Fame and Infamy

Essays for Christopher Pelling on Characterization in Greek and Roman Biography and Historiography

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Colour in Suetionius’ *Lives of the Caesars*

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...he would say to you, 'I am like the purple stripe on a cloak (ὅλον ἐν ἰματίῳ πορφύρα)—do not expect me to be similar to other men, nor criticize my nature that has made me stand out from other men.'

*Epictetus, Discourses* 3.1.23

- The word house in blue; minotaur and all struck passages in red.
- The only struck line in Chapter XXI appears in purple.


('A Note on This Edition: Full Colour')

When reading ancient biography, colour ought to be useful to think with for a number of overlapping reasons. Stylistically, colour works well in ekphrastic description¹ as a mode which history-based narratives often embrace.² At the same time, a chromatic characteristic may switch on assumptions about veracity vs falsehood, social decorum vs transgressive pageantry, and so forth. Recent studies of colour in antiquity have explored its impact across the ideological,

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¹ Cf. Quint. 8.3.64–5, with Webb 2009: 107–10 and further remarks at 122–3 about the cultural formulae that sustain *ekphrasis*. On the rhetorical plenitude of colour in Philostratus’ *Eikones*, see Dibel 2009.

² E.g. Luc. *Hist. Scr.* 19; Q. Curt. 3.3.17–19; Ael. *VH* 9.3; already Hdt. 1.98, 9.22.

I am grateful to Rhiannon Ash and Judith Mossman for their comments on an earlier draft of this paper. It is an honour to join in the festschrift for Chris Pelling.
ethical, and cognitive dimensions; in a nutshell, colour contributes to evaluative discourse—which is pursued (whether rudimentarily, semi-consciously, or committedly) by all biographical literature from the Greco-Roman world. Plutarch’s Lives, where ethico-political evaluation reigns supreme, zoom in on colours for the sake of contextualizing and judging both individuals and polities. Thus, sizeable purple-dyed (Δωμοιφής) fabrics are equated with luxury, ergo decadence and arrogance (Lyc. 13.6; Philop. 9.7; Luc. 40.1; Alex. 67.3; Alc. 16.1, 32.2; Pomp. 24.4; Ant. 26.1); a moralist Roman statesman makes a point of wearing a darker, less fashionable shade of purple (Cato Min. 6.3); the citizens who dress up in festive white apparel for an unworthy honorand have clearly lost the plot (Pomp. 40.3–5, cf. Cato Min. 13); the Persians’ ‘white and soft bodies’ translate into proof of their martial inferiority (Ages. 9.8); Alcibiades has a greater ability to assimilate himself to different mures than a chameleon (Alc. 23.4–5).

It is, again, Plutarch’s Lives which offer the strongest clues to the deep, architectonic connection between colour and the very idea of biography. When Plutarch juxtaposes his life-writing with portraiture (Alex. 1.3; Cim. 2.2–5), the poetics of biographical text implicitly falls back on the polychromy in ancient painting and, if we stretch the brackets of the Plutarchan analogy ever so slightly (cf. Cim. 2.1–2; Per. 2.1), sculpture. Portrait sculpture to Plutarch is a valid enough medium for gauging a man’s inscape; notably, eye and skin colour, readable off polychromous statues, may become building blocks of characterization (Sulla 2.1–2). Alongside such loosely physiognomical commentary, Plutarch also employs colour (rather more vigorously in the Moralia than the Lives) as a point-blank ethical trope: there is a ‘hue’ (χρώμα, χρωτι) to virtuous characters and actions (Phoc. 3.8; Arat. 48.5; Mult. Virt. 243C), and vices can be mapped onto an elaborate palette too (De sera 565B–D). It would be fair to say that for Plutarch, portraits, physiognomy, and chromatic symbolism tie in with each other—as well as with the motif of optic awareness that is key to advertising evaluative cogitation through (Plutarchan) narrative. In Plutarch’s programmatic proems, biography is likened to a mirror (Aem. 1.1), while eyesight itself serves as comparandum and foil for the intellectual processing of values and ethical standards (Per. 1.3; Demet. 1.1–4). Saliently, his case rests on the premise that the primary and intrinsic purpose of vision is to perceive colours.

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12 ‘Observe . . . the motley variety of the souls’ colours here (τά ποικίλα ταίτα και πινακοδάποια χρώματα τῶν φωτισμί), this one, dirty and dirty (δρόμων καίδρωσα), is tainted with meanness and avarice; that one is bloody and flaming red (αλοίμωσι καί διάρροος) with cruelty and rancour. Where there is the blue-grey (γαλατίνωσι), some incontinence in regard to pleasures has been scarcely obliterated. Beseniful envy, if present, excuses this sort of sick-green pus (τά λίδες καί ἴσχυεν), like a squid’s ink (τά μέθα) . . . as the soul is swayed by passions and, in turn, sways the body, its wickedness generates the colours (η κακία . . . τά χρώμα ἀναδιδόμου). . . .’ See Muñoz Gallart 2012. The rare adjective γαλατίνωσι (also used about the dress of Phalaris’ henchmen in Praxe. Reipub. 821B) might mean not bluish-grey but yellow: Blanc 2002: 13–14; yet cf. Pollux, Onomasticon 4.117–18. It is worth stressing that for Plutarch, the step from the aesthetics of colour to moralism is a short one anyway: Quaest. Rom. 270E–F; De Tranq. An. 473F; esp. De Aud. Pet. 16B, with González Escudero 2001; Villard 2006: 45; Hunter and Russell 2011: 85–6.


15 This tends to be the axiomatic standpoint in Greek writing on sensory perception: Arist. De Anima 418a26–7; Gal. Phys. 7.5 and 7.7 (V.625, 637 Kühn); Boudon 2002: 67, 71–2. Cf. Bradley 2009a: 63–4 and 2013: 132 with n. 14—the latter study, however, pleads for weighing the ancient experience of colour on synaesthetic terms.
Plutarch thrives on the manifold conceptual linkage between colour and biography. Suetonius’ Lives of the Caesars, over and above other major differences from Plutarch’s Lives, 17 apparently lack this chromatic verve. Thus, we do not hear Suetonius drawing parallels between biographical texts and portraiture. The preface to the series, where he may have resorted to such rhetoric, is sadly missing. 19 Suetonius is a poker-faced narrator, 20 whose opinions and agenda have to be unpacked from the narrative. Yet the Suetonian narrative does not disappoint; the overflowing, staccato anecdotes of the Lives add up to political and cultural messages. 21 Colour was certainly part of the aesthetic and ideological matrix of imperial Roman literature. 22 Furthermore, it was under the Principate that the discourse of visibility acquired special relevance for the projection and assessment of power. 23 In what follows I attempt to construe colour in Suetonius’ Lives of the Caesars as a diegetically embedded ingredient of both Suetonius’ biographical strategy and the political intuition behind it.


19 Wardman 1974: 144–52 remains the most incisive broad-brush synkrisis of Plutarchan and Suetonian approaches to life-writing.

20 For the scraps of extant data, see Baldwin 1983: 38–41; Gascoy 1984: 254–5, n. 2 and 343–4.


22 These are fruitfully reconstructed by modern scholars: see e.g. Konstan 2009; Power 2012; Gunderson 2014; Ash, forthcoming.

23 Bradley 2009a, passim.

not at all surprising in the broadly physiognomic Suetonian close-ups of the emperors’ heads (1):^{28} Julius Caesar had black and energetic eyes (Jul. 45.1 nigris yegetisque oculis); Galba’s eyes were blue (Galba 21 oculis caeruleis);^{29} the hair of Augustus and Nero was light-blonde (Aug. 79.2. capillum ... subflauum; Nero 51 subflauo capillo);^{30} the overall complexion (color) is noted as ‘fair’ for Julius (Jul. 45.1 colore candido) and Tiberius (Tib. 68.2), but ‘very pale’ for Caligula (Cal. 50.1 colore expallido), whereas Augustus was ‘between dusky and fair’ (Aug. 79.2 colorem inter aquilum candidumque); Domitian is ruddy-faced (Dom. 18.1 suulta ... ruborisque pleno) by nature; the face of Vitellius was ‘typically flushed’ due to binge-drinking (Vit. 17.2 facies rubida plerumque ex uinolentia). Suetonius is attentive to facial colour, because it can readily yield psychological and ethical symptoms.^{31} Under omens (2), the primordial polarity of brightness/white (Aug. 94.6 ‘extraordinarily white’ horse, equis candore eximio, in a dream; Cal. 1.1 white hen, gallinam album) and the unlucky dark/black (Galba 18.2 atratumque ... senem) is brought into play.^{32} Alternatively, the symbolism is inferred contextually: a youngster who has turned grey in an instant (Galba 8.2 capillus repente toto capite canescret) portends that a young ruler (Nero) will be succeeded by an old man.

Finally, categories (3) and (4) have ample ethico-political potential at a micro-diegetic level. Purple, given its status of ‘prestige cloth’

(Bradley 2009a: 50) and entrenched associations with power,^{33} is significant throughout the Lives in more than one way. The funerary display of Julius Caesar asserts his kinglyvis via the inclusion of purple (Jul. 84.1 lectus eburneus auro ac purpura stratus). There are attempts by emperors to restrict wearing of purple. Julius tightens up the rules on purple clothing (Jul. 43.1 conchyliatae uestis);^{34} Nero engineers a cynical ploy, followed up with disturbingly drastic enforcement:

Having forbidden the use of amethystine or Tyrian purple dyes (usum amethystini ac Tyrri coloris), he secretly sent a man to sell a few ounces on a market day but shut down the shops of all the other dealers. It is even said that when he saw a matron in the audience at one of his recitals clad in the forbidden colour (ueitita purpura cultum), he pointed her out to his agents, who dragged her out, and had her stripped on the spot not only of her garment, but also of her property.

(Nero 32.3, trans. J. C. Rolfe, modified)

King Polylene of Mauretania is ‘suddenly’ (repete) executed by Caligula for having worn an eye-catching purple robe in the amphitheatre (Cal. 35.1 quod ... conuerisse hominum oculos fulgere purpureae abollae).^{35} As a visual statement of the emperor’s authority, purple can also undergo cultural transmogrification: Domitian presides at the Capitoline Games (Dom. 4.4) ‘attired in a purple toga in the Greek fashion’ (purpureaque amictus toga Graecanica), surrounded by similarly dressed (pari habitu) priests.^{36} Often purple allows Suetonius to highlight the extravagant and outright scandalous luxury of a Princeps’ lifestyle. Caligula’s favourite horse was provided, among other costly comforts, with purple blankets (Cal. 55.3 purpurea tegumenta). Nero indulged in fishing ‘with a golden net drawn


^{29} On the Roman attitude to blue eyes, see Bradley 2009a: 11, with n. 53; cf. Polomo, Phys. (Leiden) A6.

^{30} The cognomen of Nero’s father is explained (Nero 1.1) from the red beards (rutula barba) that run in the family ever since their ancestor’s beard was divinely changed from black to copper-coloured (e nigro rutillum aeternae adsimilis capillum); cf. Phryg. Aen. 25.2–4.


^{32} See too the Egyptians and Ethiopians performing scenes from the underworld for Caligula (Cal. 57 A arguentum inferorum per Aegyptios et Aethiopios explicatur) shortly before his death. An interesting ‘chromogentic’ good omen is the rainbow-like circle around the sun during Octavian’s arrival at Rome (Aug. 95 circulos ad spectum caelestis arcus orbem solis ambit); this omen probably has to do with the link made by the Romans between the rainbow and the colour purple—see Bradley 2009a: 48–50.

^{33} Even so, the ancient use of purple was not (even in the later Roman Empire) aligned exclusively with regal status: Reinhold 1970; Bessone 1998; Bradley 2009a: 197–209.

^{34} Reinhold 1970: 45–6; Bessone 1998: 177.

^{35} One plausible rationale for this cruelty is the wish to monopolize the purple within the visual protocol of Roman autocracy: Lindsay 1993: 127 and Wardle 1994: 271—pace Reinhold 1970: 50, n. 1 and Bessone 1998: 180. Cf. Aug. 60: at meetings with Augustus client kings would be wearing togas rather than their royal garb (togae ac sine regio insigni); yet see Bradley 2009a: 200 on the ideological complexities of purple in the Augustan era.

by cords woven by purple and scarlet threads' (Nero 30.3 rete aurato et purpurea coccoque funibus nexit, trans. J. C. Rolfe). Back in the days of the republic, Cicero seized upon the allegation that Julius Caesar had reclined in king Nicomedes' bedroom 'on a golden couch arrayed in purple' (Jul. 49.3 in aureo lecto ueste purpurea decubuito, trans. J. C. Rolfe).

Suetonius' Caligula and Nero are, arguably, the most chromatically intensive biographies of the whole series. References to the colour and style of Nero's dress form a kind of substructural axis in his life-story. At the finale of his quasi-triumphal 38 return from Greece in AD 68 he wears 'a [Greek] mantle emblazoned with golden stars, over a purple robe' (Nero 25.1 in ueste purpurea distinctaque stellis aureis chlamyde). As his downfall is gathering momentum, Nero considers the option of dressing in black and making a contrite appeal to the crowd (Nero 47.2 an atratus prodiere in publicum). Fleeting from Rome, he wraps himself in a 'faded cloak' (Nero 48.1 paenulam obsoleti coloris superinduit). Further humiliation ensues, of which Nero is poignantly self-aware (esp. Nero 48.3 haec est, inquit, 'Neronis decocta') —yet in death, dignity and chromatic gentility are restored to him: his body is laid out on the pyre in white gold-embroidered robes (stragulis albis auro intexit) which he had worn on 1st January (Nero 50), and his ashes are put to rest in a tomb built of three varieties of expensive coloured marble (Nero 50).

Caligula, on the other hand, treats colour as a resource for staging flamboyant spectacles. In his Life, the arena of the Circus gets strown (or, paved?) with cinnabar and malachite (Calc. 18.3 minio et chrysocolla constratu Circo) —the club colours of the Red and the Green factions, respectively. His custom-built ships for luxurious cruising are furnished with multi-coloured sails (Calc. 37.2 ursicoloribus uels).

Perhaps the most outrageous exploitation of colour by Caligula is when he commands a select gang of Gauls to dye their hair red (rutilare ... comam), so that they can pretend to be Germans in the emperor's triumphal parade after a campaign that never happened (Calc. 47). Mark Bradley rightly comments that this story, along with an analogous one about Domitian (Tac. Agr. 39.1), encapsulates the Roman elite's anxiety about the visual side of political experience under autocracy: 'Bad emperors could control and manipulate reality by controlling and manipulating vision' (2009a: 176). It is hard to disagree with Bradley here. But the role of colour in the Lives of the Caesars exceeds, one should think, that of a test of political integrity. For while mentions of colour are not distributed evenly across the twelve biographies, there seems to be no straightforward correlation between presence or absence of colour and the individual Princeps' profile. The narratives of Caligula, Nero, and Domitian, but also of Julius, Augustus, and Galba, are markedly richer in colour references than the Lives of Tiberius and Vitellius, whereas the Lives of Claudius, Otho, Vespasian, and Titus are virtually devoid of chromatic features. Indeed, it could be argued that there is no consistent colour-scheme as such for a Suetonian Life; just two out of twelve protagonists have their eye-colour explicitly identified.

My contention is that, discrepancies and irregular rate of occurrence notwithstanding, colour in the Caesars works out as a factor

57 For a compatible, if more grotesque, instance of chromatic hedonism pushed beyond the item's practical utility, see Petr. Sat. 38.5, with Schmeling 2011: 143.
60 More accurately, the sails (or maybe, awnings; Hurley 1993: 142; cf. esp. Plut. Pomp. 24.4) are 'colour-changing'; the adjective ursicolor implies sophisticated coloration with a shimmering, rainbow-like lustre: Culham 1986: 237, with n. 10; for a similar understanding of the Greek πούξαλος, see e.g. Manfrini 2009: 52. It is possible that Caligula's pleasure fleet, like the navi of Alexander the Great (Pliny Nat. 19.22), was finished out with expensive embroidered textiles. On a smaller scale, Cives' rebels on the Rhine made 'not unseenly' sails out of 'multi-coloured officer cloaks' (Tac. Hist. 5.23.1 capitae lutes sagulis ursicoloribus hauud indecore pro uels inuabantur);
of Suetonius' biographical design for the series—a deep holistic principle for envisioning the generic emperor, so to speak. The reasons why colour is sprinkled (or not) onto each particular episode may vary, being more or less transparent and more or less ad hoc and ad hominem, but equally reflecting the overt or submerged Roman concerns about social and moral norms, identities, and perversions (e.g. Domitian's rubor). Yet if there is a single, overarching criterion of chromaticity in Suetonius, it reveals itself in the practice of clustering colour around the lead character. To put it bluntly, in each Life the Princeps is the only figure who can own colour, interact with colour, and have a say, for better or worse, over matters of colour.

This might not immediately strike us as a consequential and fresh idea. After all, in the narrative economy of biography it is expected that the protagonist would receive the maximum share of descriptive details—facial appearance, costume, and so on—which are likely to involve colour. Of the categories proposed above, (1), (2), and (3) represent the aspects which Suetonius as a life-writer cannot help addressing and, to some degree, painting in. Having said that, the same category (3) and especially the most action-packed category (4) look beyond the rudimentary requirements of biographical writing. The Suetonian emperors attire themselves in coloured fabrics, unchallenged by their intra-diegetic environment—except Julius Caesar (Jul. 49.3), but the criticism must pre-date his dictatorship; Nero's theatrical personality is aptly framed through the clothes he wears, or thinks of wearing. A Princeps in Suetonius' text has colour at his disposal for publicity experiments. Domitian keeps a brightly clad freak conspicuously next to himself when he attends gladiatorial shows:

at his feet stood a small boy in scarlet (ante pedes est stabat puellus coccineatus) with an abnormally small head, with whom he used to talk a great deal, sometimes seriously.

(Dom. 4.2, trans. J.C. Rolfe, modified)

The aura of carnivalesque excess about Nero's and Caligula's style of transportation is enhanced with colour. Caligula's ships carry multi-coloured sails (Cal. 37.2); city-walls are pulled down before Nero, who arrives with white horses (Nero 25.1 albis equis introitum). These are outré and objectionable performances by bad emperors, for sure, but the underlying message bears on imperial self-presentation in general: colour in Suetonius' biographies is, by default, a facet of power. The Principate (mal)functions as a centripetal regime both politically and chromatically—the man-in-charge, however problematic, is the chief stakeholder in colour. Hence the elimination of Ptolemy of Mauretania by Caligula (Cal. 35.1), or Domitian's sensitivity to the chromatic etiquette at court:

He was vexed that the retinue of his brother's son-in-law were dressed in white—like his own (generum fratris indigne ferens albatos et ipsum ministros habeere). He recited the line [II. 2.204], 'Many lords is not good!'

(Dom. 12.3, trans. J. C. Rolfe, modified)

Support for some of the colour-coded Circus factions can be part of the emperor's identity. Vitellius executes several commoners for

On the comparable evolution of the dress of Demetrius the Besieger in Plutarch's Life (esp. 41.7—8; 44.9), see Duff 1999: 125 and Mosman, in this volume (ch. 10); on the pronounced theatrical flavour of this Life, see De Lacy 1952: 166–71; Mastrocinque 1979: 269–76; Duff 2004: 283–4.

50 For a forceful argument that puerulus here means 'dwarf', see Jones 1996: 38–9.

51 See n. 35 above. Ptolemy's death in the Suetonian text is subsumed under the tyrannical crimes of Caligula (cf. Cal. 26.1)—leaving out the empire's realpolitik: Gascou 1984: 420–1 and 427.


having publicly maligned the Blues (Vit. 14.3 quod Venetae factioni clare male disserant, interemit), which he takes personally (cf. 7.1); Caligula is extremely fond of the Greens (Cal. 55.2 prasinæ factioni ita addictus et deditus); Domitian set up two new factions, the Golds and the Purples (Dom. 7.1 duas circensibus gregum factiones aurati purpureique panni . . . addidit).54

Emperors are privileged users of colour within the Suetonian narrative. Moreover, the Lives showcase the autocratic capacity of a Princeps to act as the arbiter and controller of colour. The colour of other people’s clothes is susceptible to the emperor’s intervention, if it happens to be purple (Jul. 43.1; Cal. 35.1; Nero 32.3).55 or deemed otherwise inappropriate for the Roman civic template:

He [Augustus] desired also to revive the ancient fashion of dress, and once when he saw in an assembly a throng of men in dark garments (pullatorum turba), he cried out indignantly, ‘Behold them—Romans, lords of the world, the nation clad in toga’ [Aen. 1.282], and he set the aediles the task not to allow ever again anyone to appear in the Forum . . . except in the toga and without a cloak. . . . and he decreed that no one in dark clothing (sanxitque ne quis pullatorum) could sit in the middle rows.

(Aug. 40.5 and 44.2, trans. J. C. Rolfe, modified)

Physiognomic color, too, may be liable to authorization by the Principes; Augustus insists on personally vetting the complexion of every male going near his banished daughter Julia (Aug. 65.3 ut certior fieret . . . quo colore). Tampering with ethnic hair-colour in order to fake a triumph (Cal. 47) is comically odious, but by the same token, indicative of the chromatic hegemony the Suetonian emperors are licensed to exercise. In Lives of the Caesars, colour communicates power ceremonially but also exhibits it through hands-on rewards, acts of largesse or punishment. Augustus awards Agrippa a blue flag after the naval victory in Sicily (Aug. 25.3 caeruleo uxillo donavit);56 Caligula strews the arena of the Circus with expensive red and green mineral substances (Cal. 18.3); the Claudian aqueduct supplies Rome with high-quality water from springs near Tibur, one of which is called ‘Blue’ (Claud. 20.1 gelidos et uberos fontes quorum alteri Caerulea . . . nomen est).57 When a crucified criminal invokes his Roman citizenship, Galba (still governor of Spain) commands that the man is moved to a higher cross painted white (Galba 9.1 multoque praeter ceteras altorem et dealbatam statui crucem iussit). Julius Caesar disciplines two tribunes of the people who protested against a laurel wreath with a white band (coronam lauream candida fasia) placed on his statue (Jul. 79.1).58 Last but not least (considering Suetonius’ philological savoir-faire!), it is curious how the Principes’ prerogative to do things with colour extends to vocabulary and diction: Augustus habitually used the adjective ‘darkish’ instead of ‘dark’ (Aug. 87.2 pro pule),(59 puleiacum); Domitian came up with a simile for greying red hair (caput uariatate capilli subtruitum et incanum), calling it ‘a splash of mead on snow’ (Dom. 20 perfusum niuem mulso).60

Use of colour in Suetonian mosaic narrative bespeaks the strongly monocratic nature of each Life as a module of ethico-political reportage,61 behind which there looms a unified pattern. The pervasive subtext of Suetonian biography, at the end of the day, is that the Principate hinges on the emperor’s persona-cum-authority.62 References to colour are a tactic for negotiating this ideological algorithm by dint of anecdotes and descriptive observation. While Suetonian is beholden to a plurality of established—but obviously dynamic—Roman and Hellenistic discursive frameworks for tackling colour (e.g. clothes as chromatic markers of social status, moralistic misgivings about colourful profanity, physiognomic reading of character), colour’s most basic function in the Lives of the Caesars is to connote the exclusive political and diegetic standing of the Principes.63

55 Note how Suetonius’ syntax conveys the impression of direct, almost physical action by the Princeps: Julius Caesar ‘took away’ (ademit) the use of purple clothes (Jul. 43.1); Caligula ‘suddenly smote’ (repente percussit) Ptolemy of Mauritania (Cal. 35.1). Nero ‘stripped’ (exuit) the matron of the ‘forbidden purple’ and her property alike (Nero 32.3); cf. Lounsbury 1991: 3752–3.
57 Hurley 2001: 145.
59 The lectio difficilior is apud pullum.
60 Colour was certainly on the radar of erudite Roman wordsmiths in the second century AD: see esp. Gell. NA 2.26, with Romano 2003: 41–4 and Bradley 2009a: 229–33.
62 See Boller 2001: 6, 8; Dominik, Garthwaite, and Roche 2009: 20.
63 This tendency in imperial historiography is lucidly summed up by Kraus 2005: 249–50: ‘what changes with the Principate is that, as the person of the emperor arrogates to himself the gaze of reader and writer alike, as history essentially shifts.
A Suetonian emperor is programmed to be the chromatic linchpin of his own biography. Effectively, the narrative illustrates and reinforces the notion that colour in the top-down imperial system is, first and foremost, an affordance of power. Colour may be an external stimulus for the emperor's action, but crucially, it submits to and colludes with his demands all the same; only Caligula is, perhaps, momentarily disempowered as a fan of the Green faction (Cal. 55.2 prasinæ factioni ita addixtus et deditus)—here colour somehow gains mastery over the master of Rome. It is yet more telling that the only ruler in the series whose entanglement with coloured objects triggers open hostility towards him among the cast of his narrative seems to be Julius Caesar (purple robe: Jul. 49.3; white band attached to the crown: Jul. 79.1–2), that is, a forerunner of the Principate but not a full-fledged Princeps. Otherwise, no Suetonian emperor is really criticized on chromatic grounds by the insiders of his own story (the disparagement of Vitellius in Vit. 14.3 is at best oblique). Colour remains firmly harnessed to one-man rule in the political aesthetics of Lives of the Caesars. Suetonius' chromatic philosophy as biographer of emperors is therefore simply yet smart: colour punctuates the text so as to intensify and drive home the metanarrative of autocracy. Suetonius, unlike Plutarch, does not metaphorize his biographical project in the idiom of visibility. The Suetonian Lives are instead 'watermarked' with tiny specks of colour that on close reading combine into a historical signature of the Principate.

from the res gestae populi Romani to the res gestae diui Augusti . . . . Cf. Pelling 1997b on Cassius Dio's propensity for 'biostructuring' his narrative around the emperors.

It is tempting to compare the deep-running acknowledgement of the emperor's exceptional clout with regard to gift-exchange or sexuality. See, respectively, Roller 2001: 173–6, 192–212 and Vout 2007: 1–9, 19–21, 29–33—although the thrust of Vout's argument is that literary and visual images of the Princeps as lover destabilize the paradigm of domination (21–3, 113, 241).

Consider also the passive respersus est . . . sanguine when a sacrifice goes mistakenly wrong for Caligula (Cal. 57.4) on the eve of his assassination. See n. 27 above; Hurley 2014: 156; Ash (forthcoming), text to n. 25.

Cf. Baldwin 1983: 217, 338. Famously, Suetonius leans towards the view that Julius Caesar was 'legitimately slain' (Jul. 76.1 iure caesari); Baldwin 1983: 220–1; Pelling 2006a: 10, 22–3; Wardle 2012: 308; further, Henderson 2014.

Yet see now Hulls 2014; cf. also Calhoon 2010: 281–3 on dye and poison as ethico-political metaphors.

Bigger from a Distance

Appian on Antiochus 'the Great'

Luke Pitcher

I think continually of those who were truly great.
Who, from the womb, remembered the soul's history
Through corridors of light where the hours are suns
Endless and singing.

(Stephen Spender)

In the ancient world, as in the modern, the relationship between historiography and biography was often a tense one. No one, over the last few decades, has done more to examine this tension than Christopher Pelling. Ancient historians were divided as to whether the life and deeds of an important man made an appropriate structural unit for a history. Diodorus believed that they could. Polybius did not, and vigorously criticized Theopompos for having thought so.

In the context of such debates, Appian's Syriake, the book of his larger Rhomaika which deals with affairs in Syria, holds a particular

1 On history and biography, see most recently Pelling 2006a and Pelling 2010. Pelling 1997b: 118 coins the term 'biostructure' for the organization of material around a dominating individual, and detects a 'move towards biostructure' (121) in the text of Cassius Dio as his narrative hits the Principate.

2 Rhannon Ash notes, per litteras, that the beginning of Tacitus' Histories makes this point in a particularly provocative fashion, its consular starting point of 1 January AD 69 (Tac. Hist. 1.1) pointedly not setting off the narrative at the death of Nero six months earlier.

3 Dio. 16.1.1.

4 Polyb. 8.11.3–4.