

Augustus in Tacitus, *Annals* 12.60

Open the pages Tacitus' *Annals*—or even Velleius—and the message seems to be, “Hurry on, let's get to Tiberius” (an observation inspired by Thakur 2020). Augustus is not absent; he's just not belabored. In fact, he appears in all five of Tacitus' extant works. He looms large over any and all representations of the Julio-Claudian dynasty, the principate, and their dealings with the senate. Yet Augustus is not a central figure in any of the five extant works, nor does his life fall within the temporal parameters of any of the works of Tacitus. Syme (1958, *inter alia*) took this absence as a shortcoming on Tacitus' part; obviously Augustus is very important, and Tacitus should have chosen a different starting point for the *Annals*. For O'Gorman, when Tacitus sidesteps Augustus, he is engaging in a deliberate *recusatio*.

I'd like to apply the lessons from Slatkin's penetrating and illuminating reading of the *Iliad* and consider the interplay between implicit and explicit allusions to Augustus in the *Annals*. Attention needs to be paid to Tacitus' orchestration of the history against which his narrative is composed. He constructs the *Annals* using the history of Augustus that is not related in full, but only in part. In these moments, we may say Tacitus is inventing, but also abridging, limiting, or expanding the compass of his invention.

To this end, Joseph (2023) identified in *Annals* 12.22 an allusion to Ovid's depiction of Augustus in *Tristia* Book 2 and argues that “Tacitus pointedly aligns Agrippina at the height of her powers with none other than Augustus himself” (p. 2). However, just a few pages later, Tacitus refers directly to *divus Augustus* at 12.60. With attention to this passage, this paper explores the extent to which Joseph's findings hold and the degree to which Tacitus' use of the fragments of Augustan history construct the larger story of the Julio-Claudians. In this

continuous shuffle between explicit and implicit meaning, Tacitus not only alludes but, as Slatkin teaches, interprets. Thus, the *Annals* constitute an act of creation. Against the grain of the densely compact dynamic core of the *Annals*, Tacitus layers allusions that reverberate across the narrative, continually linking the history to other histories and by which we may locate the *Annals* within a multidimensional historical realm. In a most contrary way, then, recourse to allusion and interpretation renders a completeness to Augustus in the *Annals*.

Bibliography

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