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Women in Livy and Tacitus

By Stephen Prevoznik

Introduction

Livy and Tacitus are both influential and important Roman authors. They have written two of the most influential histories of Rome. Livy covers from the founding of Rome until the Reign of Augustus. Tacitus focuses on the early empire, writing from the end of Augustus' reign through Nero. This sets up a nice symmetry, as Tacitus picks up where Livy stops. Much has been written about the men they include, but the women also play an important role. This essay plans to outline how the women in each work are used by the authors to attain their goals. In doing so, each author's aim is exposed.

Livy: Women as Exempla

Livy's most famous work, *Ab Urbe Condita*, is meant to be read as a guide. Livy, lived during the chaos of the early empire. He saw the political crisis as the result of lost Roman values. In his preface he writes:

ad illa mihi pro se quisque acriter intendat animum, quae vita, qui mores fuerint, per quos viros quibusque artibus domi militiaeque et partum et auctum imperium sit; labente deinde paulatim disciplina velut desidentis primo mores sequatur animo, deinde ut magis magisque lapsi sint, tum ire coeperint praecipites, donec ad haec tempora quibus nec vitia nostra nec remedia pati possumus perventum est. (Liv.pr.9-10)

Here are the questions to which I would have every reader give his close attention—what life and morals were like; through what men and by what policies, in peace and in war, empire was established and enlarged; then let him note how, with the gradual relaxation of discipline, morals first gave way, as it were, then sank lower and lower, and finally began the downward plunge which has brought us to the present time, when we can endure neither our vices nor their cure¹.

Livy wants to remind his contemporary Romans about how they achieved greatness in an effort to stop the current moral decline. Therefore, the men that Livy writes about are supposed to serve as examples. This section investigates how the women in the early books of *Ab Urbe Condita* are supposed to serve as examples. Some women are used by Livy as good examples. Among these

¹ All translations are pulled from B.O Foster in the Loeb Classical Library edition of Livy, *Book 1* (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1919 [1998]).

is Lavinia who exemplifies how beneficial selflessness in aim can be. However, not all women embody good examples, as Tullia explicitly shows the dangers of ambition. Lastly, there is a small group of women who cannot be classified as simply good or bad examples. These women exemplify deceit, a virtue that is both good and bad for the Romans. By examining the examples that these women provide we can get a better sense of exactly what Livy meant by the decline of morals and what virtues he deemed essential to the preservation of the Roman state.

Lavinia is one of the first women that appears in the work. She is the wife of Aeneas and is tasked with managing the newly founded city until her son, Ascanius, is old enough to rule (1.3.1). Livy praises her for keeping the state running and secure for her son, going so far as to interject *tanta indoles in Lavinia erat* (1.3.1) “so strong was Lavinia’s character”. The Latin is vague in this interjection, warranting a further investigation of Lavinia’s character. The selflessness that she employs in her rule would certainly be praiseworthy. She never looks to increase her own standing or gain wealth while in power. The first example that Lavinia is providing is to women in prominent families.² As will be examined later, some highborn women tried to use their position, or that of their husband, to increase their power. This usually had negative results for Rome and Lavinia provides an early example against this type of behavior. Another important aspect of her rule is that she gives up her power willingly. This is in sharp contrast to the political power struggle that Livy lived through. So indeed, a normal and uneventful transfer of power, especially so early in the history of Rome, served as an example and was a reminder about just how low Roman morals have sunk. Livy is reminding the reader that political strife and civil wars were not the default of Roman politics, there was a time when politicians gave up power willingly and just served the state. The fact that a woman is giving up

² Stevenson 176:2011.

power, something contemporary men struggled with, makes this reminder even more jarring and would certainly draw a Roman's attention.

The Sabine women are the first Roman women. They also hold a very important role in the history of Rome. The Romans realize that they do not have enough women, and that if they did not find some the state would perish with them. Romulus makes a festival and invites some neighboring peoples. The Sabines are especially important, as they bring their women and children. During the festival they are kidnapped by the Romans. Despite this they settle in with their new husbands and rush between their Roman husbands and Sabine relatives to stop them from warring against each other (1.9-13). They are so committed to their new home that they even blame the conflict on themselves stating to the two armies, *Si adfinitatis inter vos, si conubii piget, in nos vertite iras; nos causa belli, nos vulnerum ac caedium viris ac parentibus sumus* (1.13.3) "If you regret," they continued, "the relationship that unites you, if you regret the marriage-tie, turn your anger against us; we are the cause of war, the cause of wounds, and even death to both our husbands and our parents." This leads to the adoption of all the Sabines into Rome and the joint rule of Romulus and Tatius. Again, we see a woman acting in a selfless way to help the Roman state. They place themselves in between the two armies, putting themselves in danger, to prevent bloodshed between relatives³. In this way they serve as an example in a similar way as Lavinia does.

Livy also uses the Sabine women to show what is needed for a successful marriage. Earlier in the chapter Romulus addresses the captured women to lift their spirits. He declares that,

³ Since the Sabine women are married to the Roman men, the Sabines and Romans are relatives by marriage.

patrum id superbia factum, qui conubium finitimis negassent; illas tamen in matrimonio, in societate fortunarum omnium civitatisque, et quo nihil carius humano generi sit, liberum fore; mollirent modo iras et, quibus fors corpora dedisset, darent animos. Saepe ex iniuria postmodum gratiam ortam, eoque melioribus usuras viris, quod adnurus pro se quisque sit ut, cum suam vicem functus officio sit, parentium etiam patriaeque expleat desiderium. (1.9.14-15)

the pride of their parents had caused this deed, when they had refused their neighbours the right to intermarry; nevertheless the daughters should be wedded and become co-partners in all the possessions of the Romans, in their citizenship and, dearest privilege of all to the human race, in their children; only let them moderate their anger, and give their hearts to those to whom fortune had given their persons. A sense of injury had often given place to affection, and they would find their husbands the kinder for this reason, that every man would earnestly endeavour not only to be a good husband, but also to console his wife for the home and parents she had lost.

Given the outcomes, it is safe to say that affection did arise from their injury. Romulus offers partnership (*societas*) to the women. This implies that the women and their husbands will have to cooperate with each other, and this is true. This sense of cooperation and co-partnership is in addition to a spirit of mutual good will. The women are told to temper their anger and accept their captors. In exchange they will get good husbands who will do everything in their power to make up for the longing of their home and family that they left behind. The essence of a good marriage is rooted in these two concepts: cooperation and mutual good will and the Sabines are perfect examples of this.⁴ Their situation also lends itself to being compared to a high-class Roman marriage. For the Romans marriage was not a choice. Many marriages were prearranged between two families of similar status with the only goal being immediate political gain.⁵ This meant that high class roman women found themselves in a similar situation to the Sabine women. Both were in a foreign home that they were forced into and were torn between the family they were born into and the one they were married into. The Sabine women show it is possible to mediate between these two different families.

⁴ Brown 303:1995.

⁵ Dixon 355:1985.

There may have been a contemporary inspiration for the Sabine women, as the parallels between Julia, the daughter of Caesar, and them are striking.⁶ For context Julia was married off to Pompey so that there could be peace between Caesar and Pompey. That plan worked while she was alive but once she died the peace ended. Lucan states that she might have been able to quell the anger of her father and husband, if she were granted a longer life (Lucan *Pharsalia* 114-118). In both cases we see women mediating peace between two enemies. This is probably meant to contrast bad examples, who actively promote violence to help them attain power.

Hersilia is not mentioned often in Livy, but she plays an important role, nonetheless. She was the daughter of the Sabine king, Titus Tatius, and was married to Romulus after she was kidnapped. She is able to convince Romulus to accept the Antemnates into the Roman state. After being moved by the entreaties of the captured Antemnite women she pleads to Romulus that the Antemnates should be incorporated into the state. She claims, *ita rem coalescere concordia posse* (Liv 1.11.2) “in this way the state would gain in strength by harmony.” It would appear that she increases the power of the state by substituting harmony for conflict. She is an exemplary woman for supporting her husband and promoting harmony. This is especially important since Romulus is in a warlike frame of mind. The beginning of the sentence has Romulus *duplicique Victoria ovantem* (1.11.2) “Exulting over his double victory.” The double victory is referring to him both routing the Antemnite army and capturing their city. Romulus would never have considered accepting them peacefully if it were not for Hersilia. Again we see an example for Roman women as she supports her husband with no ulterior motives.⁷ She never

⁶ Piper 27:1971.

⁷ Hersilia’s positive example is not universally agreed upon. Stevenson states that the Roman readers would have been troubled by Romulus accepting his wife’s advice so quickly.

publicly berates him or challenges him in military affairs. She works behind the scenes and only offers this suggestion in confidence.

The last good example comes from Lucretia. She is the wife of Lucius Tarquinius Collatinus. She is raped by Sextus Tarquinius, the son of the king. She commits suicide out of shame stating, *nec ulla deinde inpudica Lucretiae exemplo vivet* (Liv 1.58.10) “nor in time to come shall ever unchaste women live through the example of Lucretia.” Having sworn to avenge her death, her husband, his father, and Brutus swear to avenge her. Brutus realizes that revenge can only take one form and states

Per hunc,” inquit, “castissimum ante regiam iniuriam sanguinem iuro, vosque, di, testes facio me L. Tarquinium Superbum cum scelerata coniuge et omni liberorum stirpe ferro, igni, quacumque denique vi possim, exsecuturum nec illos nec alium quemquam regnare Romae passurum. (Liv. 1.59.1)

By this blood, most chaste until a prince wronged it, I swear, and I take you, gods, to witness, that I will pursue Lucius Tarquinius Superbus and his wicked wife and all his children, with sword, with fire, aye with whatsoever violence I may; and that I will suffer neither them nor any other to be king in Rome!

She is the reason that Brutus expels the king from Rome and starts the Republic. Lucretia, in a very self-aware way, kills herself because she is frightened she could be seen as a bad example. Before she was raped, she was chaste and apparently a model for how Roman women should act. This model is broken when she is raped and the only way she believes she can preserve her good reputation is suicide. In doing this she becomes the prime example of what a married woman (*matrona*) should be like.⁸ She adheres so resolutely to her chastity that she kills herself even when no blame is attached to her. None of her contemporaries believes that she is to blame. This importance is mentioned earlier in her story. Sextus is only able to get her to be quiet by

⁸ Stevenson 186:2011.

threatening to frame her for adultery (1.58.4). Livy holds chastity as an important value and Lucretia is his best example of it.⁹

It is interesting that Livy would start the Roman Republic, a time in which Roman virtue was great, with an example of *matrona*. In doing this I believe that he is trying to show how important a mother is for Rome. How else are children supposed to grow up virtuous and husbands not be led astray if not by a virtuous *matrona*? Livy was also aware that the Republic ended because of Antony's treatment of Octavia and this sets up an interesting bookend for the Republic. It started with a chaste, well respected woman being wronged and then proceeded to end the same way. This is intentional by Livy: For instance he could have easily glossed over Lucretia's role, pinning it more on the men than herself. However, he gives her a speech and Brutus seems to indicate he is only excising the king to avenge her, he has no ulterior motive (1.59.7-9). Roman readers would have noticed the similarities between Lucretia and Octavia, they were by design.¹⁰

One theory, provided by Sandra Joshel, is that Livy is doing this to make the connection between bodily and political desire more evident. The crisis of the end of the Republic is often attributed to political ambition and male bodies being out of control in the social world. Political ambition is self-evident. However the connection between bodily control and social change is strong in Livy.¹¹ Ancient authors deemed that when men lost control of their bodies to vices, ruin and disaster occurred. This is caused by one vice leading to another, then another until all morals slip (Praef.9). Livy includes Lucretia not just as an example for women, but also for men. She

⁹ A contemporary woman may have inspired Livy's Lucretia. Octavia, the sister of Octavian, was also an example of what a Roman *matrona* should be like. For more see Piper 27: 1971.

¹⁰ Joshel 117: 1991 and Piper 27:1971.

¹¹ Lucretia is raped. Octavia is left by Marc Antony for another woman. In both cases men lose to their passion.

may be the model *matrona* but she is also a reminder that when men lose control of their passions political structures change. The Republic began this way but this is also how it was killed. Livy is desperate to teach his readers how important it is to stay away from *luxus*, *avaritia*, *libido*, *abundantes voluptates* (Liv.praef.11-12) “Luxurious living, avarice, lust, immoderate desire, excessive pleasures.” Lucretia is a poignant example of that because she is so innocent. None of the blame falls on her and therefore the entire fault must lie on Sextus losing his passions. The parallels to Octavia would induce recent memories for Roman readers, making Lucretia’s example all that much stronger.

While Lucretia exemplifies Roman virtues much more than the women that preceded her. Tanaquil and Tullia are both very outspoken and controlling of their men. This could have something to do with their ancestry. Typically, Etruscan women are portrayed as domineering. Livy pays special attention to their Etruscan heritage and seems to be OK with their domineering nature. The best example of this is Tullia. She is the younger daughter of Servius Tullius. She is ambitious, wanting to increase her political standing, and jealous of her sister who is married to the prominent Lucius Tarquinius. She killed both her husband and sister then married her brother-in-law. After this she helped elevate him to the throne. Tullia is constantly challenging the discipline of her husband. Livy writes that Tullia, while still married to her first husband, *tota in alterum aversa Tarquinium eum mirari, eum virum dicere ac regio sanguine ortum* (Liv.1.46.6) “With her whole soul she turned from him to his brother; him she admired, him she called a man and a prince.” It is Lucius who eventually gets the kingship, but Livy adds *sed initium turbandi omnia a femina ortum est* (liv1.46.7) “but it was the woman who took the lead in all the mischief,” so Livy squarely puts the blame on her shoulders. Why is this? What separates her from Lucretia, who was absent of all blame? It is because Tullia tempts Lucius

with ambition. Ambition is thought of as a particularly feminine vice and one that men must protect them from¹². The reverse happens here. Lucius is so tempted by Tullia that he lets ambition influence both of them. The result is that his son ends up raping Lucretia. His succumbing to ambition marks the beginning of the end for the monarchy in Rome. Tullia is being used to serve as a bad example, an example of a wicked woman using ambition to raise her status. This picture too would have been all too familiar to the Roman reader, as it conjures up images of Fulvia¹³, the widow of Clodius and the first wife of Marc Antony. She was seen as a troublemaker even in ancient times, with Plutarch saying she was not content with normal womanly things and that she was more suited to govern (Plut. *Ant.* 10.8). Either way, much like Lucretia, a contemporary example of this vice would reinforce Livy's message. However, Livy is not trying to reinforce her example. Instead he wants to stamp her example out of Roman politics.

Another less than exemplary woman is Tarpeia. Her story is incredibly complicated in Livy. The simple story is that Tarpeia lets armed Sabine men into the Roman citadel and dies as a result. However, the version Livy gives is much more complex:

Huius filiam virginem auro corrumpit Tatius ut armatos in arcem accipiat; aquam forte eam tum sacris extra moenia petitem ierat. Accepti obrutam armis necavere, seu ut vi capta potius arx videretur seu prodendi exempli causa ne quid usquam fidum proditori esset. Additur fabula, quod volgo Sabini aureas armillas magni ponderis brachio laevo gemmatosque magna specie anulos habuerint, pepigisse eam quod in sinistris manibus haberent; eo scuta illi pro aureis donis congesta. Sunt qui eam ex pacto tradendi quod in sinistris manibus esset derecto arma petisse dicant et fraude visam agere sua ipsam peremptam mercede. (Liv.1.11.6-9)

This man's maiden daughter was bribed with gold by Tatius to admit armed men into the fortress: she happened at that time to have gone outside the walls to fetch water for a sacrifice. Once within, they threw their shields upon her and killed her so, whether to make it appear that the citadel had been taken by assault, or to set an example, that no one

¹² Smethurst 84:1950.

¹³ Piper 27:1971.

might anywhere keep faith with a traitor. There is also a legend that because most of the Sabines wore heavy golden bracelets on their left arms and magnificent jewelled rings, she had stipulated for what they had on their left arms, and that they had therefore heaped their shields upon her, instead of gifts of gold. Some say that, in virtue of the compact that they should give her what they wore on their arms, she flatly demanded their shields and, her treachery being perceived, forfeited her life to the bargain she herself had struck.

In the first story she is bribed by Tatius, then killed either to give the appearance of a fight or to make an example of a traitor. In this case the moral is very simple: do not be a traitor. However, the use of the word *exemplum* is notable. Not only is this its first appearance in the work but it is also used as a motive for Tarpeia's death.¹⁴ By including this word Livy spells out a moral that can be taken from her story, but he provides both more morals and more stories. He also includes one where she is tricked by the Sabines, getting shields instead of gold. In the last story she tries to trick the Sabines into giving her shields, but they sense her trickery and kill her.

A look at the source material shows that Livy is very particular with the sources he uses for Tarpeia's section.¹⁵ It was a deliberate choice by Livy to include these three particular versions. There is also an openness to this example that is not present in the others: it is up to the reader to decide. Livy is not making this as clear as Lucretia's example. Lucretia's aim in killing herself is explicitly shown by Livy, but here he gives different versions of the same story. This forces the reader to make a decision for himself. This decision is hard, as all of the different versions contrast and make the other mute. One reason for this could be that Tarpeia is an example for the otherness of women. They are often used as coin, as transactional and are thus removed from their situation.¹⁶ Women are predisposed to being viewed in different perspectives just as Tarpeia is being viewed in the light of three different stories.¹⁷ This is compounded by the

¹⁴ Welch 173:2012.

¹⁵ Welch 173:2012.

¹⁶ Julia (pg 4) and Octavia (pg. 6) are examples of women being used transactionally. Both were married off to promote peace.

¹⁷ Welch 180:2012.

fact that she is unmarried. This makes her even more susceptible to the push and pull of different perspectives. This is especially true through the perspective of a man. Men's ingenuity was seen as something women could be easily influenced by. One thing that is common to the stories is that Tarpeia was seen as a pawn, as something to be manipulated by a man. In Roman society when a woman is married her openness to the ingenuity of other men is closed off.¹⁸ Tarpeia is an example of what happens when a woman succumbs to the influence of a nefarious man. He leads her to do something disastrous: the Sabine capture of the Roman citadel. If she were married, Tatius would never have been able to trick her. Livy is including all her stories to allow her to exemplify multiple things. Including all of these stories and examples urges the reader to reflect on all of them and draw their own conclusions.

Some women are impossible to interpret as either bad or good. One of them is Tanaquil. She is subject to ambition but uses it towards praiseworthy ends. She has her own husband killed so that Servius Tullius can be installed. After Tarquin, her husband, was assassinated, she hid his death, instead saying that he had only been injured. Then she named Servius as the one to be in charge until he was well again. She waited until he had gained the respect of the people and then she revealed the truth. He was eventually named as king by the senate (1.34-42). She uses deceit and trickery to accomplish a task that was pleasing to the gods.¹⁹ Deceit was a complicated value for the Romans, as they saw its utility in war, but also acknowledged how dangerous it was. The Romans had several criteria for morally evaluating deceit. It must be used for something good and be driven by the desire to benefit Rome.²⁰ This is why it is justifiable for Romulus to use deceit in battle, but Tullia secretly killing her husband to get power is dishonorable. To add to

¹⁸ Wech 181:2012.

¹⁹ Liv.1.39.2 The reign of Servius is foretold by the Gods.

²⁰ Lee-Stecum 269:2010.

this confusion, she is domineering over her men. She convinces Tarquin to emigrate from their home, simply because his standing in Tarquinii was too low for her. Livy even goes as far to state that, *ferre indignitatem non potuit oblitaque ingenitae erga patriam caritatis, dummodo virum honoratum videret, consilium migrandi ab Tarquiniis cepit* (1.34.5) “She could not endure this indignity, and forgetting the love she owed her native land, if she could only see her husband honored, she formed the project of emigrating from Tarquinii.” There is no debate who is the driving force of the move. Tanaquil also uses augury to convince Tarquin that he will achieve greatness. Livy fully admits that most Etruscans are very good at reading, “celestial prodigies,” (1.34.9). Tanaquil does not just control his life however, she controls his death to institute Servius Tullius as the next king. She is a domineering woman who manipulates and schemes to stay in power. If a Roman woman did this, she would be seen as the embodiment of evil. Roman women were not supposed to be this independent and active, they were submissive. However, Tanaquil is not Roman. Her behavior is acceptable for an Etruscan woman. Etruscan women were famed in the ancient world for being able to participate with men in banqueting and dance. This freedom was criticized by the Greeks and Romans, who thought that this made these women shameless and degenerate.²¹ It appears that much of Tanaquil’s behavior is just due to her origin, and it would be wrong to judge her by Roman standards.²²

The women in *Ab Urbe Condita* may not get as much attention as the men, but for the most part they serve a similar purpose. They provide examples, both good and bad, didactically for Livy’s Roman readers. The virtuous women were able to act selflessly and always put Rome ahead of themselves. The bad women are overcome by ambition and show how important it is

²¹ Hall 34:1978.

²² Many Roman authors portrayed the Etruscans as cruel and unfit to lead. It is also common to see the men as commonly thought of as decadent and soft. For more information about Roman conceptions of Etruscans, see Scheffer.

for a Roman man to cling to his *disciplina* when confronted with an ambitious woman. Lastly, there are women who are hard to categorize, but in being so they embody the moral implications that deceit had in Livy's time. These women both help us understand the morals that Livy held in high regard and those that are results of the moral slip he saw in his time.

Tacitus: Women that Characterize Associated Men

Tacitus is not writing a history for the same reason Livy is. This is obvious in his introduction to *The Annals* where he writes,

Sed veteris populi Romani prospera vel adversa claris scriptoribus memorata sunt; temporibusque Augusti dicendis non defuere decora ingenia, donec gliscente adulatione deterrentur. Tiberii Gaique et Claudii ac Neronis res florentibus ipsis ob metum falsae, postquam occiderant recentibus odiis compositae sunt. Inde consilium mihi pauca de Augusto et extrema tradere, mox Tiberii principatum et cetera, sine ira et studio, quorum causas procul habeo (1.1)

But, while the glories and disasters of the old Roman commonwealth have been chronicled by famous pens, and intellects of distinction were not lacking to tell the tale of the Augustan age, until the rising tide of sycophancy deterred them, the histories of Tiberius and Caligula, of Claudius and Nero, were falsified through cowardice while they flourished, and composed, when they fell, under the influence of still rankling hatreds. Hence my design, to treat a small part (the concluding one) of Augustus' reign, then the principate of Tiberius and its sequel, without anger and without partiality, from the motives of which I stand sufficiently removed²³.

In his own words, he is going to write an objective history. There is no moralizing, just facts. He will not make the emperors look better than they actually were, like many other writers before him, but will not make them appear worse either. Scholars do not agree with Tacitus regarding this claim. Benario, who Tacitus writes "There is a dissatisfaction with, if not enmity toward, the principate" in *The Annals*.²⁴ This dissatisfaction does make sense when Tacitus' life is considered. He was a child when Nero was emperor and a young man under Domitian. He was

²³ All Translations will be from John Jackson in the Loeb Classical Library edition of Tacitus, *The Annals: Books I-III*, Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1931 [1998].

²⁴ Benario 105:2012.

affected by everything they did to Rome, he was not looking at a history that was far in the past nor shrouded in myth.²⁵ He has personal grudges against these men, and those shine through in his history.²⁶ In a way, this is a brilliant move by Tacitus. By making the reader believe that everything in the work is factual and impartial, the emperors become even more evil. That is not to say that everything is a lie in Tacitus, he just bends the truth to accomplish his goal. The women in the work are not exempt from this. He bends their truths to accomplish his goal. Women play an important part in his history by coloring the men around them. The women can be categorized in three ways: good, bad and neutral.

There are plenty of bad women in *Annales*. The first that appears is Livia. She is an excellent example of how Tacitus uses gossip and style to create a negative picture of someone. He uses the word *noverca* (stepmother) to describe her (1.3). This was damaging, since a *noverca* was a hated character in Roman Literature. There was a strong connotation between stepmothers and poison, as well as the murder of their stepchildren. Ovid describes how long-ago terrible stepmothers mixed their poisons (*Met* 1.147). Horace writes about a boy who is kidnapped by witches to make a poison. The boy asks why they stare at him like a stepmother (*Epod* 5.9). Finally, even Plautus shows a negative stepmother, although his is more concerned with financial gain (*Pseud.* 313-14). Tacitus was not the first to use this trope in connection to Livia, but he did use it explicitly to do the most damage.²⁷

²⁵ Jackson 236:1998.

²⁶ Interestingly, Tacitus' critiquing of emperors caught the attention of the Napoleons. Napoleon I writes that, "I know of no other Historian who has so calumniated and belittles mankind as he... out of every emperor he fashions a complete villain" (see Frölich's *Napoleon I, und seine Beziehungen zum klassischen Alterum*, 1882). Napoleon III said that the emperors were, "tyrants branded on the shoulders for ever by Tacitus." (Simpson, *Rise of Louis-Napoleon*, p.218.

²⁷Barrett 171-172:2001.

The reason Tacitus wants to damage Livia is to weaken the character of Augustus. This is evident in the formation of the marriage. Livia divorced her previous husband, Tiberius Claudius Nero, before marrying Augustus. Tacitus portrays the marriage as an abduction stating that Augustus participated in, *abducta Neroni uxor (1.10)* “The abduction of Nero’s wife.” The word *Abducta* can also mean rape. This abduction reflects poorly on Augustus. It links him to the monarchy, since this is where Lucretia was raped. However, it will also link him to Caligula, who was also a wife stealer. Caligula uses Augustus as a model for his own violence against women.²⁸ Augustus is poorly characterized by the circumstances surrounding his marriage to Livia.

In Republican Rome there were a few criteria that women were judged on. They were expected to be modest, faithful, fertile, devoted to their children, run the household, and have the occupation of wool working. However, a husband was expected to control his wife’s behavior, and a son to domineer his mother. If a husband or son failed to do this, they would be subjected to social criticism.²⁹ In this way the behavior of a wife or mother can degrade the character of some of the men around them. In Livia’s case, she was married to Augustus and Tiberius was her son. It is clear that neither controlled her. Tacitus implicates her in the deaths of both Lucius and Gaius Caesar. He wrote, *Vt Agrippa vita concessit, Lucium Caesarem euntem ad Hispaniensem exercitus, Gaium remeantem Armenia* et (1.3) “When Agrippa gave up the ghost, untimely fate, or the treachery of their stepmother Livia, cut off both Lucius and Caius Caesar, Lucius on his road to the Spanish armies, Caius—wounded and sick—on his return from Armenia.” This inclusion again includes *noverca*, insinuating that Livia poisoned Gaius. These are the nephews of Augustus. By

²⁸ Strunk 135:2014

²⁹ Foubert 346:2010.

inviting an evil stepmother into his house and allowing her to kill members of his family Augustus hardly comes off as the head of his household. If he cannot manage his wife, how is he going to manage the Roman state?

Tiberius, as a son, is not controlling his mother. This is best seen in his treatment of Agrippa Postumus. He was killed by a centurion, and Tacitus calls this the, *Primum facinus novi principatus* (1.6) “The opening crime of the new principate.” It was, apparently, on an order from Augustus but Tacitus immediately casts doubt on that idea.³⁰ Instead, he implicates Tiberius and Livia. Tiberius did have every reason to want Agrippa dead. He was the grandchild of Augustus and therefore was a legitimate threat to take power. Livia only wanted him dead due to *novercalibus odiis* (1.6) “stepmotherly dislike.” Tacitus later reveals that Tiberius had no knowledge of the order to kill Agrippa, and that the matter would have to be brought up in the senate. The man who had given the note to the tribune, Salluatius Crispus, heard the matter was going to be brought to the senate and immediately conferred with Livia to make sure that it was not.³¹ Tacitus does not mention the order after this, implying that Crispus’ suggestion was realized. This event makes Livia appear ruthless, as the event seems to be more her fault than Tiberius’. However, it shows that she does wield considerable influence over him. Tacitus implies that Livia was able to convince Tiberius not to bring the ordeal to the senate, thereby manipulating him. This is unacceptable for any Roman, especially a ruler. This point is reinforced when Tacitus describes the character of Tiberius. He writes that Tiberius is undesirable as a ruler due to his anger, hypocrisy and lust. After this, he remarks, *Accedere matrem muliebri inpotentia: serviendum [est] feminae* (1.4) “Add to the tale his mother with her feminine caprice: They must be slaves.” The

³⁰ Tacitus states that Augustus was responsible for his exile. However, there was no reason to kill his grandchild to ease the mind of his stepson.

³¹ Crispus does this to ensure the crime is not attributed to him.

subject of the *est* is ambiguous. Linda Rutland suggest that this is by design.³² The ambiguity could mean that Tiberius is a slave to his mother. Tacitus certainly wants the audience to believe this. However, it could also implicate the Roman state. In this interpretation Augustus is also implicated. By inviting an evil stepmother, a woman who wholly goes against the ideals of a Roman wife, into the royal family and not controlling her Augustus has subjugated the entirety of Rome to her.

Despite all of her wrongdoings, her most odious act might be putting Tiberius on the throne. She is implicated in the death of Augustus, albeit through rumor alone. At the beginning of 1.5 Tacitus writes, *Haec atque talia agitantibus gravescere valetudo Augusti et quidam scelus uxoris suspectabant* “While these topics and the like were under discussion, the malady of Augustus began to take a graver turn; and some suspected foul play on the part of his wife.” Nevertheless, Livia’s previous actions of killing Augustus’ nephews and plot to kill Agrippa left Tiberius as the only real candidate to take power. This marks a turning point for the principate. As mentioned above, Augustus did not have control of his wife, and this makes up the bulk of the complaints leveled at him. He was a good ruler, as chapters 1-7 are complimentary to the empire. This changes during the rule of Tiberius, for reasons that will be addressed later.³³ What is important here is that by getting Tiberius to the throne, she started a downward spiral for the empire. The anger, hypocrisy and lust of her son begin to show, and it is nothing short of disastrous for Rome. Other poor rulers are chosen after him and Tacitus begs the reader to

³² Rutland 18:1978.

³³ Benario 111:2012.

recognize that if it was not for Livia a more competent ruler could have been chosen and the suffering of Rome may have been avoided.³⁴

Another bad woman is Agrippina the Younger, who will simply go by Agrippina in this section unless otherwise noted. She is immediately used to classify Claudius. After his previous wife, Messalina, died he needed to find a new one. Tacitus claimed that freedmen, who were influential during the reign of Claudius, and the eligible women were fighting amongst each other as to who he should pick. To remedy this, he called in three freedmen and had them pitch a woman to him. When Pallas argues for Agrippina he says she should be married, *quod Germanici nepotem secum traheret, dignum prorsus imperatoria fortuna: stirpem nobilem et familiae luliae Claudiaeque posteros coniungeret, ne femina expertae fecunditatis, integra iuventa, claritudinem Caesarum aliam in domum ferret* (12.2) “Because she brought with her the grandson of Germanicus, who fully deserved an imperial position: let the sovereign unite to himself a famous stock, the posterity of the Julian and Claudian races, and ensure that a princess of tried fecundity, still in the vigor of youth, should not transfer the glory of the Caesars into another family!” This episode tells a lot about the rule of Claudius and is incredibly ironic. Claudius comes out of this looking very passive.³⁵ He is not able to choose a wife, he cannot take a decisive action. This is backed up in the previous section, where Tacitus admits that it is the wife who runs things. He starts book twelve by stating *orto apud libertos certamine, quis deligeret uxorem Claudio, caelibis vitae intoleranti et coniugum imperiis obnoxio* (12.1) “for there followed a conflict among the freedmen, who should select a consort for Claudius, with his impatience of celibacy and his docility under wifely government.” The word *imperiis* translated as “government” can also be

³⁴ In 1.13 Tacitus gives some alternatives to Tiberius. This underscores the idea that other prominent men could have been competent rulers if given the chance.

³⁵Foubert 358:2010.

translated as “control” which I think gets to the sentiment that the woman is controlling the Roman state. Claudius is docile and subservient to his wife, and this makes it clear why the freedmen are so desperate to convince him of their pick. It is not favor with the emperor they seek; it is favor with his wife.

On the surface, this should not be a problem. Agrippina is portrayed as a model wife, who will continue the royal line. She is outstanding compared to the other noble women who vied for the position. However, this notion is quickly dispelled. In the very next section, it is revealed that Agrippina was working in the shadows. She had already captivated her uncle and was starting to exercise power as a wife. The example given is getting charges trumped up against Silanus, who was betrothed to Octavia (12.4). This was to ensure that her son, Nero, could marry Octavia instead. Even before marriage she was able to manipulate and convince Claudius that the husband he chose for Octavia was not good enough. After Agrippina is married she is not a good wife at all.

Another great example is given when she desires the gardens of Statilius Taurus. She ruined him by having another person bring an accusation against him. It caused him to commit suicide and Agrippina got her garden (12.58). Tacitus is painting the picture of a woman in rule. Nobody was safe from her whims, not even prominent Romans. In prefacing the event, Tacitus tells that Claudius, *saevissima quaeque p̄Romere adigebatur eiusdem Agrippinae artibus* (12.58) “was being forced to a display of sheer cruelty, still by the machinations of Agrippina.” Claudius is again completely spineless. He is being forced to prosecute prominent Romans because his wife wants something. Nobody fit for rule would engage in something despicable and politically damaging only because his wife told him too. Claudius is servile and will do what he is told, and this is very well exemplified by his relationship with Agrippina. In fact, she is written as an equal to Claudius. On one occasion, some British prisoners were brought before Claudius to ask to be

pardoned. They are granted this request and decide to also pay homage to Agrippina in the same way they did Claudius. Tacitus calls this act, *Novum sane et moribus veterum insolitum, feminam signis Romanis praesidere: ipsa semet parti a maioribus suis imperii sociam ferebat.* (12.37) “It was an innovation, certainly, and one without precedent in ancient custom, that a woman should sit in state before Roman standards: it was the advertisement of her claim to a partnership in the empire which her ancestors had created.” Tacitus explicitly states that the two were partners, and as mentioned earlier this was not socially acceptable. A husband and wife were not an equal team. He also mentions that her ancestors began this trend. This may be a reference to Augustus, who by initiating the empire made this sort of relationship possible.

Agrippina’s relationship with her son, Nero, is also troubling. First of all, she plays a big part in getting him to the throne. She was involved in Claudius’ death, but this time it was not a rumor. There is not a “Some say” or “It was reported” in his report, Tacitus is sure that she killed him. She had a eunuch named Halotus put the poison on a mushroom, panicked when it was not working fast enough, then tried another poison that worked faster. The plan worked and Claudius died (12.67-68). She then shuts all of Claudius’ children and parades Nero in front of troops to assure them they would be paid well. She also insured that Claudius’ will was never read to protect against any heir he might have named (12.69). She was the sole reason Nero came to power, and she wielded considerable influence over him. Public opinion was that Nero was not old enough to rule and he was only there because Agrippina killed Claudius (13.1). That is a tenuous grip on the throne, it was not seen as justified. Tacitus is using foreshadowing here. The last reign that started this way was destructive, and this one will be too. In an interesting parallel to Livia, this reign begins with a death that is unknown to the emperor. Agrippina kills Junius Silanus to eliminate a legitimate threat for the throne. Nero had no idea about it.

Her relationship with her son, Nero, is complicated. It appears to start as domination, exemplified by the phrase, *optimae matris* (13.2) “The best of mothers” being used as the password for the tribune of the watch. She was also granted numerous requests by the senate to appease her. She was the one in control, not the senate and certainly not her son. This domination does not last. Eventually, Nero breaks away from her, and she becomes emotional and irrational. As Rutland rightly points out: the precision and calculation she used to get Nero to power seems absent when he turns away from her. She realizes her power is slipping and reacts emotionally and impulsively.³⁶ Her new impulsivity is shown in one scene in particular. Tacitus reports, *Tradit Cluvius ardore retinendae Agrippinam potentiae eo usque provectam, ut medio diei, cum id temporis Nero per vinum et epulas incalesceret, offerret se saepius temulento comptam et incesto paratam* (14.2) “It is stated by Cluvius that Agrippina’s ardour to keep her influence was carried so far that at midday, an hour at which Nero was beginning to experience the warmth of wine and good cheer, she presented herself on several occasions to her half-tipsy son, coquettishly dressed and prepared for incest.” This reeks of desperation. She is willing to participate in an incestuous relationship to regain favor with her son. Tacitus does mention later that Nero was the one who wanted to enter into that relationship. Regardless, all she does is distance herself from Nero, who eventually decides that she must die. He does this by constructing a ship that will sink after it has gone out to sea. Nero completely deceives her by starting a rumor that she, *acciperetque Agrippina, facili feminarum credulitate ad gaudia* (14.4) “with the easy faith of her sex in the agreeable, would probably accept.” Throughout the work there is no woman who is more calculating, cold and goal oriented. She behaves in a way that is more becoming of a female politician.³⁷ Yet even she cannot escape the fact that she is a woman. Tacitus is adding fuel to the

³⁶ Rutland 23:1978.

³⁷ Rutland 24:1978.

fire that women cannot be left in-charge: their true natures will eventually come to light. She was also consumed by the female vice of ambition. Once she tasted power, she was willing to do anything in order to get more of it. When she felt her power waning, she went to the extreme of incest to keep her influence. She is a power-hungry woman who grabbed for power until it ultimately destroyed her.

There are some aspects of Nero's and Agrippina's relationship that make Nero look like a good ruler. He does not fall for most of her schemes. Yes, he does allow her to kill someone without his knowledge (13.1). However, this was early in his reign. He did not take part in an incestuous relationship with her, despite her temptations and his apparent desire. He also kills off the rival, Britannicus after his mother threatens to promote him to emperor. Nero looks like a competent leader after their relationship is dissolved and after she is killed. Tacitus allows this perception for two reasons. The first is that he is emboldened by killing her. Tacitus does an excellent job subverting both the audience's and Nero's expectations when he returns after killing her. He describes an extremely nervous Nero, taking his time getting back to Rome, acting like a child expecting to be punished. Nero wonders what the situation will be like: will the senate be obedient? The crowds enthusiastic for his return? However, when he finally enters, he is applauded. As Tacitus puts it, *iret intrepidus et venerationem sui coram experiretur; simul praegredi exposcunt* (14.13) "the name of Agrippina was abhorred and her death had won him the applause of the nation." This makes Nero feel invincible. He was literally applauded for matricide and because of that he felt that he could do anything without criticism. By being as terrible as she was, Agrippina created someone just as bad. The second reason is that his treatment of Octavia makes him seem sadistic. Nero does keep his mother at distance and never falls for any of his mother's schemes. However, he was emboldened by her death and Rome as a whole seems

corrupted by the applause he enters with. This perception is reinforced by his treatment of Octavia. The combination of these two things makes sure that the audience knows that any good leadership qualities Nero displays go against his norm.

Octavia, is one of the few good women in *Annals*. She is used as a sympathetic character. The audience is supposed to feel for her and be upset at Nero for executing her. As Paul Murgatroyd notes Tacitus does a masterful job of building up sympathy over her story.³⁸ First, she is divorced by Nero on account of sterility. After this, Nero's new wife and former lover Poppaea accuses Octavia of having an affair with a slave. To prove, this Octavia's maids were tortured. Most of them maintained Octavia's innocence, with one going so far as to say that Octavia's body was more chaste than the mouth of the torturer. Unable to kill her, yet wanting her gone, Nero sends her to Campania and put under military supervision. This leads to protests across Rome, which are turned into celebrations once a rumor is started that Nero is returning her.

Poppaea is troubled by this, so she convinced Nero that the protests and celebrations are revolts meant to overthrow him. He decides that someone more reliable than a slave needed to prove adultery, so he bribes Anicetus to do it. He was a prefect and helped Nero kill Agrippina, so he is perfect for the job. Nero announces the new charge, stating that she seduced Anicetus in order to gain control of his squadron. However, Nero claims that she had an abortion, forgetting that he divorced her on an accusation of sterility. She is confined to the island Pandateria and was pitied by everyone who saw her. After a few days she is ordered to be killed. She begs and pleads with the soldiers, invoking her royal ties and even stating she was a staunch supporter of Agrippina. She is brutally executed by having her veins opened in each limb. She is so terrified that she isn't

³⁸ Murgatroyd 263:2008.

bleeding, so they place her in an extremely hot vapor bath to suffocate. After her death, her head is sent to Rome to be viewed by Poppaea. To finish, Tacitus recalls that the senate made thank-offerings to the Gods (14.59-64).

The placement of Tacitus' words embellishes the facts he presents. Others look at Octavia with pity, encouraging the reader to do the same. She is brutally killed, after begging and pleading and suffering alone on an island. She is meant to evoke sympathy from the audience, and the purpose of this is to characterize Nero as an evil tyrant, who is motivated by fear and easy to manipulate. Poppaea was able to manipulate him using fear. She gives a speech to Nero that has three main points: That the people were ready to revolt, Octavia could be their leader and Octavia needed to be expelled to Campania(14.61). Much like his mother, there is nothing that troubles Nero more than the loss of his power. Poppaea is able to easily play on that fear, and in doing so gets him to do exactly what she wants. Poppaea's involvement makes Octavia's position even more pitiful. As Rutland puts it, "She [Octavia] is almost entirely on her own against two evil and powerful opponents and all their helpers."³⁹ She is seen as an innocent and helpless girl who is going against the manipulator Poppaea and her evil, gullible husband Nero.

This dynamic is best exemplified by Octavia herself. Although she does remain silent and passive for most of the event, right before her execution she begs the soldiers not to kill her. The first part of the appeal by Octavia is, *cum iam viduam se et tantum sororem testaretur* (14.64) "[She] protested she was husbandless now, a sister and nothing more." This would appear to signal that she is no longer a threatening political entity. She no longer has the prominence or pull of an empress. By killing her, all Nero is doing is killing his stepsister.⁴⁰ However, there is a deeper

³⁹ Rutland 264:2008.

⁴⁰ Octavia was the child of Claudius and Messalina. Claudius remarried Agrippina the younger and subsequently adopted Nero into the family.

meaning here. She is the daughter of the old emperor and can trace her lineage back to Augustus. This means that any male children she bore could eventually challenge for the throne. This plea, although probably innocent in intent, would only anger Nero and make him stouter in his resolve to kill her.⁴¹ She then invokes the *communis Germanicos*, meaning that they were from the same family. This would have a similar effect on Nero because of a tense relationship he had with many of his relatives. Germanicus, Nero's Grandfather, was loved by both the Roman people and its historians. Tacitus himself calls Germanicus the perfect moral person.⁴² Germanicus was also devoted to his wife, Agrippina the Elder. Tacitus praises Germanicus through *Annals*. He is someone that Nero would be jealous of and invoking his name here would only serve to make him jealous.⁴³ Again, her last entreaty can be construed negatively by Nero. She invokes Agrippina's name, because she always supported Agrippina. Nero and his mother had a complex relationship that eventually saw her murdered by Nero. This would not have helped her case.

These entreaties would usually have been effective. Most leaders would be merciful to a sister, recognize that someone related to Germanicus is important, and be thankful that a person supported their mother. The fact that this entreaty enrages Nero serves to show just how twisted he is. Nero represents an inversion of Roman morals. Family and blood do not matter to him. He is consumed by jealousy and power, making the pleas of Octavia fall on deaf ears. The entreaties do work on the audience, and adds to the Octavia's sympathy. By extension, all of Rome appears morally backwards. Nero and Poppaea, who are morally corrupt, are not only leaders but conspire to kill a morally innocent Octavia. To make matters even worse, Anicetus, is essentially given a pension for lying about Octavia. In Nero's Rome wickedness is rewarded and morality is punished.

⁴¹ Bastomsky 607:1992.

⁴² Walker 118:1952.

⁴³ Bastomsky 609:1992.

This reversal of morality falls squarely on the head of Nero. Tacitus is clear about this, as he is the only one who gives Octavia a speech.⁴⁴ The reader has no choice but to read Nero as a cruel and evil despot who ignores Roman morals.

Agrippina the Elder is a complex character who can be considered neither good nor bad. On the one hand she was a virtuous mother, but she also appeared very ignorant. She was also involved in military affairs, which as we have seen is frowned upon by Tacitus. She is a chimera of praise and scolding. Each offence and virtue will have to be examined to get a better understanding of her character.

One of the best qualities Agrippina shows is her motherhood. This is especially evident when Sejanus comes into play. He is an ambitious Prefect who manipulates people for his own political gain. He grows bolder as the work goes on, and plots to kill Agrippina's three sons to muddy the royal line of succession. In reference to this plot Tacitus tells us, *Neque spargi venenum in tres poterat, egregia custodum fide et pudicitia Agrippinae impenetrabili* (4.12) "To distribute poison among the three was impossible; for their custodians were patterns of fidelity, Agrippina's chastity impenetrable." Agrippina's chastity allows her to deflect Sejanus' advances and safeguard her home.⁴⁵ Another event where Agrippina saves her family is right after the death of Augustus. Soldiers stationed on the frontiers of Rome, mainly the Danube and Rhine, rebelled. The soldiers felt that their general, and Agrippina's husband, Germanicus deserved to be emperor. The unstable situation was unsuitable for a pregnant Agrippina and her young son. Her departure is seen as "feminine and pitiable," and Tacitus beautifully shows that when he writes, *profuga ducis uxor*,

⁴⁴ Bastomsky 609:1992.

⁴⁵ Foubert 352: 2010. Foubert also proposes that Agrippina's chastity is meant to be compared to another woman's infidelity. He singles out Livilla. She was seduced by Sejanus then helped him to poison her husband. This caused her household to crumble into shambles.

paruulum sinu filium gerens, lamentantes circum amicorum coniuges, quae simul trahebantur; nec minus tristes qui manebant (1.40) “the commander’s wife in flight with his infant son borne on her breast, and round her the tearful wives of his friends, dragged like herself from their husbands. Nor were those who remained less woe-begone.” Agrippina again is depicted as devoted to both her husband and children. She does not want to leave Germanicus, she cares for him. However, she has to, since her young children are not safe in such a tense military climate. The fact that he is so upset by having to choose between husband and child makes her an excellent *matrona*.

Agrippina’s chastity reflects well on her husband. The soldiers are very upset to hear that she had left and implore Germanicus to explain why it was necessary (1.41). This sets Germanicus up for a speech where he requests the troops to put the blame on him, not Agrippina and Caligula.⁴⁶ The speech chastises the soldiers for not taking the word of the senate seriously and implores them to subjugate themselves back to him and the emperor Tiberius (1.42-44). What is important here is that Agrippina, in her chastity and motherliness, makes Germanicus look heroic. She was loved by the troops, to the point where they were distressed about her leaving and Caligula was adored. She was a catalyst for them to quell their revolt, and quelling that revolt makes Germanicus seem like a good leader and a loyal Roman.

Not everything Agrippina did was noble. On his deathbed Germanicus tells Agrippina, *per memoriam sui, per communis liberos oravit exueret ferociam, saevienti fortunae summitteret animum, neu regressa in urbem aemulatione potentiae validiores inritaret* (1.72) “by the memory of himself, and for the sake of their common children, to strip herself of pride, to stoop her spirit before the rage of fortune, and never – if she returned to the capital – to irritate those stronger than

⁴⁶ Benoist 266:2015. The reason the Soldiers might want to attack them is their royal bloodlines. They may think this would be a way to send a message to Tiberius.

herself by a competition of power.” Germanicus acknowledges that without him Agrippina will need to tone down her anger and pride if she wants to survive. In this passage it is noteworthy that *ferociam* and *aemulatione* are words typically used to describe males. This is not an isolated incident, throughout *Annales* Tacitus uses masculine words in association with Agrippina.⁴⁷ The best example of this ferocity is during the trial of her cousin, Claudia Pulchra. Claudia was accused of adultery, unchastity and the use of poison and magic. Agrippina, *semper atrox, tum et periculo propinquae accensa, pergit ad Tiberium ac forte sacrificantem patri repperit* (1.52) “fierce-tempered always and now inflamed by the danger of her kinswoman, flew to Tiberius, and, as chance would have it, found him sacrificing to his father.” Seeing that Tiberius is sacrificing to Augustus she quips, *non eiusdem ait mactare divo Augusto victimas et posteros eius insectari* (1.52) “It was not for the same man to offer victims to the deified Augustus and to prosecute his posterity.” Tiberius is shaken by this. He seized her and told her in Greek that she was not an injured woman just because she lacked the throne (1.52). This insult hurts more when the family lines are examined. Agrippina and her cousin are both directly related to Augustus.⁴⁸ Therefore, by saying this she is not only calling him a hypocrite, she is rebuking his legitimacy to the throne. Tiberius was adopted; he did not have the royal lineage Agrippina did. This rebuke is unique, nowhere else in the work does a woman stand up to an Emperor like this. This shows just how brash and out-spoken Agrippina was. This is not something that is praised in women. The reason she acts like this is to characterize Tiberius. Bringing up his lack of royal blood obviously bothered him and it is a completely valid point. Agrippina could be a mouthpiece for Tacitus here, making the audience very aware that this man was not royal, and was being talked down to by someone

⁴⁷Mchugh 74:2012

⁴⁸ Agrippina is the granddaughter of Augustus, Claudia Pulchra is his great niece.

with royal blood. Tacitus sees flattery to those in power as a source of corruption. He may have found Agrippina's outspokenness commendable, as is it part of his mission for writing *Annales*.⁴⁹

Agrippina was involved in the military affairs of her husband. After the episode mentioned before, where she flees the camp, she hears a troubling rumor. Germanicus' army was trapped and the Germans were advancing. In the ensuing panic some wanted to destroy a bridge at Vetera to slow the enemy down. Doing this would have isolated Germanicus and his troops.⁵⁰ Agrippina prevents this from happening, and also provides the returning soldiers with clothes and dressings for wounds (1.69). This event is used to characterize good and bad virtues. Agrippina enters a manly sphere, she is not supposed to be helping out in military affairs. This would be looked at negatively by most romans, and this is usually a negative in Tacitus⁵¹. However, she has a noble aim. She protects the bridge not because she wants to win power or to gain standing, she does it to help her husband and his soldiers. In this regard her actions could be considered an extension of her marital and domestic duties and therefore completely acceptable.⁵² She is doing something that is bad but she is doing it for noble reasons.

This event also characterizes Tiberius. Sejanus, trying to sow seeds of discord in Tiberius, claims the following about the event:

non enim simplicis eas curas, nec adversus externos studia militum quaeri. Nihil relictum imperatoribus, ubi femina manipulos intervisat, signa adeat, largitionem temptet, tamquam parum ambitiose filium ducis gregali habitu circumferat Caesaremque Caligulam appellari velit Potiorem iam apud exercitus Agrippinam quam legatos, quam duces; conpressam a muliere seditionem, cui nomen principis obsistere non quiverit (1.59)

⁴⁹ Mellor 52:1994

⁵⁰ Foubert 353:2010.

⁵¹ Tacitus includes a speech by Caecina Severus that proposed no man who obtained a province should be accompanied by his wife. The reason for this is that decisions would be slower, military discipline would soften and women would corrupt officers and soldiers. For more information see *Ann.* 3.32-3.35 and Foubert 353:2010.

⁵² Foubert 255:2010.

There was something behind this officiousness; nor was it the foreigner against whom her courtship of the army was directed. Commanding officers had a sinecure nowadays, when a woman visited the maniples, approached the standards and took in hand to bestow largesses—as though it were not enough to curry favour by parading the general's son in the habit of a common soldier, with the request that he should be called Caesar Caligula! Already Agrippina counted for more with the armies than any general or generalissimo, and a woman had suppressed a mutiny which the imperial name had failed to check.

Tiberius is easily manipulated and very suspicious. He is desperate to hang on to his power and sees any potential threat to that power as dangerous. By saying this Sejanus is able to turn Tiberius against Agrippina. A good ruler would never be so insecure in his rule to see a woman with a young child as a legitimate threat.

Agrippina the Elder and Tanaquil: Similar Women with Different Messages

Tacitus uses women strictly to characterize the men around them. Evil women make men look weak and good women can juxtapose how evil a man is. Agrippina the elder is unique, since she is embodying both good and bad qualities. This is necessary though, as Tacitus uses her to characterize the amiable Germanicus and the odious Tiberius.

The difference in concept between Livy and Tacitus is very evident in how they use women. It will be beneficial to take two women and place them side by side, in order to see how each is used to accomplish each author's goals. The characters of Livia and Tanaquil are very similar.

Tanaquil is an Etruscan woman who is very ambitious. She convinces her husband to leave his native city and come to Rome to live up to her highborn lineage. She is an incredibly complicated character, but her outcomes and background are what are truly useful. She installs a foreign ruler, who is by all accounts good. Servius was also not native to Rome and Tanaquil

uses augury to predict his future greatness.⁵³ Tanaquil is the only reason he becomes king and is even in the royal palace. She is the driving force behind him. Livy's estimate of him is that he is a well-liked and respectable king. He did useful things like start the census, walled the city and updated it to prosper in both peace and war (liv.1.47-45.1). Livy also mentions how well liked he was by the roman people and does not include many unsavory details about him. Therefore, Tanaquil chooses a king who is capable, beloved and successful.

This may seem out of place for Livy, but it is actually an example of him keeping true to his introduction. Lucretia is a model of virtue, and her origin is wholly Roman. She is completely noble, but is so terrified of being seen as a potential bad example she is compelled to commit suicide. Tanaquil is not at this moral level, but she is involved in the lives of two good leaders. Her aggressiveness and independence can be attributed to her origin. This is Livy making an example of foreign influences on Rome. It is acceptable at first, but you cannot let it go too long or too far. This is what he sees in his age. He believes Rome has allowed too much foreign influence, especially Greek. Prominent romans, like Cicero and Horace, also think that too much foreign influence is detrimental.⁵⁴ Replace the Greeks of Livy's time with the Etruscans of the monarchy. In a very short time, they take power and influence. Their influence leads to Roman turmoil. In Tanaquil's case this happens when Tullia, looking to emulate Tanaquil, does terrible things to get into power. It is clear that people during the republic saw foreign influence as dangerous, and Livy is echoing that sentiment in his work.

⁵³ 1.39. Livy tells that when Servius was a child his head burst into flames while he was sleeping and went out when he awoke. He also denies a completely servile origin for him. He supposes that his mother was the queen from the city of Corniculum, which was conquered by Rome. Tanaquil notices her, and notices that she is pregnant, and takes her to live with the royal family. He lives like a member of the family, and his name Servius is just a reflection that his home town was taken over by an enemy.

⁵⁴ Wedeck 197:1929.

It should be noted that the Sabine Women, although foreign, do not add to this sentiment. They take up the Roman mantle and are willing to die to prevent their husbands from committing crimes (Liv.1.9-13). They act as ideal Roman wives and citizens. However, Tanaquil acts as an Etruscan, she never takes up the mantle of a Roman. The Sabine women are also mainly commoners, with only a select few being stolen for prominent men. Plebians were not affected by the foreign influence like the elites were. They did not have to be in vogue or have a Greek poet praise them. They saw foreigners as just other people, with no special love or resentment.⁵⁵ It is foreign influence among the elite that is dangerous, and it proves to be dangerous in Livy. Tanaquil, is innocuous and seems good at first. She picks good rulers and acts as is expected of her in her old home. Her crime is opening the door. In an incredibly short amount of time her daughter uses that same independence and ambition to destroy the political system of Rome. The reader is implored to wonder if this is not exactly the type of thing that can distance Rome from what made it great and cause the slipping of morals Livy mentions in his prologue.

Tacitus uses Livia to promote his agenda. His portrayal of her is harsh, much more so than other authors. He goes so far as to subversively criticize her using her obituary.⁵⁶ This criticism is absent in other ancient authors. Pliny the Elder is only critical of her intrigues. Velleius and Seneca admire her. The unabashed criticism is something unique to Tacitus, and thus deserves a deeper examination.

The agenda of Tacitus is to expose the cruelty and evil of those in power. He is upset with the positive writing about them, which was only done to save the author's own skin. However, Livia's terrible character does not hurt Augustus. He is a good leader, bringing

⁵⁵ Wedeck 198:1929.

⁵⁶ Barrett 54-59:2003.

political stability to Rome and he started conquests in Germany and Spain.⁵⁷ However, he has a wife that is unhinged and lets her influence his personal decisions. He is also at the very beginning of the story. There is no reason to vilify him. He is the starting point of the depravity and may act as a sort of measuring stick for the other rulers.

Livia starts the downward trend of emperors in Rome. Tiberius is a terrible leader in Tacitus and his rule is completely due to Livia. Tiberius is the reason why Livia must be so deplorable. She chooses a leader, and it makes sense that a terrible woman would choose a terrible leader. Tacitus' image of Tiberius is fairly clear: he is a hypocritical and paranoid leader who is a slave to his mother. This is a harsh outlook. He was handed a bad economy and a bad military situation. His reign started with mutinies that he suppressed. The economy led to politicians using prosecutions to recoup some of their money (*Ann.*6.16). He was often seen as ungenerous and frugal⁵⁸, but he did give many gifts personally. This was due to the economy. There are also stories about his vices on Capraea and Rhodes, but these can be discounted due to their being based on rumors. This is all to say that many of the negatives attributed to Tiberius could be due to his situation or have no solid facts backing them up. Tiberius may have just been misunderstood. He also thwarted the plot by Sejanus. Tacitus again exaggerates this. He states that,

Inritatusque suppliciis cunctos, qui carcere attinebantur accusati societatis cum Seiano, necari iubet. Iacuit immensa strages, omnis sexus, omnis aetas, inlustres ignobiles, dispersi aut aggerati. Neque propinquis aut amicis adsistere, inlacrimare, ne visere quidem diutius dabatur, sed circumiecti custodes et in maerorem cuiusque intenti corpora putrefacta adsectabantur, dum in Tiberim traherentur, ubi fluitantia aut ripis adpulsa non cremare quisquam, non contingere. Interciderat sortis humanae commercium vi metus, quantumque saevitia glisceret, miseratio arcebatur (6.19)

⁵⁷ Purchell 2015.

⁵⁸ He did not throw many festivals or games. Levick:2016.

And as executions had whetted his appetite, he gave orders for all persons in custody on the charge of complicity with Sejanus to be killed. On the ground lay the huge hecatomb of victims: either sex, every age the famous, the obscure; scattered or piled in mounds. Nor was it permitted to relatives or friends to stand near, to weep over them, or even to view them too long; but a cordon of sentries, with eyes for each beholder's sorrow, escorted the rotting carcasses, as they were dragged to the Tiber, there to float with the current or drift to the bank, with none to commit them to the flames or touch them. The ties of our common humanity had been dissolved by the force of terror; and before each advance of cruelty compassion receded.

The image here is of an uncontrollable despot. Tiberius seems to be insane. He is not doing these executions to quell a rebellion, but to wet his thirst for blood and violence. The end of this section is particularly telling of Tacitus' aim. Tiberius is not just killing, he is terrorizing his subjects. There is no justice nor due process, just bloodshed. This is not entirely true. As Edward Salmon notes, fifty-two people were accused of treason in Tiberius' entire reign. Of these, about half were not convicted. There were four innocent people that were condemned, but this was due more to the senate than to a perceived bloodlust by Tiberius⁵⁹. Tiberius did execute people during his reign, but the "hecatomb victims" that Tacitus refers to is an exaggeration. Tiberius is also suffering from a stereotype. He is a member of the Cladii family, who were known to be ruthless and arrogant. However, Tiberius was an atypical Claudii. He was not prideful and was more a general than a politician.⁶⁰ He did not embody the characteristics of his family, but the name characterized him regardless. This connotation would have made Tacitus' audience very receptive to the ruthless Tiberius that he creates.

Tacitus stretches and manipulates facts to achieve his goal. Yes, Tiberius was probably the "Gloomiest of men" as Pliny the Elder called him (*Natural Histories* 25.5.32). However, he was not the ruler that Tacitus portrays him as. Tacitus does everything in his power to make the

⁵⁹Salmon 133:1968.

⁶⁰ Syme 482:1974

emperors look as bad as possible, and the women they associate with are no exception to his hyperbole.

The women that Livy and Tacitus include are used to serve each writer's goals. Livy holds them up as examples, both good and bad. They are meant to be used as a reference point and show how Romans need to act to save their state from constant political discord. The women in Tacitus are needed to make their respective emperors look bad. They help Tacitus distort the facts and hyperbolize cruelty to show what life was really like in this tumultuous time in Rome. Men are the focus in both authors, but the women are very important. Both Livy and Tacitus are artists, with men as the focus of their art. The women are used as colors and shades: to deepen and complete the understanding of the subjects.

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