

THE ORATOR MEMMIUS IN SUETONIUS*

Of the many lost subjects of Suetonius' *Illustrious Men* that have been proposed by scholars, an unduly neglected name is Gaius Memmius, the orator who was praetor in 58 BC. No fragment of a biography of his has been preserved by Jerome, but Jerome's entries were compiled in haste (*tumultuarii operis*, Chron. praef. 2), and their use of Suetonius was selective and haphazard.¹ It is in recognition of this fact that both Wallace-Hadrill and Kaster survey writers who are mentioned or used as sources by Suetonius, although curiously neither mentions Memmius.² The orator appears several times in Suetonius' extant *Lives* (*Vita Ter.* 60–3; *Gramm.* 14,1; *Iul.* 23,1; 49,2; 73), and is cited no less frequently as a source than, for example, Messalla Corvinus (*Gramm.* 4,2; *Aug.* 58,1–2; 74) and almost as many times as Asinius Pollio (*Gramm.* 10,2; 10,6; *Iul.* 30,4; 55,4; 56,4), both of whom were almost certainly included in Suetonius' *Orators* (see below).³ In this note, I wish to offer some additional evidence in support of a Suetonian biography of Memmius. I shall conclude by venturing a conjecture on the *Life's* content.

First, let us look briefly at a letter of Pliny the Younger, in which he lists notable figures who, according to him, were both virtuous and yet composed erotic verses (*Ep.* 5,3,5–6):

an ego uerear – neminem uiuentium, ne quam in speciem adulationis incidam, nominabo – sed ego uerear ne me non satis deceat, quod decuit M. Tullium, C. Caluam, Asinium Pollionem, M. Messalam, Q. Hortensium, M. Brutum, L. Sullam, Q. Catulum, Q. Scaeuolam, Seruium Sulpicium, Varroem, Torquatum, immo Torquatos, C. Memmium, Lentulum Gaetulicum, Annaeum Senecam et proxime Verginium Rufum et, si non sufficiunt exempla priuata, Diuum Iulium, Diuum Augustum,

*) I wish to thank Roy Gibson for helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper. For Suetonius' fragments I use the text of A. Reifferscheid (Leipzig 1860), for Suetonius' *Divine Julius* that of H. E. Butler and M. Cary (Oxford 1927), for Suetonius' *Vita Terenti* that of A. Rostagni (Turin 1944), for Suetonius' *Vita Horati* that of F. Klingner (Leipzig 1959), for his *Vita Lucani* that of R. Badali (Rome 1992), and for his *Grammarians and Rhetoricians* that of R. A. Kaster (Oxford 1995). All translations are my own.

1) See e.g. A. Wallace-Hadrill, *Suetonius: The Scholar and his Caesars* (London 1983) 51–3; T. Viljamaa, *Suetonius on Roman Teachers of Grammar*, ANRW II 33.5 (1991) 3826–51, at 3831 n. 21; G. Herbert-Brown, *Jerome's Dates for Gaius Lucilius, satyrarum scriptor*, CQ 49 (1999) 535–43, at 536.

2) Wallace-Hadrill (above, n. 1) 50–9: "If we seek to extend Jerome's list, we should think in the first place of authors Suetonius knew and used ..." (59); R. A. Kaster (ed.), *C. Suetonius Tranquillus: De grammaticis et rhetoribus* (Oxford 1995) xxxi–xxxiii; cf. Viljamaa (above, n. 1) 3830–1. For Suetonius' biographical approach of reading his own subject's works, see Wallace-Hadrill (above, n. 1) 62.

3) Memmius is also cited as a source more than Pollio's son Asinius Gallus (*Gramm.* 22,3), who was likewise included in the *Orators* (*Jer. Chron. Ol.* 198,2 = fr. 68).

Diuum Neruam, Tiberium Caesarem? Neronem enim transeo, quamuis sciam non corrumpi in deterius quae aliquando etiam a malis, sed honesta manere quae saepius a bonis fiunt; inter quos uel praecipue numerandus est P. Vergilius, Cornelius Nepos et prius Accius Enniusque. non quidem hi senatores, sed sanctitas morum non distat ordinibus.

Should I fear – I shall name no one alive, so as not to slip into seeming flattery – but should I fear that it should not sufficiently become me, that which became Marcus Tullius, Gaius Calvus, Asinius Pollio, Marcus Messalla, Quintus Hortensius, Marcus Brutus, Lucius Sulla, Quintus Catulus, Quintus Scaevola, Servius Sulpicius, Varro, Torquatus, nay the Torquati, Gaius Memmius, Lentulus Gaetulicus, Annaeus Seneca and most recently Verginius Rufus and, if civilian examples are not enough, Divine Julius, Divine Augustus, Divine Nerva, Tiberius Caesar? For I pass over Nero, even though I know that things sometimes done by the evil are not spoiled, but remain honourable for being often done by the good. Among the latter, ranked especially high must be Publius Virgil, Cornelius Nepos, and earlier Accius and Ennius. These were not in fact senators, but moral virtue does not discriminate against social classes.

Almost half of the names in this catalogue (excluding the Caesars) are thought, based on evidence in Jerome and Donatus, to have had biographies in the *Illustrious Men*: Ennius (Jer. Chron. Ol. 135,1; 153,1 = fr. 8–9), Accius (Ol. 160,2 = fr. 13), Virgil (Vita Verg.), Cicero (Ol. 168,3; 174,2; 175,2; 179,4; 184,2 = fr. 50–4), Asinius Pollio (Ol. 195,4 = fr. 59), Messalla Corvinus (Ol. 180,2; 188,3; 197,3 = fr. 60–2), Nepos (Ol. 185,1 = fr. 75), Varro (Ol. 166,1; 188,1 = fr. 83–4), and Seneca (Ol. 211,1 = fr. 86).⁴ It is certainly possible that Pliny's list is influenced by, or engages with, Suetonius' choice of subjects in the *Illustrious Men*, since Pliny probably had first-hand knowledge of the work in late draft form by the time he was composing his fifth book.⁵ Pliny perhaps mentions Memmius among other poets

4) On the fragments of Jerome and their derivation from Suetonius, see R. Helm, Hieronymus' Zusätze in Eusebius' Chronik und ihr Wert für die Literaturgeschichte (Leipzig 1929) 3–12 (Ennius), 22–3 (Accius), 27–31 (Cicero), 70 (Asinius Pollio), 46–52 (Messalla Corvinus), 57–8 (Nepos), 23–4 (Varro), and 81–2 (Seneca). I am not convinced by S. C. Stroup, Catullus, Cicero, and a Society of Patrons: The Generation of the Text (Cambridge 2010) 276 n.3 that the Messalla mentioned by Pliny is instead Messalla Rufus, the consul in 53 BC. Pliny almost certainly means Messalla Corvinus, who is the Messalla cited in the works of Suetonius, and in Tacitus (Ann. 4,34,4); on Corvinus, see R. H. Martin / A. J. Woodman (eds.), Tacitus: Annals, Book IV (Cambridge 1989) 180–1 (ad loc.).

5) Cf. A. N. Sherwin-White, The Letters of Pliny: A Historical and Social Commentary (Oxford 1966) 317: "it is possible that Pliny drew his list from a literary history." For Pliny's knowledge of the *Illustrious Men*, see T. J. Power, Pliny, *Letters* 5.10 and the Literary Career of Suetonius, *JRS* 100 (2010) 140–62; on Suetonius and Pliny, *Letters* 5,3, see R. K. Gibson, Suetonius and the *uiri illustres* of Pliny the Younger, in: T. J. Power / R. K. Gibson (eds.), Suetonius the Biographer: Thirteen Studies (Oxford, forthcoming), who argues that Pliny's list especially resembles Suetonius' *Illustrious Men* in its focus on earlier and lesser-known figures,

in this letter at least partly because of Memmius' biography in the Suetonian collection that he has recently read, and may even have been reminded of Memmius' verses by that work.

Another indication that Suetonius wrote the biography of Memmius is that he has (at least ostensibly) a similar respect for Memmius' speeches to that afforded by Cicero, who, unlike Quintilian, deemed them important enough to mention in his *Brutus*. Although Cicero claims that Memmius preferred Greek to Latin literature and that his oratorical skills were diminished by lack of practice due to his laziness (*tantum sibi de facultate detraxit quantum imminuit industriae*, Brut. 247), he nonetheless praises his style (*argutus orator uerbisque dulcis*, *ibid.*). Suetonius certainly knew and used this text (Iul. 55,1 ~ Brut. 261; Iul. 56,2 = Brut. 262),⁶ and appears to have admired Cicero's views on literary matters.⁷ Suetonius may be taking his lead from Cicero in considering Memmius worthy of citation in his *Lives*. Witness, for example, the following passage (Iul. 49,1–3):

omitto Calui Licini notissimos uersus:

*Bithynia quicquid
et pedicator Caesaris umquam habuit.*

praetereo actiones Dolabellae et Curionis patris, in quibus eum Dolabella 'paelicem reginae', 'spondam interiorem regiae lecticae', at Curio 'stabulum Nicomedis' et 'Bithynicum fornicem' dicunt. missa etiam facio edicta Bibuli, quibus proscrispsit collegam suum Bithynicam reginam, eique antea regem fuisse cordi, nunc esse regnum. quo tempore, ut Marcus Brutus refert, Octavius etiam quidam ualitudine mentis liberius dicax conuentu maximo, cum Pompeium regem appellasset, ipsum reginam salutauit. sed C. Memmius etiam ad cyathum et uinum Nicomedi stetit obicit, cum reliquis exoletis, pleno conuiuio, accubantibus nonnullis urbicis negotiatoribus, quorum refert nomina. Cicero uero ...

I say nothing of the notorious lines of Licinius Calvus:

Whatever Bithynia and the paramour of Caesar ever possessed.

I leave aside the speeches of Dolabella and the elder Curio, in which Dolabella calls him 'the rival of the queen', 'the inner frame of the royal litter', while Curio calls him 'the tavern of Nicomedes' and 'the Bithynian brothel'. I also disregard the edicts of Bibulus, in which he published that his colleague was the queen of Bithynia, and that he was formerly pleased by a king, now by a kingdom. At that time, as Marcus Brutus reports, in a very large assembly a certain Octavius who was rather freely spoken because of mental illness, after addressing Pompey as king, saluted him as queen. But Gaius Memmius even charges that

in contrast to the rest of Pliny's *Letters*. On Pliny's selection of names in this letter, see also R. K. Gibson / C. Steel, *The Indistinct Literary Careers of Cicero and Pliny the Younger*, in: P. Hardie / H. Moore (eds.), *Classical Literary Careers and their Reception* (Cambridge 2010) 118–37, at 129–30.

6) Cf. also Gramm. 3,2 ~ Brut. 169 and 205–7, with Kaster (above, n. 2) 75–7.

7) See e.g. W. C. McDermott, *Suetonius and Cicero*, CW 64 (1971) 213–14.

he bore the drinking-cup and wine of Nicomedes, together with the rest of his boys at a full banquet attended by many of the town-merchants, whose names he reports. Indeed, Cicero ...

Suetonius first employs rhetorical *praeteritio* (*omitto ... praeterito ... missa etiam facio ...*) with regard to the first three sources: the verses of Calvus, the speeches of Dolabella and Curio, and the edicts of Bibulus. The last of these calls Caesar 'the queen of Bithynia', to which Suetonius adds Brutus' similar story. Suetonius then makes a transition to Memmius and Cicero not only because of their more detailed and condemning accounts, but with an emphasis through the words *sed* and *uero* on the greater credibility of these figures.⁸

A similar contrast with Memmius as a more reliable source may be observed in the *Life* of Terence, where Suetonius follows his discussion of the common rumour (*non obscura fama*, Vita Ter. 47) that Laelius and Scipio aided the poet in writing his plays first with support from verses by Terence himself, which he has reason to find suspect (Vita Ter. 48–58). Suetonius then turns to quotations of Memmius and Nepos (59–63): *quae tamen magis et usque ad posteriora tempora ualuit. C. Memmius in oratione pro se ait ... Nepos auctore certo ...* ('Nevertheless, this rumour gained more strength, and all the way into later times. Gaius Memmius in a speech in his own defence says ... Nepos on high authority ...'). Again, Memmius is thus paired with Nepos as a more legitimate source than the preceding citations in the *Terence*, just as he is with Cicero in the *Life* of Caesar.

The last piece of evidence for a biography of Memmius by Suetonius is a passage of the *Grammarians and Rhetoricians*, in which Suetonius reports an affair between Memmius and Pompey's wife Cornelia (Gramm. 14,1):

Curtius Nicia adhaesit Cn. Pompio et C. Memmio; sed cum codicillos Memmi ad Pompei uxorem de stupro pertulisset, proditus ab ea Pompeium offendit domoque ei interdictum est.

Curtius Nicias was associated with Gnaeus Pompey and Gaius Memmius; but since he had brought a note from Memmius to Pompey's wife about a sexual rendezvous, when he was betrayed by her he offended Pompey, being forbidden from his home.

Kaster believes that the source of this anecdote is a lost biography of Lucilius by Santra, since Santra is cited at the end of this passage for Nicias' own work on the poet (Gramm. 14,4).⁹ Santra may indeed have used Nicias in such a work, but it seems unlikely that he would have included biographical details about him that were so far removed from his proper subject. Since Suetonius' other predecessors on Nicias were scant,¹⁰ a better candidate for the source is a composition dealing with Memmius, especially since the story seems characteristic of the latter: given the orator's reputation for amorous activities (Cic. Att. 1,18,3; Catull. 28,9–10; Val. Max. 6,1,13), erotic poetry (Ov. Tr. 2,433–4; Pliny above; Gell. NA 19,9,7), and pol-

8) Cf. B. Baldwin, Suetonius (Amsterdam 1983) 116 on Memmius. On this episode involving Caesar and Nicomedes, see e.g. D. C. Braund, *The Politics of Catullus 10: Memmius, Caesar and the Bithynians*, *Hermathena* 160 (1996) 45–57, at 45–7; J. Osgood, *Caesar and Nicomedes*, *CQ* 58 (2008) 687–91.

9) Kaster (above, n. 2) 170, 176.

10) Cf. Baldwin (above, n. 8) 434.

itical scandal due to his impeachment for bribery (Cic. Q. Fr. 3,2,8; Fam. 13,19; Att. 5,11; 6,1; App. B. Civ. 2,24),¹¹ the anecdote would fit perfectly with source material on Memmius.

What was the source? All of Suetonius' references to Memmius' own works are to his speeches (*oratione*, Vita Ter. 60; *obicit*, Iul. 49,2; *orationibus*, ibid. 73), but it is doubtful that a speech written by him would have contained this embarrassing anecdote. The story may therefore indicate a lost source on Memmius that was found by Suetonius during biographical research conducted specifically on the orator. The only remaining alternative to this would be to argue for the material's being pillaged from Suetonius' unused notes in composing an unknown historical work that dealt with Pompey, such as the one posited by Reifferscheid for some of Jerome's entries which do not fit easily into the biographer's corpus (fr. 208–28). Since relating Suetonius' source at Gramm. 14,4 to one of his known works is preferable to positing an unknown one, and since Suetonius used the subjects of his literary *Lives* as sources for each other, a source discovered while writing Memmius' biography in the *Illustrious Men* is the best choice.

It is reasonable to conclude that Memmius has been overlooked as one of the probable orators in Suetonius' *Illustrious Men*. The absence of Memmius from Jerome's *Chronicle* has deterred scholars from this conjecture, but it cannot be given much weight in this question, because Jerome's entries from Suetonius are by no means exhaustive, and there is enough evidence elsewhere to suggest his Suetonian biography. This conclusion coheres with Suetonius' particular interest in the period surrounding the empire's foundation,¹² and with the fact that no other orator appears as often as a named source in Suetonius who is not also included in his literary *Lives*. Moreover, Gramm. 14,1 may even derive from a source originally consulted by Suetonius for his biography of Memmius. Considering Suetonius' use of the literary writings of the Caesars in the *Illustrious Men* (Vita Ter. 116–21; Vita Hor. 2,4–8; 2,11–17; Vita Luc. 18–19), we may well wonder whether this lost *Life* contained any quotation from the speeches of Caesar against Memmius, which Suetonius refers to in the dictator's *Life* as written *non minore acerbitate* (Iul. 73).¹³

New York

Tristan J. Power

11) For Memmius' poetry, see A. S. Hollis (ed.), *Fragments of Roman Poetry*, c. 60 BC–AD 20 (Oxford 2007) 90–2. On Memmius' impeachment, see G. V. Sumner, *The coitio* of 54 BC, or *Waiting for Caesar*, HSPH 86 (1982) 133–9.

12) For Suetonius' greater focus on this period, see Wallace-Hadrill (above, n. 1) 56–7.

13) On these speeches, see Schol. Bob. ad Cic. Sest. 18; ad Cic. Vat. 15; cp. M. Gelzer, *Caesar: Politician and Statesman* (Oxford 1968) 97 n. 6. Could Suetonius' *Life* of Memmius be the source of the anecdote in the same scholia about Vatinius' conspirators, who climbed onto the tribunal and seized the ballot-boxes when Memmius as praetor was appointing a judge for Vatinius' trial (Schol. Bob. ad Cic. Vat. 34)? Such a story seems characteristic of Suetonius; see e.g. Gramm. 9,5; 22,1; 26,2; 30,4–5; Iul. 43; 76,2–3; Aug. 33; Calig. 16; Claud. 14–15; Ner. 15; Dom. 8. There is a precedent in the scholia to Juvenal, which preserve a fragment from Suetonius' *Life* of the orator Passienus Crispus (Schol. Iuv. 4,81 = fr. 71). For other possible fragments of Suetonius in the scholia to Juvenal, see C. P. Jones, *Suetonius in the Probus of Giorgio Valla*, HSPH 90 (1986) 245–51.