

THE CONCEPTION OF HISTORY IN VELLEIUS PATERCULUS' *HISTORIA ROMANA**

Abstract: This article explores the conception of history in Velleius Paterculus' historiography. It argues that this conception is, against common assumptions, by no means one-dimensional court propaganda, but the result of a subtle tension between teleology and unpredictability arising from Tiberian Rome. Approaching Velleius' *History* from this perspective allows us to deepen our understanding of both the significance of history under Tiberius and the anthropological function and value of (historiographical) narrative as a means of coming to terms with the exposure of human life.

The transition from the republic to the principate after a century of turmoil and civil war is usually considered the most crucial breaking point in Roman history—a process which is, nevertheless, not least characterised by the protagonists' effort to disguise the change as continuity. The result was a balancing act between continuity and discontinuity and a tension between the past on one side and the present and the future on the other. Velleius Paterculus has usually been read as a splendid example of a blunt court propagandist who refuses to acknowledge any disruption in Roman history through Augustus' reign and whose historiographical work helps to keep up the pretence of continuity and stability. Against these common assumptions, this paper examines Velleius' *Historia Romana* in order to show that its conception of history is more complex and rooted in the subtle tension between teleology and uncertainty in Tiberian Rome. Approaching Velleius from this angle helps to shed light on the significance of historical narrative as a means of grappling with socio-political crisis, with general uncertainty and by extension, the exposure of human life.

The argument is divided into three major parts. The first section is based on the observation that the diffuse influence of superhuman forces such as *fortuna*, *fata*, *felicitas* and the gods is more prominent and of greater importance than has commonly been acknowledged. Nevertheless, as I argue in the second section, the eulogistic attitude of Velleius' text cannot be

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denied. This is trenchantly reflected on both the level of the story and in the narrative composition: the *History* refuses to acknowledge a breaking point between the old republic and Octavian and, instead, emphasises unbroken continuity and identifies a strong teleological drive in Roman history leading to Augustus and Tiberius. In accordance with this, the narrative form prominently features compositional techniques that initiate a strong teleology and monophony. Roman history is thus conceptualised as a closed space with no room for controversies, uncertainties or open future. I think that this tension is both a product of Tiberian Rome and crucial for our understanding of the *History*. Therefore, I argue in the last paragraph that Velleius' narrative is an attempt to come to terms with the experience of political, military and ideological fragility in Tiberian Rome—and accordingly, that the view of him as a court-propagandist falls short of doing justice to his narrative.¹ By this means, the peculiarities involved in writing history under Tiberius are addressed as is also the significance of narrative as a possibility to come to grips with real life experiences.

I. Fortune, Fate, Felicities: Unpredictability and Open Future in Tiberian Rome

When it comes to explaining the causes of actions, events and developments, fortune plays a leading role in Velleius' *History*.² *Fortuna* figures prominently in more than seventy situations.³ This accumulation has stimulated a number

¹ As is well known, the praising tone and Velleius' obvious proximity to Tiberius have earned him a reception that was almost exclusively negative until well into the twentieth century, despite Dihle's optimistic article in the *RE* (1955). Lana (1952), esp. 7, does not want to classify Velleius as a historian, but as a mere propagandist who published his work on the occasion of the anniversary of the reclamation of the standards from the Parthians. Syme (1958) 200 first neglects Velleius' existence altogether, denying that anything has survived 'from the Roman historians who wrote in the hundred and thirty years' between Livy and Tacitus. Klingner (1958) 194 in a similar approach declares that Velleius can easily be dismissed. Later, Syme (1984) refers outright to 'mendacity in Velleius'. Even in 2000, Schmitzer (2000), esp. 22, still records that Velleius 'habe nicht spürbar an Renommee gewonnen' and has been seen as 'footnote material' only, while Eder (2005) 15 calls him a 'court historian'. But the last years have seen a growing interest in Velleius. The most splendid evidence is Cowan (2011), which not least builds on Woodman's commentaries (1977 and 1983), taking Velleius seriously as a historiographer, and drives forward the interest in Velleius' work that has been stimulated by scholars such as Lana, Sumner, Syme, Hellegouarc'h, Elefante, Schmitzer and Gowing (cf. Cowan (2011a) xiii).

² For a coherent treatment of explanations in Velleius, see Marincola (2011). Since he highlights Velleius' tendency to see 'the world largely in terms of individual achievements' (136) this article is partially complementary to his by focussing on the role of those forces that cannot be fully influenced by individuals.

³ See Elefante's concordance (1992).

of examinations in the second half of the twentieth century, most of which were part of larger works addressing the purpose of Velleius' text.⁴ Two major trends can be observed. On the one hand, it has been emphasised that *fortuna* is an important aspect of ancient rhetoric and that Velleius' preference in using it to explain the course of history has to be taken as an indicator of his background in rhetorical education and interest.⁵ As a result, *fortuna* is regularly reduced to a mere narrative technique that made it possible for Velleius to condense his work and stick with his frequently evoked *brevitas* and *festinatio*.⁶ On the other hand, there has been a persistent focus on the interaction between *fortuna* and *virtus*. For I. Lana, who refuses to classify Velleius as a proper historian and instead reads him as an official propagandist, the virtuous man is able to tame fortune and make her work in his favour.⁷ Unsurprisingly, this interlocking of *virtus* and *fortuna* is most splendidly embodied by Tiberius. J. Hellegouarc'h similarly lays emphasis on the association of the two terms, but tends to lay more weight on *fortuna*, the increasing importance of which is for him characteristic of Velleius' time⁸ and whose favour towards Tiberius indicates the religious dimension of the *princeps*' position in Roman history.⁹ While the reduction of Velleius' text to blunt flattery or official propaganda remains questionable, the association of virtue and fortune has been a fruitful and important observation. The virtue of outstanding characters is indeed important, which can be seen from the contrast between Pompey and Augustus or Tiberius. Pompey is not characterised as virtuous and as a result, Velleius emphasises that his fortune changed from the best to the worst.¹⁰ In the early years, Pompey's *bona fortuna* is emphasised to the point that it is suitable for his defeated enemies, Mithridates and Tigranes, to claim that it is no shame to succumb to a man so favoured by fortune (2.37.4):

⁴ Lana (1952); Hellegouarc'h (1964); Kuntze (1985) 65–70 and 226–33; Schmitzer (2000); Kober (2008).

⁵ Hellegouarc'h (1964), esp. 682; see Kober (2008) 65, esp. n. 74 for the use of *fortuna* in ancient rhetoric. See also Schmitzer (2000) 218 who refers to Velleius' 'narrative economy' and sees his *fortuna* as a *Leitmotif* (191) that is based on different traditions and tends to activate her individual characteristics as suitable for the respective argument.

⁶ On *brevitas* and *festinatio* as narrative features, see Lobur (2007), Bloomer (2011).

⁷ Lana (1952), esp. 222; see also Kuntze (1985) 69, also n. 5. Generally, this idea is characteristic of republican thought: see, e.g., Enn. *Ann.* 257: *fortibus est fortuna viris data*.

⁸ Hellegouarc'h (1964) 684 highlighting that Velleius draws and elaborates on Sallust's (et al.) conception of *fortuna*.

⁹ See also Kober (2008) who in my opinion overemphasises the controversies of Lana's and Hellegouarc'h's interpretations.

¹⁰ On Pompey, see also Kober (2008) 52–6 and Seager (2011).

non esse turpe ab eo uinci, quem uincere esset nefas, neque inhoneste aliquem summitti huic, quem fortuna super omnis extulisset.

[He claimed] there was no disgrace in being beaten by one whom it would be a sin against the gods to defeat, and there was no dishonour in submitting to one whom fortune had elevated above all others.

Achieving victory after victory, Pompey is raised to the zenith of his career through the power of fortune (2.40.4):

huius uiri fastigium tantis auctibus fortuna extulit, ut primum ex Africa, iterum ex Europa, tertio ex Asia triumpharet et, quot partes terrarum orbis sunt, totidem faceret monumenta uictoriae suae.

This man was raised by fortune to the pinnacle of his career by great leaps, first triumphing over Africa, then over Europe, then over Asia, and the number of the monuments he created in honour of his victory equalled the number of the parts of the worlds.

All over the world, Pompey erects monuments in honour of his victories. If we take the grammatical construction seriously, *fortuna* is not merely a vaguely supportive force, but the subject, the driving force in Pompey's extraordinary rise to power and success. But only a couple of years later, Pompey is deserted by his good fortune and meets his death (2.48.2):

qui si ante biennium, quam ad arma itum est, perfectis muneribus theatri et aliorum operum, quae ei circumdedit, grauissima temptatus ualetudine decessisset in Campania ... defuisset fortunae destruendi eius locus ...

Had he only died two years before the outbreak of hostilities, after the completion of his theatre and the other buildings with which he had surrounded it, at the time when he was attacked by a serious illness in Campania ..., fortune would have lost the opportunity of overthrowing him ...

The conditional clause intensifies the tragedy of Pompey's fall—if he had died earlier, he would have been spared the shame of losing his fortune. He tempted his fate and pushed his luck. Contrary to Pompey, though, Augustus and Tiberius do not lose their luck and stay successful till the end. Scholarship has, as already mentioned, identified their *virtus* as a reason for

this.¹¹ Indeed Lana is right in pointing out that only those characters that show both *fortuna* and *virtus* are able to master their challenges.¹² Capricious fortune can be tackled by a man's *virtus*, accordingly *bona fortuna* cannot be preserved without *virtus*, and *mala fortuna* can be corrected through a virtuous character. Thus Lana argues that Velleius emphasises the power of *virtus* over *fortuna*—in order to defend Rome's rise to power as merited—and not as pure luck as implied by her opponents.¹³ It is indeed intriguing that Augustus and Tiberius are presented as having it all. Octavian conquers Perugia thanks to it (2.74.4): *usus Caesar uirtute et fortuna sua Perusiam expugnauit* ('Relying on his virtue and fortune, Caesar conquered Perugia'). Tiberius is successful in commanding the troops in Germany after the death of his half-brother Drusus Claudius (2.97.4): *moles deinde eius belli translata in Neronem est: quod is sua et uirtute et fortuna administravit ...* ('The burden of this war was then entrusted to Nero: he carried it on with his customary virtue and good fortune'). And also later campaigns in Germany are under the protection of his luck (2.121.1): *eadem uirtus et fortuna subsequenti tempore ingressi Germaniam imperatoris Tiberii fuit, quae initio inerat* ('And when Tiberius entered Germany later, his virtue and fortune were the same as in the first campaign'). But a look at the depiction of the younger Scipio shows that this claim must be challenged (2.4.2):

at P. Scipio Africanus Aemilianus, qui Carthaginem deleuerat, post tot acceptas circa Numantiam clades creatus iterum consul missusque in Hispaniam fortunae virtutisque expertae in Africa respondit in Hispania.

But when P. Scipio Africanus Aemilianus, the destroyer of Carthage, was made consul for the second time after all the defeats experienced at Numantia, and when he was sent to Spain he confirmed his good fortune and virtue that he had earned in Africa.

The combination of *virtus* and *fortuna* enabled him to destroy Carthage. But it is crucial to consider the consequences of this final victory (2.1.1):

¹¹ On the association of the terms, see *TLL* VI.1195; Hellegouarc'h (1964) 680–1 for a collection of passages in Latin literature that feature these terms in combination, among these a couple of examples from Cicero showing that the association is a republican *topos*. The combination *fortuna–virtus* is also prominent in two authors close to Velleius, namely Florus and Pompeius Trogus.

¹² Lana (1952) 221–30. Other characters that are described as having both *fortuna* and *virtus* are the younger Scipio (see below), Cato (2.35) and Caesar who, however, loses his fortune along with his virtue. On Caesar, see esp. Kober (2008) and Pelling (2011).

¹³ Lana (1952) 222.

potentiae Romanorum prior Scipio viam aperuerat, luxuriae posterior aperuit: quippe remoto Carthaginis metu sublataque imperii aemula non gradu, sed praecipiti cursu a uirtute descitum, ad vitia transcursum; uetus disciplina deserta, nova inducta; in somnum a uigiliis, ab armis ad uoluptates, a negotiis in otium conuersa ciuitas.

The first of the Scipios had opened the way for the supremacy of the Romans, the second opened the way for luxury: for, when Rome was freed of the fear of Carthage, and when her rival for power was out of her way, things defected from virtue and turned towards corruption, and all this not gradually, but in headlong course; the old discipline was abandoned and gave place to the new; the state passed from vigilance to slumber, from the pursuit of arms to that of pleasure, and from duty to idleness.

The destruction of Rome's greatest rival opens the door for Rome's decline. This concept is of course conventional and had been particularly emphasised by Sallust.¹⁴ Nevertheless, it is explicitly highlighted in Velleius' *History* since it is presented to us at a very prominent place, the beginning of the second Book. Hence, we have to distinguish between Scipio's personal fate on one side and the consequences for the state on the other. Whilst Scipio indeed does not fail and whilst his name is committed to the public memory in the best way possible, the very same forces that raised him personally initiated the decline of Rome. Without overemphasising this observation one can observe that causation in history appears to be subject to unforeseeable quirks—and that *virtus* is no final remedy for that.

These examples show that a person's relationship with *fortuna* is a crucial aspect of his or her characterisation. *Fortuna*, accordingly, appears in the

¹⁴ Sall. *Cat.* 10: *sed ubi labore atque iustitia res publica crevit, reges magni bello domiti, nationes ferae et populi ingentes vi subacti, Carthago, aemula imperi Romani, ab stirpe interiit, cuncta maria terraeque patebant, saevire fortuna ac miscere omnia coepit. Qui labores, pericula, dubias atque asperas res facile toleraverant, iis otium divitiaeque optanda alias, oneri miseriaeque fuere.* ('But when our country had grown great through toil and the practice of justice, when great kings had been vanquished in war, savage tribes and mighty peoples subdued by force of arms, when Carthage, the rival of Rome's sway, had perished root and branch, and all seas and lands were open, then Fortune began to grow cruel and to bring confusion into all our affairs. Those who had found it easy to bear hardship and dangers, anxiety and adversity, found leisure and wealth, desirable under other circumstances, a burden and a curse.') The translation is that of the Loeb edition. Equivalent passages in Sallust can also be found in the *Histories*, namely 1.12 and 1.16; see Woodman (1969) 787.

shape of a *genius* or a *genius*-like force.¹⁵ But Velleius' fortune is not limited to this aspect; in accordance with the general notion of ancient *fortuna* she is not a uniform force.¹⁶ I. Kajanto's synopsis allows us to broadly distinguish between the *genius-fortuna* who is closely linked to Roman religion and *fortuna-tychē* who, under the influence of Greek myth and historiography, is fickle, capricious and a potential obstacle to human undertakings.¹⁷ Both aspects are visible in Velleius' *History* and his *fortuna* fluctuates between these two poles.¹⁸ The latter aspect is best visible from a number of aphoristic sentences highlighting the impermanence of human achievements:

... ut appareat, quemadmodum urbium imperiorumque, ita gentium nunc florere fortunam, nunc senescere, nunc interire. (2.11.3)¹⁹

... apparently, as in the case of cities and empires, so the fortunes of families flourish, wane and pass away.

quis fortunae mutationes, quis dubios rerum humanarum casus satis mirari queat? (2.75.2)

Who can adequately express his astonishment at the changes of fortune and at the mysterious vicissitude in human affairs?

rumpit interdum, interdum moratur proposita hominum fortuna (2.110.1)

Fortune sometimes breaks off, sometimes delays the execution of men's plans.

¹⁵ Velleius characterises the older Cato as a man who *semper fortunam in sua potestate habuit* (2.35.2), qualifies Augustus' *virtus et fortuna* explicitly as *sua* (2.74.4) and singles out Tiberius as *fama fortunaque celeberrimus* (2.99.1).

¹⁶ Kajanto (1981) 502–58.

¹⁷ Kajanto (1981) 530–2. The influence of *tychē* on (Roman) history is particularly highlighted by Pol. 1.4.4–5, 8.2.3–6.

¹⁸ Schmitzer (2000) 190–225 and Kober (2008) develop detailed categories to differentiate between the various aspects of *fortuna* in Velleius. These categories are unduly static, and indeed both scholars admit that in many cases a certain and exclusive attribution cannot be made. This said, I propose here to leave it as a rather simple binary division that has its general backdrop in Roman literary and material culture, and is specific enough to characterise Velleius' concept.

¹⁹ Apart from Sallust, it is mostly Polybius who draws attention to the circumstance that all constitutions and hegemonies fall in the end: see, e.g., Bispham (2011) 44.

The frequency of these passages draws our attention to the unpredictability of human fate.²⁰ This is intensified through the circumstance that *fortuna* is not the only supernatural, superhuman force at work in Velleius. Apart from fortune, it is also *fata*, *felicitas*, and the gods—both specific ones and the anonymous ‘god’—that influence the course of events. The multitude of fateful influences on human life strongly emphasises the unpredictable and fickle nature of history—even more so if we consider this passage (2.57.3):

sed profecto ineluctabilis fatorum uis, cuiuscumque fortunam mutare constituit, consilia corrumpit.

But verily the power of destiny is inevitable; it confounds the plans of him whose fortune it has determined to reverse.

In his typical *sententia*-like manner, Velleius reflects on the inevitability of fate when depicting the assassination of Caesar. Caesar's famous fortune is subject to the power (violence) of the inevitable *fata* which can even change and corrupt fortune itself. The capriciousness of fortune comes even more to the surface if we consider the context of this sentence. Velleius reports that Caesar had received many warnings trying to keep him from leaving the house and falling victim to an attempt on his life. This report is ended with the above sentence: ‘But verily the power of destiny is inevitable; it confounds the plans of him whose fortune it has determined to reverse.’ Even prophecies and human insight in the supernatural via dreams and haruspices cannot prevent Caesar's death. Obviously, there are superhuman forces at work that cannot be influenced and that in turn influence human life and the course of history.²¹ Similarly, and with verbal allusions to the earlier passage, Varus' disastrous defeat by the Germans is linked with the fateful intervention of the *fata* and the god (2.118.4):

²⁰ Velleius similarly lays emphasis on the fickleness of fortune at war. Accordingly, fortune was capricious to the point that Perses of Macedonia (160 BC) won wide parts of Greece in the battles with the Romans (1.9.1: *Nam biennio adeo varia fortuna cum consulibus conflixerat, ut plerumque superior fuerit magnamque partem Graeciae in societatem suam perduceret*). She influenced the course of the Italic wars and claimed the lives of both consuls (2.16.4: *tam uaria atque atrox fortuna Italici belli fuit*). Similarly, the war in Sicily between Octavian and Sextus Pompeius (38–36 BC) was fought with changing fortune (2.79.3: *ea patrando bello mora fuit, quod postea dubia et interdum ancipiti fortuna gestum est*). These examples are only three out of many. The fickle influence of fortune at war is also a predominant aspect of Livian *fortuna* (Liv. 9.17.3): see Kuntze (1985) 227.

²¹ This observation forms the contrast to those forces—the gods—that can be addressed through prayers and *vota* and are, to a certain extent, responsive. See the examination of the prayer in the end of the *History* (below).

sed praeualebant iam fata consiliis omnemque animi eius aciem praestrinxerant: quippe ita se res habet, ut plerumque cuius fortunam mutaturus deus, consilia corrumpat efficiatque quod miserrimum est, ut, quod accidit, etiam merito accidisse uideatur et casus in culpam transeat.

But now the influence of fate was dominating his plans and had impaired the sharpness of his mind: for, it is usually the case that the god perverts the plans of those whose fortune he is about to change and—which is the worst part of it—brings it to pass that that which happens by chance seems to be deserved and that accident passes over into culpability.

Velleius explicitly closes the passage by noting that luck and accidents are too easily understood as the consequence of human decisions and deeds—and thus explicitly points to the power of fate and luck on history. Let me close this section with one last example from the very end of the *History*. While classicists have not tired of reprehending Velleius for his panegyric ending, the surprisingly dark tones in the end of the work have remained under-examined.²² Intriguingly, the last part of the eulogist section focuses on the manifold calamities Tiberius had to experience recently, including the deaths of his son Drusus and adopted son Germanicus. After all the emphasis on Tiberius' virtue and his position on top of Roman history,²³ the section about 'thwarted hopes' comes as a surprise.²⁴ And even more so because Velleius introduces this section with the words *audeo cum deis queri* ('I may dare to make this plaint to the gods', 2.130.3). He accuses the gods of not treating Tiberius in accordance with his outstanding achievements. In a split-second, Tiberius metamorphoses from the virtuous master of fortune into the sport of fate and the gods. And Velleius' solution to this is ending his *History* with a prayer to the gods asking for Tiberius' and Rome's welfare:

uoto finiendum uolumen est. Iuppiter Capitoline, et auctor ac stator Romani nominis Gradiue Mars, perpetuorumque custos Vesta ignium, et quicquid numinum hanc Romani imperii molem in amplissimum terrarum orbis fastigium extulit, uos publica uoce

²² Bispham (2011), esp. 44–5, is an exception when he explicitly draws our attention to the circumstance that Velleius does not present us with a 'Vergilian happy ending' and assuredly eternal domination of Rome.

²³ Hellegouarc'h (1964) 678 on Tiberius' reign: 'qui nous est présenté comme le terme idéal de l'évolution de l'histoire romaine'.

²⁴ Also acknowledged by Woodman (1977) 272.

obtestor atque precor: custodite servate protegite hunc statum, hanc pacem, <hunc principem>, eique functo longissima statione mortali destinate successores quam serissimos, sed eos quorum ceruices tam fortiter sustinendo terrarum orbis imperio sufficiant quam huius suffecisse sensimus, consiliaque omnium ciuium aut pia ***

Let me end my book with a prayer. O Jupiter Capitolinus and Mars Gradivus, author and guarantor of the Roman name, Vesta, guardian of the eternal fire, and all divinities who elevated the influence of the Roman empire to the highest point on earth, on you I call and to you I pray with public voice: guard, preserve and protect this present state of things, this peace and this *princeps*; after he has fulfilled his duty in the longest period ever granted to mortals, grant him successors until the latest time, but successors whose shoulders are as strong in sustaining the world empire as we have found his to be; and the plans of all citizens ***

Velleius prays for successors who are worthy of Tiberius' heritage and who are capable of shouldering their duties. This statement in particular demonstrates the deep entanglement of individual capacity and the influence of superhuman forces: apparently, Tiberius' influence is not enough to secure Rome's future. To guarantee a successful succession, Tiberius is not sufficient—a *uotum* to the gods by the author is necessary.²⁵ By ending with a triple complex of eulogy, thwarted hopes, and invocation of the gods, Velleius' work reveals a conception of history in which the course of things arises from a subtle, but deep tension between strong individual impact and inevitable fate. Velleius' way of responding to this tension conforms to the economy of religious communication: he addresses a prayer to the gods.²⁶ Whether or not this prayer will be successful remains open. The *uotum* is pending and as ambiguous as the end of the *History*.

History is fluctuating between the continuous flow of teleology and capricious fortune whilst neither virtuous behaviour nor religious/ritual observance can finally determine the course of things. E. Kramer and E. Bispham drive this point home similarly. They identify the succession of empires, their rise and decline, as the core feature of the *History* and highlight that, hence, Rome's power also is seen as fragile and (potentially) impermanent.²⁷ Velleius' conception of history plays with this tension,

²⁵ See also Cowan (2011) xii.

²⁶ I thank I. Goldenhard for alerting me to the difference between supernatural forces within and beyond the limits of the economy of religious communication and reciprocity.

²⁷ Kramer (2005), with a focus on the first book; Bispham (2011) 44–5. One of the most trenchant examples is the allusion to Appian and Polybius (App. *Rom.* 132): 'Scipio,

alternately favouring one over the other, thus reminding us of the open future Rome is facing and confronting us with the exposure and fragility which is ever-present in the lives of humans and states alike.²⁸

II. Teleological History

Although I have so far emphasised the role of *fortuna*, Velleius' insistence on presenting Roman history in a bright light and as culminating in his own time cannot be denied. The influences of fortune are embedded in a strongly teleological narrative which is visible both from its periodisation and the narrative form.

I. Continuity in Roman History

The first aspect that creates continuity and teleology in Velleius' *History* is its periodisation. Octavian's victory in the battle of Actium is commonly seen as an event of symbolic importance, flagging the moment when, along with the civil wars, the Roman republic came to an end and made room for the establishment of a new monarchic government. Tacitus famously begins his *Annales* with a clear indication of this breaking point between the *libera res publica* and the authoritative system of government in the wake of Octavian's rise to power (*Ann.* 1.3–4):

domi res tranquillae, eadem magistratum vocabula; iuniores post Actiacam victoriam, etiam senes plerique inter bella civium nati: quotus quisque reliquus qui rem publicam vidisset? igitur verso civitatis statu nihil usquam prisci et integri moris: omnes exuta

beholding this spectacle, is said to have shed tears and publicly lamented the fortune of the enemy. After meditating by himself a long time and reflecting on the rise and fall of cities, nations, and empires, as well as of individuals, upon the fate of Troy, that once proud city, upon that of the Assyrians, the Medes, and the Persians, greatest of all, and later the splendid Macedonian empire, either voluntarily or otherwise the words of the poet escaped his lips: "The day shall come in which our sacred Troy | And Priam, and the people over whom | Spear-bearing Priam rules, shall perish all." Being asked by Polybius in familiar conversation (for Polybius had been his tutor) what he meant by using these words, he said that he did not hesitate frankly to name his own country, for whose fate he feared when he considered the mutability of human affairs.' Strong allusions of this kind emphasise the proximity of Velleius' *fortuna* to Polybian *tychē* and remind us of the impermanence of human affairs and, subsequently, the inevitable circle of empires rising and falling.

²⁸ This reading confirms the thesis of Grethlein (2010a), esp. 1–12, that our engagement with history (in all kinds of genres) is ultimately an attempt to balance contingency.

aequalitate iussa principis aspectare, nulla in praesens formidine, dum Augustus aetate validus seque et domum in pacem sustentavit.

All was calm at home, the magistrates carried their old names; the younger men had been born after the victory of Actium, and even most of the older ones during the civil wars: how many were left who still had seen the republic? The state was thus turned into its opposite and of the old, unspoilt Roman character not a trace lingered: after equality was abolished, everyone expected the orders of the *princeps*, for now without fear, as long as Augustus, strong at his age, upheld himself and his house in peace. (my translation)

Tacitus de-masks the subtlety of the Roman revolution by drawing our attention to the tension between the splendid surface and reality. The return to republican conditions is nothing more than the conservation of the traditional labels whilst *priscus et integer mos* and *aequalitas* are undermined.²⁹ The alleged turn to the better is thus put into perspective when he highlights that hardly anyone in Rome is qualified to form an opinion about the developments: almost none of Augustus' contemporaries had seen the free republic with their own eyes, but only the perverted republic of the civil wars. The 'mercy of late birth' is inverted to a tragedy; it is fatally skewing the picture of Augustus' role and thus taints historical judgement. Tacitus' depiction of the 'Roman revolution' proved to be very influential until modern times and forms a stark contrast to Velleius, whose sketch of the developments in the wake of Actium come to us all the more surprisingly (2.89.3):

finita uicesimo anno bella ciuilia, sepulta externa; reuocata pax, sopitus ubique armorum furor; restituta uis legibus, iudiciis auctoritas, senatui maiestas; imperium magistratum ad pristinum redactum modum; tantummodo octo praetoribus adiecti duo. prisca illa et antiqua rei publicae forma reuocata.

After twenty years, the civil wars were brought to an end, foreign wars were suppressed, peace was restored, the turmoil of wars ever-present was laid to rest; validity was restored to the laws, authority to the courts and majesty to the senate; the power of the magistrates was reduced to its former limits, besides that two praetors were added to

²⁹ Similarly, Suetonius and Cassius Dio acknowledge the breaking point in Roman history. The latter refers explicitly to the establishment of a monarchy under Augustus: see Suet. *Aug.* 28.1 and Dio 53.17.1.

the eight that already existed. The former and traditional nature of the republic was restored.

As E. Cowan says, ‘Velleius saw continuity where later authors only saw radical change’.³⁰ The mere accumulation of the prefix ‘re-’—*revocare*, *restituere*, *redagere* and further *repraesentare* (2.89.2) and *redire* (2.89.4)—strongly directs our perception of the nature of the Roman political system after Actium. Octavian’s steps are not seen as the establishment of a new order or a new government, but as the restoration of the traditional state that had been distorted through the earthquakes of civil war. The explicit hint to individual institutions that were subject to post-Actium restorations leaves no doubt that the ‘new order’ is nothing less than the old *libera res publica* whose core elements, *leges*, *senatus*, *magistratus*, can finally return to their former strength and prosperity.³¹ The republic never ceases to exist.³² And Velleius even goes one step further. His depiction of Tiberius makes clear that Augustus has only been one step in a teleological development that is to be complemented by the accomplishments of his successor (2.126.2–5):

reuocata in forum fides; summota e foro seditio, ambitio campo, discordia curia, sepultaeque ac situ obsitae iustitia aequitas industria ciuitati redditae; accessit magistratibus auctoritas, senatui maiestas, iudiciis grauitas ...

Trust has been restored in the forum, strife has been banished from the forum, canvassing for office from the Campus Martius, discord from the senate-house; justice, equity and industry, long buried in oblivion, have been restored to the state; the magistrates have regained their authority, the senate its majesty, the courts their dignity ...

³⁰ Cowan (2011) x.

³¹ Cf. Sattler (1960) 40–1: ‘Gesetze, Gerichte, Senat und Magistrat sind diejenigen Institutionen, welche nach der traditionellen Auffassung das Gemeinwesen zu einer Republik machen, ohne sie gibt es keine Republik’; Woodman (1983) 252, who also brings in a parallel from Cicero (*Red. Sen.* 34) that bolsters Sattler’s claim.

³² This observation has been trenchantly made by Gowing (2005) 44–8. In his analysis of Cicero’s death, he shows how Velleius constructs his accusation of Antony as Ciceronian *Philippics*. This subtle intertextual reference along with the explicit statement that Cicero will stay alive in Rome’s memory makes clear that the republic has not come to an end, but stays alive just as does her most distinguished and symbolic representative. See also Kraus (2000) 439–42 who identifies Cicero’s *Philippic* speeches as the landmark and breaking point in Roman oratory: ‘They were the last time a political orator spoke so publicly, and so freely, on a matter of state importance: they are, in short, the last example of truly outspoken republican oratory.’

Velleius ends his Tiberian narrative with a synoptic appraisal of his accomplishments which picks up on some of the elements also given in the Augustan narrative and elaborates on them. The magistrates, the senate and the courts are brought in again, but now supplemented with the restoration of financial security. The explicit hint at the *forum*, the *campus Martius* and the *curia*, the traditional meeting places of the *comitia tributa*, the *comitia centuriata* and the senate, draws our attention to the institutional pillars of the republic.³³ Furthermore, the terms *seditio*, *ambitio*, and *discordia* refer us to the conditions that are conventionally seen as having initiated the fall of the republic (cf. Sall. *Cat.* 9–12). Besides, his principate also restores peace and security in the realm of private life for each and every Roman, a development that is already obvious when Tiberius is made Augustus' successor (2.103.5):

tum refulsit certa spes liberorum parentibus, uiris matrimoniorum, dominis patrimonii, omnibus hominibus salutis, quietis, pacis, tranquillitatis, adeo ut nec plus sperari potuerit nec spei responderi felicius.

On that day there sprang up once more in parents the assurance of safety for their children, in husbands for the sanctity of marriage, in owners for the safety of their property, and in all men the assurance of safety, order, peace, and tranquillity; indeed, it would have been hard to entertain larger hopes, or to have them more happily fulfilled.

The restorations in private and public life put the Tiberian narrative in parentheses. *Refulsit certa spes*—hope and confidence are brought back in all major fields of private life and especially the trust in a secure future for the next generation, for marriage and patrimony re-consolidates the *familia* as a central institution in Roman society. The emphasis on traditional Roman values demonstrates the continuity reinstalled in Roman history. The fourfold emphasis on peace—*salus*, *quies*, *pax*, *tranquillitas*—sharpens the contrast, however, between Tiberian Rome and the upheavals of civil war in the last century. When Velleius thus stresses that there was nothing more to hope for after Tiberius had been made the new *princeps*, Tiberius' position at the climax of Roman history, following and even surpassing Augustus, is evident. The use of the verb *refulgere* bolsters this impression: the *princeps*' reign hits Rome as a bright light and illuminates the remains of the dark age of civil war. Hence, it does not come as a surprise when Tiberius is named *princeps optimus* in the final acknowledgement (2.126.5; see quotation above).

³³ Cf. Woodman (1977) 237.

2. Narrative Form: The Construction of Tense and Voice

This emphasis on teleology and continuity is furthermore encoded in the narrative form of the *History*. The focus on the narrative construction of (ancient) historiography has been continuously influential in the past decades.³⁴ As for our interest in the narrative construction of the *History*, it is possible and apt to refer back to the text since it is the narrator Velleius himself who engages in narratological deliberations (1.3.2–3):

quo nomine mirari convenit eos, qui Iliaca componentes tempora de ea regione ut Thessalia commemorant. quod cum alii faciant, tragici frequentissime faciunt, quibus minime id concedendum est; nihil enim ex persona poetae sed omnia sub eorum qui illo tempore uixerunt dicenda sunt.

... paulo ante Aletes, sextus ab Hercule, Hippotis filius, Corinthum, quae antea fuerat Ephyre, claustra Peloponnesi continentem, in Isthmo condidit. neque est quod miremur ab Homero nominari Corinthum; nam ex persona poetae et hanc urbem et quasdam Ionum colonias iis nominibus appellat quibus uocabantur aetate eius, multo post Ilium captum conditae.

On this account, one has a right to be surprised about those poets who write about the time of the Trojan War and call this region Thessaly. Although this is a common practice, it is, surprisingly, most frequent among the tragic poets, for whom actually least allowance should be made. For nothing must be uttered by the poet himself, but only by his characters, who lived in the time referred to.

... Shortly before, Aletes, the son of Hippotes and the sixth to come after Hercules, founded upon the Isthmus the city of Corinth, formerly known as Ephyre, the key to the Peloponnesus. There is no need for surprise that it is called Corinth by Homer, for it is in his person as poet that he calls this city and some of the Ionian colonies by the names which they had in his day, although they were founded long after the capture of Troy.

³⁴ The interest in the narrative construction of ancient historiography is not least rooted in both classical scholarship on rhetoric in historical writing (see e.g. Woodman (1988)) and the increasing influence of narratology. For a short outline of the history of narratology in the context of Classical Studies, see, e.g., Grethlein and Rengakos (2009) 1–11. The subtitle of their volume on narratology and interpretation, ‘the content of narrative form in ancient literature’ furthermore alludes to White’s influential book, *The Content of the Form* (1987).

According to this reflection, not every narrative mode is appropriate for every text type or genre. While the epic bard is allowed to see and tell the past from his remote vantage point, *ex persona poetae*, the dramatist has to focus on the experiences of his characters who are thus the only ones through whose eyes the story may be seen. Since our narrator is obviously aware of these different concepts and the different perspectives the *poeta* can adopt, an analysis of his narrative perspective gives us an important insight into his conception of history and his self-conception as a historiographer. As the preface is unfortunately lost, we lack a coherent programmatic account.³⁵ Nevertheless, there are a couple of passages that allow us a glimpse (1.14.1):

cum facilius cuiusque rei in unum contracta species quam diuisa temporibus oculis animisque inhaereat, statui priorem huius uoluminis posterioremque partem non inutili rerum notitia in artum contracta distinguere ...

Inasmuch as a condensed picture of related facts makes more impression on the eye and mind than one that gives these facts separately in their chronological sequence, I have decided to separate the first part of this work from the second by a useful and confined summary ...

Velleius downplays the importance of a strictly chronological order in favour not only of thematic treatment,³⁶ but especially of a coherent overall image, *in*

³⁵ Possible reconstructions of the preface are still subject to controversial discussions, but have to be bracketed here for the benefit of a coherent argument. See, e.g., Rich (2011) 73–6 for a reconstruction of the programmatic account of the preface. Associated with this is also the question of the *History's* starting point, recently surveyed in detail by Kramer (2005). He discusses the most common assumption that Velleius began with the Trojan War, as also argued by Sumner (1970) 281, Starr (1981) 162–3 and Elefante (1997) 23–6 and (2011) 59. Assuming that Velleius' two books were of approximately the same scope and emphasising his repeated reaching out to universal history, Kramer suggests, though, that the starting point of the history was the foundation of the Assyrian Empire. For this claim, see also Rich (2011) 78 who highlights that Nicolaus of Damascus and Pompeius Trogus also started their universal histories with the Assyrian Empire. For objections, see Bispham (2011) 19 with 48 n. 21, referring to Pitcher (2009). However, Schmitzer (2000) 46–56 and Wiseman (2010) argue that Velleius began his *History* with Hercules and conclude that the emphasis on Orestes and Hercules combined with the absence of Aeneas must be read as a conception of history which consciously distances itself from the Julian concept, focussing on Aeneas and the Trojan roots of Rome.

³⁶ Perhaps most important among Velleius' thematic digressions are the paragraphs on literary history (Homer and Archilochus in 1.5.1–3; Hesiod in 1.7.1; Greek drama and philosophy in 1.16.1–5), which have garnered a comparatively great deal of attention. See Schöb (1908), Della Corte (1937) 154–9, Gustin (1943), Noé (1982) 511–23, and most

unum contracta species. Roman history is a condensed and coherent picture drawn in retrospect and particularly apt to sink deeply into memory.³⁷ The mimetic depiction of individual events ‘as they truly happened’ and as they were experienced seems less important.³⁸ Instead he focusses on an analytical perspective, on discovering the hidden structure underlying history, and on revealing the great logical lines that span historical events that lie widely apart. So, F. Shipley is inclined to even call Velleius an epitomist who succeeded in ‘writing a *multum in parvo* of historical condensation’.³⁹ This can also be seen towards the end where Velleius relies on the *recusatio topos* to justify his summarising approach (2.89.6):

nos memores professionis uniuersam imaginem principatus eius oculis animisque subiecimus.

As regards myself, remembering my task, I have set before the eye and mind of my reader a universal picture of his principate.⁴⁰

This technical endeavour to coherence has its parallels on the level of the content as I tried to show in the first section of this article. Roman history is a ‘seamless whole’ without any indication of a break between republic and principate.⁴¹ These brief programmatic passages show that the perspective Velleius adopts as a narrator is first and foremost characterised by his use of retrospective knowledge about the course and outcome of historical events. This comes to the fore in two aspects of his narrative technique: the construction of tense and voice.

recently Schwindt (2000) 139–52, as well as Schmitzer (2000) 72–100. For a general discussion of the style of Velleius’ digressions, see Yardley and Barrett (2011) xxviii–xxvii.

³⁷ It is important to note that Velleius distinguishes his *History* from a proper historiographical work which he is going to write afterwards: 2.89.1, 2.99.3, 2.96.3, 2.103.4, and 2.119.1. Therefore, he sticks with *festination* (1.16.1; 2.42.1; 2.124.1; 2.108.2) and *brevitas* (2.55.1).

³⁸ Marius’ narrow escape from execution by Sulla (2.19) could be considered an example of vivid depiction.

³⁹ Shipley (1924) xvii.

⁴⁰ The declared striving for the overall picture of his object of study reminds us of Plutarch’s programme as presented in the proem to the Alexander and Caesar *Lives* (Plut. *Alex.* 1.1–3), where he emphasises that it is not Histories he is writing, but Lives, and that he will not engage in exhaustive details, but in epitome. A bit more strongly than Velleius, he presents the metaphor of pictures or portraits.

⁴¹ Gowing (2005) 34; id. (2007) 411–18; Marincola (2011) 135. Also acknowledged by Christ (2003) 79, but I would argue that his analysis of Velleius *Geschichtsbild* falls short, as he exclusively focuses on content-related guiding themes (*otium*, *luxuria*) and Velleius’ judgement of historical personalities as compared to the historiographical tradition.

A. The Construction of Tense

Let us first explore the construction of tense in the narrative. The most interesting narratological category for an examination of Velleius' *History* is narrative order, which means in G. Genette's terms the order in which the events of the story are presented in the discourse.⁴² Flashbacks (analepses) and previews (prolepses) are the most common ways of leaving the chronological order and both are used frequently in ancient historiography.⁴³ It is telling that analepses are rare in Velleius' *History*, while previews and brief anticipations are introduced into the narrative very frequently. In particular, we can observe a dense network of what I would suggest calling 'micro-prolepses'. By this, I mean previews that do not assume the shape of elaborate digressions, but of very short glimpses into the future that are nevertheless significant enough to anticipate the outcome. These micro-prolepses endow the narrative with a strong teleological edge since the openness of future developments as experienced by the historical agents is removed and replaced with a closure that appears to be the only possible and natural solution.⁴⁴ One example for this is Velleius' character sketch of Jugurtha and Marius. When referring to their youths and highlighting their conformities in character, he immediately anticipates their future rivalry (2.9.4):

quo quidem tempore iuuenes adhuc Iugurtha ac Marius sub eodem Africano militantes in iisdem castris didicere quae postea in contrariis facerent.

At the same time, Jugurtha and Marius, both still young men and serving under the same Africanus, received in the same camp the military training they would later use in opposing camps.

Sulla, later on, is referred to in a similar way (2.28.3): *primus ille, et utinam ultimus, exemplum proscriptionis inuenit*—'He was the first, and would that he had been the last, to set the precedent for proscription.' The narrator uses an elliptic optative to intervene in the story and reveals his knowledge about the subsequent civil wars and the undermining of Roman values. In these two examples, the wars could be used to emphasise the unforeseeable paths of history—in accordance with the strong *fortuna*-motif—as well as to create

⁴² Genette (1980) 33.

⁴³ See, e.g., the contributions by Rood (2007a, b, c, and d), Hidber (2007a and b) and van Henten-Huitink (2007) on time and narrative construction in historiography.

⁴⁴ For a comprehensive discussion of experience and teleology as the two antipodes of historiographical narrative, see Grethlein (2013).

tension for the reader. But the anticipation of Marius' and Jugurtha's war and of the praxis of proscription makes the developments appear as predetermined. Things develop for the worse without any alternative—a teleological course that must make Augustus' and Tiberius' reestablishment of the *libera res publica* particularly radiant. This interpretation can be backed up by another striking example of a micro-prolepsis (2.36.1):

consulatus Ciceronis non mediocre adiecit decus natus eo anno diuus Augustus abhinc annos LXXX<X>II, omnibus omnium gentium uiris magnitudine sua inducturus caliginem.

No slight prestige was added to Cicero's consulship by the birth of Divus Augustus in that year, ninety-two years ago; Augustus who was destined to overshadow all men of all races by his greatness.

The passage is framed by a depiction of Catiline's conspiracy and of Pompey's war against Mithridates. And amidst this turmoil of inner and foreign wars, Augustus is faded into the narrative; strikingly, not with his birth name as Octavian, but with his later honorific title. This anachronistic terminology anticipates Augustus' future position. There is a similar example where Augustus' closing of the Temple of Janus and his role as a peace maker is anticipated (2.38.3):

immane bellicae ciuitatis argumentum quod semel sub regibus, iterum hoc T. Manlio consule, tertio Augusto principe certae pacis argumentum Ianus geminus clausus dedit.

It is strong proof of the warlike character of our state that only three times did the closing of the Temple of the double-faced Janus give proof of safe peace: once under the kings, a second time in the consulship of the Titus Manlius just mentioned, and a third time under the principate of Augustus.

Both times Velleius anachronistically uses the name 'Augustus' when he speaks about his birth, an approach he had, as we have seen earlier, criticised with regards to tragedy, but endorsed for epic. Once more, history is thus explicitly seen as a picture sketched in retrospect rather than as contingent experiences made by historical agents. By this means, Velleius re-configures the civil wars and turns the experience of fragility and uncertainty facing an open future into a teleological process with Augustus (and later Tiberius)

floating above the scene like an omnipresent *deus ex machina* who would finally guarantee the happy ending.⁴⁵

The teleological construction of history is also visible from the frequent and strong deixis to the narrator's own time which takes various forms. Among the most important indicators is the dedication of the *History* to the consul and Velleius' fellow aristocrat Vinicius.⁴⁶ This dedication involves a number of explicit references to Vinicius' consulship and is furthermore accompanied by an exhaustive use of adverbs such as *abhinc*, *adhuc*, *nunc*, and *hodie*.⁴⁷ Although references to the writer's present are not uncommon in ancient historical writing, Velleius' extensive use is unique.⁴⁸ The adverb *abhinc* is especially striking since it is regularly used to date events by counting back from the narrator's own present and to thus put past events in a relative chronological order. So Carthage, for example, is said to have been destroyed *abhinc annos centum septuaginta tris* (1.12.5 and 2.38.2) and the second Punic War is dated *abhinc annos ducentos quinquaginta* (2.38.4 and 2.90.2), a dating scheme for which Bispam coined the term 'before presents'.⁴⁹ It is, of course, well known that neither the Greeks nor the Romans created an absolute chronology in the manner of the BC/AD axis.⁵⁰ Accordingly, events are not placed in a pre-existing time scheme, but are interrelated with one another in order to construct a relative time frame 'within which the events have meaning'.⁵¹ Nothing else is done in Velleius' *History*, but the events he chooses to establish his relative chronology and the scheme he develops to map the past are exceptional. That Velleius 'devotes a good deal of space to

⁴⁵ The link to the earlier closures of the temple, especially to Titus Manlius, Livy's paradigmatic republican hero, furthermore emphasises the continuity and disguises the crucial political caesura induced by Augustus. The micro-prolepses thus help in the composition of a narrative that emphasises the teleological and continuous character of Roman history.

⁴⁶ The *History* is one of very few historiographical works with a dedication. Among these are also Hirtius' continuation of Caesar's *Gallic War* as well as Coelius Antipater's and Claudius Quadrigarius' works; see Rich (2011) 75.

⁴⁷ There are 25 *abhinc*-constructions, nine mentions of *hodie* and three of *adhuc*. *Nunc* is used once in this sense.

⁴⁸ Nevertheless, a systematic use of present-time referencing earlier than Velleius' is only evident from epigraphic sources, namely the Parian Marble and the so called *Chronikon Romanum*: see Rich (2011) 82–3. In this context, Rich also discusses the possibility that Velleius' model for his chronological scheme might have been Atticus' *Annales* which are likely to have made similar use of Cicero's consulship—and which can plausibly be assumed to have served as an important model for Velleius' *uolumen*.

⁴⁹ 'Before presents' in Bispam (2011) 21.

⁵⁰ Feeney (2007) 15; see also *ibid.* (2009) for a summarising discussion.

⁵¹ Feeney (2007) 15, referring to Wilcox (1987) 9, 13, 74.

chronological information' has often been noticed.⁵² The points of reference in this relative chronology change and are often applied in combination; but it is the narrator's present, either referred to by an *abhinc*-construction or by Vinicius' consulship, that forms the most important benchmark. How important Vinicius' term of office is can be seen from the circumstance that it is used to chronologically fix an institution which itself commonly serves as a major anchor in the Greek and also Roman time scheme, the Olympics (1.8.1):

is eos ludos [i.e. Olympios] mercatumque instituit ante annos quam tu, M. Vinici, consulatum inires DCCCXXIII.

He established the Games and the concourse eight hundred and twenty-three years before you, M. Vinicius, assumed the consulship.

After he has established the Olympics as a fixed point, he uses them to date Rome's foundation (1.8.4):

sexta olympiade, post duo et uiginti annos quam prima constituta fuerat, Romulus, Martis filius, ultus iniurias aui Romam urbem Parilibus in Palatio condidit. a quo tempore ad uos consules anni sunt DCCLXXXI; id post Troiam captam annis CCCCXXXVII.

In the sixth Olympiad, twenty-two years after the first establishment of the Olympics, Romulus the son of Mars had avenged the wrongs of his grandfather and founded the city of Rome on the Palatine, on the day when the festival of the Parilia was held. From this time to your consulship it is seven hundred and eighty-one years; this took place four hundred and thirty-seven years after the fall of Troy.

Intriguingly, the foundation legend is only touched upon very briefly and we are not given more than some key data. Velleius' focus is different. Altogether he gives four fixed points in relation to which Rome's foundation can be situated, the current Olympiad, the foundation of the Olympic Games, Vinicius' magistracy and the sack of Troy⁵³—a method that has been

⁵² Rich (2011) 80.

⁵³ The Olympiads were a common dating scheme for Fabius Pictor and Cincius Alimentus (in Greek) while Cato was the first to fix the foundation of the city by counting 432 years from the fall of Troy: cf. Feeney (2007) 142. It is striking that Velleius combines both techniques. Besides the common importance of Troy in anniversary contexts, as e.g. Feeney (2007) 142 shows, Velleius does not use it this way. Apparently, the narrator's present with Vinicius and Tiberius has become more important than linking the historical present back to the mythic past.

called 'heavy marking'.⁵⁴ It is striking that Velleius does not focus so much on synchronisation, but on temporal relations or intervals.⁵⁵ By this means, Rome's foundation is firmly embedded between the mythic past⁵⁶ and the future and history appears as a closed space that unfolds between the narrator's present and variable past events. This is also visible when Velleius records the destruction of Carthage (1.12.5–6):

Carthago diruta est, cum stetisset annis DCLXVI, abhinc annos CLXXVII Cn. Cornelio Lentulo L. Mummio consulibus. hunc finem habuit Romani imperii Carthago aemula, cum qua bellare maiores nostri coepere Claudio et Fulvio consulibus, ante annos CCXCVI quam tu, M. Vinici, consulatum inires.

Carthage was destroyed after standing for six hundred and sixty-six years, during the consulship of Cn. Cornelius Lentulus and L. Mummius, one hundred and seventy-seven years ago. This was the end of Carthage, the rival of the Roman Empire, with whom our ancestors had begun the conflict in the consulship of Claudius and Fulvius, two hundred and ninety-six years before you entered your consulship, M. Vinicius.

Again, we are showered with a flood of relative dates: Carthage had been standing for 666 years and was destroyed 178 'before present' while the rivalry between Rome and Carthage had started 296 'before present'. Again, history appears as framed by her own past and future. Again, the narrator's present is the most prominent vantage point from which to map the past with a meaningful network of events interrelated. Velleius' present—the still unknown future at Rome's foundation and at Carthage's destruction—is the

⁵⁴ Bispham (2011) 37.

⁵⁵ A similar thought can be found in Bispham (2011) 41 who however sees synchronism and intervals as on a par.

⁵⁶ The role of myth in the *History*, which needs to be bracketed here, has been addressed in a couple of recent studies. The focus on Italy's Greek roots is especially surprising and opinions on this issue are divided, especially in terms of the mythic dimension. Schmitzer (2000) 46–56 and Wiseman (2010) argue that the emphasis on Orestes and Hercules combined with the absence of Aeneas must be read as a conception of history which consciously distances itself from the Julian concept, which focused on Aeneas and Rome's Trojan roots. First of all, a Tiberian focus on Orestes and Hercules as strong as that argued by Schmitzer has no proof in material culture. Secondly, Velleius refers to Caesar as a descendant of Venus and Anchises (2.42.1). Thirdly, Rich (2011) 77 with good reason calls attention to the poor transmission and the probably comprehensive lacuna after 1.8.6, and argues that this leads to the Greek overbalance.

anticipated *telos* from which history is plotted and towards which history magnetically aspires.

The relevance of this observation becomes clear if we read Velleius against the backdrop of republican historiography for which the last quotation above is an apt starting point. Besides the relative chronology, Velleius offers the eponymous consuls to further fix the temporal coordinates. The indication of the eponymous magistrates, however, is a predominant characteristic of the annalistic scheme, the central republican method of mapping the past in an account of events written year by year. The reminiscences and discrepancies of the annalistic structure and the formal composition of the *History* are striking and Velleius obviously alludes to the annalistic tradition.⁵⁷

The relation between the *tabula ad pontificem*, the *annales maximi* and the (so called) annalistic historiography has been subject to vivid controversies in modern scholarship.⁵⁸ But if we bracket the question of genesis, the structural similarity between these different media cannot be denied. The idea of history as a continuous flow from year to year and open towards the future is a constant and typical notion in republican thought. Velleius superficially follows this tradition, but twists it with far-reaching consequences: The eponymous consuls are always introduced in combination with a ‘before present’.⁵⁹ As a result, we are not only facing a huge number of references to the narrator’s own time per se. Due to the explicit juxtaposition of the eponymous consuls and the ‘before presents’ we are also directly confronted with a paradigm shift in the construction of historical time: the narrative no longer has its starting point in the past, developing into an open future, as is common in republican notions of history, but is organised backwards from its anticipated *telos*.⁶⁰ Hence, the ‘before present’ scheme tells us more than the date of Velleius’ work.⁶¹ It is a core feature of its conception of history.

⁵⁷ For Velleius’ sporadic notion of other eponymous *consuls* and ‘dependence on annalistic’ tradition, see Elefante (2011) 70 n. 2; Feeney (2007) 190–3.

⁵⁸ See e.g. Frier (1979) and the critique of Petzold (1993) 151–88; Frier (1979/1999) and Gotter et al. (2003). For a comprehensive discussion of the development of the *Annales Maximi* see, most recently, Rich (2013) 141–59, esp. 156–9 on their relation with early historical writing.

⁵⁹ Other passages that combine the indication of the consuls or in one case the commanders (2.38.4) with ‘before presents’ are 1.12.5; 1.14.3; 1.14.7; 1.15.2; 1.15.4; 1.15.5; 2.2.2; 2.4.5; 2.15.1; 2.27.1; 2.36.1; 2.90.2; 2.100.2; 2.103.3.

⁶⁰ This becomes even more evident if we take into consideration that Velleius’ consuls are always introduced in ablative absolute constructions—a construction that is frequent in Tacitus (70 percent), but less common in Livy (25 percent) whose consuls lead off the year in the nominative. Feeney notices that by these means the consuls’ role in the narrative is reduced ‘from that of actors to ciphers’ in Tacitus. Vinicius, on the contrary,

B. The Construction of Voice

The second aspect of narrative form relevant to my argument is the construction of voice. Like time, voice is one of the core categories in classical narratology.⁶² Despite possible objections to the somewhat bulky terminology, Genette's subcategories of the voice are still a helpful tool. In narratological terms, we are facing an extradiegetic-heterodiegetic narrator with several shifts into homodiegetic narration. Thus, the story is told by a first-level narrator (extradiegetic) who does not participate in the story he is recording (heterodiegetic), bar several episodes that he admits to having witnessed himself (homodiegetic).⁶³ Two observations are important in this context: occasions on which the main narrator lends his voice to one of his characters are conspicuously rare; and divergent sources for the events he is recording almost never have their say. Accordingly, neither intradiegetic narration nor additional extradiegetic voices loom large in the *History*, contrary to common historiographical practice. Due to this choice of narrative perspective we are facing a monolithic narrative and a strong monophony. Both are crucial for our understanding of Velleius' conception of history.

Let me first turn to the (lack of) intradiegetic narration. There are only a handful of passages in which characters are given a voice and these are, compared to the elaborate speeches in ancient historiography, rather short and unimportant.⁶⁴ None of these passages contains a whole speech and only one is longer than one sentence. The importance of direct speech in ancient historiography has been emphasised in a number of brilliant studies over the

is frequently granted an active position (e.g. *ante annos quam inires consulatum*)—a contrast that trenchantly demonstrates the shift in vantage point.

⁶¹ Similarly to the reconstruction of the preface, the date of the *History* is controversial, and it shall suffice here to refer to the relevant literature: most recently, Rich (2011) 84–7 has argued for a hasty composition right after Vinicius' designation, against Woodman (1975) 275–82 and Starr (1981) 170–1. I am inclined to follow the latter reading and Starr in particular, who suggests that Velleius' work was well underway when Vinicius was designated and that the specific before-presents were inserted accordingly.

⁶² On 'voice' as narratological term, see Genette (1980) 212.

⁶³ These are a couple of passages towards the end of the *History*, including 2.101 and 2.104. Eyewitness reports in Greek historiography are very important: Cato and probably already Fabius Pictor emphasised their own participation in important events and had autobiographical passages; cf. Kierdorf (2003) 42.

⁶⁴ See 2.4.4; 2.32.1; 2.70.3; 2.86.3; 2.104.1 and 4; 2.107.2. Battle speeches, however, which tend to invite the historian to present them in direct speech, are rare and throughout given in reported speech in Velleius (2.27.1–3: Pontius Telesinus, general of the Samnites, at the Colline Gate; 2.55.3: Caesar at Munda; 2.85.4: Octavian at Actium). See Bispham (2011) 20 n. 32.

last decades⁶⁵ and the observation that they draw our attention to the experiential dimension of history is close to having won common consent. Inserting direct speeches always direct the reader to the actual experiences of the agents rather than anticipating the outcome of the situation they are entangled in. ‘When words render words, narrated and narrative time converge and we seem to gain unmediated access to the past’, as Jonas Grethlein trenchantly puts it.⁶⁶ Intradiegetic narration is also a method of rendering the characters’ qualities or vices visible—as in Sallust, who has Caesar and Cato speak in front of the Senate (*Cat.* 51, 52) and inserts speeches given by Catiline (*Cat.* 20, 58).⁶⁷ These intradiegetic voices also act as a counterbalance to the main narrator’s voice.⁶⁸ Velleius’ presentation of these occurrences is quite different (2.35.1–5).⁶⁹ His treatment starts with the acknowledgement that this day brought Cato’s splendid virtue to the fore. A short biography follows in which, again, Cato’s outstanding character is highlighted.⁷⁰ Subsequently, we get a brief summary of Cato’s pleading:

hic tribunus pl. designatus et adhuc admodum adulescens, cum alii suaderent ut per municipia Lentulus coniuratique custodirentur, paene inter ultimos interrogatus sententiam, tanta uī animi atque ingenii inuectus est in coniurationem, eo ardore [oris] orationem omnium lenitatem suadentium societate consilii suspectam fecit, sic impendentia ex ruinis incendiisque urbis et commutatione status publici pericula exposuit, ita consulis uirtutem amplificauit, ut uniuersus senatus in eius sententiam transiret ...

At this time, though he was only tribune elect and still quite a young man, while others were urging that Lentulus and the other conspirators should be placed in custody in the Italian towns, Cato,

⁶⁵ See, e.g., Fornara (1983) 142–68 and most recently Marincola (2007a) with additional bibliography. For speeches in Livy see Chaplin (2000) *passim*, esp. 50–72 and Pausch (2011) 157–88; for Sallust see, e.g., Batstone (2010); for a recent study of enemy speeches see Adler (2011).

⁶⁶ See Grethlein (forthcoming).

⁶⁷ For Catiline’s speeches, see, e.g., Batstone (2010).

⁶⁸ Grethlein (2006).

⁶⁹ The repeated focus on a comparison between Velleius and Sallust is based on the frequent and strong allusions to Sallustian concepts. This observation is a safe starting point for examining Velleius’ peculiar shifts in narrative composition and re-configuration of the Roman past. For a comprehensive study on Sallustian influences on Velleius, see Woodman (1969).

⁷⁰ Cato’s characterisation as *qui numquam recte fecit ut facere uideretur* also directly reminds us of the equivalent passage in Sallust (54.6): *esse quam uideri bonus malebat*. See Woodman (1969) 789.

though among the very last to be asked for his opinion, inveighed against the conspiracy with such vigour of spirit and intellect and such earnestness of expression that he caused those who in their speeches had urged leniency to be suspected of complicity in the plot. Such a picture did he present of the dangers which threatened Rome, by the burning and destruction of the city and the subversion of the constitution, and such a eulogy did he give of the consul's firm stand, that the senate as a body changed to the support of his motion ...

Two observations are important. First, Cato is not given the chance to speak himself. The correlative clause '*sic ... ita ... ut*' especially draws our attention to the fact that Cato's highly vivid and rousing speech is presented to us not only indirectly and mediated by the main narrator, but also pre-evaluated and pre-interpreted. This fits in with the observation that the speech-passage is embedded in Cato's character sketch: as opposed to Sallust's account, Cato's character and distinction do not speak for themselves and do not come to the fore through his actions, but are presented in the analytical tone of the narrator. Interpretational sovereignty, again, is with the primary narrator. Secondly, although Velleius' account is clearly based on Sallust's corresponding passage in the *Bellum Catilinae*, only Cato's speech is mentioned explicitly; Caesar's is absent. Velleius attributes the pleading for leniency to *alii*, not to Caesar, and thus obliterates the direct rivalry between two senatorial opponents at eye level. Cato's part is so predominant and superior from the very beginning of Velleius' account that the experience of political rivalry, opposition and of an open and democratic decision-making completely fades into the background. The striking scarcity of intradiegetic narration in general and this example in particular highlight that the *History's* focus is neither on visualisation and vividness nor on the creation of a diversity of voices.⁷¹ Instead, there is one single force to tell the story. This is

⁷¹ Another example is Caesar's battle speech in Munda before the crossing of the Rubicon (2.55.3). Velleius' account is rather dry and Caesar's words facing death and defeat are given in mediated speech, focalised through the main narrator: *denuntiaret militibus uestigio se non recessurum; proinde uiderent quem et quo loco imperatorem deserturi forent* ('he announced to his soldiers that he would not retreat a step; he asked them to consider who their commander was and in what a pass they were about to desert him'). By contrast, Appian lets us face a highly vivid depiction of the same occurrences and inserts Caesar's words in direct speech (*BC* 2.104): 'When battle was joined fear seized upon Caesar's army and hesitation was joined to fear. Caesar, lifting his hands toward heaven, implored all the gods that his many glorious deeds be not stained by this single disaster. He ran up and encouraged his soldiers. He took his helmet off his head and shamed them to their faces and exhorted them. As they abated nothing of their fear he seized a shield from a soldier and said to the officers around him, "This shall be the end of my life and of your military service" (*ἔσται τοῦτο τέλος ἐμοί τε τοῦ βίου καὶ ὑμῖν τῶν στρατειῶν*). Then he sprang

even more surprising given that Velleius, as we have seen, shows a particularly strong interest in the characters and deeds of outstanding individuals—so much so that the style of the *History* has often been described as biographical.⁷² For Velleius, it is the strong individual that makes history. But strikingly, the same individual is not allowed to speak, to map or interpret the past or to act as a counterbalance to the narrator's idea of history.⁷³ While, on the level of the story, vicissitudes in the shape of fortune, fate and gods disturb the teleological course, the narrative is dominated by one single voice; it leaves no room for potential disagreement and closes off any narratorial rivalry. This observation is the narratological equivalent to Bloomer's interpretation: when the Caesars enter the stage, the 'envious and destructive rivalry of the great republican figures' is closed off. Thus, the elimination of rivalry, actual and narrative, is an important feature of Velleius' conception of history, which squares the past with the new political reality of the developing imperial system.⁷⁴

This observation can be taken further if we consider how Velleius withholds his sources. There are very few passages in the whole *History* where the narrator mentions the necessity of weighing different opinions or sources against each other and so refers to other extradiegetic voices.⁷⁵ In none of

forward in advance of his line of battle toward the enemy so far that he was only ten feet distant from them.'

⁷² See e.g. Starr (1980) 292 ('passion for biography') and Elefante (1997) 32 ('il prevalente carattere biografico'); most recently, see the exemplary reading of Pelling (2011) of the 'Caesarian narrative'. This interest in the deeds of individuals is not Velleius' invention, but stands in a tradition which reaches back to republican times; see also the Introduction of Woodman (1977). While for Cato history admittedly was the history of the Roman people (Nep. *Cato* 3.4; Plin. *HN* 8.11; see, e.g., Kierdorf (2003) 23), a collective history refusing to stress individual achievements, the Romans generally tended to focus on the individual's impact. As to that, Pelling (2011) 158–9 follows Woodman in highlighting the importance of character sketches in Sallust's *Catiline* and *Jugurtha* as well as the role of outstanding individuals in Livy. Apart from historiography, the significance of the individual's achievement is of course clearly evident from the extensive memorial culture on which aristocratic authority was based. The multifaceted ancestor cult at the *domus* and at the *pompae funebres* as well as the honorific statues explicitly served to single out merited individuals and to represent the nobility's pride of rank: see, e.g., Flower (1996); Sehmeyer (1999).

⁷³ Pelling (2011) 162–5 comes to a similar conclusion in his examination of focalisation. While Caesar dominates the narrative, the story is not seen through his eyes. Instead, 'the narrative is often more concerned to convey what to think of, say, Sulla or Caesar, rather than what Sulla or Caesar were thinking' (165). Primary focalisation is as dominant as primary narration.

⁷⁴ Bloomer (2011), esp. 93–4.

⁷⁵ I.11.4; 2.4.6; 2.26.5; 2.41.1; 2.53.4. See also Marincola (2011) 122 on variant versions in Velleius.

these passages does Velleius give a detailed discussion of alternative explanations. In looking at Herodotus, Thucydides and Sallust, two types of voices have been distinguished. The Herodotean/Sallustian narrator comes to the fore very frequently and 'reinforces the gap between narrative and events'. Thucydides' voice, on the other hand, 'evokes the impression of the events telling themselves'.⁷⁶ With this distinction in mind, we can show that the Velleian voice is a construction in between these extremes, floating between narrative authority and invisibility. The narrator of the *History* is very present, but in a different way from Sallust. He addresses Vinicius, he reveals himself as a participant in Tiberian campaigns, addresses the reader with rhetorical questions and exclamations, and last but not least gives us insight into his programme. Indeed, he announces himself as structuring the narrative, but without focussing on the fact that he sometimes only delivers one of several possible explanations. The combination of a strongly present narratorial voice and an obvious refusal to acknowledge divergent readings of the past highlights the text's self-conception as the sole representation of Roman history. Again, the influence of *fortuna* and superhuman forces may make history appear as a space of endless possibilities and with uncertain developments and outcome. The monophony of the narrative, however, confronts us with a conception of history in which there is only one outcome and one interpretation possible.

III. Velleius' Conception of History as a Product of Tiberian Rome—or: The Case of Narrative

Recapitulating what has been said about the conception of history in Velleius' opus we can register that the long common view of him as one-dimensional court poet and panegyrist falls short. We have seen that the capricious influence of fortune dims the forthright goal-directedness of Roman history. We have nevertheless also seen that the composition of the *History* bluntly homes in on narrative authority and teleology. This paradox can be understood as a product of Tiberian Rome. In order to explain the paradox and its link to its socio-political context, I propose to take the *History* seriously as a narrative and to consider modern scholarship on its distinctive characteristics and the socio-anthropological relevance of narrative.

Understanding narrative as embedded into its socio-political context means that it is of double importance. First, the narrative reacts to its extra-textual reality. It can explicitly refer to this reality or rather implicitly act as a mirror of it through its narrative form. As for Velleius, we have seen that history consists of the great lines leading to a *telos* rather than a conglomerate

⁷⁶ Grethlein (2006) 323; see also Hornblower (1994) 131–66.

of occurrences experienced by historical agents. This conception of history is encoded in the narrative structure: Velleius as the narrator of the past is the only force to structure the narrative, just as Tiberius is the magnetic-like force that attracts and structures history. If we again compare the republican diversity of voices with Velleius' monolithic history, we can record that both ways of structuring can be understood as mirrors of their political reality: public speeches and the diversity of voices are crucial for Republican life and the face-to-face character of Roman politics; even though speeches do not vanish from the political stage altogether in Tiberian Rome, their importance starts to shrink. The missing polyphony of the *History* can be understood as a narrative mirror of this development. Secondly, narrative is not only a mere mirror of its reality—and historiographical narrative is not only a mirror of history. Narrative actively and creatively participates in the process of constructing social and historical reality. With Velleius this could sound suspiciously like falling back into the common reading of Velleius as a propagandist who shapes his reality in accordance with the will of those in power. But then the paradox would remain unexplained.

Both philosophical and literary critical approaches in the last decades have drawn our attention to the structural similarities between human experience and narrative:⁷⁷ both develop in time; both have to deal with the tension between a well-known past and unknown future or, if you will: between experience and expectation. In his phenomenological approach, Reinhard Koselleck defines human time as arising from the tension between our space of experiences and horizon of expectations.⁷⁸ Based on our experiences in the past, we direct expectations to the future, which can be fulfilled or disappointed. In turn, they will again act as experiences guiding our attitude towards the future. In real life, these are our own past and

⁷⁷ Perhaps the most influential philosophical studies of this kind are those by Ricoeur (1980) and particularly (1984–8). Criticising Husserl's and Heidegger's concept of a pure phenomenology of time, he establishes the distinction between phenomenological and cosmological time, i.e. time as actually experienced by human beings and 'objective time'. Narrative, for Ricoeur (1984–8) III.11–96, is the means to reconcile them by mutually intertwining them and thus creating what he calls 'historical time'. This approach has been developed further by Grethlein (2010) 313–27, who acknowledges Ricoeur's crucial link between narrative and the temporal nature of human experience whilst criticising his rather vague and abstract account of how exactly this process of re-configuring time through narrative is to be understood. While Ricoeur (1984–8) III.142–92 recognises the reconciliation between phenomenological and cosmological time as a mutual interweaving of history and fiction in the very act of narration, Grethlein (2010) 315 addresses the question of narrative *qua narrative* and argues accordingly that the link between narrative and the temporal character of human experience is to be found in the structures of narrative itself.

⁷⁸ Koselleck (1985). For an analysis linking Koselleck's theory of historical time with the nature of narrative, see Grethlein (2010) 316.

future, our own experiences and expectation; in the story-world, experience and expectation belong to the characters. Narratives thus allow us to re-experience this tension in a safe space, indirectly and mediated through the fictional characters. Drawing on Jauß's concept of the 'aesthetic attitude', Grethlein points out that this act of re-experiencing in the mode of 'as if' makes narrative a means to come to grips 'with our temporality by letting us re-enact the tension between expectation and experience'.⁷⁹ This is particularly interesting for historiographical texts, and especially for a text like Velleius' that focusses on contemporary history—and thus on events and atmospheres that are experienced by himself as well as by his readers.

While the tension between experience and expectation is an anthropological constant, its quality and degree can vary profoundly. In a stable environment characterised by an even pace and exempt of radical changes and unforeseeable developments, our expectations for the future will be more or less in line with our experiences and knowledge about the course of things. By contrast, the more uncertainty and the more crucial changes we face, the bigger the gap between our experiences and expectations becomes. Accordingly, coping mechanisms that help us to bridge this gap become all the more important. Tiberian Rome arguably belongs to the latter category—and Velleius' narrative is an attempt to make it manageable, to close the gap between experience and expectation through its peculiar narrative re-configuration of the Roman past.

As for that, let me turn briefly to Velleius' socio-political context. Velleius' time is a particularly ambiguous period, weighed down with both Augustus' unattainable example and the political, ideological and military burdens of his reign.⁸⁰ The succession from Augustus to Tiberius was perhaps the most critical point since the early twenties BC, all the more since Tiberius appears to have always been the less-than-ideal solution after the premature deaths of Marcellus, Agrippa and the *principes iuuentutis* C. and L. Caesar. The functioning and identity of the young 'republican principate' was crucially linked to the authority of Augustus himself—which was not transferable. The nomination of a successor—maybe even less distinguished than Augustus himself—necessarily made it difficult to maintain the pretence of the *optimus status liberae rei publicae*. The balancing act between tradition and innovation was at its most vulnerable at this point. Matters were complicated further by the rather dark military situation in the East culminating in the Varian disaster and persisting through the end of Augustus' reign. All these factors overshadowed Tiberius' principate. Right at the outset he had to deal with

⁷⁹ Grethlein (2010) 319.

⁸⁰ See, e.g., Christ (2009) 178–207 on the consolidation of the principate under Tiberius and Gowing (2010), esp. 252, who examines the role of the republican civil wars and their lasting impact on Roman thought in the early Empire.

the mutiny in Germany and Pannonia; he had to compete with other leaders like Germanicus who were more popular with the army and the people. He did not succeed in avenging the *clades Variana*, and in Rome he had to resolve internal quarrels with the senate and distribute political responsibilities. When Velleius' *History* was published, Rome was additionally approaching the next succession.

The experience of uncertainty and an open future was daily fare. These are mostly aspects that were not touched upon by Velleius; as we have seen, though, he does let darker tones come to the fore⁸¹—but he attributes them not to politics, but to luck and fate. Against this backdrop, I propose reading Velleius' text not so much as the work of a propagandist or even a 'weak minded' adulator of those in power, but to understand his peculiar conception of history as an attempt to cope with these existential experiences. The act of coping consists of re-configuring the past by recording it in a form that is exempt of uncertain outcomes, and which becomes instead monolithic and predictable. The Roman past is to be re-experienced as a safe space and the contemporary uncertainties are eliminated by giving Rome a predestined and bright future aspiring to a fixed *telos*.

The conciliatory notion of Velleius being an important witness of his time, frequently endorsed by those who deny him the status of a proper historian, turns out to be truer than expected. The *History* not only fills the gap between Livy and Tacitus; as the only surviving narrative of this period, the *History* also interacts with a socio-political system which is still evolving, not fully formed and which involves, to a special degree, 'the ability to retell, rewrite and re-examine Rome's history'.⁸² The *History* aims at bridging the gap between outdated experiences and untried expectations, and is thus a telling example of the significance of historical narrative at the edge of profound changes and an indeterminate future.

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⁸¹ See, e.g., Bispham (2011); Cowan (2011) xii.

⁸² Cowan (2011) xii.

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