1) Syme’s thesis: “The rule of Augustus brought manifold blessings to Rome... Yet this new dispensation...was the work of fraud and bloodshed, based upon the seizure of power and redistribution of property by a revolutionary leader.” (2)

2) The achievement of Octavian as a revolutionary leader: “This present inquiry will attempt to discover the resources and devices by which a revolutionary leader arose in civil strife, usurped power for himself and his faction, transformed a faction into a national party, and [reshaped] a torn and distracted land into a nation, with a stable and enduring government.” (4)

3) Military adventure and betrayal: Octavian was a “military adventurer who betrayed and proscribed his ally” [Cicero]. (4)

4) Peace and Despotism: “In the beginning kings ruled at Rome, and in the end, as was fated, it came round to monarchy again. Monarchy brought concord. During the Civil Wars every party and every leader professed to be defending the cause of liberty and of peace. Those ideals were incompatible. When peace came, it was the peace of despotism.” (9)

5) The qualities of Octavian: “The personality of Octavianus will best be left to emerge from his actions. One thing at least is clear. From the beginning his sense of realities was unerring, his ambition implacable. In that the young man was a Roman and a Roman aristocrat. He was only eighteen years of age; but he resolved to acquire the power and glory along with the name of Caesar.” (113)

6) Octavian’s means of gaining power: “For the ambitious Octavianus, the gradual advancement of a Roman noble through the consecrated order of magistracies to the consulate, the command of an army, the auctoritas of a senior statesman, all that was too long and too slow... Legitimate primacy, it is true, could only be attained at Rome through many extra-constitutional resources, bribery, intrigue, and even violence; for the short and perilous path that Octavianus intended, such resources would have to be doubled and redoubled.” (119)

7) Octavian benefited from disorder: “With his years, his name and his ambition, Octavianus had nothing to gain from concord in the State, everything from disorder.” (120)

8) Octavian compared with Caesar, Antonius and Cicero: “By nature, the young man was cool and circumspect; he knew that personal courage was often but another name for rashness. But the times called for daring and the example of Caesar taught him to run risks gaily, to insist upon his prestige, his honor, the rights due to his name and station. But not to excess: Octavianus took a firm stand upon his dignitas without dangerous indulgence in chivalry or clemency; he perfected himself in the study of political cant and the practice of a dissimulation that had been alien to the splendid and patrician nature of Caesar. He soon took the measure of Antonius: the Caesarian soldier was a warning against the more generous virtues and vices. Another eminent Roman could furnish a text in the school of politics. The failure of Cicero as a statesman showed the need for courage and constancy in all the paths of duplicity. A change of front in politics is not disastrous unless caused by delusion or indecision. The treacheries of Octavianus were conscious and consistent.” (122)

9) Cicero’s attempt to legitimize and then control Octavian: “The political alliance between Octavianus and Cicero was not merely the plot of a crafty and unscrupulous youth. Cicero was
Selections from *The Roman Revolution*, by Ronald Syme, 1939

possessed of an overweening opinion of his own sagacity; it had ever been his hope to act as a political mentor to one of the general of the Republic.” (143)

10) **The loss of free speech**: “Freedom of speech was an essential part of the Republican virtue of libertas, to be regretted more than political freedom when both were abolished. For the sake of peace and the common good, all power had to pass to one man. That was not the worst feature of monarchy—it was the growth of servility and adulation.” (152)

11) **Definition of Libertas**: “Libertas is a vague and negative notion—freedom from the rule of a tyrant or a faction. It follows that libertas, like regnum and dominatio, is a convenient term of political fraud. Libertas was most commonly invoked in defense of the existing order by individuals or classes in enjoyment of power and wealth. The libertas of the Roman aristocrat meant the rule of a class and the perpetuation of privilege.” (155)

12) **Brutus disagrees with Cicero’s elevation of Octavian to formal command in the war against Antony in 43**: “Octavianus was a greater danger to the Republic than Antonius: that was the argument of the somber and perspicacious Brutus.” (184)

13) **The formation of the Second Triumvirate in 43**: “Two days of concentrated diplomacy decided the fate of the Roman world. Antonius when consul had abolished the Dictatorship for all time. The tyrannic office was now revived under another name—for a period of five years three men were to hold paramount and arbitrary power under the familiar pretext of setting the Roman State in order.” (188)

14) **The Proscriptions of the Second Triumvirate in 43**: “Roman society under the terror witnessed the triumph of the dark passions of cruelty and revenge, of the ignoble vices of cupiditas and treachery. The laws and constitution of Rome had been subverted. With them perished honor and security, family and friendship.” (190)

15) **Octavian during the Proscriptions of 43**: “Caesar’s heir was no longer a rash youth but a chill and mature terrorist.” (191)

16) **Brutus and Cassius at Philippi in 42**: “The men who fell at Philippi fought for a principle, a tradition and a class—narrow, imperfect and outworn, but for all that the soul and spirit of Rome.” (205)

17) **Summary of Octavian’s conduct between 43 and 38**: “Octavianus the adventurer, after achieving recognition with Republican help against the domination of Antonius, deserted and proscribed his associates before a year had passed; again, at Perusia, he stamped out the liberties of the Rome and Italy in blood and desolation, and stood forth as the revolutionary leader, unveiled and implacable.” (216)

18) **Octavian’s divorce of Scribonia and marriage of Livia in 40**: “Marriage and divorce were the public tokens of political pacts of feuds. Octavianus abruptly divorced Scribonia, his senior by many years and a tiresome character. He then contracted with unseemly haste an alliance that satisfied head, heart and senses, and endured unimpaired to the day of his death. For once in his life he surrendered to emotion; it was with political advantage.” (229)
19) The War of Actium between Octavian and Antony & Cleopatra in 31: “The official Roman version of the cause of the War of Actium is quite simple, consistent and suspect—a just war, fought in defense of freedom and peace against a foreign enemy: a degenerate Roman was striving to subvert the liberties of the Roman People, to subjugate Italy and the West under the rule of an oriental queen. An expedient and salutary belief. Octavian was in reality the aggressor, his war was preceded by a coup d’état: Antonius had the consuls and the constitution on his side. It was therefore necessary to demonstrate that Antonius was ‘morally’ in the wrong and ‘morally’ the aggressor. The situation and the phraseology recur in the history of war and politics whenever there is a public opinion worth persuading or deceiving.” (271)

20) The War of Actium and propaganda against Cleopatra: “It was not a war for domination against Antonius—Antonius must not be mentioned. To secure Roman sanction and emotional support for the enterprise it was necessary to invent a foreign danger that menaced everything that was Roman, as Antonius himself assuredly did not. The propaganda of Octavian magnified Cleopatra beyond all measure and decency. To ruin Antonius it was not enough that she should be a siren: she must be made a Fury—‘fatale monstrum’” (275)

21) The War of Actium and propaganda against Cleopatra: “The policy and ambitions of Antonius or of Cleopatra were not the true cause of the War of Actium; they were a pretext in the strife for power, the magnificent lie upon which was built the supremacy of Caesar’s heir and the resurgent nation of Italy.” (275)

22) The War of Actium and propaganda against Cleopatra: “Actium was a shabby affair, the worthy climax to the ignoble propaganda against Cleopatra, to the sworn and sacred union of all Italy. But the young Caesar required the glory of a victory that would surpass the greatest in all history, Roman or Hellenic... Actium became the contest of East and West personified, the birth legend in the mythology of the Principate.” (297)

23) Octavian’s celebration of three triumphs in 29: “Peace was a tangible blessing. For a generation, all parties had striven for peace: once attained, it became the spoil and prerogative of the victors. Already the Senate had voted that the Temple of Janus should be closed, a sign that the world was at peace on land and sea.” (303)

24) Security of property rights under Augustus: “Liberty was gone, but property, respected and secure, was now mounting in value. The beneficial working of the rich treasure from Egypt became everywhere apparent. Above all, security of [property rights] was to be the watchword of the new order.” (304)

25) The desire for Order after civil war: “What Rome and Italy desired was a return, not to freedom—anything but that—but to civil and ordered government, in a word, to ‘normal conditions.’” (206)

26) The settlement of 27 - princeps: “Octavianus himself assumed the title traditionally pertaining to the senator foremost in rank and authority, that of princeps senatus” (307)

27) The settlement of 27 – proconsular imperium: “C. Julius Caesar Octavianus went through a painless and superficial transformation. The process was completed...when he resigned all powers and all provinces to the free disposal of the Senate and People of Rome. Acclamation
was drowned in protest. The senators [begged] him not to abandon the Commonwealth which he had preserved. Yielding with reluctance to these manifestations of loyalty and patriotism, the master of the whole world consented to assume a special commission for a period of ten years, in the form a proconsular authority over...Spain, Gaul and Syria.” (313)

28) The settlement of 27 – Augustus: “A new name was devised, expressing veneration of more than mortal due.” (314)

29) The settlement of 27 - consul: “But Augustus was to be consul as well as proconsul, year after year without a break.” (315)

30) The settlement of 27 – avoidance of reminders of Caesar: “The power and domination of Augustus was in reality far too similar to that of the Dictator [Caesar] to stand even a casual reminder, let alone pointed and genuine comparison.” (318)

31) The settlement of 27 – reality of despotism: “In truth, it may be regarded as merely the legalization, and therefore the strengthening of despotic power.” (323)

32) The new settlement of 23 – reasons: “Three events—a state trial, a conspiracy and a serious illness of Augustus—revealed the precarious tenure on which the peace of the world reposed.” (333)

33) The settlement of 23 – powers: “The two pillars of his rule, proconsular imperium and tribunician powers, were the Revolution itself—the Army and the People. On them stood the military and monarchic demagogue.” (337)

34) The settlement of 23 – significance: “Liberty had perished. The Revolution had triumphed and had produced a government, the Principate assumed form and definition. If a exact date must at all costs be sought in what is a process, not a series of acts, the establishment of the Empire might suitably be reckoned from this year.” (338)

35) The weakening of the Senate and the rise of an imperial bureaucracy: “The Senate becomes a body of civil servants; the magistracies are depressed and converted into qualifying stages in the hierarchy of administration.” (387)

36) The importance and the danger of the Army: “Not in Rome but with the provincial armies lay the real resources of power and the only serious danger.” (388)

37) The sacrifice of Liberty and the achievement of Order and Security: “There is something more important than political liberty; and political rights are a means, not an end in themselves. That end is security of life and property: it could not be guaranteed by the constitution of Republican Rome. Worn and broken by civil war and disorder, the Roman People was ready to surrender the ruinous privilege of freedom and submit to strict government.” (513)

38) Contemporary judgment of Augustus: “That the power of Caesar Augustus was absolute, no contemporary could doubt. But his rule was justified by merit, founded upon consent and tempered by duty.” (520)