

CENSURE OF POWERFUL WOMEN:  
ROMAN MONARCHY AND GENDER ANXIETY

THE CENSURE OF POWERFUL WOMEN:  
ROMAN MONARCHY AND GENDER ANXIETY

By:

SERENA WITZKE, B.A.

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AUTHOR: Serena Witzke, B.A. (McMaster University)

SUPERVISOR: Dr. Claude Eilers

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## ABSTRACT

The criticism of Roman women, particularly from the Late Republic to the early dynasties of the Principate, was a constant in the literary and historical accounts of ancient Roman society. This censure has previously been either attributed to the cultural misogyny inherent in a patriarchal society or treated disparately for the anecdotal content without a survey of themes and tropes found in the criticisms. When the material is gathered together and examined as a whole, several themes and patterns emerge from the episodes involving the disparagement of women close to power. Such women were criticized for their involvement in politics (often through influence over powerful men), administration, and the military. The criticisms were motivated by various anxieties experienced by the male elite, such as the disparity between cultural ideal for Roman women and the reality, the conflict between the *domus* and the *res publica*, and the overarching anxiety about the burgeoning monarchy (and women's place in it) developing in the Late Republic and coming into fruition with the Principate of Augustus, as it related to Roman ideas of tyranny. Chapter Two examines the themes of criticism in the accounts of strong Julio-Claudian female figures, Livia, Messalina, and Agrippina Minor. Chapter Three explores the origins of these criticisms in the anecdotes of public female action in the Republic, with particular emphasis on the triumviral period. Chapter Four deals with the women accompanying Roman officials into the provinces (which were a kind of monarchy) to show that the themes and tropes in the censure of Roman women close to power were uniform across time period and geographical location.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Roman literature is full of disparaging commentary on women. Females in general are depicted as greedy, susceptible to *luxuria*, at the mercy of their uncontrollable passions, deceitful, jealous and cruel; a woman in proximity to power will attempt to corrupt that power or usurp it for herself and her own personal desires. Though the women of Rome's semi-mythological history could act heroically, their descendents seemed to lack this admirable quality, engaging in selfishness and rebellion throughout the Republic, inspiring the outrageous acts of the triumviral wives. When Augustus gained power, a monarchy developed at Rome under the guise of a reinstated Republican government. The power of the Senate was undermined, rivals to Augustus' power were removed, a hereditary succession was established and the state was no longer able to function without the *princeps*' guidance.<sup>1</sup> By relocating the seat of government to his home on the Palatine, Augustus effectively made the running of state the family business.<sup>2</sup> The (imperial) women, under the Republic expected to participate in family business,<sup>3</sup> now found themselves in a position of great influence in state business. With the imperial women's increased power came elite male criticism, directed both at women close to power at the capital and in the provinces. These women were reported to have engaged in such atrocities that even today readers are captivated by the lurid details. This study will demonstrate that the censure of Roman women close to power did not occur in disparate incidents, but was uniform in content over time period and geographic area; the criticisms of imperial women were expressed concurrently in anecdotes of governors' wives in the provinces (provincial posts being monarchical in nature themselves), and both were influenced by the development of invective against women during the Republic (when accusations of monarchical and tyrannical aspirations entered political invective), all reflecting male anxieties of the implications of women having access to public power and tension over the breakdown of the male ideal of the Roman woman.

The involvement of women in power, or at least their perceived involvement, both in the capital and the provinces under the empire, disturbed a Roman male elite already suspicious of women's roles in the Late Republic. Women in power seemed to violate traditional Republican gender roles and male ideologies of female status. This tension between ideal and reality was expressed in the sources, written by the men most affected by the changes in government and social order. These authors attempted in their work to come to terms with the creation of monarchy and women's place in it, as well as the negative connotations of tyranny inherent in monarchy and female power.<sup>4</sup> Because the Julio-Claudian dynasty was a time of socio-political upheaval and transition, the imperial

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<sup>1</sup> Susan Fischler, "Social Stereotypes and Historical Analysis: The Case of the Imperial Women at Rome," in *Women in Ancient Societies: An Illusion of the Night*, ed. Léonie J. Archer, Susan Fischler, and Maria Wyke (New York: Routledge, 1994), 120.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 122, Kristina Milnor, *Gender, Domesticity and the Age of Augustus* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2005), 48-50.

<sup>3</sup> Fischler, "Social Stereotypes," 118.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 115-16.

women were particularly vilified for their roles, both for their own characters and as reflections of the negative characters of their imperial male counterparts.<sup>5</sup> In the provinces badly behaved wives of officials evinced their husbands' poor character and administration, which in turn reflected the detrimental innovations of the imperial regime in provincial administration. Allowing women to accompany their husbands on provincial posts emphasized the monarchical nature of these posts; the autocratic governor now brought a 'royal house' with him.

Underlying the criticism of regime was the Roman male author's anxiety regarding women's participation in power. Women were identified with the private, the feminine *domus*, and political power in a woman threatened the male *res publica*. Such power was a conflict of interest in which, it was feared, the *res publica* would be subordinated to the desires and whims of the *domus*. These fears were tied to anxieties about the Roman monarchy; rule of a family over the state resonated with the traditional definitions of tyranny, the Greek tyrant's violation of '*nomos*' and democratic '*isonomia*', and the blurring of the boundaries of public and private inherent in tyranny. The principate was, in essence, a monarchy (ill-concealed under the rubric 'Principate') and for Romans monarchy signified a violation of the *res publica*.<sup>6</sup> To respond to, and perhaps exorcize, these fears, Roman authors vilified women who were perceived to transgress the bounds of feminine propriety, public women given power and status by this new regime and its precursors. It should be noted that 'monarchy', for the purposes of this study, refers not to the semi-historical ruling regime of Rome's distant past, as it predates written Roman history and cannot accurately be studied for its attitudes towards women. The term applies more generally to the Roman principate, its precursors in the Late Republic (in the shifting politics of the triumviral periods), and the governors' provinces which functioned monarchically.

Many ancient sources will be used in this study. Tacitus, as previously mentioned, was a large contributor of anecdotal evidence for the wives and families of officials in the provinces, as the historian used them particularly, along with the imperial women, to promote his theme of moral and political degradation under the Julio-Claudian regime. His *Annales* contain considerable mention of the activities of both provincial and imperial women. Cicero's *in Verrem* is an interesting character study of the 'tyrant governor' and an example of the perceived complications women bring to provincial administration. Valerius Maximus' collection of anecdotes, customs and traditions can be plumbed for cultural conventions regarding gender and power. As Velleius Paterculus

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<sup>5</sup> Using a woman's negative behaviour to criticize her husband or undermine his career was a common motif in Roman Republican and Imperial polemic (A. J. Marshall, "Roman Women and the Provinces," *Ancient Society* 6 (1975): 112.). Cicero cited Fulvia's military behaviour as a means of evidencing Anthony's weak, effeminate character (Cic. *Phil.* 5.22; 13.18). Caesar divorced his wife Pompeia because her name was indirectly connected with a scandal involving Clodius Pulcher, an enemy of Caesar's. Despite her innocence in the affair, Pompeia was rejected so that Caesar's career would be unsullied by any possible reflection of the scandal (Plut. *Caes.* 10; Suet. *Div. Iul.* 6).

<sup>6</sup> J. Roger Dunkle, "The Greek Tyrant and Roman Political Invective of the Late Republic," *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 98 (1967).



was sycophantic towards Augustus and Tiberius, his work can often contrast the invective and rumour of Tacitus. Dio Cassius is consulted to offer corroboration of or evidence against Tacitus' recordings. Seneca in his many *consolationes* evinces Roman attitudes towards proper feminine decorum and litters his philosophical musings with anecdotes of feminine behaviour. Martial and Juvenal, though satirical, offer genuine glimpses of Roman elite male fears surrounding women and gender roles. Finally, Livy is an excellent source for Roman attitudes towards monarchy in general, women's place in such a regime, and the development of female authority.

Second wave feminism has prompted the renewed study of the "Roman Woman". Prior to this, the study of women in the ancient world had been sporadic, and episodes had been treated in isolation of one another, often relegated in textbooks to a token paragraph at the end of a chapter on social history, if included at all. Now several studies on the gendering of space and the tensions created by shifting power structures in male-female roles have been produced through which to study the sexuality and cultural norms of the Roman people. Marshall has written some of the only surveys of women in the provinces following the prorogation of governor's terms and the alteration of the laws prohibiting the families of officials from accompaniment to provincial post.<sup>7</sup> Santoro L'Hoir and Ginsburg have both produced important work on the Tacitean *dux femina* trope, which sheds light on the historians' biases and possible motivations for exploring this theme so extensively.<sup>8</sup> Fischler and Baumen have written thought-provoking work on the shifting political influence of women under a monarchy and its effect on the elite male-female dynamic of Rome in the early days of the Principate.<sup>9</sup> Milnor's work *Gender, Domesticity and the Age of Augustus* explores the ways in which space was used to facilitate or debilitate power in the Roman world and how the dynamics of masculine and feminine space were upset and altered during the inception of the Julio-Claudian regime.<sup>10</sup>

This study is organized diachronically by area of research. Each chapter will examine the attitudes of the ancient authors towards their relevant female characters to reveal the developing attitudes of the Roman masculine elite towards feminine agency and influence, in both the capital and the provinces. Anecdotal episodes from the Republic and early Empire will be the main source of interest for this survey, to demonstrate that disparagement of imperial women was not unique, but a natural development of the tradition of invective against female power developing throughout the

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<sup>7</sup> A. J. Marshall, "Ladies in Waiting: The Role of Women in Tacitus' Histories," *Ancient Society* 15-17 (1984-1986), Marshall, "Roman Women and the Provinces.", A. J. Marshall, "Tacitus and the Governor's Lady: A Note on *Annals* 3.33-4," *Greece and Rome* 22, no. 1 (1975).

<sup>8</sup> Judith Ginsburg, "In *Maiores Certamina*: Past and Present in the *Annals*," in *Tacitus and the Tacitean Tradition*, ed. T. J. Luce and A. J. Woodman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), Francesca Santoro L'Hoir, "Tacitus and Women's Usurpation of Power," *Classical World* 88, no. 1 (1994), Francesca Santoro L'Hoir, *The Rhetoric of Gender Terms: 'Man', 'Woman', and the Portrayal of Character in Latin Prose*, vol. 120, *Mnemosyne Supplement* (New York: E. J. Brill, 1992).

<sup>9</sup> Fischler, "Social Stereotypes."

<sup>10</sup> Milnor, *Gender, Domesticity and the Age of Augustus*.

Republic, and that the criticisms involving provincial women were in no way exclusive to provincial conduct, but were a reflection and extension of anxieties concurrent in the capital.

Chapter Two summarizes the attitudes of the Roman male towards women at the birth of the Julio-Claudian age, as well as the cultural associations of monarchy with tyranny, and explores the conflict between *domus* and *res publica* expressed in the fully developed themes and tropes present in the censure of imperial women. Chapter Three explores the creation and refinement of these themes throughout the shifting politics of the Republic, demonstrating a clear line of development from this period to the one following. Chapter Four outlines the application of the same themes to women traveling in the provinces with Roman officials, while the conclusion summarizes the ways in which the criticisms and underlying tensions functioned together to express and normalize male anxiety about both women's roles and the changing political situation of Rome.

Following this survey it can be concluded that the disparagement of Roman women close to power did not occur in singular or sporadic episodes but was the product of a long tradition of invective rhetoric against autocratic power and women's part in it, which can be traced back from the anecdotes of the Julio-Claudian wives to the triumviral consorts to the Republican elite matrons. The censure of women accompanying their governor husbands in the provinces, which seems particularly unique and vehement in Tacitus' *Annales*, was actually a reflection of these developing tropes and themes, finding precedent in the same sources out of the same anxieties. This study is a much-needed examination of the censure of Roman women in literature. Rather than treat these incidences as isolated examples of Roman misogyny, it is more beneficial to the study of Roman social history to view the criticism of powerful women as part of a larger, often unconscious effort on the part of elite male authors to come to terms with their anxiety at the changing status of women in a burgeoning monarchy in a culture that had by the Late Republic equated monarchy and the rule of a family with tyranny.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Andrew Erskine, "Hellenistic Monarchy and Roman Political Invective," *Classical Quarterly* n.s. 41, no. 1 (1991): 111-20.

## Chapter 2: Disparagement of the Julio-Claudian Wives

“The same actions may be seen in a negative or positive or neutral manner, depending on cultural judgments. The absolute, the action, remains unchanged; it is the interpretation that alters.”<sup>12</sup>

The most salient disparagement of women in Roman literature is that involving the imperial wives of the Julio-Claudian dynasty. These episodes are particularly memorable for their larger-than-life female characters engaged in outrageous activities contrary to the Roman ideal of feminine behaviour. The biographic genre and the new, character-driven style of annalistic history led by Tacitus lent itself well to describing these episodes in great detail. The authors had a rich tradition of censure of women on which they could draw, and as a result, the critical descriptions of the imperial women come alive in lurid detail. To contextualize the disparagement of imperial wives within the literary and cultural tradition, first a short survey on the development of criticism of Roman women is necessary.

The Roman standard of feminine behaviour expressing the male ideal was offered as early as the second century B.C. in Plautus' *Mostellaria* (lines 186-228). A woman was expected to be a *univira* (having only one husband in her lifetime), be faithful *in aeternum* (her death should precede her husband's, and only her death would sever the bonds of matrimony), and she should submit to her husband in all things.<sup>13</sup> According to the ideal, she was to be modest, chaste and quiet, desiring nothing beyond the locus of her domestic life (her husband and family), never seen and rarely heard. In reality, women's roles were considerably more dynamic.

Although Roman women were prohibited from political activity, they were compelled to act politically on the behalf of their husbands when necessary; such activity was socially acceptable when framed as devotion to their husbands. This was particularly apparent in the Late Republic during the proscriptions and exiles, as well as during the early Empire, when matrons were forced to canvas for support among their absent husbands' political allies.<sup>14</sup> In addition to this, women both participated in family

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<sup>12</sup> Elizabeth Carney, "Olympias and the Image of the Virago," *Phoenix* 47, no. 1 (1993): 35.

<sup>13</sup> D. Baharal, "Public Image and Women at Court in the Era of the Adoptive Emperors (A.D. 98-180), the Case of Faustina the Younger," in *Studies in Latin Literature and Roman History*, ed. Carl Deroux, *Collection Latomus* (Bruxelles: 2000), 330-31.

<sup>14</sup> E. A. Hemelrijk, "Masculinity and Femininity in the *Laudatio Turiae*," *Classical Quarterly* 54, no. 1 (2004). In the *Laudatio Turiae*, "Turia" aided her husband who fled the proscriptions by procuring food, slaves and money for his well being, while also approaching the triumvir Lepidus for aid. Cicero's wife Terentia also made efforts on his behalf during his voluntary exile by means of letters offering political information and security advisement, as well as sending him money (Cic. *Fam.* 14.1-4). Ovid's wife too stayed at Rome during her husband's exile by Augustus. He begged her to intervene on his behalf, as well as send him information from Rome (*Tr.* 1.3.79-102; 1.6.5ff; 4.3.71ff; 5.2.37ff; 5.14.15ff; *Pont.* 3.1.31ff).

business and influenced male members of the household on that business;<sup>15</sup> they consulted in marriage negotiations,<sup>16</sup> looked after family clients,<sup>17</sup> and actively participated in the financial aspects of household business.<sup>18</sup> The influx of slaves into the Roman economy by the first century B.C. made it unnecessary for elite Roman women to participate in household physical labour (such as spinning wool and making clothing), thus freeing a matron's time for other activities as well, though literary tradition maintained that this activity was a standard of ideal behaviour in a Roman matron).<sup>19</sup> Common criticisms against women chastised them for the above activities, as well as moral depravity by means of drunkenness, adultery, inclination towards *luxuria*, and political appearances in the *forum*. Most disparagement of Roman women arose out of the tension created by the artificial construct of the ideals of feminine behaviour and the realities of the 'private' domestic life of elite, wealthy Roman matrons.

Despite the ideal of private domesticity, the Roman *domus* was also a center of political power, economy and social networking.<sup>20</sup> There existed the political ideology that an active citizen must present his *domus* to public display.<sup>21</sup> The very design of the typical wealthy Roman atrium house was created in such a way as to facilitate the elite Roman male's ritual morning *salutatio*.<sup>22</sup> The structure required for the *salutatio* followed the sightline axis from the street; the visitor entered through the doorway, proceeded through the *fauces* to the *vestibulum*, to the atrium, to the *tablinum*. Many clients and friends of the *paterfamilias* would circulate through these areas on a daily basis. It is important to note that within this architectural structure there is no designated area for the distaff side. Male and female areas overlap with no physical segregation of gendered space. The matron's loom, the locus of her traditional, ideal virtue, was located

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<sup>15</sup> Fischler, "Social Stereotypes," 117-18. This is evidenced by the epitaphs of Roman matrons, which laud their activities in running the households of their husbands.

<sup>16</sup> Suzanne Dixon, "Family Finances: Terentia and Tullia," in *The Family in Ancient Rome: New Perspectives*, ed. Beryl Rawson (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), 105.

<sup>17</sup> Plut. *Ant.* 54.

<sup>18</sup> Fischler, "Social Stereotypes," 117-18.

<sup>19</sup> Milnor, *Gender, Domesticity and the Age of Augustus*, 29-30. The epitaph of Claudia (CIL 6.15346), the *Laudatio Turiae* (CIL 6.41062) and others (CIL 6.11602); Livy (1.57.9) finds the heroine Lucretia modestly sitting at home spinning wool with her maidservants while the other soldiers' wives attend parties.

<sup>20</sup> To contrast the design of a Roman house to the Greek for their differing ideologies of space, see Lisa C. Nevett, *House and Society in the Ancient Greek World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

<sup>21</sup> Milnor, *Gender, Domesticity and the Age of Augustus*, 65f. When the tribune M. Livius Drusus was building his house on the Palatine in the early 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C., he insisted that the architect construct it to always be open to everyone's view (*si qui in te artis est, ita compone domum meam, ut, quidquid agam, ab omnibus perspicui possit*). Vell. Pat. 2.14.3; Plut. *Mor.* 800F.

<sup>22</sup> Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, *Houses and Society in Pompeii and Herculaneum* (Princeton University Press, 1994). Vitruvius in *De Architectura* (6.5.1) stated that the average man (a *privatus*) had no use for the *vestibulum-atrium-tablinum* structure, as he called on others and did not receive calls.

in the public space of the atrium, and was likely attended throughout the day by the female staff. This stood as a visible reminder of the matron's place within the home and male ideology – she was a visible, albeit silent, participant in the Roman public arena.<sup>23</sup> Her presence in the average Roman elite *domus* was constantly attested by her inclusion in business and the *cena*,<sup>24</sup> her loom in the visible public areas of the house, and the lack of physical segregation of gendered space. It follows naturally then that when an imperial monarchy was instituted in Rome, and the political realm was shifted to Augustus' home on the Palatine, the women of the *domus* would be all the more visible and active in that public sphere.

In the Augustan Age, Rome saw a monarchy develop under the guise of a reinstated Republican government. This included a relocation of the seat of government to Augustus' home on the Palatine, which effectively made the running of state a family business.<sup>25</sup> One result was that imperial women then found themselves in a position of increased influence in state business, which in turn attracted hostility and criticism from elite males.<sup>26</sup> Women attached to a monarchy naturally found themselves in a position of power within that monarchy, especially when the locus of power shifted so fully to the *domus*, the ideological sphere of the Roman matron. Due to tension created by the clash of elite male ideals concerning women and the realities of the Roman world, the increased power of women in a monarchy (with its inward power shift) exacerbated these ideological problems. Augustus himself complicated the issue with his moral legislation, which put Roman matrons and their activities fully in the public eye. Marriage, children and morality were now for the first time a state and legal concern through which elite citizens could be judged and persecuted.<sup>27</sup> With this legislation, Augustus reinforced

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<sup>23</sup> The segregation of male-female space in the Roman elite house was ideological. While the *materfamilias*' loom stood in a highly visible public area, privy to the political business of the *paterfamilias*, her presence was merely representative; the loom stood as a public example of her *pudicitia* and 'private', traditional virtues while she was excluded from the public business occurring there. See Tom Hillard, "On the Stage, Behind the Curtain: Images of Politically Active Women in the Late Roman Republic," in *Stereotypes of Women in Power: Historical Perspectives and Revisionist Views*, ed. Barbara Garlick, Suzanne Dixon, and Pauline Allen, *Contributions in Women's Studies* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1992), 40-41.

<sup>24</sup> On women and drinking/dinner parties: Val. Max. 6.3.9-12; on Roman women at dinner parties compared to their Greek counterparts: Nep. *de excellentibus ducibus exterarum gentium*, pref. 6-7.

<sup>25</sup> Cass. Dio 55.12.5 mentions the publicity of Augustus' new palace. See also Milnor, *Gender, Domesticity and the Age of Augustus*, 48-50.

<sup>26</sup> Reinvented tyranny in the guise of a principate was a difficult concept for the people to accept, and the tensions were reflected in the literature on the imperial family. The vilification of imperial women drew on earlier episodes of the tyranny of a family over a city as a means of expressing ideological anxiety.

<sup>27</sup> Milnor, *Gender, Domesticity and the Age of Augustus*, 11. For more information on Augustus' moral legislation, see Synnøve Des Bouvrie, "Augustus' Legislation on Morals – Which Morals and What Aims?," *Symbolae Osloenses* 59 (1984), Catherine Edwards, *The Politics of Immorality in Ancient Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), Richard I. Frank, "Augustus' Legislation on Marriage and Children," *California Studies in Classical*

gender anxiety and created a paradox within his own household; he required of them the appearance of traditional, private female life, but as the principal women of the state, his female relations were subject to public scrutiny and imitation.<sup>28</sup> Modesty, domesticity and traditional virtue, dress and comportment were demanded of these women, while at the same time their proximity to singular power and their contribution to dynastic aspirations thrust them into a political arena completely at odds with traditional, ideal feminine roles.<sup>29</sup> From this ideological clash arose a tradition of highly charged disparagement of the women of the Julio-Claudian dynasty.

Despite the sheer amount of censure of these women, however, a study of the nature of the criticism is not without difficulty. Much of the extant literature is from a later period, far removed from the events of the earlier dynasties. The majority of the information on the wives of the Julio-Claudians comes from Silver Age Latin literature, that of Tacitus, Juvenal, Martial, Pliny and Suetonius.<sup>30</sup> As well, each author filters his source material through the lens of his own perceptions and motivations; this results in a very particular organization of material and character presentation, reflecting contemporary socio-cultural and political concerns as much as those of the earlier periods about which he is writing.<sup>31</sup> The situation is further complicated by the long-standing literary tradition of using female characters to reflect the poor virtues and values of their husbands. It was common practice in the Late Republic to disparage men through their female family members,<sup>32</sup> and this trend recurs in the criticism of imperial wives. The wives of the emperors, however, could be used to criticize not only the emperors

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*Antiquity* 8 (1975), Karl Galinsky, "Augustus' Legislation on Morals and Marriage," *Philologus* 125 (1981), Judith Evans Grubbs, *Women and the Law in the Roman Empire* (New York: Routledge, 2002), Judith Lynn Sebesta, "Women's Costume and Feminine Civic Morality in Augustan Rome," *Gender and History* 9, no. 3 (1997), Susan Treggiari, "*Leges Sine Moribus*," *Ancient History Bulletin* 8, no. 3 (1994).

<sup>28</sup> Ironically, Augustus' interest in marriage and family, when legislated, reduced women's role to dynastic purposes; instead of playing a nurturing role in the family, women's charge was child production, with a focus on numbers. Only through legally stipulated child-bearing quotas could women be freed of *tutela* and their husbands gain political privileges. Antti Arjava, *Women and the Law in Late Antiquity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 78, Sharon James, "Future Perfect Feminine: Women Past and Present in Vergil's *Aeneid*," in *Approaches to Teaching Vergil's Aeneid*, ed. William S. Anderson and Lonna N. Quattarone (New York: 2002), 143, 46.

<sup>29</sup> Marleen B. Flory, "Livia and the History of Public Honorific Statues for Women in Rome," *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 123 (1993): 304-06.

<sup>30</sup> It will be noted, however, that the popular critical tradition arose during, or shortly after, these women's lifetimes, and the historians themselves cite such earlier precedents for their literary attacks.

<sup>31</sup> Ronald G. Cluett, "Roman Women and Triumviral Politics, 43-37 B.C.," *Echos du Monde Classique* 42, no. 17 (1998): 68-69, Fischler, "Social Stereotypes," 120-21.

<sup>32</sup> Harriet Flower, *Ancestor Masks and Aristocratic Power in Roman Culture* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 123.

themselves, but also the entire monarchical regime.<sup>33</sup> The reader must discern if the author meant to slander the woman herself, her husband, or the regime, and by the time the Silver Age historians were writing, all three elements had become inextricably linked. The Julio-Claudian era had then been fixed in the annals of Roman history as a time of political flux with chaotic abuse of authority in which the imperial family threatened with their arbitrary absolutism every value held by Roman society.<sup>34</sup> The characters of the dynasty's women reflected this disintegration of political and social order, and their characterizations in turn reflected their husbands'. Thus, later authors could highlight the doddering ineffectiveness of Claudius by presenting two of his wives as dominating, power-hungry haridans, usurping Claudius' imperial power and exercising their own. Nero's mother was portrayed as a power-hungry murderess, and his wife Poppaea was a debauched and gregarious whore; both of these characterizations were aspects of Nero's own character as perceived by later Roman elite authors.

The lack of contemporary source material further problematizes the nature of the criticism against imperial women. Though a popular tradition of criticism issued from the imperial women's enemies during their lifetimes,<sup>35</sup> they were disparaged in the published literary sources only long after their deaths. Was it that the women were feared too much in their own time, or was it a fear of their husbands that curtailed literary disparagement? Tacitus reports that Tiberius forbade punishment for disparagement of living imperial family members,<sup>36</sup> though one has to wonder if this did anything to lessen the fear of punishment for criticizing the current regime – slanderers were convicted on other charges instead.<sup>37</sup> Unsurprisingly, contemporary authors writing on the period range from sycophantic to circumspect. Legally prohibited or not, it was clearly dangerous to criticize the ruling regime.<sup>38</sup> Silver Age authors had the benefit of being far removed

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<sup>33</sup> Judith Ginsburg, *Representing Agrippina: Constructions of Female Power in the Early Roman Empire* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2006), 106-07, Sandra R. Joshel, "Female Desire and the Discourse of Empire: Tacitus's Messalina," in *Roman Sexualities*, ed. Judith P. Hallett and Marilyn B. Skinner (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 242-47.

<sup>34</sup> Fischler, "Social Stereotypes," 121.

<sup>35</sup> For instance, Livia was slandered by Scribonia's supporters and was presented negatively in Agrippina Minor's *Memoirs*, which Tacitus used as source material. Tac. *Ann.* 4.53.2; See Patricia Watson, *Ancient Stepmothers: Myth, Misogyny and Reality*, vol. 143, *Mnemosyne Supplement* (New York: E.J. Brill, 1995), 177.

<sup>36</sup> Tac. *Ann.* 2.50. Appulacia Varilla, the niece of Augustus' sister, was accused of adultery and insulting the deified Augustus as well as Tiberius and Livia. Tiberius saw that she was convicted under the *lex Iulia de adulteris et stupris* of 17 B.C., and resolved that she should be punished for any disparagement against Augustus, while any remarks against himself or his mother should be discarded.

<sup>37</sup> *Crudelitas* was one of the typical characteristics of a tyrant. Such a tyrant will eliminate his enemies and do so in a dissimulating way, as Tiberius did in convicting slanderers on other trumped up charges for the offense. Tacitus wrote Tiberius' character in the mould of the Greek tragedy-tyrant to emphasize the corruption of his reign. See Dunkle, "The Greek Tyrant," 168.

<sup>38</sup> Velleius Paterculus, for instance, writing on Augustus and Tiberius, avoids any negativity, even when referring to Augustus' daughter Julia's adulteries, placing the blame

from the earlier eras, and the additional benefit of criticizing a regime denounced by the current imperial families.

A survey of the evidence reveals that the censure of imperial women fell into three basic categories: involvement in politics (particularly for female influence over officials), the military, and imperial business or administration. Strictly speaking, Roman women could take no part in politics as defined by suffrage, magistracies and membership in the senate, but these were not the limits and definitions of political power at Rome. After the emergence of Augustus' monarchy with the Palatine home as the locus of Roman political power, imperial women could use their influence considerably. This influence could find outlet in a variety of ways: women might be barred from magistracies, but they could influence other men on behalf of a favoured candidate; they could be patronesses of *collegia* and cities in the Greek East;<sup>39</sup> and they could maintain the honour of their families by arranging favourable dynastic matches with other powerful families.<sup>40</sup> Although women had long been participating in politics in this way during the Republic, it was when their participation came into the public eye of the empire, with increased stakes of power, that this was given widespread literary criticism. Now the family's political circle was comprised of monarchs, tribes and kingdoms; its sphere of influence was limited not to its inner circle of elite families and their associates, but the entire empire.<sup>41</sup> Women, whose interests were perceived to be only in the advancement of their children and the aggrandizement of their *gens* (the *domus*), could now affect the entire realm of Roman power with their personal ambitions.

Imperial women's influence over the emperor was a source of anxiety for elite male historians. It was expected that Roman matrons would seek to influence their husbands in matters of family business and negotiation,<sup>42</sup> but when their husbands were

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instead on her accomplices; she was simply a girl who had gotten "caught up with a bad crowd". Santoro L'Hoir, *The Rhetoric of Gender Terms*, 117-18.

<sup>39</sup> Mika Kajava, "A New City Patroness?," *Tyche* 5 (1990), Mika Kajava, "Roman Sentatorial Women and the Greek East. Epigraphical Evidence from the Republican and Augustan Period," in *Roman Eastern Policy and Other Studies in Roman History: Proceedings of a Colloquium at Tvärminne, 2-3 October 1987*, ed. Heikki Solin and Mika Kajava, *Commentationes Humanarum Litterarum* (Helsinki: Finnish Society of Sciences and Letters, 1990).

<sup>40</sup> Suzanne Dixon, "A Family Business: Women's Role in Patronage and Politics at Rome 80-44 B.C.," *Classica et Mediaevalia* 34 (1983): 91-94.

<sup>41</sup> Republican grandees "held court" with many powerful individuals of the empire as well; Cornelia, mother of the Gracchi, counted kings among her circle, but she could not benefit her family beyond her own reputation; her sons were dead, as well as her husband, making her influence less threatening. Nonetheless, Juvenal (6.167-171) admonishes men to stay away from 'Cornelias' when picking wives, as such women were too intelligent and assertive, and would undermine their husband's reputation and authority. Plut. *C. Gracch.* 19.1-3; Richard Bauman, *Women and Politics in Ancient Rome* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 44.

<sup>42</sup> Fischler, "Social Stereotypes," 117-18, 25. Women had a moral authority within the home, *materna auctoritas* (according to Asconius), which carried the assumption that women would use their influence to persuade their husbands to work on their behalf towards some end. Tom Hillard, "Republican Politics, Women and the Evidence," *Helios* 16, no. 2 (1989): 165.



emperors, and their family business was that of empire, there was a high degree of tension surrounding this practice.<sup>43</sup> The authors feared that imperial women would seek to influence the emperor to the detriment of the defenseless citizenry, the masculine *res publica*. Women's loyalties were located in the *domus*, in the careers of their children and their own personal reputations. They would seek to subvert male loyalty to the *res publica* to the benefit of the family. When the *paterfamilias* was also the *pater patriae*, this represented a very dangerous conflict of interest. This anxiety has its roots in imperial ideology; the emperor was the administrator of justice, but it was within his power to judge capriciously and arbitrarily. The success of the system required that he judge fairly, with clemency, and be above outside influence. Historians seized upon incidents in which the emperor's judgment seemed to be compromised by the imperial women,<sup>44</sup> as these provided clear examples of the tyranny inherent in monarchy.

The Roman army, an exclusively and decidedly male sphere, also became a locus of fear of feminine power through the increasingly common presence of imperial women in all aspects of imperial management.<sup>45</sup> Silver Age authors were simultaneously fascinated and repelled by the idea of the '*dux femina*', a female transgressor of the male-dominated military sphere. She was an aberration, and her participation in military activity was equated with *dominatio* and *servitus*, two terms of revulsion and horror for the Roman elite male.<sup>46</sup> Foreign queens and female generals were viewed with a mixture of respect, awe and disgust,<sup>47</sup> while the most venomous censure was reserved for Roman women who attempted to transgress into the military arena. Agrippina Minor and the women active during the 'Year of the Four Emperors' of 69 A.D. featured prominently in this criticism.<sup>48</sup> It would be over two hundred years before elite women could attach their names to the Roman army without recrimination.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Fischler, "Social Stereotypes," 122.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 125-6. Generally: Tac. *Ann.* 12.7; Cass. Dio 60.28.2; Suet. *Claud.* 29.1. Specific cases: Livia and Tiberius - Urgulania (Tac. *Ann.* 2.34), Julia Livilla (Cass. Dio 60.8.5); Agrippina and Claudius - Statilius Taurus (Tac. *Ann.* 12.59), Domitia Lepida (Tac. *Ann.* 12.64); Claudius was 'a slave to his wife (Messalina) and freedmen' (Cass. Dio 60.14.1).

<sup>45</sup> Male members of the imperial family sent out on campaign and assignment often were accompanied by their wives and children – the royal family on the 'grand tour' as it were.

<sup>46</sup> Santoro L'Hoir, "Tacitus and Women's Usurpation of Power."; Ginsburg, "*In Maiores Certamina*."

<sup>47</sup> Such as Cleopatra (Plut. *Ant.*); Tueta of Ilyria (Polyb. 2.10); Queen Erato and the Armenian (Tac. *Ann.* 2.4.6); Cartimandua and the Brigantians (Tac. *Ann.* 12.40.16); the Sithones (Tac. *Germ.* 45.9); Veleda and the Batavians (Tac. *Hist.* 4.61, 5.24-5); Boudicca of the Britons (Tac. *Ann.* 14.35; *Agr.* 16.1, 31.4); Zenobia of Palmyra (SHA *Tyr. Trig.* 30).

<sup>48</sup> Agrippina Minor: Tac. *Ann.* 12.37.3; 12.56.3; wives of emperors and generals: Triaria at Tarracina girding on a sword like Fulvia (Tac. *Hist.* 3.77); the women joining the fray at the Capitaline, led by Verulana Gratilla (Tac. *Hist.* 3.69); Salonina, wife of the Vitellian general Caecina, appearing as an eastern despot on horseback, clad in purple, offended the people's sensibilities (Tac. *Hist.* 2.20). See also Marshall, "Ladies in Waiting," 175.

<sup>49</sup> Julia Domna received the title '*mater castrorum*' (ILS 442-444) and the vestal virgin Campia Severina was a patroness to the Roman army (ILS 4929). Marshall, "Roman Women and the Provinces," 113.

Criticisms in the areas of business and administration related to this issue of influencing the emperor, if the family business in which these women were participating was imperial business. In the Roman *domus* the *materfamilias* had charge of the slaves of the *familia*, and they often acted as benefactors to their freedmen who owed them *operae et obsequium*.<sup>50</sup> Under the empire, imperial women now had control of a veritable army of slaves and freedmen who were able to gain considerable power as members of the imperial *familia*.<sup>51</sup> Claudius' wives Messalina and Agrippina were loathed and feared for their influence over the imperial *familia*, who also had great influence over the emperor.<sup>52</sup> The wealth of imperial women and the use of that wealth was also a matter of concern for historians and critics. At times emperors granted financial freedom to their female relations by special allowance, giving imperial women control over vast wealth which they could then use to benefit the people or abuse at the expense of the citizenry, for their own purposes or for the advancement of their favoured friends and family.<sup>53</sup>

While the criticism of imperial women fell into the above three categories, the majority of the disparagement of imperial women also impugned their chastity. When women's power exceeded the limits stipulated in the male ideal, it was often attributed to their uncontrollable lusts – women were believed to be irrational creatures motivated by their passions. There was a long-standing tradition in Roman ideology and literature that the *pudicitia*, morality, and chastity of the Roman matron were inextricably linked to the well being of the state.<sup>54</sup> Violated chastity then made for virulent accusation in the criticism by elite male authors. Adultery was practically the language of political slander and a motif so common that it featured in every type of literature as a means by which one could exercise criticism.<sup>55</sup> The '*meretrix Augusta*' found in derogatory anecdotes

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<sup>50</sup> Thomas Wiedemann, *Greek and Roman Slavery* (New York: Routledge, 1981), 53f.

<sup>51</sup> See P. R. C. Weaver, *Familia Caesaris; a Social Study of the Emperor's Freedmen and Slaves* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972).

<sup>52</sup> Fischler, "Social Stereotypes," 124.; Suet. *Claud.* 37; Cass. Dio 60.33.3a; Tac. *Ann.* 12.57.

<sup>53</sup> Nicholas Purcell, "Livia and the Womanhood of Rome," *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society* n.s. 32 (1986): 85-86. In 35 B.C. Octavian granted Livia and Octavia (by law or *senatusconsultum* or triumviral edict) freedom from *tutela* (Cass. Dio 49.38.1). This was reinforced in 9 B.C. by the granting of the *ius trium liberorum* (Cass. Dio 55.2.5). Then in 9 A.D. he freed Livia from any remaining financial limitation by granting immunity from the *lex Voconia*, which had limited women from inheriting more than HS 100,000 at a time (Cass. Dio 56.10.2).

<sup>54</sup> In Livy (1.57-60), for instance, to demonstrate decadence and tyranny of the regal period that culminated in the last generation, he made the matrons carouse at parties while their husbands were away. Their promiscuity stood in direct opposition to the modesty of Lucretia (paragon of Roman female virtue). Lucretia's violated chastity then required the purge of the current system of government to right the abuses and violations.

<sup>55</sup> Garrett G. Fagan, "Messalina's Folly," *Classical Quarterly* 52, no. 2 (2002): 568, Joshel, "Female Desire and the Discourse of Empire," 227.

became a strong and hostile stereotype for these assertive women of the imperial house.<sup>56</sup> The *pudicitia* of nearly every imperial woman of the Julio-Claudian dynasty criticized in the literature was impugned in some way, from Livia to Poppaea. Common motifs included the dubious paternity of children, the use of birth control or abortives, adultery and frequent marriage (a violation of the precept of *univira*), and a lack of decorum.<sup>57</sup> Sexual intrigue and adultery were common motifs to criticize either sex in the biographies of unpopular emperors, but when applied to empresses and other female members of the imperial family, the sexual intrigue was generally coupled with rebellion or conspiracy. Agrippina Maior, Messalina, and Agrippina Minor were all purportedly involved in adulteries that resulted in some sort of conspiracy against the emperor.<sup>58</sup>

While this makes for titillating storytelling by the historians, the recurrence of this motif indicates deeper ideological tensions. In the imperial context, infidelity suggested the terrible violation of the state due to the nature of imperial succession. Hereditary succession was difficult enough in the Julio-Claudian dynasty, and often adoption and tenuous familial relationships were relied upon. Any sexual misbehaviour by women of 'royal blood' had political repercussions by default. In a world where aristocratic Roman women served as pawns in political alliances between families, the marriages and associations of imperial women were all the more politically important. If her husband's identity was intertwined with concerns of dynasty, so too were an imperial woman's lovers' identities, and as imperial women were the subject of a certain amount of public scrutiny for their very existence, their adulteries had a very public, political dimension that threatened the safety of the empire.<sup>59</sup> As well, lack of female chastity was representative of familial disorder. Imperial women who transgressed the ideals of matronly *pudicitia* threw doubt upon the emperor's ability to check his own family and, by extension, the state.<sup>60</sup> If an imperial matron's body was connected metonymically to the state, then the penetration of an unchaste empress was equivalent to the violation of

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<sup>56</sup> Adulterous women were forbidden to remarry under the *lex Iulia de adulteris coercendis* of 18 B.C. Convicted of adultery, these women were reduced to a social class carrying *infamia*, likening them to prostitutes. Ginsburg, *Representing Agrippina*, 122.

<sup>57</sup> Amy Richlin, "Julia's Jokes, Galla Placidia and the Roman Use of Women as Political Icons," in *Stereotypes of Women in Power: Historical Perspectives and Revisionist Views*, ed. Barbara Garlick, Suzanne Dixon, and Pauline Allen, *Contributions in Women's Studies* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1992), 66.

<sup>58</sup> Agrippina Maior: sexual intrigue with Asinius Gallus (Tac. *Ann.* 6.25), conspiring with him and others against Tiberius, planning to be the mother of emperors, angering the emperor (Tac. *Ann.* 4.12, 4.52-4, 4.70); Messalina: adultery with Gaius Silius (Tac. *Ann.* 11.12), plotting to have Gaius Silius made emperor (Tac. *Ann.* 11.30-31); Agrippina Minor: poisoning Claudius (Tac. *Ann.* 12.66), sexual perversion and incest with her son Nero (Tac. *Ann.* 14.2).

<sup>59</sup> Fagan, "Messalina's Folly," 575-77. Retribution for the adultery of empresses and princesses was swift and harsh. For a list of the punishments of imperial women and their lovers, see Fagan, "Messalina's Folly," 576.

<sup>60</sup> Ginsburg, *Representing Agrippina*, 123-26. Messalina's adultery with Gaius Silius made Claudius appear as a ridiculous cockuld, emphasizing his weak administrative abilities.

the state itself.<sup>61</sup> The castigation of women for their roles in both adultery and dynastic succession references Roman discomfort with the nature of monarchy, that it displaced the *res publica* and that it ensured its own survival through dynastic succession. Childbearing, a prime activity of the private realm, had implications for the public sphere in a monarchy (or tyranny), since in such a state, public and private were inextricably linked.<sup>62</sup> Succession had the potential to damage the state and illegitimate succession could bring with it social chaos through conflict between factions.

Aside from the categories of criticism with the attendant accusations of unchastity, there are other constants in the criticism of imperial wives. Generally, when women were mentioned in Roman literature, in criticism or praise, they were fixed as one opposite in a polar pair, the 'good matron or the 'whore'. The former was characterized by her beauty, fertility, *pudicitia* and domestic virtues. She often also possessed good taste, wealth and education. The latter was the virago/whore. Beauty was twisted into voluptuousness, wealth became extravagant *luxuria*, education was taken to an excessive level (usually with extra emphasis on Greek literature<sup>63</sup>), fertility became a mark of wild adultery and charm became bold speech and urbanity unbecoming in a woman.<sup>64</sup> The whore type also had elements of the eastern despot. Eastern effeminacy, *luxuria* and lack of morality were common motifs in Roman moralizing literature, and women who took on these characteristics in an authoritative, assertive role were reviled as aberrations. When applying censure to imperial women, the authors often used some variation of the virago/whore stereotype, often coupled with the characteristics of the eastern despot. This was particularly true of Messalina and Agrippina Minor.

Depending on the source of the information, the same women could be portrayed as both main types. For example, the imperial representation of Messalina, and then Agrippina Minor, presented her as a fertile wife and mother, the embodiment of the 'good matron' motif. The historians, however, twisted her fecundity into sexual intrigue, adultery and insatiable lust. The strongest and most powerful criticisms took such praise of imperial origin and perverted it, inverted it. Livia, the center of the imperial household, a symbol of the family's domestic unity and feminine virtue, was disparaged by later historians and biographers as an evil stepmother and poisoner.<sup>65</sup> The literary tradition, rich with tales of scheming, conniving, adulterous, and rapacious women from the

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<sup>61</sup> Joshel, "Female Desire and the Discourse of Empire," 243.

<sup>62</sup> Clara Shaw Hardy, "Nomos and Replaceability in the Story of Intaphrenes and His Wife," *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 126 (1996): 105, 08.

<sup>63</sup> Sall. *Cat.* 25; Juv. *Sat.* 6.185-199. See also R. P. Bond, "Anti-Feminism in Juvenal and Cato," in *Studies in Latin Literature and Roman History*, ed. Carl Deroux, *Collection Latomus* (Bruxelles: 1979), 425-7.

<sup>64</sup> For a detailed look at the inversion of the virtues of a good Roman matron, see Fischler, "Social Stereotypes," Barbara Weiden Boyd, "Virtus Effeminata and Sallust's Sempronia," *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 117 (1987).

<sup>65</sup> Antony A. Barrett, "Tacitus, Livia and the Evil Stepmother," *Rheinisches Museum* 144, no. 2 (2001), M. J. G. Gray-Fow, "The Wicked Stepmother in Roman Literature and History: An Evaluation," *Latomus* 47 (1988): 745-46, Watson, *Ancient Stepmothers*, 176-92.

earliest history, provided ample instances to speak to the veracity of these types of accusations.<sup>66</sup>

There are several tensions and anxieties underlying the criticism of imperial women. Authors were ostensibly motivated by a desire to criticize emperors or the imperial regime through the disparagement of the women of the *domus Augusta*. As women represented the ideologies and sanctity of the state when acting in accordance with social and cultural strictures, when they transgressed the boundaries of these ideological structures, be it in politics, business or the military, the behaviour of these women represented a breakdown in the order of the state. When Augustus moved the locus of political authority to his home on the Palatine, the imperial family *became* the state. Their transgressions indicated the corruption of the imperial regime itself.

The Principate was, in essence, a monarchy, and in Roman thought from the Late Republic, monarchy and tyranny were interchangeable.<sup>67</sup> According to Greek (and Roman) thought, tyranny was contrary to '*nomos*' and '*isonomia*', the sort of government in which everyone shared equally in power and offices were not permanent. The abuses and corruption inherent in tyranny violated *nomos*,<sup>68</sup> and in turn, any violation of *nomos* could be seen as aspiration for tyranny.<sup>69</sup> The conflation of public and private was seen as primary violation of *nomia*, breaking 'the boundary between stateroom and bedroom'.<sup>70</sup> Such a conflation, however, was inevitable in a monarchy, as such a system requires dynastic succession to sustain itself. If the breaking of this boundary was an avoidable characteristic of monarchy, and was also considered an indication of a tyrannical system,<sup>71</sup> it was inevitable that the Roman principate would face the criticisms of both.

The stereotype of the tyrant in Greek literature, imported into Roman culture, involved injustice, autocratic power, lack of morality and sexual oppression. This type of

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<sup>66</sup> Purcell, "Livia and the Womanhood of Rome," 94-5. Plautus (*Pseud.* 313-314) in 200 B.C. had already made the stepmother a character of terror, drawing on existing contemporary fears around the stepmother trope, and Afranius' *Divortium* of 100 B.C. perpetuated the motif. Horace (*Epod.* 5.9) writes of evil witches who snatch a boy and gaze upon him *ut noverca* "like a stepmother". In Ovid (*Met.* 1.147) terrible stepmothers (*terribiles novercae*) mix poisons, and in Vergil's Arcadia (*Ecl.* 3.33) an *iniusta noverca* oppresses her shepherd stepson. Historical evidence is cited in Sallust (*Cat.* 15): Aurelia Orestila did not wish to marry Catiline while he had a living son, so they arranged the son's murder. Cicero too in his defense of Cluentius recalls the terrible deeds of his mother Sassia, who arranges the murder of Oppianicus of Larinum's two sons before she will marry him (*Cic. Clu.* 26). In both of the historical cases there are other motives at work, but the use of the motif for its derogatory connotations should be noted. Barrett, "Tacitus, Livia and the Evil Stepmother.", Gray-Fow, "The Wicked Stepmother," 741.

<sup>67</sup> See Erskine, "Hellenistic Monarchy and Roman Political Invective."

<sup>68</sup> Shaw Hardy, "*Nomos* and Replaceability," 104.

<sup>69</sup> Hubris, the arrogance to violate the *nomos*, was a characteristic of a tyrant, according to Herodotos (3.80.3). In the Roman context, Tiberius Gracchus' deposing Octavius from the tribuneship can be viewed as a violation of *nomos*, and he was then accused of aspiring to kingship (Plut. *Ti. Gracch.* 14, 19). See also Dunkle, "The Greek Tyrant," 158-59.

<sup>70</sup> Shaw Hardy, "*Nomos* and Replaceability," 105.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*: 108.

tyrant would also use excessive force, display hubris and display impiety.<sup>72</sup> Roman authors developed the character of the tyrant to possess four major characteristics: *vis*, *superbia*, *libido* and *crudelitas*. *Vis* implied power gained by force and then held with the threat of violence. *Superbia* was the arrogance of an autocrat, while *libido* represented everything in opposition to Republican government (*lex*); *libido* could also describe a lecherous lust or unchecked sexual appetite. *Crudelitas* was the most typical characteristic of a tyrant. It implied autocratic power that was gained by violence and held by force or the elimination of one's political enemies.<sup>73</sup> When Roman government became a monarchy, the *res publica*, as a result, could no longer exist.<sup>74</sup> Influenced by Greek attitudes towards tyranny and monarchy, Roman authors of the imperial period could use the stereotypes associated with the Greek tragedy-tyrant to describe emperors they felt to be corrupt, to disparage both their policies and their morality at once.<sup>75</sup> Women, by extension, could aid in the characterization of tyrants by being portrayed with these characteristics themselves (as women were used to reflect men's characters). The four qualities of a tyrant were also more terrible in a woman, as such characteristics were so antithetical to the ideal of the Roman matron. In the following three case studies, such qualities can be observed in both the emperors and the women attached to them.

The underlying tension between the *domus* and the *res publica*, the conflation of public and private (and the violation of *nomos*), also motivated much of the censure of imperial women. Women, whose loyalty was to the home and their families, could be expected to work through the *paterfamilias* of their household to the aggrandizement of their *domus* over the good of the *res publica*. This had much larger implications when the *paterfamilias* was also the *pater patriae* who controlled the entire empire. When the *res publica* was subverted in favour of the female *domus*, the male citizenry suffered. This tension was further complicated by the aforementioned allegations of sexual misconduct. If a woman's locus of loyalty was the home – the *domus* – adultery was the betrayal of that loyalty. In the cases of adultery among imperial women, the adultery is often motivated by a desire to further the careers of a woman's children; the betrayal of a husband for the support of a dynasty. When the cuckolded mate was the emperor, familial upset translated into divisions of loyalty for the empire and instability for the Roman people, making sexual impropriety a topic of immense concern to imperial detractors.

Moreover, through Augustus' centering of political power in his imperial palace, the *domus* gained considerable autonomy and authority. The imperial women were granted powerful public privileges such as the sacrosanctity of the tribunes, lictors, the right to use carriages in the city, and other benefits previously held only by elected

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<sup>72</sup> Eur. *Supp.* 426-55; Herod. 3.80.5; Dunkle, "The Greek Tyrant," 153.

<sup>73</sup> Augustus, for instance, was accused of employing *vis* to gain his position of power, and then *crudelitas* to maintain it (Tac. *Ann.* 1.2-3).

<sup>74</sup> As before, when the semi-historical Roman monarchy had to be abolished to found the *res publica*. Dunkle, "The Greek Tyrant," 168-69.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*: 171.

magistrates.<sup>76</sup> Now these were arbitrarily granted rights, put to use for the aggrandizement of the *domus* over the *res publica*, the natural result when political power was granted to persons without the male responsibility to the citizenry. Political and legislative power in men could be rationalized; it was granted on a temporary basis to persons deemed worthy of it by the *populus Romanus*. In women, such *auctoritas* was a subversion of state order, privileging the private over the public good.

In each of the following case studies, the above tensions can be seen. These imperial wives were criticized for their transgression in the realms of politics, the military and business, and such disparagement was often coupled with allegations of sexual misconduct. All of the women sought to aggrandize their sons over their husbands, ironically using the authority gained through their emperor husbands at the expense of the *res publica* and the rights of the male citizenry. The outrageous conduct of each was also used by male authors to signify the breakdown of proper Roman social order, to criticize the monarchical regime that allowed such transgressions to occur. The authors present a vivid picture of an empire in chaos, threatened by the abomination of female power and the illegitimate abuse of male power, resulting in tyranny over the masculine *res publica*.

### Imperial Women

#### *Case Study: Livia*

Livia, arguably the most powerful woman in Roman history, wife of the first Roman emperor Augustus, was also the first subject of major criticism against imperial women. In her lifetime of 87 years she amassed incredible wealth, an array of honours and titles, and vast influence in the Roman state. Livia occupied a new transitional zone between Roman ideals of female status and the new realities for women of the imperial monarchy. Through careful negotiation of this liminal realm she won contemporary respect, fear, and deification, but incurred the censure of the elite male historians writing long after her death.<sup>77</sup>

Livia held an array of titles that rivaled her husband's in number. She was called the *Romana princeps*, the *princeps femina*, and (after Augustus' death) *Augusta*.<sup>78</sup> This last title, a cognomen, was willed to Livia following the death of Augustus, and was a great honour for the women of the *domus Augusta*; it came to be voted by the senate to imperial mothers whose husbands were deceased and whose sons currently held the 'throne'. In essence, the *Augusta* was the living conduit of imperial power from deceased emperor to ruling son, and had an enormous amount of power because of this

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<sup>76</sup> Cass. Dio 60.22.2; Suet. *Claud.* 17.3; Purcell, "Livia and the Womanhood of Rome," 84-86; Linda W. Rutland, "Women as Makers of Kings in Tacitus' *Annals*," *Classical World* 72 (1978): 25.

<sup>77</sup> Purcell, "Livia and the Womanhood of Rome," 80.

<sup>78</sup> *Romana princeps*: *Consolatio ad Liviam* 356; *princeps feminae*: Ovid *Pon.* 3.1.125; *Augusta*: Tac. *Ann.* 1.8.1; Suet. *Aug.* 101.2; Cass. Dio 56.46.1; Marleen B. Flory, "The Meaning of *Augusta* in the Julio-Claudian Period," *American Journal of Ancient History* 13, no. 2 (1988).

connection.<sup>79</sup> It was also rumoured that the senate attempted to give Tiberius filiation through his maternal side by adding *Iuliae filius* or *Liviae filius* after his name; they also debated adding *mater patriae* or *parens patriae* to Livia's list of titles.<sup>80</sup> This was debated and rejected by Tiberius. That the Senate would even suggest such a thing and seek to gain favour with the emperor by bestowing major titles on his female relatives was indicative of the new role of women in the imperial house and their public persona. Tiberius' rejection of the proposal was at the same time a reaction against the change in women's roles and a resistance to their growing *auctoritas* in the imperial family and the empire. Caligula derisively called Livia *Ulixes stolatus*, "Odysseus in petticoats", attempting to reduce her position of influence and authority to the petty scheming of a *mulier*. That Caligula, like Tiberius, felt threatened by her reputation is telling in itself, but it is his choice of words that is interesting. While he associated her with the motif of the domineering, cunning shrew already popular in literature (the *mulier*), he still maintained her aura of respect in his choice of *stolatus*, the female equivalent to the male toga, and a garment demanding the highest respect for its denotation of the wearer as a respectable Roman matron requiring deference and respect.<sup>81</sup> The tension generated by her power was very real. Tiberius and Caligula were products of Roman gender valuing, while at the same time part of the regime that allowed women access to political power. This resulted in cognitive dissonance for the male ruling elite; they could scorn female power and attempt to degrade it through derision or denunciation, but they could not deny its existence and the implications this had for Roman gender ideologies.

The number of grants and privileges Livia accrued in her lifetime was extensive. Augustus in 35 B.C. granted her and his sister Octavia public statues.<sup>82</sup> In the same year they were both granted the sacrosanctity of the tribunes and the removal of *tutela*. The sacrosanctity came with the privilege of the *carpentum* and the inherent publicity in such a grant. In 9 B.C. Livia was granted the *ius trium liberorum* and then immunity from the *Lex Voconia*, which had limited the hereditary rights of women. This grant allowed her to amass large amounts of wealth. While Augustus' moral legislation and his own personal agenda sought to carefully police the lives and activities of the imperial household, his grants and privileges thrust the imperial women into the public arena with the powers and

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid.: 118. While it is unlikely that the title was accompanied by legitimate, constitutional *auctoritas*, when Livia intervened for Plancina during the Piso conspiracy, the Senate honoured her request out of respect for her having given birth to the ruler of the empire (*Senatus Consultum de Pisone* 115-116).

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.: 120-21. Tac. *Ann.* 1.14.1; Cass. Dio 57.12.4, 58.2.3; Suet. *Tib.* 50.2-3. The intent was to recognize her authority with her son Tiberius', but he quickly ended the debate (Tac. *Ann.* 1.14.2; Suet. *Tib.* 50.3). It would not be until the 3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D. that an imperial woman could hold the title *mater patriae*, which speaks to the reluctance to bestow such a powerful honour on women up until this point.

<sup>81</sup> Suet. *Gaius* 23.2; Purcell, "Livia and the Womanhood of Rome," 79.

<sup>82</sup> Cass. Dio 49.38.1. In 9 B.C. Livia received another after Drusus' death as a form of consolation (Cass. Dio 55.2.5).



abilities such grants gave.<sup>83</sup> Augustus also issued coinage associating Livia with Ceres, Iustitia and, most notably, Pax, also dedicating his *Ara Pacis* on her birthday; this was a mighty honour for the 'first lady of Rome'.<sup>84</sup> The *Consolatio ad Liviam* (l.41-50) highlights her extensive power and influence, and Livia was in effect, if not officially, the *mater patriae*, with the *auctoritas* that accompanied such an honour.<sup>85</sup> Velleius all but divinizes her in his praise,<sup>86</sup> and in A.D. 41 she was voted apotheosis. These were such honours as were never before seen bestowed on one woman. While Augustus' propaganda represented his family as highly traditional, his actions set the women far apart from the cultural and societal norms for their sex. He elevated female status and gave them public power. Given the mixed message of intended imperial representation of domesticity versus the reality of public power, it is unsurprising that male authors expressed anxiety about the female members of the *domus Augusta*.

Livia used her power, influence and incredible wealth to make numerous benefactions in her own name, advancing her reputation and indebting many to her.<sup>87</sup> She soon gained a reputation as a builder, benefactor and philanthropist, very much in the fashion of the elite Roman senators in her circle of influence.<sup>88</sup> She provided girls with dowries, gave aid to fire victims, rebuilt many temples and shrines, erected an aqueduct, responded to petitions on behalf of the imperial cult, protected the Judean prince Agrippa and other hostage princes, was the would-be recipient of a plea for aid from Cleopatra, and amassed a large circle of dependents with her benefactions to various Senators.<sup>89</sup> She routinely saw hopeful dependents in her private quarters and received

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<sup>83</sup> Purcell, "Livia and the Womanhood of Rome," 84-86. Livia's privileges were very similar to those of the Vestal Virgins, who were also powerful women negotiating a careful balance of public and private power in Roman society.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.: 92-93.

<sup>85</sup> Such was her power that Ovid asked his wife to address to Livia her pleas for Ovid's recall from exile (*Ex Ponto* 3.1).

<sup>86</sup> 2.130.5: *eminentissima et per omnia deis quam hominibus similior femina, cuius potentiam nemo sensit nisi aut levatione periculi aut accessione dignitatis*.

<sup>87</sup> The removal of *tutela* allowed her to dispose of her wealth at will, and freed from the restrictions of the Lex Voconia she had no lack of resources.

<sup>88</sup> Purcell, "Livia and the Womanhood of Rome," 89.

<sup>89</sup> Dowries: Cass. Dio 58.2.3; Hemelrijk, "Masculinity and Femininity in the *Laudatio Turiae*," 195.; fire victims: Cass. Dio 57.16.2; temples and shrines: Bona Dea Subsaxana (Ovid *Fasti* 5.157-58), Fortuna Muliebris (*CIL* 6.883), possibly the ancient temples of Pudicitia Plebeia and Pudicitia Patricia, construction of shrine of Concordia, co-dedication with Tiberius of the Temple of the Deified Augustus (Cass. Dio 56.46.3; Pliny *NH* 12.94); aqueduct: vicani Matrini in southern Etruria (*CIL* 11.3322); imperial cult: *SEG* 11.922, Mary Taliaferro Boatwright, "The Imperial Women of the Early Second Century A.C.," *American Journal of Philology* 112, no. 4 (1991): 534.; protecting princes: Jos. *AJ* 17.10; plea from Cleopatra: Cass. Dio 51.13.3; aiding Senators: Suet. *Otho* 1.1; benefaction in general: Suet. *Galba* 2; Cass. Dio 54.7.2; Jos. *AJ* 16.139; Phil. *Leg. ad Gai* 157, 319; Suet. *Aug.* 40.2; *Tib.* 51.1. The *Senatus Consultum de Pisone* cites (116-117), after her giving birth to Tiberius, Livia's *beneficia* towards the state and Senate.

pronouncements in her own name alongside Tiberius'.<sup>90</sup> Her power was such that Tiberius feared it would overshadow his own, and so he took steps to limit it.<sup>91</sup>

A woman with such a public presence could not avoid criticism for her transgression of the masculine realm, especially if that woman was attached to the most powerful man in Roman history, the progenitor of a dynasty that was inscribed in the annals of that history as chaotic, abusive and tyrannical. The historians, with varying vehemence, brought to bear the typical criticisms applied to publicly active women, demeaning Livia's authority and inverting her imperial image as the morally upright and inviolable center of the *domus Augusta* to that of a scheming, domineering, wicked stepmother bent on destroying the very household she upheld. Dio critically claims that Livia attempted to exercise sole rule of the empire (though not through the Senate, army camps or official political channels), and Tiberius made every attempt after Augustus' death to downplay her honours and political agency.<sup>92</sup> Though he had only benefited from Livia's supposed machinations, Tiberius, as a Roman male raised in Rome's cultural traditions, could not fully accept that his own power had come from the arguably greater power of his mother, and he attempted to re-assert the superiority of the *res publica* over the female power of the *domus* to redress the disparity.

The historical tradition for Livia is complex. Velleius Paterculus (2.130) and Seneca (*Clem.* 1.9, *Cons. Marc.* 2-5) are unabashed admirers of the 'first lady of Rome' and Valerius Maximus (9.4.3, 9.61) cites her as a paragon of *pudicitia*.<sup>93</sup> Pliny Maior (*NH* 7.150) records only that Augustus was aware of her intrigues. Suetonius and Dio are mildly critical, relaying anecdotes of her scheming where relevant, but avoiding direct censure.<sup>94</sup> Tacitus, however, maintains consistent criticism and harsh castigation of Livia whenever possible, ostensibly restrained only at the beginning of Book 5 of the *Annals* in which he gives her epitaph. Since Livia's *pudicitia* could not easily be impugned,<sup>95</sup> Tacitus (*Ann.* 5.1.2) suggests she invited Augustus' inappropriate attentions which led to the hasty divorce of her current husband and even hastier re-marriage to the *princeps*, while still pregnant with her first husband's child.<sup>96</sup> The negative tradition against Livia likely originated in Augustus' first wife Scribonia's supporters, as well as Tiberius' political enemies. She also featured in a very negative light in the *Memoirs* of Agrippina

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<sup>90</sup> Cass. Dio 57.12.2; Flory, "The Meaning of *Augusta*," 120, Purcell, "Livia and the Womanhood of Rome," 80.

<sup>91</sup> Cass. Dio 57.12.3; Suet. *Tib.* 50.3.

<sup>92</sup> Cass. Dio 57.12.3; Tac. *Ann.* 1.14.2; Suet. *Tib.* 50.3.

<sup>93</sup> This is in keeping with the situation described on page 15; given the legal difficulties in doing so, authors failed to criticize imperial women of the Julio-Claudian dynasty in its own time.

<sup>94</sup> See also Rutland, "Women as Makers of Kings in Tacitus' *Annals*," 21.

<sup>95</sup> Livia maintained a staunch image of uncompromised chastity throughout her lifetime, and the representation issued from the emperor always reinforced this image. Her image as the bastion of the *domus Augusta* made slander as *saeva noverca* more damaging than as a *meretrix Augusta*.

<sup>96</sup> In this story, Augustus displays the *libido* characteristic of a tyrant by stealing another man's wife (demonstrating lust), already pregnant (a violation of *lex*).

Minor, which Tacitus is known to have used.<sup>97</sup> In Tacitus' very theatrical history, Livia is involved in the misfortune and deaths of every *dramatis persona* on the stage of the *domus Augusta*: Agrippa Postumus (Tac. *Ann.* 1.6; Cass. Dio 57.3.6), Marcellus (Cass. Dio 53.33.4), Lucius and Gaius (Tac. *Ann.* 1.3; Cass. Dio 55.10a.10), Augustus himself (Tac. *Ann.* 1.5; Cass. Dio 56.30.1-2; Aurelius Victor *epit.* 1.27), and Germanicus (Tac. *Ann.* 3.17.2; Cass. Dio 57.18.5a) are all victims of her lust for power and her son's success.<sup>98</sup>

Since Livia's chastity was inviolate, her manipulation of dynastic politics was a better source of criticism. Her role as the household's paragon of virtue, first lady of Rome and matriarch to the Caesars was cast instead as that of a scheming villainess bent on ruining the *domus Augusta* from the inside through various treasonous actions intended to put her son on the throne, while undermining the dynastic solidarity that Augustus sought to achieve.<sup>99</sup> Tacitus presents the most vivid picture of her excessive influence, echoed occasionally in Dio, that of the wicked stepmother. The motif had long been popular in literature, and Tacitus uses language that would recall for his reader the well-established tradition of *matronae veneficae/novercae veneficae*.<sup>100</sup> This rich tradition, coupled with Tacitus' subversive inclusion of gossip and rumour interspersed cleverly with fact, so successfully blackens Livia's character that it remains tainted to the modern day.<sup>101</sup> He claims the *novercae Liviae dolus* contributed to the deaths of Gaius and Lucius (mentioned together, though they died two years apart).<sup>102</sup> Next, the *novercalibus odiis* of Livia in cooperation with Tiberius dispatched Agrippa Postumus.<sup>103</sup> Her involvement in Germanicus' death is insinuated too, stemming from her stepmotherly enmity with Agrippina Maior.<sup>104</sup> The death of Augustus also falls into the stepmother tradition. The beautiful young wife, Livia, had trapped (*devincio*) her doddering old husband (*senex*) Augustus with her feminine wiles (*dolus novercae, obscurae artes*) to promote her own son at the expense of the true heirs. He adopts her son and disenfranchises other possible rightful heirs (such as Agrippa Postumus). When the time is right, the wicked stepmother brings about the death of her husband too, and her son inherits all.<sup>105</sup> Such an envisioning was the embodiment of male tension

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<sup>97</sup> Tac. *Ann.* 4.53.2; Watson, *Ancient Stepmothers*, 177.

<sup>98</sup> Suet. *Tib.* 21, however, denies Livia's influence in Tiberius' adoption and ascension.

<sup>99</sup> Purcell, "Livia and the Womanhood of Rome," 95.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid. See also notes 65 and 66.

<sup>101</sup> Barrett, "Tacitus, Livia and the Evil Stepmother." Ironically, Livia is stepmother to none of her alleged victims, but the little bit of truth in their familial association is strong enough for Tacitus to exploit the motif.

<sup>102</sup> Tac. *Ann.* 1.3.3.

<sup>103</sup> Tac. *Ann.* 1.6.2. Dio (55.32.2) also supports this tradition, citing that Agrippa Postumus had criticized Livia as a stepmother, and so had prompted his own murder.

<sup>104</sup> Tac. *Ann.* 1.33.3. The mode of death was poison, well-known from the stepmother motif, Livia had a long enmity with Agrippina, and her association with Plancina, the wife of the alleged murderer (and poisoner) was also damning. Watson, *Ancient Stepmothers*, 186-88.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.: 181-83. Tac. *Ann.* 1.5.3-4. Tacitus can only rely on rumour and insinuation for these allegations, but his suggestions build upon a strong enough suspicious tradition to

regarding female identification with the *domus*. Because a woman's loyalties were always to her children, she could not be entrusted with the important political concerns of her husband, as was done during the Julio-Claudian dynasty. Augustus, in bestowing upon Livia so much power, enabled her to subvert her husband's own political agenda and advance *her* son. The male anxiety was that if a woman held her offspring before all, she could not be responsible to the good of the state should it interfere with her own good, as can be seen in the allegations that Livia had murdered the legitimate heirs to Augustus' principate.

The historians claim that while Augustus was living Livia exercised her insidious influence (or attempted to) at every opportunity – she took advantage of the love and affection of a senile old man to gain her aims. At one point Livia interceded on behalf of Samos, petitioning the imperial house for its freedom. Augustus rejected her entreaty, though he was sorely tempted to give in to her.<sup>106</sup> Tiberius too was under Livia's influence. Tacitus (*Ann.* 2.34) describes a potential abuse of the judicial system involving Urgulania, an old friend of Livia. Livia put pressure on Tiberius to rule in her favour. This request was not at odds with tradition – family friends often entreated one another for aid – but Tiberius was aware of the potential criticisms that could arise from his involvement. He sidestepped the issue by delaying his arrival at the trial. Tacitus' mention of this episode foreshadows the excesses and abuses under Claudius' regime. When imperial women could upset the proper judicial channels by exercising their influence over the emperor, the supposed arbiter of justice, the legal system was thrown into chaos, and the imperial regime became tyrannical.<sup>107</sup> Male politicians attempting to influence other politicians were a fact of Roman politics. Such influence was seen as legitimate coming from members of Rome's political arena and exercised over other men of legitimate authority. Men could reasonably be assumed to have state interests at heart. When women could exercise such influence it was a perversion of the political system, abuse from the outside that sought to benefit the female private realm at the expense of the male public realm. The power of imperial women to do this represented the abuses and illegitimacy of the monarchical regime in general.

The inversion of Livia's public representation was the most successful censure employed against her. She was identified as a typical scheming woman, advancing her children at the expense of her husband and upsetting the familial bliss she was purported by the imperial house to have created. Due to her very public role and the *auctoritas* she held, Livia as an active female political agent had to be deconstructed by sources motivated by their need to undermine the Julio-Claudian regime. Existing Roman ideologies could not reconcile Woman with legitimate political power.

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successfully slander the characters of Livia and Tiberius. The historian claims too that Tiberius was aware of this gossip, which resulted in his dissimulation in ascending to the throne in the weeks following Augustus' death (*Tac. Ann.* 1.7).

<sup>106</sup> J.M. Reynolds, *Aphrodisias and Rome* (London, 1982), doc. 13. Dio (54.9.7) states that Augustus gave Samos its freedom.

<sup>107</sup> Fischler, "Social Stereotypes," 126. Tyrants were accused of neglecting trials or only allowing for the *appearance* of due process (Herod. 3.80.5).

*Case Study: Messalina*

Unlike Livia, Claudius' wife Messalina did not have a collection of good works and semi-legitimate authority to counterbalance the criticism lodged against her. She was never made *Augusta*, and she received limited imperial privileges.<sup>108</sup> Dio (60.12.5) says that the senate offered to make her *Augusta*, but Claudius refused. Messalina was, however, allowed the occasional privilege of the *carpentum*, and she had a seat of honour at state events (Suet. *Claud.* 17.3; Cass. Dio 60.22.2). There seemed to consistently be a contest over representation of imperial wives. Claudius gained power through the same regime that allowed women access to great power, much as Tiberius did. The senate, wishing to please the emperor, acted in the now-standard fashion: it attempted to aggrandize female imperial family members alongside the male. Claudius (much as Tiberius) faced with the tension resultant of women's new roles (which were created or reinforced by his dynasty), attempted to limit the authority of the imperial women with the hope of diffusing the tensions resultant of their increasing power. Such an attempt was impossible when the emperor continued to grant special privileges while at the same time he curtailed others. The historians, critical of the hypocrisy of the regime, fed on such contradictions and emphasized the excesses of imperial women to expose the hypocrisy of the monarchy. A number of ancient authors describe the downfall of Messalina,<sup>109</sup> and all frame her transgressions on the model established earlier in this chapter. In these accounts, the empress was guilty of asserting herself in the male political sphere and inciting rebellion, motivated by her uncontrollable lusts. Not only was she framed as a whore, but she was also characterized as savage, violent, mad and capricious, the very epitome of imperial excess.<sup>110</sup>

Tacitus' account of Messalina is the fullest in the ancient sources, and he frames his drama in a particular way, one that will appeal to the elite Roman reader and engage his outrage at the motifs of the excesses of women in power, as well as the arrogance of slaves and freedmen. The details of Messalina's fall and the criticism lodged against her are basically unchanging across the literature, but the sources upon which these accounts were based were never completely accurate in the first place. Unlike events involving private citizens, which can be verified through the *acta senatus*, affairs involving the imperial family were private, and the speeches and details could only be conjectured in the literature.<sup>111</sup> The similarity of sources, however, suggests that a tradition arose soon after Messalina's demise, and it is from this tradition that our evidence derives. Whether the disparagement in our accounts was a product of reliable sources or hostile slander, the castigation of Messalina reveals contemporary fears of the power of imperial women.

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<sup>108</sup> Flory, "The Meaning of *Augusta*," 125.

<sup>109</sup> Tac. *Ann.* 11.12, 26-38; Cass. Dio 60 (61).31.1-5; Suet. *Claud.* 26.2, 29.3, 36, 39.1; Juv. *Sat.* 6.115-32, 10.329-45; Aur. Vict. *Caes.* 4.12-13; Jos. *AJ* 20.149; Sen. *Octavia* 257-69, *Apocol.* 11, 13.

<sup>110</sup> Joshel, "Female Desire and the Discourse of Empire," 249, note 2.

<sup>111</sup> Fagan, "Messalina's Folly," 568-70.

Messalina was accused of exercising improper power – Tacitus calls it *potentia* (Ann. 11.26.4). She was responsible for a number of murders, imperial executions and suspicious inquiries, all of which arose out of her alleged petulant capriciousness.<sup>112</sup> Tacitus uses *potentia* (part of his subversively negative vocabulary) specifically to highlight the contrast between the empress' power and legitimate authority (*auctoritas, imperium*). In his account, when Messalina is stripped of her influence, she is an utterly miserable character. She is bereft of her companions, forced to walk on foot, then transported in a refuse cart. She is shouted down by the emperor's slaves and in the end receives no trial or chance to defend herself. Narcissus, Claudius' imperial freedman advisor, sends counterfeit orders to the Praetorian guard, who dispatch Messalina ignobly in the gardens of Lucullus. This pathetic image highlights a critique implicit in Tacitus – illegitimate authority wielded by women is transient and will always crumble in the face of real *auctoritas*.<sup>113</sup>

The empress' improper power extended to her influence over doddering, incompetent Claudius. Tacitus was very critical of that emperor and used Messalina and the powerful freedmen to represent Claudius' passivity and lack of agency.<sup>114</sup> Dio (60.14.1) says that Claudius was a 'slave to his wife and freedmen'. Since the emperor embodied the state, in essence the state was brought into the domestic sphere. A wife and freedmen, whose locus of authority should be limited to the confines of the *domus*, now controlled the *res publica*. The perception of Messalina's excessive influence angered the male elite for the violation of proper gender roles, but also as it related to the outrages of a monarchy, equated with tyranny. In such circumstances justice could not prevail and the entire populace was enslaved to the arbitrary whims of a family ruling without legitimate authority to do so.<sup>115</sup>

As the tradition had it, Messalina used her influence over the emperor to bring about the trials of several elite Roman citizens. She encouraged the senator Suillius to accuse Valerius Asiaticus of conspiracy in 47 B.C. The trial took place in the privacy of the imperial household (highlighting yet another abuse of the judicial system by the 'bad emperors') and the accusation was that the senator had been involved in the death of Caligula. Asiaticus defended himself admirably and persuasively, but Messalina exhorted Vitellius, another member of her circle, to press the accusation. Asiaticus was forced to commit suicide. In the same affair, two equestrians and another noblewoman Poppaea Sabina (mother of Nero's infamous wife of the same name) were executed or compelled to suicide.<sup>116</sup> The real reason behind the trial, as asserted by Tacitus, was convoluted and evidence of Messalina's mad excess. Asiaticus had allegedly been the lover of Poppaea Sabina, who had offended Messalina by having an affair with *her* lover,

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<sup>112</sup> Tac. Ann. 11.28.3.

<sup>113</sup> Joshel, "Female Desire and the Discourse of Empire," 233. Though here too the moral is problematized, as Messalina's authority was stripped of her by imperial freedmen exercising counterfeit authority themselves.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 226-27.

<sup>115</sup> Dunkle, "The Greek Tyrant," 168.

<sup>116</sup> Tac. Ann. 11.1-4.

the actor Mnester. Messalina was also moved by a desire for Asiaticus' property, the very gardens in which she, ironically, ends her life. The outrageous injustices perpetrated by Messalina (or at least attributed to her) were motivated by her personal lusts and jealousies, to the detriment of many persons of legitimate power in the Roman state. For the Romans, this was the definition of tyranny. Messalina encouraged Claudius to act in a manner typical of tyrants; he failed to give fair trials and he allowed Messalina's *crudelitas* free reign to eliminate her enemies.

It was the sexual intrigue associated with Messalina, however, that incurred the harshest attacks in the literature. The empress was depicted as a nymphomaniac, unable to sate her savage lusts. Her alleged lovers included actors, the prefect of the German bodyguard (Cass. Dio 60.28.2), Claudius' freedman advisor Polybius (Cass. Dio 60.31.2), Traulus Montanus (Tac. *Ann.* 11.36.4), Suillius Caesoninus (Tac. *Ann.* 11.36.5), Gaius Silius (Tac. *Ann.* 11.12.2), and innumerable others she serviced in the brothels (Juv. *Sat.* 6.115-32; Pliny *NH* 10.172; Cass. Dio 61.31.1). By the time her lover Silius proposed reckless marriage to her, Messalina had become tired of her degenerate activities and desired yet worse ones – she longed for *infamia* (Tac. *Ann.* 11.26.1-6).<sup>117</sup> The presentation of her adulteries highlights areas of Roman elite male anxiety. The adulteries were a violation of the boundaries of the *domus* – not only did Messalina open up her body to penetration, she opened up her home. Family heirlooms were found in Silius' home during the investigation after the couple was found out (Tac. *Ann.* 11.35.2). But while Messalina violated the *domus* with her adultery, she did so with an aim to protect it; she sought to advance her children over her husband. There was speculation that her union with Silius was intended to insure that her son Britannicus would eventually ascend to the throne,<sup>118</sup> which she (correctly) feared would not happen should Claudius desire another wife. As with Livia, Messalina's intentions for her children came at the expense of her husband who had given her the power to act in the first place. He gave over his public power, the *res publica*, to the feminine *domus*, into Messalina's hands.<sup>119</sup> Given the loyalties of women, this could only translate into disaster and injustice for the people, as the *paterfamilias* was also the *pater patriae*; conflicts and private affairs could and *did* spill over into the public sphere.

Messalina was attributed with none of the redeeming characteristics of Livia, and her character was fully exploited in the elite male criticism against her. She transgressed male spheres, used her influence to secure the deaths of many elite Roman citizens and instill terror in others through the revived practice of delation, and engaged in sexual intrigue. Her characterization employed the various tropes and motifs for disparagement to highlight the excesses and abuses of the Julio-Claudian regime, while also reinforcing

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<sup>117</sup> For a detailed reading of this passage, see Joshel, "Female Desire and the Discourse of Empire," 230-31.

<sup>118</sup> See Fagan, "Messalina's Folly," 573, note 32.

<sup>119</sup> Joshel, "Female Desire and the Discourse of Empire," 231-32. He did this out of love for her, but this love was presented by the historians as yet more evidence for Claudius' submissiveness to his wife's whims – he was emasculated by virtue of his very love for her.

the tyranny inherent in a monarchy, the abuses suffered by the citizenry when the public realm was subordinated to the whims of the household.

*Case Study: Agrippina Minor*

Agrippina, the next wife of Claudius and mother of Nero, both exceeded and fell short of the hostile literary tradition of Livia and Messalina. She certainly garnered a considerable degree of power in her lifetime: she was the first empress to be named *Augusta* while her husband still lived (Tac. *Ann.* 12.26.1), she became a priestess of her *divus* husband's cult after his death, she received public honours, the password for the tribune of the watch was 'the best of mothers' (Tac. *Ann.* 13.2),<sup>120</sup> and she was placed on the obverse of coinage (displacing her son and emperor Nero to the reverse).<sup>121</sup> Because of the highly public nature of her reign, both as Claudius' wife and partner in his imperial power and as Nero's mother and a sort of co-regent in his youth, Agrippina seemed to exceed the limits of power of any woman before her, fully stepping into the role the Roman monarchy had created for imperial women: active participation in the governance of the empire.

The disparagement of Agrippina likely originated from contemporary imperial sources. She was first banished by her emperor brother during one of Caligula's fits of pique. When she fell out of favour with Nero (and was then murdered by him) her name was subject to further imperial abuse.<sup>122</sup> While Agrippina tested the limits of a woman's power under a monarchy, the men with whom she ruled still could neither fully accept nor reject a woman in this capacity. The granting of extensive honours and her appearance as co-regent suggest that the emperors attempted to normalize imperial women's new roles and incorporate them into the re-invented *res publica* of the principate, but the vilification of Agrippina when she settled into this role indicates that even the emperors could not accept the changes they had created. Ironically, the regime that had earlier provided positive imperial representation for Agrippina was responsible later for the historical vilification of her.

Claudius' depiction as the weak-willed pawn of his women and freedmen continued, and it was said (Tac. *Ann.* 12.3) that Agrippina had even more influence over him than Messalina before her. As it was perceived by the historians, Claudius' continued enslavement to the *familia* could only result in more tyranny over the Roman people, a situation which would worsen under Nero. Agrippina was accused of having too much influence over her husband Claudius and was cast in the role of the *saeva noverca*. In the opening of Book 12 of the *Annals*, Tacitus depicts the freedmen arguing over who should succeed Messalina as Claudius' wife.<sup>123</sup> As it is presented by Tacitus

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<sup>120</sup> Yet another example of the now inextricable connection between the state and the *domus*.

<sup>121</sup> Rutland, "Women as Makers of Kings in Tacitus' *Annals*," 25.

<sup>122</sup> Ginsburg, *Representing Agrippina*, 119. Tac. *Ann.* 14.10.3-11.2.

<sup>123</sup> Tacitus, unlike Dio who makes the freedmen support Agrippina unanimously, presents this as a contest among the three freedmen, with each choosing a different woman, to facilitate



(*Ann.* 12.25.1), Agrippina used her lover, the freedman Pallas, to convince Claudius to adopt Nero and name her *Augusta* – a telling appellation for the Roman people, as this signified that she was the mother of an emperor, or emperor-to-be.<sup>124</sup> She then banished or executed all of those palace attendants and followers who supported Britannicus, the true heir, and had them replaced with her own coterie.<sup>125</sup> Agrippina also maneuvered Nero into marriage with Octavia, Claudius' daughter, further cementing her hopes of Nero's ascension. The *topos* came to fruition with Agrippina's murder of Claudius by means of poison, the stepmother's stock weapon.<sup>126</sup> When Nero was named emperor instead of Britannicus, Tacitus uses the vocabulary of the stepmother motif, asserting that a stepson was chosen over a true son, despite the fact that Roman adoption made Nero the legal son of Claudius as much as consanguinity would have.<sup>127</sup>

As if her depiction as the wicked stepmother of cultural revulsion and her masculine ambition for political influence and power were not enough to irreparably damage her character, the characterization of Agrippina was also that of an incestuous adulteress. Tacitus differentiates her adultery from Messalina's – while Messalina was motivated only by her excessive lusts, Agrippina only resorts to adultery in pursuit of *dominatio*.<sup>128</sup> Agrippina's sexual transgression also differs from Messalina's in that Agrippina's sexual history was rife with incestuous activity. She was first compromised by her brother Caligula, then she induced Claudius into an incestuous union with her in pursuit of power,<sup>129</sup> and finally she attempted to seduce her own son in order to sustain her waning influence. Her adulteries are said to have included Marcus Lepidus (her brother in law; *Tac. Ann.* 14.2.2; *Suet. Gaius* 24.3; *Cass. Dio* 59.22.6-9), Ofonius Tigellinus (*Cass. Dio* 59.23.9, *Schol. Juv.* 1.155), the imperial freedman Pallas (*Ann.* 12.25.1; 12.65.2; 14.2.2; *Schol. Juv.* 1.109), Nero's tutor Seneca (*Cass. Dio* 61.10.1), and Faenius Rufus, the prefect of the praetorian guard (*Tac. Ann.* 15.50.3), all of whom were politically or socially powerful and could serve her pursuit of *dominatio*.<sup>130</sup> Both Tacitus and Dio use her history of adultery to justify the rumours of her incestuous suggestions to

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the rhetorical *topos* of the wicked stepmother, and to a lesser extent, the *topos* of imperial freedmen asserting too much authority.

<sup>124</sup> Flory, "The Meaning of *Augusta*," 125. *Tac. Ann.* 12.26.

<sup>125</sup> *Tac. Ann.* 12.41.2-3.

<sup>126</sup> Gray-Fow, "The Wicked Stepmother," 746-47. *Tac. Ann.* 12.3-9, 12.25-26, 12.66-69; *Suet. Claud.* 27-29, *Ner.* 33.

<sup>127</sup> Watson, *Ancient Stepmothers*, 196-97.

<sup>128</sup> Ginsburg, *Representing Agrippina*, 127-29.; Joshel, "Female Desire and the Discourse of Empire," 235.; *Tac. Ann.* 12.7.3. In this way, Agrippina recalls Augustus as presented in *Suet. Aug.* 69.1 – he too only engaged in adultery when it suited his political aims. But Augustus was a man with legitimate power and cultural dispensation to engage in promiscuity. Agrippina was not.

<sup>129</sup> Marriage between uncle and niece was incestuous by Roman law. They were forced to obtain special dispensation to allow it (*Tac. Ann.* 12.5.1, 12.72).

<sup>130</sup> Ginsburg, *Representing Agrippina*: 117. In spite of her adulteries and incest, Agrippina was not likened to a prostitute, despite the *infamia* she would have incurred for both types of sexual transgression.

her son; she was clearly capable of transgressive sexual activity, so it was plausible that she would attempt this disgusting act.<sup>131</sup>

Allegations of incest were particularly potent for their implications for the *domus*. While a woman's focus was on the advancement and well-being of her children and family, incest was a perversion of the loyalties to the *domus* and a violation of its well-being. A woman could be expected to betray her husband or the state, but to betray the *domus* was to reject the most basic identity of womanhood. Such accusations also evoked outrage at the hubris (characteristic of a tyrant) involved. Incest was outlawed in most ancient societies as the prerogative of the gods alone,<sup>132</sup> but the Ptolemies practiced it to strengthen their image as gods, both Greek and Egyptian. There could be some hostility to that tradition here; Agrippina could be said to usurp the rights of the gods and associate herself with the Ptolemaic monarchies (which in turn had the tyrannical associations with Cleopatra) with her incestuous acts.<sup>133</sup> Whether the depiction of promiscuous Agrippina was realistic or not, the characterization was useful to the historians in sketching her character. As an adulteress she was violating the ideals of matronly behaviour, much as she had as a *saeva noverca*. Agrippina's supposed sexual transgressions violated the sanctity of the state, and her wicked character was a reflection of the degenerate nature of Nero's principate.

Agrippina was reported to violate the norms of feminine behaviour, first during Claudius' reign, then under Nero's. Tacitus was especially interested in the *dux femina* motif (which will be explored in depth in subsequent chapters) and used it to describe the actions of female monarchs and generals of other cultures. By establishing this trope, however, the historian intended implicit comparisons of the imperial women to these foreign leaders exercising feminine *dominatio*.<sup>134</sup> While the women exercising power in foreign cultures might have legitimate power there (though not by Roman standards), any Roman woman seen to aspire to the same *imperium* was an abomination according to Roman social norms. In Book 12 of the *Annals* Agrippina sits with Claudius on a *suggestus*, ostensibly a partner to Claudius' imperial power, to receive the obeisance of the captive Briton Caratacus and his family.<sup>135</sup> Later in Claudius' reign, during the inaugural ceremonies at Lake Fucinus, Agrippina dressed in a golden costume (*chlamys*) associated with triumphant generals and presided over the dedication with her husband.<sup>136</sup> Tacitus' portrayal seeks to compound Agrippina's offenses by making her violate the military sphere, a particularly aberrant act. She could then be seen to violate all proper

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 121. Incest was considered a religious taboo (Cic. *de leg.* 2.22, 2.41) that violated the sanctity of the state. Agrippina was culpable of adultery, which was a violation of the imperial household and threatened the state as well.

<sup>132</sup> See the 'Tales of Helen's Sons' in Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths: I*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (London: Penguin, 1960), 160 (#43.h).

<sup>133</sup> Egypt and incest: Sarah B. Pomeroy, *Women in Hellenistic Egypt from Alexander to Cleopatra* (New York: Schocken Books, 1984), 16.

<sup>134</sup> Ginsburg, *Representing Agrippina*, 112-13. See note 47.

<sup>135</sup> Santoro L'Hoir, "Tacitus and Women's Usurpation of Power," 22. *Tac. Ann.* 12.37.3.

<sup>136</sup> *Tac. Ann.* 12.56.3.

matronly activity, reflecting a tyrannical regime that had violated all government responsibility.

When Agrippina's influence over Nero began to wane, and as Nero's own tyranny grew, the emperor declared a separation of the *domus* and *res publica* (Tac. *Ann.* 13.4.2). Despite his ambitious claim, Agrippina began to participate directly in politics. When the Senate sought to amend some of Claudius' laws, as priestess of Divus Claudius Agrippina opposed them. This left the Senate in a difficult position: they had empowered Agrippina by naming her priestess of the cult, but as a result they were forced to face the consequences of such empowerment by listening to her objections on behalf of the new god.<sup>137</sup> To debate the amendment and Agrippina's objections, the Senate met in the Palatine Library. A door concealed by a curtain was constructed at the back, so that Agrippina might slip inside and listen unseen.<sup>138</sup> As a result, Agrippina became the first woman in Roman history to attend a meeting of the Senate,<sup>139</sup> bringing imperial women fully into the political realm. Agrippina also attempted to insert herself into meetings of foreign policy. She sought to seat herself upon Nero's dais beside him when a delegation from Armenia arrived, but Seneca, Nero's tutor and advisor, outmaneuvered her (Tac. *Ann.* 13.5.3); if she had been allowed to fulfill her desire, she would have appeared as Nero's consort to the visiting delegation, equal and not subordinate.<sup>140</sup>

Agrippina's open bid for power shocked Nero into action, and he severely limited her access to public power in an attempt to assert his own agency over that of a woman, his own mother (as Tiberius had attempted to do with Livia). In fear of her waning influence, Agrippina made several desperate bids for power, putting her support behind Britannicus,<sup>141</sup> and then his sister Octavia after Britannicus' death. She also met with military tribunes and centurions seeking support to back her new imperial candidate.<sup>142</sup> Nero then removed her military access by disbanding Agrippina's military escort and German troops (her source of *vis*). Agrippina had previously enjoyed considerable influence and power through the morning *salutatio* at the palace, where she met with friends and clients as Nero did, but Nero moved her to Antonia's former house to limit her political influence.<sup>143</sup> True to his word, Nero was indeed limiting the power, military and political, of the maternal part of the *domus*.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Bauman, *Women and Politics in Ancient Rome*, 193.

<sup>138</sup> Tac. *Ann.* 13.5.1-2.

<sup>139</sup> Women had long been barred from knowledge of the inner workings of the Senate. For an anecdote on this topic, see Aul. Gel. 1.23, the story of Papirius.

<sup>140</sup> At this point Seneca and Burrus, Nero's advisors, began to dictate the whole of imperial administration. Cass. Dio 61.3.3-5.6.

<sup>141</sup> Nero demonstrated further his *crudelitas* by murdering Britannicus (as rumour had it), his political enemy. Tac. *Ann.* 13.15-27; Suet. *Ner.* 33.3-3; Cass. Dio 61.7.4.

<sup>142</sup> Tac. *Ann.* 13.2.3, 14.1, 18.3.

<sup>143</sup> Tac. *Ann.* 13.18.4-5; Cass. Dio 61.8.4-5.

<sup>144</sup> He traded his mother's influence for the influence of his courtiers and freedmen, as Claudius before him had done, and for the influence of yet another woman, his mistress Poppaea. It was she who insisted that Nero remove Agrippina, while the others merely kept mother and son apart.

Though Agrippina sacrificed her loyalty to her husband for loyalty to her son, Nero in turn betrayed her, though not for his loyalty to the *res publica* over the *domus* as it should have been; it was his love of self and desire for unchecked rule (as well as a wife deemed unfit by his mother) that motivated him to throw off the maternal yoke and end Agrippina's influence. Nero dispatched her ignobly at her villa, and Agrippina ended her life much in the same way as Messalina, to be remembered as one of the most despicable 'queens' in history.

To summarize, the disparagement leveled against imperial women fell into three basic categories: participation in the business of empire, politics (with excessive influence) and the military. These criticisms were applied to present a negative image of political authority in women. This criticism was usually presented through the virago/whore *topos* in contrast to the ideological construction of the 'good matron'. The women at whom this censure was aimed all possessed (or were supposed to possess) a certain degree of personal agency and political power under the monarchical regime, by virtue of their contribution to dynastic succession and their intimate relationship with the ruler of the empire. While the detractors of imperial women were ostensibly motivated by a desire to criticize the regime or emperor to whom these women were attached, in each case the author was also reacting to the new role of women in a monarchy and the implications that it had for the male citizenry. Romans linked monarchy and a single ruling family with tyranny, under which the *res publica* would suffer. This was further complicated by the increased power of imperial women under the monarchy. A woman's loyalties were to her children over her husband and the state – she could not be expected to act for state good. When the Roman monarchy gave women access to public power, it was feared that the state would then suffer, subordinated to the whims and goals of the imperial *domus*. The formulation of these fears can be seen in Chapter Three, during the Roman Republic. In this period the tropes that were fully formed during the Principate were first developed and the male fears and anxieties regarding women were incubated.

### Chapter 3: Censure of Republican Women

“When removed from the domestic sphere, woman is treacherous, a perversion of the natural order, a *fatale monstrum*. When this *topos* is conflated with the moral implications of ancient ethnographical theory, the result is an Artemisia, or a Sempronia, or a Cleopatra.”<sup>145</sup>

The criticism of women in power or close to power in the imperial period was foreshadowed in the political invective of the Roman Republic. Women were rarely mentioned without reference to a man or political situation, both in the speeches of the politicians and in the historians who collected anecdotes and *exempla*. During the imperial period at Rome and in the provinces, the censure of women had developed into vigorous attacks on many aspects of a woman's actions and character, and the motifs and tropes became well established. The rich tradition of the censure of women preceding it developed into the sharp reproofs of women in proximity to power. In the Republican stage, the tension created by the contrast between ideal gender roles and the reality for Roman women translated into an effective means to attack a male political opponent who could not ‘control his women’. Anxiety over the role of women and the implications female power had for the male citizenry made women's public actions a rich area for criticism and authors incorporated censure of female power into invective against men. Slandering a man's female associates could be more damaging to the man than the women if the man was a highly public person.

The polar pair of the good matron and the domineering virago was already firmly entrenched in the Republican period. While the Republic did boast paragons of female virtue such as Octavia, Turia and Lucretia, the Livias, Messalinas, and Agrippinas of the Julio-Claudian dynasty were foreshadowed in the power-hungry Fulvias, Chelidons and Sempronias of the Late Republic. It was in the Republic that the tropes and motifs of women's character and behaviour developed and took root in the literary and socio-cultural tradition. The fear of women in proximity to power was nurtured in the political invective of the period, in the historians' prologues and asides, and in the ever-present appeals to simpler days when men were public agents and women were domestic creatures.

The specific criticisms leveled at powerful women differed in content during the Republic, nevertheless, the basic themes were the same. Women who participated in the male spheres of politics and military affairs were criticized for being pseudo-men, abandoning their traditional virtues and transgressing the bounds of propriety. “Playing the man” could not elevate them above their subordinate female status; it could only make them into aberrations subject to disgrace and censure. And for every woman who aspired to manliness, there was a man who was emasculated in the process. This was then an effective rhetorical tool for reducing a political opponent's *virtus* – accuse his women of having usurped it.<sup>146</sup>

<sup>145</sup> Weiden Boyd, "Virtus Effeminata and Sallust's Sempronia," 200-01.

<sup>146</sup> Hillard, "Republican Politics, Women and the Evidence," 165-66.

A woman's influence over men in power was a frequent complaint of the period. Behind the shameful acts of Clodius Pulcher and Verres were the insidious whispers and suggestions from Clodia and Chelidon. Antony's ambition was inflamed by his Egyptian lover. Before Messalina and Agrippina manipulated Claudius, similar women were steering the course of the Roman Republic, or so say our politicians and historians. The literary attacks describing the unscrupulous acts of Messalina and her uncompromising influence over Claudius could not have carried such weight and impact without the precedent established in the political rhetoric of the Republic.

When women were criticized in Republican literature for their proximity to power, the author justified it in a variety of ways. Ostensibly, he was motivated by personal affront. Women who showed an inclination to act militarily or politically invited criticism, as it followed (according to Roman logic) that they were power-hungry and domineering; the transgression of their traditional role justified censure. The motif of *muliebris aemulatio*, common in the tales of the imperial wives and in the anecdotes of provincial maladministration, was foreshadowed in the Republican period as well. Ambitious and power-hungry women would clash in feminine jealousy. They would compete with each other for power and influence to their own destruction, as well as that of their male relations, and even the state. Masculine competition and ambition was healthy and necessary for the betterment of self, *virtus* and the state itself. Manifested in women it was another transgression of male spheres – a perversion of normative behaviour and a cause for male anxiety.

The most common ascription for women's desire for power was sexual intrigue and rebellion. Any public act of a woman left her open to accusations of sexual impropriety. Given that prostitution is arguably humanity's oldest public profession, it is not difficult to see the logical bridge in the minds of authors and politicians. If a woman participated in an act situated outside the ideally constructed activities reserved for proper women, she compromised her membership in that group *ipso facto*. Publicity associated her with other female public figures – actresses and whores. It can be no coincidence that the toga, the symbol of male political power, was barred from all Roman women, save prostitutes, Rome's "working girls".<sup>147</sup> With this reasoning, it is unsurprising that Sempronia was inclined towards sexual impropriety – her alleged participation in Catiline's rebellion marked her as a woman outside the bounds of matronly propriety; it was no large leap to assert that she would be open to other kinds of transgressive behaviour.

Elite male authors were, however, more often motivated by deeper rhetorical concerns. Censure of women close to power was frequent in the historians, biographers and satirists. In such cases, an author's motivations for involving a woman in the narrative are often telling. Gender anxiety was created by the conflict between elite male ideals regarding the roles of women and the realities actually experienced in Roman society. This tension motivated some of the strongest censure.<sup>148</sup> As well, often the

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<sup>147</sup> Caroline Vout, "The Myth of the Toga: Understanding the History of Roman Dress," *Greece and Rome* 43, no. 2 (1996): 215.

<sup>148</sup> Baharal, "Public Image and Women," 333.

intent was to criticize the current officials and regime by attacking the women to whom the ruling men were attached, in this case, the triumvirs of the Late Republic who grasped for power beyond what was allowed them by the Roman constitution. Rhetorical *topoi* were employed against political enemies through their female relations. Although men merited mention in their own right, women never appeared without reference to a man – often one who had transgressed the bounds of political propriety, as such cases often afforded an opportunity for abusive political attacks on every aspect of his life.<sup>149</sup> When women took an active, public role in a man's life it emasculated him. Effeminate or passive men were not fit administrators of Roman state business, which rendered this a potent type of invective. By the time the historians, biographers and satirists begin to catalogue the offenses and abuses of the Julio-Claudian women there existed a rich tradition of rhetorical invective from the Republic filled with anecdotes of transgressive women. These reflected a commonly shared socio-cultural tension around women and power, as well as anxiety about male abuse of power. The Republican precedent made the criticism of the imperial women thoroughly plausible and even expected. If the political order of the state was intrinsically linked to the social order of the genders and ideal behaviours, then the breakdown of this order in the Republic justified the accusations of political chaos during the early imperial regimes.<sup>150</sup>

During the Late Republic, political invective became rife with accusations of tyranny against one's enemies. In the Late Republic, as in the Julio-Claudian dynasty, women featured as signifiers in accusations of tyranny, since the Greek episodes involving the conflation of public and private through the nature of monarchy used women's influence as a feature of corruption. After Livius Andronicus introduced the Greek tragedy-tyrant into Roman consciousness at the *Ludi Romani* of 240 B.C., it was soon realized by politicians that the accusation of tyranny could be potent rhetorical tool.<sup>151</sup> Not only could one denounce the policies of one's enemy, but one could also disparage his moral character and the value he held for the state. The Greek tyrant became conflated with the Roman 'rex' (and then those politicians who aspired to more than usual power), and the Roman tyrant had to be shown to display the typical characteristics of tyranny to fit the trope, *vis*, *superbia*, *libido* and *crudelitas*.<sup>152</sup> These characteristic traits were more salient and detrimental to the state if they involved women, since the subordination of state good to that of the family was a popular feature in the anecdotes of tyranny imported from the Greek world; politicians could attack other politicians for their interaction with women and any possible influence these women might hold. The socially acceptable influence a woman might have over her husband was transformed into subversive and detrimental manipulation of the *domus* over the *res publica*.

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<sup>149</sup> Hillard, "Republican Politics, Women and the Evidence," 176.

<sup>150</sup> Maria Wyke, "Augustan Cleopatra: Female Power and Poetic Authority," in *Roman Poetry and Propaganda in the Age of Augustus*, ed. Anton Powell (London: Bristol Classical Press, 1994), 111.

<sup>151</sup> Dunkle, "The Greek Tyrant," 153-54.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*: 168.

Propagandistic purposes, tied to rhetorical *topoi* and political attacks, also motivated the censure of women during the Republic, especially the Late Republic. During the so-called First Triumvirate and the Triumvirate of Octavian, Antony and Lepidus, a highly sophisticated rhetorical campaign was developed in which the various factions might slander their political opponents through the disparagement of female relations. Cicero was particularly fond of this tactic, and his rhetorical assaults on Antony are particularly powerful examples of such a propaganda campaign.<sup>153</sup> These character attacks became so entrenched in the literary consciousness that hundreds of years later, Octavia (sister to Augustus, the victor) was still considered a paragon of womanly virtue, while Fulvia (wife to Antony, the vanquished) remained a standard example of female transgression and degenerate behaviour.<sup>154</sup>

### Women and Politics<sup>155</sup>

Women's participation in politics seemed to violate the Roman gendered social code, and when access to the political realm was gained through a man, the situation smacked of tyranny; as elite males saw it, the woman sought to subordinate both the male gender and the state. As explained in Chapter Two, however, the violation of the political sphere was not a literal one – women were not permitted to hold offices or magistracies or be members of the Senate. Instead, it was an elite male perception of increased female participation in activities with a decidedly political bent. Republican history is liberally infused with such anecdotes. In these episodes of burgeoning female power, the direct political involvement of women was limited. During the imperial period and concurrently in the provinces, female political participation was more overt, or at least was presented as such. Given the singular authority of the men in power (the emperor and provincial governor) women had a clear means of gaining access to power through their proximity to this channel; there was no need to whisper suggestively to a husband, who must in turn convince his colleagues in power to take action. The trope of feminine political ambition developed out of the Republican episodes of growing female authority, and the increased censure of imperial women was motivated by the gender anxiety reinforced by these earlier anecdotes. Just as precedent for later male gender anxiety found precedent here, so too did the rhetorical device of using a woman's behaviour to criticize certain men, their political policies or institutions.

Unlike the Julio-Claudian dynasty, a singular familial group and centralized authority which symbolized socio-cultural chaos and the demise of beloved political institutions (and so could be characterized by authors as wholly bad), the Republic was a

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<sup>153</sup> Diana Delia, "Fulvia Reconsidered," in *Women's History and Ancient History*, ed. Sarah B. Pomeroy (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 199.

<sup>154</sup> Cluett, "Roman Women and Triumviral Politics, 43-37 B.C.," 83.

<sup>155</sup> Note that while this chapter is divided into sections united in theme, these are largely arbitrary divisions. Episodes are rarely characterized by just one type of transgression. Often anecdotes of political involvement include military, business and administration, and undue influence.



time of constant political flux with a wide cast of characters. Episodes of women close to power, women exercising political authority or seeking political recourse were not treated in the literary sources in a homogenous way; given the number of factions and motivating factors in the Republic, we see a wide variety of response to women's political actions. But, as asserted above, these responses were based on the authors' feelings towards the men to whom these political women were attached, justifying the complexity of reaction. If one surveys the instances of female political actions which were deemed acceptable, and those which were decidedly not, patterns arise. Women who acted (in feminine ways and within the bounds of feminine propriety) on behalf of the state in crisis or to their husbands' benefit (provided that he was a politically approved-of man himself or one used by the author to incur reader sympathy) were seen as problematic but acceptable – products of difficult times. On the other hand, women who seemed to act for their own benefit, for the benefit of politically stigmatized men, or to the detriment of the state were perversions of the social code, moral propriety, and the ethos of Republican government, thus incurring censure.

### *Response to Crisis: Early – Middle Republic*

There are several incidents in the semi-historical and historical past of Rome involving women and political involvement. In three of these anecdotes in particular, women interacted directly with the senate or high-ranking officials to enact some kind of social change or contribute to the state. Elite reaction to these episodes was mixed, depending on the motivation for this female mobilization. In 395 B.C., the pontiffs determined that one-tenth of the property of the Veientes was sacred to Apollo. As this property had fallen into the ownership of Rome, the Roman senate and tribunes were responsible for collecting the sum in gold for the value of the land and territory, along with all of the property contained in it. Lacking the liquid funds necessary, the tribunes were at a loss. The Roman matrons, however, met together to discuss the issue, then *en masse* pledged their jewelry and other luxury goods to the tribunes to cover the deficit. The senate was grateful, and in return for the matrons' largesse, they granted the *matronae* of the city the right to drive a carriage to games and festivals and two-wheeled traps on all holy and work days.<sup>156</sup> In 390, after the Gauls sacked Rome, the matrons again convened to make the ransom out of their holdings, as the treasury funds were insufficient. For this the *matronae* received public thanks, and they were granted the right to funeral *laudationes*.<sup>157</sup> In both cases Livy's tone and vocabulary is neutral to positive. The senate was not affronted by the matrons' mobilization on behalf of the state. There was no question of the appropriateness of the action. The matrons, out of duty to their Republic and out of a sense of motherhood, family and propriety, gave up their jewels and other fine accoutrements (the only badges of honour or marks of distinction allowed a woman<sup>158</sup>), in a fine act of self-sacrifice which was rewarded by the senate. No

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<sup>156</sup> Livy 5.25.

<sup>157</sup> Livy 5.50.

<sup>158</sup> Val. Max. 9.1.3; Livy 34.7.5f.

censure was applied, nor were the women compared to an army or negative force by appearing *en masse*.<sup>159</sup>

In direct contrast to these episodes is the female mobilization associated with the *Lex Oppia* in Livy (34.1f). The *Lex Oppia* was a sumptuary law enacted in 215 B.C. during the second Punic War. It limited the amount of gold a woman could wear on her person in public, the colours she could display, and the type of conveyance she could use. During wartime this law was deemed acceptable, but when the war was over, the women began to take offense at the curtailing of their privileges, and in 195 the *matronae* mobilized to have the law repealed. The matter came to head with all of the Roman magistrates and the majority of the nobility convening to discuss the issue. While those assembled were divided, the consul Cato vehemently denounced the abrogation of the law in a masterpiece of rhetorical misogyny. After much grandstanding, however, those in favour of the matrons' cause won the day and the law was repealed.

This episode is problematic for a number of reasons. First, it is difficult to determine how much of Cato was Cato, and how much Cato was Livy. While Livy depended on circulating copies of Cato's speeches for his *Ab Urbe Condita*,<sup>160</sup> it cannot be known now how much of the author himself was interjected into the history. Did Livy present Cato's impassioned denunciation as it was, or was it embellished to make a point on the mobilization of Roman women? Second, how much of Livy was in L. Valerius' rebuttal in favour of abrogation?<sup>161</sup> Finally, to what extent were contemporary gender anxieties injected into the Republican past?<sup>162</sup> Cato's language, and Livy's presentation of it, indicate that this episode at least made the author uncomfortable. Livy's enthusiasm for and appreciation of the golden age of Rome's past would suggest that an episode which could be considered a catalyst for Rome's descent into luxury, avarice and decadence would strike discord in the author. Although the law was indeed repealed, it is Cato's speech that resonates in the mind of the reader, regardless of outcome.<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> Katariina Mustakallio, "Legendary Women and Female Groups in Livy," in *Female Networks and the Public Sphere in Roman Society*, ed. Päivi Setälä and Liisa Savunen (Rome: 1999), 63-64.

<sup>160</sup> David Braund, "Cohors: The Governor and His Entourage in the Self-Image of the Roman Republic," in *Cultural Identity in the Roman Empire*, ed. Ray Laurence and Joanne Berry (New York: Routledge, 1998), 14.

<sup>161</sup> Valerius Maximus cites many examples of positive female action (34.5-8-13), which Livy has already recounted in the *Ab Urbe Condita*, as precedent for the mobilization of the women. While his speech lacks the rhetorical impact and syntactical flair of Cato's, it is Valerius' speech that wins the day for the matrons.

<sup>162</sup> S. E. Smethurst, "Women in Livy's 'History'," *Greece and Rome* 19, no. 56 (1950): 84. See also Ida Mastroianni, "Speeches *Pro* and *Contra* Women in Livy 34.1-7: Catonian Legalism and Gendered Debates," *Latomus* 65, no. 3 (2006).

<sup>163</sup> It has been argued that the *Lex Oppia* was not a war-minded effort, but a sumptuary law. In the crisis of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Punic War, ancient religious rites were re-enacted and new ones were introduced for the safety of the state, and these were largely presided over by women. Because religious utensils of gold and silver were popularly used in the rites, women's display of wealth increased. During wartime this was obnoxious to male taxpayers who had so recently surrendered

In contrast to the noble matrons of 395 and 390 relinquishing their trapping of wealth for the good of their men and the state, the women lobbying for the abrogation of the *Lex Oppia* desired to embellish themselves and advertise their wealth for selfish gain. Cato attributes this to feminine rivalry, the desire of each wife to outdo the others, to make apparent her rank and station at the expense of those lower on the social ladder. He goes so far as to insinuate that whorish behaviour would develop out of this rivalry - if a woman's husband refused to give her stunning finery, she would seek out the husbands of others.<sup>164</sup> The motif of good matrons descending into sexual promiscuity was to become standard in such rhetorical invective and can be found in most episodes denouncing female political involvement from this era onwards.<sup>165</sup> This theme is connected to insinuations of rebellion and intrigue as well.<sup>166</sup> The mobilization of the matrons, previously mentioned uncritically, becomes likened to military mobilization. Cato calls them an *agmen mulierum*<sup>167</sup> – they march on the forum, they harangue their husbands, they enslave and emasculate the men who fall victim to the matrons' army. If allowed free rein, these women would not only demand the laws abrogated, but they would also demand magistracies and suffrage. Soon women would be not just the equals of men but their masters!<sup>168</sup> Cato's military image is interesting, and it too became a common motif in the denunciation of active women. Women who participated publicly in male spheres were no longer proper *matronae*, but aberrations of social order (whores) and pseudo-men (perverted military leaders). As well, the conflation of the public and private spheres was characteristic of tyranny; women participating publicly uncomfortably recalled for Livy's readers episodes of tyrannical government in both Rome's mythological past and the contemporary political situation of the triumviral period. The military association, as can be seen here, rarely occurred alone, but with other elements of transgressive

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large amounts of wealth to the wartime effort. Once the crisis had passed, however, it seemed insulting to the women not to return to their former status (since displays of wealth clearly marked their status). Their husbands likely supported them in this because these men were also aggrandized through their women's luxurious adornment. By giving luxuries to their female relations, men were seen as generous and wealthy, while not gaining a reputation for decadence themselves. This generosity was quite simple on their part, as the money and wealth remained in their control as male heads of household. Thus while politicians like Cato might bemoan the devastation of traditional ideologies, the status-minded elite would find no fault with the measure. See Phyllis Culham, "The *Lex Oppia*," *Latomus* 41 (1982).

<sup>164</sup> Livy 34.4.14f.

<sup>165</sup> For Tacitus' appropriation of this debate and its themes into imperial-era censure of women, see Ginsburg "In *Maiores Certamina*: Past and Present in the Annals" and Santoro L'Hoir "Tacitus and Women's Usurpation of Power."

<sup>166</sup> Livy 34.2.1-4.

<sup>167</sup> Livy 34.2.8.

<sup>168</sup> Livy 34.2.11-34.3.3.

behaviour, the censure of all of which was aimed at fully insulting the women involved, or the men to which they are attached.<sup>169</sup>

### *Political Action and Rebellion: Early Rome*

There were also contrasting literary precedents in the area of women and rebellion against the state. A more positive example of the *agmen mulierum* appears in an episode involving Corolianus, a Roman general who went into voluntary exile after insulting the plebs over a grain shortage.<sup>170</sup> His travels brought him to the Volscians, enemies of Rome, who adopted him as their general and declared war on Rome. When Corolianus and his troops marched on Rome, the senators and priests attempted to dissuade him, to no avail. It was then the women who mobilized to dissolve the conflict. The women congregated at the house of Corolianus's mother Veturia and his wife Volumnia to persuade them to assemble Corolianus's children and march on his camp as a last resort, since the pleas of senators and priests fell on deaf ears. When Veturia and Corolianus met in the field, like two generals at a parlay, she scorned his embrace and railed at him, telling him that he had to choose between his family and Rome or the Volscians. Her speech stressed the importance of family – she emphasized her connection to him as his mother, she reminded him of his wife and children, his love of the *patria*, the disservice he did to the family's gods. Veturia's speech, heavy on guilt and shame, was accompanied by the tears and wails (*turba mulierum*) of Rome's matrons, Veturia's entourage. Resolve finally broken, Corolianus withdrew his army.<sup>171</sup>

While the actions of the matrons are political (they gathered to make a public appeal), the military imagery is unmistakable. The women mustered their forces then drafted a general, Veturia, with a second-in-command, Volumnia. They marched on Corolianus's camp as a force and made a parlay with him. The two 'generals' came face-to-face and exchanged words similar in theme to the speeches of enemy commanders elsewhere in Livy – the gods, country, family, bravery and duty were emphasized to induce action.<sup>172</sup> The *turba mulierum* is reminiscent of war trumpets and the call to arms accompanying these speeches.<sup>173</sup> Such military embodiment and appropriation by women was generally negative, but because the matrons acted out of love of country and family, the actions were deemed acceptable.<sup>174</sup> The matrons were self-sacrificing and

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<sup>169</sup> For another interpretation of this episode, see Bauman, *Women and Politics in Ancient Rome*, 33. Cato's complaint was also with the husbands of the women, who supported the avarice of their wives and allowed them to march on the forum. See note 163.

<sup>170</sup> Livy 2.40.1-12 and Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 8.39.1-8.54.5.

<sup>171</sup> Mustakallio, "Legendary Women and Female Groups in Livy," 59-61.

<sup>172</sup> Livy 2.40.5-9.

<sup>173</sup> For an examination of female voices as literal calls-to-arms in Latin epic, see A. M. Keith, *Engendering Rome: Women in Latin Epic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 65-100.

<sup>174</sup> Some scholars would suggest otherwise. *Mulier* is often used in a negative context, and Livy could be mildly denigrating female mobilization here, rather than praising it outright. See Santoro L'Hoir, *The Rhetoric of Gender Terms*, 84-85. Livy (12.40.1) could not determine if

saved many Roman lives.<sup>175</sup> This is also an example of the *domus* working towards the protection and preservation of the *res publica*, as the matrons abandoned their traditional posts and convinced a general to avoid conflict with the state. Corolianus was asked to look to the good of his family, which could only come with the safety of the state.

*Political Action and Rebellion: Sempronia*

Veturia and the matrons were a positive example of women involved in political action in a time of rebellion against the state. It was possible for this public activity of women to be positive because the actions of the matrons stood in favour of the order and sanctity of the Roman state and its upstanding men. In direct contrast are the actions and participation of Sempronia in another period of Roman crisis, Catiline's conspiracy. In 63 B.C. Catiline was accused of attempting to overthrow the Roman government in a bloody coup with the aid of Rome's disaffected youth and morally-bereft 'matrons'. Sallust provides the portrait of Sempronia, a template for future authors inverting the 'good matron' motif.<sup>176</sup> In Sallust's portrait, the virtues of the proper matron (chastity, modesty, obedience to her husband and woolwork,<sup>177</sup> as well as beauty, fertility and household management<sup>178</sup>) are inverted to create a stereotype of the 'bad matron'. She is beautiful and fertile, but her fertility is twisted into sexual depravity – she prostitutes herself with an insatiable desire for sex. She is well-read and accomplished, but so much so that she is too accomplished for the standards of female propriety.<sup>179</sup> She lends her house to the conspirators in her husband's absence too, hardly behaving dutifully as a wife. The portrait as a whole puts Sempronia not in the class of elite Roman matrons, but in the company of Rome's *luxuria*-weakened men or *meretrices*.<sup>180</sup>

Sallust's portrait is the only appearance of Sempronia in accounts of Catiline's conspiracy.<sup>181</sup> His account of her is more a caricature than an account of a historical person. Her portrait complements that of Catiline's (Sall. *Cat.* 5) in such a way that she can be considered a perfect counterpart to Catiline himself and an embodiment of the social disorder that Sallust divined in Catiline's coup.<sup>182</sup> As his female counterpart, her

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the women went of their own accord out of fear (*muliebris timor*) or public policy, asked by the Senate. Plutarch (*Coriol.* 33.3) says that they acted on their own and Dionysius (*Ant. Rom.* 8.39.1) reproaches them for abandoning their homes and traditional roles (Bauman, *Women and Politics in Ancient Rome*, 11, note 14.).

<sup>175</sup> The Roman people erect a temple to *Fortuna Muliebris* in honour of the matrons' heroic actions on behalf of the state. Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 8.55.3.

<sup>176</sup> Sall. *Cat.* 24.3-25.5.

<sup>177</sup> Hemelrijk, "Masculinity and Femininity in the *Laudatio Turiae*," 188.

<sup>178</sup> Fischler, "Social Stereotypes," 117.

<sup>179</sup> Her interest in Greek literature is deliberate slander on Sallust's part, as this is a common trope employed by authors to express female decadence. Bond, "Anti-Feminism in Juvenal and Cato," 425-26.

<sup>180</sup> Weiden Boyd, "Virtus Effeminata and Sallust's Sempronia," 198.

<sup>181</sup> Hillard, "On the Stage, Behind the Curtain," 47-48.

<sup>182</sup> Hillard, "Republican Politics, Women and the Evidence," 173.

appropriation (and perversion) of manly *virtus* highlights Catiline's effeminacy and the moral deprivation of those who follow him.<sup>183</sup> She is political, wildly excessive and sexually active – by 'playing the man' she stands as representative of the social disorder and inversion of Catiline's conspiracy (later framed by Cicero as attempted tyranny [*in Catilinam*]), as much as she reflects male anxieties surrounding women close to power.<sup>184</sup>

### *Political Action for Endangered Husbands*

Women also took an active political role when their husbands were incapable of acting alone. In some cases, this type of public action was approved of in women, when framed as an extension of their domestic duties. The example of "Turia" is instructive here. The husband/speaker of the *Laudatio Turiae*<sup>185</sup> praises Turia for her active aid during the proscriptions of the triumvirate of Octavian, Antony and Lepidus. While he was on the run, in hiding, she gave him aid in the form of money, slaves and food. She even went to the triumvir Lepidus to beg his help. Throughout this list of Turia's good deeds, her husband describes her in male vocabulary. She has *virtus* (2.6a and 19), *firmitas animi* (2.8 and 15), *constantia* (1.25) and *patientia* (2.21). He uses military terms to describe her actions as well – she provided reinforcements (2.2a), protected him (2.7a), made allies (2.8), developed stratagems (2.8), and received wounds from Lepidus (2.17). He culminates by calling her a *speculatrix* and *propugnatrix* (military spy and defender, 2.61).<sup>186</sup> Her husband takes a passive (and so, feminine) role in contrast to her masculine agency.

Yet Turia's actions are presented as acceptable. Her masculine virtues are offered as exceptional qualities to which a woman under duress could aspire. The author never loses sight of her feminine virtues, and enumerates extensively Turia's *pietas*, *pudicitia*, *modestia*, *obsequium*, *lanificium*, all the primary virtues of a good Roman matron. Qualified in this way, Turia escaped the censure that generally applied to women taking political action. Fulvia undertook similar military activity for her husband's interests, but the propaganda issuing from the winners of Actium presented her in a negative light. Not only were her masculine virtues untempered by feminine ones, but she was acting on the behalf of an unpopular politician.<sup>187</sup> Rhetorical strategy is also employed here to abuse Lepidus. His cruel indifference and the injustice Turia endured at his hands are emphasized in a propagandistic way. When Augustus attained sole power he gave aid to Turia's husband (or at least, we are to infer that, as her husband lived long enough to outlive her and erect the memorial). Stressing the abuse of a courageous woman, the *Laudatio Turiae* insults Lepidus' unpopular politics and emphasizes his role in the proscriptions while glorifying Augustus.

<sup>183</sup> Weiden Boyd, "Virtus Effeminata and Sallust's Sempronia," 185-90.

<sup>184</sup> Wyke, "Augustan Cleopatras," 111. Fischler, "Social Stereotypes," 119.

<sup>185</sup> *CIL* 6.41062.

<sup>186</sup> Hemelrijk, "Masculinity and Femininity in the *Laudatio Turiae*," 189.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*: 191-94.

Other women undertook public or political action to give their husbands aid without censure. They liquidated their property or jewelry, they sent slaves, and they hid their husbands. Some even went so far as to disguise themselves as slaves to sneak their husbands out of Rome during the proscriptions. Each was praised for her duty towards her husband.<sup>188</sup> Terentia, wife of Cicero, sent him money and letters from Rome on security, his finances and contemporary politics. She even went to his politician allies for aid on his behalf.<sup>189</sup> Ovid's wife desired to join him in exile. He felt that he would be better served with her in Rome, lobbying on his behalf, so he entreated her to remain as his eyes and ears at home.<sup>190</sup> The proscribed Coponius' wife went so far as to seduce Antony during Caesar's proscriptions to save her husband, such was her love and sense of duty. Appian (*B.C.* 4.40) says that she 'cured one misfortune by another'. This anecdote highlights the tyranny of Caesar and Antony's regime, rather than the wife's lack of propriety. *Libido*, the mark of a tyrant, was displayed by Antony, who forced the previously chaste matron to compromise herself for her husband's safety (an inversion of the usual trope of a woman committing adultery to her husband's detriment), and his abuse of the citizenry is addressed here, with an innocent woman cast as the victim to arouse reader outrage. Feminine loyalty, even when it caused women to transgress their proper, domestic role, was still in keeping with the tenets of ideal female virtue, so long as a woman was exercising this male power on behalf of a legitimate masculine relation without negative political connections.<sup>191</sup>

In stark contrast to these devoted women who acted on behalf of their endangered husbands were those cruel and self-interested women who compromised their husbands in times of crisis. Such anecdotes highlight elite masculine anxiety about the capricious nature of women and their untrustworthiness, while also perpetuating the trope of the sexually excessive, scheming wife (and these episodes in turn reinforced gender anxiety). Appian (*B.C.* 4.23) relates the horrifying cases of women so sexually degenerate that they had their husbands proscribed so that they might be widowed and free to marry lovers. The perversion of socio-cultural order is striking here. Women were highly praised for their devotion to household and husband; women who betrayed their household, the locus of their legitimate existence, inverted every Roman cultural ideal when they traded their husbands' good for their lovers'.<sup>192</sup> Because women had the reputation for being fickle and inclined to betrayal, stories of women who acted cruelly against their husbands made the fear of women more resonant; a woman was a potential viper in the household and should be held in suspicion to maintain the safety of the men there. The alienation of the

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<sup>188</sup> Val. Max. 6.7.1-3. Appian (*B.C.* 4.39-40) relates several tales of female loyalty: Acilius' wife gave up all her jewels to obtain safe passage for her husband. Lentullus' wife braved many hardships to travel to her mistreated husband's side. Antius' wife hid him in the laundry and had him carted out by porters. Rhegius' wife hid him in a sewer and then snuck him out of town as a charcoal-seller while she created a diversion.

<sup>189</sup> Cic. *Fam.* 14.1-4. Hemelrijk, "Masculinity and Femininity in the *Laudatio Turiae*," 190-91. Dixon, "Family Finances," 98.

<sup>190</sup> *Tr.* 1.3.79-102; 1.6.5ff; 4.3.71ff; 5.2.37ff; 5.14.15ff; *Pont.* 3.1.31.

<sup>191</sup> Hemelrijk, "Masculinity and Femininity in the *Laudatio Turiae*," 190.

<sup>192</sup> Cluett, "Roman Women and Triumviral Politics, 43-37 B.C.," 72.

feminine in the house also served to reinforce patriarchal loyalty and maintain gender norms.

The recurring theme of sexual impropriety is also important to note. These episodes were deliberately interpreted by male authors as sexually motivated; a woman would only compromise her husband for the lust of her lover, not for political or monetary gain. The political agency of such empresses as Messalina and Agrippina Minor would later be reinterpreted in the same way, as sexual depravity, as it seemed irreconcilable to Roman male authors that female political activity could be motivated by anything other than uncontrollable lust.

### Women and the Military

Perhaps even more problematic than a woman participating in political action was a woman transgressing the male sphere of military activity. Depictions of Agrippina Maior, Plancina (both examined in the following chapter), and Agrippina Minor developed out of Republican mythological and semi-mythological literature, characters such as Dio, Camilla and Cloelia, as well as in the historical and poetical depictions of Fulvia and Cleopatra. The episodes of women ‘playing the general’, ranging from ambiguous to quite negative, reflect both the gender tension of the socio-cultural climate as well as a fascination with the perversion of social order, observed above in the descriptions of women in politics. The powerful female generals nearly always invoked hostility – only a very select few escaped censure.<sup>193</sup> When the authors failed to apply criticism themselves, it was generally ascribed by later authors. As can be seen in the episodes of the ‘matrons vs. the *Lex Oppia*’, Coriolanus’s mother, and the case of “Turia”, military insinuations can be applied to various effect. The literal embodiment of military activity (the *dux femina*), as a motif, was so negative a characterization that it was generally reserved for political invective in the Republic, which allowed for the increasingly negative development of the trope in Tacitus. One can trace the Roman literary precedent of the ‘*dux femina*’ through its nascent stages in Virgil and Livy,<sup>194</sup> then its full formation in the historical accounts of Fulvia and Cleopatra, contrasted with the one shining *exemplum* of Octavia.

#### *The dux femina in the Late Republic: Fulvia and Octavia*

Rome’s first historical *dux femina* came in the character of Antony’s wife Fulvia. Thanks to an enthusiastic propaganda campaign against her husband, she is remembered

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<sup>193</sup> Agrippina Maior was an ambiguous case (Tac. *Ann.* 1.69).

<sup>194</sup> For Dio and Camilla, see Ver. *Aen.* 1.364 (Dio), 7.803f and 11.508f (Camilla), as well as W. P. Basson, "Vergil's Camilla: A Paradoxical Character," *Acta Classica* 29 (1986), Trudy Harrington Becker, "Ambiguity and the Female Warrior: Vergil's Camilla," *Electronic Antiquity* 4, no. 1 (1997), Keith, *Engendering Rome*. For Cloelia, see Livy 2.13.6-11, Flory, "Livia and the History of Public Honorific Statues for Women in Rome.", Mustakallio, "Legendary Women and Female Groups in Livy."



as the antithesis of matronly modesty and humility. Fulvia was powerful, wealthy, political and influential. She looked after her husband's interests while he was away from Rome. She joined her husband's brother when he required her aid on campaign and acted militarily on Antony's behalf. In these respects Fulvia was no different from the virtuous, courageous matrons described earlier in the chapter, women protecting their husbands' interests during the proscriptions and taking every opportunity possible to aid their men. In fact, had the war between Antony and Octavian ended differently, Fulvia might have been lauded among those women. In the political fallout following Caesar's assassination and again after Antony's defeat at Actium, Antony was vilified as a tyrant and reviled by his enemies, and Fulvia's actions, which would have seemed appropriate and dutiful had she been attached to a better man, were recorded as degenerate and scandalous.<sup>195</sup>

In the descriptions of Fulvia she was cast as a cruel woman with masculine ambition. Plutarch (*Ant.* 10.3) says she had no interest in Minerva's arts (i.e. weaving), and Velleius Paterculus (2.74.2f) says that there was nothing feminine about her but her body. The *Perusinae glandes* suggest that her body was deformed as well, and ancient authors asserted that she lacked the feminine charms of her mother.<sup>196</sup> As *lanificium* came to be representative of all proper matronly virtue, Plutarch's comment asserts that Fulvia possessed none of the matronly virtues necessary in a proper Roman woman, and so it naturally follows that she would be a perversion of appropriate behaviour – she had none of the traditional female characteristics that might temper or justify her masculine activities. The fact that her form was unwomanly as well further set her apart from proper Roman women. Her inner masculine characteristics and aspirations literally mapped themselves onto her body, transforming it physically to set her apart.

Before an episode involving Hortensia and the matrons in 42 B.C. (App. *B.C.* 4.32),<sup>197</sup> Fulvia seems to have kept a low profile, and there was little censure against her. It was only during the proscriptions and Antony's difficulties with Octavian that Fulvia's character came into prominence. Cicero asserts that Fulvia was instrumental in gaining the Armenian throne for Deiotarus – Antony took bribes, and Fulvia traded sexual favours with the king (Cic. *Phil.* 3.16 and *ad Att.* 14.12.1). Given the rhetorical hostility of the *Philippics*, the defamation of Fulvia's character here in connection with Antony's is unsurprising. Prior to this Fulvia had appeared at the trial of Milo as the bereaved widow

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<sup>195</sup> Hemelrijk, "Masculinity and Femininity in the *Laudatio Turiae*," 191-93.

<sup>196</sup> *CIL* 11.6721.5. Judith P. Hallett, "Perusinae Glandes and the Changing Image of Augustus," *American Journal of Ancient History* 2, no. 2 (1977): 157. There was some speculation that Sempronia, co-conspirator of Catiline, was Fulvia's mother. Sarah B. Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves* (New York: Schocken, 1995), 185.

<sup>197</sup> In this episode the matrons, led by Hortensia, came to Fulvia seeking redress for the heavy taxation of their property by the triumvirs. Fulvia, acting the part of a despot's wife, denied the women an audience and forced them to seek public action rather than the traditional, private approach. The heavy taxation and Fulvia's haughty attitude as depicted reflected the tyrannical abuses of Antony's regime. See also Bauman, *Women and Politics in Ancient Rome*, 81-82, Cluett, "Roman Women and Triumviral Politics, 43-37 B.C.," 73.

of Clodius.<sup>198</sup> Through her association with so many of Cicero's hated political enemies, Fulvia was marked for future invective and hostility.<sup>199</sup> Cicero had cast Antony into the role of the 'tyrant', and Fulvia, by default, became the typical wicked tyrant's consort, violating the *nomos* of good government along with him. Antony was accused of having several of the characteristic traits of a tyrant: *vis* (for using an armed bodyguard in the Senate [*Phil.* 2.8.15, 19]),<sup>200</sup> *libido* and *crudelitas* (*Phil.* 3.28), and the accusations against Fulvia could seem justified, given the abuses of her husband.<sup>201</sup>

Fulvia came fully into the public sphere in 41 B.C. Cassius Dio (45.12-13 and 48.3) states that rather than Lucius Antonius and Public Servilius, she and Antony were the real consuls. During Antony's extended service in the East (and his long dalliance with Cleopatra there), Fulvia took responsibility for Antony's interests in Rome. Octavian's propaganda featured Fulvia as a bloodthirsty harridan – he attributed the terrible proscriptions of the period to Antony (and through him Fulvia) and Lepidus, casting his own benevolence in contrast to their tyranny and excess.<sup>202</sup> Octavian advertised his philanthropy by saving T. Vinius and his proscribed family while Fulvia harshly rejected their appeals for aid.<sup>203</sup>

In addition to her role in the proscriptions, literature deriving from Augustan sources says Fulvia then incited Antony's brother to take up arms against Octavian. The result was the Perusian War and Fulvia's depiction as a *dux femina*; Fulvia was such a wicked inversion of the proper matron that she set the state at war with itself. Octavian had been actively proscribing his political enemies and confiscating land in Italy for his veterans following the events at Philippi in 42 B.C. In 41, Antony's consul brother Lucius took up the Italian cause against Octavian. He rallied Antony's legions in Italy against Octavian by presenting Fulvia and her children to remind the legions of their duty towards their general and his family (App. *B.C.* 5.14). While Lucius roused the Italians, Fulvia went to Lepidus (much like "Turia") to ask for his protection and aid. Then

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<sup>198</sup> Plu. *Luc.* 10.2-3; Cic. *Clu.* 101-2f; Cluett, "Roman Women and Triumviral Politics, 43-37 B.C.," 73. If Fulvia had been politically active during her marriage to Clodius, Cicero would not have refrained from mentioning her as he did when she was involved with Antony. Cicero's derogatory remarks about Fulvia for her association with Clodius were applied retrospectively after she and Antony become subject to Cicero's invective. At the time of her marriage to Clodius, Cicero only mentions her once in a letter, and there are no derogatory terms (*ad Att.* 14.12). See Delia, "Fulvia Reconsidered," 199.

<sup>199</sup> Fulvia, however, got the last laugh at Cicero. According to Dio (47.8.4), before his head and hands were placed on the rostra following his execution, Fulvia took up the head and spat on it, then removed her hairpins and pierced Cicero's tongue for the vile abuses it had heaped upon her and her husband.

<sup>200</sup> This was a symbol of tyranny since Peisistratus seized Athens by force in the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. (Herod. 1.59).

<sup>201</sup> Dunkle, "The Greek Tyrant," 164.

<sup>202</sup> As was observed above with "Turia" and Lepidus. Turia's epitaph was further propaganda for Augustus, as it depicted Lepidus as the cruel triumvir who proscribed, while Octavian was the benevolent triumvir who saved.

<sup>203</sup> Cass. Dio 47.7-8; App. *B.C.* 4.32-34; Suet. *Aug.* 27.

fearing for their safety, Fulvia and Lucius withdrew to Antony's colony of Praeneste with their legions and some loyal senators. It was then at Praeneste that the infamous incident of Fulvia's military action occurred. According to the Augustan tradition (preserved in Dio 48.10) Fulvia belted on a sword, stalked the battlements and rallied the soldiers, usurping Lucius' role as general. The pair failed to gain Lepidus' aid, however, and negotiations with Octavian broke down. They marched on Rome, received much support there, and then continued north to rally Antony's generals in Gaul.<sup>204</sup> They settled into the town of Perusia, where their luck once again turned as Octavian laid siege to Perusia. Lucius was depicted as fully rendering his command to Fulvia, who began to send missives to Antony's Gallic generals to ask them to raise the blockade and send reinforcement to Antony's brother.<sup>205</sup> Unfortunately for Lucius and Fulvia, Octavian was successful in his siege. Fulvia fled with her mother and children to Sicily to meet with Antony, whom she had contacted some time earlier to inform him of the events in Italy. She never met with her husband, though, as she died on the journey.<sup>206</sup>

In the aftermath of the doomed war, Octavian and Antony healed the rift between them with a dynastic marriage of Octavian's sister Octavia to Antony, as well as a public denunciation of Fulvia's actions.<sup>207</sup> Being dead and politically unpopular, Fulvia made an excellent scapegoat for both parties – as a woman with access to power, she could elicit censure on her own account. Being a woman with access to power attached to an unpopular man, she was further subject to political invective when Octavian emerged from the civil wars victorious. The process of Fulvia's vilification incorporated several of the typical tropes we have observed thus far. She was said to be motivated by feminine jealousy, rather than out of respect for her husband and marital duty to see to his affairs. Fulvia was first jealous of Antony's Cappadocian mistress Glaphyra, then his Egyptian consort Cleopatra. In fact, Plutarch (*Ant.* 30) asserts that Fulvia became involved in the Perusian War for the sole purpose of bringing her husband back to her. Sexual impropriety was rarely absent from the censure of powerful women, and Fulvia did not escape allegations of sexual promiscuity. Cicero had already impugned her virtue with his comments on Deiotarus' regaining the Armenian throne (*Phil.* 3.16 and *ad Att.* 14.12.1). Martial (9.20.3f) records Octavian's verses, saying that Fulvia had given Octavian the option of either making love to her (presumably in retaliation for Antony's extra-marital affairs) or going to war with her.<sup>208</sup> In a jocular fashion, Octavian quips that sex with Fulvia was such a disgusting option that he desired the latter alternative.

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<sup>204</sup> Catherine Virlouvet, "Fulvia the Woman of Passion," in *Roman Women*, ed. Augusto Fraschetti (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 77.

<sup>205</sup> App. *B.C.* 5.33.

<sup>206</sup> Cass. Dio 48.27.4; App. *B.C.* 5.59; Plut. *Ant.* 30.

<sup>207</sup> Virlouvet, "Fulvia the Woman of Passion," 79-80. Octavian attributed the war to Fulvia in his *Memoirs*, too. There was certain discomfort in denouncing Lucius Antonius, as he was claiming to fight for Republican values. Octavian later claimed to be doing the same, and clearly felt it would be unwise to criticize Lucius' actions. Delia, "Fulvia Reconsidered," 205.

<sup>208</sup> Fulvia's jealousy over Glaphyra: Martial 11.20; App. *B.C.* 5.7; Cass. Dio 49.32.3-4.

Even this epigram is rife with complex Augustan propaganda. Octavian in his early days was rumoured to be an effeminate, passive homosexual by his political enemies.<sup>209</sup> The epigram works to bolster the image he wanted to project – here Octavian appears virile and appropriately manly. He undermines Fulvia's political agency by reducing a potentially disastrous civil war to the tantrum of a sex-starved, jilted woman.<sup>210</sup> The infamous Perusian sling bullets have the same effect. These small stones originating from Octavian's camp during the siege of Perugia were carved with lewd statements about Fulvia's genitalia and threatened her sexually. Fulvia was depicted as neither a real general nor a woman acting militarily for the good of her husband – she was a sexually-frustrated, dried-up prostitute.<sup>211</sup>

The image of militant, promiscuous Fulvia was created in contrast to the propaganda surrounding Octavia. For Octavia to be the feminine victim of Antony and his machinations, the women for whom she was a foil had to be very active, unfeminine and corrupt. For Octavia to represent the ideal Roman matron, Fulvia had to embody her antithesis.<sup>212</sup> While Fulvia literally girded on a sword and stalked the battlements, Octavia more subtly offered herself as a mediator between Octavian and Antony at Tarentum in 37 B.C.<sup>213</sup> Because Octavia was cast in the role of the ideal matron, she acted in the interests of her husband (despite his unworthiness) while Fulvia acted out of sexual frustration. Octavia escaped censure for her political and military action because she was an important part of the canon of Augustan propaganda - she served to further undermine Antony, that he could wrong such a virtuous woman.<sup>214</sup> In the literary tradition rising from Augustus' principate, Octavia became the embodiment of the feminine ideal Augustus wished to disseminate with his moral legislation and espousal of Republican values. Antony's rejection of Octavia was representative of his denunciation of Roman values and his association with Fulvia and her own rejection of Roman gender values which further vilified him in historical record.

### *Cleopatra*

It is worth examining the literary tradition around Cleopatra as a *dux femina* as well. Her connection to Antony made her a political target in the Augustan literary tradition, and her foreignness, coupled with her political agency and power, offered an irresistible opportunity for Roman authors to impugn her character. These character sketches, most notably that of Cleopatra as a warrior-queen, incorporated the usual motifs used in denunciations of women in power, and most clearly set the precedent for all

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<sup>209</sup> In the *Perusinae Glandes*: CIL 11.6721.9a, 10, 11; Suet. *Aug.* 68 (accused by Sextus Pompeius, Marc Antony, and Lucius Antonius).

<sup>210</sup> Hallett, "Perusinae Glandes and the Changing Image of Augustus," 163.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid.: 157. CIL 11.6721, nos 3-5 and 14.

<sup>212</sup> Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves*, 185-86. Delia, "Fulvia Reconsidered," 207.

<sup>213</sup> App. *B.C.* 5.93-5; Plut. *Ant.* 35; Mary White Singer, "Octavia's Mediation at Tarentum," *Classical Journal* 43, no. 3 (1947): 173-77.

<sup>214</sup> Plu. *Ant.* 54; Watson, *Ancient Stepmothers*, 200-01.

future invective against Roman women with monarchical power (i.e. the wives of the emperors).<sup>215</sup>

Like Fulvia, Cleopatra VII was a foil for Octavia in Augustan propaganda, as well as a justification for the repudiation of Antony's bid for power. She had already become infamous as Caesar's lover, she bore him a son and had even gone to live in Rome for a short time, a situation for which Caesar was castigated by his political peers.<sup>216</sup> It was well-known that Cleopatra had sought sole power in Egypt and had gone to war with her brother-husband to attain the monarchy for herself.<sup>217</sup> By the time Antony had taken her as mistress, she was notorious at Rome as a 'whore queen' (*meretrix regina*) who sought to aggrandize herself and her position through obscene alliances with powerful Roman generals.<sup>218</sup> Her image in Egypt, however, was quite different. The Egyptian monarchical system had many ways of accommodating legitimate female power. Since Cleopatra II's marriage to Ptolemy Philometor in 173 B.C. Egyptian queens could rule alongside their husbands with political equality.<sup>219</sup> Egyptian queens were given the symbolism of mothers and benevolent rulers who protected the land and its people. Cleopatra's titles in Egypt included "queen", "the goddess", "Father-loving" and "Fatherland-loving". She was associated with Isis (and 'new Isis' [Plu. *Ant.* 54]), and with the birth of Caesarian she was assimilated to Isis' role as the mother of Horus in Egyptian imperial art and coinage.<sup>220</sup> Roman political and poetical discourse had no such means of representing legitimate female power. In the literary propaganda following Cleopatra's defeat at Actium, the queen was stripped of her titles and political power, completing the conquest of her person. Instead of being Isis, goddess mother of Horus (assimilated with Caesarian), she was a whore (*incesti meretrix regina Canopi* in Prop. 3.11.39) who exhausted herself in sex with her own slaves (*famulos inter femina trita suos* in Prop. 3.11.30). Instead of being a legitimate wife to Antony, as her propaganda claimed, she was an *Aegyptia coniunx* (Ver. *Aen.* 8.688) or a false *coniunx* demanding an 'obscene bride-price' (Prop. 3.11.31). For the Romans, a foreigner, even a foreign queen, could not be a *real* bride of a Roman citizen, and so the title '*coniunx*' carried with it the implication of falsity and mockery.<sup>221</sup> Far from being the savior of Asia,<sup>222</sup> Cleopatra

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<sup>215</sup> For a comprehensive collection of sources on Cleopatra from contemporary Roman literature through the subsequent centuries, see Prudence J. Jones, *Cleopatra: A Sourcebook* (University of Oklahoma Press, 2006).

<sup>216</sup> Cass. Dio 43.27.3. Caesar was married to a wealthy, elite Roman matron Calpurnia, and Cleopatra's presence in Rome was an embarrassment to her and her family. Their dalliance also provided ample fodder for anti-Caesarian political invective.

<sup>217</sup> App. *B.C.* 2.84.

<sup>218</sup> She was also rumoured to have taken Pompey's son Gnaeus her lover as well as Caesar (Plu. *Ant.* 25).

<sup>219</sup> Grace Harriet Macurdy, *Hellenistic Queens: A Study of Woman-Power in Macedonia, Seleucid Syria and Ptolemaic Egypt* (Chicago: Ares Publishers Inc., 1932), 150.

<sup>220</sup> Wyke, "Augustan Cleopatras," 102-03.

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

<sup>222</sup> *Sibylline Oracles* 3.350-80.

was for the Romans a *fatale monstrum*,<sup>223</sup> a perversion of social order and legitimate authority, and a power-hungry foreign female bent on the destruction of the Roman world.

Cleopatra's image as a *dux femina* became nearly canonical for depictions of militant barbarian women in subsequent historical texts. She was the precursor to Cartimandua, Boudicca and Zenobia and the embodiment of the dangers inherent in allowing a woman to attain political power and authority. To the Romans, her command was illegitimate from its inception. Cleopatra bribed Antony's advisor Canidius to make certain that Antony allowed her to remain a part of the battle, arguing that her sailors would be heartened by her presence, and that she was no stranger to military stratagem, having learned from Antony himself.<sup>224</sup> She also manipulated Antony into believing that the only means of victory was through a naval battle, with Cleopatra's forces being the key participants (Plu. *Ant.* 61); she persuaded him in spite of the arguments of his generals, who knew their naval forces to be inferior to those of Octavian (Plu. *Ant.* 63). Her petulant insistence on such an ill-advised stratagem reflected more on the character of Antony than Cleopatra. Once Caesar's brilliant general, Antony became the slave of a woman who usurped his command. His character was further impugned by the events which followed. Cleopatra, being a weak, foreign woman, could not wait for the outcome of the battle, and so fled before the victor was determined (Cass. Dio 50.33). Antony, more concerned with his lover than his army, turned his ship and sailed after her, leaving the Antonian forces without a leader.<sup>225</sup>

In Augustan propaganda, the very fact that a foreign woman was leading the army opposing Rome was a clear indication of Roman superiority. Octavian's speech before the Battle of Actium, recreated in Dio 50.24.3-7, rallies the troops to fight, citing the ludicrousness of fighting a woman's army; it was unimaginable that the people who defeated Pyrrhus, Philip, Perseus and Antiochus should fear a slavish, effeminate eastern army of tyrannical women and slaves. Cleopatra's barbarian forces were no match for the civilized army of the Romans; the queen rallied her troops not with a battle harangue, but a rattling *sistrum* (Ver. *Aen.* 6.696), and her chattering Anubis was no match for stalwart Jove (Prop. 3.11.30). Propertius asks why the Romans ought to fear the threat of a woman (*femineo Marte* 3.11.58) and denounces women's weapons – Rome conquered and 'a woman paid the price' (4.6.22).<sup>226</sup> Roman discourse on Egypt itself employed the same themes. Eastern men were effeminate and slavish, while the women took power and authority in tyranny, which is in itself a perversion of natural order and proof of the Egyptian men's inferiority. In the *Sibylline Oracles* (3.350-80) originating in Egypt written *before* Actium, a woman is prophesied to embody 'conquering Asia' and avenge Egypt. In the *Oracles* written *after* Actium (3.75-92), a woman from Asia will only bring

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<sup>223</sup> Hor. *Ode* 1.37.21.

<sup>224</sup> Plu. *Ant.* 56.

<sup>225</sup> Plutarch (*Ant.* 66) provides a poignant picture of the lovers' flight, describing Antony's soul as living inside Cleopatra, giving him no choice but to follow after her.

<sup>226</sup> Martial too (*Ep.* 4.11.4) derides Antony for carrying the arms of a "Pharian" wife (Pharos referring to the lighthouse of Alexandria).

suffering, the ruin of the entire Mediterranean world.<sup>227</sup> Antony, in 'marrying' a foreign wife, relocating his power base to Alexandria and taking up the trappings of eastern monarchy, was identified in this discourse with the Egyptians. His character and desire were antithetical to Republican ideologies of masculine authority in the Augustan propaganda that followed. Octavian, wishing to make his conflict with Antony not a civil war, but a conflict to preserve Roman *libertas* threatened by Eastern tyranny, effectively vilified Antony and his consort.<sup>228</sup> Thus Cleopatra's character was defamed to support the political invective aimed more at Antony and his politics. The image of the *dux femina* was particularly potent, and bolstered the criticism against Antony. Only a weak and effeminate man would allow not one, but two women to usurp his authority as general and fight for him instead. To portray him as giving military access to his wives also neatly incorporated one of the chief characteristics of tyranny, the conflation of public and private, and the abuses that would result of this.

### **Women and Influence**

In Chapter Two we saw the portrayal of Messalina's powerful hold over Claudius. We now see that in the Republic there were women with much influence over political men. It was expected that women would exercise influence at home,<sup>229</sup> but there was always the fear of women having *too much* influence over their powerful spouses and lovers – influence that would extend beyond the *domus* and shape Roman politics. Politicians of the Republic were expected to be conspicuous. While a woman's influence was private and insidious, masculine political activity was meant to take place in full view of the people as a check on a man's character and administration. Such actions were notable and open to observation.<sup>230</sup> A politician's home was also supposed to be open to public view – through the morning *salutatio* it became a locus of political power and activity. When M. Livius Drusus was building his house on the Palatine in the early 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C., the architect planned to build it so that it was highly decorated but it concealed all activity within. M. Livius responded, "if you have any kind of skill, you will build my house so that, no matter what I am doing, everyone can see it."<sup>231</sup> This openness and conspicuousness was an intrinsic part of Republican political ideology. To hide one's actions was sinister and feminine, possibly even conspiratorial. Here though there is already a contradiction in ideal and reality. Women had influence over their husbands at home, but this influence should not be seen.<sup>232</sup> For the Republican politician, all of his activity was made public, or should at least be seen as such. His home was open to the view of his political peers. Thus even the traditional activity of a woman, that

<sup>227</sup> Jones, *Cleopatra: A Sourcebook*, 43-45, Wyke, "Augustan Cleopatras," 104-05.

<sup>228</sup> Wyke, "Augustan Cleopatras," 108.

<sup>229</sup> Fischler, "Social Stereotypes," 125. See Chapter Two, note 42.

<sup>230</sup> Hillard, "On the Stage, Behind the Curtain," 43.

<sup>231</sup> *Si quid in te artis est, ita compone domum meam, ut, quidquid agam, ab omnibus perspici possit.* Vell. Pat. 2.14.3; Plut. *Mor.* 800F. Milnor, *Gender, Domesticity and the Age of Augustus*, 65.

<sup>232</sup> Hillard, "Republican Politics, Women and the Evidence," 167.

of exercising some influence over her spouse in the home, undermined the conspicuous nature of Republican political activity.

Women's reputation for being insidious and manipulative made them even more suspect when they had access to men who could affect the course of Roman politics. With the Republican Roman constitution's inclusion of annuality and collegiality, however, there was less opportunity for women to shape the course of Roman politics. Each politician was checked by his peers in office, as well as the body of senators. But during the Late Republic there was a shift; the checks and balances were no longer quite as strong. Certain politicians began to have more prominence over their peers. Existing Roman gender anxiety manifested itself in the larger socio-political tension of the period. Roman politicians, affronted by the rise of their former peers, lashed out with political invective. A man's close association with women provided an excellent opportunity to undermine his authority. Roman gender anxiety provided a precedent for invective aimed at men giving too much power to their female associates. This political invective then became a precedent for future tension regarding women's roles, thereby perpetuating the gender anxiety in each generation.

### *Chelidon*

The most salacious account of a woman's influence over a man in power was that of Verres and Chelidon. In 70 B.C. Cicero published the *Verrine Orations*, based on the *repetundae* trials of Verres for his governorship in Sicily from 73-71 B.C. In these attacks on Verres' actions in Sicily, Cicero incorporated invective against Verres' earlier actions during his praetorship in 74 B.C. In one of the highlights of the *Verrine Orations*, Cicero states that Verres was completely ruled by his *meretrix*, or prostitute, Chelidon. Cicero defames Verres' character by insisting that during his praetorship, Verres gave all judicial authority to his prostitute, perverting both political *and* social order. Important judgment was passed on the whim of a woman – any woman would have done to make the point; Cicero's speech is all the more titillating because Chelidon was also a *prostitute* – a prostitute ordering about the praetor, one who should by legal rights give orders, not take them.<sup>233</sup>

Cicero's account follows much the same line as Tacitus' and Dio's accounts of Messalina and Claudius. Verres became praetor of the city and very quickly allowed himself to be manipulated by his prostitute lover Chelidon. Throngs of senators and Roman elite that ought to have been attending the praetor's court crowded her house (*Verr.* 2.1.120 and 2.1.136f). She heard their cases, and (if it pleased her) she would see that Verres judged in their favour. Verres' reputation for allowing her influence was so widely known that there was not a single person in Italy who did not know to whom they had to plead their case (*Verr.* 2.5.34). Cicero shames Verres, asking, "*Do you feel no shame, Verres, that your conduct as a praetor has been wholly governed by a woman...?*" (*Verr.* 2.1.140).

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<sup>233</sup> Hillard, "On the Stage, Behind the Curtain," 44.



The authority of a praetor was in the hands of a woman, upsetting the natural order of Roman society and politics. The secrecy was stressed – these meetings took place in her home, a den of iniquity and vulgarity. The perversion of justice was also emphasized - Chelidon made a mockery of due process, whispering in the praetor's ear. Verres was emasculated by giving up the dignities and responsibilities of his office; he was enslaved to a woman who should be ruled herself, not the other way around.<sup>234</sup> Ostensibly this was a cautionary tale of the dangers inherent in women gaining access to men with power. A woman would influence the men attached to her and pervert the social, political and judicial system. This attack incorporated several motifs of tyranny, accusing Verres of combining house and state as well as charging him with violations of *lex*, compromising the rights of the citizenry.

This invective, however, is not only leveled at Chelidon. Cicero would make no mention of her if it would not harm the man to whom she was attached. It was not really her activities, or her involvement with Verres, that were on trial – it was his lack of propriety and his active enslavement of self that Cicero wished to bring to attention. Verres was a weak administrator, lacked agency to perform his elected duties, and allowed the justice of Rome to be debased during his office. The Chelidon episode was meant to prove that even before Verres was a corrupt provincial governor, he showed evidence of perversion and maladministration at Rome. The anxiety over women close to power was actually a byproduct of the proceedings, a warning to future administrators and office holders and a precedent for future authors, like Tacitus and Dio.

### *Praecia*

In an anecdote of the Late Republic, the beautiful courtesan Praecia made provisions that her lover Lucullus be granted consular command in the east in 74 B.C. It was asserted that she had Cethegus' favour and so managed to influence and persuade him in some cases. Lucullus originally managed access to Praecia through various gifts.<sup>235</sup> In ordinary circumstances, such influence and aid would not be considered untraditional. Elite Roman women often persuaded their male relations in various business and social transactions, and their favour was gained by family clients through gifts or promises. In this case, however, the actions of a woman on behalf of a male associate were unacceptable, given their relationship. In addition, it was not a husband that Praecia was seeking to influence, but an independent person of authority. The sexual impropriety of the circumstances rendered the aid dishonest and incurred the censure of Lucullus' political enemies.<sup>236</sup> As with the Chelidon episode, the sexual impropriety of the relationship provided more rhetorical impact for the political invective – women's political action was inextricably linked to their sexual activity. This episode too has more to do with Cethegus' character than Praecia's. In Plu. *Luc.* 6.1-4 it is stated that, like Verres, Cethegus did nothing without Praecia's approval. This is then political rhetoric

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<sup>234</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>235</sup> Plu. *Luc.* 6.

<sup>236</sup> Dixon, "A Family Business," 108.

following the motif of the politician who gave up his agency to others. Cethegus also seems to have incurred political censure for his factionism. In 74 B.C. he had a *populares* power base, but his support of Lucullus and Lucullus' consular colleague Cotta, and their friend M. Antonius shifted his loyalties to the Sullan establishment, a betrayal of his previous policies. It is unsurprising that his former friends, now political enemies would seek to defame Cethegus' character, and his association with a celebrated prostitute fit very well into the motifs of impassioned rhetorical invective.<sup>237</sup>

### *Servilia*

Another lady of the Late Republic, Servilia, mother of Brutus and half-sister to the Younger Cato, was a woman who moved in the most elite circles. She was married to two ex-consuls, connected by marriage to many of the best families, and had influence with many prominent politicians. Having power through familial connection was the most traditional means by which men and women could possess authority and wield influence in Rome, and Servilia also possessed vast amounts of wealth through her own family and her two husbands. Servilia's elite status made her paradoxically both irreproachable and open to censure. Because she was attached to the younger Cato, a very powerful politician, rumours began to surface that she was wielding inappropriate influence over him. Since Servilia could be expected to try to influence her male relations, the abuse of their relationship had more to do with Cato than Servilia. His political opponents sought to undermine his authority, and they used the popular trope of feminine influence to do so. Rumours circulated that Servilia mothered and coddled him, gossip more with the intent to emasculate Cato than to criticize Servilia. Like Verres, Cato was a praetor, and the insinuation was that Servilia, like Chelidon, had usurped (or at least had the potential to usurp) Cato's political power.<sup>238</sup>

It was when Caesar came to political prominence that Servilia became subject to nasty censure herself. Cicero snidely remarked (*ad Att.* 2.24.3) that Servilia had considerable influence with Caesar due to her prowess in the bedroom. He even remarked (if the late sources are accurate) that she prostituted her own daughter Tertia to Caesar for political favours.<sup>239</sup> Once again, the motif of the promiscuous matron is utilized. All of Servilia's personal power and agency was stripped away from her and she was cast in the role of a *meretrix*, or worse, a *lena*.<sup>240</sup> Caesar was too large a target, and Servilia too prominent a woman for their association to escape notice. As with many of the preceding episodes, it was not just Servilia's character at issue here. Rather, it was also Caesar's character that was impugned by rumours of extra-marital dalliance and

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<sup>237</sup> Hillard, "Republican Politics, Women and the Evidence," 168-69.

<sup>238</sup> Hillard, "On the Stage, Behind the Curtain," 53-54.

<sup>239</sup> Caesar had given Servilia many presents during the civil war, and from some confiscations he gave her several estates at a very low price. Cicero said she had gotten the property at a third off (*tertia deducta*), a play on words to imply that she had sold him the favours of her daughter Tertia in exchange (Suet. *div. Iul.* 50).

<sup>240</sup> Hillard, "On the Stage, Behind the Curtain," 54.

claims of poor administration (taking bribes and making large favours of the misfortunes of others).

The contrast between the domineering wench and the good matron, employed in anecdotes and political invective, often for the purpose of slandering men's characters, resulted in the deeper entrenchment of Roman gender tension and anxiety. These early precedents of women behaving badly perpetuated the stereotype of the 'wicked woman' in Roman literature and culture. The 'bad girls' of the Late Republic were often used to highlight the political injustices of the time, in accusations of tyranny between political enemies. To show that a politician had violated the boundaries between public and private could be used to assert that he had violated other precepts of good government as well. Such 'evidence' of female treachery and manipulation justified future censure of elite Roman women close to power, such as the Julio-Claudian wives, daughters and sisters. The chaotic socio-political climate in Rome, coupled with the intensified public gaze turned inward on the private actions of women resultant of Augustus' moral legislation, made the women of that later period a prime target for censure. The excess and social disorder of the early empire could be made manifest through depictions of elite female behaviour. The tropes and motifs developed throughout the Republic were thoroughly cultivated by the time Tacitus and Dio were writing their histories, as can be seen in Chapter Two.

In Chapter Four the criticism of provincial officials' wives and families will be explored, as the disparagement of these women originates in the same rhetorical tradition. The power they held as the wives of governors and officials, who had in essence a monarchy in their provinces, was akin to that of imperial women, and thus the areas of criticism were mirrored there, as were the motifs of the virago/whore and the eastern despot.

## Chapter 4: Provincial Women Close to Power

“It was to the wives that the basest of the provincials at once attached themselves; it was the wife who took in hand and transacted business. There were two potentates to salute in the streets; two government houses; and the more headstrong and autocratic orders came from the women.”<sup>241</sup>

An examination of invective against the female accompaniment of government officials in the provinces reveals the same trends, themes and ideals as the disparagement of both powerful women of the Republic and those of the Julio-Claudian dynasty. The types of criticisms, the ostensible motivations attributed to the women, and the motivations on the part of the authors developed concurrently with those of the Roman women closer to the capital. The anecdotes involving women in the provinces during the Republic focus strongly on tales of women who had a public presence and interfered in politics and administration via insidious influence. After the revision of the *repetundae* legislation to include governors' wives, the criticisms centered on administration and greed. As in the anecdotes of women in the Republic and the empire, there was harsh censure for women who acted militarily, as this was one of the most transgressive actions of a woman. The criticisms of women in the provinces increased as the censure of imperial women grew harsher, in order to reflect the chaos and tyranny at the capital, which seemed to infect the whole empire with its excess and social upset.

It is difficult to determine the extent to which Roman women were traveling to the provinces during the Republic. In 184 B.C. the elder Cato railed against the practice of provincials issuing statues of governors' female relations, but he was unsuccessful in having this legally prohibited.<sup>242</sup> There are several documented cases of epigraphical evidence for the honourific mention of governors' female relations in the provinces,<sup>243</sup> but in most cases, without the benefit of an historical narrative to corroborate the data, it cannot be determined whether or not these women were actually present in the provinces. In some cases it is actually confirmed that the women themselves were *not* present.<sup>244</sup> This fact problematizes any attempt to reconstruct the extent to which women accompanied their male relatives into the provinces during the Republic, as well as any attempt to discover the acceptability of this practice to elite Roman males of the period. As Rome progressed into the Late Republican period, there was a clear shift in attitude towards the power and visibility of Roman women in the provinces and the capital. Reaction to women close to power in the provinces by this period generally reflected the tension resultant of a monarchical regime (triumviral and imperial) and the shifting gender roles within it. Since the provinces had always been in essence miniature

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<sup>241</sup> Tac. *Ann.* 3.33.

<sup>242</sup> Pliny *NH* 34.31.

<sup>243</sup> Kajava, "Roman Senatorial Women and the Greek East. Epigraphical Evidence from the Republican and Augustan Period."

<sup>244</sup> For instance, Pomponia, wife of Q. Tullius Cicero (brother of Cicero, governor of Asia [61-58 B.C.]) remained at home in Rome, which we know from Cicero's letters (*Att.* 2.1.11; 3.4; 4.1.7), but was honoured in Samos. See Kajava, "Roman Senatorial Women," 91.

monarchies, the women of governors' families came under scrutiny following the ideological tensions created by the publicity and power of the imperial wives under the newfound Roman monarchy. The fear that women would seek to aggrandize themselves and their families (the assertion of their *domus*) at the expense of the good of the province and state (the *res publica*) motivated much of the criticism surrounding them, as such a conflation had implications of monarchical abuse of power.

The criticisms developing concurrently in episodes of the provinces involved similar offenses as those of women at Rome during the Republic and early Empire. During the Republic, women's influence over Roman governors and officials was a matter of concern. As tensions became more fully realized during the early imperial period, and focus was directed onto the female relatives of officials living abroad, women's administration became an area for censure, especially after the amendment of *repetundae* legislation.<sup>245</sup> Women's military and political involvement were always greatly disturbing to the elite male author. As seen in the previous chapters, the women were attributed with a tendency towards sexual depravity and rebellion against social norms. This motivated them towards transgressive behaviour. As well, it was asserted that these women were consumed by *muliebris aemulatio*; that affliction caused them to participate in masculine competition for power and influence, but with a woman's pettiness and susceptibility to mental weakness.

As was the case with the criticized women of the Republic and early Empire, the censured women close to power in the provinces were rarely disparaged for their own lack of merit; the criticisms were generally motivated by the author's desire to lash out at the ruling regime and to relate rhetorical *topoi* or propaganda that could be appreciated by the reader. The intent too was to criticize the men to whom these women were attached. Often a writer was motivated by all of these. The monarchical nature of provincial government created, in effect, royal houses when officials began bringing their families along with their entourages. Unlike the traditional offices of the *cursus honourum*, the capacity and authority of a provincial governor were not challenged by a colleague in power. As sole authority in business, administration and military, a governor held court in his home. His wife, or other female relative, already accustomed to influencing and carrying out matters of domestic business,<sup>246</sup> became instrumental in influencing provincial business. In essence (it seemed to the ancient authors), the entire province became a woman's *domus* and locus of authority. The wife of a governor befriended the worst provincials, took part in business and forced equal "rule" with her husband, but her "rule" was the harsher of the two.<sup>247</sup> This *auctoritas* and high public profile were in ideological opposition to traditional gender roles in Roman society. The nature of Roman

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<sup>245</sup> Women of the province, on the other hand, were not censured for doing business with the provincial governor through their procurators. Cicero himself wrote to a provincial governor on behalf of a female acquaintance in Asia. Cic. *Fam.* 13.72; Marshall, "Roman Women and the Provinces," 116.

<sup>246</sup> See Dixon, "A Family Business.", Dixon, "Family Finances.", Fischler, "Social Stereotypes.", Hillard, "Republican Politics, Women and the Evidence."

<sup>247</sup> Tac. *Ann.* 3.33.

provincial government had much in common with the ideas of tyranny in monarchy imported into Roman culture. The provincial governor, as sole ruler, was responsible for law, justice, commerce and the military in his province; his word was absolute. He was also accompanied now by his family, which functioned as a royal house in the 'monarchy' of the provinces. Because government was located in the person of the governor (and wherever he traveled was the locus of government<sup>248</sup>), the boundaries of public and private were inextricably blurred. As a result, accusations of a governor's use of *vis*, his *superbia*, *libido* and *crudelitas* (the characteristics of a tyrant<sup>249</sup>) were frequent in the literature involving provincial episodes. Because women featured strongly in episodes of tyranny in the East, those Roman authors seeking to cast their political opponents as tyrants incorporated women into the attacks, lending legitimacy to their accusations of tyranny.

Attacks on provincial administration were generally also attacks on the ruling regime at the capital. Though the shifting of gender norms likely occurred during the Late Republic following Sulla's dictatorship and his establishing the precedent for allowing wives to accompany officials into the provinces,<sup>250</sup> later Roman authors preferred to attack Tiberius' active approval and encouragement of the practice as a means of attacking his imperial regime. The emperor's reputation for undermining the army and his lack of expansionist politics made him unpopular with traditionalists, and his role in the breakdown of Roman gender norms in provincial *loci* of power provided authors with an excuse for disparagement.

The ancient sources often exploited their material for propagandistic or rhetorical purposes. Gaius Gracchus intended in his *De legibus promulgatis*<sup>251</sup> of 122 B.C. to expose the corruption of officials traveling outside of Rome and the abuse of their authority. He describes a trip made by a consul and his wife; the wife requested the use of the local baths, and when these were not turned over to her quickly enough and were not clean enough, she complained to her husband. The consul then ordered the '*civitatis nobilissimus homo*' to be stripped naked and flogged for the offense. Gracchus' use of the wife in the episode serves to demonstrate the tyrannical aspect of the consul who would abuse his authority at the behest of a woman. The consul behaves like the Greek tragedy-tyrant, displaying his *superbia* with the flouting of law and moral right, as well as his *crudelitas* in the flogging of the 'best man' in town.

To highlight Tiberius' negative policy of allowing officials' wives into the provinces, many authors (chief among them Tacitus) enumerated the incidences of women involved in *repetundae* trials for provincial mismanagement. To expose Tiberius' hatred and ill-treatment of his more popular family members, the episodes of Plancina's misbehaviour were emphasized. Her misconduct sullied her husband Piso's

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<sup>248</sup> For an example of the mobile nature of a governor's court, see A. J. Marshall, "Governors on the Move," *Phoenix* 20, no. 3 (1966).

<sup>249</sup> Dunkle, "The Greek Tyrant," 168-69.

<sup>250</sup> Kajava, "Roman Sentatorial Women and the Greek East. Epigraphical Evidence from the Republican and Augustan Period," 59-60.

<sup>251</sup> Malcovati 4, pp. 191f., fr. 48.

reputation, and through him Tiberius' character. Conversely, when it suited the purposes of the author, powerful women in the provinces could be shown to embody the 'good matron' motif. Sosia Galla was an elite woman persecuted for her loyalty to Agrippina Maior, Tiberius' daughter-in-law and political enemy. She was depicted as a victim of Tiberius' corruption, brought up on trumped up charges of provincial maladministration along with her husband to conceal the real reason for her persecution.<sup>252</sup> Agricola, the acclaimed general persecuted by the 'wicked' emperor Domitian, brought his wife and daughter on campaign with him. Because Agricola was being lauded by the author to stand in opposition to the terrible Domitian, it would not do to disparage such a man for bringing his female relations into his provinces with him, or to censure their conduct while with him.<sup>253</sup> Seneca praised his aunt for her invisibility while her husband was governor of Egypt for sixteen years.<sup>254</sup> This, of course, reflects well on him for having such a virtuous female relation who showed forbearance in the face of corruption. Tacitus also mentions, in passing, the wife of Luceius Albinus, procurator in North Africa, who threw herself in front of his murderers and was slain with her husband.<sup>255</sup> Tacitus felt favourable towards this politician, and so allowed him a virtuous wife in the narrative.

Thus, it is clear that much like at Rome during the Republic and Empire, there were examples of female relations of Roman officials observing proper, traditional decorum. Since so many authors, however, were much more interested in the character of the 'bad official's wife', a survey of the criticisms applied to her will be explored, along with the author's motivations for employing the trope. This chapter will be divided, as the previous, into themes: the involvement of provincial officials' female relations in business and administration, in politics, and in military spheres, with an examination of the criticisms for their ostensible motivations, as well as the deeper intentions of the author for expressing such censure, such as anxiety over the conflation of *domus* and *res publica* and the tyrannical implications of monarchical government.

### **The Origins of Officials' Wives in the Provinces and Criticisms**

During the Republic it was rare, or at least rarely recorded, for a governor to take his wife to his assigned province with him; tradition prevented the practice.<sup>256</sup> The provinces were often dangerous frontiers, unsuitable to proper matrons. Female relations would be a burden and a safety risk,<sup>257</sup> and a wife was far more useful at home while her

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<sup>252</sup> Tac. *Ann.* 4.19.

<sup>253</sup> Tac. *Agr.* 6.3 (Asia), 29.1 (Britain).

<sup>254</sup> *Cons. Helv.* 19.6. Hemelrijk, "Masculinity and Femininity in the *Laudatio Turiae*."

<sup>255</sup> Tac. *Hist.* 2.59.

<sup>256</sup> Caecilia Metella established the convention in the Late Republic, but Augustus curtailed it, allowing legates to see their wives only in the winter months (Suet. *Aug.* 24.1). See also Marshall, "Roman Women and the Provinces," 119.

<sup>257</sup> For instance, during a conflict with Armenia, Caesennius Pactus weakened his already strained resources to divert troops to protect his wife and son. After the crushing rout that

husband was on assignment. There are many literary examples of the dutiful wife, bidding farewell to her husband at the city gates.<sup>258</sup> Decorum dictated that she express marital devotion by publicly showing her support and then by privately keeping her husband informed of political and family affairs to safeguard his senatorial interests in his absence.<sup>259</sup> In the Greek East a governor's wife might receive an honorary statue to accompany her husband's, but, as previously stated, it was unlikely that most of these women were personally present in the provinces.

During the civil wars, the political situation changed and women began to travel more frequently. Caecilia Metella accompanied Sulla to Athens in 86 B.C.,<sup>260</sup> and this established precedent for the wives of political refugees and of the triumviral members some years later.<sup>261</sup> Some elite wives of the Late Republic fled from Rome with their husbands. Cornelia, daughter of Metellus Scipio, married Pompey in 52 and fled with him to Egypt. After witnessing his murder, she returned to Rome.<sup>262</sup> Fulvia stayed at her husband Marc Antony's camp at Brundisium in 44 B.C., and his next wife Octavia accompanied Antony to Athens during his appointment there (from 40-36 B.C.), during which time the citizens granted her many honours.<sup>263</sup> Fulvia was censured for her participation in Antony's provincial affairs, while Octavia was renowned for her feminine decorum. As was demonstrated in the previous chapter, the difference in the receptions of these two women depended on the propaganda campaign launched by Octavian against Antony.

After the chaos of the civil wars and the socio-cultural instability it caused, Augustus attempted to re-establish the former austerity in provincial governance and to reaffirm the military values of the command by prohibiting extended visits by wives of governors.<sup>264</sup> While Republican governors' terms were restricted to the traditional one year, with a possible extension of an extra year, such a condition was inoffensive. Under

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followed, Paetus was blamed for his bad judgment in diverting resources to safeguard his family. See Tac. *Ann.* 15.10; *Ibid.*: 122.

<sup>258</sup> Cic. *Att.* 4.1.4; 7.2.2; *Fam.* 14.5; Seneca, *Controv.* 9.25.1; *Ibid.*: 113.

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid.*: 113-14. This also held true for the wives of exiled citizens – their role was not to accompany their husbands into exile (though this was a praiseworthy act [*App. B.C.* 4.39]), but to campaign for their husbands' recall (Ovid *Tristia* 1.3.79f; Tac. *Hist.* 4.67; Plut. *Amat.* 25; Dio 66.3; 66.16; Vell. Pat. 2.67.2).

<sup>260</sup> Plut. *Sull.* 6.12; 13.1; 22.1; Sen. *de Matrim.* 63.

<sup>261</sup> Marshall, "Tacitus and the Governor's Lady," 11.

<sup>262</sup> Plut. *Pomp.* 74.76f; Other refugee wives: Val. Max. 6.7.3; *App. B.C.* 4.39f, 48; Cass. Dio 54.7.1.

<sup>263</sup> Fulvia: Cic. *Phil.* 5.22; 13.18. Octavia: Plut. *Ant.* 33.3; *App. Bell. Civ.* 5.76. Octavia received so many honours, in fact, that Cleopatra was made very jealous when she accompanied Antony there in 39 B.C.

<sup>264</sup> Suet. *Aug.* 24.1, Marshall, "Roman Women and the Provinces," 118-19, Marshall, "Tacitus and the Governor's Lady," 12. Augustus himself, though, had often brought Livia along 'on tour' (Tac. *Ann.* 3.34.6).



Augustus' principate, however, governors were appointed for 3-year periods.<sup>265</sup> During his successor Tiberius' reign, the terms of governors were further prorogated, and officials in both the provincial and senatorial provinces were then spending extended periods of time away from Rome and their families.<sup>266</sup> Perhaps to make long service more appealing, Tiberius abolished the traditional rule and permitted the female relations of officials to accompany these men on their posts. Tacitus hints that Tiberius broke with established tradition to undermine the morale of the armies, already undercut by lengthy encampment without action.<sup>267</sup> More likely, this measure was conceived to mollify the governors compelled to remain abroad beyond the traditional term of service checking the idle legions.<sup>268</sup>

The criticism of women close to power, in the provinces or otherwise, was in practice long before Tiberius gave women's presence official sanction. This measure only gave critics a new focus for their censure.<sup>269</sup> Women were reflections of their husbands, and so their officially recognized presence simply provided more material for their husbands' detractors. Tacitus (who seems to have had a particular distaste for women's involvement in any type of political activity) does not mention this practice merely for the sake of denouncing the power it opened up to women - it was also a comment on the increasingly civilian nature of provincial posts. The implication was that even those governors in command of an impressive military force were compelled into idleness by Tiberius' passive foreign policy. This extension of the Augustan precedent<sup>270</sup> seemed to further undermine Republican *virtus*; the armies were largely reactionary, and early in Tiberius' reign spent more time in domestic conflict (i.e. mutiny) than in engaging the enemy.<sup>271</sup> By allowing women into the camps, it was an acknowledgment of the passive nature of the provincial post.<sup>272</sup>

In 21 A.D., the Senators desired to reestablish Republican tradition and prohibit wives from accompanying officials during their posts in the provinces, and the resultant debate was a succinct summary of male anxiety regarding women close to power and the stereotypes associated with female power and ambition. The main concerns focused on the participation of women in the military activities of the camps, as well as the

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<sup>265</sup> P. A. Brunt, "Charges of Provincial Maladministration under the Early Empire," *Historia* 10 (1961): 206.

<sup>266</sup> Tac. *Ann.* 1.80; Marshall, "Roman Women and the Provinces," 119.

<sup>267</sup> Tacitus exaggerates the problem; women had almost always had a place in or around the military camps. Official sanctioning for officers' wives did not begin the practice, just the criticism for actively allowing it.

<sup>268</sup> Marshall, "Ladies in Waiting," 169.

<sup>269</sup> Marshall, "Roman Women and the Provinces," 126.

<sup>270</sup> Augustus had made a point of establishing the boundaries of the empire and had wished for future emperors to maintain those borders, without engaging in further imperialistic expansion.

<sup>271</sup> Marshall, "Ladies in Waiting," 167. See also Tac. *Ann.* 1.16; Tac. *Ann.* 1.31.

<sup>272</sup> This, however, is an oversimplification by Tacitus; even in the most peaceful provinces, there was the problem of brigandage, marauding hillsmen and piracy. See Marshall, "Roman Women and the Provinces," 111.

opportunities for provincial maladministration attendant to their presence; many complaints from the provinces involved extortion by governors' wives. *Muliebris aemulatio* was cited as the instigator for feminine trouble, and the speaker implied that women would commit various sexual indiscretions if exposed to the new environment of the provinces. In Catonian rhetorical fashion,<sup>273</sup> the speaker asserted that if given free reign, the wives of officials would dominate their husbands at home, the *fora* and the camps.<sup>274</sup> The counterargument suggested that women were better safeguarded with their husbands, as their 'feminine weakness' would open them up to scandalous sexual misbehaviour if left to their own devices at Rome.

Although this debate was ostensibly about the increase of female power and the dangers inherent in allowing women to gain access to the provinces, areas rich in wealth as well as political and military importance, in fact it had more to do with Tacitus' concerns about the loss of senatorial agency and the detrimental effects of the Julio-Claudian ruling regime. Tacitus had repeatedly witnessed the importance of the provinces to Roman authority. He had seen and studied the patterns of mutiny among the provincial legions,<sup>275</sup> the power that derives from the command of provincial governors and *imperators*, and how that power translated into politics for ascension to the principate.<sup>276</sup> Immediately preceding the 'debate' were the power politics of Piso and Germanicus in the provinces, which ended in the death of the imperial heir and skirmishes just short of civil war.<sup>277</sup> Tacitus viewed these affairs as being the direct result of feminine scheming; Livia was responsible for inciting *muliebris aemulatio* towards Agrippina in Plancina, both of whom overstepped the bounds of feminine propriety while accompanying their husbands in the provinces.<sup>278</sup> Most commentary regarding women was made with the intent of exposing weaknesses either in the imperial regime itself and its inherent tyranny or in the characters of the men connected to the

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<sup>273</sup> For a detailed examination of Tacitus' use of Cato's speech on the Lex Oppia as a model for his senatorial debate, see Ginsburg, "*In Maiores Certamina*," Santoro L'Hoir, "Tacitus and Women's Usurpation of Power."

<sup>274</sup> Tac. *Ann.* 3.33.

<sup>275</sup> In Pannonia: *Ann.* 1.16f; in Germany: *Ann.* 1.31f and renewed in 1.39; in Africa: *Ann.* 2.52; in Syria (Piso and Plancina): *Ann.* 2.77.

<sup>276</sup> Well-summarized at *Hist.* 2.76. This can be seen with regard to the year of the four emperors, 69 A.D.; Galba was governor in Hispania Tarranconensis, elevated by the Senate and his legions to be emperor. When the army became displeased with their choice, the legions in Germania Inferior named Vitellius emperor (*Hist.* 1.52-58). Otho, the Senate's choice as successor to Galba, was defeated by Vitellius' legions (*Hist.* 2.45). Meanwhile, Vespasian's legions in Aegyptus, Iudaea and Syria named him emperor, a choice also supported by the governor of Syria (*Hist.* 2.76f).

<sup>277</sup> Tac. *Ann.* 2.55 (Piso stirring the legions) and 2.57 (the open enmity between them), 2.72 (death of Germanicus), 2.77 (skirmishes).

<sup>278</sup> Santoro L'Hoir, "Tacitus and Women's Usurpation of Power," 17. *Muliebris aemulatio*: Tac. *Ann.* 2.43; Agrippina's impropriety: 1.69; Plancina's impropriety: 2.55, 2.75.

female offenders.<sup>279</sup> The men acted inappropriately in the provinces and so their wives (considered weak by nature and susceptible to all manner of evil) were magnified versions of their husbands' misconduct.

### Women and Administration

The wives of government officials on provincial assignment had garnered a negative reputation long before Tacitus established 'the wicked governor's wife' as a character in his *Annals*. These women were gossipy or gossiped about, intrusive and rapacious. While women were expected to tend the business of the *domus*, the convention became problematic when the *domus* was a Roman province. Male fear about the conflation of *domus* and *res publica* mapped itself onto provincial administration much as it did with the imperial household of the Julio-Claudian principates. When women were placed in close proximity to state power, it was feared that they would subvert the common good for the benefit of the household, the locus of feminine loyalty. Men, whose primary concern was supposed to be the *res publica* and its territories, were then forced into conflict between their state duty and their domestic loyalties. Charges of *repetundae* were the embodiment of the failure to assert the state over the self. Although governors were certainly capable of provincial mismanagement of their own accord,<sup>280</sup> there existed a collective prejudicial belief that if women were introduced into the governor's ideological struggle between self and state, it would be to the detriment of the state.

The first indication of poor management behaviour in a governor's wife was a penchant for gossip or the habit of being the subject of gossip. There was a long Graeco-Roman tradition of the ideal woman's anonymity, that she never be talked of, neither in praise nor blame.<sup>281</sup> In contrast to the ideal, the public notoriety of governors' wives was so typical that Seneca in his praise of his aunt Helvia emphasizes that even though she lived in a province (Egypt) particularly given to gossip, she was not only innocent of any wrongdoing, but was never even talked of at all.<sup>282</sup> The trope of the gossipy governor's wife was also established enough to be appreciated in satire. Juvenal creates an unforgettable image of this character:

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<sup>279</sup> G. Vidén, *Women in Roman Literature*, vol. LVII, *Studia Graeca Et Latina Gothoburgensia* (Västervik: Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis, 1993), 64.

<sup>280</sup> For a list of persons brought up on *repetundae* charges under Tiberius alone, see the list of 'Defendants' in Robert Samuel Rogers, *Criminal Trials and Criminal Legislation under Tiberius*, ed. Joseph William Hewitt, vol. VI, *Philological Monographs Published by the American Philological Association* (Middletown: American Philological Association, 1935). For maladministration more generally, see Brunt, "Charges."

<sup>281</sup> *Pericles' Funeral Oration*, Thuc. 2.46. Part of Cicero's campaign of defamation against Clodia in the *Pro Caelio* (47) was to stress that she was the talk of the town, particularly Baiae, a town with a reputation itself for decadence and luxury (which further emphasized Clodia's infamy). M. R. Lefkowitz, *Heroines and Hysterics* (London: Duckworth, 1981), 35-36.

<sup>282</sup> Sen. *Cons. Helv.* 19.6.

Better to be mad about music, however, than brazenly hurry  
 all over the town, facing the meetings of men, and engaging  
 uniformed generals in conversation in her husband's presence,  
 without any trace of embarrassment and with no milk in her breasts.  
 That kind of woman knows what's happening throughout the world –  
 what Thrace and China are up to, what secrets a stepmother shares  
 with the son, and who's in love, and for whom the ladies are scrambling.  
 She will tell you who made the widow pregnant and in which month...<sup>283</sup>

The gossiping wife would intrude on the public forum and would chatter with powerful men (uniformed generals), putting on airs and assuming herself worthy of such company by virtue of her powerful husband. Juvenal suggests that her transgressive behaviour would transform the governor's wife into a pseudo-man, her breasts dried up from lack of use in the womanly activity of nursing. Such a woman would have no interest in the proper domestic aspects of the home, such as child-rearing and weaving, but instead would seek to aggrandize herself and her *domus* with political machinations and public activity.<sup>284</sup> The bad governor's wife would exploit her transgressive behaviour and use political influence and access for the betterment of her house and self. In the environment of the provinces, such activity worked to the utmost detriment of the administration, both local and national, as it naturally progressed into (or at least was perceived to progress into) extortion. Extortion, especially when it involved women working with their governor husbands, was an indication of tyrannical behaviour in a governor in the political rhetoric of the period.<sup>285</sup>

Beginning in the mid-2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C., a series of laws penalized officials' misbehavior in the provinces. These laws typically imposed financial penalties in direct or double proportion of the damage done, as well as bringing other consequences, depending on the law, such as exile or *infamia*.<sup>286</sup> In 24 A.D.<sup>287</sup> the law was amended by *senatusconsultum* (moved by Cotta) to extend to the wives of governors and government officials on assignment in the provinces. With this new law, husbands were then liable

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<sup>283</sup> Juv. *Sat.* 6.398ff. Translation by Niall Rudd.

<sup>284</sup> Lefkowitz, *Heroines and Hysterics*, 37, Arlene W. Saxonhouse, "Introduction - Public and Private: The Paradigm's Power," in *Stereotypes of Women in Power: Historical Perspectives and Revisionist Views*, ed. Barbara Garlick, Suzanne Dixon, and Pauline Allen, *Contributions in Women's Studies* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1992), 7.

<sup>285</sup> See Cic. *Verr.* 2.3.32.77-34.79.

<sup>286</sup> Richard Bauman, *Crime and Punishment in Ancient Rome* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 22-24, Brunt, "Charges," 189-206.

<sup>287</sup> There is a debate over the exact date. R.S. Rogers, "Criminal Trials and Criminal Legislation under Tiberius (Middletown, 1935), 51, 79 believes that the entry in Ulpian's *Digest* was properly recorded as 20 A.D., dated to the same year as Cotta's consulship. Brunt, "Charges," 198 note 28 and Marshall, "Tacitus and the Governor's Lady," 14 note 6 assert that Ulpian mistakenly conflated the decree's initiator with his previous consulship, which need not have been the case. Tacitus places the *senatusconsultum* in 24 A.D., presumably prior to Sosia Galla's conviction with her husband (*Ann.* 4.20) for charges of *maiestas* (*repetundae* having been dropped for the more extreme charge).

for their wives' conduct, and conversely (to the unfortunate detriment of some) the women could be tried for their husbands' mismanagement. This law, while ostensibly revolutionary, was in keeping with the Augustan precedent of publicizing and politicizing private domestic life. Women were now more often hauled into court and made to act on the judicial stage.

The tensions created by this forced juncture of *res publica* and *domus* now found hostile outlet in the wives of Roman governors. Juvenal and Martial, with biting wit, attack the character of the rapacious governor's wife:

Amongst Libyan tribes your wife, Gallus, has a  
bad reputation; they charge her foully with insatiate  
greed. But these stories are simply lies; she is not at all  
in the habit of receiving favours. What, then, is her  
habit? To give them.<sup>288</sup>

And:

If your staff is above reproach, no long-haired boy is permitted  
to sell your verdicts, and no complaint is attached to your wife,  
(if she doesn't look forward to swooping down through the towns and districts,  
pouncing on cash with her crooked claws, just like a Celaeno),  
you may trace your line to the woodpecker king;<sup>289</sup>

Martial's account of the greedy governor's wife is made humorous by its surprise twist; the reader expects a joke in keeping with the 'rapacious wife' trope, and instead is more amused by the 'authoritative woman as whore' stereotype, the innuendo that rather than receiving monetary favours, Gallus' wife doles out sexual ones.<sup>290</sup> Juvenal's simile is effective for the sinister image it creates. He references the long-standing problem of the governor's retinue and the stereotype of homosexual misconduct by governors on assignment as well as the trope of the greedy wife.<sup>291</sup> Through the hyperbole presented by Juvenal, the reader can appreciate the difficult position of the Roman governor and commiserate with the sorry state of the *res publica* to have such opposition for its interests.

Though the 'greedy governor's wife' stereotype had likely been in place for some time, it was not until Tiberius' principate that men could be held responsible for the

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<sup>288</sup> Martial *Epigrams* 2.56. Translation by D. R. Shackleton Bailey.

<sup>289</sup> Juv. *Sat.* 8.132f. Translation by Niall Rudd.

<sup>290</sup> Lindsay Watson and Patricia Watson, eds., *Martial: Select Epigrams* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 19. This also recalls the well-established practice of insulting men through their wives' conduct as well as calling into question the sexual propriety of active women.

<sup>291</sup> See Braund, "Cohors: The Governor and His Entourage in the Self-Image of the Roman Republic." For misconduct involving homosexuality, see Livy 39.42, Cic. *de Senec.* 12.42 and Plut. *Flam.* 18 (Flaminius and a male prostitute); *P. Oxy.* 3.471 (prefect of Egypt and homosexual intrigue). See also H. G. Pflaum, *Les Procurateurs Équestres Sous Le Haut-Empire Romain* (Paris: 1950), 308.

actions of their wives in the provinces. Presumably it was the case of Piso and Plancina that inspired the extension of the *repetundae* laws to include women. Their case involved both *repetundae* and *maiestas*. Tacitus presents the events involving the couple in Book II of the *Annals*, and his narrative is corroborated in the recently discovered *Senatusconsultum de Cn. Pisone patre* (SCPP).<sup>292</sup> One of Piso's wife Plancina's first offenses was to receive gifts from the Parthian king Artabanus.<sup>293</sup> The laws on *repetundae* expressly forbade receiving gifts in one's province. She was also party to her husband's treasonous activities in illegally attempting to reoccupy the province (Syria) from which Piso had been recently deposed. While she could not be tried for *repetundae* at this time (20 A.D.), Plancina's actions in stirring up the soldiers alongside her husband were in violation of the laws on *maiestas*, under which she could be prosecuted.<sup>294</sup>

Piso was first put on trial under the *lex Cornelia de sicariis*, but this was quickly thrown out. He was then prosecuted under charges of maladministration in Spain, an earlier post he had held, and for the treasonous activity in Syria, against neither of which he could adequately defend himself.<sup>295</sup> Plancina's participation further sullied the reputation of her husband and contributed to the difficulty of his defense. It was general legal practice at the time to attempt conviction under the greater of the charges, if there was a likelihood of conviction.<sup>296</sup> Piso would most probably have been convicted under the charge of *maiestas* for his actions in Syria, rather than his extortion in Spain, had he not committed suicide.<sup>297</sup> Plancina, who had withdrawn her support of her husband to be tried separately, was saved by the intercession of Livia, though her involvement would not soon be forgotten.<sup>298</sup>

The actual extent of Plancina's involvement is unknown. While the SCPP supports Tacitus' claims of her participation, the historian had a variety of motivations for emphasizing her active involvement. The Piso-Germanicus episode was employed by Tacitus as a vehicle to demonstrate the tyranny of the Tiberian regime. Piso, a favourite of Tiberius, was contrasted with Germanicus, one of the few remaining representatives of the Republican ethos. Contemporary rumour (Tac. *Ann.* 2.43) suggested that Tiberius wished to be rid of Germanicus and had sent Piso to accomplish this. Tiberius was made again to display the characteristic trait of the tyrant, cruelty resulting in a desire to eliminate his rivals at all cost. With Germanicus representing Republican values of

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<sup>292</sup> See W. Eck, A. Caballos, and F. Fernández, *Das Senatusconsultum de Cn. Pisone Patre*. (Munich: 1996).

<sup>293</sup> Tac. *Ann.* 2.58.

<sup>294</sup> *Repetundae* legislation was augmented by the *leges Cornelia et Julia de maiestatis* to prohibit the actions of governors who attempted to incite rebellion, raise an army or wage war in their provinces. See Brunt, "Charges," 190-92.

<sup>295</sup> Tac. *Ann.* 3.10-15.

<sup>296</sup> Rogers, *Criminal Trials and Criminal Legislation under Tiberius*, 78.

<sup>297</sup> Ibid., 48. The trial continued however, as is custom in *maiestas* hearings, and it was necessary to deal with Piso's sons and wife. Piso's suicide: Tac. *Ann.* 3.15; the trial continued: 3.16-17.

<sup>298</sup> Plancina withdrawing support and her salvation by Livia: Tac. *Ann.* 3.15, 17. Marshall, "Roman Women and the Provinces," 121.

*libertas* and *res publica*, and Tiberius standing for the feared tyrannical aspects of monarchy, Tacitus could use the conflict between Germanicus and Piso (Tiberius' representative) as an allegory for the struggle between the old system of government and the new. Germanicus acted with the legitimate authority of his office and was slain, while Piso acted illegally and with cruelty, poisoning his rival. Germanicus' death then symbolized the failure of the Republic to assert itself over the corruption of a monarchical regime, and Piso's actions foreshadowed the abuses of authority to come in the subsequent years.

Because Piso and Germanicus clashed personally, Tacitus emphasized the struggle between their wives Plancina and Agrippina. Plancina was seen to be operating under *muliebris aemulatio*, and allowed her negative opinion of Agrippina and Germanicus to interfere with the administration in Syria.<sup>299</sup> She insulted the imperial heir, Germanicus, and his wife; she even went so far as to doff her mourning clothes for bright attire when news of Germanicus' death reached her.<sup>300</sup> Throughout the narrative, Plancina sought to aggrandize herself and her household, at the expense of both the province and the state. Livia incited jealousy of Agrippina in her and a fear for her household's status. Plancina received gifts from the Parthian king Artabanus for the status the friendship visited on her family. She shared in her husband's ire when their position was threatened and presumably encouraged Piso's competitive and murderous activities.<sup>301</sup> Tacitus, writing much later, exploits the contemporary fears of women close to power. The fear of a woman putting her household before the good of the state was a salient one, and an effective literary trope. As well, Tacitus has chosen to display her insolence in the narrative to further damn Plancina's husband Piso for his conduct in the affair. With a wife like his, Piso and his character are further defamed, and the reader is prepared for the *maiestas* charges to follow and the justification for them. As well, female encouragement of, and participation in, Piso's abuses of authority strengthened the accusations of the tyrannical nature of Piso's command and Tiberius' regime.

Following the *senatusconsultum* of 24 A.D. making governors liable for their wives' crimes in the provinces there were a number of instances in which women were indicted with their husbands. These anecdotes served one of two purposes: they either verbalized the tensions resulting from the monarchical nature of provincial government and women's roles in it, or they criticized the regime under which these crimes occurred. The first of such incidents involved Sosia Galla, wife of Gaius Silius. Both were indicted for *maiestas* and *repetundae*. Gaius Silius commanded the army of Upper Germany from 13 A.D. to 21 A.D. and Visellius Varro, the current consul and associate of the corrupt praetorian Sejanus, brought charges against the couple. Tacitus recorded the offenses to

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<sup>299</sup> *Aemulatio muliebris*: Tac. Ann. 2.43, 2.82; insulting Agrippina and Germanicus: Tac. Ann. 2.55.

<sup>300</sup> Tac. Ann. 2.75.

<sup>301</sup> Piso complained when the king of the Nabateans gave Germanicus and his wife heavier crowns than the ones with which he and Plancina had been presented (Tac. Ann. 2.57), and Tacitus explicitly stated that Piso was motivated by his wife's wealth and status, and that she in turn was motivated by the 'feminine machinations' of Livia (Tac. Ann. 4.43).

include complicity with Sacrovir in the revolt of Upper Germany and failure to report to Tiberius until well after the revolt had gained force (these were both covered under the *maiestas* legislation), as well as extortion in the province after the rebellion had been quashed (covered under the *repetundae* laws).<sup>302</sup> Silius was convicted of *maiestas* after his suicide (the charges for *repetundae* were thrown out in favour of the harsher charge), as was Sosia, who was exiled and stripped of a quarter of her property.<sup>303</sup>

While Tacitus freely admitted the couple to be guilty of the *repetundae* charges, he suggested the *maiestas* charges were stand-in accusations for real ones – conspiracy with Germanicus' supporters against Tiberius. Sosia Galla was an intimate friend of Agrippina and was keenly interested in helping the princess assert the claims of her own family over Tiberius' line. Though these imperial dynastic struggles were considered a detriment to both the new regime and the Roman people, Tacitus was concerned more with the defamation of Tiberius' character in this anecdote. The new *senatusconsultum* was sullied by tyranny from its inception; it was used by Tiberius, the Senate and their political partisans to dispose of enemies of the imperial regime. Perhaps *because* the stereotype of the rapacious governor's wife existed, Tacitus accepted the *repetundae* charges without question, and the episode has dual relevance. Tacitus could subtly criticize the practice of allowing women close to provincial administration and explore the results of this practice (the double *repetundae* charges) while overtly using the episode to highlight the increasing tyranny and political instability of the era.<sup>304</sup>

To summarize, the trope of the gossipy and rapacious governor's wife was such a salient one because it exploited and reinforced Roman elite male fears about women's inclinations when given access to power. A woman, socially expected to tend to household business and administration, would seek to expand her locus of control when an entire province became her *domus* through her husband's near-monarchical control of his administrative region. Male anxiety that women would use their influence to assert their own households and interests over provincial and state good was so strong that it was deemed necessary to make women responsible for criminal extortion while their husbands were provincial officials; if men insisted on bringing their wives with them on duty, these officials would be made responsible for the poor conduct that would presumably ensue.

The gossipy and avaricious governor's wife made a recognizable stereotype for satire because she was a long-held construct of Roman fear over the clash between *domus* and *res publica*. Roman governors, dangerous enough to the provinces alone, were all the more suspect when they brought their female relations, as these women would be motivated by lust, *muliebris aemulatio* and masculine ambition to assert their families over the needs of the provinces. With the amplified voice of temptation, Roman governors would endanger state gain and the amicable relations between Rome and her

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<sup>302</sup> Tac. Ann. 4.19.

<sup>303</sup> Rogers, *Criminal Trials and Criminal Legislation under Tiberius*, 75-78. Tac. Ann. 4.20.

<sup>304</sup> The trial of Labeo and Paxaea (Tac. Ann. 6.29; Cass. Dio 5.8.24) was used for similar effect.



provinces. Tales of the misbehaviour of governors' wives were employed by historians because they allowed the writer to both expound on the negative consequences of women's access to power and denounce the corrupt and tyrannical regimes that allowed for this access.

### **Politics and Influence**

Related to fears of female involvement in business and administration within the province was the anxiety over women's proximity to politics and their access to political action. Women, be they legitimate relations or illicit companions, with affective bonds to officials in the provinces were suspicious for their access to and influence over these men. While Roman officials on assignment in the provinces were appointed to keep the peace and administer with Roman law and authority in the interests of the state good, women were bound by no such moral, societal or political obligation. They would seek, through limited political action or influence, to assert their family or personal good, and the corrupt or weak-willed governor would be manipulated into their power.

When these fears are made tangible in the literature, the officials were presented as slavish or effeminate in a reversal of gender roles resultant of their giving active agency over to a woman whose character was supposed to be defined by passivity. This trope could be employed in political invective to indicate the corruption of an official in order to emphasize his unsuitability to govern (as established in the Republic in Gaius Gracchus' and Cicero's political rhetoric). These anecdotes were also presented to explore the corruption of the regime in which such excesses and tyrannical activity could occur. The disparagement of the women in these tales was rarely employed merely for its own sake; each episode evidenced deeper anxiety for the ideological clash between women and the state, as well as a desire to defame the men attached to the women rather than simply the women themselves.

There are several episodes in the historical record pertaining to female political action in the provinces. These episodes appear in varied sources, and their meaning can be intuited from the motivations on the part of the author for including the reference. In Tacitus there was the mention of Plancina taking gifts from Artabanes, a pretender to the Parthian throne.<sup>305</sup> This action can be deemed political in the sense that Plancina received the attentions of a would-be royal who curried her favour with the expectation that she had the authority and inclination to influence her husband, who could in turn influence the imperial family on Artabanes' behalf. Plancina's acceptance of the gifts entered her into a reciprocal political relationship with Artabanes. As explored in the previous section, it was Tacitus' intention with the inclusion of this episode to assert the dangers of allowing women close to power, as well as to disparage the Tiberian regime. Plancina sought the aggrandizement of herself and her husband over the state's interests, and it was the corruption and tyranny of Tiberius' principate that put Plancina and Piso into power. Plancina's selfishness and avarice highlighted the same qualities in her husband, reflecting his character with her own.

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<sup>305</sup> Tac. Ann. 2.58.2.

A Roman governor had a difficult enough time policing his own conduct on provincial post without the insidious addition of other persons pursuing their own agendas. As notorious a stereotype as the rapacious governor's wife was that of the decadently tyrannical or philandering governor. It was well-established that a governor was responsible for the conduct of his entourage in the provinces, and that the success of his administration there was in part dependent on his responsibility for choosing appropriate companions.<sup>306</sup> The governor was known to the provincials by his entourage, who wielded considerable power through their association with him. It was to this party that the provincials made their appeals, and through whose power provincials would either be benefited or abused. In lieu of a wife and family, a governor might include mistresses, prostitutes, dancers, actresses or other men and women of ill-repute. While a wife might have some legitimate influence over her husband (and the degree of respectability that accompanied it) illegitimate companions of the governor were the worst sort of entourage. Their influence was damaging both to the state and to the reputation of the governor, whose manhood might be called into question if he were seen to be too influenced by his lovers.

A popular tactic in political invective was to defame a Roman governor by criticizing his choice of entourage and its conduct.<sup>307</sup> The governor of Baetica, Classicus, had the misfortune of committing his extortion practices to paper, in a letter to his mistress boasting of the vast amounts of money he had extorted from his province, and Pliny the Younger used this bit of evidence to convict Classicus of *repetundae* upon his return.<sup>308</sup> The most common means of attacking a Roman governor in political invective was to accuse him of being excessively influenced by female members of his entourage, especially women of ill-repute. To accuse a Roman governor of giving up his authority to a woman was to assert that he had no power to administrate, since his authority had been shamefully tendered away to one who should be ruled herself. These episodes, as described in Chapter Three, focused on the abuse of authority by a ruling figure. The defamation of character was complete if the jury or Roman public could be made to believe that the individual in question was unfit to administrate because he could not control his own lusts, passions, and self, but offered himself over to the power of a lesser individual, one with no authority to rule or character to do so. Common themes in these attacks were accusations that the locus of authority – the governor's court or the forum – had been transferred to private areas, such as a courtesan's house, the private portions of the *domus*, even the official's bed. Moving the political to private areas upset the natural order of the Roman political world; actions that should take place in full view of all were cloaked in subterfuge and secrecy. The authority of women, the voice of the *domus*,

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<sup>306</sup> Braund, "Cohors: The Governor and His Entourage in the Self-Image of the Roman Republic," 12-18.

<sup>307</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>308</sup> Pliny *Ep.* 3.9.13. The *senatusconsultum* of 24 A.D. was still in full effect at this time, as Classicus' wife Casta, as well as their daughter, were tried along with various other members of Classicus' 'entourage'.

usurped the authority of the Roman constitution and the voice of the Senate, which resonated with corruption and tyranny.

*Women With Influence: Flaminius' Prostitute*

There was an episode of abuse of authority involving Lucius Flaminius, brother of Titus Flaminius, Liberator of the Greeks. The longest version of the account is in Livy, who drew on the speeches made by Cato during his censorship in 184 B.C. Flaminius was one of the seven senators ejected from the Senate during that year's *lustrum* for corruption and abuse of his duties. During Flaminius' governorship in Gaul, he had with him a degenerate entourage. At a dinner party Flaminius' courtesan complained that she had never seen a man die, so Flaminius brought in a Gallic prisoner and decapitated him for her entertainment.<sup>309</sup> Cicero's *de Senectute* (42) has Cato use 'libido' as the reason for Flaminius' actions; Livy (39.43.1) adds 'crudelitas' to the offenses, casting Flaminius in the role of the tyrant for his excessive abuse of authority.<sup>310</sup>

In Seneca's *Controversiae*, this anecdote is related as evidence of the dangers that arise for Roman officials left to their own devices abroad, and serves also as a discussion of maladministration. Seneca's version is a particularly heated denunciation of the influence of women, particularly that of prostitutes and provincial women who attached themselves to a governor's entourage.<sup>311</sup> This episode, however, is not just about the negative influence of women. This tale was originally delivered in a speech publicly denouncing a member of the senate and there are several rhetorical strategies intended to elicit outrage in the listener – the perversion of justice in the consul, the drunken and debauched setting, and the status of the prisoner (either a condemned man deserving due process, or a deserter invoking the Roman moral code of clemency). Flaminius displayed several characteristics that associated him with the Greek tyrant, an import into Roman political invective at the time; by casting Flaminius in the role of the tyrant, his detractors could suggest that not only were his politics faulty, but also his morality.<sup>312</sup> By emphasizing the role of the prostitute, his detractors could indicate the conflation of public and private, as well as the cruelty of women with influence.

The most provocative point the ancient sources attempt to make here is that the official abuses his authority at the behest of a person who should be ruled, not rule herself. A man with supreme, singular, and monarchical authority tendered over that authority at the nod of a woman, a prostitute, no less.<sup>313</sup> Seneca (*Controv.* 9.2.2) drives this point home – in his dialogue, Vibius Rufus states that "*the whore reclined in the*

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<sup>309</sup> Livy 39.42 (following Cato) describes the prostitute as male, as do Cicero (*de Senect.* 12.42) and Plutarch (*Flam.* 18) while Livy 39.43 (following Valerius Antias) and Seneca (*Controv.* 9.2) cite her as a female courtesan.

<sup>310</sup> Dunkle, "The Greek Tyrant," 159-60.

<sup>311</sup> Marshall, "Roman Women and the Provinces," 115-16.

<sup>312</sup> Dunkle, "The Greek Tyrant," 156.

<sup>313</sup> Braund, "Cohors: The Governor and His Entourage in the Self-Image of the Roman Republic," 14-15.

*wife's place, or rather, in the praetor's*", the insinuation being, she made the decisions of the praetor for him. That a woman actively and eagerly encouraged a bloody spectacle both justified and perpetuated the anxiety of the elite male Roman over women's influence. The locus of authority was not the governor's court, but the dining hall, presided over by a prostitute (a cruel woman) and her enslaved governor, who abused the authority placed in him by the Roman government in favour of decadence and tyranny.

### *Verres' Women*

Some of the most infamous political condemnation of a woman's influence is located in Cicero's *Verrine Orations*, seen in Chapter Three with the rhetor's passionate denunciation of Verres' association with the courtesan Chelidon while praetor at Rome. This anecdote was included to demonstrate that Verres was incapable of administering even before his governorship of Sicily from 73 to 71 B.C.<sup>314</sup> With such a precedent at Rome, Verres' excesses and corruption were inevitable in his province, as he had no understanding of a virtuous and appropriate method of governance. Cicero used various techniques in his defamation of Verres to demonstrate that Verres ruled as an autocrat with absolute power while in Sicily.<sup>315</sup> One of his tyrannical abuses of authority was that Verres handed over the tithe-collection to a 'wife' of a man of Syracuse. This woman Pipa, also a mistress to Verres, extorted excessively large sums of money from the people of Herbita. When the people had difficulty tendering the sum, they sought Verres, who received them in his bedchamber where he lounged in the aftermath of a lovemaking session with Pipa.<sup>316</sup>

Not only had Verres turned over the provincial administration to a woman of dubious social propriety, but he had moved the governor's court to his bedchamber, violating the *nomos* of good government by breaking the boundaries between public and private, a chief problem inherent in monarchy (and developing into tyranny).<sup>317</sup> The financial administration of the province was at the whim of his mistress, and Verres' rulings came from sex-sodden satiation in a decadent bedchamber. To compound the abuse of his authority, Verres offered up the tithes of the Acestans to his mistress Tertia,<sup>318</sup> a ballet dancer and former 'wife' of a Rhodian flute-player, in what Cicero calls 'a disgraceful present to a whore'. Cicero provides her lineage with relish, emphasizing her shameful associations to further defame Verres' character. He describes their relationship much as he did Verres' with Chelidon, asserting that 'this Tertia had more

<sup>314</sup> Hillard, "On the Stage, Behind the Curtain," 44-46.

<sup>315</sup> Dunkle, "The Greek Tyrant," 160. Cicero attempted to show Verres as another in a long line of tyrants in Sicily (such as Phalaris of Acragas, Gelon of Gela, Dionysius I and II of Syracuse), but he asserts that Verres' was the worst of all (as it naturally followed, according to the Greeks, that the last tyrant was the worst, since he moved the people to depose him [Polyb. 6.3.10]). See Cic. *Verr.* 2.3.20-21, 2.4.124, 2.5.145.

<sup>316</sup> Cic. *Verr.* 2.3.32.77-34.79. Couplets about her also appeared on Verres' dais, giving her literary presence in lieu of a physical one, but making her influence known tangibly.

<sup>317</sup> Shaw Hardy, "Nomos and Replaceability."

<sup>318</sup> Cic. *Verr.* 2.3.36.83 and 2.5.13.31.

influence over him than any of his other women, more even than Pipa: as much, I would almost venture to say, while he was praetor in Sicily as Chelidon had while he was praetor in Rome'.<sup>319</sup> Making fully tangible the transition from public administration to private tyranny was Verres' transfer of the governor's court from the former palace of King Hiero (the use of which had already carried implications of autocracy) to the harbour entrance, where he erected opulent tents and pavilions to form pleasure palaces inhabited by prostitutes, dancers and actors. He corrupted his son, too, who had come as a member of Verres' entourage to be schooled in that governor's degenerate ways.<sup>320</sup>

This episode contained all of the elements of effective political invective against a Roman governor. Verres allowed himself to be enslaved by several prostitutes, whose selfish influence was felt instead of just and moral advisors. In abusing his power thus, Verres emasculated himself and tendered control to women, taking the passive role himself. Effeminate and unfit to rule, the governor transfers his public court to the private domain of his women, who committed various outrages against the powerless province. Verres was made out to be a decadent tyrant, his debaucheries consuming him – quite literally – when Cicero states that the marks of Verres' campaign were the 'scars made by women's teeth (love-bites) on his chest'.<sup>321</sup> While these episodes did criticize the women involved in them, Cicero's purpose was to undermine the authority of Verres, to prove him guilty before a *repetundae* court of provincial maladministration. These accusations were made more powerful by the rich tradition of anxiety for women's roles and fear of female power in which they were entrenched. They served to reinforce the socio-cultural standard that any female political activity in the provinces, be it legitimate influence of wives over their governor husbands or the illegitimate abuse of power by provincial women and prostitutes, would have negative impact on the Rome and the governor sent to represent her interests.

The political influence of women, either legitimate female relatives or illicit companions, was feared by the Roman elite male because it overturned the socio-cultural order of Rome. Officials should not seem influenced by persons outside the proper network of political action. To allow one's authority to pass into the hands of a woman was to demonstrate one's inability to govern both the self and the state, and to indicate a monarchical regime in which women were empowered beyond the male ideal of feminine authority. Women could not be trusted to look to the state's interests, and men who were unduly influenced by women were equally suspect. The political action of women close to power in the provinces was never seen as appropriate in the sources, in contrast to the few episodes in the Republican era at Rome where the desperation of the period allowed

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<sup>319</sup> Verr. 2.3.34.78.

<sup>320</sup> Cic. Verr. 2.5.12.30-31. Cicero also outlines various other abuses that depict Verres as a Greek tragedy-tyrant: he flogged a Roman citizen during his tribunate (2.1.122-23), displaying 'superbia' and 'crudelitas'; he used the women and children of Sicily for his lusts (1.14) on the model of Herodotus' tyrant (3.80.5); he forced the towns of Sicily to provide him with women and he raped freeborn women (2.5.28.4; 2.4.116); and finally he attempted to rape the daughter of a citizen of Lampsacus, for which Cicero called him a '*tyrannum libidinosum crudeliemque*' (2.1.82). See also Dunkle, "The Greek Tyrant," 160-62.

<sup>321</sup> Cic. Verr. 2.5.13.32; Marshall, "Roman Women and the Provinces," 116.

for socially radical action. Given the monarchical nature of a governor's post, women's public participation was suspect for the impact it could have over the province at large, and the tales describing female abuse of political authority reinforced these fears.

### **Women and the Military – The *duces feminae*: Agrippina Maior and Plancina**

The most heated denunciations of female appropriations of male action occurred in descriptions of women with military involvement. Women who participated in this hyper-masculine zone surrendered their femininity and social respectability by default; the very aggressive and public nature of the military sphere was completely at odds with the ideals of the 'good matron'. Women were seen as weak creatures with a lack of self control and an inability to control their passions and inferior female desires for power. The *dux femina* was the literal embodiment of these faults. 'Female generals' sought to control those who should control, and through this subversive *dominatio* their subjects were emasculated and feminized.<sup>322</sup> Any kind of female rule was the equivalent of *servitium*, the basest and most passive state of existence, completely at odds with Roman ideals of *libertas*.<sup>323</sup>

Some historians, Tacitus in particular, viewed this perversion of gender roles as by-product of the tyrannical Julio-Claudian regime, where first the imperial family was infected with female transgression of masculine spheres, then the empire at large as the illegitimate *dominatio* spread.<sup>324</sup> The transition in possible roles for women, however, was the result of the shifting ideologies and practices of the Late Republic. Seen in Chapter Three, as the Roman political scene became increasingly monarchical under the rule of the triumvirs, women were thrust into public roles on behalf of their husbands or themselves. As the socio-political chaos of the Late Republic and its triumviral politics gave way to the Roman principate, society struggled to come to terms with both the new ruling regime and the changing status monarchy brought to women of the imperial family. The tension surrounding women and military in the provinces was an extension of the ideological battle being waged in the capital, and the anecdotes involving female presence in the military camps expressed those masculine fears of female participation and its detriments, real or imagined.

In the Latin language, especially in Tacitus, when words of legitimate female status were invoked, they brought a certain pedigree to the object of the description – aristocratic women were *feminae*, and *femina* was often paired with *nobilis* or *inlustris* for further effect.<sup>325</sup> To apply censure, authors employed varying degrees of derogatory

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<sup>322</sup> Ibid.: 112.

<sup>323</sup> Michael Roberts, "The Revolt of Boudicca (Tacitus, *Annals* 14.29-39) and the Assertion of *Libertas* in Neronian Rome," *American Journal of Philology* 109 (1988): 126-27, Santoro L'Hoir, "Tacitus and Women's Usurpation of Power," 11, Santoro L'Hoir, *The Rhetoric of Gender Terms*, 132.

<sup>324</sup> Santoro L'Hoir, *The Rhetoric of Gender Terms*, 134.

<sup>325</sup> Ibid., 120-21. Junia Silana, victim of Messalina's greed, was called a '*nobilis femina*' (Tac. *Ann.* 11.12.7), and Calpurnia, victim of Agrippina, was called an '*inlustris femina*' (Tac. *Ann.* 12.22.12).

adjectives: *muliebris* (connoting low-class status in post-Livian authors), *audax*, and *ferox*.<sup>326</sup> By combining the noun *femina* with *dominatio* and *servitium* (both perjorative nouns when applied to either sex), as well as *auctoritas*, *imperium*, and *impotentia*, they implied a perversion of legitimate power, masculinizing the female characters and exposing their aberrant nature. Such women fell outside of normative Roman social values and inhabited a peripheral realm of pseudo-men in which they were viewed as subversions of the ideological norm, inverting the patriarchy and undermining Republican values. Tacitus in particular relished such characters, as they provided further evidence of his theme concerning the degeneration of values during the Julio-Claudian principate.<sup>327</sup>

The *dux femina* as a motif accompanied the censure of women's involvement in the provinces as much as it did in the invective against women at the capital (during the Republic and early Empire), and was referenced specifically in Caecina's polemic at Tac. *Ann.* 3.33-34. Given that the problems associated with Piso's presence in Syria immediately preceded the senatorial debate, Caecina was undoubtedly referring to Plancina when he said *praesedis nuper feminam exercitio cohortium, decursu legionum*.<sup>328</sup> The incident to which he referred was Plancina's disgraceful conduct in Syria. Inflamed with a lust for power resultant of her background and the *muliebris aemulatio* inspired in her by Livia,<sup>329</sup> Plancina presented herself at the training of the cavalry and the exercises of the cohorts, haranguing the troops with insulting remarks about Germanicus and his wife Agrippina, while her husband courted the affections of the most corruptible soldiers and encouraged license and indolence in the province.<sup>330</sup> The image of Plancina surveying and addressing the troops recalled (perhaps intentionally) Fulvia's earlier display at Brundisium, with all of the negative character connotations. Plancina's parody of a general's activity undermined the authority that the office ought to have held and reflected badly on the soldiers under her 'command'; according to the logic, they certainly must have been the worst sort of soldier and inclined to transgressive activity if they would willingly place themselves under the authority of a female general. Plancina's behaviour, seen as the ultimate transgression of feminine decorum, reflected back onto her husband Piso, expressing further the degeneration in *his* character. The message here is as it was for Fulvia – women who were disinclined towards traditional domestic activity failed to adhere to the ideological expectations of them and would channel their efforts into insidious activity, all the more dangerous in the provinces, where the monarchical nature of provincial assignment gave them freer rein and larger area for subversive influence.

Agrippina Maior embodied the *dux femina* trope as well. Accompanying her husband Germanicus during the conflict in Germany, Agrippina participated in military activity, distributing clothing and medicine to the wounded and preventing the troops

<sup>326</sup> Rutland, "Women as Makers of Kings in Tacitus' *Annals*," 15-16.

<sup>327</sup> Santoro L'Hoir, "Tacitus and Women's Usurpation of Power," 5-7.

<sup>328</sup> Tac. *Ann.* 3.33.

<sup>329</sup> Tac. *Ann.* 2.43.3-4.

<sup>330</sup> Tac. *Ann.* 2.55.

from destroying an important bridge over the Rhine.<sup>331</sup> Agrippina's character was presented ambiguously here. One might argue that Tacitus' characterization of Agrippina was a positive one, and that this episode was presented as a shining exception to the general rule of the negativity of female military activity.<sup>332</sup> She was presented by Tacitus as a woman of unimpeachable *pudicitia*, headstrong and *semper atrox*,<sup>333</sup> but checked by her love for her husband Germanicus.<sup>334</sup> Her *fecunditas* was constantly emphasized, further reinforcing her legitimate status as a proper Roman matron, with frequent mentions of *constantia* and *fides*.<sup>335</sup>

Agrippina's passionate and violent nature were, however, repeatedly mentioned in the narrative, put into the mouths and minds of Tiberius and Sejanus.<sup>336</sup> One of the most subversive tools at Tacitus' disposal was his use of innuendo. Though her negative characteristics were insinuated by Agrippina's enemies, they were still presented to the reader, contributing to the overall impression of her character. Given Agrippina's dynastic and political power plays later in Tiberius' reign and her arrogant attitude towards Tiberius, this episode might be better seen as a foreshadowing of Agrippina's impending authoritative behaviour rather than providing an exception to the negative female military activity rule.

The *duces feminae*, acting as military commanders and transgressing the bounds of appropriate feminine behaviour, usurped masculine *virtus* from their husbands and shamed the men under their *dominatio*, but worse, (in the case of Plancina) they contributed to treasonous activity that broke the peace of the provinces. Seen in this context, *duces feminae* were not only undermining Roman *virtus*, but also actively threatening the very fabric of the Roman empire in their role as officials' wives. The Roman provinces, even peaceful ones, were precarious *loci* of Roman control, often on hostile frontiers. Rebellion was common enough under normal circumstances, but the presence of domineering women bent on their own personal agendas rather than state good further undermined the authority of the Roman governor and upset the balance of power there.

Despite women's constant presence in the military camps and in proximity to the army,<sup>337</sup> historians opposed their presence during the first two hundred years of the

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<sup>331</sup> Tac. Ann. 1.69.

<sup>332</sup> J. I. McDougall, "Tacitus and the Portrayal of the Elder Agrippina," *Échos du monde Classique* 25 (1981): 104-05.

<sup>333</sup> M. Kaplan, "Agrippina Semper Atrox: A Study in Tacitus' Characterization of Women," in *Studies in Latin Literature and Roman History, I*, ed. Carl Deroux, *Collection Latomus* (Bruxelles: 1979), 410.

<sup>334</sup> Tac. Ann. 1.33, 4.52.

<sup>335</sup> Tac. Ann. 2.75, 3.1, 4.12.

<sup>336</sup> McDougall, "Tacitus and the Portrayal of the Elder Agrippina," 105-06. Tac. Ann. 1.33 (*indomitum animum*); 2.75, 3.1 (passionate character); 4.52 (*atrox*); 4.53 (*pervicax irae*); 6.25 (*impatiens aequi, dominandi avida*); her enemies: *aemulationem* 4.40; *iniquas...offensiones* 4.39; *subnixam popularibus studiis inhiare dominationi* 4.12.

<sup>337</sup> Called '*lixae*' or '*calones*', they were hangers-on following the army (attested at the Battle of Numantia in 134 B.C. [App. *Iber.* 85] and Varus' massacre at the Battle of Teutoburg



Roman principate.<sup>338</sup> This verbalized opposition was likely inspired by the increasingly public presence of women during the Julio-Claudian principate. In the capital Roman society was struggling with reconciling the ideal of the Roman matron with women's roles following the political upset of the triumviral years, and then the publicizing of the *domus* under the Roman monarchy. The Tiberian regime gave legitimacy to women's participation in provincial politics and military spheres and so its detractors had a tangible cause at which to direct their criticism. Women's military involvement seemed to be yet another indication of the socio-cultural disintegration resultant of the Julio-Claudian regime.

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Forest in 9 A.D. [Cass. Dio 56.20.2-5; 56.22.2]). Although soldiers were not permitted to marry (see Percy Ellwood Corbett, *The Roman Law of Marriage*, 2nd Edition (Reprint of the 1930 Edition) ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1979), 39f.), long-stationed soldiers often had common law wives (see Sara Elise Phang, *The Marriage of Roman Soldiers (13 B.C. - A.D. 235): Law and Family in the Imperial Army* (Leiden: Brill, 2001).), attested by gravestones (see Margaret M. Roxan, "Women and the Frontiers," in *Roman Frontier Studies 1989*, ed. V. Maxfield and Dobson (1990).).

<sup>338</sup> Not until the Severan period would female involvement with or sponsorship of the military camps be socially or politically acceptable: Julia Domna: *ILS* 442-444; the vestal Campia Severina: *ILS* 4929; Marshall, "Roman Women and the Provinces," 113.

## Chapter 5: Conclusions

In the Late Republic, the changing political situation forced women into the public sphere to lobby against detrimental legislation, to seek aid for endangered husbands, to contribute money or mediate in times of crisis. Though these were laudable actions, women's public presence in Roman society attracted criticism from elite males who suffered anxiety at the breakdown of the male ideal of female passivity and invisibility. The authors countered anecdotes of positive female action several times over with episodes of transgressive female activity disadvantaging the state and its values. Sempronia, Chelidon, and Fulvia were portrayed as the rule rather than the exception. The themes employed in the censure of powerful women developed into the Julio-Claudian period, when Augustus' emphasis on tradition and *exempla* paradoxically brought female behaviour under public scrutiny, defying the ideal of feminine propriety while purporting to maintain it. Monarchy brings with it increased power and ability for women. Their access to the emperor, combined with the honours monarchy must bestow on its members, gave imperial women new outlets for political access and expression. With the business of state conflated with the business of the *domus* on the Palatine, these supposedly 'traditional' women had more public access than any other Roman women before them.

Throughout the Late Republic and into the Empire, women garnered more public roles and more personal power than the ideological constructs of Roman societal norms allowed, due to their access to and influence over men with increasingly autocratic power. Women's increased visibility and political influence, however, was problematic for the Roman people as it blurred the lines of public and private (the divisions of the *res publica* and the *domus*). An official could not be assumed to be looking only toward the state good when he gave favours to women or listened to their counsel, as women's interests were directed inward to the private realm of children and personal benefit (the *domus*) rather than the state. Women with power in the public sphere would neglect the public good in favour of the benefit of their feminine *domus* at the expense of the masculine citizenry (the *res publica*).

The conflation of public and private was also symptomatic of tyranny as established on the Greek model of monarchy in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. In Roman conceptions of monarchy (and tyranny, which was the natural progression of monarchy) the conflation of state and family was detrimental to both the people and the family. Dynastic struggles would destroy the *domus*, which in turn had detrimental effects for the state when the two were joined. To support the theme of imperial corruption, authors related with gusto the episodes of Livia's intrigues to benefit her son Tiberius, Messalina's notorious marriage to Silius to insure succession for Britannicus, and Agrippina Minor's supplanting the imperial heir for her own son Nero. In these anecdotes, the chaos of the *domus* spilled over into the *res publica* with accusations of conspiracy and rebellion. A great number of Romans, citizens with legitimate office and authority, were murdered or executed due to dynastic conflict and factional politics. Instead of administering with justice, the emperor was influenced by the members of his household rather than his rightful ministers, another indication of tyranny. Women,

given to petty cruelty by nature, seemed to subvert moral right and justice for their own personal gain.

Prior to the autocracy of the Julio-Claudian regime there were many men in the Late Republic who gained singular authority and were accused of abusing it. These anecdotes often featured women in order to emphasize the corruption, since women featured strongly in the Greek and Hellenistic stereotypes of tyranny imported into Roman literature. Flaminius sacrificed provincial interests to satisfy the morbid curiosity of his prostitute. Verres played the tyrant in Syracuse, allowing actresses and whores to be financial administrators; before that he gave the influence of his office over to his infamous prostitute at Rome, Chelidon. Caesar was accused of granting to Servilia and Cleopatra excessive favours of lands and funds gained from the proscription of the Roman citizenry. Antony as well empowered his women as military commanders, supplanting traditional Roman generals. The rhetorical abuse of all of these politically unpopular men was made more effective by framing them as tyrants facilitated by the women they empowered beyond the Roman ideal of feminine authority. Playing the 'tyranny card' in rhetorical discourse threw an enemy's politics and morality into question, and disparaging his women allowed for accusations that he had given his private life access to and influence in his public one, in conflict with his constitutional duties.

The result of these tensions between ideal and reality, public and private, monarchy and Republic was an emotionally charged and highly sophisticated system of censure of Roman women close to power in a complex style employing specific tropes and themes evolving throughout the Republic and into the Empire. As elite male anxiety grew, these tensions developed into patterns of criticism. Dissonance created by the failure of the ideal to match reality, anxiety at the perceived subordination of the *res publica* to the *domus*, and increasing anxiety for the tyrannical corruption in the newly re-created Roman monarchy influenced a literary backlash against women's perceived public power, and the men and regimes which empowered them. Throughout the Late Republic and into the Julio-Claudian principate these criticisms focused on women's participation in politics and the military, as well as women's influence over legitimate male authority figures. The unconscious gender tensions seething beneath the invective attempted to turn women's aspirations to power into petty feminine squabbles (*muliebris aemulatio*), lovers' quarrels, feminine hubris or womanly weakness. The above anxieties and reactions to them inspired Roman authors, and then modern historians following them, to undermine the female presence and diminish women's importance in the historical record. But to dismiss the censure of Roman women as disconnected incidents of Roman misogyny is to deny the complicated tensions, ideologies and anxieties underlying the tradition and to further undermine the historical importance of women in the Roman world.

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