In an academic paper, as in a panegyric, it is customary to begin with an apology for the difficulty of the topic and the writer's inadequacy in its face: the mass of material baffles exposition, the author's talent is thin, and (worse yet) people always make these excuses.\textsuperscript{1} So it might seem simply \textit{pro forma} to say that trying to examine Constans in the light of his image, indeed in any light at all, is a daunting task: that does not make it any less true. Some emperors have many extant speeches in their praise or blame, some none, but Constantine's youngest son—an Augustus for over a decade (337–350)—is unique in that half a panegyric about him survives, from the wrong half of the Empire: the 59th oration of Libanius, expertly explicated elsewhere in this volume by Alan Ross.\textsuperscript{2} The thought that our image of Constans hangs by the slender thread of what the Antiochene sophist believed was relevant in the middle of the 340s is of little comfort: Nicomedia was a very long way from the emperor's stamping grounds on the Rhine and Danube and Libanius never evinced any other interest in him.\textsuperscript{3} This lack of materials for history is why Constans normally has only three fleeting roles in the history of the fourth century: as victor in a brutal civil war with his elder brother Constantine II in 340, as the man who supplied a definitive riposte when Constantius II asked Athanasius 'you and whose army?' one time too many, and as a failure who died hunted and alone, in flight from the forces of the usurper Magnentius.\textsuperscript{4} The history of his reign has to be pieced together from inscriptions, laws, and compressed and often

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{1} cf. Libanius \textit{Or.} 59.5.
\item \textsuperscript{2} Chapter 8. cf. Ross 2016.
\item \textsuperscript{3} The date of \textit{Or.} 59 is uncertain: Portmann 1989, argued for 344, but Malosse 2001 argued for 348 (repeated in Malosse 2003, 7–11). The precise date is not a matter of absolute importance for this piece. For Constans' movements see Barnes 1993, 224–5. Libanius' other mention of Constans is at \textit{Or.} 14.10 (not complimentary).
\item \textsuperscript{4} For the civil war see Bleckmann 2003. On Constans' role in the ecclesiastical politics of the 340s, Barnes 1993, 47–108, in particular 89 for the authenticity of Constans' letter threatening war after the council of Serdica (that some such threat was made is strongly suggested by Lucifer of Cagliari, \textit{De sancto Athanasio} 1.29).
\end{itemize}
considerably later narratives. What follows is, therefore, necessarily a little experimental.5

A second caveat: Constans was probably only 14 when his father died in 337.6 He was a child emperor who grew up and he did at least some of that growing up as ruler of two-thirds of the Roman world, sitting astride a complex machine of government and ‘leading’ its massive armies. If it is exaggerated to call to mind Jean-Paul Laurens’ famous portrait of Honorius enthroned, feet pathetically unable to touch the floor, then the problem of agency still looms large when we think about Constans. It is obvious that for much of his early reign he was guided, or even directed, by some of the men his father had placed around him—experienced administrators like Fabius Titianus, many of them from Italy and powerful aristocrats in the sub-empire Constans was to rule.7 Despite this, reference is here made to Constans and his regime—the wider apparatus about him—interchangeably. This is because our evidence is simply not thickly-textured enough to be more subtle. It is a troublesome enough business to try to assemble the skeleton prosopography of his government, let alone to work out which factions swirled at any one time, who was really the power behind the throne, or when and why Constans changed his mind. It would be entertaining to speculate, but speculation is all it would be.

That failure of Constans mentioned above has cast a long shadow over his reign. He was the only emperor of the neo-Flavian dynasty to die at the hands of his subjects (they generally preferred to keep murder a family affair) and the temptation to interpret everything about him through the lens of 350 is strong. It reaches its fullest expression in some of John Drinkwater’s articles, which may be summarised with only a little unfairness as stating that Constans was a failure because he was overthrown and was overthrown because he was a failure. We learn that Constans was ‘wholly discredited’, that the extent of his popularity led him to be branded a tyrant, that he was so weak he could have been destroyed at any time, that he was a political bankrupt, that he was extremely unpopular and even ‘probably deserved to be overthrown’.8 Others have hardly been kinder about his ‘ruthless and tyrannical manner’, and the fact he was ‘not a popular and widely respected ruler’.9 This impression of general ineptitude and unpleasantness has its roots in the poor reputation which Constans

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5 For the basic outline of his reign, see now Maraval 2013, 39–62; Harries 2012, 189–96 is a rich and perceptive survey (one wishes it were longer).

6 Barnes 1982, 45 for the calculation.

7 ‘Fabius Titianus 6’, PLRE 1, 918–9.
