seven of Lucan's *Pharsalia*', *Hermes* 104 (1976), 210–39, at 224 (paraphrasing an opinion earlier voiced by R. Pichon, *Les sources de Lucain* [Paris, 1912], 155).

<sup>20</sup> Supporting Suetonius' judgement that this was a good, if not the best, Ahenobarbus, both Cicero (*Phil.* 10.13) and Velleius (2.72.3) have nice things to say about him.

farce. He gave beast-baitings both in the Circus and in all the regions of the city; also a gladiatorial show, but with such inhuman cruelty that Augustus, after his private warning was disregarded, was forced to restrain him by an edict.

In this passage we detect a few suggestions of traditional Roman virtues, but each of these is undermined by an undesirable aspect. The triumphal insignia are balanced against skill in driving, which is a rather decadent sort of pastime, but at least it was only 'in his youth' (*in adolescentia*)<sup>21</sup>—Nero will have the same interest even after his youth (*Ner.* 22). Although Lucius held the highest offices, he brought the upper classes onto the stage—before this became illegal—as Nero does after the law (11).<sup>22</sup> He gave shows, but they were so cruel that Augustus—often a gauge of Suetonius' own opinion—would not abide them. Cruelty is also a trait of Nero (33–8).

We can compare the above passage of Suetonius with Tacitus' obituary of the same Lucius (*Tac. Ann.* 4.44). Unconcerned with Nero, Tacitus' glowing report concentrates on Lucius' distinguished family and impressive military achievements. For Suetonius, however, his unattractive character traits are more important than his military record. These two passages show that there was material available to make this Ahenobarbus into a tale of virtue, or vice, according to requirement. Where Tacitus chose virtue, Suetonius chose vice.

Lucius' son, the Gnaeus who became Nero's father, was a high-profile figure and a potential threat to the *princeps*. For Suetonius, however, Gnaeus' most important feature is that he is *detestabilis*, a word used a few sections later of Nero himself (6.1). True to the pattern of a line degenerating a generation at a time, Nero's father is by far the worst of Suetonius' Ahenobarbi, if never quite as despicable as Nero himself (*Ner.* 5.1–2):

ex Antonia maiore patrem Neronis procreavit omni parte uitae detestabilem, siquidem comes ad Orientem C. Caesaris iuuenis, occiso liberto suo quod potare quantum iubebatur recusarat, dimissus e cohorte amicorum nihilo modestius uixit, sed et in uiae Appiae uico repentem puerum citatis iumentis haud ignarus obtruiuit et Romae medio foro cuidam equiti R. liberius iurganti oculum eruit, [5.2] perfidiae uero tantae ut non modo argentarios pretiis rerum coemptarum sed et in praetura mercede palmarum aurigarios fraudauerit, notatus ob haec et sororis ioco \*\*\* querentibus dominis factionum repraesentanda praemia in posterum sanxit. maiestatis quoque et adulteriorum incestisque cum sorore Lepida sub excessu Tiberi reus mutatione temporum euasit decessitque Pyrgis morbo aquae intercutis, sublato filio Nerone ex Agrippina Germanico genita.

He had by the elder Antonia a son Domitius who became the father of Nero, a man hateful [*detestabilis*] in every walk of life; for when he had gone to the East on the staff of the young Gaius Caesar, he slew one of his own freedmen for refusing to drink as much as he was ordered, and when he was in consequence dismissed from the number of Gaius' friends, he lived not a whit less lawlessly. On the contrary, in a village on the Appian Way, suddenly whipping up his team, he purposely ran over and killed a boy; and right in the Roman Forum he gouged out the eye of a Roman knight for being too outspoken in chiding him. He was moreover so dishonest that he not only cheated some bankers of the prices of wares which he had bought, but in his praetorship he even defrauded the victors in the chariot races of the amount of their prizes. When for this reason he was held up to scorn by the jests of his own sister, and the managers of the troupes made complaint, he issued an edict that the prizes

<sup>21</sup> I thank an anonymous reader for this point.

<sup>22</sup> At *Suet. Aug.* 43.3 we learn that the Senate outlawed this, but only after Augustus himself had put knights in his shows with impunity. In Domitius' time this was not illegal, but when Nero did it, it had been unacceptable for some time. From at least 19 C.E., putting high-ranking Romans on the stage was in contravention of the laws on *infamia*, discussed by B. Levick, 'The *senatus consultum* from Larinum', *JRS* 73 (1983), 97–115, at 108.



should thereafter be paid on the spot. Just before the death of Tiberius he was also charged with treason, as well as with acts of adultery and with incest with his sister Lepida, but escaped owing to the change of rulers and died of dropsy at Pyrgi, after acknowledging Nero son of Agrippina, the daughter of Germanicus.

Even from this account we can tell that Gnaeus had a successful career, but of course that will not be Suetonius' message. Despite his family's wealth, he is portrayed as parsimonious (cf. Quint. *Inst.* 6.1.50) and, in Suetonius, Gnaeus is charged with *perfidia* regarding money he owed others. Not only is he greedy, but he cheats; Nero will also be greedy to the point of contriving false accusations to seize property (*Ner.* 32). The father is also needlessly and casually violent: killing a freedman, running over a boy with a team of horses and gouging out eyes (*Ner.* 5.1–2). The horse-drawn chariot seems to be a motif of the Ahenobarbi, occurring in relation to two of Nero's ancestors (a third rides elephants), and it is a theme of Nero's *Life*, appearing amongst his frivolous hobbies and in his pseudo-triumph (*Ner.* 11.1, 24.2, 25.1).

Suetonius would have us believe that the charge of *maiestas in principem* was one more demonstration of Nero's father's 'detestable' character, adding to the *impietas* charges of adultery and incest with his sister (*Ner.* 5.2). These salacious details foreshadow Nero's numerous charges of adultery, including the rape of a Vestal Virgin and his suspected incest with his mother (*Ner.* 28.2).

Each of Nero's vices, catalogued at 26.1 as *petulantia*, *libido*, *luxuria*, *avaritia*, *crudelitas*, is prefigured by a vice in at least one of his ancestors.<sup>23</sup> For instance, *petulantia* could be represented by the first ancestor, who missed out on the priesthood and changed the rules out of spite. The father of Nero embodies *libido*, accused of adultery and incest with his sister, and *avaritia*, since he failed to pay his promises, despite being wealthy. *luxuria* is foreshadowed particularly by the grandfather, who is *profusus* (4). *crudelitas* is the best represented in this list, prefigured by the second ancestor (*ingenium trux*, 2.3) as well as by the fourth (*immitis*, 4) and the fifth (Nero's father, 5.1–2). In fact, the description of the fourth ancestor as *arrogans*, *profusus*, *immitis* (4) could be a summary of the more detailed list, even following the same order, with *arrogans* standing for *petulantia*, *profusus* a gloss of *libido*, *luxuria*, *avaritia*, and *immitis* standing for *crudelitas*:

arrogans	profusus	immitis ( <i>Ner.</i> 4)
petulantiam,	libidinem, luxuriam, avaritiam,	crudelitatem ( <i>Ner.</i> 26.1)

And just as Nero's grandfather then received a clause each for those three adjectives, so too Nero's vices will be demonstrated in this order, later at 26, but at greater length. Nero appears to be a composite of his ancestors' vices, all the worse for having them all in the one person. Perhaps the most interesting part of this is that the 'sharp and rude' or 'ferocious' family identities that modern scholars have identified in the historiography on the Ahenobarbi is not the family identity that comes out of this family tree. The Ahenobarbi as they appear in Suetonius are each in their own ways paradigms for Suetonius' construction of their famous descendant—even more than paradigms,

<sup>23</sup> Bradley (n. 2), 29 lines up the parallels between the traits in the lineage and in Nero, also warning us that 'It would be unwise and overly artificial to argue that the bulk of the biography takes up every single characteristic described in ss. 1–5.'

however, they are what Seager called ‘ironic foils’,<sup>24</sup> that is, they are vice-ridden, but Nero is not just like them, he is even worse than they are, because he embodies all their worst qualities in the one individual *and* degenerates further. Nero is worse than all of the Ahenobarbi put together.

Suetonius has not exactly embroidered, but he has been very selective. Even according to Suetonius, the Ahenobarbi of the Republic were at least resolute and competent military types, as we can see in their record of magistracies and victories, if not in anecdotes. But virtues in Suetonius’ Ahenobarbi are few and far between. While Suetonius mentions both virtues and vices at 1.2, we are really looking at a picture of inherited vice rather than of degenerate virtue. Whatever virtues they have are expressed in terms of consulships, military posts and the like, and even then they are never unmitigated. There is no paragon amongst the Ahenobarbi from whom Nero might be a clear-cut degeneration. In the absence of concrete examples of ancestral virtue, Suetonius’ claim that Nero had degenerated from their virtues (*degenerasse a suorum uirtutibus*) is not saying very much.

### *Tiberius*

*Tiberius* is the real test of the principle of degenerating from virtue and inheriting vice—which is apparently what Nero did, but Nero’s ancestors hardly had any virtues for him to degenerate from—because Tiberius’ ancestors do in fact offer examples of both virtue and vice, and Tiberius himself is not without redeeming virtues. It appears that Tiberius actually inherited both.

We might expect *superbia Claudiana*—a well-known family identity of the Claudii<sup>25</sup>—to be the main theme, but the word *superbia* does not even appear in *Tiberius*. It is not the side of Tiberius that Suetonius wants to push. Again, as with *Nero*, Suetonius creates a family identity that is not quite the one we know from other literary sources, but one that makes sense for the Caesar we are dealing with. Suetonius makes only one reference to Tiberius’ arrogance: a remark ascribed to Augustus, excusing his arrogant mannerisms (*ingrata atque arrogantiae plena*) as ‘natural failings, not intentional’ (*naturae uitia esse, non animi, Tib. 68.3*). Here, the family identity appears to be acknowledged and, when it appears, it is ‘natural’, but over the *Life* Tiberius is more often described as *ciuilis* ‘citizenlike’ (for example *Tib. 11, 26.1; perciuilis, Tib. 28*) than arrogant. What Tacitus (and later Syme)<sup>26</sup> describes as ‘Claudian pride’ (*uetere atque insita Claudiae familiae superbia, Ann. 1.4.3*) becomes, in Suetonius, much less clear-cut: a family divided along good and bad lines to reflect Tiberius’ internal struggles with himself.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>24</sup> On ironic foils, see R. Seager, ‘Ciceronian invective: themes and variations’, in J. Booth (ed.), *Cicero on the Attack* (Swansea, 2007), 25–46, at 38.

<sup>25</sup> For *superbia Claudiana*, see e.g. T. Mommsen, ‘Appendix: the patrician Claudii’, in *The History of Rome*, transl. W.P. Dickson, 5 vols. (London, 1894<sup>2</sup>), 1.495–508; T.P. Wiseman, ‘The legends of the patrician Claudii’, in *Clio’s Cosmetics: Three Studies in Greco-Roman Literature* (Leicester, 1979), 55–139; A. Vasaly, ‘Personality and power: Livy’s depiction of the Appii Claudii in the first pentad’, *TAPhA* 117 (1987), 203–26. Mommsen (this note), 505 supposes that the stereotype which first appears in Livy was based on the Claudii of the generation of Sulla, and the inventor was Licinius Macer. Wiseman (this note), 104–15 follows Mommsen as far as to say that the tradition is an invention of the Late Republic, retrojected back onto the earlier Claudii, but he places the origins of the stereotype in the Claudii of the 50s.

<sup>26</sup> Syme (n. 13), 5 = 3.913.

<sup>27</sup> Lindsay (n. 2 [1995]), 13–14 argues that Tiberius was hypocritical—i.e. the aspects of Tiberius

The ancestry section of *Tiberius* is long and detailed, and authors who identified rhetoric in the ancestry section of *Nero* have also referred us to *Tiberius* for a similar phenomenon.<sup>28</sup> The *gens Claudia* has one of the most famous family identities, but it cannot be used wholesale to explain Suetonius' *Tiberius* (or *Caligula*, or *Claudius*). These last two, both *Claudii*, also require bespoke introductions, as introduction to *Tiberius* both is and is not an appropriate introduction to their *Lives*.<sup>29</sup> In fact, there are several ways in which the ancestry section at the beginning of *Tiberius* does not conform to the pattern of the other *Lives*. I believe that Suetonius finds *Tiberius* difficult because of his unusual mix of virtue and vice, and he approaches the task by adjusting the plan of the introductory section. The five unexpected features of *Tiberius*' ancestry section are: (1) that the ancestors are arranged alternately, good and bad, rather than in chronological order; (2) that they include non-ascendent *Claudii*; (3) that women are included in the list; (4) that there is a list of maternal ancestors nearly as long as the list of paternal; (5) that some of those are adoptive ancestors. Suetonius situates the examples he will provide by saying (*Tib.* 2.1):

multa multorum Claudiorum egregia merita, multa etiam sequius admissa in rem p. extant.

There are on record many distinguished services of the *Claudii* to their country, as well as many deeds of the opposite character.

Thereby he introduces a catalogue of three good *Claudii*: Appius Caecus, Caudex and Caecus' descendant (Tibus) Nero,<sup>30</sup> all of whom contributed to some sort of military success, a forte they share with *Tiberius* himself. For balance, three bad *Claudii* will come later. Note that, of these good *Claudii*, it is possible that only one of them (Caecus) is *Tiberius*' direct ancestor.

Suetonius' first good *Claudius*, Appius *Claudius* Caecus, held all the important offices, including the censorship (312 B.C.E.) and the dictatorship. Suetonius emphasizes Caecus' wisdom in advising against an alliance with Pyrrhus, thus maintaining Rome's independence. The second is Caudex,<sup>31</sup> who headed the first military mission across the

that appear to be good were just covering up for the bad parts. This is supported by the statement at section 42 that *Tiberius* had 'for a long time ill concealed' particular vices. Those vices, certainly, he had been hiding. Pace Lindsay, I do not find it persuasive that he was faking the virtues, especially given the transitions at sections 26 (he begins to act, but still humbly and carefully, like a *priuatus*) and 33 (now he begins to behave 'like a *princeps*') (implied: no longer like a *priuatus*). The word *princeps* often marks out whatever Suetonius approves of, in antithesis with something that is not-*princeps*: e.g. in *Calig.* 22.1, not *princeps* but *monstrum*; in *Claud.* 29.1, not *princeps* but *minister*; in *Dom.* 9–10, not *princeps* but cruel and greedy. The fact that *Tiberius profudit* 'poured forth' his vices at this point does not imply that the virtues he exhibited before this were fake. Hypocrisy is much more a theme in Tacitus than in Suetonius, and if Suetonius had been trying to argue this, I cannot explain why he included the good *Claudii* at the beginning. In fact, I believe that these good *Claudii* point us away from the hypocrisy argument from the outset.

<sup>28</sup> E.g. both Gascou (n. 2) and Barton (n. 2) mentioned *Tiberius* when they discussed *Nero*.

<sup>29</sup> For a statement that the introduction to *Tiberius* serves to introduce these two as well, T. Power, 'Suetonius *Galba* 1: beginning or ending?', *CPh* 104 (2009), 216–20, at 218; a similar thought is expressed by Penella (n. 2), 162.

<sup>30</sup> The text has Tibus (obelized); it is usually thought to be a mistake for Gaius.

<sup>31</sup> The relationship between Caudex and Caecus is not clear. *RE* makes them brothers, but H.J. Mason and M.B. Wallace, 'Appius *Claudius* Pulcher and the hollows of Euboia', *Hesperia* 41 (1972), 128–40 make Caecus the father of the main lines and do not include Caudex. Of course, we might reason that Suetonius might know something we do not, and that he is not straying as far from the direct line as we think. As the female *Claudia*e certainly include non-ascendent relatives of *Tiberius*, I believe that it is reasonable to allow them here as well.

sea from Rome, and the third was also notable for his military leadership in a crucial battle: C. Claudius Nero<sup>32</sup> distinguished himself in a military defeat of Hasdrubal in 207. This catalogue of good Claudii (*egregia merita*) emphasizes the military endeavours of earlier Claudii, and Tiberius' impressive military credentials are an important part of his *Life* (for example *Tib.* 9.1–2, 16–20). Military impressiveness in the Claudii can best be demonstrated by reaching beyond the direct line of the Claudii Neronese to the earlier Claudii, although in *Nero* the list was restricted to the family of the same *cognomen*. It is worth noting that these 'good' Claudii achieve great things but are not strongly characterized as personalities.

When it comes to the 'bad' Claudii, they do have personalities. The bad Claudii in Suetonius' list are lots of things, but *superbia* is not the strongest theme. Claudius Pulcher, Regillianus and Russus all did whatever they wanted without a thought for others, and it is this same conceit that marks the later years of Tiberius. In his old age, Tiberius' most prominent traits are *saeuitia* and depravity (*libido* and *obscaenitas*). His famous dictum 'let them hate me, provided they respect me' (*Tib.* 59.2) exemplifies his disdain for inferiors. However, Tiberius is not a clone of his ancestors' vices. An early remark Suetonius makes about the Claudians creates the expectation—soon enough shown to be untrue—that Tiberius would be staunchly patrician and hate the plebs (*Tib.* 2.4):

praeterea notatissimum est Claudios omnis—excepto dumtaxat P. Clodio, qui ob expellendum urbe Ciceronem plebeio homini atque etiam natu minori in adoptionem se dedit—optimates adsertoresque unicos dignitatis ac potentiae patriciorum semper fuisse atque aduersus plebem adeo uiolentos ac contumaces ut ne capitis quidem quisquam reus apud populum mutare uestem aut deprecari sustinuerit, nonnulli in altercatione et iurgio tribunos plebi pulsauerint.

It is notorious besides that all the Claudii were aristocrats and staunch upholders of the prestige and influence of the patricians, with the sole exception of Publius Clodius, who for the sake of driving Cicero from the city had himself adopted by a plebeian and one too who was younger than himself. Their attitude towards the common people was so headstrong and stubborn that not even when on trial for his life before the people did any one of them deign to put on mourning or beg for mercy; and some of them during bickerings and disputes struck the tribunes of the people.

After this tarring of 'all' the Claudii, it is rather surprising to find that Tiberius is quite self-conscious in his interactions with ordinary people—at least in the beginning. The best example is his horror at having imposed on the convalescents on Rhodes (11.2). In the early period, that is, the sections before 40, he is often *ciuilis* or *perciuilis*,<sup>33</sup>

<sup>32</sup> *Tib.* 2.1; see note 30 above on the name.

<sup>33</sup> Others who are *ciuilis* or *perciuilis* are the two paragons, Germanicus at *Calig.* 3.2 and Drusus at *Claud.* 1.4. *ciuilis* and *princeps* are the ideals for Suetonius' Caesars. Suetonius' own Caesar, Hadrian, displays the same quality of *ciuilitas* (described as *ciuilissimus* at *HA, Hadr.* 20.2); A.R. Birley, *Hadrian: The Restless Emperor* (London, 1997), 94 n. 4. But the coincidence of Hadrian's having these qualities could be due less to Suetonius' wish to flatter Hadrian than to the author of the *Hadrian* having absorbed the fact that these are the desirable qualities in (Suetonius') *principes*. If Suetonius' use of *ciuilis* were a reference to Hadrian, I suspect that we would see it less prominently in *Tiberius* and perhaps more prominently in other, less ambiguous Caesars. On the notion of a *ciuilis princeps* in the Early Empire, see also A. Wallace-Hadrill, 'Ciuilis princeps: between citizen and king', *JRS* 72 (1982), 32–48. It has been asked whether Suetonius is deliberately reflecting on Hadrian: see T.F. Carney, 'How Suetonius' *Lives* reflect on Hadrian', *PACA* 11 (1968), 7–21 and D. Wardle, 'Suetonius and his own day', in C. Deroux (ed.), *Studies in Latin Literature and Roman History* 9 (*Collection Latomus* 244) (Brussels, 1998), 425–47.

and only once (*unum hoc modo*) uses his tribunician power (11.3)—even then not unreasonably according to Suetonius.<sup>34</sup> He is 'almost excessively' courteous with the senators. He loathes flattery. Even later in life, although he is no longer excessively respectful of those lower in station, Tiberius is not noticeably anti-plebeian. So the one trait that is supposedly shared by 'all the Claudii, except one' is not a strong feature of Tiberius himself.<sup>35</sup> The Claudii also possess virtues, and Tiberius, unlike Nero, does show familial virtues as well as familial vices. In fact, although he becomes more flagrantly vicious as he gets older, Tiberius is never completely one-dimensional. The curious coexistence of both vices and virtues in Tiberius poses a challenge to the biographer, which explains the unusual structure of the ancestry section along good/bad lines.

The fact that Tiberius is doubly Claudian reinforces this contradiction in his nature.<sup>36</sup> After the preface on the *exempla diuersa* of the Claudii, Suetonius' comment is (*Tib.* 3.1):

ex hac stirpe Tiberius Caesar genus trahit, et quidem utrumque

Such was the stock from which Tiberius Caesar derived his origin, and that too on both sides.

The double heritage of Tiberius is another point of difference between Tiberius and other Caesars: although Livia is nominally and legally a Livia on account of her father's adoption, and later a Julia, Tacitus and Suetonius think of her as a Claudia, and therefore make Tiberius Claudian 'on both sides'.<sup>37</sup> But although Tacitus' Tiberius is the quintessential Claudian (for example *Tac. Ann.* 1.4.3, 1.33, 4.57), when we consider what 'Claudian' means in sources outside Suetonius, his Tiberius cannot be explained away as thoroughly Claudian at all. Suetonius, unlike Tacitus, also sees a role for the Livii, and this gives his Tiberius a 'third' family.

The third family is useful for creating a new family identity where the Claudian family identity will not be very useful. Tiberius' good points are mainly military, but the Claudii are hardly military types. Suetonius emphasizes the military members of the Claudii in his *Tiberius*, but it would be a stretch for Suetonius to make the Claudii into a military family.<sup>38</sup> It is reasonable to suppose that the Livian side is padding out the Claudian contribution to Tiberius' proclivity and talents in the military arena. It is quite the opposite of the problem in *Nero*: a convincingly military family with a descendant as unarmy as they come.

The Livii, like the Claudii, also bring controversial political activism to the *Life*, in roughly equal parts popular and unpopular. Both families can be thought to support the vice/virtue conflict in Tiberius. It is also interesting that the Claudii are supposed to be

<sup>34</sup> *Tib.* 11.2, the sick people he inconvenienced; 11.3, *tribunicia potestas*, used once (when on Rhodes, before he was *princeps*), not unreasonably; 26–8, would not accept honours; 27, loathed flattery, wanted free speech (cf. 29: this was 'more noteworthy', because with the Senate he was very obsequious).

<sup>35</sup> I do not think that Suetonius particularly wants us to identify the 'exception'—Publius Clodius—with Tiberius. It seems more likely that he includes Clodius for the sake of making Cicero look good. On Suetonius' affection for Cicero, see A. Macé, *Essai sur Suétone* (Paris, 1900), 297.

<sup>36</sup> This was briefly noted by Barton (n. 2), 51.

<sup>37</sup> *utrumque*, *Suet. Tib.* 3.1; *utrimque*, *Tac. Ann.* 6.51; for Livia, see *Tac. Ann.* 5.1.

<sup>38</sup> Mommsen (n. 25), 497 noticed that the Claudii produced remarkably few *triumphatores* for such an old and prominent family. This underachievement of the Claudii is also noted by Du Four (n. 2), 10 n. 1.

vehemently anti-plebeian, but Tiberius is neither noticeably pro-patrician nor anti-plebeian. This un-Claudian feature of his character requires the explanation that his Livian ancestors (and therefore his mother) were plebeians, a fact Suetonius emphasizes (*Tib.* 3.1). The Livian parts of Tiberius, more a theme of Suetonius than of Tacitus, might even be a revision of Tacitus' black portrait.<sup>39</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The ancestry sections, in their privileged position at the beginning of the *Life*, have an important role to play in setting the tone for the rest of the *Life*. While other biographers such as Plutarch sometimes use ancestors as a foil or paradigm, Suetonius is interesting because he employs this technique of characterization through lineage in almost every *Life*. This rhetorical strategy rests on the notion of 'family identity', a kind of branding of an individual by his family's known characteristics, common in the Republic. In *Nero* and *Tiberius* the families Suetonius is dealing with already have 'family identities' in the literature, but, rather than use the established identity, Suetonius adapts by making a new family identity to suit his Caesar.

*Australian National University*

PHOEBE GARRETT  
[phoebe.garrett@anu.edu.au](mailto:phoebe.garrett@anu.edu.au)

<sup>39</sup> It has been noticed that Suetonius' portrait of Tiberius goes from good to bad, whereas Tacitus' goes from bad (but concealed) to bad: D.M. Pippidi, *Autour de Tibère* (Rome, 1965), 81 n. 2. Suetonius has been thought to have responded to Tacitus in other parts of the *Lives*, on which see J. Beaujeu, 'Le *mare rubrum* de Tacite et le problème de la chronologie des *Annales*', *REL* 38 (1960), 200–35, at 234 and Hurley (n. 2 [1993]), 19. But T. Power, 'Suetonius' Tacitus', *JRS* 104 (2014), 205–25 rejects the idea that Suetonius must have read Tacitus.