

Res Publica Morbida: Political Violence, Malaise, and Regime Change in the Late Roman Republic

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CC 679B
Honors in the Department of Classics
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4 May, 2018

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Abstract

Two thousand years of ink have been spilled on the events of the first century BCE in Rome that led to a fundamental shift in political life. While in hindsight, we speak about the "end" of the Roman "republic," it is worth remembering that the transition from a republican system to autocracy was none too clear for those who lived through it. Nevertheless, many contemporaneous accounts evinced a conviction that Rome and its republic fell into disrepair. I explore the "pessimism" about republican politics in the late Republic that is characterized by Cicero's lamentation *re publica . . . amissa* ["the republic is forsaken"] and Sallust's image of a *res publica . . . pessuma ac flagitiosissima* ["the worst and most blameworthy republic"].

I attempt demonstrate violence's responsibility for this crisis of faith in republican politics and the idea of Rome as an exceptional political system. The republican political elite was particularly attuned to the stress placed on the republican system by the experience and memory of acts of politically-charged violence. Political violence perpetrated by the political elite contradicted a long-held Roman exceptionalism regarding the endurance of their *politeia* (political community). The principate (i.e. the early empire) addressed some of the republican political elite's malaise by legitimizing itself as having redressed the political violence as epitomized by Augustus' claim *bella civilia exstinxeram* ["I had snuffed out civil wars"].

I focus on three watershed moments that had particular significance for those who lived through them, and had an especially powerful and influential afterlife in the principate and long after: the Catilinarian conspiracy of 63 BCE, the civil war between Pompey and Caesar, and the Ides of March. I understand these events as representative of three facets of political violence which the Romans long dealt with: *coniuratio*, *bellum civile*, and political murder/assassination. The Roman interpretations of the violence colored their accounts of political regime change in the late first century BCE. Furthermore, understanding the Romans relationship to these phenomena illustrates the necessity of understanding Roman politics (and our own) through the lens of norms and not a 19th century *Staatsrecht* framework.

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Parentibus Optimis Patriaeque

Introduction

Julius Caesar had done it again. In the summer of 2017, the Public Theater in New York's Free Shakespeare in the Park performance found itself in a firestorm involving the President of the United States.¹ The company's summer season featured a new production of *Julius Caesar*. In a nod to the political atmosphere of the early days of the Trump Administration, the production was updated: Julius Caesar sported a big blue suit, a Slavic-accented Calpurnia, a red power tie flapping below the belt, and a shock of yellow-orange hair. He even spoke with the hint of Queens English. The assassins, Cassius, Brutus, Casca, and all were played by actors of color. When Act II came around, the audience saw Donald Trump fall at the hands of racial minorities against whom so much of his campaign rhetoric was aimed. As Medialite put it, "Senators Stab Trump to Death in a Performance of Shakespeare's Julius Caesar" (*NYT*, June 12, 2017). With a production sponsored by Delta Airlines, American Express, and Time Warner Cable, John Nolte of the *Daily Wire*, asserted that "the news that it is both a righteous and patriotic act to assassinate President Trump is blared loudly and clearly" (*Daily Wire*, June 7, 2017).² The accusations that the performance was an incitement to violent action were taken seriously. Delta Airlines announced that it withdraw funding of the production, stating "the graphic staging of 'Julius Caesar' at this summer's free Shakespeare in the Park does not reflect Delta Air Lines' values."³ That the production was thought to incite the audience to violence was rejected by the director, Oskar Eustis: "Our production of 'Julius Caesar' in no way advocates violence toward anyone" (*NYT*, June 12, 2017)⁴.

¹ ["Why Julius Caesar Speaks to Politics Today: With or Without Trump" Michael Cooper, New York Times June 12, 2017](#)

² ["Proud Sponsor of President Trump's Nightly 'Assassination' — CNN's Parent Company Time Warner" John Nolte, June 7, 2017](#)

³ ["Et tu, Delta? Shakespeare in the Park Sponsors Withdraw from Trump-Like 'Julius Caesar'" Liam Stack, New York Times, June 11, 2017.](#)

⁴ ["How Outrage Built Over a Shakespearean Depiction of Trump" Michael Paulson and Sopan Deb, New York Times June 12, 2017.](#)



Public Theatre, 2017 (Village Voice)

The figure of Julius Caesar has been a touchstone for the United States as long as there has been a United States. The most prominent political assassination in American history was committed by an actor fresh off performing as Brutus. In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, productions of *Julius Caesar* have resonated with contemporary American anxieties. In the wake of Barack Obama’s election, a Minneapolis production responded to the racist undertones of many ad hominem criticisms of Obama by featuring a black actor playing Caesar who is killed by an all-white senate (*NYT*, June 12, 2017).

The 2017 production, however, was differed not least because it became victim to a presidential twitter-storm. Since 2016 tension and worry about American politics has been high as has been the possibility of violent solutions in American politics. For ten years polls have indicated that a super-majority of Americans believe the “country is head in the wrong direction,”⁵ and low voter turnout rates suggest that in the political system is on the decline. Coupled together with the often—violent confrontations between the “alt-right” and occasionally

⁵ https://realclearpolitics.com/epolls/other/direction_of_country-902.html

neo-Nazi far right and the “resistance” and Antifascist organization on the left, America appears to be in turmoil. The personage of the President of the United States has also been a constant factor through his public statements to increase factionalism in America. The contemporary anxiety about the degeneration of political institutions and norms inspired Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt to publish *How Democracies Die* in 2018.

It is not just because of plot and the weight of ethical questions in *Julius Caesar* that it forms a moving touchstone for fraught political life since the founding of the United States of America have consciously and unconsciously approached Rome as a model for the political “experiment” in republicanism. For the critical junctures in US history looking to Rome for caution or guidance has been routine practice. “Rome also provides,” writes Maria Wyke, “the paradigm of imperial structures in relation to which modern empires have even been modeled, as well as understood” (Wyke, 2006). Within the last two decades, debates about American over reach in the Middle East has inspired such works as *Empires of Trust* (Thomas Madden, 2008) and *Are We Rome?* (Cullen Murphy, 2007), spinning interpretations of Roman imperialism to address American concerns. The Central Park performance of *Julius Caesar*, while not only contributing to America’s rich Shakespearean tradition, falls into the same vein of using Rome as a distant mirror. Indeed there is little new about America using the archetypal *res publica* of Rome to assess present concerns.

If the 2017 *Caesar* production struck a chord because of the violence that many political observers sensed was palpable at the moment, these same fears are shared by most communities. For a country that idealizes its foundation and political culture like the United States, the spectre of violence is especially disturbing because it reveals how frail its institutions actually are. The ease with which civility deteriorates is a reminder that norms are the biding force that give laws

their weight.⁶ “Julius Caesar is about how fragile democracy is,” writes director Oskar Eustis in “A Note from Oskar Eustis,”⁷ “The Institutions that we have grown up with, that we have inherited from the struggle of many generations of our ancestors, can be swept away in no time at all.” Many other societies have reckoned with the weaknesses of their politics. Few have been exhaustively studied, even in their own time, as Rome’s. The breakdown of politics in Rome in the second and first centuries BCE was a focal point for the Romans themselves. The core of the high school Advanced Placement curriculum, the *Aeneid* and *de Bello Gallico*, originates in the violence of the first century, and offers thousands of American high school students with an intimate portrait of Rome in troubled times.

My study of what may be the most written-about and closely-studied period of classical antiquity is hardly original. It rests on the work of giants beginning with Thucydides’ insights into internal war in Greece and extends to Harriet Flower’s re-periodization of the Roman “Republic.” Most of the best studies of these tumultuous years and their aftermath are macroscopic in scale, tracking the political changes that ultimately resulted in the “constitutional settlement” of 27 BCE⁸ that granted Octavianus Caesar *divi filius* the title of Augustus in marked contrast to the way politics had been conducted in what we loosely label the “republic.” I explore some of the same questions that have been asked about that “regime change” that were first asked in antiquity. But I pursue these questions through the plague of violence. How did the Roman political class make sense of the violence through which both they and their parents’ generations lived? In increasingly violent politics, Americans have looked to the example of the Romans by way of Shakespeare. The Romans were not so fortunate to behold *Julius Caesar* on

⁶ Bazelon, Emily “Ground Rules” *New York Times Magazine* 13 July, 2017.

⁷ <https://publictheater.org/Julius-Caesar/>

⁸ All dates are BCE unless otherwise indicated.

stage. They had to live it. The Romans had to grapple with profoundly difficult and often dispiriting questions. What did it all mean for the *res publica* at the end of the day?

Writing in the midst of civil war about events that had occurred some twenty years earlier when he was a young man, Gaius Sallustius Crispus said that the work at hand, the *Bellum Catilinae*, was about “how the best and most beautiful republic changed little by little into the worst and most detestable”⁹ (*BC*, 5.9). Sallust spoke for the age. Marcus Tullius Cicero, whose response to the alleged *coup d’etat* which Sallust was analyzing, said as much when he lamented to his best friend, Atticus, that “the republic has been lost” (*Att.* 1.18.6). Eventually in the more public genre of philosophical treatise, Cicero has a key interlocutor admit that the Rome people—the sovereign power in the republic—had been inextricably divided into two parts (*de rep. pub.* 1.13). After securing victory in three years of ruinous civil war, Julius Caesar is believed to have declared that the “republic is nothing” (*Sue. Jul.* 77). Sallust and his contemporaries speak to a “crisis of confidence” beyond any that Jimmy Carter envisioned. Political community had, in their eyes, failed in Rome.

However, some twenty years after Sallust identified his dismal topic, talk of the *res publica* was largely sanguine. In lines millions of Latin readers and speakers would read or hear, Publius Vergilius Maro proclaimed a golden age (*Aen.* 1.257-296). Vergil identifies *Iulius*, *a magno demissum nomen Iulo* [Julius, a name passed down from great Iulus] (1.286) as the one to achieve success abroad and at home. Talk of restoration of the republic was palpable. Coins were struck that announced that the *princeps* “has restored the statutes and *iura* of the republic” (Cooley, 258-9). Rome in the intervening two decades between the composition of the *BC* and the early stages of the composition of the *Aeneid* had changed. This change is one of the most

⁹ All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

studied, best-documented, and most compelling for students of the ancient world and political transformations. One of its best interpreters, Sir Ronald Syme insisted that this span amounted to a revolution, the triumph of autocracy over an unstable aristocracy, and the rise of new economic and social power in Italy. One of Syme's most influential successors, Andrew Wallace-Hadrill has styled the shift as a "cultural revolution" in which the entire Mediterranean was forced to respond to fundamental shifts in power dynamics especially in the control of knowledge. My work rests on the shoulders of two thousand years of giants.

The factors directing the shift of sentiment from Sallust to Vergil are manifold. Underlying the transformation and the political class' prognosis of advance malaise is unprecedented violence on a large scale. For modern historians of the late republic, its history is pockmarked by tensions which give shape to the surviving *longue durée* narratives of Appian and Cassius Dio from the second and third centuries respectively. The changes in Roman political life that Sallust, Cicero, and Caesar identified are indeed difficult to separate from the entrance and flourishing of violence into Roman political life.

At the heart of my study is an examination of how the Romans of the late Republic and their successors made sense of the violence. Ancient cultures typically interacted with gruesome violence on a daily basis. Rome was a slave society, after all. But political violence, the application of violence on the part of political actors—citizens and non-citizens alike—to achieve political ends was anathematic to the theory and practice of Roman politics, and is universally corrosive to political life. Indeed, the experience of political violence in 5th century BCE Athens prodded writers like Thucydides, Xenophon, and Plato to address the foundations of political community. Political science, in effect, was born from political disarray.

Republican politics was understood as the supreme political achievement by the Roman elite. It was a system that Cicero characterized as embodying the ideal political organization (*politeia*) envisioned by Aristotle in his *Politics*. The outbreak of political violence in the 2nd century BCE undercut this idealization.

The Romans experienced a plethora of varieties of political violence. Many, to be sure, were painful but are not recounted in the historical record. I limit myself to a study of only three varieties, which I posit had an immediate and long-standing impact on how the Romans characterized their political *trauma* (in the Greek sense, a wound): conspiracy, civil war, and assassination. The political destructiveness of these varieties of violence was a constant source of worry for those who live through them. . For later observers, the conspiracy of Catiline, civil war, or the assassination of Caesar represent the nail in the coffin that was sealed unto the republic. At any rate, a survey of literature demonstrates how these phenomena normalized violence in Roman political life. Their life and afterlife in the principate and beyond would indicate a fundamentally new political culture on the rise.

Neither the Roman observers nor I exist in an intellectual vacuum. To make sense of their prognosis of political decay, Sallust and Cicero reached into the traditions of Greek historiography, searching for analogues and Thucydidean or Polybian frameworks to a Roman context. In fact, understanding Sallust's understanding of Thucydides becomes an essential piece to understanding Sallust's pessimism. Horace and Vergil interacted not only with their Greek literary godfathers but also exhaustively drew on the Roman mythologizing of their deep past. While my study endeavors to elucidate the relationship between political community and political violence at the critical juncture in Roman history, it also relies on contemporary

discourse on violence, political norms, and a contemporary sense of political frailty in the United States.

Vastness of subject matter finds its best refiner in brevity. My study can scarce touch on all the ancient sources –let alone the modern. The works and authors I most prominently feature speak mostly for the political elite whose lives were most actively shaped by political violence. Conspiracy, civil war, and assassination affected multitudes, and the better-preserved evidence from the principate indicates the extent to which the memory of the violence may have lingered in the Roman imagination. Political theory—despite the best intentions of its theorists—does not affect as many people at all. Nor is this in any way an exhaustive study of the material. The ancient authors I concentrate on I have chosen out of interest and the appearance of necessity.

This discussion is contingent on vocabulary. Neither did the Romans have a vocabulary for political change nor for political violence. The Romans “did not really have a vocabulary of political terms to analyze their changing civic landscapes,” writes Harriet Flower (10). Neither did they talk of “revolutions” or “constitutions.” The use of *res publica* described Roman political authority for centuries—republican or imperial. Nor did Romans have a catch-all term for varieties of “political” violence. In the first place the concept of “political” was not at all that distinct from the “religious.” “Both ‘politics’ and ‘religions,’” states Hendrik Mouritsen, “were ultimately concerned with preserving the community” (22). Romans also recognized violence in ways far different than we do. “Roman traditions tolerated and even encouraged violence in political and private disputes,” posits Andrew Lintott, “and both the law and constitutional precedent recognized the use of force by private individuals” (4). In many regards, to speak of “political violence” and “regime change” is disingenuous. Even while umbrella terms like *Discordia* and *dissensio* were applied to describe the era (Cic. *Rep.* 6.1), they lack the specificity

of the English technical terms. However, this problem in language makes it instructive to examine three varieties of violence that the Romans recognized as turning points that challenged the essence of political community.

The classic account of the “end of the republic” generally focus on the *nobiles*, the republican elite, and their inability to address the problems that came with Rome’s expanding empire. A city state cannot govern an empire the phrasing goes. The violence that dotted the first century is often treated as derivative of the systemic problems. While this is certainly true, violence was a problem in its right and while it not only wreaked death on thousands it was also critical to killing the elite belief in Rome’s unique claim to being the best kind of polity. Studies of the era often treat the political class as having been inured to the likes of *seditio*, *dissensio*, and *Discordia*. Rome after all was a violent society. Also, the monumental studies of Rome by Mommsen, Syme, and others evinced a greater interest in a *Staatsrecht* approach that often focused on anachronistically-conceived institutions such as the “constitution” and the so-called *senatus consultum ultimum*. These institutions were given the starring roles in the narratives of the transition from “republic” to “autocracy” to the disservice of behaviors and norms that underlay Roman political traditions. My study of violence is fundamentally a study of political behavior—in fact the kind of political behavior that leads to the breakdown of politics itself. While I do not dispute the consensus view that Rome was faced with a “crisis without an alternative” (Meier, 1991) based on longstanding structural inadequacies in a competitive aristocratic republic, I posit that violent political behavior made the “crisis” all but insoluble.

The three fundamental junctures about which I write are steps in the direction of the “crisis.” Catiline’s conspiracy succeed in terrifying the ruling class. Cicero’s despondent *o tempora, o mores* (*Cat.* 1.2) was an expression of malaise for his fellow senators’ inaction.

Sallust, who would have been in his early twenties at the time of the conspiracy (Ramsay, xxxiii) was deeply affected by it, and his *Bellum Catilinae* depicts Rome in a state of *stasis* through its use of Thucydidean ideas and language. The civil war between Caesar and Pompey was civil war on a grander scale than Sulla's, costing thousands of Roman and non-Roman lives. At stake was nothing less than control of Rome. While Caesar's rule was cut short, the civil war proved the training ground for the civil wars of 43, 36, and 31. Finally, the assassination of Julius Caesar on the Ides of March set in motion the events that would lead to the principate. Caesar's murder also set a precedent for future attempts on the lives of his successors, helping to characterize the position of Caesar and *princeps*. Each juncture further normalized political violence. Each juncture made the *res publica* more obscure. The civil war of 49 and Caesar's assassination are commonly cited as points when the "republic" ended. Due to the difficulty of defining *res publica* (Flower, 2010, Chapter 1), the truth is more obscure. Whatever definition of *res publica* one touts, it is clear that the Romans thought largescale political violence as incompatible with maintaining a *res publica*. Much of the legitimacy of Augustus' elevation to power came from having brought *pax augusta* to Rome. Of the ancient authors, Appian, who wrote in the 2nd century CE, is perhaps the most responsible for tying violence to political change. Beginning his narrative of the "Civil Wars" with the murder of Tiberius Gracchus, "the first to perish in internal war" (1.2) [πρῶτος ὅδε ἐν στάσει ἀπώλετο], and ending in Octavian's defeat of Sextus Pompeius, Appian summarized the period as "so from these intricate internal wars the Roman political community came to be situated in harmony and the rule of one man" [ὅδε μὲν ἐκ στάσεων ποικίλων ἡ πολιτεία Ῥωμαίοις ἐς ὁμόνοιαν καὶ μοναρχίαν περιέστη] (1.6). Appian's narrative therefore introduced the concept of the Roman "long century" from the outbreak of

violence and discord in 133 with the tribunate and death of Tiberius Gracchus (Cic. *Rep.* 1.18) and ending in early January 27 when Octavian Caesar was voted the name Augustus.

The intervening 106 years between 133 and 27 further reveal the challenges of empire especially in the wars against the Cimbri and Jugurtha in the 100s when Marius' accumulation of extended commands challenged the power-sharing that characterized the "republics of the *nobiles*" (Flower, 25). As the problem of empire focused power and attention on a single individual—the general (*imperator*)—political violence continued to become a normal recourse over increasingly difficult challenges such as the civil right of the Italian *socii*. Foreign and domestic instability soon led to the outbreak of Rome's first civil war in 88 when Sulla marched on Rome to seize a lucrative military command. The next seven years left an enduring legacy of Rome particularly on the youth who had been prepared for future civil wars. Not all of Sulla's reforms were not enduring; his restrictions on the tribunate for instance were repealed within a decade.. The problems of empire continued to build upon the first century, particularly stressing traditional republican politics as the three-man cabal of Pompey "the Great," Crassus, and Caesar stage-managed Roman politics until the breakdown of the "triumvirate" and the beginning of civil war in 49. Problems at home and afield became inseparable, and from 49-27, the solution involved turning against one's fellow-citizens.

The Roman elite of the 1st century were acutely aware of the failures of their political system. Even the advocates for *libertas* and "tradition" like Cicero, Cato, and Brutus, had grown up in a long century of violence that had not truly known a functioning *res publica*. What was clear to their epoch is that no amount of conspiring, civil warring, or assassinating could ameliorate the malaise that engulfed Rome.

I. *Quousque tandem?* Catiline and Rome at the Brink

The conspiracy plot of Lucius Sergius Catilina is a touchstone of Roman history. Cicero's four speeches against Catiline have been exhaustively studied by rhetoricians and students of Latin grammar alike for two-thousand years. The plot inspired Ben Jonson and Hendrik Ibsen respectively to try their hands at giving dramatic sway to the failed conspiracy. Mary Beard's bestselling history of Rome *SPQR*, opens with an evocative account of "the terrorist conspiracy to destroy the city" (Beard, 21). The fascination with the plot is hardly a recent phenomenon. Sallust composed a sizeable monograph because of the *sceleris atque periculi novitas* (BC, 4.4) inherent in the conspiracy of Catiline. Yet Catiline's threat was hardly new. His plot was an exemplary *coniuratio*, a secretive and politically-charged gathering outside the sanctioned limits of political action in which the fringes of society—women, slaves, and non-citizens—were involved. *Coniuratio* threatened the Roman practice of political openness; its violence endangered *concordia*. "[C]onspirators' clandestine actions run counter to the most fundamental principle of *res publica* that all actions concerning Rome be conducted in public" (Pagán, 5). In the "pre-truth" world, rumor was a fundamentally destabilizing force, and rumors of conspiracy only begot fear and agitation. Like the Bacchanalian conspiracy in the early 2nd century, the senate saw the Catilinarian *coniuratio* as an affront to its authority. Conspiracies—real and imagined—retained their own "form and structure" (Beard, North, Price, 95) that amounted to a subversive para-state in the imagination of the political class. Yet unlike the Bacchanalian conspiracy which had long fallen out of living memory by 63, this *coniuratio* had a leader. Catiline actualized the Roman political class' existential fear of one man working outside of the system to achieve control of the state. By his contemporaries and many who lived after him, Catiline was classified as one of the quintessential would-be tyrants of the Roman past. As early

as his first speech against Catiline, Cicero compares Catiline to past would-be tyrants including the long-dead Spurius Maelius (1.4) and the fairly recent Saturninus (1.5). Catiline was a Roman *bête noire*, but he was hardly a new one.

For a threat almost as old as the *res publica*, much of the newness of Catiline's danger derived from circumstances and his place in the charged politics of the late republic. It is improbable that we will ever know the scale of Catiline's plot, but we can infer from the immediate responses to Cicero's actions that the characterization of Catiline as an existential threat to Rome struck a chord with many. The litany of ills—*flamma atque ferrum* (*Cat.* 3.1)—that Catiline's plot threatened were understood as reasons for alarm. Indeed, Catiline offered a threat to the republican system that could not have been imagined a century before. The brush with sedition and taste of civil war in 63 were symptoms of a deteriorating *res publica*—and Romans responded to the sense that something was rotten.

In Cicero's invectives against Catiline, the conspiracy stands for the break-or-make moment of all *boni*. Cicero appealed to the crisis of faith in the *res publica*, which only made the crisis worse. As Flower observes, Cicero's leadership in putting down the conspiracy “contributed to a sense of insecurity in Rome” (Flower, 145). Cicero exploited divisions in the polity, and in the Second Catilinarian classifies Catiline's confederates, offering insight on the respective danger of each group (2.14). Cicero reaps from the seeds of mistrust that he has sown.

Any discussion of Catiline is a discussion of Cicero. The hero of the hour stepped into unprecedented territory himself. Not only was his execution of Cethegus, Lentulus, and company an abnegation of any due process, but it marked how Cicero's and the senate's response to the conspiracy broke republican political norms. “When Cicero declared *salus rei publicae suprema lex*,” writes Flower, “. . . this was no more than a hollow political slogan that portended the end

of constitutional government” (Flower, 2010, 147). Likewise, the manner in which the senate and people honored Cicero was somewhat unprecedented. The conferral of the honorific *pater patriae*, Appian notes, may have been unprecedented: “some think that this honorable appellation . . . had its beginning with Cicero” (App. *BC* 2.7). Thereafter, Julius Caesar and the *principes* would be styled with the title.

“The *res publica* seems renewed [*recreate*] by me,” the consul modestly boasted after Catiline fled Rome (*Cat.* 2.7). Cicero was frequently credited (and credited himself) with saving the republic—a distinction that would carry much weight in the principate. Augustus inherited more than an honorary title and a line of rhetoric from his one-time enabler. The Catilinarian *coniuratio* represented a debauched nadir of the pre-Augustan order, what Cicero called a *rei publicae pestis* (1.31), that, as later accounts of the conspiracy would demonstrate, would flare into far worse.

Writing twenty years after the *coniuratio*, Sallust understood Catiline as a part of groundswell in Rome, an expression of the tension that had boiled up since the defeat of Carthage. In Sallust’s narrative, the defeat of Catiline does not resolve the problems that led to Catiline in the first place. Assuming the themes and language of Thucydides, Sallust presents a Rome in the grips of *stasis*.

1. *Res publica recreata*: From Cicero to Vergil

. . . *hinc procul addit*
Tartareas etiam sedes, alta ostia Ditis, et
scelerum poenas, et te, Catilina, minaci
pendentem scopulo Furarumque ora trementem (Aeneid, 8.666-669)

The Shield of Aeneas only for a moment returns the reader to the Underworld. Lucius Sergius Catilina, object of the poet’s only apostrophe in this noteworthy ekphrasis, is suffering

the punishment reserved for miasmatic guilt: dangling from a crag and forever trembling in the midst of the Furies. Catiline is the last of three tyrannical figures—following Tarquinius and Manlius—described on the shield of Aeneas, but he is the only figure who is described as suffering a divine justice through punishment for his wicked deeds. But while the poet describes Catiline’s punishments, he does not so much as elaborate on his *scelera*. It is contrasted by the descriptions of Tarquinius fighting to return to power or Manlius *Capitolia celsa tenebat* (*Aen.* 8.655). The poet offers only another contrast. As Catiline is suffering in history’s Tartarus, Cato—the poet does not tell us which one—is among the *pii* who are removed from the torments handing down laws [*secretosque pios his dantem iura Catonem* (8.670)]. While Cato the Elder enjoyed a reputation as a lawgiver, Vergil’s dropping the name recalls the younger Cato, the erstwhile adversary of Catiline, and the proponent of the “hard line” in the debate on the conspirators.

Vergil was only seven years old when Lucius Sergius Catilina absconded from Rome by night to join a ragtag army of impoverished and indebted veterans. What about Catiline’s failed conspiracy gave its instigator the staying power to make a cameo in a poem composed forty years after his demise? Vergil makes explicit Catiline’s break with the Roman past that his iniquity and *scelera* are only on par with the worst of Roman history. Therein lies an implicit contrast with the present. That Vergil does not detail Catiline’s crimes suggests that he does not need to. Catiline’s memory was not too distant. Nor was the contrast between Catiline’s threat to Rome and the leader who claimed he *leges et iura restituit*. Surely it was not lost on Vergil that Augustus was born in Cicero’s turbulent consulate.

The principate did not bring an end to *coniurationes*. Even the resilient Augustus was the target of the younger Lepidus’ plot to unseat him (*Vell.* 88). But *coniuratio* was no ordinary act

of violence. Its inherent subversions made it particularly odious to the political class, and likely contributed to exaggerated reports of conspiracies' extent and threat. *Coniuratio* was difficult to classify; neither outright war nor murderous rampage, it retained shadows of *bellum civile* and assassination that made it especially threatening. And unlike troops on the battlefield, a *coniuratio* could not be contained. As Pagán eloquently distinguishes conspiracy from civil war, “conspiracy is more like an earthquake, whose unseen forces suddenly and unexpectedly shift the ground beneath one’s feet” (Pagán, 6). Cicero’s consistent demonization of Catiline and his associates as depraved procurers of *libidines* (2.10) reinforces an image of a crisis that runs to the hearts of the conspirators. *Coniuratio*, in other words is embedded within the depths of the individual.

Cicero’s variegated use of the past in the first Catilinarian demonstrates that the complexities of the conspiracy could resonate with a variety of political crises. Citing the senatorial responses to Tiberius Gracchus (1.3), Gaius Gracchus (1.4), and Saturninus and Servilius (1.4), In order to justify his response to Catiline, Cicero relies on pointed moments of political violence and division in Rome. “A night did not intervene,” [*nox nulla intercessit*] he declared between the Senate’s grant of power to Lucius Opimius and the destruction of Gaius Gracchus’ supporters. Cicero actively parallels some of the most lethal political crises to have occurred in the city itself in the previous seventy years. He cites them as justification for the proposed punishment for Catiline and to illustrate the scale of the Catiline’s danger.

Much of the First Catilinarian is an attempt to goad the senate to action. Cicero’s invocation of the past also condemns the politics of the present. Cicero’s famous complaint *o tempora, o mores* (1.2) forms the exact transition from his rhetorical questioning of Catiline with which he opened the speech and his critique of inaction [*Senatus haec intellegit, consul videt, hic*

tamen vivit (1.2)]. Cicero's condemnation of the political class' inaction exploits a belief that the *res publica* is actually unsound. Much like a US President who declares that there is a "crisis of confidence," saying that the senate and politics are degenerated compared to those of yore, can actually make it so. Cicero's strategy of senate-shaming rests depends on cynicism about the current state of Rome.

2. *Aemulatio Thucydidis*

Writing in the first years of Tiberius' principate, Velleius Paterculus, in his roll-call *eminentium ingeniorum* (2.36.2) of the first century, briefly references the historians Corvinus and Asinius Pollio, but confers upon only one this honor and burden: *aemulumque Thucydidis*. Gaius Sallustius Crispus was neither the first nor the last historian whose literary achievement and authorial perspective would earn comparison to Thucydides. Indeed, of the Greek and Roman historians in the centuries succeeding Thucydides the historians whose works survive more intact than Sallust's (like Tacitus') seem to merit a more favorable comparison with the second father of history. Velleius' tribute to Sallust, however indicates the tenor of times as much as it reveals a critical Roman reception of Thucydides.

Velleius' comparison of Sallust to Thucydides was no doubt stylistic. The late first century BC saw the flourishing of "Atticism" in elite Roman circles; the terseness that characterized this tight prose earned alternately the respect or derision of its successors, and was controversial enough in its own day. Cicero concluded that "his contemporaries who were attracted to Thucydides as a stylist failed to appreciate that the Greek historian's abrupt and obscure manner of writing history was inappropriate as a model for forensic oratory" (Ramsay, xliv). Sallust's own terse and abrupt style captured the imagination and criticism of succeeding generations of Romans, and was in turn emulated by the likes of Tacitus. Yet the Thucydidean

elements of Sallust's writing transcended the mere stylistic. Association with Thucydides was perceived not merely from literary arrangement alone, but from piercing attitudes to historiography and human nature.

Sallust's generation grappled with the problem of civil war. In Greek, Polybius and Posidonius had heaped praise on the Roman political system that had enabled the Roman *res publica* to subdue much of the Mediterranean. But the achievements of the second century were swiftly overshadowed by the destruction of the political violence, sedition, and ultimately civil war that irrevocably altered Roman political life. The ultimate task of the Roman historian evolved to understanding what led the republic of *mos maiorum* and *consensus ordinum* to degenerate into civil war. Sallust himself was one of a string of politically-involved Romans in the first century who turned his efforts from political life to recounting the recent past. For Sallust, and for so many of the historians of his generation, there was not a guide as reliable as Thucydides.

Although there are Thucydidean elements in the *Historiae* and *Bellum Jugurthinum* as well, I will focus on only one the *Bellum Catilinae*. More so than his other works, the *BC* recounts events that come the closest to the terms of *stasis* in the Corcyrean episode. Ambition and deception are at the heart of the *BC*; armies do not fight in a *bellum civile* on the same scale as those fought by Sulla, Pompey, Caesar, and Octavian, but politics nevertheless devolve into degenerate into citizen killing fellow-citizen.¹⁰ While the *BC* is not perfectly parallel to the *stasis* of Corcyra, it retains glimmers of Thucydidean insights on civil strife's toll on human nature. To some extent, it will be an intertextual exercise involving close readings of parts of the *BC* that resonate or even emulate the *stasis* on Corcyra in Book 3. "The importance of this section for the

¹⁰ Cf David Armitage on differences between *bellum civile* and *stasis* (31-2)

student of Th[ucydides]’s own opinions cannot be exaggerated,” remarks Simon Hornblower of the Corcyrean *stasis*, “[I]t is the most substantial expression of direct personal opinion in all Th[ucydides].” (Hornblower, 1992, 478). “For the serious reader,” adds Jonathan Price, “close and patient scrutiny of detail [in this sections] is the only way to unlock Thucydides’ thought” (Price, 12). And Sallust was a serious reader.

Sallust’s topic is not civil war. Rather it is the unsuccessful conspiracy and uprising of Lucius Sergius Catilina. The monograph is called the *Bellum Catilinae*, but the work of war—which T.P. Wiseman has more accurately called a “peasants’ revolt” (Wiseman, 346)—is only detailed in the work’s last five chapters. Nevertheless, even in absence of the kind of a civil war narrative that would more closely parallel the *Bellum Catilinae* to the *stasis* on Corcyra, Sallust consistently draws on Thucydidean language and theme for events that largely occur when Rome is at peace. “If we recognize a pattern that is familiar from canonical authors, we are more likely to believe that it obtains in the present case as well,” reasons Christopher Pelling, “[P]atterning is also basic to historical explanation” (Pelling, 107). Thucydides’ account of *stasis* on Corcyra is the *locus classicus* for the breakdown of political community.

Sallust opens his oeuvre with the stark (and indirect) question, “how did the best and most beautiful republic slowly become changed to the worst and most detestable?” (*BC*, 5.9). Sallust’s subsequent demonstration of the deterioration of Roman political life is patterned as a Thucydidean analysis of *stasis*. Sallust’s opening question on this political change invites a question: does the *res publica* remain *pessuma ac flagitiosissima* (5.9) by the work’s end? Understanding Sallust through a Thucydidean lens may glean insight into the depth of Rome’s fundamental political crisis as Sallust understood it.

“[G]iven,” considers Pelling, “that one cannot play history over again experimentally, the only way a writer or reader of history can do that is to recall other past sequences that share enough of those crucial conditions to be comparable” (Pelling, 108). The differences between Sallust and Thucydides are fairly obvious: Thucydides narrates the conditions of internal war, a total breakdown of political order that would most evoke civil war in a Roman context. Sallust recounts the conspiracy and rebellion of a disaffected aristocrat and his disenfranchised supporters who—in their adversaries’ imagination at any rate—were perilously close to bringing Rome to the conditions of *stasis*. David Armitage disputes that *bellum civile* is *stasis* by another name. “[t]he Romans were sure they were experiencing something new,” he writes (32). Of course, Sallust is not writing about civil war himself, and *stasis* is a critical parallel to larger themes of a *res publica . . . pessuma ac flagitiosissima facta sit*. In a sense, Sallust recounts an aberration in Roman political life. Thucydides frames Corcyra as a model for all other political communities that will endure “as long as human nature is the same” (3.82.2).

Yet Sallust’s account includes the symptoms of *stasis*. The narrative portion of *BC* (15) begins in factional strife between the powerful and powerless. It is the same sort of factional strife which also opens the Corcyrean episode, between the Spartan-backed aristocrats and Peithias and his democratic supporters (3.70). Sallust writes for Catiline a speech that draws a contrast between the power *paucorum potentium* and the powerlessness of *ceteri omnes, strenui, boni, nobiles atque ignobiles* (20.7). It is a division, Catiline observes that finds recourse in conspiracy and violent resistance—in other words, the kind of overthrow engineered by the aristocrats on Corcyra (3.70.6). This initial factionalism in Sallust’s narrative gives way to the threats of violence that closely resemble those on Corcyra. Sallust lavishes attention on the young men whose minds were “still pliable and unstable” (14.5). In his narrative, a critical mass

of powerful young men catalyze fears about societal upending. Not only are the young men dismissive of the republic (37.8), but they—*filiī familiarum, quorum ex nobilitate maxuma pars erat*—plot to kill their fathers (43.2). Sallust also recounts the fear of fire, massacre of the senate, killing of the consuls (18.7; 28.1; 43.2), and even Catiline’s wooing of powerful women to support his cause (24.3-4). And in a fitting nod to Corcyra, Sallust highlights the danger of slave rebellion in southern Italy (30.2; 46.3) and the intervention of an external power, the Allobroges (40).

The intervention of foreign powers, factional division, recruitment of slaves, the threat of the incineration of the city, dissolution of the most basic units of social organization are mainstays in Thucydides’ account of *stasis* from 3.70-3.81. Of particular note, Thucydides highlights each faction’s recruitment of slaves “with promise of liberty to take their parts” (3.73). There are seldom clearer signs of social breakdown in the classical world than the empowering of slaves; the prospect of Catiline *servitia urbana sollicit[at]* must have been downright terrifying for the Roman political class less than ten years after another major slave revolt in southern Italy.

The violence on Corcyra went beyond anything achieved by Catiline. Thucydides includes actions *in extremis* that fall beyond the Catilinarian conspiracy’s actual success. “All forms of death were seen For the father slew his son; men were dragged out of the temples and then slain hard by” (3.81.5). The scale of violence—imagined or realized—of Catiline’s conspiracy may not have equaled the savagery of *stasis* as Thucydides recounts it, but it was close enough.

Stasis is not only violence. The horrors on Corcyra are inextricably tied to a change in social interaction. “The received value of names imposed for signification of things [τῆν

εἰωθυῖαν ἀξίωσιν τῶν ὀνομάτων] was changed ἐς τὰ ἔργα,” notes Thucydides (3.82.4). In as political a tract as the *Bellum Catilinae*, we can observe the ease with which Sallust’s characters employ similar political catchwords. Both Catiline and Cato appeal to *libertas*; *nos pro patria*, *pro libertate*, *pro vita certamus*, Catiline proclaims to his forces (58.11). Catiline appeals to *libertas* four times (20.6, 20.14, 58.8, 58.11). Cato also asks if *libertas* is *in dubio* (52.6).

Indeed, in his speech, Cato becomes a Thucydidean character as he wearily declares, *iam pridem equidem nos vera vocabula rerum amisimus* (52.11). In Sallust’s hands, Catiline becomes an agent of the subversion of social norms, his *crudelis animus* (31.4), responsible for the *sceleris atque periculi novita[s]* (4.4) and for gathering youth who “preferred uncertainty to certainty, war to peace” (17.6). Indeed, Sallust characterizes Catiline as a curator of *stasis*, finding men like Manlius, Cethegus, and Lentulus who embodied τόλμα . . . ἀλόγιστος (3.82.4). Sallust takes great interest in the demographics and loyalties of Catiline’s supporters: the warping of words and *mores* elucidates how so many disparate groups could unite under the banner of one leader.

However, Sallust’s narrative description of Catiline’s *facinus* (4.4) is in many ways the least Thucydidean element of the *Bellum Catilinae*. That we can read similarities between the conspiracy and the πολλὰ καὶ χαλεπὰ κατὰ στάσιν (3.82.2) on Corcyra invites us to draw deeper comparisons. If we can draw similarities between Corcyra and Rome—even if there is a degree difference between open warfare on Corcyra and only the rumor of it in Rome—we can begin to make less-superficial connections between the two phenomena. Sallust employs, to borrow a turn of phrase from Christopher Pelling, Thucydidean “narrative codes” (Pelling, 108). By using the same “narrative code” in description of the Corcyra and the conspiracy, “then it is evident” for the readers aware of the pattern used in the text, “that those story patterns have to come from somewhere: it is familiarity with past stories that gives an audience the templates that will fit the

new ones” (Pelling, 108). But beyond this, it is also an invitation to explore how Sallust differed from Thucydides in his description.

Sallust portrays in Rome in a “staseic” condition through much of the *BC*, occasionally borrowing Thucydidean language, but more often borrowing his predecessor’s imagery of what a political community in *stasis* looks and feels like. Sallust, in *aemulatio* with Thucydides’ enduring analysis of *stasis* in 3.82, also asks for the ultimate cause of the staseic conditions in Rome. In both Thucydides and Sallust, ambition and avarice “should be isolated as the ultimate reason for civil strife and moral corruption.” (Scanlon, 99-100). Nothing could be clearer in the *BC*, that Sallust is studying the same phenomenon as Thucydides.

“The cause of all this is desire to rule out of avarice and ambition, and the zeal of contention from those two proceeding.” (Thu. 3.82.8) Translated by Thomas Hobbes.

(πάντων δ’ αὐτῶν αἴτιον ἀρχὴ ἢ διὰ πλεονεξίαν καὶ φιλοτιμίαν: ἐκ δ’ αὐτῶν καὶ ἐς τὸ φιλονικεῖν καθισταμένων τὸ πρόθυμον.)

“Hence a craving first for money, then for power, increased; these were, as it were the root of all evils. For avarice subverted trustworthiness, integrity, and other virtuous practices The desire for advancement drove many mortals to become false . . .” (BC 10.3-5).

(*Igitur primo imperi, deinde pecuniae cupido crevit: ea quasi materies omnium malorum fuere. Namque avaritia fidem, probitatem ceterasque artis bonas subvertit Ambitio multos mortalis falsos fieri subegit.*)

While *avaritia*/πλεονεξία and *ambitio*/φιλοτιμία appear at very different points in Sallust’s and Thucydides’ narrative—in Sallust’s preface and in Thucydides’ ethical analysis of *stasis* respectively—they conceptually ground Thucydides’ and Sallust’s insights into human nature. Moreover, their appearance in society is the ultimate cause for the horrors in Coreyra and for all kinds of *mali* (10.3) at Rome. “[O]ne should not conclude,” writes Scanlon, “that Sallust merely adopted the useful phrasing but did not necessarily agree with the entire analysis, without first considering that Sallust may indeed have been influenced by Thucydides’ thoughts as well as his words on this topic” (Scanlon, 100). Indeed, Sallust drives home the presence of these

mots Thucydidiens; *avaritia* and *ambitio* appear some fifteen times throughout the *BC*. Of all the forces responsible for Catiline and the fragile state of the *res publica*, Sallust suggests that *ambitio* and *avaritia* are the prime suspects. Homage to Thucydides further invites the reader to interpret Sallust's "narrative code," to present a Roman update to the *stasis* on Corcyra.

But in contrast to Thucydides' account, Sallust asserts that *ambitio* and *avaritia* flourished in times of peace after the defeat of Carthage. Avarice and ambition are indeed the αἴτιον of *stasis*, yet for Sallust they insidiously flourish not just in the depths of internal war, but in peace. Sallust's *aemulatio* expands staseic conditions to include even peace time. Precious little of the *Bellum Catilinae* is in fact a war: the conspiracy develops in the languor of peace—Sallust scarcely dwells on how the contemporaneous Mithridatic wars affected domestic politics—and the conspiracy's threat of violence never materializes in the city of Rome itself, only on a battlefield hundreds of miles away. To be sure, Thucydides can envision πλεονεξία and φιλοτιμία coming to be in times in peace, yet it is only in the grips of war that they become a force unto themselves.

"For in peace and prosperity as well cities as private men are better minded because they be not plunged into necessity of doing anything against their will. But war, taking away the affluence of daily necessities, is a most violent master and conformeth most men's passions to the present occasion" (3.82.2) Translated by Thomas Hobbes

(ἐν μὲν γὰρ εἰρήνῃ καὶ ἀγαθοῖς πράγμασιν αἱ τε πόλεις καὶ οἱ ἰδιῶται ἀμείνους τὰς γνώμας ἔχουσι διὰ τὸ μὴ ἐς ἀκουσίους ἀνάγκας πίπτειν· ὁ δὲ πόλεμος ὑφελὼν τὴν εὐπορίαν τοῦ καθ' ἡμέραν βίαιος διδάσκαλος καὶ πρὸς τὰ παρόντα τὰς ὀργὰς τῶν πολλῶν ὁμοιοῖ.)

In Sallust, peace becomes the βίαιος διδάσκαλος. Ambition takes its toll as generals out-generated other generals in pursuit of renown and his troops' support. Avarice infects not only the most powerful of the *res publica* but the youth and military as well (11.6; 12.2). It is in the tense peace after Sulla's regime that Catiline's *crudelis animus* (31.4) flourishes. The *boni mores* (9.1) that the Romans practiced on the military campaigns of yore depended on the diversion of

foreign war. To be sure, *hunc post dominationem L. Sullae libido maxuma invaserat rei publicae capiundae* (5.6) in young Catiline. But in Sallust's emendation of the Thucydidean "narrative code," the likes of Catiline do not necessitate a Corcyra. This Thucydidean narrative code, continues Pelling, "is particularly important when we are dealing with civil war," (Pelling, 108), yet as Sallust demonstrates, its applicability reaches beyond civil war as well.

As Sallust tells it, on the heels of Cicero's discovery of the plot, the plebs *Ciceronem ad caelum tollere, veluti ex servitute erepta gaudium atque laetitiam agitabat* (48.2). Cicero becomes the hero, the first Roman to win the appellation *pater patriae*, Catiline is ultimately defeated, and everyone lives happily ever after. But the new-found peace and order was not to be. Sallust concludes the *Bellum Catilinae* on the field of civil war. The surviving victorious soldiers *volventes hostilia cadavera amicis alii, pars hospitem aut cognatum reperiebant* (61.8). Civil war is a grim resolution.

Sallust's invocation of the "narrative pattern" of *stasis* on Corcyra is a tribute to the staying power of a handful of chapters composed more than three centuries before Sallust lived. It is also testament to the flexibility of Thucydides' masterful description of political community falling apart that a historian writing much later, in a far different political culture, and in an entirely different language could repurpose the passage to shed invaluable insights into his own time, and stretch the conceptual framework for far different circumstances. Thucydides offers no neat resolution to the *stasis* in Corcyra. Indeed, it is not until Book 4 that Thucydides informs us that another round of foreign intervention was required for the cessation of hostilities. In *stasis*, victory is only momentary. The forces of ambition and avarice are beyond the scope of any ordinary human agency. Thucydides entertains the possibilities of a political community in disarray. They are indeed grim possibilities, but for the *Bellum Catilinae*, they extend the

promise of only more war. For an author considering as complicated an historical development as the rise of the Roman empire and the collapse of the Roman Republic—in other words, Sallust's opening question—no other guide could quite get the contours of history writer as Thucydides.

II. *Pestifera Bella Civilia* and Shutting the Gates of War

The last sentence in the *Bellum Catilinae* is not of a terrorist plot gone wrong. Sallust presents a portrait of civil war on a microscale. “Turning over the enemies corpses [*hostilia cadavera*], some soldiers were discovering the body of a friend, a portion discovers the body of a house-guest or someone they knew [*hospitem aut cognatum*]” (BC, 61.8). Indeed, the “War of Catiline” is a story of escalating conflict: the alleged plotting of disgruntled office-seekers in Rome flamed to citizen facing citizen hundreds of miles away. Sallust was likely writing the *Bellum Catilinae* in the midst of the civil war between the *liberatores* and triumvirate, “after the death of all the leading personalities including Cicero” (Ramsay, xxxiii) and only five years separated from a previous one. It was a social and political phenomenon whose imprimatur is left not only on Sallust’s historiography, but upon generations of Romans.

Civil war can be understood as a particularly Roman problem. It was, notes civil war’s new *doyen*, David Armitage, an “invention” (Armitage, 31). Internal conflict is common to all societies, but “having been the first to define what was ‘civil,’” the Romans, asserts Armitage, “inevitably understood the most wrenching conflicts in definitively political terms as clashes among citizens that rose to the level of war” (Armitage, 31). Civil war was a fusion of long-standing social conceptual fields that were otherwise mutually exclusive: war and civic life. “What made ‘civil’ war so different,” notes Armitage, “was that the enemies were all too familiar and could even be thought of as familial: it was one’s fellow citizens—or *cives*—who were on the other side” (Armitage, 33). Indeed, *bellum civile* contained a “paradoxical sense” (Armitage, 35, quoting Robert Brown), when the *cives* who were members of the same political and often physical community faced each other on the opposite sides of a battlefield.

Bellum civile's grip on the Roman political imagination was strong. For those who lived through it, like Cicero, it represented the nadir of political life—politics broken to the point where war determined public policy. The accounts of Appian and Cassius Dio bear the assessment out, as they testify to the mass deaths of Roman citizens. Appian speculated that anywhere between 7,200 and 26,000 Romans died at Pharsalus (2.82). “They saw Italians embattled against Italians,” he wrote of the battle (2.77). Accounts also stress the civil wars’ particularly corrosive effect on the political class.

“War is hell,” asserted William Tecumseh Sherman. It is with surprising ease that we are able to be desensitized to this fact when fighting a foreign enemy. With foreigners, aliens, some kind of “other,” who falls outside of our own political community, savagery on the battlefield become more justifiable, and in turn, less noticeable. When fighting those who were formerly in the same political community, the scale of violent savagery may not radically alter from a foreign war, but the recognition of the violence does. Civil war is staging ground for cognitive dissonance. “The very term *bellum civile*,” writes Matthew Roller, “. . . privileges this view,” (Roller, 29) namely that civil war is fought within a “community of moral obligation” (Roller, 28). Civil war is fundamentally a contradiction: one does not fight and kill fellow members of a “community of moral obligation.” The taboo of civil war also stems from the resulting contradictions in the community’s values. Because the community was “the ultimate source and reference point of moral value” (Roller, 22), a fracture in the community through civil war would result in “competing, often contradictory, value judgements on particular actions” (Roller, 29). What may have been an act of *virtus* while fighting foreign enemies could be construed as *impietas* while fighting fellow citizens (Roller, 28-29). Waging civil war alienates one from

those with whom had previously participated in a “community of moral obligation,” and can result in “violating the obligations and duties one owes fellow citizens and kin” (Roller, 30).

Moreover, as the Romans discovered all too often in the first century, there is something sickeningly traumatic about killing men (and sometimes women) who understand the same language, had fought together in foreign wars, and may share the same physical community as well. Lucan was not only referring to Pompey and Caesar’s marriage pact when he labelled his subject “worse than civil wars.” Countless civil wars have been waged without calling them such—revolutions, wars of independence, wars against distant powers—and doing so enables one to escape the horror of recognizing the perversity of civil conflict. “[W]e should not,” writes Armitage, “underestimate the effect of civil wars in forcing a recognition of commonality amid confrontation, of making use ourselves in the mirror of enmity” (Armitage, 12).

In understanding civil war, there are two aspects I want to bring out. The first is civil war’s relation to the political malaise of the 1st century BCE. The surviving writers of the late Republic—lest we forget—were themselves children of civil wars. For the likes of Cicero and Atticus who were raised on the Polybian myth of Roman political exceptionalism, civil war was a place where Rome and idealism about it went to die. Cicero’s role models (and eventual characters in his dialogues), Lucius Crassus and Marcus Antonius, were themselves victims of *iste furoris / impetus* [“that onslaught of madness”] (Luc. *Phars.* 2.109-110) that accompanied Marius’ return to Rome in 86. Both Cicero and Caesar were sent out of Rome for their own safety in the dogged days of conflict. Sallust himself was born in Marius’ last consulate in 86, making him “a member of the generation” that included future wagers of civil war Mark Antony and Marcus Brutus (Ramsay, xvii).

Civil wars brilliantly proved Suetonius' Julius Caesar correct. The *res publica* really was *nihil* (*Jul.* 77) if its politics had degenerated to the point that the only consequential decision were the ones that involved killing fellow citizens. Yet at the same time civil war didn't "kill" the republic for everyone. Sulla and his cadres won the propaganda war in the end: after the bloodshed of 82, the *res publica* had been "restored." Later in his life while writing *de Officiis*, Cicero blamed Caesar, not the civil war between Caesar and Pompey for the death of *libertas*. Sulla's public opinion victory demonstrated for future civil warriors that the victors could sustain the story that they had fought on the side of the "republic." This thought contained the understanding that civil war did not necessitate regime change. Much like today's defenders of a revisionary interpretation of the Second Amendment who assert that guns don't kill people, but rather people kill people, in the similar vein, victors in civil war claimed that civil wars did not kill the *res publica* or *libertas*, but aspiring tyrants or powerful *factiones* do. The truth of the matter, as Sallust and Varro saw it in the late republic—was far more complicated.

The second aspect of civil war that I approach is its hold on memory and justifications for new regimes, principally Augustus'. Syme's image of *Pax et Princeps* (Syme, 2) is actually quite a compelling one. For in the Roman imagination the two became inextricably entwined. Rome could not have a *princeps* without *pax*, nor *pax* without a *princeps*. The *pax* that was celebrated in Augustus' regime was primarily freedom from civil war. Much of Augustus' legitimacy and *auctoritas* derived from his consistent self-portrayal as peacemaker who brought an end to civil war. Augustus himself had a notably complex relationship with civil war, avoiding its connotations immediately after defeating Mark Antony, but embracing the Vergilian image of the man who calms the waters. In the *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*, he claims matter-of-factly that he transferred (*transtuli*) *potestas* to the Roman people *postquam bella civilia extinxeram* (*RG*, 34).

By the later empire, as Pliny and Tacitus testified, the principate had become associated with freedom from civil war. When civil war did break out, in the case of 69, the stakes were *summum imperium*, not *libertas*.

1. Can Civil Wars be Reconciled with a *Res Publica*?

The first mention of *bellum civile* in Latin literature dates only to 66 in *de imperio Gn. Pompei* (Armitage, 59). Cicero lists civil war as one of the varieties of combat at which Pompey excelled, thereby meriting the kind of command for which Cicero promoted him. In the absence of so much Latin prose and the relatively short memory of civil war dating back only some twenty-two years before, it cannot be of immense surprise that it is in the Ciceronian corpus that *bellum civile* first appears. But it is a mystery that an event as weighty as *bellum civile* appears only twice more in Cicero's writings before 49 (Armitage, 64, citing Brown "Terms *Bellum Sociale* and *Bellum Civile* in the Late Republic," 104). For a prominent politician who was a child of it, civil war's conspicuous absence in his works testifies to fear and taboo.

Political violence was long compatible with Roman political tradition. The founding myth of the *res publica* involved the forced exile of the king. Sexual violence, the rape of Lucretia, and the kidnapping of the Sabine women were also foundational Roman myths. Unlike *coniurationes* and political murders, there was not a long, quasi-mythical legacy of civil war in Rome. Civil strife lies at the heart of the fratricidal foundation myth as well as the stories of struggles between the orders. Civil war, however, was something new, challenging those deeper traditions of Roman life. For the Romans who had to wrestle with the weight of civil war in the first century, inexact parallels to Greek models of stasis and the extant historical examples of civil war were the only framework through which contextualizing civil war was possible.

The Catilinarian conspiracy, despite its alleged *sceleris atque periculi novitas* (Sall. *BC*, 4.4), finds a precedent in sedition of the Bacchic cult in the third century. In the hands of Livy, Catiline became an unwritten stock character upon whom Livy appears to have modelled would-be-tyrants like Marcus Manlius. However unprecedented the Ides of March were for the first century, Romans cultivated the story that Senators killed Romulus. To this end, the violence involved in 63 and at Caesar's murder, was understood to deeply resonate with republican tradition. Conspiracy and political murder were forms of violence as old as the republic itself. Civil war, on the other hand, had a far more limited frame of reference outside of the scope of myth or the deep past. In so far as the republic was a republic of norms and *memoria*, it was far more challenging to rationalize civil war as part and parcel with republican traditions.

More goes unsaid about the taboo of civil war than said. It is clear from Caesar, Cicero, and Sallust's accounts of *bellum civile* in Rome (not just limited to the first century), that civil war is associated with two particularly pernicious threats to political life. *Saevitia* and *dominatio* were essential facets of civil war that made the conduct of war and post-war settlement nefarious.

For a culture that was not deeply concerned with the violence displayed toward foreign enemies, the Roman made especial note of violence in civil war. The *saevitia* of the waging of civil war puts the paradox of *bellum civile* in harsh relief. For Caesar and Sallust, Sulla became the *exemplum par excellence* of craven violence applied to citizens. Caesar's emphasis on *venia* and *clementia* in the first book of his *Civil War* distinguishes his acts of wartime mercy directed at his opponents from the memory of Sulla's troops terrifying Praeneste and even the Campus Martius. The memory of Sulla's proscriptions and seemingly senseless deaths of Roman citizens was enduring even in the principate. Lucan's account of the devastation wreaked by Sulla's return to Rome puts it in cosmic terms: *numquam poena fuit* (2.201). Never had punishment vied

with natural disaster as a source of human deaths. Of course, Sulla was only the first Roman whose civil war conduct was condemned as *saevitia*. Pompey himself only earned his nickname *carnifex adulescentulus* after dutiful service to Sulla in southern Italy (Val. Max. 6.2). Suetonius particularly highlights as exemplary of Vitellius' *saevitia* in civil war his burning alive of several of Vespasian's relatives on the Capitoline (*Vit.* 15.3)

The *Oxford Latin Dictionary* offers two definitions for *dominatio*: "1. Position of authority of a paterfamilias; 2. The position of an absolute or arbitrary ruler, dominion, despotism." In the context of civil war, the "absolute or arbitrary" sense of *dominatio* are more pronounced, and the absolute sense is emphasized by the association with the life-and-death authority of the *paterfamilias*. "The *paterfamilias* was in law arbiter of life and death over his *liberi*" (Brunt, 284); associating *paterfamilias* with *dominatio* reveals a sizeable distinction in status between the ruler and the ruled. Starting with Sulla and then Cinna, civil war delegitimized the victors' political regimes as well. Regimes won through civil war are described *dominationes* up through the *praefatio* of the *Annales*. *Dominatio* is a byword for politics gone wrong. Rather than a specific *politeia*, it is more an articulation of style of rule in which the norms of civil war extend to peace time governance. In Lepidus' speech in the *Historiae*, he uses *dominatio* and *tyrannnis* interchangeably (1 fr. 49.7-8 Rolfe). *Tyrannnis* is a Greek import but *dominatio* is singularly Roman.

Despite a prodigious literary output at the time of Rome's first civil war in 88, only fragments of influential works like Lucilius' *Satires*, Sulla's *Memoirs*, and *Rhetorica ad Herennium* have been passed down to us, furnishing a very incomplete picture of the first major fractures in the Republic. Nevertheless, notes Flower, the generation who led the civil war of 49 and 48 relied on earlier works for "oratory and many other forms of literary production" (Flower,

2010, 166), that not only critically shaped their political education, but also how they understood the past.

Sallust's speech for Marcus Aemilius Lepidus in the *Historiae* is perhaps the exemplary attack on Sulla in Latin literature. The speech opens with a stark contrast:

Clementia et probitas vostra, Quirites, quibus per ceteras gentis maximi et clari estis, plurimum timoris mihi faciunt advorsum tyrannidem L. Sullae.

Sallust makes explicit the contrast between the distinctive "Roman" qualities of moderation and *clementia*, and the stance of Sulla's "tyranny." It is this shocking distinction that inspires Lepidus' considerable amount of fear. Opening with a word as charged as *clementia* was when Sallust was writing in the forties, involves memories of Sulla and Caesar's conduct in civil war. *Clementia*, the functional antonym to *saevitia* is a behavior most prominently exhibited in civil war.

Lepidus' speech is marked by omitting distinction between Sulla's wartime actions and post-war rule. According to Lepidus, Sulla brings a bellicose attitude to peace. *Sed tum crudelior quom plerosque secundae res in miserationem ex ira vortunt* (3). This peacetime belligerence crows the Roman public *a repetunda libertate terremini* (4). With the result that *(itaque) illa quies et otium cum libertate*—which used to be valued by leaders of the community—*nulla sunt* (9). At the end of the speech Lepidus subverts the Ciceronian catch phrase of *otium cum dignitate* (*pro Sest.* 98) again by calling Sulla's *dominatio* one of *otium cum servitio* (25). From Lepidus' perspective the civil war might as well be continuing: "in this time it is necessary to be a slave or *imperator*" (10). Lepidus does not even question taking up arms. Here is a politician who accepts that sedition in such circumstances is a legitimate recourse.

Lucan, who wrote 150 years after Rome's first civil war, includes a memorable speech by *aliquis magno quaerens exempla timori* (2.67); the first half concerns Marius' return to Rome

and the second half to *Sulla . . . ultor* (2.139). This speech is part history and part prophecy, demonstrating what can result from Rome bursting into open war. Besides thrilling the reader with graphic gore (*congesta accepit / Omnia Tyrrhena Sullana cadavera gurgis* (209-210), this recollection of the past reveals that the demon haunting Rome was never extinguished by the first civil war. Memory of civil wars was of yore acknowledges the *res publica*'s frailty and susceptibility to civil war yet again. It is also a vivid reminder that the civil war of the eighties were the training ground for the *campi Emathi*.

Caesar's *Commentarii de bello civile* consistently recall the civil wars of the 80s. Within the *Commentarii* there are no direct references to the mythical Roman past (let alone Polybius' theory of *anakyklosis*), but Sulla is never far from Caesar's mind. References to Sulla proliferate the work's beginning sections; the narrative's account of Caesar's behavior as a civil warrior, his *clementia* to civilians and enemy combatants, draw a further distinction with his notoriously cruel predecessor. Yet Caesar shrinks from so much as mentioning the phrase *bellum civile* in the opening chapters of Book 1, evincing the well-assessed Roman taboo against mentioning civil war. To be sure, no Roman leader wanted to be associated with civil war: in part because of its prodigious casualties and violence that visited upon the proscribed and enemies, Sulla's rotting legacy, and perhaps accusations about Rome being out of joint. The path from accusations of instigating civil war to running a *dominatio* was surprisingly direct; it would be used to describe many Romans to come.

Yet Caesar and his generation were nonetheless inured to the dangers of civil war in a way that following generations were not. Taboo though it was, and very aware of the dangers it posed, the likes of Caesar, Pompey, Cassius, and Cicero nevertheless accepted it as an available recourse when they could identify Rome and politics as beyond repair. "Caesar," writes Flower,

“had never seen a fully functional republican of the traditional Roman kind in action” (Flower, 2010, 162). The memory of the republic which accesses does not extend to a time before civil wars, and he capitalizes on a Roman readership’s lack of political faith to justify his war with Pompey. Caesar and Pompey’s generations went through the motions of avoiding its mention by name and retained a tense relationship to the memory of Sulla’s *dominatio*, but such condemnations amounted to mere lip-service. Pompey was a civil warrior through and through, and the lessons learned from the frontlines of Picenum remained with him still thirty-five years later at Pharsalus. For Cicero and Caesar (particularly during their most active parts of political life), *bellum civile* remained a taboo. Once civil war erupted in 49 there was no outcry. The righteous indignation that Cicero reserved for the plot that threatened Rome all but dissipated when push came to shove and the Republic descended into war. We can feel the effects the desensitization that Sulla dealt their generation.

It seems clear that Julius Caesar is very careful to avoid accusation that he is a danger to Rome on the scale of a Sulla or Catiline. Hence in the narrative, he never asserts that he is waging civil war, but is in fact making a valuation his *dignitas* as “more worthy [*potior*] than life” (*BC*. 1.9.2). Caesar paints a picture of Rome held hostage by his craven *inimici*—characterized by Cato’s *beteres inimicitiae Caesaris*, the consul Scipio’s “dread of law-suits [*iudiciorum metus*]” (*BC*. 1.4.3), and Lentulu’s lust for *summa imperii* (*BC* 1.4.2). Caesar, perhaps fighting his opponents propaganda war of “defending the republic” against a *hostis*, presents his opponents as charlatans and the real dangers to the *res publica*. In the first eleven chapters of the *Commentarii*, he recounts the “attacks” on the tribunes of the plebs. They are not given time “to consider their own danger [*sui periculi deprecandi*]” (*BC* 1.5.1). Their *extremi iuris intercessione retinendi* is violated “which Sulla had preserved for them” (*BC* 1.5.1). The

tribunes were subjected to unprecedented danger (*BC* 1.5.2). It is a credit to Caesar's political savvy that he can appropriate Cicero's fifteen year-old rhetoric about protecting the republic, and depict himself as the only major player acting *causa* and *salute rei publicae* (*BC* 1.9).

Writing the *Commentarii*, Caesar was faced with the undeniable truth that he was writing about war between Romans. To that end, he actively depicts himself as the war's non-aggressor. He grounds this in the initial parleys with Pompey before the outbreak of the war that ground Caesar's argument that he is in the right not just as the conflict's non-aggressor but as the prominent advocate for peace with *dignitas* since "*dignitas* was always foremost for him" (1.9.2). Instead, as Caesar recounts in his first speech (delivered of course in *oratio obliqua*), his *inimici* thwarted all attempts at peace, preferring war to negotiation. Caesar recounts the back-and-forth between his and Pompey's representatives, making overtures for peace *rei publicae causa* (*BC* 1.9.3). After Pompey issues his terms, which Caesar calls *iniqua* (*BC*, 1.11.1), he asserts that Pompey's unwillingness to meet and adherence to objectionable terms *magnam pacis desperationem adferebat* (*BC*, 1.11.3). It is immediately after laying the blame on Pompey for not talking, Caesar moves into the war narrative proper (1.11.4).

Part of retaining the propagandistic high ground in civil war also required Caesar to demonstrate his better behavior in war against citizens. The enduring legacy of Sulla included his behavior during the civil war as well. Sulla is the paragon of *saevitia* in public life. "Altars and other places sacred to the gods," asserts a fragment of Sallust's depiction of the civil war of the 80s, "were darkened with the supplicants' blood" (*Hist.* 1 fr. 38 Rolfe). Caesar has his opponents and the active memory of Sulla looming over him. Describing his campaigns' behavior, he cites the free cooperation of civilians in Brundisium (*BC* 1.28.1), signaling Caesar's troops from roof tops. He emphasizes the forgiveness of enemies who had actively pursued hostilities. He gives

one opponent, Lentulus Spinther the response that Caesar's pardon would offer *solacium* for other combatants (*BC* 1.22.6). The *Commentarii* go to great lengths in building the cult of Caesar's *clementia* to his enemies. At the conclusion of Book 1, Caesar recounts his remonstrance of the opposing generals Afranius and Petreius. He was well positioned to fight, but held back (*BC* 1.85.2) in hope of peace. Caesar's depiction of *clementia* in action justifies his cause. Caesar's account of the opening shots of civil war elide much including the crossing of the Rubicon.

2. Augustus Restoring Rome from Civil War

So much about the study of Roman political life begins with Theodor Mommsen. The attribution of the slogan *res publica restituta* to the age of Augustus is no different. With this phrase, Mommsen characterized the propaganda of the settlement of 27 to the point of caricature although it was scantily attested in the first century (Rich, 107). Inevitably tells us more about Mommsen than Augustus. Mommsen based much of his evidence for the valence of *res publica restituta* on his reconstruction of lacunae in the *fasti* of Praeneste that commemorated the Corona Quercea voted to Augustus (Rich, 107). Mommsen's interpolation of *res publica restituta* is simply "conjectural" without any basis in the surviving language from the recorded dedication (Rich, 108). Indeed, as Rich notes, only in Septimius Severus' arch is *res publica restituta* "first attested in official discourse" (110). So much for Mommsen.

Nevertheless, even though *res publica restituta* is not an Augustan slogan, the concept of *restitutio* is. Its primary sense is physical, the refurbishment and often the reconstruction of monuments. Chapter 20 of the *Res Gestae Divi Augusti* records for posterity *duo et octoginta temple deum in urbe consul sextum ex auctoritate senatus refeci* (20.4). This is one of several claims of having *refecisse* Roman landmarks including the Capitoline and and theatre of Pompey

(20.1) and aqueduct channels (20.2). *Reficere* falls in the same semantic range as *restitution*. Livy refers to Augustus as *templum omnium conditorem ac restitutorem* (4.20.7), helping to draw the link between “rebuilding” (*reficere*) and “restoring” (*restituere*). Without using *restituere* Augustus characterizes himself as a *restitutor* of the physical landscape as much as of the



LEGES ET IURA P R RESTITVIT (Courtesy: vroma.org)

political one (to the extent the two can be separated). Augustus depicts himself as a fundamental force in remaking and renewing Rome: *multa exempla maiorum exolescentia [] ex nostro saeculo reduxi et ipse multarum rerum exempla imitanda posteris tradidi* (RGDA 8.5). Augustus’ use of *reduxi* emphasizes his role as a renewer of the old. His emphasis on *exempla* bespeaks an interest in Roman life that transcends a physical reconstruction. A single aureus from 28 proclaiming *LEGES ET IURA P[opulo] R[omano] RESTITVIT* (Cooley 258-259) emphasizes that Augustus “restored constitutional government” (Cooley, 258) after the tumult of the Triumviral years.

For all the *re*-prefixed words in the *Res Gestae* and contemporary Roman assessments of his principate, it is less clear from what former state of things was Augustus “restoring,” “re-introducing,” or “rebuilding.” The language of “restoration” is a political convenience, but in part

also derives from the contemporary Roman anxiety about Rome. The *princeps* tapped into this anxiety on many fronts, but the memory of twenty years of almost constant civil war, with several previous decades of tense politics made *reficere*, *reducere*, and *restituere* particularly poignant. The end of civil wars formed the bulwark of the arguments for the legitimacy of Augustus' rule, and made the language of *restitution* all the more salient.

Ronald Syme is more responsible than any other English-speaking scholar in the twentieth century for associating the principate with *Pax et Princeps*. Titling the last chapter of *The Roman Revolution* after this most inauthentic of slogans, Syme—not inaccurately—presented *pax et princeps* as the quintessence of the *novus status*. Both concepts are remarkably well-attested by the likes of the *Aeneid*, the *Forum Augusti*, and the *Ara Pacis*, as well as by later Tacitus' depiction of the Augustan transformation. Both concepts are critically related to Augustus' legitimizing claim to have “snuffed out civil wars” (*RGDA*, 34.1). *Pax* and *princeps* signify the amelioration of the crisis in the trust in the *res publica*.

The word *princeps* does not appear in the first extended simile of the *Aeneid*. Neither, for that matter, does *bellum civile*. But Vergil's comparison of Neptune calming the waters to a *vir* who *regit dictis animos et pectora mulcet* (1.153) emphasizes the singularity of the individual who can control the *ignobile volgus* (1.149) through words and not arms. The *magnus populus* (1.145) that this man manages to control is in no peaceable state: *coorta est / seditio* (1.148-9). Vergil's choice of *seditio* has a generalizing force. The Oxford Latin Dictionary gives an open-ended definition of “violent political discord (either the strife of rival parties or the action of a group against established authority), faction.” *Seditio* is considerably vaguer than *bellum civile*, but the ambiguity can be all the more menacing in this passage. The enjambment of *coorta est / seditio* has an unsettling effect doing to the hexameter what *seditio* does to the *populus*. Much

ink has been spilled on the “programmatically nature” (Feeney, 189) of the simile as regards to the rest of the Aeneid. It is also a vital credo of the post-civil war Rome. Vergil’s characterization of this *vir* is one of soft power in distinct contrast to the arbitrary and cruel rule associated with *dominatio*.

Augustus understood that a crisis of political faith in Rome was exacerbated by twenty years of civil war that irrevocably altered the political class. Augustus actively characterized civil wars as antithetical to Rome and its *res publica*.

Annos undeviginti natus exercitum privato consilio et privata impensa comparavi, per quem rem publicam a dominatione factionis oppressam in libertatem vindicavi (RGDA, 1.1).

Augustus’ overview of his accomplishments begins with his entry to civil war. Not even deigning to call this recourse to arms *bellum civile*, Augustus simultaneously castigates civil war itself and his opponents in it. Calling what was in fact a civil war between the tyrannicides and the avengers of Caesar an act of “vindicating *libertas*” takes the moral high ground. Condemning his opponents with the thoroughly unrepublican moniker of *factionis dominatio*, he undermines their pretext to “liberate” Rome as well as present them as the real dangers to *libertas*. To make the point even clearer, in the second chapter of the *Res Gestae*, Augustus holds *qui parentem meum interfecerunt* as responsible for *bellum inferentis rei publicae* [bringing war upon the *res publica*].

An additional part of Augustus’ legitimizing claim to power and *auctoritas* rests on the fact that it was only *postquam bella civilia exstinxeram* (34.1), that he could “hand over” *rem publicam ex mea potestate*—which he aggregated in the first place by fighting in civil war—in *senatus populi que Romani arbitrium* (34.1). Civil war, Augustus implies, deprived Rome of a functioning *res publica*. At a more technical level, his bold claim might refer to the Triumvirate,

which operated far outside of republican norms. But in its broadest sense, the claim *rem publicam . . . transtuli* is an answer to the fear in Rome that something was fundamentally rotten in the *res publica*. “Augustus’ ending in 30 BC of a sequence of civil wars that lasted more or less continuously for several decades ever since the conflict between Sulla and Marius,” observes Cooley, “was one of the most important factors in winning him public support.” (Cooley, 256). This attitude about civil war’s inherent damage to the *res publica* stands in contrast to the previous generation’s more ambivalent attitude. Caesar’s self-stylization as a civil warrior fighting on behalf of the tribunes and demonstrating *clementia* normalizes civil war within recent history. Unlike Augustus’ generation, Caesar’s does not evince that civil war is a political state that can be at all reconciled with a *res publica*. Caesar employs the rhetoric of a dysfunctional *res publica* as a *casus belli* for waging civil war that his generation grudgingly conceded was ruinous. Augustus on the other hand, depicts civil war as irreconcilable with *res publica*, resting his claim to legitimacy on snuffing out civil war. Treating civil war as the source of this sense of decay in Rome and antithetical to a *res publica*, he can proceed with repairing Rome.

Pax underscored the era. While symbolized by the closing of the doors of the temple of Janus and the Ara Pacis, *pax* took on a broad meaning to include the cessation of civil conflict. Augustus derived his legitimacy from ending civil wars. The layout in the Forum Augusti illustrates the Augustan response to a Roman past of civil war in light of a need for peace. The statues of Roman *summi viri* included the legendary and also the recent deceased, including civil warriors (provided their memory did not threaten Augustus’ regime) who had plunged Rome into the furor from which Augustus would claim he would restore it. The gallery of the *summi viri*, writes Gowing, displays the continuities among figures with whom Augustus “most wished to be associated, not those from whom he wished to distance himself” (Gowing, 145). The strategic

inclusion of both Marius and Sulla (Geiger, 156) is suggestive of an “end of history” narrative that Rome (and Augustus by extension) has transcended the conflicts of the past and has moved into *pax*. This is of piece and parcel with poetic descriptions of post-civil war Rome as entering a golden age.

Jupiter’s prophecy to Venus neatly captures the cessation of civil wars’ to Rome’s destiny. Tracing a pattern of glorious ascendancy from the Trojan refugees, Jupiter tells Venus, the *rerum dominos, gentemque togatam* (1.282) will rule the world, yet then ultimately triumph over its own demons.

*Aspera tum positis mitescent saecula bellis;
cana Fides, et Vesta, Remo cum fratre Quirinus,
iura dabunt; dirae ferro et compagibus artis
claudentur Belli portae; Furor impius intus,
saeva sedens super arma, et centum vinctus aenis
post tergum nodis, fremet horridus ore cruento.* (1.291-296)

The “dropping of wars” is itself the Augustan achievement of *pax*. Although Vergil does not explicitly claim the cessation of civil war, the image of Romulus and Remus ruling together goes to the very root of the *discordia* that haunted Rome. The chaining up of Furor and the closing of the gates of war are key Augustan motifs and claims to legitimacy. Furor personifies the ultimate cause of both civil war. *Furor Impius* is in many respects antithetical to the notion of *bellum pium et iustum*: that it sits upon *saeva . . . arma* suggests that it is unsanctioned violence. In fact, Vergil’s imagery of Furor in chains paralleled a painting in the Forum Augusti, according to Servius, that depicted Bellum and Furor sitting on a pile of arms (Austin, 113). In the *Res Gestae*, Augustus claims the distinction of seeing the doors of the temple of Janus closed three times under his leadership (*RGDA*, 13). Rome continued waging foreign wars in Augustus’ principate, but it was after defeat of Antony and Cleopatra, that the gates were first shut in 29 (Cooley, 159). The war against Antony and Cleopatra “was considered both a foreign and civil

war in the official ideology of the regime” (Lange, 122); the obscurity of the rationale behind closing the gates in 29 may represent the cessation of civil and foreign wars after Octavian’s victory over the unhappy couple. Vergil’s description of the chaining up of Furor and closing of the gates of War extends the metaphor of *claudentur . . . portae* to the end of civil war as well.

Civil wars became associated with the previous regimes that undermined the *res publica* that Tacitus later characterized as *dominationes* (*Ann.* 1.1). From the poetic perspective, Vergil comes closest to the downright demonization of civil war and what was wrong with Rome in the form of *Furor impius* (1.296). The celebration of the Augustan peace and cessation of civil war later in the principate becomes one of the justifications for the principate’s existence. For Augustus and Tiberius, the cessation of civil war—a foundational threat to Rome—could support claims that the principate was republican in spirit. For the political elite of the principate who lived through the civil war of 69 CE, the principate could at least claim that it had removed dispositions from Rome that would otherwise lead to civil war. As Gowing notes in his analysis of the *Dialogus*, the republican idolization of *libertas* included the possibility of civil war—which Tacitus’ interlocutors are happy to confine to the past (Gowing, 115).

III. Political Murder and the Aftermath of the Ides of March

1. *Rei publicae profuit*: Political Murder and Political Malaise

*solem quis dicere falsum
 audeat? ille etiam caecos instare tumultus
 saepe monet fraudemque et operta tumescere bella;
 ille etiam extincto miseratus Caesare Romam,
 cum caput obscura nitidum ferrugine textit
 impiaque aeternam timuerunt saecula noctem.
 tempore quamquam illo tellus quoque et aequora ponti,
 obscurnaeque canes importunaeque uolucres
 signa dabant.* (*Georgics*, 1.463-471).

The “snuffing out of Caesar” on the Ides of March in the consulate of Caesar and Mark Antony, is just the kind of event to “speak ill of the sun.” The ramifications of Caesar’s murder, Vergil writes, are on the cosmic scale, throwing day, night, sky, earth, sea, dogs, and flying things out of whack. As Vergil continues this narrative of ever-expanding cosmic destruction at the end of the first *Georgic*, he relates a chain of events that begins with Caesar’s murder and ends with bloody civil war: “Philippi saw Roman battle lines—again” (1.490). Following Caesar’s death, the heavens literally conspired against Rome: the instability and frailty in the body politic is compounded by a disturbed cosmos. Caesar’s death was one of the most contentious events of antiquity, and even in 2018 it remains a touchstone of political difficulties. “The tragedies of history,” wrote Syme, “do not arise from the conflict of conventional right and wrong. They are more august and more complex.” (Syme, 59) The death of Caesar was a “tragedy of history” long before Shakespeare wrote his version of it. Tacitus testifies to the murder’s enduring divisiveness (*Ann.* 1.8.6). Yet even at the Ides—for the killers and the avengers alike—one thing was clear: Julius Caesar’s death was ultimately Rome’s tragedy.

Of the three phenomena I study, assassination affected the fewest people, yet its ramifications were felt throughout the Roman political class—indeed in all political classes to come—in the principate and beyond. Assassinations are power-centric actions, directed at the

victim who is the representative of the supreme power in the polity. Assassination confirms that politics are centered on one person—the victim. Assassination—the murder of a head of state by other political elements—is not supposed to occur in republics. Republican systems from Rome to the United States enshrined peaceful recourses including elections and impeachment proceedings to remove individuals from *summum imperium*. Assassination is a break in political process and recognizes that the *res publica* or *libertas* is dead or dysfunctional.

The assassination of Julius Caesar on March 15, 44 marked the introduction of assassination to the highest levels of Roman life. Assassination, more so than *coniuratio* or *bellum civile* was understood by the Romans—at the time of Caesar’s assassination and in hindsight—as a fundamentally different political recourse for a regime that is antithetical to the republic. On the Ides of March, Caesar’s assassination was portrayed as the fundamentally republican act. By the time Suetonius wrote Caesar’s and his successors’ biographies, assassination—regardless of pretext—cemented the appearance that Rome was an autocracy.

By referring to “assassination,” I am employing a term—unlike *coniuratio* or *bellum civile*—that was coined long after the Romans. Most Latin accounts of Caesar’s assassination will often supply *caedes* (Vell. 2.59.5; Suet. *Jul.* 81) or gloss over it with *facinus* (Vell. 2.58.1). The word “assassination” in fact derives from the 12th century Muslim group (*OED* 3rd Edition) who had more in common with a spy network than with the sixty senators who killed Caesar. However, to speak of Julius Caesar’s murder as an assassination (and not merely as a byword for the technical “non-random political murder”) is also to locate his death in the bloody history of future assassinations; in this respect, we can understand Julius Caesar’s death as looking backward to the Roman past and forward to the future. Caesar’s murder, while made possible by

the normalization of murder as a political tool against Tiberius Gracchus some 89 years earlier, was also a watershed for Rome.

“No sword was brought into the assembly and there was no internecine murder until Tiberius Gracchus, a tribune while passing legislations, was the first destroyed in *stasis*.” (App. *BC*, 1.1.2). Appian, writing three-hundred years after Gracchus’ death, was not the first to understand his death as a breaking point for Rome. Even Cicero, who said of Scipio Nasica that even Scipio Aemilianus was no more of benefit to the *res publica* than the orchestrator of Gracchus’ death (*Off.* 1.22) has an interlocutor declare elsewhere that both Gracchus’ “death and earlier programme of his tribunate divided one people into two parts.” (*Rep.* 1.18). For the Romans of the republic and principate, Tiberius Gracchus’ death became a point of no return.

Political murder became a recognized political recourse in 132. On the one hand Cicero depicts assassination as a tactic in keeping with rhetoric of removing would-be tyrants (*Cat.* 1.3). On the other hand, supporters of Caesar condemned his death as *parricidium*, the breaking of one of the most essential political bonds (*Sue. Jul.* 88) Despite the valence each particular murder carried for the killers and the killed, it was seen as essential in unravelling Rome. Laelius’ comments in *de Re Publica* address this problem: *divisit populum unum in duas partis* (1.18). Notwithstanding the charged history of political murder in the late Republic, there are some critical distinctions between Tiberius Gracchus’ murder and Julius Caesar’s that point to Caesar’s as a new *non plus ultra*.

A key distinction rests in the status of the killed. Tiberius Gracchus was one tribune out of ten. Julius Caesar was the victor of civil wars. Although Tiberius was an influential tribune, he had nine colleagues, and wielded authority that would soon be exceeded by his own brother and later by the likes of Glaucia and Saturninus—all of whom were successfully re-elected and

ultimately killed. By the Ides, Julius Caesar was *dictator perpetuus* and functioned in our terms as the head of state. The murder of the Gracchi twelve years apart ripped asunder an ancient republican norm that conferred sacrosanctity to the people's magistrates.

Tiberius and his brother were condemned openly by members of the senate. In fact, Gaius was killed after Lucius Opimius obtained the so-called *senatus consultum ultimum* against him. All of the victims of political murder of the 2nd century had only been killed after open deliberation that at least retained the "patina" of *mos maiorum*. Caesar was the victim of a behind-the-scenes *coniuratio*.

Cicero notes time and time again that Scipio Nasica was a *privatus* "when he dispatched Tiberius Gracchus" (*Off.* 1.22; cf *Cat.* 1.3). While Nasica and Opimius propelled the deaths of the Gracchi, they did not literally have blood on their hands. Caesar's murderers were magistrates. Brutus was a praetor. Decimus Brutus was a consul elect [cite]. Unlike Nasica who delegated the dirty work; at the Ides magistrates were soused with blood.

Caesar's murderers claimed Caesar was a tyrant. The famous coins they struck featured the *pileus* (Image 1) which would become a recurring motif after the violent death of *principes*, such as after the death of Nero, when, as Suetonius writes, some Romans took to the streets donning the *pileus* (*Suet. Ner.* 57.1). The men behind the death of Gracchus and Clodius could point to tyrannical behavior, but Caesar's assassins pointed to his political status and *facta dictaque* (*Sue. Jul.* 76.1) as evidence that the charge of *tyrannus* fit Caesar.



Image 1: Denarius commemorating Ides of March

Cicero, one of the assassins' most enduring supporters fashioned an enduring rhetoric against tyrants.

hoc omne genus pestiferum atque impium ex hominum communitate exterminandum est (Off. 3.6).

His diatribe against tyrants hardly stands in a vacuum. The Ides of March, observes Greg Woolf, “haunts” all of his arguments for tyrannicide in his last philosophical work (Woolf, 71). In the light of the influence of the Ides of March, Cicero’s passages on tyrannicide must seem like a retrospective justification of the assassination. In contrast to his other rationalizations of the political murders of Tiberius Gracchus, Cicero’s arguments for tyrant-killing notably veer away from Roman political history and tradition. For Cicero, the traditions of the *res publica* alone lack cannot justify the Ides.

Throughout *de Officiis*, Cicero seeks to justify political murder. Drawing from *exempla* and republican traditions against autocracy, as well as Stoic and Peripatetic doctrines against tyrants, Cicero brings republican traditions into scrutiny. Historical *exempla* can only justify murders—particularly the insidious *coniuratio* against Caesar—only so much. Cicero’s reliance on largely non-republican, philosophical justifications for tyrannicide demonstrates a recognition that some political murders fall outside of Roman tradition.

Cicero does not refrain from mentioning Caesar early on in *de Officiis* (1.8), but his most fleshed-out argument for tyrannicide occurs early in Book 3. Declaring *nulla est enim societas nobis cum tyrannis* (3.6), Cicero sidesteps Roman arguments for political murder that are grounded in precedent, opting for tyrants’ incompatibility with *humana societas* (3.6). If Cicero argues from a Stoic-inspired perspective, he need not go great lengths to justify that most un-Roman of institutions employed against Caesar, the *coniuratio*. That Cicero does not justify tyrannicide (or simply opposition to tyrants) with traditional Roman rhetoric of *libertas*,

consensus, and *Concordia* belies some recognition that Roman tradition is not adequate to justify the task at hand.

Cicero's first mention of Caesar in *de Officiis* is in reference to *gloriae cupiditas*.

Caesar's *temeritas* proved Cicero's observation that "whenever a situation is of such a nature that not more than one can hold pre-eminence in it, competition for it usually becomes so keen that it is an extremely difficult matter to maintain a 'fellowship inviolate'" (1.8 trans. Miller). A Caesar, distinguished by *gloriae cupiditas*, could not have arisen, in a Rome that had not fallen prey to political instability. Cicero must therefore distance himself from those conditions which led to *tanta contentio* in the first place. If the political conditions that created Caesar had deteriorated to such an extent, why would Cicero appeal to the *res publica*?

To be sure, in *de Officiis* and elsewhere, Cicero justifies violence with appeals to *mos maiorum*. The assassins also employed this strategy, making much of Brutus' name. In a twist of the parricide rhetoric, Cicero accuses Caesar of committing *foedissimum et taeterrimum parricidium patriae* (3.21) through his rise of power. These arguments, however are dead-ends for sympathizers of Caesar's assassination. While appealing to the memory of the ancient Brutus hearkened to the beginnings of *libertas*, the mythical Brutus did not murder, but exile Tarquinius from Rome.

His opposition to tyrants is based on how much damage they wreak on their subjects. In that regard, they are a *genus pestiferum* that "ought to be wiped out" (3.6). In *de Officiis* at least, he does not address the ripple-effects that the violence of assassinations would promote (as what occurred after the Ides). To be sure, Cicero's political actions immediately after the Ides, such as endorsing amnesty for the murderers while recalling the Athenian general amnesty after the overthrow of the Thirty Tyrants (Rawson, 470) indicates that in *modus politicus*, Cicero was

concerned with the assassination's implications as part of a rising tide of violence. In fact, while Cicero is in his *modus philosophicus*, he “made the mistake of thinking that Caesar's murder was a piece of limited violence which would not have far-reaching consequences for the constitutional position” (Lintott, 65). Cicero's defense of tyrannicide certainly helped by the fact that he does not place tyrannicides in the same camp as *coniurati* as Velleius and Suetonius would later do. The fact that *coniuratio* is often the means of tyrannicide are of no interest to Cicero's philosophy.

Much of Cicero's political rhetoric and philosophy, including his First Catilinarian (1.3) and *de Re Publica* (*Rep.* 2.46) depended on the *exempla* of *privati* entering public life. Not only was this an appeal to *mos maiorum*, but it “was in accordance with Stoic and Peripatetic ideals that non-magistrates could, and should, intervene in public affairs for the benefit of the state” (Cooley, 107). Dependence on heroic *privati* suggests that Cicero believes that there is deeply wrong in the *res publica* that would necessitate private violence; the political community must have the inability to correct itself. This reasoning resonates with the *Res Gestae*, wherein Augustus' reference to *private consilio* (1.1) identifies action that occurs outside of the political system. Augustus' use of *privato consilio* to describe his youthful military ventures, tacitly acknowledges, writes Cooley, “that Octavian had no authority to do so” (Cooley, 106). The extent to which Cicero paved the way for Octavian's self-justification is unclear, but Cicero's defense of *privati* is a slippery slope indeed.

Cicero, a friend to the assassins, and Augustus, their bitter enemy, both come to terms with the incompatibility of the assassination with republican tradition. The *Res Gestae* opens with Augustus “vindicating into *libertas*” the *rem publicam a dominatione factionis oppressam* (*RGDA* 1.1). As Allison Cooley notes, the Latin is unclear as to whom the “despotism of a

faction” refers, but the Greek clearly refers to the conspirators (Cooley, 108). Not only is Augustus’ characterization of the assassins as such emblematic of the divisiveness of the Ides of which Tacitus later took stock (*Ann.* 1.8.6), but it also reveals how the *coniuratio* could be swiftly delegitimized as a cabal of craven warlords whose actions are antithetical to the traditions of the *res publica*.

Augustus faced plots against his life one concocted by the son of his former fellow-triumvir (Vell. 2.88). Augustus’ efforts to avoid the title of *dictator* has long been understood as an attempt to avoid Julius’ fate. That Augustus cultivated an avowedly non-monarchical persona speaks to the sticking-power of the tyrannicide rhetoric among the political class. Assassination was hardly a desirable fate, but Augustus’ and Tiberius’ cultivation of “republican” political personalities indicates that the rhetoric of assassination was just as dangerous to the security of their regimes. More often than not, the murder-tyrannicide helped make the reputation of a tyrant.

Writing two centuries after the Ides, Suetonius’ depiction of the Caesars is inseparable from the double scourge of plots and assassinations. His *de vita Caesarum* is one of the most insightful works that explores the continuities between Caesar and those who would call themselves Caesar decades after him.

2. *Conditionem principum miserrimam aiebat*: Suetonius and the Afterlife of the Ides

Of the twelve Caesars whose lives Suetonius surveys in varying degrees of detail, seven met violent ends. Julius Caesar, Caligula, Galba, Vitellius, and Domitian were murdered; Nero and Otho committed suicide. It is not a promising statistic. Domitian says just as much (*Dom.* 21.1) when he bewails his and the other emperors’ most sorry lot, one that is full of power yet full of the constant worry of a violent demise. Domitian’s life is the bookend to *de vita*

Caesarum, rounding off Suetonius' tract that began with Julius Caesar, who more inaugurates the *condicio miserrima* than he begins the "office" of emperor. Suetonius' accounts of the Caesars' violent deaths and their responses to plots against their lives grounds not only Suetonius' insights into the Caesars' characters, but also the changes in political culture from Caesar to Domitian. Like autocratic rule, conspiracy and assassination are normalized.

The *condicio principum miserrima* is in fact two-fold. It contains the ultimate fear of assassination which looms over the position of *princeps*, yet, strictly speaking, of which only Julius, Caligula, and Domitian were victims. But the genesis of Domitian's statement was the fear of conspiracy, as old as the principate itself.

Condicionem principum miserrimam aiebat, quibus de coniuratione comperta non crederetur nisi occisis.

(He used to say that the lot of *principes* was the sorriest, since it was not believed regarding a conspiracy that had been found out as intended for the *principes* until they had been killed.)

Conspiracy contained an implicit threat of assassination, yet was in fact far more sinister, warping emperors' behavior toward the paranoid. Yet all of Suetonius' emperors—save the civil war emperors (the typical exceptions to most rules one can draw from Suetonius)—face plots against their lives and regime. Suetonius frequently gives credence to plots that may not have even occurred, famously alleging that Agrippina was the mastermind of Claudius' death.

"But as a glance backwards in Roman history shows," asserts Mary Beard of Caesar's assassination, "this was the last in a series of murders of popular, radical but arguably too powerful politicians that started with the lynching of Tiberius Gracchus in 133 BCE" (Beard, 291). While Beard cannot be disputed, Caesar's death was also a watershed. Rome had endured dictators—even dictators who secured power through violent civil war. The violent overthrow of a Roman head of state was the stuff of legend. Many a tyrant or aspiring tyrant had been said to have been forced into exile; but only late Republican accounts of Romulus recorded that a head

of the Roman political community had been murdered (Livy 1.16.4). For Suetonius, Caesar's bloody end proved more confirmation than any "autocratic" actions he took in life that he was truly the first emperor. That assassination became a viable line of political recourse in 44 marks a transformation in the political culture, and is one that Suetonius acknowledges by categorizing his subjects not as *principes* or *Augusti*, but *Caesares*. To share in the name is to share in Julius' remarkable assassination. In Suetonius, death revealed not only the man, but the regime.

Suetonius' inclusion of Julius is of course one of the great questions for readers of Suetonius. However, Julius Caesar was the first Roman to know what the "sorry lot of the *principes*" felt like when he was assassinated. As Suetonius frames it Julius Caesar's life and death become the bookend and the standard by which the reader can judge and interpret the actions of the succeeding Caesars. Domitian's death concludes *de Vita Caesarum*. Caesar and Domitian, each vividly receiving the bitter end of the emperors' lot frame an upheaval of political culture. For the Roman political class, the one hundred-forty years that separated the assassinations of Julius and Domitian were nothing less than traumatic. This included an acceptance of a fundamentally un-republican figures of power, including the imperial household, and fundamentally un-republican methods of political action which included conspiracy and assassination.

The principate was born out of civil war, and it was through another more than a century later that a new dynasty "undertook and strengthened the empire" (*Ves.* 1.1). Galba, Otho, and Vitellius were not victims of traditional assassination plots. They died in civil war. Gone too were the days when Roman political life was diffuse and not focused on one man. Nothing can be more indicative of the degree to which Caesars dominated the political stage, inhabiting a new political regime than the lengths to which plotters and enemy combatants took to kill them. It is

not without reason that Suetonius includes in his *Vita* the lives of *principes* who held power for less than a year. Their violent deaths make them *Caesares* as much as anything in life.

Suetonius' focus on the lives and deaths of the twelve "Caesars" illuminates at least one perspective on the nature of the change in political culture from the Ides of March to the eighteenth of September in 96 (*Dom.* 17.3). He does not mask his acquiescence to the phenomenon of assassination—rooted in a realization that it is the cost of doing things in the new political order.

All assassinations in *de vita Caesarum* begin with conspiracy. Conspiracies, failed and successful, occupy far more of Suetonius' pages than assassinations. The advent of conspiracy in Roman political life indicates a fundamental shift in political culture. Conspiracies flourish in autocracy, especially in a Roman context; "not all pre-industrial rulers," observes Greg Woolf, "were quite as liable as the Caesars to be murdered by their entourages" (Woolf, 123).

But the *coniurationes* that the emperors faced were fundamentally different in kind. These conspiracies targeted individuals—the head of state in particular—and not the *res publica* writ large. Imperial conspiracies were also led by some of Rome's most noteworthy and powerful individuals. The conspiracy against Caesar involved—according to Suetonius—some sixty senators, some of whom had led armies in the civil war between Pompey and Caesar. The stymied conspiracies that Augustus faced were comprised of disaffected and ambitious senators, most notably—as Velleius relates—by the son of Octavian's fellow-triumvir, Marcus Lepidus (*Vell.* 2.88). The leaders of conspiracies reflect the changing gravity of Roman political culture toward the *domus principis*. While Suetonius tells us that senators supported most attempted conspiracies against emperors (e.g. *Dom.* 23.1), the leaders of varied plots against emperors more

often included powerful insiders in the imperial household, ranging from the inevitable Praetorian prefect to members of the imperial family itself.

As Suetonius tells it, most of the leaders of *coniurationes* acquiesce to autocracy. Revolution and regime change may have been the goals of Catiline's conspiracy, but in the principate, the objectives of a *coniuratio* were more modest. While passive supporters of an assassination plot—for example senators after the murder of Caligula, *in asserenda libertate adeo consensit* (*Cal.* 60)—the actual plotters are described of simply wanting to murder the emperor. In Suetonius' narrative, uninvolved factions take political advantage of murders that had not transpired for political ends. Covert violent opposition becomes the only viable political recourse when a single person has a monopoly on power. As in any autocratic organization, one cannot simply impeach or un-elect a ruler.

The Ides of March were essential to embedding political murder of a *princeps* in Rome's cultural DNA. The death of Caesar legitimized forms of violence which horrified republican sensibilities. Despite their immense power, neither Sulla nor Marius were ever the victims of assassination plots. The murder of Cinna in the thrall of his *dominatio* (*Vell.* 2.24.5), resulted in the death of the most powerful man in Rome, but he was more a victim of civil war than a *coniuratio*. Republican political culture portrayed conspiracies as active agents in the deterioration of Roman political life. The principate normalized (and sanitized) conspiracies and assassination as much as it institutionalized the position of the emperor.

All the Caesars are ultimately responsible for their own deaths. Their tyrannical behavior is demonstrated to both encourage conspiracy and to merit their deaths. Suetonius rationalizes all of their violent ends. A justification given for assassinations encourages readers to think that the

emperors both deserved their violent death and were also plainly tyrannical. One would be hard-pressed to find a biography of McKinley or Kennedy that claim that their *facta dictaque* (*Jul.* 76.1) encouraged their assassinations. For emperors who ultimately meet violent ends, Suetonius leaves the readers with a lingering sense that they “had it coming” throughout their life.

This is the business of classical biography. “[T]hat a person’s nature is more or less fixed,” writes Woolf (Woolf, 103), necessitated classical biographers to demonstrate a consistent pattern of tyrannical behavior in emperors who had been threatened with violent death. In this respect, a biographical approach is at odds with a philosophical critique of autocracy that can be found in *de Officiis* or in *specula principum* like *de Clementia* (Gowing, 68). Nowhere does Suetonius offer an authoritative critique of the foundations of the principate; nor does he, to employ Woolf’s turn of phrase, “talk tyrannicide,” (Woolf, 52), justifying plots and murders on the grounds of an inherent detestability of tyranny.

Suetonius’ retrospective rationalizations of violent ends stands in remarkable contrast to earlier writers of the principate, who were swift to depict assassinations and plots against the *principes* as unmitigated evils. Velleius reserves especially harsh statements for Caesar’s assassins, when he assumes a blithe and even supportive stance for the murder of Clodius; he condemns Cassius as *atrocissimi mox auctor facinoris* (Vell. 2.46.4). Suetonius reserves his invective (and more often his lurid narrative) for the most egregious *facta dictaque* of the emperors. We can attribute the difference in Suetonius’ and Velleius’ attitudes to the tumultuous century that separated them, understanding Suetonius’ acceptance of violent deaths and plots as a product of a different age. But this explanation does not suffice to understand why Suetonius, who worked in the imperial household did not seem compelled to cast aspersions on the plotters and killers

Saevitia and *crudelitas* top the list as the *raison d'être* for the deaths of most emperors. The abuse of power is the hallmark of the tyrant, and its taking the form of indulgence in wanton cruelty and violence appears in almost every life. Julius Caesar, however is an exception. Suetonius diligently notes examples of Caesar's notorious *clementia*. "He truly demonstrated admirable moderation and *clementia* when in the administration of his victory of the civil war," Suetonius notes (*Jul.* 75.1). Yet immediately after Suetonius account of Caesar's *clementia* even for *detectas coniurationes conventusque nocturnas* (*Jul.* 75.5), Suetonius begins his rationalization of Caesar's murder. Caesar's "other deeds and statements preponderated, that he was thought to have abused his power and his murder justified" (*Jul.* 76.1). For Suetonius, *arrogantia* more than anything defines Caesar's behavior as dictator. Suetonius catalogues the "continuous consulship, dictatorship for life and prefecture of *mores*" (*Jul.* 76.1) that were offered to Caesar, justifying the ire of the political class. Suetonius depicts Caesar as being entirely blasé about the state of politics, brazenly declaring that, "the republic is nothing!" (*Jul.* 77), and not standing for the senate as it conferred honors upon him (*Jul.* 78.1). The final straw in Suetonius' account of the Caesar's "tyrannical behavior" is Caesar's supposed flirtation with monarchy. Caesar's refusal of Antony's attempted coronation (*Jul.* 79.2) is not enough to recover his reputation among the Senatorial class.

Suetonius does not indulge in armchair republicanism (insofar as one could in the second century). It is Caesar's patent disregard for the senatorial class (*Jul.* 78.7), not the overthrow of the republic that functions as a narrative explanation for his death. This is of course a truism of Roman political discourse that Roman political terminology is at times despairingly fungible, and our conception of a discrete regime change from *res publica* to *monarchia* is the not well attested by most extant authors, and certainly not by Suetonius. His portrait of Caesar is not of a

man who killed the republic—although saying that it amounts to nothing (*rem publicam nihil esse*) borders on that—but the first Caesar to indulge in behavior that consistently characterizes his successors.

For his affronts to the political order, Caesar set the standard for all future Caesars. Caesar’s “tyrannical” behavior was in most ways proto-tyrannical behavior. Suetonius depicts Caesar as undermining the existing political order. In this biographical-historical narrative, a Julius Caesar becomes necessary to re-align the gravitational pull of Roman politics around one person before a Caligula can employ the new political order to his cruel nature.

Suetonius accounts *crudelitas* as a leading culprit in the violent deaths of Caligula, Nero, Vitellius, and Domitian. Indeed, all Caesars, even those not successfully assassinated are depicted as possessing a cruel streak that only feeds the Suetonian rumor mill of possible plots against their lives.

While Suetonius catalogs Caligula’s acts of *saevitia* (*Cal.* 27.1) in the arena and the courtroom, he does not rationalize it as the proximate cause for the assassination plots. Rather, Suetonius tells us, Caligula *nec cessavit ex eo criminari alterum alteri atque inter se omnis committere* (56.1), thereby using the looming threat of assassination plot to undermine his own guard. That Caligula’s cultivation of distrust among the Praetorian is further rationalized as responsible for undoing by the very fact that Cassius Chaerea led the plot. Suetonius attributes Cassius Chaerea’s leadership of the plot to Caligula’s unrelenting mockery. That Caligula’s crime is made to appear all the more justifiable is Suetonius’ distinction between Caligula the *princeps* and Caligula the *monstrum*. Nearly two-thirds of the life of Caligula are an extended Suetonian setup for his assassination; of course, any Caesar who is described as an “abomination” (22.1) will be further depicted as deserving his death.

Vitellius participates in behavior that Suetonius sees as characteristic not just of a tyrant, but also a civil war combatant. Of the overthrown emperors, that is those emperors who were deposed or killed by opposing armies, Vitellius' murder deserves especial attention. Suetonius notes that he was "especially given to excess and savagery," (*Vit.* 13.1) before tantalizing the reader with the typical litany of crimes. These attributed failures are antithetical to the imperial virtues of *moderatio* and *abstinentia* that Suetonius attributes to the emperors after Domitian (*Dom.* 23.2). Whereas Suetonius contrasts Caesar's *clementia* with Pompey's "heavy-handedness" (*Jul.* 75.1), he writes of Vitellius, "although everyone was praising *clementia*, he ordered that they be killed in public" (*Vit.* 14.2). Suetonius, perhaps inspiring some of the dialogue for the Uruk-Hai in *The Two Towers*, credits Vitellius with saying, "a dead enemy smells best, but a dead citizen even better" (*Vit.* 10.3). In narrating Vitellius last days, Suetonius describes Vitellius in the language of a war criminal without equal. Vitellius, while fighting the Flavians, massacred Vespasian's brother and many other relatives in a savage fire in the Temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus of all places (*Vit.* 15.3). Suetonius presents this nadir as the ultimate *exemplum* of Vitellius' outrages as if he needed to provide any more justification for his ninth Caesar's ignominious death.

More so than any imperial murder (with the possible exception of Caligula's), Domitian's is a cloak and dagger murder par excellence. For a Caesar who ruled for fifteen years, Domitian's life is peculiarly short. Even Galba's life includes as many chapters as Domitian's. Nevertheless, Suetonius seems to have no shortage of accusations and allegations of Domitian's *crudelitas* even before Domitian's life begins. "It is allowable that Domitian paid the penalty [*luisse poenas*] deserving of his *cupiditas* and *saevitia*" (*Ves.* 1.1). "But he did not remain in the hold of either *clementia* or *abstinentia*," (*Dom.* 10.1), Suetonius informs us, before relating

Domitian's executions of senators and members of the imperial household. Before listing the members of the plot against Domitian, Suetonius recounts (*Dom* 14.4) Domitian's execution of the father of his designated successor Flavius Clemens and Epaphroditus, whom Suetonius reports to have been "aiding" Nero as he was committing suicide (*Ner.* 49.3). With these details, Suetonius would have us believe that the ordered executions of a relative and a once powerful freedman must have hit close to home. Domitian is killed by his inner circle, after he executes his cousin. Domitian's *vita* merely leads into his murder.

In the life of each "tyrannical" (i.e. destined to be assassinated or overthrown) emperor there are several episodes and anecdotes relating acts of cruelty, but Suetonius' presentation includes an episode that becomes the final straw for the plots. *Crudelitas* and *saevitia*—in particular—are vices particular to emperors. Fondness for *luxuria* may make for a bad *princeps*, but the examples of it with which Suetonius provides us are seldom lethal. A Caesar's *saevitia* is only the beginning of a savage cycle that will end with the *princeps*' own death. Almost all anecdotes of *crudelitas* relate that it is directed toward members of the imperial circle and its immediate peripheries. *Saevitia* becomes the logical extension of the *arrogantia* that killed Julius Caesar: it is an affront to the political class that includes violence, and can only be met with violence in turn.

The death and conspiracy narratives are representative of Suetonius' perception of the "long century" of political changes and continuities from Julius to Domitian. Just as Suetonius catalogs the actions of the Caesars which he views as causative of their eventual downfalls, he also presents a study in conspirators' motives. In distinct contrast to Velleius and earlier writers' condemnation of the assassins of Caesar, Suetonius' exploration of killers' motives is part of a

much larger project that reveals how central violent death and conspiracy is to Suetonius' understanding of the Principate.

While Suetonius does not necessarily celebrate any conspirators or assassins in particular, he nonetheless strives to understand them, and the salacious catalogs of the *Lives* of course serve as an additional justification for the plots and murders. But his characterization of the motives of the conspirators appears to reflect his conception of a Caesar-oriented political culture. He does not characterize plots as attempts to orchestrate regime-change although he relates factions (almost always senators) who were less than peripheral to the plots and clambered for fundamental regime change.

Julius Caesar's assassination appears that it would be an exception. The assassins characterized themselves as *liberatores*, famously minting coins with the *pileus*. But Suetonius does not grace the assassins with their chosen epithet, but rather calls them *coniurati* (*Jul.* 80.1), lumping them in the same camp as the *liberti* who killed Domitian one hundred-forty years later. Suetonius notes that the people "was dishing dirt on Caesar's *dominatio*" (*Jul.* 80.1), but does not so much as drop *libertas* as one of the sixty senatorial conspirators' motives. Rather, Suetonius tells us, the conspirators' only plan—and soon abandoned—was "to fling the body of the killed man into the Tiber, to make public his properties, [and] rescind his legislative acts" (*Jul.* 87.4). Suetonius' portrait of the assassins is a far more pedestrian one than the proto-revolutionaries of eighteenth century lore. In the same manner the "Caesarian vices" of the first Caesar influence Suetonius' characterizations of the subsequent Caesars, the non-revolutionary portrait of Caesar's assassins set the standard for Suetonius' subsequent portrayals of the leaders of the coups to come.

Recounting some seven conspiracies and attempted murders that erupted during Augustus' life, only Telephus the *nomenclator's* hapless and botched attempt receives some explanation of motive which includes his delusion that he was "destined for power" (*Aug.* 19.2). The conspirators against Augustus become power-craven creatures as interested as any in maintaining the *principatus*. In fact, the only discussion of "restoring" the republic is attributed to Augustus himself (*Aug.* 28.1), whom Suetonius says "twice considered the return of the republican system." So much for *coniuratio* as organized resistance.

In contrast to the Senate which *in asserenda libertate adeo consensit* (*Cal.* 60), Caligula's killers' motives are merely personal and centered on the threat Caligula poses to their lives; they also lack an agenda for political revolution. The guards accept that Caligula must have a successor, whom they have not decided upon: *neque coniurati cuiquam imperium destinaverunt* (*Cal.* 60). The facility with which the roaming guards acclaim Claudius, indicates that Suetonius is portraying the killers' motives as more personal than institutional.

Nero faced many a conspiracy as Tacitus vividly recounts, but Suetonius does not so much as mention the "Stoic opposition" in the life of Nero or any conspiracy that employed the language of "restoring" the republic. The Pisonian conspiracy receives, as Pagán has observed, only "brief mention in Suetonius' *Nero*" (Pagán, 7-8). Moreover, Suetonius does not cite any motivation for Vindex's revolt, let alone mention of restoring the republic. Suetonius recounts that Nero's death was met with a spectacle of liberation *ut plebs pilleata tota urbe discurreret* (*Ner.* 57.1), but like his depiction of popular clambering before the assassination of Julius Caesar, the people have no efficacy to influence the plotters. Conspiracies are as non-republican as the Caesars are.

Suetonius does not even attribute revolutionary motives to Galba save the acclamation by Galba's troops (*Gal.* 10). He was invited by Vindex to become *humano generi asseriorem ducemque* (*Gal.* 9.2)—not at all the image of a liberator. Galba is also depicted as having entertained imperial fantasies since Augustus predicted a taste of power to the young Galba (*Gal.* 4.1). The Caesars' revolts of 69 are scarcely motivated by hopes of regime change. In fact, Suetonius depicts Vitellius' death as a form of payback after he burned Flavius Sabinus and his family to death. This is the business of civil war (and *Game of Thrones*)—you win or die. Suetonius presents Otho's motive for challenging Galba as deriving from his *instigante super animi dolorem etiam magnitudine aeris alieni* (*Oth.* 5.1). However, Suetonius takes a dim view of the public outpouring of grief after Otho's death. A kind of republicanism was attributed to Otho—*libertatis restituendae* (*Oth.* 12.2). Instead, says Suetonius, it was the contrast between the obsequiousness of Otho's life and the dignity of his death instead of any revolutionary zeal that was responsible for Otho's post mortem reputation. Raw power and ambition are revealed as motives in the civil war for the overthrow of emperors.

Besides the civil war emperors, Suetonius includes Caligula, Nero, and Domitian as the only Caesars who are suspected of participating in *coniurationes*. Their alleged participation more reinforces their generally tyrannical behavior, and reveals motives as power-hungry as any. "His brother [Domitian] did not cease to lay traps for him [Titus]" (*Tit.* 9.3), Suetonius tells us. Caligula may be endowed with a vivid imagination to envision killing a sleeping Tiberius *ad ulciscendam necem matris et fratrum* (*Cal.* 12.3), but he and his fellow conspirators are never depicted as possessing much of a political imagination. All of Suetonius' actors are acculturated to the Principate. Participating in an assassination plot is the surest way to demonstrate fidelity to the legacy of Caesar.

The survival statistic for Caesars is not a good one. For conspirators—even the unsuccessful ones—it is even worse. The successful conspirators must be prepared for death in Suetonius. Cassius Chaerea, Galba, and all of the defeated civil war emperors pay the ultimate price for their foray into making the *condicio principum* a miserable one indeed. Yet, for Suetonius, neither the principate nor the threat of conspiracy are unmitigated evils. Conspiracy for all of its risks is the only effective resistance in an autocracy: at the very least the threat of assassination can keep a Caesar on his toes. Suetonius has little patience for dreams of a return to the republic, so much so, that coups that have elsewhere been portrayed as “republican” in spirit, Suetonius treats as just another conspiracy if he mentions them at all.

To be sure, Suetonius is no Seneca. He is no Tacitus. He pours attention on the foibles and characters of his subjects. Suetonius does not make grand statement of political theory, yet his *de Vita Caesarum* is also a biography of change, gradual adaptation to an aristocratic-inflected autocracy. It is after all, difficult to determine where a *princeps* ends and the *principatus* begins: the regime is the person. “The *condicio principum miserrima* is also one of the *novus status* (*Aug.* 28.2) that came to be. Suetonius does not indulge in “historical”—as opposed to “biographical”—explanation for the violent demise of seven *principes* and plots against so many others, but *de Vita*’s oft-observed ring composition and his violent death narratives depict a fundamentally new order “[f]ounded in Julius Caesar’s blood . . . destined to relive his murder again and again” (Woolf, 128) just as Suetonius’ Caesars do.

The final chapter of the life of Julius Caesar relates the deaths of the conspirators. “Some,” Suetonius tells us, “passed away by the very same dagger by which they had wounded Caesar” (*Jul.* 89). It is a grim poetic justice: conspirators never get away with it. But they nevertheless managed to remake political culture which offers insight into the superstructure and

ethos of Suetonius' project. Just like the Caesars, Suetonius tells us, plots against them and violent deaths are there to stay.

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Acknowledgements

To call this undertaking a “thesis” is altogether misleading. It is in fact an *essai* in the truest sense, an attempt to put to paper thoughts about an era and a societal dread that has grasped my imagination for as long as I have been a student of classical antiquity. However, this project could not have been attempted let alone realized without the patience, enthusiasm, and mentorship of Karl Galinsky. Since first stepping into his office in the fall of my freshman year, my life and expectations for the future have guided me away from the pursuit of an academic career in classical philology. In Professor Galinsky, I found the unique professor who is not just of the world, but in it, who shared my fascination in the American political situation, making this *essai* a delight to work on. His reminder that this project was ultimately my own was liberating, and emboldened me to address a topic much too broad for the normal constraints of a “thesis.”

I also owe much of this *essai* to the instruction and feedback of several professors. Foremost among them is Andrew Riggsby, my second reader, whose Roman History lecture course and Latin seminar on Suetonius offered an intellectual framework to more clearly understand the principate, as well as writing the initial draft of the section on Suetonius. Cristina Carusi’s course on Greek historiography formed the basis for the section on Sallust and Thucydides. Adam Rabinowitz’s course on Space and Place offered me the first academic opportunity to wrestle with the violence that devastated the *res publica*. His generous feedback on that paper and subsequent undertakings has been invaluable. Erik Dempsey’s tutelage in the program in Core Texts and Ideas was foundational to my attempt to wrestle with the ideas of the ancient world. I am also deeply indebted to Paul Woodruff not only for his moral example, but for clarifying the toll of civil war in the ancient and modern world.

In my experience, senior “theses” are among the best opportunities for processing all of the angst one has accumulated in college. I have no doubt that I would have not completed this *essai* without the kindness of my friends. The Junior Fellows program (in whose ranks I entered only because of a last minute letter of recommendation from Professor Galinsky) offered the support of other undergraduate researchers from a plethora of fields, and immeasurably enriched my undergraduate academic life, giving me, especially under Elizabeth Scala’s leadership, a new circle of friends. My roommates past and present, Josh Armstrong, Jordan Cope, and Bryson Kisner always took me out of the momentary problems of the thesis, offering instead good cheer. My friends and colleagues in the Texas Political Union, particularly Paul Vonder Haar, were extraordinarily patient with me and always gave me something to look forward to every Tuesday. Throughout the process, Sam Ross and Ethan Russo were steadfast friends and shining *exempla* of dedication to learning and humanity. I could not number the evenings I spent discussing the existential dread of “thesis”-writing with Elizabeth Hamm. No doubt that those discussions slowed my progress, but they were damn sure cathartic.

I have done little better than choosing Paula Tyler as a life-mentor; her support through my college years has kept me grounded and anchored. She was critical in taking me to task about making my “thesis” make sense. Jake Martinez always offered a respite from the problems of the moment. Finally, my parents David Orr and Susan Ayres have been my *sine qua non*. Not only did they make it all possible, but they were consistently my best audience and always furnished encouragement and support when I needed it most.

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