

## Suetonius' Augustan Endorsement

In this paper, I shall demonstrate how in the *Divus Augustus*, Suetonius endorses the “justice” and legitimacy of Augustus’ career (1) by imitating the language of *pietas*, *iustitia*, and “restoration”, prevalent in Augustan propaganda, as e.g. in the *Res Gestae* and (2) by paralleling successful episodes in his life—particularly where he has trumped earlier precedent—with similar episodes in the *Divus Iulius* that indicate the shortcomings of Julius Caesar’s career.

Suetonius parallels the funerary *laudationes* that both Augustus and Caesar gave early in their careers. Augustus notably is only a boy of twelve when he eulogizes his grandmother, showing his quick ascent up the *cursus honorum* (*Divus Augustus* 8). Caesar at age 31 gives a *laudatio* for his aunt, in a short excerpt of which he uses derivatives of the word, *rex*, four times, thus indicating his monarchical ambitions (*Divus Iulius* 6). In another case, Caesar encounters a statue of Alexander and groans in despair of his career in comparison (*Div. Iul.* 7), while Augustus lays flowers and a gold crown upon Alexander’s body in an act of *pietas*.

When we look at how Suetonius justifies Augustus’ actions leading up to the Civil War against Brutus and Cassius, reserving less approbation for Caesar’s pretexts for the five year renewal of his proconsulship in Gaul. Augustus wishes to lead an army against Brutus and Cassius to avenge Caesar as tribune of the plebs, despite his patrician and non-senator status. When Marcus Antonius opposes this, Suetonius says that Antonius would not even allow “*ius ulla*”. While this *ius ulla* is hypothetical in this case, the implication is that the tribuneship which Augustus sought was just. . In this case, Suetonius literally “justifies” Augustus’ actions. Suetonius further uses the words of Augustan propaganda when, after Augustus attempts to assassinate Antonius in response to his refusal to grant the tribuneship, Augustus hires veteran bodyguards *in suum ac rei p. auxilium* (*Div. Aug.* 10). As for Caesar’s seeking five more years as

proconsul in Gaul, Suetonius says that Caesar in seeking this *nec deinde ulla belli occasione, ne iniusti quidem ac periculosi abstinent* (*Div Caes* 24). This is what Barry Baldwin would call the Suetonian “double standard” employed between lives of “good” and “bad” emperors (245).

Lastly, by tracing the parallel events in the *Divus Augustus* and *Divus Iulius*, we are better able to interpret Augustus’ appeal to the *plebs* among other things. Barry Baldwin notes that in Suetonius’ description of Augustus’ death, “the mourning is official, and restricted to the senatorial and equestrian orders” (245). He indicates that the lack of any account of genuine mourning of the *plebs* is the mark of the death of a bad emperor, such as Domitian, whose death the *plebs* bears *indifferenter* (with indifference). While it is true that the *plebs*’ reaction is not described here, they certainly have the opportunity to crowd around the Mausoleum and the old rostrum to hear Tiberius’ eulogy and line the way of the procession of his body. That Suetonius omits to report whether there was a spontaneous display of grief for Augustus at his funeral or whether people lined the ways, speaks less about an indifference over Augustus’ death and more about the order that Augustus has restored to Rome, as Caesar’s death is a far more chaotic affair, spurring riots where Augustus’ inspires an orderly parade (*Div Iul.* 82-87).

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