

CONFLICTING REPORTS? AUGUSTUS' RELATIONSHIP WITH THE SENATE AND ESTABLISHED ORDER DURING HIS ROAD TO POWER IN *RES GESTAE*, VELLEIUS PATERCULUS, SUETONIUS, AND TACITUS*

Abstract: This paper explores four accounts of Augustus' relationship with the senate and established order during his early career, with particular focus on his involvement in the civil wars: his own *Res Gestae*, Velleius Paterculus' *Roman History* 2.59–89, Suetonius' *Life of Augustus*, and Tacitus' *Annals* 1.1–10. Through comparison of these—at times wildly conflicting—accounts, it demonstrates that relations with the senate play a significant role in verdicts on the first emperor's rise to power. In *Res Gestae* Augustus executes the will of the senate from start to finish, in Velleius Paterculus he is temporarily forced to oppose the senate when it falls under the sway of the 'Pompeian Party', in Suetonius his questionable early career is offset by his later *ciuilitas* and commitment to uphold senatorial authority, while in Tacitus he is a revolutionary who relentlessly undermines the senate and turns the state upside down.

Keywords: Augustus, Senate, *Res Gestae*, Velleius Paterculus, Suetonius, Tacitus

Introduction

Given that the writing of history in Rome was traditionally a senatorial undertaking, the Romans did not have a proud tradition of honouring those who challenged the senate and established order. To advocate socio-economic change was dangerous, as the Gracchi were to discover, both in terms of life expectancy and for one's posthumous reputation. Indeed, if Cicero is anything to go by, Roman Republican heroes were, almost to a man, pro-senatorial heroes.¹ Roman politicians consequently had little choice but to

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¹ P. Scipio Nasica (*Cat.* 1.3; *Mil.* 8; *Rep.* 1.6; 2.67; cf. *Val. Max.* 3.2.17; 5.3.2e), C. Servilius Ahala (*Cat.* 1.3; *Mil.* 8; *Sen.* 56; *Dom.* 86; *Rep.* 1.6; cf. *Val. Max.* 5.3.2g), Q. Caecilius Metellus Numidicus (*Clu.* 95; *Red. Sen.* 25, 37–8; *Red. pop.* 6–7, 9–11; *Sest.* 130; *Pis.* 20; *Planc.* 89; *Dom.*

treat the senate with respect if they wished to safeguard their posthumous reputations.

This remained true with the advent of the *de facto* monarchy of the *principes*, for whom cordial relations with the senate were not only a matter of life *and* death but also a matter of life *after* death. ‘The “good” emperor’, as noted by Wallace-Hadrill, ‘may be synonymous with the “pro-senatorial” one’.² While the power wielded by the emperors should not be underestimated, it bears remembering that those who took a too uncompromising line towards the senate tended not only to inspire rebellions and/or assassination attempts but also to have their posthumous reputations tarnished: Caligula was murdered after only four years in the purple and generally dismissed as a madman, while Nero and Domitian—although they managed to stay in power for fourteen and fifteen years respectively—were afterwards subjected to harsh condemnation in the historical record. All three suffered various forms of senate-backed memory sanctions.³ No less than politicians under the Republic, then, the rulers of the early Roman Empire needed to stay on good terms with the senate (or at least lay the foundation for a narrative that made such an interpretation possible) if they wanted to preserve their reputations intact after death.⁴ Augustus, whose rule straddled

82, 87; *Rep.* 1.6; *Leg.* 3.26; *Fam.* 1.9), P. Popilius Laenas (*Clu.* 95; *Balb.* 28; *Brut.* 95, 128; *Red. pop.* 6–7, 9–11; *Dom.* 82, 87; *Rep.* 1.6; *Leg.* 3.26), L. Opimius (*Cat.* 1.4; 4.13; *Sest.* 140; *Pis.* 95; *Planc.* 69–70, 88; *Rep.* 1.6; *Mil.* 8, 83; *Phil.* 8.14), M. Aemilius Scaurus (*Mur.* 16, 36; *Rab. perd.* 21, 26; *Verr.* 1.52; 2.3.209; *Font.* 24, 38; *Deiot.* 31; *Arch.* 6; *Prov. cons.* 19; *Sest.* 101–3; *Brut.* 110–13, 116, 135; *De or.* 1.214; *Leg.* 3.36; *Off.* 1.76, 108, 138; 2.57; 3.47, 70; *Fam.* 1.9.16), and L. Licinius Crassus (*Clu.* 140; *Rab. perd.* 26; *De or.* 1.105; 3.82; *Pis.* 62; *Leg.* 3.42; *Off.* 1.108, 133; 2.47, 57, 63; 3.47). Cicero’s selective use of C. Marius as an *exemplum* underlines his uneasiness about modelling himself too closely on a *popularis* politician; cf. van der Blom (2010), esp. 277–9.

² Wallace-Hadrill (1982) 45; cf. Oakley (2009) 184: ‘Although no *princeps* could hope to survive if he alienated his troops, it is equally true that, after Tiberius, no *princeps* who alienated the senate did survive.’ See also Madsen (2019b) on the importance of the senate in Dio.

³ On memory sanctions in ancient Rome, see Flower (2006); in relation to imperial portraiture, see Varner (2004); against Mark Antony, see Lange (2009) 136–40. One of the anonymous reviewers reminds me that the senate would also have had a say in the decree (or not) of a *consecratio*. On *RG* as (among other things) an implicit argument for apotheosis, see Bosworth (1999), esp. 12–18.

⁴ If anything, the advent of the principate made it even more important to be ‘pro-senatorial’, since the people—as one of the anonymous reviewers reminds me—no longer constituted an alternative source of political legitimacy in competition with the senate. The *Lex de imperio Vespasiani* (*CIL* VI.930) illustrates how the senate remained a key locus of power in the imperial period by formally awarding omnipotence; cf. Winterling (2009) 26–7. On the perfunctory role of the popular assembly in making it a *lex*, see Brunt (1977). On the imperial senate, see Russell (2019), who argues that the senate embraced a more corporate identity after Actium: ‘Ironically, his [Augustus] Senate found a consensus that it never

Republic and Empire, is a case in point. Could his actions during the civil wars be portrayed as pro-senatorial?⁵

While the first *princeps* could reasonably claim senatorial support for his post-31 BCE political performance, he faced an uphill battle to portray himself as a champion of the senate and established order during his involvement in the civil wars following Caesar's assassination. As noted by Smith, 'Augustus' early career was notorious'.⁶ In fact, the contrast between the famously mild Augustus and the infamously brutal Octavian would become a rhetorical staple, as seen, for example, in Seneca the Younger's *De Clementia* (1.9.1):

Divus Augustus fuit mitis princeps, si quis illum a principatu suo aestimare incipiat; in communi quidem rei publicae gladium mouit. cum hoc aetatis esset, quod tu nunc es, duodevicesimum egressus annum, iam pugiones in sinum amicorum absconderat, iam insidiis M. Antonii consulis latus petierat, iam fuerat collega proscriptionis.

The deified Augustus was a mild prince if one should undertake to judge him from the time of his principate; but when he shared the state with others, he wielded the sword. When he was at your [*sc.* Nero's] present age, having just passed his eighteenth year, he had already buried his dagger in the bosom of friends; he had already in stealth aimed a blow at the side of the consul, Mark Antony; he had already been a partner in proscription. (Basore, trs.)

In addition to remarking on his brutality and deception, the Senecan passage notes that the early (i.e., not-yet) Augustus attacked a consul and participated in the proscriptions. Seneca revisits the contrast between mild *princeps* and brutal youth two chapters later, as he recalls the blood-red sea of Actium, the destructive naval battles off Sicily, and the altars of Perusia and the proscriptions (*Perusinas aras et proscriptiones*, 1.11.1).⁷ As we shall see, these events recur frequently in the historiographical tradition that portrays the first *princeps* as a revolutionary rather than a reformer. In other words, the claim that Augustus

had during the Republic' (332). On the preservation of this consensus as a key element in imperial ideology, see Lobur (2008). On Augustus' concern with his legacy, see Strunk (2018).

⁵ It bears remembering that prominent senators of the late republic—most notably Asinius Pollio and T. Labienus—had written histories, of which now only fragments remain, that may have portrayed Augustus' rise to power in a less positive light than he wished: cf. Strunk (2018) 223–4.

⁶ Smith (2013) 457.

⁷ On Perusia in Roman historiography, see now Lange (2021), which traces the tradition as far as Dio. See also below on Suet. *Aug.* 14–15.

had—from the very beginning—been on the side of the senate and established order was not only of vital importance for his posthumous reputation but also critically vulnerable to attack.

In this paper I analyse the treatment of Augustus' relationship with the senate and established order during his rise to power in his own *Res Gestae*, Velleius Paterculus' *Roman History* 2.59–89, Suetonius' *Life of Augustus*, and Tacitus' *Annals* 1.1–10. I argue that the overall assessments of the early career of the first *princeps* in these four—at times wildly diverging—accounts depend to a large degree on how they construe his behaviour towards the senate.⁸ The performance of tasks on behalf and/or for the benefit of the senate contributes to a positive assessment, whereas opposition to the senate entails criticism—or demands explanation. In short, a key battle in the struggle for Augustus' posthumous reputation was fought around the question of whether his rise to power had been achieved in concert with or at the expense of the senate and established order.

Augustus' *Res Gestae*: A Champion of the Senate and Established Order

In *Res Gestae* (*RG*) Augustus consistently portrays himself as a champion of the senate and senatorial class, that is, of the established order.⁹ The word *senatus* makes twenty-six appearances in the text: twenty-two times the senate is an active agent, either providing authority and legality to the young Caesar's actions or rewarding him for jobs well done.¹⁰ The very first passage, a

⁸ I have chosen these four texts as they allow us to see the competing traditions negotiating for pre-eminence during the early principate, from friend (*Res Gestae*) to foe (Tacitus) and various compromises between the two (Velleius, Suetonius), as well as the various rhetorical challenges they faced and strategies they employed. That said, Augustus' relationship with the senate and established order during his road to power could be fruitfully investigated also in other texts, not least early imperial poetry and later imperial historiography (see below, nn. 28, 31, and 40 on Dio), and such investigations would surely add more nuance to the analysis here offered.

⁹ As noted by Lange–Vervaeke (2019a) 6, *RG* is not an autobiography *stricto sensu*, but rather an autobiographical account of Augustus' *res gestae et impensae*. On *RG* as civil-war commentary, see Lange (2019). On Augustus' fragmentarily preserved thirteen-book autobiography published in the mid-20s BCE, see Smith–Powell (2009); Smith (2013).

¹⁰ The senate's active twenty-two interventions (either as subject or in expressions such as *senatus consulto*) include 1.2 (*senatus ... adlegit ... dedit ... iussit*), 4.1 (*[decerente] ... sena[t]u*), twice at 4.2 (*decreuit senatus ... ex senatus consulto*), 5.1 (*[delatam a popu]lo et a se[na]tu*), 6.1 (*[senatu populo]u[e] Romano consentientibus*), 6.2 (*[senatus] u[o]luit*), 8.1 (*iussu populi et senatus*), 9.1 (*senatus decreuit*), 10.1 (*[senat]us c[onsulto]*), 11 (*senatus consacrauit*), 12.1 (*[ex senatus auctoritat]e*), 12.2 (*[senatus ... censuit]*), 13 (*[senat]us censui[t]*), twice at 14.1 (*senatus populusque Romanus ... designauit ... decreuit senatus*), 20.4 (*ex [auctori]tate senatus*), 22.2 (*[s(enatus) c(onsulto)]*), twice at 34.2 (*senat[us*

schematic narrative from his mobilisation of an army in the spring of 44 BCE to the institution of the triumvirate in November 43 BCE, sets the tone (*RG* 1):

annos undeuginti natus exercitum priuato consilio et priuata impensa comparaui, per quem rem publicam a dominatione factionis oppressam in liberatatem uindicaui. eo [nomi]ne **senatus** decretis honorif[i]cis in ordinem suum m[e **adlegit** C(aio) Pansa et A(ulo) Hirti]o consulibus, con[sula]rem locum s[ententiae dicendi simu]l [dans et i]mperium mihi **dedi**; res publica n[e quid detrimenti caperet], me pro praetore simul cum consulibus pro[uidere **iussit**. p]opulus autem eodem anno me consulem, cum [consul uterqu]e in bel[lo ceci]disset, et triumuirum rei publicae constituend[ae creauit].

Aged nineteen years old **I mustered** an army at my personal decision and at my personal expense, and with it **I liberated** the state, which had been oppressed by a despotic faction. For this reason **the senate** with honorific decrees **admitted** me to its body in the consulship of Gaius Pansa and Aulus Hirtius, at the same time giving me consular precedence in stating my opinion, and it **gave** me an official command. It **ordered** me as *propraetor* to take precautions together with the consuls to prevent the state from suffering harm. In this same year, moreover,

consulto] ... quem mihi senatum pop[ulum]ue Rom[anum] dare), and twice at 35.1 (*senat[us] et e]quester ordo populus[ue] Romanus uniuersus [appell]au[it] ... ex s(enatus) c(onsulto)*). The senate is mentioned only four times as an entity upon which others act: 6.2 (*conlegam ... [a sena]tu [de]poposci et accepi*), 7.2 (*[p]rinceps [senatus] fui*), 8.2 (*senatum ter legi*), and 34.1 (*rem publicam ... in senat[us] populi]ue Rom[ani] [a]rbitrium transtuli*). See also 25.3 (*fuerunt senatores*) and Appendix 4 (*a[micis] senat[oribus]ue*). While the Roman people makes twenty-eight appearances (*populus* 25, *plebs* 3), in twenty of these they have a passive role: twice in the heading (*imperio populi Romani ... in rem publicam populumque Romanum*), 8.2 (*censum populi*), 13 (*[imperium] po]puli Roma[ni]*), 15.1 (*plebei Romanae uiritim ... numerau[i] ... dedi ... p[er]numer[a]ui ... emensus sum ... dedi*), 15.2 (*trecentis et uiginti millibus plebis urbanae ... uiritim dedi*), 15.4 (*plebei ... dedi*), 22.1 (*spectaculu[m] p[ro]pulo pra[ebui]*), 22.3 (*[uen]ation[es] best[ia]rum Africanarum ... popul[o] dedi*), 23.1 (*naualis proeli spectaculum populo de[di]*), 26.1 (*omnium prouinciarum populi Romani*), 26.4 (*amicitiam meam et populi Romani*), 27.1 (*Aegyptum imperio populi [Ro]mani adieci*), 29.2 (*amicitiam populi Romani*), twice at 30.1 (*populi Romani exercitus ... imperio populi Romani*), 30.2 (*im[peri]a p[ro]puli Romani*), twice at 32.3 (*[p]opuli Rom[ani] fidem ... cum populo Roman[o]*), and 34.1 (*in senat[us] populi]ue Rom[ani]*). Moreover, six of the people's eight active interventions include the senate as a co-agent: 5.1, 6.1, 8.1, 14.1, 34.2, and 35.1. The people act independently of the senate only on two occasions: 1.4 (*[p]opulus ... me consulem ... et triumuirum ... [creauit]*) and 10.2 (*[populo id] sace[r]dotium deferente mihi*). On Augustus' stress on senatorial support in *RG*, see Cooley (2009) 39–40; cf. Hodgson (2019) 57. On the representation of the people in *RG*, see Slootjes (2020).

the people appointed me consul, after both consuls had fallen in war, and triumvir for settling the state.¹¹

The senate is the subject of three of the six main verbs of the introductory passage: *adlegit, dedit, iussit*.¹² Although he acted on his own initiative, the senate showed appreciation of his actions, entrusted him with increased authority, and ordered him to defend the state. In the very first paragraph of *RG*, then, the young Caesar is progressively recognised by the senate, empowered by the senate, and finally an agent of the senate. That his appointments as consul of 43 BCE and later triumvir for settling the state were accomplished against the will of the senate is naturally left unspecified, detectable only in the change of subject from *senatus* to *populus*.¹³

The length to which Augustus would go in *RG* to portray himself as a darling of the senate even before he attained *de facto* monarchic power is strikingly illustrated where evidence for senatorial support is flimsier, for example, in his treatment of Actium. Augustus claims that his followers included more than 700 senators and 83 people who either had been or would become consuls: *qui sub [signis meis tum] militauerint, fuerunt senatores plures quam DCC, in iis qui uel antea uel post]ea consules facti sunt ad eum diem quo scripta su[nt] haec LXXXIII, sacerdo]tes cir[c]iter CLXX* ('There were more than 700 senators who served under my standards at that time, among whom there were 83 who either before or afterwards up until the day on which these words were written were made consuls, and about 170 priests', *RG* 25.3). While the numbers are impressive, they are also carefully filtered. Most notably, the counting of both former and later consuls allows Augustus not only to rack up the numbers but also—by dismissing the epochal significance of Actium—to give an impression of continuity, as if the battle did not constitute a major break in Roman politics whose outcome greatly impacted the future political careers of those who participated. Augustus surely intended to convey the impression that he was actively supported by a large number of consulars (rather than mere *pedarii*), but, as noted by Cooley, at best the passage demonstrates that he rewarded his supporters well after his victory.¹⁴ The blending of before and after, in turn,

¹¹ Text and translation (the latter here slightly modified) of *RG* are from Cooley (2009).

¹² The corresponding verbs in the Greek text are all preserved: *προκατέλεξε ... ἔδωκεν ... ἐπέτρεψε*. Note also that the very first line recalls Cicero's praise in *Philippics* 3, not least *Phil.* 3.5.1: *qua peste priuato consilio rem publicam (neque enim fieri potuit aliter) Caesar liberauit*.

¹³ Cf. Sloop (2020) 286–7.

¹⁴ Cooley (2009) *ad loc.* Both consuls of 32 BCE, Cn. Domitius Ahenobarbus and C. Sosius, supported Mark Antony, who was himself consul in 31 BCE, together with the young Caesar. Note also that Augustus employs his tribunician powers to do the senate's bidding (6.2, with Bosworth (1999) 17) and that his opponents are portrayed as natural enemies of the

allows him to backdate the authority and support he enjoyed later in life to the contested period of the civil wars, all of which only underlines the point: Augustus is at pains to persuade his readers that he enjoyed significant senatorial backing for his war against Antony.¹⁵

Augustus' eagerness to portray himself as a champion and benefactor of the senate during the civil wars is mirrored in his amplification of senatorial support also after the civil wars, for example when he mentions the closures of the Temple of Janus Quirinus: [*Ianum*] *Quirin[um] ... ter me princi[pe] **senat]us** claudendum esse censui[t]* ('the **senate** decreed it [*sc.* Janus Quirinus] should be closed three times when I was leader', *RG* 13). While the closures would certainly have been formally decreed by the senate, it bears notice that the senate is absent from most other sources. In Suetonius' account, for example, the senate plays no role: *Ianum Quirinum, semel atque iterum a condita urbe ante memoriam suam clausum, in multo breviori temporis spatio terra marique pace parta ter clusit* ('Since the foundation of the city, Janus Quirinus had been closed before Augustus' time on only two occasions. Having obtained peace by land and by sea, he closed it on three occasions in the space of a much briefer period' (*Aug.* 22). Augustus clearly—and disingenuously—wants his audience to get the impression that he followed the senate's lead.¹⁶

Finally, mentions of the senate come thick and fast in the penultimate passage of *RG* (34.1–2):

in consulatu sexto et septimo, postqua[m b]el[la civil]ia exstinxeram,
per consensum universorum [po]tens re[ru]m om[n]ium, rem publicam
ex mea potestate in **senat[us]** populi]que R[om]ani [a]rbitrium
transtuli. quo pro merito meo **senat[us]** consulto Au]gust[us]
appe]llatus sum et laureis postes aedium mearum u[estiti] publ[ic]e
coronaq]ue civica super ianuam meam fixa est, [et clu]peus [aureu]s in

established order: an anti-senatorial despotic faction (1.1–3), enemies of the state (2), temple robbers (24.1), pirates (25.1), and runaway slaves (25.2).

¹⁵ On economy with the truth in *RG*, see Rich (2010); cf. Syme (1939) 523; Ridley (2003); Lange (2019). The senate follows Augustus into battle also on Aeneas' shield in Virgil's *Aeneid* (8.679): *cum **patribus** populoque, penatibus et magnis dis*.

¹⁶ Cooley (2009) 39. Horace writes that *tua, Caesar, aetas ... Ianum Quirini clausit* ('your age, Caesar, ... closed the temple of Janus', *Carm.* 4.15.4–9), whereas Livy uses the perfect passive *clausus* with *fuit* ('has been closed', 1.19.3) and Plutarch the passive aorist *ἐκλείσθη* ('was closed', *Numa* 20.2). Dio ascribes the 29 BCE closure to the senate (51.20.4) but states matter-of-factly that the 25 BCE closure was carried out by Augustus: *Ἀύγουστος μὲν ταῦτά τε ἐν τοῖς πολέμοις ἔπραξε, καὶ τὸ τοῦ Ἰανοῦ τεμένισμα ἀνοιχθὲν δι' αὐτοὺς ἔκλεισεν* ('After these achievements in the wars Augustus closed the precinct of Janus, which had been opened because of these wars', 53.27.1, transl. Cary–Foster). The third closure never materialised due to an incursion by the Dacians (11–10 BCE), as noted by Bosworth (1999) 14. More generally on these closures, see Lange (2009) 144–8.

[c]uria Iulia positus, quem mihi **senatum** pop[ulumq]ue Rom[anu]m dare virtutis clement[iaequ]e iustitiae et pieta[tis caus]sa testatu[m] est pe[r e]ius clupei [inscription]em.

In my sixth and seventh consulships [28–27 BCE], after I had put an end to civil war, although by everyone's agreement I had power over everything, I transferred the state from my power into the control of the Roman **senate** and people. For this service, I was named Augustus by **senatorial** decree, and the doorposts of my house were publicly clothed with laurels, and a civic crown was fastened above my doorway, and a golden shield was set up in the Julian **senate** house; through an inscription on this shield the fact was declared that the Roman senate and people were giving it to me because of my valour, clemency, justice, and piety.

The senate, then, is carefully deployed in *RG* as a locus of authority and legitimacy, surpassed in importance only by the first-citizen himself.¹⁷ In the words of Hodgson, 'Augustus' self-portrait in the *Res Gestae* is revealing: rather than foreground his power, he takes on the more respectable role of *patronus* of the grateful *res publica*'.¹⁸ The first emperor knew that his posthumous reputation depended on putting a positive spin on his relations with the senate and portraying himself as a defender of the established order.¹⁹

¹⁷ On how the language of *RG*—not least the abundant use of the possessive pronoun *meus* (fifty-nine occurrences) in a text otherwise distinguished by the frugality with which it employs adjectives, as well as of the pronouns *me* (18) and *mihi* (15)—foregrounds the centrality of Augustus for the Roman state, see Cooley (2009) 22–5.

¹⁸ Hodgson (2019) 56. Augustus' aim may reasonably be compared with that of Cicero, namely 'to set himself up as an upholder of the traditional values of the Senate and the *res publica*' (van der Blom (2010) 193).

¹⁹ This is not to say that the senate is the only source of legitimacy that is of concern to Augustus in *RG*. He also invokes the people (see above, n. 10) and the equestrian order (35.1; cf. 14.2), as well as *tota Italia* (25.2) and *uniuersi ciues* (9.2): cf. Cooley (2009) 23; Slootjes (2020) 291–2. The fragments of the inscriptions displayed outside Augustus' Mausoleum, which provided monumental biographies of his deceased relatives, reveal that the senate featured prominently here too (Strunk (2018) 222). In his autobiography Augustus would have found it significantly more difficult to maintain the illusion that he had always been a champion of the senate and established order. Not only were there in the 20s BCE—unlike in CE 14 (cf. Tac. *Ann.* 1.3.7)—many people still alive who had witnessed his contentious rise to power, the length of the work would also have called for more detailed treatment of events that *RG* passes over briefly (his first, illegal consulship; the war against Sextus Pompeius) or in silence (Perusia; the proscriptions). Despite these difficulties, his wish to invoke senatorial support is visible when he makes Cicero—the staunchest supporter of senatorial authority—recognise in a dream the young Octavian as a future reformer of empire and burier of civil war (*reformatorem imperii ... ciuiliū turbinum sepultorem*, *FRHist* 60 F 4 = Tert. *anim.* 46). For

Velleius Paterculus: When the Senate Goes Bad ...

Velleius Paterculus' *Roman History*—composed *ca.* 25–29 CE²⁰—provides an account of Augustus's involvement in the civil wars that is more detailed and follows a stricter chronology than that offered in *RG*. The historian, who may reasonably be dubbed a 'loyalist' historian in the sense that he tends to mimic the official language of the Julio-Claudian dynasty,²¹ therefore needs to address events that Augustus could leave suitably vague or pass over in silence. Velleius, that is, must explain why the young Caesar first went after the senate-supported *liberatores*, then fought alongside them against Mark Antony, switched allegiance yet again after the Battle of Mutina, participated in the subsequent triumviral proscriptions, and helped his former enemy defeat the last senatorial armies under Brutus and Cassius, before he finally took on his remaining rivals and installed himself as first citizen of Rome.²²

Velleius introduces Augustus to the political scene as a man who would restore the Roman state: *conditorem conseruatoremq̄ Romani nominis* ('founder and preserver of the Roman name', 2.60.1).²³ Treated haughtily by Mark Antony upon his return to Rome after the assassination of Julius Caesar (2.60), he is driven smoothly into the role of senatorial champion (2.61.1):

the dream, see also Suet. *Aug.* 94.9 and Plut. *Cic.* 44.2–4. Cicero is mentioned also in 60 F 5 (= Plut. *Comp. Dem.–Cic.* 3.1) and F 13 (Plut. *Cic.* 45.6). As noted by Smith (2013) 539, 'his relationship with Cicero was obviously a delicate matter for Augustus to handle in the autobiography'. On Augustus' autobiography, see also Lewis (1993) 679–82; Powell (2009); Lange (2019) 194–8. As noted by Gowing (1992) 321–2, Appian's account of the debate between L. Antonius and Young Caesar at Perusia (*BC* 5.42–5) seems to draw on the autobiography (*FRHist* 60 F 8; III.541–2); cf. Lange (2021) 350.

²⁰ Woodman (2012); cf. Kraus–Woodman (1997) 82; Cowan (2019) 240.

²¹ While recent scholarship paints a more sympathetic picture of Velleius than Italo Lana's propagandist and Sir Ronald Syme's liar, the *communis opinio* is nonetheless that he was 'a loyal citizen of the emperor' (Bloomer (2011) 99). Cf. Hillard (2011) 219: 'Velleius certainly saw *continuities*, and he was politically aligned with those who wished to *emphasise* continuities.' See also Gowing (2005) 34–48; id. (2007) 411–2; id. (2010) 252; Balmaceda (2014); Cowan (2019) 240.

²² This is not to say that Velleius is unable to employ omissions and simplifications for rhetorical purposes. As noted by Gowing (2010) 254–7, his biases are readily apparent when he appeals to the brevity of his account to justify his choice of material and as an excuse not to go into too much detail. Cf. Woodman (1977) 109 *ad* 2.96.3 and 148–9 *ad* 2.108.1.

²³ Text and translations (the latter here slightly modified) of Velleius' *Roman History* are from F. W. Shipley's Loeb edition (1924). As noted by Woodman (1983) *ad* 2.60.1, Augustus is a *conditor* also at Virg. *Aen.* 6.792 (*aurea condet saecula*), Suet. *Aug.* 7.2 (*conditorem urbis*), and Flor. 2.34.66 (*quia condidisset imperium*).

torpebat oppressa dominatione Antonii ciuitas. indignatio et dolor omnibus, uis ad resistendum nulli aderat, cum C. Caesar undeuicesimum annum ingressus, mira ausus ac summa consecutus priuato consilio **maio rem senatu pro re publica animum habuit.**

The state languished, oppressed by the tyranny of Antony. All felt resentment and indignation, but no one had the power to resist, until Gaius Caesar, who had just entered his nineteenth year, with marvellous daring and supreme success, demonstrated by his individual initiative **a courage on the state's behalf which exceeded that of the senate.**²⁴

The senatorial support for Augustus is underlined immediately, as two of Mark Antony's legions, *cognita et senatus uoluntate et tanti iuuenis indole* ('learning of the feeling of the senate and the spirit shown by this courageous youth', 2.61.2), switch sides.²⁵ Furthermore, the senate honours him with an equestrian statue and orders him to wage war against Mark Antony together with the two designated consuls with the rank of propraetor (*eum senatus honoratum equestri statua ... pro praetore una cum consulibus designatis Hirtio et Pansa bellum cum Antonio gerere iussit*, 2.61.3).²⁶

However, as soon as Mark Antony is defeated at Mutina, the senate shows its true colours and gives free rein to the 'Pompeian party' (2.62.1):

omnia ante quam fugaretur Antonius honorifice a senatu in Caesarem exercitumque eius decreta sunt maxime auctore Cicerone; sed ut recessit metus, erupit uoluntas protinusque **Pompeianis partibus** rediit animus.

²⁴ The passage owes a lot to *RG* 1.1 (see above), most notably the expression *priuato consilio* and the description of Rome as oppressed by the domination of a faction, which, as Christina Kraus points out to me, recalls also Julius Caesar's justification of his decision to leave his province and enter Italy with an army: *ut se et populum Romanum factione paucorum oppressum in libertatem uindicaret* ('to liberate myself and the Roman people from oppression by a small faction', *BC* 1.22.5, transl. Damon). Woodman (1983) *ad loc.*, noting that the young Caesar had already entered upon his twentieth year at this point, suggests—following Chishull—to emend *ingressus* to *egressus*, rendering the phrase 'shortly after his nineteenth birthday', i.e., at the beginning of his twentieth year.

²⁵ Cf. Woodman (1983) *ad loc.*: 'Here V. has interpreted events strongly in Octavian's favour (*uoluntas senatus* is an almost official phrase: Cic. *Verr.* 2.95, *Phil.* 5.41, Liv. 28.39.18, 39.47.8, etc.).'

²⁶ Velleius' reliance on *RG* (1.2–3) is again apparent: *senatus decretis honoriffi]cis in ordinem suum m[e adlegit] ... res publica n[e quid detrimenti caperet], me pro praetore simul cum consulibus pro[uidere] iussit* (Woodman (1983) *ad loc.*).

Before the defeat of Antony the senate, chiefly on the motion of Cicero, passed all manner of resolutions complimentary to Caesar and his army. But, now that their fears had vanished, their real feelings burst into the open, and **the Pompeian party** once more took heart.²⁷

The actions undertaken by Brutus and Cassius in the East, despite being in conflict with earlier senatorial decrees, are formally ratified by the senate, while Augustus' achievements are shamelessly ignored (2.62.2–5).²⁸ From this point onwards the term 'Pompeian party', previously employed to designate Pompey the Great's supporters during the civil war with Julius Caesar (cf. 2.48.4: *pro Pompei partibus, id est, ut tunc habebatur, pro re publica* ('on the side of Pompey, that is to say, as it was then regarded, on the side of the republic')), comes to refer first to those who pinned their hopes on the *liberatores* and then—with a disingenuous semantic somersault—to those who joined Sextus Pompeius after his return from Spain: *quem [S. Pompeium] senatus paene totus adhuc e Pompeianis constans partibus ... reuocatum ex Hispania ... in paterna bona restituerat et orae maritimae praefecerat* ('The senate, which still consisted almost entirely of **Pompeians** ... had recalled Sextus from Spain ... restored him to his father's property, and had entrusted to him the guarding of the coast', 2.73.2). Through association with a man described as a pirate infesting the seas with his gang of slaves and runaways (2.73), the phrase loses any remaining meaningful connotations of legitimate senatorial authority and republicanism.²⁹ The senate, in fact, fades into the background after this (there is a solitary reference to the senate house at 2.83.3), as the narrative focuses on war and intrigue among the remaining dynasts.

²⁷ I have modified Shipley's translation slightly, relying on Yardley–Barrett (2011).

²⁸ Cf. Woodman (1983) 131–2. This plotline recurs in Dio when the senate turns against the young Caesar after the Battle of Mutina (46.39–42). The senate's propensity to shift its allegiance from leader to leader is identified by Dio as decisive in undermining senatorial authority (cf. 46.34, with Rich (1989) 96–7). Unlike Velleius, however, who masks the transition from republic to empire (Gowing (2007) 311), Dio readily admits that the young Caesar stood for monarchy, while Brutus and Cassius championed the cause of freedom (47.22, 28.5, 32.1–2, 38.3, 39, 42.3–5; 53.11–12, 17–19). On Dio's portrayal of Augustus, see below, nn. 31 and 40. On Brutus and Cassius as champions of the senate and the republic, see also App. *BC* 4.69–70, 90–98, 132, 138.

²⁹ For the supporters of the *liberatores*, see 2.62.6 (*Pompeianarum partium*), 2.63.3 (*Pompeianis*), and 2.65.1 (*Pompeianae partes*). For the supporters of Sextus Pompeius, see also 2.79.4 (*Pompeianae classis*). As noted by Woodman (1983) *ad* 73.1, Velleius' character sketch of Sextus is inspired by Sallust's description of the troublemaker Cethegus at *Cat.* 1.43.3–4. Augustus too portrays Sextus as a pirate (*RG* 25.1). Cowan (2019) 243–4 argues that Velleius' continued use of the labels 'Caesarians' and 'Pompeians' implies that he thought of the two conflicts as, essentially, a single civil war; cf. Woodman (1983) 78. For a rehabilitation of Sextus as a key protagonist in the civil wars of the late republic, see Welch (2012).

Only after Mark Antony is defeated at Actium and Augustus returns to Rome is dignity restored to the senate (*senatui maiestas*, 2.89.3), whose membership is revised in a manner both fair and severe (*senatus sine asperitate nec sine seueritate lectus*, 2.89.4). With the state restored to its traditional form (*prisca illa et antiqua rei publicae forma reuocata*, 2.89.4),³⁰ the senate is soon back on the right path, justly bestowing on its saviour the title of Augustus: *quod cognomen [Augustus] illi iure Planci sententia consensus uniuersi senatus populique Romani indidit* ('This title of Augustus was deservedly given him on the motion of Plancus with the unanimous acclaim of the entire senate and the Roman people', 2.91.1). The alignment between the first *princeps* and the established order is underlined when he puts down revolts with the help of state authorities (2.91.2):

erant tamen qui hunc felicissimum statum odissent: quippe L. Murena et Fannius Caepio ... cum iniissent occidendi Caesaris consilia, oppressi **auctoritate publica**, quod ui facere uoluerant, iure passi sunt.

Yet there were those who did not like this prosperous state of affairs. For example, Lucius Murena and Fannius Caepio had entered into a plot to assassinate Caesar, but were seized by **state authority** and themselves suffered by law what they had wished to accomplish by violence.

As soon as the senate and state have been restored to their proper forms, they have in Augustus a champion and benefactor. In this way, Velleius' Augustus escapes unscathed from his apparent collisions with the senate and established order during the civil wars.

Suetonius: From 'moriendum esse' to *Ciuitas*

While Augustus and Velleius give voice to a wholly positive tradition as regards the former's relationship with the senate, Suetonius' *Divus Augustus* follows the tradition exemplified above by Seneca.³¹ The young (i.e., not yet) Augustus is both brutal—most (in)famously during his '*moriendum esse*' moment at Perugia

³⁰ Cf. Woodman (1983) *ad* 89.2–6: 'V. describes Augustus' reign as a period of "restoration" (*repraesentauerit, reuocata, restituta, redactum, reuocata, rediit*); cf. *RG* 8.5: *multa exempla maiorum ... reduxi* ('I revived many exemplary ancestral practices'). See also *RG* 8.2: *senatum ter legi* ('I revised the membership of the senate three times'). Augustus' and Velleius' predilection for verbal compounds in *re-* is noted also by Bloomer (2011) 97.

³¹ Wardle (2014) 27, 33–4. This tradition would later be adopted and adapted by Dio, whose Augustus is at times duplicitous but ultimately on the right side of history; cf. Rich (1989); id. (1990) 13–18; Reinhold–Swan (1990); Madsen (2019a); Markov (2019); Lange (2021) 348–58. On the importance of the senate in Dio, see Madsen (2019b); Schulz (2019) 312.

(*Aug.* 15.1) and during the proscriptions (27.1–2)—and opportunistic: after the Ides of March he first intends to fight Brutus and Cassius to avenge Caesar (10.1), then he joins the optimates when Mark Antony opposes him (*ad optimates se contulit*, 10.2), and finally, realising where the wind is blowing, he deserts the senatorial cause without hesitation (*causam optimatum sine cunctatione deseruit*, 12.1). Moreover, he threatens the senators with violence when they hesitate to confirm his first, illegal consulship (26.1):

consulatum uicesimo aetatis anno inuasit, admotis hostiliter ad urbem legionibus, missisque qui sibi nomine exercitus deposcerent, cum quidem cunctante senatu Cornelius centurio, princeps legationis, reiecto sagulo ostendens gladii capulum non dubitasset in curia dicere, ‘hic faciet, si uos non feceritis’.

The consulship he appropriated in his twentieth year, having positioned his legions near the city ready to attack, and sent men to demand it for him in the name of the army. However, when the senate hesitated, the centurion Cornelius, who led the delegation, threw back his cloak, pointed to the hilt of his sword and did not shrink from saying in the senate house: ‘This will do it if you don’t.’³²

In addition to representing Augustus’ rise to power as characterised by conflict with the senate, Suetonius’ account calls into question his claim, preserved in an imperial edict quoted by Suetonius himself, to have both founded and restored the state (28.2):

ita mihi saluam ac sospitem rem p. sistere in sua sede liceat atque eius rei fructum percipere quem peto, ut **optimi status** auctor dicar et moriens ut feram mecum spem mansura in uestigio suo fundamenta rei p. quae iecero.

May I so set the state safe and sound on its rightful base and reap the benefit of that achievement (which is my aim) that I may be called the author of **the best state of affairs** and that I may carry with me, whenever I die, the hope that the foundations I have laid for the state will remain in their place.³³

The edict relies on an architectural metaphor to describe Augustus’ efforts to create the best possible state of affairs, *status* (*OLD* 8: ‘the arrangement,

³² The text of Suetonius’ *Life of Augustus* is from Kaster (2016). Translations are from Edwards (2000), unless otherwise noted.

³³ Translation by Wardle (2005), slightly modified.

constitution, order (of a state or other institution)'; cf. Cic. *Rep.* 1.33: *optimum statum ciuitatis*). While *fundamenta ... iecero* points to some sort of founding act (i.e., the creation of a new state), *sistere in sua sede* and *in uestigio suo* suggest that Augustus wishes for his actions to be seen as a restoration of the old state.³⁴ Suetonius, however, immediately designates the Augustan regime solely as a *nouus status*: *fecitque ipse se compotem uoti nisus omni modo, ne quem noui status paeniteret* ('And he brought about his own wish, doing his utmost to ensure that no one regretted **the new form of government**', 28.2) Whether this is an intentional invalidation of Augustus' claim to have both founded a new and restored the old state or Suetonius has simply missed the implications of the architectural metaphor, he clearly considers the Augustan regime something qualitatively different from what came before.³⁵

Nevertheless, the overall impression of Suetonius' account—especially as the text progresses and Augustus' position becomes solidified—is that the first *princeps*, more often than not, was on the side of the senate and established order. Not only does he demonstrate concern for the state already when he musters veterans against Mark Antony (*simul in suum ac rei p. auxilium*, 10.3) and puts an end to L. Antonius' attempted revolution (*res nouas molientem*, 14.1), but he is repeatedly engaged in the suppression of riots, revolutions, and conspiracies after the civil wars (*tumultus posthac et rerum nouarum initia coniurationesque complures*, 19.1). He thwarts the designs of the slave Telephus, who had intended to attack both Augustus himself and the senate (*et ipsum et senatum adgredi*, 19.2)—a clear indication that their interests were aligned—and he works tirelessly to make sure that the soldiers cannot be tempted to revolution (*ne ... [milites] sollicitari ad res nouas possent*, 49.2).³⁶ His overall behaviour is characterised by clemency and civility (*clementiae ciuilitatisque*, 51.1), and his conduct vis-à-vis the senate is respectful: he seeks to uphold freedom of speech (54), he asks for

³⁴ On the edict, see Wardle (2005), who notes its formulation as a vow and its prayer language. See also Girardet (2000) 235, who argues that *in sua sede* is meant concretely, not metaphorically; that the city of Rome should remain where it is; cf. Ceaușescu (1981), who relates the 'bautechnischen Fachsprache' (352) to Augustus' pledge (propagandistic boast?) to maintain Rome as capital of the empire and his concomitant building programme in the city. Both options are entertained by Wardle (2005) 186–7. On the lack of evidence of Augustus ever using the phrase *restituere rem publicam*, see Millar (1973). On the tension between restoration and inauguration as a recurrent trait of the Augustan Age, see Galinsky (1996) 370–5.

³⁵ Velleius also appears to envisage an improved *status* when he describes the aftermath of the Battle of Actium: *quid ille dies terrarum orbi praestiterit, ex quo in quem statum peruenerit fortuna publica, quis in hoc transcursu tam artati operis exprimere audeat?*, 'Who is there who, in the compass of so brief a work, would attempt to state what blessings this day conferred upon the world, or to describe the change which took place in the fortunes of the state?', 2.86.1)

³⁶ As noted by Wardle (2014) 35, both the motives of the conspirators and the details of how Augustus punished them are left unspecified.

advice on how to comport himself when an accusation of poisoning is brought against his friend Nonius Asprenas (56.2–3), and he turns his friend Salvidienus Rufus over to the senate for judgement when the latter plans a revolution (*res nouas molientem*, 66.1).³⁷ The revisions of senatorial membership undertaken by Augustus, although they clearly provoked some pushback (and fear of assassination on the part of the *princeps*), are portrayed as entirely reasonable and indeed salubrious for the senate. In fact, Suetonius seems to corroborate the Velleian view (cf. above on 2.89.4) that the civil wars had led to an irresponsible increase in senate numbers and that ‘some most unworthy men’ (*quidam indignissimi*, 35.1) needed to be purged to bring the chamber back ‘to its former size and glory’ (*ad modum pristinum et splendorem*, 35.1).³⁸

Finally, senatorial approval of Augustus is expressed through a range of laudatory decrees and a unanimous offer to confer upon him the title *pater patriae*, ‘Father of the Country’ (57–8), as well as by the honours shown to him after his death (100.2–4). In short, after a chequered early career and despite his efforts to lay down the foundations of a new form of government (*noui status*, 28.2), Suetonius’ Augustus may reasonably claim to be a champion of the senate and established order.³⁹

Tacitus’ *Annals*: Augustus as an Enemy of the Senate and Established Order

While Tacitus is famously antagonistic towards Augustus, we find a version of the positive tradition preserved in the account of his funeral in *Annals* 1. Before clearing the scene for the critics of the late *princeps*, the historian allows his advocates—included among the *prudentes* (1.9.3)—to recount his rise to power and achievements (*Ann.* 1.9.3–5):

hi pietate erga parentem et necessitudine rei publicae, in qua nullus tunc legibus locus, ad arma ciuilia actum, quae neque parari possent neque haberi per bonas artes. multa Antonio, dum interfectores patris ulcisceretur, multa Lepido concessisse. postquam hic socordia senuerit, ille per libidines pessum datus sit, non aliud discordantis patriae remedium fuisse quam <ut> ab uno regeretur. non regno tamen neque dictatura, sed principis nomine constitutam rem publicam; mari Oceano aut

³⁷ On the importance of *ciuilitas* in Suetonius’ verdicts on the emperors, see Wallace-Hadrill (1982) 43–7. For Augustus as respectful towards senate and senators, see also Tiberius’ words at Dio 56.40.3.

³⁸ The revisions are mentioned by Augustus at *RG* 8.2: *senatum ter legi*.

³⁹ On Suetonius’ portrait of Augustus as fundamentally positive, see Wardle (2014) 32, 35, 39.

amnibus longinquis saeptum imperium; legiones prouincias classes, cuncta inter se conexas; ius apud ciues, modestiam apud socios; urbem ipsam magnifico ornatu; pauca admodum ui tractata quo ceteris quies esset.

The former said that, because of devotion to his parent and the requirements of the state, in which at the time there had been no place for law, he had been driven to civil war, which could be neither prepared for nor maintained by good behaviour. He had made many concessions to Antonius while avenging himself on the killers of his father, many to Lepidus; after the latter had aged from apathy, and the former had been sunk by his lusts, there had been no other remedy for his disaffected fatherland than that it be ruled by one man. Yet it was neither on kingly rule nor dictatorship but on the name of 'princeps' that the state had been based. The empire was cordoned by the sea of Ocean or distant streams; legions, provinces, fleets, everything was interconnected; there was legality among citizens, restraint among allies; the city itself was magnificent in its apparel; just a few things had been handled by force to ensure peace for the rest.⁴⁰

While superficially a positive interpretation of Augustus' political career—and despite the verbal parallels and similarities in content with *RG*—this version is significantly less confident in tone than those of the *princeps* himself and Velleius. It reads more as apologia than as panegyric: there was no room for legality (i.e., he committed illegal acts), he was forced to enter the civil wars (i.e., he participated in the killing of fellow Romans), it was impossible to survive through good behaviour (i.e., he behaved badly), he unwillingly set up a one-man rule (i.e., he became a de-facto monarch), and some things were indeed handled by force. In the words of N. P. Miller, 'the short, jerky sentences at the end of the chapter, although containing material for a very adequate defence of Augustus, have rather an air of desperation, as if the speakers were clutching at straws which could never be formed into a raft'.⁴¹

⁴⁰ The text of *Annals* is from Heubner (1994). Translations are from Woodman (2004), unless otherwise noted. For a similar account (and defence) of Augustus' early career, see Tiberius' funeral oration at Dio 56.35–41; cf. Swan (2004) 325–39; Burden-Strevens (2020) 306–17; Kuhn (2021); see also the overwhelmingly positive evaluation of Augustus' character and achievement at Dio 56.43–5 (with Swan (2004) 345–50), which blends the historian's own verdict with that of Augustus' contemporaries: he is praised for successfully combining monarchy with democracy and for preserving order and security, whereas his actions during the civil wars are attributed to the pressure of circumstances.

⁴¹ Miller (1969) 103; cf. Goodyear (1972) 156; Strunk (2018) 227–8. Miller also notes that the few verbs attributed to Augustus are either passive (*actum*), feeble (*concessisse*), or morally ambiguous (*ulcisceretur*), and that the seemingly harmless statement of fact carried by *principis*

Even more striking than the half-heartedness of their attempts to defend Augustus, however, is the absence of the senate. Given that the account is clearly inspired by *RG*—O’Gorman even suggests that we should imagine the speakers looking at the inscription, recently set up outside Augustus’ mausoleum⁴²—and that the senate plays such an active role in that text, this emphasis by omission gives the impression that not even Augustus’ advocates found it credible to insist that he had enjoyed senatorial support; that it was an illusion that it was longer possible, or no longer made any sense, to uphold.

The account of Augustus’ political career that Tacitus puts into the mouths of his critics is a *tour de force* of rhetorical confutation. Every single argument presented by Augustus’ supporters is dismantled.⁴³ The red thread of the passage is its consistent portrayal of the first *princeps* as an enemy of the senate and established order (*Ann.* 1.10.1–4):

dicebatur contra: pietatem erga parentem et tempora rei publicae obtentui sumpta: ceterum cupidine dominandi concitos per largitionem ueteranos, paratum ab adulescente priuato exercitum, corruptas consulis legiones, simulatam Pompeianarum gratiam partium; mox ubi decreto patrum fasces et ius praetoris inuaserit, caesis Hirtio et Pansa, siue hostis illos, seu Pansam uenenum uulneri adfusum, sui milites Hirtium et machinator doli Caesar abstulerat, utriusque copias occupauisse; extortum inuito senatu consulatum, armaeque quae in Antonium acceperit contra rem publicam uersa. proscriptionem ciuium, diuisiones agrorum ne ipsis quidem qui fecere laudatas. sane Cassii et Brutorum exitus paternis inimicitiis datos, quamquam fas sit priuata odia publicis utilitatibus remittere. sed Pompeium imagine pacis, sed Lepidum specie amicitiae deceptos; post Antonium, Tarentino Brundisinoque foedere et nuptiis sororis inlectum, subdolae adfinitatis poenas morte exsoluisse. pacem sine dubio post haec, uerum

nomine is undermined by the additional meaning of *nomen* as pretext or excuse: ‘the lurking idea of *soi-disant* would not be missed’ (106). To these observations we may add that the contradiction between ‘*non aliud discordantis patriae remedium fuisse quam <ut> ab uno **regeretur***’ and ‘*non regno tamen ...*’ raises questions that Augustus would surely have preferred to avoid: did he rule as a king? (cf. Strunk (2018) 227) Was kingly rule really necessary? Note also that some of his rivals are named (Mark Antony, Lepidus), that references to his age and status as a private citizen are omitted, and that the term *pax*, i.e., ‘peace secured through victories’, is avoided in favour of the more morally ambiguous *quies*, whose connotations of leisure, idleness, sleep, and relaxation situate it in the private sphere. On the meanings of *pax*, see Rich (2003); Mastino–Ibba (2012); Cornwell (2017); Lavan (2017).

⁴² O’Gorman (2009) 232–3.

⁴³ On the passage as a dismantling of the account in *RG*, see Haverfield (1912) 197–9; Goodyear (1972) 159–60; O’Gorman (2009) 232–3; Strunk (2018) 228–30. On engagement with *RG* in the *Octavia*, see Ginsberg (2017) chs 2–3.

cruentam: Lollianas Varianasque clades, interfectos Romae Varrones, Egnatios, Iullos.

It was said on the other side that devotion to his parent and the times in the state had been taken up as a screen; in reality it was in a desire for domination that veterans had been mustered by his lavishness, an army procured by a juvenile in his private capacity, a consul's legions bribed, and support for the Pompeian party pretended. Subsequently, when by a decree of the fathers he had assailed the fasces and prerogative of a praetor, after the slaughter of Hirtius and Pansa (whether they had been carried off by the enemy, or Pansa by poison poured into a wound and Hirtius by his own soldiers and by Caesar's engineering of guile) he had taken over the forces of both. The consulship had been extorted from an unwilling senate, and the arms which had been given to deal with Antonius were turned against the state. The proscription of citizens and distributions of land had not been praised even by those who did them. Of course the ends of Cassius and the Bruti had been a concession to paternal antagonisms (although it was proper to forgo private hatreds for the public good); but Pompeius had been deceived by a phantom peace, Lepidus by a display of friendship; and subsequently Antonius, enticed by the Tarentine and Brundisian treatises and by a wedding to his sister, had paid the penalty of a guileful friendship with his death. Peace there had been without doubt after that, but gory: there had been the Lollian and Varian disasters, and the killing at Rome of Varrones, Egnatii, and Iulli.

Augustus' critics start by asserting that devotion to Julius Caesar and the difficulties of the state were pretexts for his lust to rule, implying that his actions therefore cannot be excused. Then follows an impressive list of anti-senatorial and anti-establishment actions.⁴⁴ He stirs up the veterans and raises an army, not only as a young man (*adulescente*), i.e., in violation of *mos maiorum*, but also as a private citizen (*priuato*), i.e., without the approval of the senate. While *RG* proclaims proudly that Augustus had saved the republic at the age of nineteen,

⁴⁴ On the passage, see esp. Miller (1969), who offers a perspicuous literary analysis of both 1.9 and 1.10 (99–107). Few scholars have read Tacitus with a keener mind than Miller, who concludes her analysis with the following assessment: 'This is *Kunstprosa*, elaborate and complex. It demonstrates the characteristically Tacitean qualities of intensity, economy, insinuation, boldness, richness, dislocation and point' (106). On these passages, see also Shotter (1967), who notes that '[t]he main point of Augustus' critics was the unconstitutional way in which he raised an army' (173); Rich (2010) 169–71, who argues that Tacitus debunks the official line while carefully avoiding endorsement of the hostile version; Pagán (2020) 386–90, who notes that the distinction between merciless Octavian and statesmanlike Augustus is almost (cf. *adulescente* at 1.10.1) non-existent in Tacitus.

the word *adulescente* is here clearly derogatory.⁴⁵ The sense of illegality is further stressed by the claim that he engaged in bribery (*per largitionem*). He corrupts the legions of a consul, i.e., a state magistrate. He simulates friendship towards the Pompeian party, i.e., the senatorial party. He usurps—paradoxically through a decree of the senate—the *fasces* and the powers of the praetorship, i.e., a state magistracy. He slaughters Hirtius and Pansa, i.e., the senate-supported state magistrates, and seizes their forces, i.e., the forces of the senate.⁴⁶ He extorts the consulship against the will of the senate.⁴⁷ He turns the weapons that had been raised against Mark Antony (by the senate) against the state.⁴⁸ He undertakes land distributions, an activity associated with populist and anti-senatorial policy, and proscriptions, which, as noted in Tacitus' own version of the events at 1.2.1, served to eliminate his fiercest opponents among the nobility: *nullo aduersante, cum ferocissimi per acies aut proscriptione cecidissent, ceteri nobilium* ('since the most defiant had fallen in the battle line or by proscription and the rest of the nobles'). He takes vengeance on Brutus and Cassius, who, as noted earlier by Tacitus himself, commanded the last state army: *Bruto et Cassio caesis nulla iam publica arma* ('after the slaughter of Brutus and Cassius there were no more republican armies', 1.2.1).⁴⁹ And, finally, he does away with a large number of senators, most notably Hirtius, Pansa, Cassius, Brutus, Sextus Pompey, Lepidus, and Mark Antony. Nor does the bloodshed end with Actium, as the newly established 'bloody peace' (*pacem ... cruentam*) includes the defeats of Lollius and Varus as well as the killing of the senators Terentius

⁴⁵ Cf. Miller (1969) 105: 'the simple juxtaposition of *adulescente priuato exercitum* presents most economically an upstart youth unconstitutionally in control of an army, and incidentally gives a nasty twist to the opening statement of Augustus' own *Res Gestae*'; cf. *RG* 1.1; Vell. Pat. 2.61.1; but also Cic. *Phil.* 3.3, 5, 7, 15, 27, which demonstrate that *adulescens* does not have to be derogatory (though Cicero surely intends it to be shocking; cf. *paene potius puer* at 3.3). On Tacitus rewriting *RG*, see also O'Gorman (2000) 19.

⁴⁶ Cf. Miller (1969) 106: 'The deaths of Hirtius and Pansa, too, are carefully presented—death in battle dismissed in three words, and the possibility of murder elaborated in a lengthy clause containing alliteration, a Virgilian echo, and an indicative verb very factual in effect.' On the Vergilian echo, see Putnam (1989).

⁴⁷ Cf. Augustus' claim in *RG* that the consulship was bestowed on him by the people (Miller (1969) 105).

⁴⁸ The phrase *arma quae in Antonium acceperit contra rem publicam uersa* ('the arms which had been given to deal with Antonius were turned against the state', *Ann.* 1.10.2) echoes—or twists—*seruorum qui ... arma contra rem publicam ceperant* ('slaves who had ... taken up arms against the state', *RG* 25). As noted by Miller (1969) 104, the word order foregrounds the 'misuse of armed force' and the word choice (*contra* instead of the more common *in*) 'concentrate[s] attention on the victim of the attack'. The uncommonness of the phrase *arma contra rem publicam accipere/capere* suggests that this is another example of Tacitus' 'contemptuous twisting of Augustus' own statements' (Miller (1965) 9).

⁴⁹ Cf. Strunk (2018) 226: 'Tacitus makes it clear that Brutus and Cassius were the last to hold legitimate public authority, *publica arma*.'

Varro Murena, Marcus Egnatius Rufus, and Iullus Antonius. While *RG*'s Augustus executes the will of the senate, this version of the first *princeps* seems set on executing the senate itself.

While it may be argued that Tacitus refrains from explicitly endorsing the negative view, the claim that Augustus consistently opposed the senate and violently uprooted the established order finds support in Tacitus' own treatment of the civil wars and their aftermath earlier in the book.⁵⁰ Firstly, after making it clear that the fiercest of the nobles were killed either in battle or during the proscriptions, the historian notes that the remainder benefited from the new state of affairs: *ceteri nobilium, quanto quis seruitio promptior, opibus et honoribus extollerentur ac nouis ex rebus aucti tuta et praesentia quam uetera et periculosa mallent* ('the rest of the nobles, each in proportion to his readiness for servitude, were being exalted by wealth and honours and, enhanced by **the revolution**, preferred the protection of the present to the perils of old', *Ann.* 1.2.1). As signalled in Woodman's translation, the term *nouae res* comes close to the modern term 'revolution'. It is, in other words, a quintessential anti-senatorial and anti-establishment activity, an activity which, as we have seen, the Velleian version of Augustus was engaged in suppressing, not spear-heading. Even Suetonius' Augustus—a rocky start notwithstanding—gradually becomes a champion of the senate and established order.

Secondly, whereas Augustus asserted in an edict that he had laid the foundations for an improved version of the old state (see above on Suet. *Aug.* 28.2), a claim to which Velleius subscribes (see above on 2.60.1, 89.4), and Suetonius, while he acknowledges the change from republican to monarchical system of government (see above on *Aug.* 28.2: *noui status*), does not portray it in terms of constitutional breakdown or revolution and repeatedly underlines Augustus' respect for the senate (see above on 54, 56.2–3, 66.1; cf. his refusal to be called *dominus* at 53.1), Tacitus speaks of a state overturned: *igitur uerso ciuitatis statu nihil usquam prisci et integri moris* ('As a result, with the state of the community overturned, nowhere did any aspect of old-time convention remain untouched', *Ann.* 1.4.1).⁵¹ The verb *uertere*, when governing an object such as a country or institution, carries the meaning 'to subvert, ruin, confound' (*OLD* 5b). It suggests radical, violent transformation. Starting with Virgil, it may also be used specifically with buildings and walls as direct objects

⁵⁰ The end of the civil wars is summarily narrated an astonishing four times in the first ten chapters of *Annals* 1: twice by Tacitus' own authorial persona (1.1.1, 2.1), once by Augustus' advocates (1.9.3–5), and once by his critics (1.10.1–4). On *Ann.* 1.1–2 as a dismantling of 'Augustus' claim that he rose to power justly and with free consent of all', see Strunk (2018) 225, 229. On the centrality of civil war in Tacitus' historiography, see Ash (2019). On the historiography of late republican civil war more generally, see Lange and Vervaet (2019b).

⁵¹ Translation adapted from Woodman (2004).

in the sense ‘to overturn, knock down’ (*OLD* 5a).⁵² The expression *uerso ciuitatis statu*, in other words, directly contradicts Augustus’ claims to have maintained the state safely in its proper place and to have laid down lasting foundations for a most excellent state.⁵³ What Augustus and Velleius claim is a state restored and Suetonius identifies as a new state, Tacitus designates a state turned upside down.⁵⁴

Conclusions

In all four accounts of Augustus’ early career here analysed—his own *Res Gestae*, Velleius Paterculus’ *Roman History* 2.59–89, Suetonius’ *Life of Augustus*, and Tacitus’ *Annals* 1.1–10—relations with the senate and established order are central to the overall evaluation of the first *princeps*. Augustus portrays himself as someone who acted on behalf of, and at the behest of the senate and established order throughout his career. In Velleius’ account he is a founder and preserver of the Roman name, and the historian is at pains to stress that his momentary altercations with the senate were caused by it being taken over by a Pompeian faction. As soon as the senate regains its true form, it has in Augustus a defender and benefactor. While Suetonius, unlike Velleius, has no qualms about relating—and offers no defence for—his moments of brutality and frequent change of sides, the Suetonian Augustus gradually becomes a

⁵² Virg. *Aen.* 2.625–6: *mihī uisum considerare in ignis | Ilium et ex imo uerti Neptunia Troia*. Cf. Manil. 4.563: *altaque nunc statuet nunc idem moenia uertet*; Sen. *Ep.* 91.11: *non tantum manu facta labuntur, nec tantum humana arte atque industria posita uertit dies*.

⁵³ As noted by O’Gorman (2000) 19–21, the echo of Thucydidean *stasis* (3.82.3–4) suggests that there is still discord in the supposedly stable Augustan principate; cf. Spielberg (2017) 361: ‘Tacitus’ *uersus status* implies that far from resolving the *stasis* of the late Republic, Augustus institutionalized it’. The expression—now with *conuertere* (‘overturn completely’, with the prefix *con-* expressing completeness; cf. *OLD* 6)—refers to the Augustan take-over also in *Annals* 4, when Tacitus describes the various kinds of expertise necessary to thrive under different political regimes: *igitur ut olim plebe ualida, uel cum patres pollerent, noscenda uulgi natura et quibus modis temperanter haberetur, senatusque et optimatum ingenia qui maxime perdidicerant, callidi temporum et sapientes credebantur, sic conuersa statu neque alia re Romana quam si unus imperitet, haec conquiri tradique in rem fuerit*, ‘it therefore follows that, just as formerly—that is, during the period of the plebs’ influence or when the fathers were a force—it was necessary to know the nature of the public and in what ways their restraint might be maintained, and those who had acquainted themselves thoroughly with the instincts of senate and optimates were believed astute and wise for their times—so, **now that the state has been completely overturned** and there is no salvation for affairs other than if one man is in command, it will be apposite for these matters to have been assembled and transmitted’ (4.33.2, transl. Woodman (2004), slightly modified).

⁵⁴ Cf. Geisthardt–Gildenhard (2019) 276: ‘in his [Tacitus’] narrative, Augustus is not the culmination of the republic but its gravedigger, the arch-villain and founder of the dynastic principate.’

champion of the senate and established order. That said, Suetonius does imply that the regime instituted by Augustus was something different from what preceded it. Tacitus, finally, portrays the first *princeps* as opposed to the senate from the very beginning and relentless in his efforts to undermine the established order. In short, whereas the Tacitean Augustus is a revolutionary and those of Velleius and Suetonius are engaged in suppressing revolutions, according to Augustus himself, there was no revolution at all.

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