METHODS OF CHARACTER PORTRAYAL IN THE
RES GESTAE OF AMMIANUS MARCELLINUS

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INTRODUCTION:
Ammianus Marcellinus was the last of the greater Roman historians. He was of Greek descent, born at Antioch in about A.D. 330. Having followed a military career for some time, later presumably as member of the imperial bodyguard, he lived at Rome from approximately 379 where he spent about thirteen years in writing the thirty one books of his Res Gestae. Continuing where Tacitus left off Ammianus covers the period from Nerva (A.D. 96) until the death of Valens (378). Books XIV-XXXI have survived and deal with events from 353-378, i.e. during the reigns of Constantius II, Julian, Jovian, Valentinian, Valens and Gratian, all of whom ruled during the active life of Ammianus.

Many aspects of his work have been examined, but his portrayal of characters has received relatively little attention and therefore needs to be investigated systematically. For this reason I wish to examine the different methods of characterisation he employs and to analyse and discuss the various techniques of direct and indirect character portrayal.

The so-called 'intrinsic' approach has been adopted because the attention is focused upon that which Ammianus says or reveals about a character and upon the way in which he does this. For the purpose of this investigation the sources of the author may be left out of account.

The characters selected for this inquiry are the four major characters each of whom is accorded an extensive necrology or epilogue (i.e. Constantius, Julian, Valentinian and Valens), and four secondary characters, three of whom receive brief necrologies namely Gallus, Jovian and Procopius, and also Gratian who is formally characterised on two occasions as his death falls beyond the range of the Res Gestae, and the opportunity for a necrology does not present itself.

1 DIRECT AND INDIRECT CHARACTERISATION
Generally speaking, and in the light of available information the development of the Roman annalistic historiography culminates in the Annals of Tacitus; and since Suetonius' 'imperial biography' (i.e. biographies of the emperors)

*This article is based upon Part One of the author's dissertation, 'Karaktertekening by Ammianus Marcellinus', Leiden, 1972.
began fashionable. Ammianus, being primarily interested in important and extraordinary events, does not follow this fashion in his *Res Gestae* but chooses his genre independently. This, however, does not mean that he tries to avoid elements of imperial biography (Kaiserbiographie) in writing the history of the Roman Empire, for it is well known that, especially in ancient historiography, the characters of leading personalities naturally came into relief and to a certain extent became the focal point of events. Because of the fact that elements of both the history of the Roman Empire and biography of the emperors are to be seen in the *Res Gestae*, the question arises: Does the work of Ammianus relate more closely to historiography or to biography? In other words: Is Ammianus primarily concerned with characters and only in the second place with historic events, or vice versa? My personal opinion is that the main accent in the *Res Gestae* falls upon the history of the Empire. However, the emperors cannot be detached from this history and as their lives form an integral part of it, there is obviously a strong resemblance to a "history of the Emperors" (Kaisergeschichte). The influence of the imperial biography as a genre is unmistakable, especially in the necrologies, but this does not for one moment mean that the *Res Gestae* consists of a series of biographies of the Emperors or that character portrayal is its primary object.

Therefore, although characterisation is not primarily the aim of Ammianus, we nevertheless find that in the course of his writing character portraits appear which have been highly commended. But how exactly do these portraits come into being? I cannot agree with Friedrich Leo and others who take into account only the formal character portraits and necrologies. My aim is therefore to prove that Ammianus depicts his characters not only in a direct and formal way, detached from events, but also—and even to a greater extent—by letting the character develop from the course of his narrative. The necrology as such is detached from the narrative and does indeed comprise the essence of the portrait, but it is an irrefutable fact that the reader in perusing the *Res Gestae* gradually forms a picture of each character, and because of this he is not exclusively dependent on the summary epilogue for his picture of the character concerned. Moreover it has to be stressed that, although the necrology provides a short and useful summary, the portrait which arises from the description of the events is naturally more qualified and nuanced and therefore provides a more reliable and complete picture of the character concerned.

The essential question is therefore: how does the portrait of a character

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develop in the course of Ammianus' narrative? In other words by which methods are the various aspects of the personalities in the *Res Gestae* brought out? This question may best be answered by illustrations from Ammianus' character portrayal itself.

The depiction of the youthful Gallus Caesar is most revealing as to the various techniques applied: In the opening chapter of Bk XIV Gallus is introduced and Ammianus observes that after his unexpected promotion he exceeds the limits of his powers by his extreme violence (asperitate nimia, 14.1.1). The author therefore directly and explicitly depicts the Caesar as violent. A few pages further Ammianus disapprovingly relates how Gallus roams about in the streets and pubs at night asking people's opinion about 'the Caesar' (14.1.9). From what he does in an effort to gauge his own popularity his arrogant nature is revealed thus rendering it unnecessary for the author to ascribe this characteristic to the young man. Subsequently we learn about the Caesar's untimely lowering of the corn price. When the leaders of the Senate at Antioch differ from him, he is extremely annoyed and orders them to be executed every form of justice had disappeared from the courts (velut exturbatum e iudiciis fas omne discessit, 14.7.21). Without explicitly ascribing it to Gallus, the historian nevertheless clearly alludes to his unrighteousness here. On another occasion a loose subordinate clause is used to refer to the numerous victims of his ruthlessness (post multorum clades, 14.9.8). Although Gallus is not explicitly described as ruthless, this trait is nevertheless implicitly ascribed to him by way of a vague generalisation which is not corroborated by any factual evidence. When Gallus is summoned by Constantius, Ammianus makes use of the opportunity to reveal what is passing through the Caesar's mind and he declares, as if by a kind of omniscience, that Gallus is secretly aspiring to the highest office (principem locum ... clam affectabat, 14.11.8). Once again the author does not directly depict him as ambitious, but this aspect of his personality is revealed by the thoughts and feelings ascribed to him. In the same context Ammianus says that Gallus feared deception by his closest relatives who dreaded his cruelty and fickleness (qui eum ut truculentum horrebant et levem, 14.11.8). It should be noted that it is not the writer who labels Gallus as cruel and fickle, but that the reader derives this information indirectly from the feelings and opinions ascribed to the Caesar's contemporaries. After the assassination of Gallus he receives a brief necrology in which Ammianus frankly states that he was a man of eminent authority (maturius auctoritas emineret, 14.11.28). This characteristic is ascribed to him directly, and this is indeed usually the case in the necrologies. The author proceeds to claim that Gallus differed as greatly from the moderate nature of his brother Julian as Domitian had differed from his brother Titus (tantum a temperatis moribus Iuliani differens fratris, quantum inter Vespasiani filios fuit Domitianum et Titum, 14.11.28). His uncontrolled nature is ingeniously revealed in an indirect way, on the one hand by contrasting Gallus with Julian and on the other by associating him with the notorious Domitian. Finally Gallus' total depravity is insinuated by calculated innuendo,
i.e. by the simple omission of any possible positive traits from his necrology (cf. 14.11.27–29).

The preceding analysis clearly proves that Ammianus does not need a necrology to depict a character, but that by means of different methods a personality is called into being during the course of the narrative. Within the compass of a few pages the reader gets to know Gallus as violent, arrogant, irascible, cruel, unrighteous, ruthless, ambitious, fickle, and yet a man of authority, but uncontrolled—an overall picture of depravity. But what is especially noticeable is the variety of techniques used by the writer to reveal these characteristics; he uses direct characterisation, or actions, reactions and words which reveal character; the techniques of innuendo, suppression and generalisation are utilised, or the reader gets to know Gallus on the one hand through feelings ascribed to him, and on the other through the opinions of his contemporaries; in the necrology he is portrayed directly, and shortly after by means of contrast and association.

This example has been chosen to illustrate the various methods of characterisation used by Ammianus within a relatively short compass. Schematically it may be represented as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Qualities</th>
<th>Direct Characterisation</th>
<th>Reactions</th>
<th>Words</th>
<th>Innuendo and Omission</th>
<th>Generalisations</th>
<th>Opinions of Contemporaries</th>
<th>Necrology (Direct)</th>
<th>Contrast</th>
<th>Association and Generalisation</th>
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<tr>
<td>14.1.1</td>
<td>Violence</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>14.1.9</td>
<td>Arrogance</td>
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<td>14.7.2</td>
<td>Irascibility</td>
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<td>14.7.2</td>
<td>Cruelty</td>
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<td>14.7.21</td>
<td>Unrighteousness</td>
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<td>14.9.8</td>
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<td>14.11.8</td>
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<td>14.11.8</td>
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<td>14.11.28</td>
<td>Authority</td>
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<td>14.11.28</td>
<td>Uncontrolled nature</td>
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<td>14.11.27–29</td>
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It is important to note that the qualities are in the most cases implicitly present in the narrative and have to be deduced by the reader while the author seldom explicitly ascribes them to the character. In these two different ways of
character portrayal we have in fact the two basic methods of characterisation, namely \textit{direct portrayal} in which the author personally and explicitly characterises his subject, and \textit{indirect portrayal} in which the reader gets to know the qualities of a character from the narrative. These methods will in due course be more clearly defined before the various methods of direct and indirect portrayal are discussed and illustrated.

It is furthermore noteworthy that in the course of the narrative one and the same quality may by a variety of methods be revealed from different angles. For instance this holds good for the cruelty of Constantius and Valentinian which becomes in a way a recurring motif, being revealed in no less than seven different ways. The valour of Julian too is disclosed by adopting seven different methods. The portrayal of his \textit{good sense} (prudentia) provides a clear illustration of how such methods are interchanged. This quality is named directly in a formal portrait, stressed by comparing him to Titus (16.1.4), is once again stated directly in 16.2.11 (erat providus et cunctator), and is implicitly disclosed by a decision and an action (16.4.4: Caesar providebat . . .). In 18.2.1 the same quality is indirectly revealed by a parenthetical remark (cum primum ratio copiam tribuisset), in 21.1.3 by the thoughts of Julian (coniectabat ut prudens), in 22.7.9 by the opinion of his contemporaries (fortitudine, sobrietate, militaris rei scientia . . . excelsum), in 25.3.17 by his own words (examinatis rationibus), and finally it is again stated directly in his necrology (25.4.7: prudentiae eius indicia fuere vel plurima).

The same procedure followed in the table above was applied in the case of each of the eight characters, and each time a quality was explicitly stated or implicitly revealed in the course of the narrative, it was noted down. The specific method of portrayal was determined and recorded under the appropriate heading. In all 1335 cases were noted, subdivided amongst the characters as follows (cf. Appendix): Constantius 258, Julian 564, Valentinian 179, Valens 146, Gallus 57, Jovian 45, Gratian 43, and Procopius 43. As remarked above, the methods fall into two main categories, i.e. the direct and indirect methods. It soon became clear that these main groups could be subdivided, thus facilitating the analysis and discussion of the various techniques. I have made the following subdivision:

\begin{itemize}
  \item[A] \textbf{Direct Methods}
  \begin{itemize}
    \item 1. Necrologies
    \item 2. Formal character portraits
    \item 3. Sporadic direct characterisation
  \end{itemize}

  \item[B] \textbf{Indirect Methods}
  \begin{itemize}
    \item 1. Dramatic portrayal
      \begin{itemize}
        \item i) Speeches, words and letters
        \item ii) Actions and reactions
      \end{itemize}
  \end{itemize}
\end{itemize}

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2. Opinions of contemporaries; rumours
3. Comparison and association
4. Contrast
5. Thoughts, feelings and motives of the character
6. Innuendo and omission
7. Generalisations and hyperbole
8. Revealing remarks or incidents.

Before discussing these methods the concepts of direct and indirect characterisation may, for the sake of clarity, be defined as follows: Direct portrayal takes place as soon as and whenever the author personally and explicitly names one or more qualities of a character. These qualities are 'static' leaving but little room for interpretation to the reader. Indirect portrayal is primarily concerned with the narrative whereas the portrait of a character is as it were a secondary efflux or by-product of the description of events. The author remains in the background leaving it to the reader to infer—and interpret—the qualities which are implicitly present in the narrative. 8

II METHODS OF DIRECT PORTRAYAL
Because of his forthrightness Ammianus readily uses this method of characterisation. A further motivation is his tendency to moralisation 9 which, by the way, is the basis of the division of qualities into bona and vitia in the necrologies.

The direct methods to be discussed are firstly the necrology, then the formal portrait, and lastly sporadic direct characterisation.

1) Necrologies
'The epilogue . . . is, in essence, merely a consideration in retrospect of the qualities of an emperor'. But this succinct definition of L. F. Field 10 has to be explained and qualified. As was customary in ancient historiography and in accordance with Seneca's prescription, 11 the narrative in the Res Gestae is interrupted when the death of an emperor is reported and the aspects of the personality of the deceased are treated briefly. This practice bears a definite resemblance to a typical characteristic of the work of Ammianus, i.e. his digressions: a necrology, like a digression, may be omitted without disturbing the course of the narrative. The essential difference is, however, that while a

8. Cf. D. A. Pauw, op. cit., p. 12 ff. for the lengthy debate regarding direct and indirect portrayal in ancient historiographers which arose from Ivo Bruns' division of these writers into 'Subjekivist en' and 'Anhänger einer indirekten Darstellungsart'. (Bruns, Die Persönlichkeit in der Geschichtsschreibung der Alten, Berlin, 1898, Intr. p. v.)
digression does not form an organic part of the history, the necrology is organically connected for the simple reason that it in great part comprises elements intertwined in the preceding narrative. The author comes forward personally as it were and directly and explicitly gives a well-considered assessment of the emperor’s qualities. The aim of the necrology is not merely to please the reader by a character portrait in the biographical tradition, but to enable him to evaluate the emperor from the list of virtues and vices provided. Apart from its summarising function the epilogue fulfils a supplementary rôle by giving the author the opportunity of adding aspects of the personality which have for some reason or other not been revealed in the narrative, thus drawing as complete a picture as possible. A last important remark should be made: The necrology provides a static portrait comprising a list of qualities with no chance of indicating development or change, a picture composed of innate or acquired traits of the character. On close examination such a single direct portrait cannot present the reader with a full true-to-life picture of the emperor: it is but a ‘photograph’, but at the same time it is meant to be a summary of qualities gradually revealed during the life of the character. Because of the purpose of the necrology it cannot allow for the gradual unfolding or evolution of the personality and there is thus a grave deficiency in the total image. This deficiency is however supplemented when the picture revealed during the preceding narrative is merged with the necrology to form a total portrait. By qualifying some characteristics and by focusing upon certain facets of a personality, colour and perspective are bestowed upon the static qualities of the epilogue. An important fact is hereby stressed: whereas neither the epilogue nor the narrative provides a complete picture, we have here in reality the two mutually complementary components of the total image of the character as depicted by one and the same author. Thus, while the epilogue provides a useful summary as well as a necessary addition of qualities, the preceding narrative provides the necessary background, both by qualifying and by expanding the range of the ‘static’ characteristics mentioned in the epilogue.12

There is a striking regularity in the structure of Ammianus’ necrologies. A brief introduction is followed by a summary of the positive and negative qualities respectively, concluded by a concise description of the physical appearance of the deceased. Because of his strong leaning towards moralisation and on the model of an age old tradition, Ammianus divides the qualities into bona and vitia.13

Not all characters receive epilogues. Two groups may be distinguished: on the one hand only four characters are awarded detailed digressions on their vices and virtues, and these are the four emperors whose term of rule and achievements sufficiently justified such treatment, namely Constantius, Julian, Valentinian.

12. This is the main theme of part Η of my dissertation (pp. 83–172).
and Valens. They are in effect the major characters of the *Res Gestae*. The second group of whom the concluding evaluation is so brief that it can hardly be called a necrology, comprises the three secondary characters Gallus Caesar, Jovianus Augustus, and the pretender Procopius.

The epilogues of Constantius, Valentinian and Valens\(^\text{14}\) are comparable in scope and specifically in the number of qualities mentioned. Since Julian, however, was such an exceptional man in the eyes of Ammianus, an epilogue of exceptional length is dedicated to him (25.4.1–27), and moreover his positive qualities are divided into the four primary and four secondary virtues.\(^\text{15}\) From a comparison of the four necrologies it is clear that Ammianus tries to maintain a balance between the number of times a virtue or a vice is mentioned in the necrology.\(^\text{16}\)

To conclude, although the epilogue is not an ideal way of portraying a character, it is nevertheless in a certain sense indispensable. The reader having gradually and not without effort built up a picture of a character from scattered remarks and often by inferences from the narrative—a picture which is indeed more nuanced and perhaps for that reason somewhat vague—Ammianus succeeds in leaving a final, clearcut and concise impression of the character by way of the epilogue.

2) *Formal Portraits*

Together with the necrology the insertion of a formal characterisation is another important method of direct portrayal. It is however seldom used, perhaps because Ammianus is aware of the drawbacks of this technique. By stating the qualities of a man directly and formally when or shortly after he has made his appearance, the author in effect deprives the character of the possibility of growing gradually and in a natural way from the narrative.

The clearest example of this method is the eulogy on Julian including the digression on his personal manner of living. This eulogy, preceding Julian's rule in Gaul is unparalleled in the work of Ammianus. In the course of the description of the Gallic campaign the author deviates from his narrative to describe Julian's merits. The whole (16.1.1–5) may be regarded as an extensive panegyric for the elements of Menander's scheme for the βασιλικός λόγος are to be found in it and the resemblance to the formal laudatio is unmistakable.

Without going into detail it may be noted that what is found in this formal portrayal, appears, in the case of the other characters, for the first time in their epilogues. Whatever the secondary reasons may be, the basic explanation for

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this extraordinary portrait is no doubt to be found in Ammianus' well-nigh boundless admiration for Julian.

Gratian is formally portrayed on two occasions, i.e. when he becomes Augustus in 367 (27.6.15), and again after the battle against the Lentienses (31.10.18–19). The second sketch bears a remarkable resemblance to an epilogue and has to be seen as a substitute for the customary necrology, since Ammianus' history terminates in 378, five years before the death of Gratian.

The pretender Procopius is introduced by a formal portrait (26.6.1), whereas Eutherius is honoured by an encomium\footnote{17} or \textit{laudatio} because of Ammianus' admiration for him (16.7.4–8).

The single portrait or \textit{notatio} is used to introduce secondary characters at their first appearance by way of a few direct, concise remarks, e.g. Hypatius (29.2.16), Petronius (26.6.7, 8), Olybrius (28.4.1, 2), etc.

3) \textit{Sporadic Direct Characterisation}

Whereas necrologies and formal character portraits—however functional these techniques may be on the whole—are in reality digressions, interrupting the narrative and not integrated with the events, sporadic direct characterisation appears time and again in the course of the narrative and is in a way interwoven with the events. These qualities are not, however, revealed by actions but the author personally takes responsibility and explicitly mentions a quality or tendency. Since this method of portrayal as it were firmly outlines a personality, the depicting of a historic figure in the course of a history without the sporadic use of direct characterisation is in the first place unnatural, and in the second place unthinkable.

Ammianus' application of this technique is illustrated by the following examples: Constantius is labelled as \textit{impendio timidus} (16.8.10), or the author says he is \textit{aviditate plus habendi incensus} (19.11.7). Valentinian was a \textit{homo propalam ferus} (27.7.4) and a \textit{sui arrogans acestimator} (27.10.10), while Gratian is called \textit{benivolus et pius} (30.10.6), Julian was \textit{providus et cunctator} (16.2.11) and Valens is described as \textit{subrusticum hominem} (29.1.11).

Direct portrayal of this type is often interwoven with the narrative as 'epitheta ornantia', and especially in the panegyrical descriptions of Julian and Theodosius, e.g. \textit{efficacissimus Caesar}, 15.4.4; \textit{sollertissimus Caesar}, 17.2.3; \textit{spectatissimi ducis}, 29.5.8; \textit{dux consultissimus}, 29.5.35.\footnote{18} The omission of these superlatives would have no influence on the factual information and thus illustrates the use of this method.

Since this technique is applied sporadically, it is much less disturbing with regard to the narrative than a necrology or a formal portrayal. By means of this method the author can often inconspicuously ascribe qualities to a person by

\footnote{17. Cf. Leo, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 240 for the elements of the \textit{γνώμαις}. Also Field, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 99.}

\footnote{18. Cf. Thompson, \textit{op. cit.}, (pp. 89–110) for a list and discussion of the eulogistic techniques applied in the portrayal of Theodosius.}
interweaving these with the narrative. This is a very useful technique and therefore often applied as clearly appears from the table in the Appendix: in the portrayal of the eight characters, this method is used far more often than the other methods of direct portrayal in denoting qualities (218 times). The necrology takes the second place with 159, followed by the formal portrayal (54). The frequency with which these methods are applied in the description of the individual characters may also be seen in the Appendix.

III METHODS OF INDIRECT PORTRAYAL

As mentioned earlier, personalities grow gradually from the description of events by means of these methods of indirect depiction.

The reason for the subdivision of these techniques is firstly to show that the concept 'indirect portrayal' is in reality far more nuanced, and secondly to do credit to the various facets of the principle of indirect characterisation.

1 Dramatic Portrayal

This technique is used far more frequently than the other methods of indirect depiction (436 out of 904). The fact that the character reveals himself as it were by his words, actions and reactions, makes this method so effective and useful. Ammianus' extremely successful characterisation may to a large extent be ascribed to his excellent application of the various techniques of dramatic portrayal, i.e. speeches, words and letters, actions and reactions.

(i) Speeches, Words and Letters

This is not the occasion for analysing the place, the role and the nature of speeches in ancient historiography.19 It will suffice to say that characterisation is not the primary object of speeches in historical writing, but that it is at most a secondary goal.

In the surviving books of the Res Gestae there are twelve speeches, four by Constantius, six by Julian and two by Valentinian.20 They are all military speeches, probably because for Ammianus everything to a greater or lesser extent centres around the army.21 A speech is potentially not only a means for the author to voice his opinions, but also a very useful instrument for the unfolding of a personality.

An analysis of the speeches in the Res Gestae has led me to the following conclusion: Ammianus' aim is primarily to reproduce as accurately as possible the tenor of each speech in words suitable to the speaker and to the occasion. Qualities revealed by the speeches are a mere by-product of them, and it is

19. Thucydides' exposition of the nature of the speeches in his work is well-known (Hist. 1.22.1), and on the whole this represents the view of ancient historiographers.

20. Constantius: 14.10.11-15; 15.8.5-14; 17.13.26-33; 21.13.10-15. Julian: 16.12.9-12; 26.5.3-7; 21.5.2-8; 23.5.16-23; 24.3.4-7; 25.3.15-20. Valentinian: 26.2.6-10; 27.6.6-9, 12, 13.

noticeable but quite understandable that practically only positive traits are revealed, often radically opposed to the general impression gained by the reader of the character concerned (cf. App.). From this it is clear that Ammianus does not intentionally or primarily use the speech as a medium of character portrayal.

A single example will suffice to indicate how the reader gets to know a character from his speech: shortly before the battle of Strassburg, Julian addresses his men admonishing them to rest (16.12.9–12). He begins with the following words: *Urget ratio salutis tuendae communis . . . non iacentis animi Caesarem hortari vos et orare,—commilitones mei—ut . . . cautorem viam potius eligamus . . .* No less than four qualities are revealed by these words: his sense of responsibility (*ratio salutis tuendae communis*); his undauntedness (*non iacentis animi Caesarem*); his tact, revealed by the way in which he identifies himself with his men (*commilitones mei*); his caution (*cautiorem viam potius eligamus*). Further qualities which can be deduced from his speech (16.12.10) are his energetic nature (*impigram*), his audacity (*audacem*), his self-discipline (*regibilem*) and his sense of responsibility (*consultam*).

In the same way qualities may be revealed by remarks22 or by letters, such as Julian's letter to Constantius (20.8.5–17).

(ii) *Actions and Reactions*

In the 436 cases of dramatic representation a quality is revealed 141 times by words, 38 times by reactions, and in the large majority of cases (257) by actions (cf. Appendix).

Characteristics manifested by a person's reactions are especially irascibility, short-temperedness, impatience and the like. These qualities are revealed particularly in the case of Valentinian and Constantius by their outbursts of temper (*e.g. imperatoris percitii vehementer, 28.1.23; ira vehementi percutus, 30.6.3; ita acriter inflammavit, 15.3.9, etc.*).

Generally speaking a personality may be disclosed by his actions in one of two ways: on the one hand a person may be characterised by his deed as such—thus Julian saves Chonodomarius, king of the Alamanni and is revealed by his deed as merciful (16.12.65). On the other hand the accompanying comments may make an action reveal certain qualities: when for instance Ammianus relates that Julian took great pains that no one should be overloaded with a burden of tribute, his diligence is not revealed by his deed as such but by the accompanying adverb *diligenter* (18.1.1). It should be borne in mind that the handling of situations or the execution of duties in general brings out certain characteristics of the person concerned by means of the impression derived from a chapter or a narrative as a whole.

Exhaustive illustration of this technique would serve no purpose. As a matter of interest, however, it may be noted that of all the methods of character portrayal

22. *E.g. Gallus 14.7.14; Tertullus 19.10.3; Ursicinus 20.2.4; Procopius 26.7.16.*
portrayal, direct and indirect, this is the commonest (257 out of 1335 cases). In
the depiction of Julian in particular this technique is applied much more
frequently than the others, also when compared with the portrayal of the other
characters. The explanation for this is to be found in the exceptionally active
nature of this young ruler.

2) Opinions of Contemporaries; Rumours
When a historian records the statements of contemporaries or rumours about a
character in the course of his narrative, he may do so in good faith because it
provides insight, or he may do so with the purpose of evading the responsibility
for the remarks about the character concerned.23 This technique was often used
by ancient historians since the description of one person by another contributes
degree of authenticity to the impression the author wishes to create. The
opinions of contemporaries about a person may seem to be objective but the
element of subjectivity cannot be ruled out with regard to the author’s selection
of opinions or rumours he wishes to reproduce.

The judgement of contemporaries may be given through the mouth of
individuals or groups, friends or enemies. It can be in the form of criticism but
also of admiration as is clearly shown by Ammianus’ application of this
technique. Whereas this method is on the whole not used very frequently in the
Res Gestae, it appears fairly often in the depiction of Constantius and Julian. In
the case of the former practically only negative qualities are thus revealed, but
with Julian the opposite holds good: Constantius, 17 negative, 2 positive; as
against Julian, 4 to 27.

In determining qualities revealed by this technique one should obviously
distinguish carefully between characterising remarks by contemporaries on the
one hand and denigrating utterances on the other.

This medium of portrayal may be illustrated by a single representative
example: Constantius, having decided to promote the youthful Julian to
Caesar, introduces him to the soldiers by way of a complimentary address
(15.8.5–8, 10, 12–14). The author could hardly have found a more suitable
medium for such a flattering description of his hero: In the words of Constantius
he is portrayed as modest (verecundia, §8), a young man of enterprising spirit
(elucentic industriae iuvenem, §8), of quiet strength (adulescens vigoris
tranquilli, §10), of temperate behaviour (temperati mores) and excellent
disposition (praeclaram indolem). Moreover he is trained in all good arts
(praeclaram indolem bonis aribus institutam, §10) and a brave man (vir fortis,
§14).

23. Cf. R. N. Mooney, Character Portrayal and Distortion in Ammianus Marcellinus,
Diss., Michigan, 1955, p. 135: ‘Placing an unfavourable rumor or interpretation in the
mouth of an anonymous third person is an obvious means of shifting responsibility from
oneself’.
3) **Comparison and Association**

A very useful and even indispensable method of characterisation has always been the *comparison* of a person with some historical figure.\(^24\) The author saves himself the trouble of a detailed description of a person since the mere reference to a famous personage immediately implies certain eminent qualities, the mention of which thus becomes unnecessary. Often a historic personage becomes proverbial for a specific quality. Such a personage represents, as it were, the type of which people in later years are but reproductions. The power of the example in the life of the Romans can scarcely be over-estimated and the influence of *exempla* on their thoughts and actions was extremely strong.\(^25\) Greek and Roman history provided a multitude of models, examples of exemplary or of base actions which had to provide a guiding line for their descendants.

Ammianus makes frequent use of this method of portrayal and has an encyclopaedic knowledge of the Graeco-Roman literature. He readily typifies his characters by for instance regarding Gallus Caesar as a reproduction of Domitian, and Julian as a reborn Titus. It is especially the description of Julian which abounds in comparisons with great men of the past: he was shrewd like Titus, a warrior like Trajan, mild like Antoninus and resembled Marcus Aurelius (16.1.4).

*Association* is a less explicit form of comparison and it is left to the reader to deduce from the context the implied similarity or connection between two characters. For example, by associating Valens with the depravity of his father-in-law Petronius, a most unfavourable picture is implicitly created of Valens too (26.6.7–9).

4) **Contrast**

This method of character portrayal is essentially also a form of comparison. In a comparison similar qualities are concerned whereas opposing qualities are focused upon in the case of contrast. The effect of an antithesis is obtained in two ways, i.e. by explicitly contrasting two characters, and by an indirect interaction between two personalities.

The first method is often used by Ammianus in portrayals: the nature of Gallus is for instance contrasted with the self-controlled disposition of his brother Julian (*temperatis moribus*, 14.11.28). Valentinian and Valens are also strongly contrasted with the remarkable virtues of Julian (*memorandis virtutibus*, 26.10.8). However, the second method is far more often applied and is naturally a most useful medium of character portrayal in the hand of the author. By the

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exaltation of one person his counterpart is blackened by implication while an explicit contrast does not necessarily occur.

This technique is clearly illustrated by the relationship between Constantius and Ursicinus. The suspicious and jealous Constantius and the virtuous Ursicinus are continually played off against each other, the latter being extolled at the cost of Constantius' reputation (bk XVI–XIX).

Julian and Constantius are also strongly contrasted, especially with respect to their speeches, their attitude towards their men and the phrases by which they are described: while the author refers to Constantius' *animus angustus et tener* (14.5.2), he speaks of Julian's *praecelaram inolem* (15.8.10). Constantius is *dubius et mutabilis* (15.5.33), whereas Julian is *indeclinabilis* (18.1.2) and *fidentissimus* (25.1.16).

Thoughts, Feelings and Motives of the Character

Just as an author may gradually reveal a character in an indirect way by his words or deeds or by the comments of contemporaries, in the same way he may reveal qualities by ascribing certain thoughts or feelings, inclinations or motives to such a character. Ammianus applies this method freely, partly on the model of his incomparable master Tacitus.

An example of hidden thoughts ascribed to a person is to be found in Ammianus' explicit statement that Gallus was secretly aspiring to the throne (*principem locum . . . clam affectabat*, 14.11.8). The author records frightful dreams afflicting Gallus (14.11.17); but how can he know this? Feelings of uncertainty and indecision are time and again ascribed to Constantius (20.9.3; 21.7.1) and malignant motives to Valens (26.10.2; 29.2.17), or the hidden thoughts and feelings of Procopius are revealed to the reader (26.6.10–12). How can the author possibly know all these things? We have to conclude that in such cases it was impossible for Ammianus to base his 'knowledge' on facts, and that he is arbitrarily providing speculating information on the characters concerned, thus conveying his personal opinion regarding them.

This method is also used as a means of positive portrayal, especially in the case of Julian (42 out of 51 cases): we are given an insight into his private thoughts by phrases such as *multa et varia cogitanti* (18.2.2), *multa volvendo considerans* (20.8.2), etc., and references to his care and concern sound like a refrain: *nihil remittentibus curis* (16.2.2; 21.4.7), *cura constrictus* (20.4.19), *distrhebatur multiformibus curis* (22.10.1), and *constanti sollicitudine* (16.4.4), *sollicitus Caesar* (16.12.6), *sollicitus reputans* (21.1.2), etc.

Amongst the methods of indirect portrayal, actions are most frequently used (257), followed by portrayal through words (141), and in the third position by thoughts, feelings and motives (110) (cf. Appendix).

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26. 21.13.9 vs. 16.12.8, 23.5.15, 25.3.21.
27. 24.3.8, 21.5.9, 25.4.1221.16.12.
6) **Innuendo and Omission**

*Innuendo* is the method by means of which an author may create impressions by suggestions, reflections, ambiguous remarks, alternative explanations for the conduct of a character, or by conditioning the reader's mind in a certain direction. Just as his master Tacitus, Ammianus applies this subtle technique nearly exclusively while depicting negative qualities. When, for example, Constantius pardons the traitor Amphilochius because he has not yet been openly found guilty, he does this *lenior solito* (21.6.2), a remark which clearly insinuates his ruthlessness. In the battle with the Goths Valens was killed but his body could nowhere be found. In a very subtle way the author says that amongst the loss of many famous men, the deaths of Trajan and Sebastian were greatly regretted, and he proceeds to mention other names (31.13.18). The death of Valens, however, is nowhere mourned, implying that his death was no particular loss.

*Omission* is an obvious method of negative portrayal, for all positive qualities which are in any way at variance with a negative bias against a person may simply be left unmentioned. Since however this investigation does not comprise a comparison of Ammianus' rendering with that of other historians, such cases of omission can hardly be determined.29

7) **Generalisations and Hyperbole**

This method of characterisation *could* also be seen as a form of innuendo. It is concerned with the creation of certain impressions—nearly always negative—impressions which are not confirmed by facts. Generalisation is a most effective technique since it is welcomed and accepted by the reader. Generalisations are in the most cases closely coupled with hyperbole, and are part of Ammianus' rhetorical and emotional style.30

This method is used particularly in the description of the reigns of Gallus, Constantius and Valens. It generally reflects negative qualities (in 30 out of 34 cases). Words such as *cuncta, multi* and *omnes* are often indications of hyperbole. Compare for instance the allegation that during the reign of Gallus *e iudiciis fas omne discessit* (14.7.21). The alleged massacre of 14.5.9 amounts to the execution of a small number of soldiers, and the *plures, alii* and *non nullas* are in reality only a few followers of a certain Magnentius who were killed.

As far as the treason trials under Constantius are concerned, there is a marked similarity to Tacitus' description of the treason trials during the reign of Tiberius, especially such things as uncorroborated impressions, vague generalisations which are not proved, the deliberate omission of positive aspects, and

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30. Cf. A. Alföldi, *A Conflict of Ideas in the Late Roman Empire. The Clash between the Senate and Valentinian I.*, Oxford, 1952, p. 3: 'The rhetorical culture of the age which absorbed into itself all other aims required that history should be a special kind of oratory. 'That is why the literary fashion of the age, artificial, florid, and capricious in its choice of words, had free play in the work of Ammianus'.

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impressions suggested and subsequently simply repeated as facts— all this is Tacitean to the highest degree.32

The portrayal of Valens provides an excellent example of the use of exaggerated generalisations. In mentioning accusations, tortures, exile and executions, Ammianus avails himself of emotional media to heighten the impression of horror. He freely applies rhetorical methods, and hyperbole particularly is used time and again to create an impression of the enormities perpetrated. The following is an extract from the emotional description in 26.10.9–14: nothing is explicitly stated; tortures are mentioned, bloody inquisitions and executions; many innocent victims are tortured and beheaded, and many a distinguished man is driven headlong into banishment, there to waste away from sorrow, or to support his life by beggary. But the victims remain anonymous; the nature of their crimes and the manner of the trials are left unmentioned.

8) Revealing Remarks or Incidents

Qualities revealed in this way are neither explicitly mentioned, nor is a specific action described by means of which characteristics are disclosed. Often it is simply the casual reference to something experienced by a person which brings out a quality, or the reader may get to know a character through an incident in which he was involved. Instances where the effect of a man’s nature, his words or his deeds on his fellow-men are described, also belong to this category: from the reactions of contemporaries it can often be inferred whether a man was loved or unpopular, and qualities such as authority and kindness are frequently reflected in this way. Thus the suspicious nature of Constantius is revealed by the casual remark that he was accustomed eagerly to investigate secret charges (15.5.5). During the battle of Strassburg the tribune of one of the squadrons took to flight, whereupon Julian spurred on his horse to stop him. The moment he saw his general, the tribune stopped short; pale and struck with fear he rode back to renew the battle (16.12.39–41). This incident and particularly the reaction of the tribune, reveal the strong and commanding personality of Julian.

This method is evidently seldom used consciously and with calculated subtlety. Often it is a mere occurrence or a casual remark which ‘incidentally’ reveals another aspect of a personality. Negative as well as positive qualities come to light in this way.

All the methods of indirect portrayal have now been discussed; a review of the findings points to the frequency with which these techniques are applied. In the delineation of the eight characters concerned, the most frequently used method is portrayal by actions (257), followed by characterisation by means of words

31. Cf. 15.3; also the Scythopolis trials (19.12.3–12) and the ‘terrible’ aftermath in 19.12.13—without a single example to confirm the allegations!

32. Cf. Tacitus’ description of the handling of the trial of Libo Drusus by Tiberius, Ann. II. 27–32, as well as the twenty odd treason trials at the beginning of bk. VI.

Next is portrayal by ascribing thoughts, feelings, or motives to a character (110), followed by revealing remarks or incidents (101), comments of contemporaries (84), innuendo (68), comparison (54), reactions (38) and generalisations (34). The fact that contrast is apparently used the least (17 times) is misleading since it often happens that one cannot speak of 'cases' because two characters are played off against each other during an entire episode. The frequency with which the indirect methods are used with regard to the several characters may be seen in the Appendix.

CONCLUSION

It is immediately clear from the Appendix that indirect methods are used more than twice as often as direct (904 : 431). This yet again reflects the truth that the history of the Roman Empire ('Reichsgeschichte') is the primary aim of the author, whereas character portrayal is his object only sporadically. What is the result of the frequent application of the techniques of indirect portrayal? While the author explicitly states qualities by direct depiction, thus providing the reader with a 'static' portrait, this portrait subsequently comes to life, as it were, as a result of indirect characterisation. It becomes a dynamic picture, often dramatically disclosed by words, reactions or deeds. As the personality 'unfolds' itself before the reader, he gets to know this character from his own observation—and thus in a more natural way—as a living and active being distinguished by its own way of thinking and its own emotional life. As the picture 'grows' from the narrative, it is incomplete holding out the possibility of development and change. Basically the same qualities are stated in direct description, with this important difference that the bare characteristics are transformed to living qualities by indirect means, that a wider perspective is made possible by the illumination of a greater variety of aspects of each characteristic, and that these formal characteristics are qualified by the various situations by which they are revealed.

In this way indirect portrayal fulfils an indispensable function in characterisation regarded as a whole. Whereas most qualities are sooner or later stated by one of the direct methods, the static portrait is brought to life, qualified and put into perspective by means of indirect methods. By this interaction between techniques, excellent character portraits are built up resulting in the universal commendation accorded to Ammianus' masterly portrayal of character.
## APPENDIX

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Direct: 431
Dramatic: 436
Indirect: 504

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Acta Classica

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