

Ferox Femina
Agrippina Maior In Tacitus's Annales

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On 10 October 19 C.E., Germanicus, the popular heir apparent to Tiberius, died, allegedly poisoned by Piso and Plancina, the couple whose prosecution for misconduct in the East is memorialized in the *senatus consultum de Cn. Pisone patre*.¹ On his deathbed, as Tacitus narrates, Germanicus advised his wife Agrippina, the granddaughter of Augustus and the daughter of Julia Maior, as follows:

tum ad uxorem versus per memoriam sui, per communis liberos oravit exueret ferociam, saevienti fortunae summitteret animum, neu regressa in urbem aemulatione potentiae validiores inritaret. haec palam et alia secreto per quae ostendisse credebatur metum ex Tiberio.²

Then, turning to his wife he begged her, by her memory of him, by their mutual children, to cast aside her defiance, to submit her spirit to the savagery of fortune, and not, on her return to the City, to goad her superiors in power by rivaling them for it. These words openly; others were in secret, by which he was believed to have shown dread of Tiberius.³

Germanicus, therefore, told Agrippina to put aside her harsh manner (*ferociam*) and to soften her spirit in the face of savage fortune, and also cautioned her not to provoke those more powerful than her in a competition (*aemulatione*) for power. And, finally, while he openly (*palam*) made these remarks to Agrippina, he said more to her privately, warning her of danger (so it was said) from Tiberius.

In this deathbed scene and, indeed, throughout the *Annales*, the vocabulary Tacitus uses to describe Agrippina resounds with words that, like *ferocia*, typically describe fierce, angry, and even savage, animal-like behavior.⁴ The adjective *ferox* and others like it—*atrox* (cruel, dreadful, unrelenting) and *contumax* (unyielding, defiant, willfully disobedient to civil authority)—have typically been interpreted as laudatory if applied to a man, indicating a bold, fighting spirit, but wholly pejorative when applied to a woman.⁵ Modern commentators of Tacitus have judged the qualities of being warlike, savage,

fierce, and stubborn as appropriate for a soldier but less so for the respectable Roman *matrona*.⁶ Does this choice of language imply that Tacitus the historian had a negative opinion of Agrippina? A number of scholars assert that the above and similar passages are Tacitus's own unfavorable judgments of Agrippina.⁷

While I do not seek to rehabilitate the memory of Agrippina, nor to condemn it, I would like to suggest that our appreciation of the subtleties of the Tacitus's portraits of Agrippina might be enhanced by a detailed analysis of his characteristic use of ambiguity. Scholars all too often have tended to think in terms of absolutes, in this case, of whether or not Tacitus was a misogynist.⁸ Some argue that Tacitus admired Agrippina's tragic heroism, while still others would have Tacitus condemn Agrippina's transgression of traditional gender boundaries.⁹ I do not think that Tacitus worked with such a harsh contrast of absolutes, of extremes of the spectrum, but rather he painted his portraits in shades of grey, understanding the complexity of human nature and appreciating that most characters, men and women, have their share of both virtues and vices.¹⁰ This technique ultimately leaves to the reader the subjective judgment of whether Agrippina was a heroine or a villain. Thus, while I will argue that Tacitus's use of typically pejorative adjectives in describing Agrippina need not be understood as harshly as they have often been interpreted, I appreciate that Tacitean style is such that a multiplicity of meanings can be gleaned from the text. Notwithstanding, I will also argue that Tacitus does not necessarily view Agrippina's *ferocia* unfavorably.¹¹

Don Fowler's (2000, 40–63) discussion of “deviant focalization” in the *Aeneid* provides a useful paradigm of how it is possible to separate the narrator's (in this case, Tacitus's) authorial voice from the point of view (“focalizer”) represented in his narrative. The authorial voice does not necessarily coincide with the perspective represented within the narrative, even though we might expect it to.¹² Moreover, in this particular instance, the historian shows that Germanicus was aware of the dangers such behavior might present and tried to warn Agrippina that under tyranny those in jeopardy need to be especially careful to guard their speech and demeanor. The fact that Tacitus describes Germanicus as speaking openly (*palam*) in communicating this advice, while whispering other words allegedly out of fear of Tiberius, suggests that Germanicus was well aware of the risks involved in openly offending the *princeps*.¹³ The act of speaking openly was becoming an increasingly dangerous activity not only for women, but even for men, as I will demonstrate later in this paper.

Apart from this deathbed scene, Tacitus portrays in five separate episodes the enemies of Agrippina and Germanicus as highly critical of her conduct. In what follows, I argue that the historian Tacitus effectively portrays Agrippina as an exemplary Roman *matrona*, whose virtues win her an enviable popularity

with the Roman people (and the dangerous jealousy of Livia, Tiberius, and Sejanus). Agrippina's outspokenness (*ferocia*) in defense of her family and friends was not only laudatory, but also continued in the tradition of behavior expected of both male members of the senatorial class and respectable Roman *matronae*. In this article, I examine in its context each of the apparently negative characterizations of Agrippina in Tacitus's *Annales*. Analysis of gendered descriptions of women should not be separated from Tacitus's main narrative, for context often provides the key for understanding the complexities of Tacitus's approach to character.¹⁴

I. Does Agrippina Maior Fit the Negative Rhetorical Stereotype of the *Dux Femina*?

A. The Rhetorical Stereotype of the *Dux Femina*

Modern scholars detect a negative rhetorical stereotype for the behavior of certain aristocratic Roman women in use among ancient historians (especially, but not exclusively, in Tacitus). Although Roman women were not members of the military, modern historians allude to a parallel between barbarian queens, who possessed political and military power, and those Roman women who inappropriately sought involvement in activities reserved for men. As Francesca L'Hoir and Judith Ginsburg note, Tacitus frequently deploys the negative rhetorical stereotype of the *dux femina* (after a famous phrase of Vergil, referring to the Carthaginian queen and military commander, Dido).¹⁵ Although Tacitus himself does not use the term *dux femina*, these modern commentators include Tacitus's Boudicca, Plancina, and Agrippina Minor in their examples of women characterized as *duces feminae*.¹⁶ L'Hoir (2006, 118) places also Agrippina Maior in this category, for so, she believes, "Tacitus insinuates by way of the opaque mutterings of Tiberius."

I argue, however, that Agrippina Maior does not fit into this classification of women. Foreign queens such as Dido and Boudicca acted alone and ruled their people. Although the Romans did not have queens regnant, the wife of the *princeps*, from Livia onwards, while not sharing in the direct power exercised by her husband, did have a certain visibility and status. In contrast to Agrippina, Livia, the mother of Tiberius, falls at the murky margins of this category of *duces feminae*. As the wife of Augustus, she had, by virtue of her status, indirect access to the most influential people in the Empire. Livia did not aspire to or actually exercise power in her own right, yet Tacitus accuses her of numerous misdeeds, including poisoning Augustus and orchestrating the deaths of various heirs-apparent so that her own son might rule.¹⁷ In other words, she

abused her (albeit indirect) access to power. The sinister portrait of Livia stands in sharp contrast to the more ambiguous depiction of Agrippina in Tacitus's *Annales*, perhaps because the latter was ultimately the victim of Tiberius and his mother.¹⁸ Had Germanicus lived to succeed Augustus, Agrippina would have replaced Livia as wife of the *princeps*.

From the start of the *Annales* (1.33), Tacitus portrays a destructive rivalry between the Julian and Claudian factions of the imperial family. The hatred of Livia and Tiberius towards Germanicus and his family is described in the author's voice as *occultis . . . odiis . . . quorum causae acriores quia iniquiae* ([Germanicus was troubled] by the secret hatred of Livia and Tiberius, the motives for which were all the more harsh because they were unjust, *Ann.* 1.33). Livia is also described as largely, although not completely, at fault in the tensions between her and Agrippina: *accedebant muliebres offensiones novercalibus Liviae in Agrippinam stimulis, atque ipsa Agrippina paulo commotior, nisi quod castitate et mariti amore quamvis indomitum animum in bonum vertebat* (In addition there were womanly affronts, with Livia's stepmotherly goadings of Agrippina and Agrippina herself a little too volatile, except that, with her chastity and her love for her husband, she turned her [albeit untamed] spirit to good effect, *Ann.* 1.33.2–5). Later the narrator of the *Annales* implicates Tiberius and Livia in Piso and Plancina's damaging actions against Germanicus and Agrippina in Syria: *nec dubium habebat se delectum qui Syriae imponeretur ad spes Germanici coercendas. credidere quidam data et a Tiberio occulta mandata; et Plancinam haud dubie Augusta monuit aemulatione muliebri Agrippinam insectandi* (Piso was certain that the purpose of his Syrian appointment was the repression of Germanicus's ambitions. According to one view, he received secret instructions from Tiberius to that effect. Plancina certainly received advice from the Augusta [Livia], whose feminine jealousy was set on persecuting Agrippina, *Ann.* 2.43.18–22).

The narrative, therefore, clearly outlines the tension in the Julio-Claudian house surrounding the issue of dynastic succession. Both Tiberius and his mother fear the popularity of Germanicus and Agrippina and the potential threat to the *princeps*'s power that it represents. Further, Tacitus's insinuations about Livia's willingness to remove her son's political rivals through any means necessary place her in a very unfavorable light.

What I would like to suggest is that, contrary to the impression created by the negative stereotype of the *dux femina*, Roman women who ventured into traditionally male activities were not necessarily held up as objects of scorn and contempt. Rather, the distinctiveness and heroism of the so-called Turia and other elite women who behaved similarly made them stand out as special.¹⁹ They were regarded as extraordinary and exemplary, as the author of the

Laudatio Turiae makes clear: "It is your very own virtues that I am asserting, and very few women have encountered comparable circumstances to make them endure such sufferings and perform such deeds. Providentially, Fate has made such hard tests rare for women (*propria sunt tua quae vindico ac perpaucae in tempora similia inciderunt, ut talia paterentur et praestarent, quae rara ut essent mulierum fortuna cavit*, 1.34–6 Wistrand). In an important commentary on this funerary inscription, Emily Hemelrijk (2004, 185) points out that the deceased woman's husband dedicates almost half the surviving inscription in praise of his wife's extraordinary *public* deeds, often using language typically reserved for men, even military metaphors. With Hemelrijk's discussion of the *Laudatio Turiae* as a point of departure, let us examine whether or not Tacitus's report of Agrippina's actions fit the negative stereotype of the *dux femina*.

B. Agrippina Maior's Actions

A number of scholars have argued that Tacitus aligns Agrippina with the negative stereotype of the *dux femina* on the basis of the following description at *Annales* 1.69: *femina ingens animi munia ducis per eos dies induit* (A woman of heroic spirit, she assumed during those days the duties of a general).²⁰ Here, Tacitus reports how Agrippina's decisive action prevented the destruction of a bridge over the Rhine River at Vetera in 15 C.E., thus preserving an escape route for Roman soldiers fleeing the army of Arminius. Agrippina not only saved numerous lives by preventing the panic-stricken Roman soldiers from tearing down the bridge, but she also stood on the bridge, praising and thanking everyone who passed over it, and doling out food, clothing, and medicine as needed. Tacitus (*Ann.* 1.69) relates that Tiberius, on hearing of Agrippina's actions, feared Agrippina's influence on the troops and the threat to his power she represented.

L'Hoir (1994, 12) attributes the suspicion aroused by Agrippina's behavior to Tacitus rather than Tiberius: "Agrippina the Elder, like Boudicca, is a *dux femina*, as Tacitus insinuates in the opaque mutterings of Tiberius, who appreciates the redundancy of an *imperator* when a woman takes charge of the army."²¹ The context of the passage, however, which focuses squarely on Tiberius's suspicion and fear of Agrippina, argues for another possible interpretation: that Tacitus imagines and depicts but does not necessarily agree with Tiberius's troubled musings. Anthony Barrett (1996, 22) notes that in a similar passage where Tacitus describes Agrippina in the pejorative terms *aequi impatiens, dominandi avida* (*Ann.* 6.25.1), "the charges are not denied; but they are placed in the mouth of Tiberius, as if to suggest that, while not necessarily untrue, they are discredited by association."

The expressions *ingens animi* and *munia ducis per eos dies induit*, in

particular, stand out in the description of Agrippina's role in the near disaster at Tevera. Agrippina appears to have violated the boundaries between male and female spheres of influence in "taking on the role of a military commander,"²² and yet, if one looks at Agrippina's actions, she never in fact took part in the military action. She did not appear on the battlefield, equipped with weapons and armor, prepared for combat. It was when disaster was clearly imminent that she took action, distributing food and clothing and encouraging the returning soldiers, on behalf of her husband's interests.²³ Her presence and her action on this occasion were completely legitimate. In no way did Agrippina's actions undermine the loyalty of the troops to their commander, nor did her presence lead to disastrous results.²⁴ Tiberius did, however, resent her praiseworthy behavior and feared the threat to his power that Germanicus's and Agrippina's popularity represented. Tacitus points out that Sejanus took full advantage to cast a sinister interpretation of Agrippina's actions on this and later occasions, exploiting Tiberius's fears: *accendebat haec onerabatque Seianus, perititia morum Tiberii odia in longum iaciens, quae reconderet auctaque promeret* (These thoughts were kept burning and piled high by Sejanus, who, with his experience of Tiberius's behavior, sowed hatreds for the distant future, to be stored away and brought out when grown, *Ann.* 1.69).²⁵

As Riikka Hälikkä (2002, 102) notes, "Actual military action by Roman women remains rare in Tacitus' text." Despite the suggestion posed by the verb *induit* (to dress or clothe oneself) in the passage cited above, Tacitus never has Agrippina take part in the military action *per se*, unlike Fulvia who, Dio (58.10) alleges, girded on a sword and rallied the troops at Praeneste. Fulvia, without her husband or his authorization, entered battle as a female warrior and was charged for the most female of weaknesses, "lack of self-control" (*impotentia muliebris*). Agrippina, however, 'stood by' her husband, fully a *matrona* in her pregnancy, on the field of action, but in no way acting the male role.

In contrast to Agrippina, Tacitus explicitly describes Plancina, the wife of Piso, as taking part in cavalry exercises and infantry maneuvers, and thus failing to keep herself within what was *decora feminis* (fitting for a woman), thus incurring the historian's disapproval: *nec Plancina se intra decora feminis tenebat, sed exercitio equitum, decursibus cohortium interesse* (*Ann.* 2.55). There is no question about Tacitus's opinion here: he clearly states that Plancina inappropriately transgressed gender boundaries. Plancina's behavior falls within the category of the negative female stereotypes of *infirmetas animi* and *impotentia muliebris*—weakness and lack of self-control.²⁶ Furthermore, Tacitus (*Ann.* 2.55) describes her actions as part of a wider phenomenon—the general dissolution of morality in the Roman legions at Syria, encouraged largely by her husband Piso's mismanagement, bribery, and favoritism. Thus,

while Agrippina's actions complement those of her husband in a favorable way, Plancina's complement her husband's in a distinctly unfavorable one.²⁷

Hans Königer sees the troublesome Plancina as a foil to the exemplary behavior of Agrippina as she accompanied Germanicus on his travels, and Anthony Marshall notes that in Tacitus's description of Agrippina, she "remains artistically subordinated to the depiction of Germanicus as hero."²⁸ Agrippina's actions at Tevera stand in contrast to those of Plancina precisely because Plancina went too far. By contrast, Agrippina's moments of influence with the troops are due to her singular virtue and the respect and compassion she wins from the soldiers. Tacitus relates that when Germanicus had unsuccessfully attempted to quell a mutiny among the Roman troops in Lower Germany in 14 C.E., it was only the pregnant Agrippina's departure from the camp in the interests of her safety, along with their son Caligula and the wives of other Roman officials, which brought an end to the mutiny in that the soldiers were so overcome by their remorse at the danger into which they had placed these women.

Tacitus tells us that before Agrippina's departure everyone questioned Germanicus's decision to keep his pregnant wife and infant son in the company of such lawless soldiers.²⁹ While Germanicus vacillated about whether or not to send his wife and child away to safety, Agrippina protested that as a descendant of the deified Augustus she could face danger with no inferior spirit. Nevertheless, embracing her pregnant belly and their son with much weeping (*Ann.* 1.40), her husband compelled her to leave:

incedebat muliebre et miserabile agmen, profuga ducis uxor, parvulum sinu filium gerens, lamentantes circum amicorum coniuges, quae simul trahebantur; nec minus tristes qui manebant . . . gemitus et planctus etiam militum auris oraue advertere: progrediuntur contuberniis . . . pudor inde et miseratio et patris Agrippae, Augusti avi memoria, socer Drusus, ipsa insigni fecunditate, praeclara pudicitia; . . . sed nihil aeque flexit quam invidia in Treviros: orant obsistunt, rediret maneret, pars Agrippinae occursantes, plurimi ad Germanicum regressi. (*Ann.* 1.40-1)

There went on its way a pitiable column of women: the leader's wife a refugee, carrying her tiny little son in her lap and surrounded by friends' lamenting spouses, who were being dragged off with her. And no less grim were the men who stayed behind . . . And the groans and breast-beating turned even the soldiers' ears and faces in their direction. They emerged from their billets . . . Hence arose [in the soldiers] shame and pity and the memory of her father Agrippa and of Augustus her grandfather, her father-in-law Drusus, and the woman

herself, with her distinguished fertility and conspicuous modesty . . . Yet nothing influenced them so much as their resentment of the Treviri. They begged, they blocked the way: she must come back, she must stay—some of them converged on Agrippina, the majority going back to Germanicus.³⁰

Tacitus describes Agrippina's effects on the morale and loyalty of the troops as salutary: she preserved an escape route for Germanicus's troops at Tevera, and her singular virtue and her departure from her husband's camp quelled a mutiny. Apart from reporting Tiberius's troubled reaction to her and her husband Germanicus's popularity, Tacitus does not relate an unambiguously negative consequence of Agrippina's presence in the camps. True, the Roman populace feared for her safety in the course of the mutiny, and her desire to stay with her husband in the midst of such danger could be interpreted as either headstrong or heroic. Nonetheless, it is only her departure to the protection of the Treviri that persuades the Roman soldiers to heed Germanicus.

Thus, while Tacitus's characterization of Plancina aligns her with the negative stereotype of the *dux femina*, his portrayal of Agrippina's actions represents her as a respectable *matrona*, presenting no threat to the safety of her country but wholeheartedly supporting the interests of her husband in a way that reinforces her allegiance to Rome. Her loyalty to Rome, however, could be construed (and was by Tiberius, according to Tacitus) as an interest in promoting the concerns of the Julian side of the family, thus fostering dangerous factionalism against Tiberius, a Claudian by birth.

Tiberius's suspicion of Agrippina on this occasion is all the more interesting, considering that it was he who allowed wives to accompany their husbands to the provinces.³¹ When Aulus Caecina had proposed in 21 C.E. that no provincial governor should be allowed to take his wife with him to his province, insofar as (he argued) women had a harmful effect on military activities, he was met with the considerable resistance of the other senators.³² The latter reaction suggests that the practice of women accompanying their husbands to postings in the provinces by this time was common and accepted.³³ In the late years of the Republic, a few women (e.g., Sulla's wife Caecilia Metella and Pompeius's wife Cornelia) had begun to travel with their senatorial husbands as these men gathered support and began their campaigns in the eastern provinces. Marshall argues that Augustus not only disapproved of legates' wives accompanying them in the provinces, but he also tried to curb this practice; however, members of the family of the *princeps*, because they spent longer tours of duty abroad (on both diplomatic and military engagements), were granted this privilege under Augustus. Indeed, in 21 C.E., at the debate in the senate mentioned above, where Aulus Caecina voiced his objection, Tacitus (*Ann.* 3.34.25–7) has Drusus note

that Livia often accompanied her husband Augustus on his journeys. Tiberius, who extended the periods of service for governors in the provinces, relaxed the rule on families accompanying their fathers and husbands abroad in order to avert the potential hardship incurred by prolonged separation from families.³⁴

Although occurring in a military context, Agrippina's presence with her husband Germanicus on his campaigns was not extraordinary for her time. And while Tacitus describes her as acting with courage in preserving the bridge at Tevera, he does not negatively characterize Agrippina Maior as a *dux femina* in this episode. If anything, Tacitus accords her praise for actions that conform to the *exempla* of heroic Roman women in times of crisis.

II. Agrippina's Alleged Arrogance (*Contumacia*)

Sejanus uses the term *contumacia* to describe Agrippina's behavior at *Annales* 4.12.10–1: *contumaciam eius insectari* ([Sejanus] inveighed against Agrippina's arrogance). The context is Tacitus's description of how Sejanus's ambition grew after the death of Drusus, the son of Tiberius, in 23 C.E. Tacitus describes the senate and the people as assuming the appearance of grief over Drusus's death, but secretly rejoicing that the chances of succession for Germanicus's sons seemed to be improving.³⁵ But, concealed as it was, this popular goodwill, combined with Agrippina's failure to hide her hopes for her children, only accelerated the ruin of the house of Germanicus.³⁶ As there seemed to be little doubt about the succession of Germanicus's sons, and as poisoning them was not a viable option, Sejanus plotted instead to turn public opinion against Agrippina, despite her unassailable virtue (*pudicitia Agrippinae impenetrabili*),³⁷ by attacking what he termed Agrippina's arrogance (*contumaciam eius insectari*), thereby hoping to revive the longstanding animosity between Livia and Agrippina.

Sejanus's appeal to Livia's ill-will towards Agrippina continues the theme of his malevolence begun at *Annals* 1.69.5, where Tacitus emphasizes Sejanus's keen perception of human nature and his ability to manipulate others' emotions. Sejanus is said to have taken note of how deeply the popularity and heroism of Agrippina and Germanicus troubled Tiberius:

potiorem iam apud exercitus Agrippinam quam legatos, quam duces; conpressam a muliere seditionem, cui nomen principis obsistere non quiverit. accendebat haec onerabatque Seianus, peritia morum Tiberii odia in longum iaciens, quae reconderet auctaque promeret. (*Ann.* 1.69)

Already Agrippina was more influential with the armies than legates, than leaders: the woman had suppressed a mutiny which the princeps's name had been

unable to stop. These thoughts were kept burning and piled high by Sejanus, who, with his experience of Tiberius's behavior, sowed hatreds for the distant future, to be stored away and brought out when grown.³⁸

Later, in book 3, Tacitus writes that on the day of Germanicus's public funeral at Rome, Tiberius was deeply affected by the crowd's acclamation of Agrippina and her children.

nihil tamen Tiberium magis penetravit quam studia hominum accensa in Agrippinam, cum decus patriae, solum Augusti sanguinem, unicum antiquitatis specimen appellarent versique ad caelum ac deos integram illi subolem ac superstitem iniquiorum precarentur. (*Ann.* 3.4)

Yet nothing penetrated Tiberius more than men's burning enthusiasm for Agrippina, whom they called the glory of her fatherland, the sole blood of Augustus, the one and only manifestation of ancient times, and, turning to heaven and the gods, they prayed that her progeny would be untouched and would outlive those prejudiced against her.³⁹

It is in book 4 that Sejanus now turned his attention to playing on Livia's dislike for Agrippina so that before Caesar she accused her adoptive granddaughter of being haughty in her fertility, being supported by popular affection, and gaping for mastery.⁴⁰ Sejanus managed to reach the ears of Livia by choosing a messenger who was one of the Augusta's dearest friends, Mutilia Prisca. Thus Livia, who by nature (so Tacitus) was anxious for power, became irreconcilably hostile to her grandson's widow. Further, Agrippina's acquaintances were encouraged to goad on her pride in their conversations with her, no doubt in the interests of gathering more evidence against her.⁴¹

The noun *contumacia* (inflexibility, stubbornness) and the adjective *contumax* (insolent, obstinate, stiff-necked, stubborn) were usually used in a pejorative sense.⁴² Both, however, can sometimes be used in a good sense to indicate 'firmness, constancy, and self-confidence,' as well as 'unyielding, firm, steadfast.'⁴³ Indeed, from the context of the passage, it appears that the negative sense of both noun and adjective may be discounted. Tacitus makes it clear here that Sejanus was now working on reviving Livia's old animosity towards Agrippina. Because Agrippina's virtue of Agrippina was unassailable (*pudicitia Agrippinae impenetrabili*) Sejanus could not make use of a stock-in-trade well used by slanderers, namely, allegations of sexual misconduct.⁴⁴ Rather, Sejanus made his accusation more plausible by basing his criticism on Agrippina's remarkable virtues and tailoring his attack on Agrippina to themes

he knew would provoke Livia to do what he hoped she would do: *ut superbam fecunditate, subnixam popularibus studiis inhiare dominationi apud Caesarem arguerent* (Ann. 4.12). Sejanus accused Agrippina of arrogance because of her proven fertility and alleged that this, as well as her dependence on popular zeal, caused Agrippina to have aspirations of power.

Tacitus further relates that Sejanus hoped that Livia would bring this to the attention of Tiberius, who, as we have seen earlier, was already paranoid about Agrippina's remarkable virtue and popularity. Not satisfied with Livia's involvement in the matter—potent enough—Sejanus enticed those in Agrippina's circle to bait her by talk about the possibility of her sons' succession. What good Roman mother, especially one in Agrippina's position, would not have the highest aspirations for her sons' political careers? Her high spirits were not unreasonable, as everyone in Rome knew that her sons would be the heirs-apparent upon the death of Tiberius. Unfortunately, with Sejanus in charge at Rome, Agrippina's ambition for the future of her sons was twisted into something akin to *maiestas* (essentially, treason).⁴⁵ Livia, discredited by Tacitus's description of her as one anxious for power, was convinced by Sejanus's ally that Agrippina was locked in a struggle for supremacy with her, albeit through their respective sons. This is exactly the sort of *aemulatio* that Germanicus had advised Agrippina to avoid.

This passage is very interesting, as Tacitus credits Sejanus with a manipulative rhetorical skill that highlighted the tenor of the times. As Ronald Mellor (1994, 58) notes, "traditional Roman virtues ha[d] become dangerous." While we might fully expect commendation by her contemporaries for Agrippina's remarkable *pudicitia* and *fecunditas* (and Tacitus is quite clear that the people of Rome thought very highly of her), these virtues had become weapons against her in Sejanus's hands. Königer, seeing Agrippina as a tragic heroine, suggests that Agrippina was cast in the role of Niobe (*superbam fecunditate*) who had boasted that her fertility was superior to Leto's and afterwards experienced the loss of all of her children, shot by the arrows of Apollo and Artemis because of her hubris.⁴⁶ Tacitus underlines Sejanus's inversion of traditional virtues with an aphorism that occurs a little later in *Annales*, book 4: *etiam gloria ac uirtus infensos habet* (Even honor and virtue make enemies, 4.33.32–4). The fact that Tacitus notes Agrippina's possession of traditional virtues and also describes Sejanus's actions against her in such critical terms indicate that we should not take the usually uncomplimentary noun *contumacia* as Tacitus's characterization of Agrippina, but rather as part of his strategy in casting Sejanus as the thoroughly evil and manipulative henchman of Tiberius, and Agrippina as the victim of Sejanus, Tiberius, and Livia.

III. Agrippina's Alleged "Insolent Tongue and Defiant Spirit" (*Adrogantiam Oris et Contumacem Animum Incusavit*)

Similar to the charge of *contumacia* above is the criticism that Tiberius lodged against Agrippina after the death of his mother Livia (*Ann.* 5.3). Through a letter read aloud to the senate (Tiberius was on Capri), he accused Agrippina Maior's son Nero of sexual indiscretions (*amores iuvenum et impudicitiam nepoti: obiectabat*), and criticized Agrippina for her insolent tongue and defiant spirit (*adrogantiam oris et contumacem animum incusavit*). Tiberius, Tacitus notes, did not dare to invent charges against Agrippina similar to those brought against her son (*in nurum ne id quidem confingere ausus*). The themes here correspond to those in the Sejanus episode; since Agrippina's traditional virtues of *pudicitia* and *fecunditas* were unquestionable, the virtues themselves are used as weapons against her, and Tiberius accuses her of insolence and arrogance. While previously Sejanus was the one to bring such accusations against Agrippina, now Tiberius has taken up this invective as his own.

Tacitus also highlights in this passage how after the death of Livia in 29 C.E. the malice of Sejanus and Tiberius ran unchecked.⁴⁷ And while Livia, despite her dislike of Agrippina, may have been privy before her death to the letter's contents, the people believed that Livia had held it back (*missaeque in Agrippinam ac Neronem litterae quas pridem adlatas et cohibitas ab Augusta credidit vulgus*). The shocked silence and fear of the senate after the letter was read, and the uncertainty about how to react to it felt by all but those who stood to gain by agreeing with Tiberius, reveal the general feeling of the time.⁴⁸ The decent and honorable who objected to the outrageous accusations of the *princeps* were stunned into silence because of the danger into which their opposition placed them. Their fear of Tiberius placed restrictions on their freedom of expression, and this, as well as Tiberius's criticism of Agrippina, cast the *princeps* in a very unfavorable light.

Again, from the context of this negative characterization of Agrippina (*adrogantiam oris et contumacem animum*), which Tacitus places in the mouth of Tiberius just as the *princeps*'s paranoid behavior worsens, it seems very unlikely that the criticism can be taken as Tacitus's own view of Agrippina. Rather, Tiberius's abusive treatment of Agrippina characterizes the *princeps* as volatile, dangerous, and increasingly intolerant of opinions different from his own.

IV. Agrippina Semper Atrox

In contrast to the senators' silence, Agrippina's outspokenness is portrayed by Tacitus as dangerously on display after the trial of her second cousin, Claudia

Pulchra, in 26 C.E.: *Agrippina semper atrox, tum et periculo propinquae accensa* (Ann. 4.52). Claudia Pulchra had been accused of *maiestas* and adultery. Agrippina approaches Tiberius as he is making a sacrifice to the deified Augustus, and accuses him of hypocrisy as he is persecuting Augustus's true descendants (her second cousin and herself in particular) while slaying sacrificial victims in honor of Augustus. Tiberius responds in a Greek verse, telling her that she is not wronged because she is not queen, *non ideo laedi quia non regnaret*. Suetonius reports Tiberius's comment somewhat differently: '*si non dominaris, inquit, filiola, iniuriam te accipere existimas?*' (Tib. 53). For Tacitus, Agrippina's confrontation with Tiberius marked the beginning of the end as her opposition to the *princeps* was simply too overt, especially since she reminded him that she, unlike Tiberius, was a bona fide descendant of Augustus rather than an adoptive heir, and that she and her descendants represented a serious threat to Tiberius's tenure.

I argue that this passage brings us closer to an appreciation of a quality Agrippina possessed—her outspokenness, which, in addition to her undeniable *pudicitia*, *fecunditas*, *constantia*, and *fides*, Tacitus perhaps admired but also acknowledged as dangerous behavior under the reign of a tyrant. Agrippina was not afraid to speak her mind. Indeed, she seemed incapable of deception or dissimulation.⁴⁹ Modern scholars have construed this as either a positive or a negative trait. For example, while Gunhild Vidén sees this as evidence of Agrippina's honesty, Barbara Levick criticizes Agrippina's political acumen as "inadequate to her needs."⁵⁰ Agrippina's eventual fate seems to bear out Levick's assessment. But in a climate in which, as Mellor (1994, 52) describes, Tacitus clearly saw flattery and sycophancy towards those in power as the source of corruption of all relationships, Agrippina's sincerity and outspoken opposition to the *princeps* were commendable, if perhaps foolhardy.

Tacitus uses the adjective *atrox* (frightful, fierce, shocking, unrelenting) to describe Agrippina in *Annales* 4.52.⁵¹ According to Michael Kaplan (1979, 411), "*atrox* is most often used in the context of a conflict, whether that be a *pugna*, *bellum*, *oratio*, or *contio*. [It is] often used to describe soldiers. . . ." He further notes that when applied to men, this adjective obtains its positive or negative connotation from the context in which it is used. When applied to women, however, the meaning has been taken to be wholly pejorative.⁵² But I would argue that if military language can be used to describe positively the heroic behavior of women, as done in the *Laudatio Turiae*, we need to understand a wider range of meaning when *atrox* is applied to women. The author of the *Laudatio* noted his wife's outspokenness on both her family's and his behalf on several occasions, although her speech at times was met with hostility and violence. In the *Laudatio*, the language used to describe the female honorand was normally reserved for male subjects,⁵³ but the use of such terms when

applied to women was not always negative. The context in which the language occurs gives it a positive, negative, or neutral value, and the context of *Annales* 4.52 suggests that *atrox* describes Agrippina's *oratio*, her outspoken speech on behalf of her family and friends.

While many modern commentators have viewed harsh-sounding adjectives like *atrox*, *contumax*, *ferox*, etc., as Tacitus's effort to describe Agrippina's behavior as negatively masculine, they have not examined to any length how he used these adjectives to describe her freedom of expression. We should not be surprised, then, as Syme (1981, 40) notes, that this passage is one of two in the Tiberian books (books 1–6) where Tacitus comes the closest to allowing a woman to deliver an oration in direct speech. In the other passage shortly later, it is again Agrippina, now described as *pervicax irae* (stubborn in her anger), who speaks, pleading with Tiberius to let her marry again (4.53.1).⁵⁴ The fact that Tacitus uses the adjectives *atrox* and *pervicax* (both of which can mean stubborn or unyielding)⁵⁵ to describe Agrippina before she, the only woman whose speech is reported in the Tiberian books, begins to speak, indicates that the historian was preoccupied with her outspoken opposition to Tiberius. Perhaps he gave her words to allow the reader to judge them, or perhaps he wanted to portray her as a tragic figure, a victim of the malice of those in power. Regardless, Agrippina's outspokenness is a theme to which we shall soon return.

V. Agrippina's Lack of Female Weakness because of Her Masculine Ambitions⁵⁶

After Agrippina's death Tacitus relates that Tiberius savagely disparaged her legendary virtues. If previously Tiberius had not dared to accuse Agrippina of any sexual indiscretions, now he does by accusing her of adultery: *enimvero Tiberius foedissimis criminationibus exarsit, impudicitiam arguens et Asinium Gallum adulterum, eiusque morte ad taedium vitae compulsam* (Ann. 6.25). Immediately follows this enigmatic description of Agrippina: *sed Agrippina aequi impatiens, dominandi avida, virilibus curis feminarum vitia exuerat* (But in fact Agrippina, impatient of equality and greedy for mastery, had cast off female flaws in a preference for men's concerns).⁵⁷ Several interpretations of this sentence are possible. It may be a continuation of Tacitus's report of Tiberius's rant against Agrippina, as the tone appears to be consistent with Tiberius's earlier complaints about Agrippina. Or it may be taken as Tacitus's own commentary on Agrippina's character.⁵⁸

I would argue that Agrippina displayed both the traditional virtues expected of women, as well as the heroic virtues that were typically considered masculine but were sometimes exhibited by women under exceptional

circumstances. *Matronae* who possessed such a combination of virtues tended not to be criticized. If they were criticized, it typically was because of some political motivation (as is the case with the time-tested rhetorical strategy of "secondary vilification," which includes allegations of sexual misconduct as a standard *topos*). Thus, the phrase *virilibus curis feminarum vitia exuerat* could well mean that everyone knew that Agrippina's virtues were so exceptional that she was incapable of the alleged female weakness (namely, adultery), with which Tiberius charged her. In short, Tiberius's posthumous defamatory remarks about Agrippina fell flat because they were not credible. We can, then, accept Rogers' (1931, 149) statement that the sentence *sed Agrippina aequi impatiens, dominandi avida, virilibus curis feminarum vitia exuerat* (*Ann.* 6.25) is Tacitus's final judgment of Agrippina, but that it is not necessarily a negative one. Such an assessment—that *feminarum vitia exuerat* is a *positive* judgment—is consistent with the portrait of Agrippina in the *Annales* that I have been arguing for. Indeed, all but one of the apparently negative descriptions of Agrippina come from contexts where Tacitus either portrays Agrippina's outspoken opposition to Tiberius on behalf of her friends and family, or where, postulating the thoughts and emotions of Sejanus, Tiberius, or Livia, he represents the animosity that they unjustly felt toward her. While Tacitus's own opinion of Agrippina is ambiguous, he clearly illustrated how unfairly Agrippina was treated. But what of Germanicus? He, unlike the others who described her so harshly, could not have been more loyal to his beloved wife. So why does Tacitus claim that Germanicus used the noun *ferocia* to refer to his wife's behavior?

VI. The Deathbed of Germanicus: Figured Speech

Some scholars, including Mellor and Hayne, have taken Tacitus's account of Germanicus's final words to his wife—advising her to put aside her harsh manner (*ferocia*) and to learn to compromise (*Ann.* 2.72)—as damning proof that Germanicus viewed her ferocious passion and competitive ambition as character flaws.⁵⁹ If even Germanicus, who according to all accounts was happily married to Agrippina, recognized these failings in her and chided her for them, his words would support the view that Tacitus represents these qualities as reflecting negatively on her character. As we have seen, despite the impeccable *exemplum* she provided in fulfilling the expectations of Augustan moral legislation (six of her children survived infancy), her enemies (Sejanus, Tiberius, and Livia) criticized her for an allegedly domineering and harsh personality.⁶⁰

In a seminal article written in 1953, Henry Traub carefully catalogued

Tacitus's use of the term *ferocia*, especially where it signifies outspokenness and defiant behavior towards the emperor. He remarks on the passage where Germanicus apparently chided his wife at his death bed: "The character of the elder Agrippina exemplifies well the political connotations of the word *ferocia* as used by Tacitus (where *ferocia* = παρρησία / *parrhêsia*)."⁶¹ Παρρησία, which means 'saying everything,' in itself is neither good nor bad. In Athenian democratic ideology, it had a positive value, associated with the courageous expression of one's beliefs no matter how unpopular they may be. Παρρησία "always involves frankness, and the full disclosure of one's thoughts— in that sense it is opposed to dissimulation, hiding one's real thoughts or the unpleasant truth."⁶² Traub (1953, 40) notes the equation of the two nouns, *ferocia* and παρρησία, on the comparison of Tacitus's Latin and Dio's Greek accounts of when Asinius Gallus insulted the emperor Tiberius in the senate.⁶³ In examining the uses of *ferocia* and its cognates in the works of Tacitus, Traub (1953, 261) comments that the noun is sometimes used "to describe the savage tribe, the defiant youth, the reckless bravery of the soldier, or the insolence of a public enemy."⁶⁴ He observes (1953, 252) that "Tacitus very often uses the adjective *ferox* or the adverb *ferociter* in conjunction with words that signify speech or speaking." Most interestingly, though, Traub (1993, 253) notes the use of the superlative form of *ferox*—*ferocissimi*—in *Annales* 1.2 to describe that class of *nobiles* who, if they had survived the civil wars, would have opposed Augustus in his rise to power, in contrast with the other important men of the state who willingly subscribed to the new regime:

militem donis, populum annona, cunctos dulcedine otii pellexit, insurgere paulatim, munia senatus magistratuum legum in se trahere, nullo adversante, *cum ferocissimi per acies aut proscriptione cecidissent, ceteri nobilium, quanto quis servitio promptior, opibus et honoribus extollerentur.*

Traub (1953, 254–5) points out that Tacitus also used the noun *ferocia* in this sense of connotations of bold speech, opposition to the emperor, and aristocratic birth, to describe Piso the Elder, as well as L. Calpurnius Piso, the brother of Cn. Piso.⁶⁵ Although Traub (1953, 261) concludes that Tacitus would have disapproved of the expression of political defiance indicated by this particular sense of *ferocia*, I disagree. The political dimensions of Tacitus's use of the word are more important than Traub and others allow.

Although it is true that the Pisones are not favorably depicted by *ferox*-words, there are a number of parallels between Tacitus's description of Agrippina's behavior and his account of the trial of the historian Cremutius Cordus, whom Tacitus seems to have admired. Both Cremutius Cordus and Agrippina died

under Tiberius because of their outspokenness, and are associated with nostalgia for the Roman Republican past. Tacitus has the people call Agrippina *unicum antiquitatis specimen* (Ann. 3.4) upon the death of her husband Germanicus, and Tacitus claims that Cremutius Cordus called C. Cassius *Romanorum ultimus* in his *Histories* (Ann. 4.34). Tacitus reports that although both died of allegedly self-imposed starvation, their voices were preserved. Tacitus (Ann. 4.53) notes that Agrippina Maior's daughter, Agrippina Minor, recorded in her memoirs the details of her mother's life, while Seneca (*Dial.* 6.1–4) informs us that Cremutius Cordus's daughter preserved his work. I have argued elsewhere (2004) that although Tacitus clearly admired Cremutius Cordus, he also faulted him for his too open opposition to the emperor. I think the same is true of Agrippina Maior; Tacitus sees her as *unicum antiquitatis specimen* not only in terms of her matronly virtues—namely, her fidelity, chastity, and remarkable fertility—but also in the sense that she was one of the few survivors of noble birth willing to oppose the emperor. As the senate grew increasingly obsequious under the reign of Tiberius, at a time when very few men of noble birth had the courage to speak their minds, Agrippina's outspokenness was all the more remarkable and praiseworthy, especially because she was a woman.

As *ferocia* seems to have been a family flaw (or virtue, depending on one's perspective), it also appears to have been a family trait common among the descendants of the elder Julia. Not only is Agrippina Maior described as *ferox* but so also are her brother, Agrippa Postumus, and her daughter, Agrippina Minor.⁶⁶ Tacitus (Ann. 1.3) describes Agrippa Postumus as *robore corporis stolidè ferox* and Traub (1953, 257–8) argues that the overall portrait of Agrippa gleaned from the accounts of Tacitus, Livy, Suetonius, and Dio conveys a sense of both his open opposition to Augustus and his bold speech. Perhaps Postumus was also a bit of a wild man, as he is described in a physical sense as *ferox*. Tacitus describes the animosity of Agrippina Minor, the daughter of Agrippina Maior, towards Seneca and Burrus as follows: *certamen utrique [Seneca and Burrus] unum erat contra ferociam Agrippinae, quae cunctis malae dominationis cupidinis flagrans . . .* (Ann. 13.2; see Traub 1953, 259). When accused of conspiring by Burrus against Nero, Agrippina Minor delivers her response to the accusations in direct speech, which Tacitus precedes with this description: *et Agrippina ferociae memor* (Ann. 13.21). In this account, the daughter comes quite close to the mother in terms of her outspoken opposition to the *princeps*, in this case Agrippina Minor's own son.

As I have noted, scholars such as Michael Kaplan have noted that the use of adjectives like *ferox* and *atrox* may be positive when applied to men, especially soldiers. And if such traits are passed on from generation to generation, then men and women in the family will share these qualities (or flaws). Tacitus's

use of *ferox* and *ferocia* certainly seems to imply an inherited family trait, in the case of both the Pisones and the descendants of M. Agrippa and Julia, the daughter of Augustus. In contrast to Kaplan, who argues that such adjectives are always pejorative when applied to women, Judith Hallett (1984, 339) sees Agrippina as having "continued her father's high-quality service to the *princeps*, and as having inherited her father's gift for leadership in battle." Further, Hallett (1984, 338) speaks of Agrippina in the tradition of "upper-class Roman *filiae* . . . fully capable of displaying their father's, and blood family's, unique nature and talents, and often doing so in an impressive manner recognized publicly by outsiders." Agrippina, however, never assumed the formal duties assumed by male leaders, even though she is described as having taken on the responsibilities of a general.⁶⁷ As a widow, however, she does bear a man's responsibility for her own and her children's safety and their future prospects.⁶⁸ In a later article, Hallett argues that Agrippina acquired a status in public befitting her illustrious male ancestry. What Hallett (1989, 62–3) defines as Agrippina's "sameness" to her male relatives is also what makes her the Other to those whom Tacitus portrays as holding a negative view of her character. So surely Germanicus's last words are protective of her and their dynasty.

In summary, then, Tacitus's representation of Germanicus's final words to his wife need not be read as evidence that even Germanicus found Agrippina to be a difficult personality. In cautioning her, he was looking out for her and his children's interests. But I see Tacitus working with a subtle palette here, with many shades of grey. On the one hand, he portrays Agrippina's outspokenness as responsible for her demise and, therefore, as a fatal, or even an irritating, flaw. On the other hand, he indicates that in displaying this characteristic, Agrippina proved herself in following in the proud tradition of her ancestors, in that, although a woman, she displayed the sort of courage and mettle in looking out for her family which would have been admired in a man, particularly a soldier. But Tacitus also makes it clear that various people were disturbed to encounter such conduct in a woman. This, then, explains the quite diverse interpretations of her behavior.

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Notes

1. Pliny, *HN* 11.187; Tacitus, *Ann.* 2.72, 2.82; Suetonius, *Calig.* 1.2.
2. I use Fisher's 1906 Oxford text in this paper.
3. Translation from Woodman 2004, 76. Elsewhere, unless otherwise noted, translations are my own.
4. *Ann.* 1.69: *femina ingens animi, munia ducis per eos dies induit*; *Ann.* 4.12: *contumacia*; *Ann.* 4.52: *semper atrox*; *Ann.* 5.3: *adrogantiam oris et contumacem animum*; *Ann.* 6.25: *aequi inpatiens, dominandi avida, virilibus curis feminarum vitia exuerat*.
5. OLD, s.v. "ferox," 1–4; s.v. "atrox," 1–7; s.v. "contumacia," 1–2; s.v. "contumax," 1–2. Cf. TLL, s.v. "atrox," 2, *de hominum factis et sortibus terribilibus*; s.v. "contumax," 1, *de hominibus*; s.v. "ferocia," 1, *pertinet ad homines (in bonam partem)*; s.v. "ferox," 1, *homines*.
6. Kaplan 1979, 411; L'Hoir 1992, 131 and 2006, 111–95; Shotter 2000, 346, 349, 356; Ginsburg 2006, 37.
7. Mellor 1994, 76; Hayne 2000, 38; L'Hoir 2006, 118–9, 130–1.
8. Tacitus was a misogynist: Willeumier 1949, 79–80; Rutland 1978; L'Hoir 1992, 132 and 1994; L'Hoir 2006 *contra* those who say Tacitus was not a misogynist: Baldwin 1972, 97; Syme 1958, 534–6 and 1981, 41–2; Wallace 1991, 3574; Hälikk 2002, 102.
9. E.g., Königer 1966, 12–3 and 63–87 vs. Hayne 2000, 38.
10. As Syme (1958, 545 and 1981, 43) has also argued.
11. In this, I am in agreement with Goodyear (1972, vol. 1, 106), who notes that the lexical division, *in bonam partem* vs. *in malam partem*, which Gerber-Greef 1962 (and, I would add, the authors of the entries in the TLL) impose on such words as *ferox* and *ferocia* is an artificial one, and that "*ferox* in T[acitus] often gets favourable or unfavourable colour from its context, but quite often too it seems neutral in tone."
12. *Contra* L'Hoir 2006, 48, who, though noting this distancing strategy in Tacitus's *Annales*, credits the opinions expressed to the historian himself.
13. On the distinction between *palam* and *aperte*, see Ahl 1984.
14. Goodyear 1972, vol. 1, 106; Vidén 1993, 9; Hälikk 2002, 100.
15. L'Hoir 1994, 6–12 and 2006, 112–8; Ginsburg 2006, 23, 112–6.
16. Other characterizations of such women include Cicero's Clodia, Vergil's Dido, Seneca's Phaedra, and Plutarch's Fulvia and Cleopatra; see L'Hoir 1994, 17–24 and Ginsburg 2006, 112–6.
17. *Ann.* 1.3: Livia's involvement in the deaths of Gaius and Lucius; 1.5: suspicions that she poisoned Augustus; 1.3; 1.5–6: her alleged involvement in the exile and death of Agrippa Postumus; see Gafforini 1997, 133.
18. Gafforini (1997, 140–1) suggests that Tacitus may have used a source extremely favorable to the family of Germanicus, which perhaps explains Tacitus's negative view of Livia.
19. E.g., Terentia, Cicero's wife: Cicero, *Fam.* 14.7.1–4; Ovid's anonymous wife: Ovid, *Tr.*

1.3.79–102, 1.6.5ff., 4.3.71ff., 5.2.37ff., 5.14.15ff.; *Pont.* 3.1.31ff.; and the anonymous addressee of the *Laudatio Turiae*: Hemelrijk 2004, 189–93; cf. Hemelrijk 1999, 89–92.

20. Shotter 2000, 346, 349, 356; L'Hoir 1992, 132; 1994, 12; 2006, 118; Kaplan 1979, 412: "Agrippina has committed one of the cardinal acts of Roman non-femininity: she has presided over Roman troops." Although Ginsburg (2006, 26) seems to see Agrippina Maior's actions at Tevera as praiseworthy, she sees an unfavorable verbal parallel between mother's and daughter's conduct. L'Hoir (2006, 119) sees Tiberius's words as serving "a proleptic purpose in the narrative of the *Annales*," anticipating the actions of Agrippina Minor. Syme (1958, 314) has Tacitus progressively reveal both Agrippina Maior and Minor, rather than provide a portrait of either one: "Pride, anger, energy, ferocity, and ambition are manifested in all these women say and all they do. A powerful epithet renders them, or a sharp phrase for comment in passing."

21. Cf. also L'Hoir 1992, 132 and 2006, 118. Marshall (1975, 14) and Königer (1966, 24ff.) are entirely positive about Agrippina's actions on this occasion.

22. Walker (1952, 63) discusses Tacitus's use of the metaphor of clothing and stripping with respect to the elder Agrippina. She notes that this metaphor "is a constant means of characterizing the hypocrite, and is also used in reference to the pretences forced on honest characters by their oppressors." However, the examples she cites make it unclear whether she sees Agrippina as a hypocrite or an honest character. She accepts that Tacitus negatively characterizes Agrippina, citing the same phrases I critique in this paper, but without examining each in its specific context in the *Annales*.

23. In their introduction to their edited volume, Joshel and Murnaghan (1998, 15) note that the elite Roman male characterization of both slaves and women often involves the portrayal of the wife or slave as a "flawless second self, whose interests naturally coincide with those of the husband or master." In such stories of Roman loyalty, "under the pressure of political crises . . . the loyal wife enacts the role of a husband so that the husband will not be reduced to the role of a wife."

24. Marshall's (1984, 169 note 6) citations of instances of "scandal and military disaster attributed to women's presence in the camps" (*Ann.* 2.55, 57; 15.10.6, 13.1; Pliny, *Ep.* 6.31; Dio Cassius 56.20.2, 22.2; 59.18.4) bears some examination as proof that this was the general attitude of the Romans toward women in the camps.

25. English translation from Woodman 2004, 36.

26. Hemelrijk 2004, 189 and L'Hoir 2006, 111–57.

27. Pelling 1993 is a nuanced discussion of Tacitus's portrayal of all of these characters.

28. Königer 1966, 24ff.; Marshall 1975, 14 note 5; also Vidén 1993, 38.

29. *Ann.* 1.40: *cur filium parvulum, cur gravidam coniugem inter furentis et omnis humani iuris violatores haberet?* (People asked why, among these madmen who had broken every law, he kept with him his baby son and his pregnant wife).

30. Translation from Woodman 2004, 22–3.

31. Marshall 1975, 12–4 and Rawson 1986, 27–8.

32. *Ann.* 3.33–4; Marshall (1975, 17) in his analysis of Caecina's speech sees in the order of Caecina's arguments a description of progressive decline: women's improper influence "extending from the initial domination of the Roman *domi* to subsequent control of civil *fora*, and now as presenting the culminating challenge to proper management of the *exercitus*." L'Hoir (1994, 13–7) and Ginsburg (1993, 88–96) see in Caecina's speech a "rhetorical pastiche of Livy's debate over the repeal of the *Lex Oppia*, legislation aimed at curbing women's expenditure on personal adornment and inhibiting their mobility."

33. Raepsaet-Charlier 1982, 59: "Il apparaît donc que femmes et familles accompagnaient

fréquemment les sénateurs en charge dans toutes les provinces de l'Empire, quelles que fussent les conditions de confort, et pour toutes les fonctions possibles, même en période de guerre ou de troubles. Les choix étaient uniquement personnels et il ne semble pas y avoir eu d'évolution chronologique."

34. Marshall 1975, 12–4 and Rawson 1986, 27–8.

35. *Ann.* 4.12: *ceterum laudante filium pro rostris Tiberio senatus populusque habitum ac voces dolentum simulatione magis quam libens induebat, domumque Germanici revirescere occulti laetabantur.*

36. *Ann.* 4.12: *quod principium fauoris et mater Agrippina spem male tegens perniciem adceleravere.*

37. *Ann.* 4.12: *nam Seianus ubi videt mortem Drusi inultam intersectoribus, sine maerore publico esse, ferox scelerum, et quia prima prouenerant, volutare secum quonam modo Germanici liberos perverteret, quorum non dubia successio. neque spargi venenum in tres poterat, egregia custodum fide et pudicitia Agrippinae impenetrabili.*

38. Translation from Woodman 2004, 36.

39. Translation from Woodman 2004, 84.

40. *Ann.* 4.12.10–4: *igitur contumaciam eius insectari, vetus Augustae odium, recentem Liviae conscientiam exagitare, ut superbam fecunditate, subnixam popularibus studiis inhiare dominationi apud Caesarem arguerent.*

41. *Ann.* 4.12: *quia Prisca in animo Augustae valida anum suapte natura potentiae anxiam insociabilem nurui efficiebat. Agrippinae quoque proximi inliciebantur pravis sermonibus tumidos spiritus perstimulare.*

42. *Harpers' Latin Dictionary: A New Latin Dictionary Founded on the Translation of Freund's Latin-German Lexicon*, edited by E. A. Andrews (New York and Cincinnati, 1907), vol. 1, s.v. "contumacia" and s.v. "contumax." I have cited *Harpers' Latin Dictionary* here rather than the *OLD*, as the entries for these words are fuller in this source.

43. *Harpers' Latin Dictionary*, s.v. "contumacia," I.A and "contumax," I.A.

44. Allegations of sexual misconduct were a key element in the standard Roman repertoire in discrediting the women associated with one's political opponents. See Dixon 2001, 140–53 and Cluett 1998, esp. 81–2.

45. Tacitus discusses Tiberius's revival of the treason law at *Ann.* 1.72.

46. König 1966, 71, with Ovid, *Met.* 6.167–317.

47. *Ann.* 5.3: *ceterum ex eo praerupta iam et urgens dominatio: nam incolumi Augusta erat adhuc perfugium, quia Tiberio inveteratum erga matrem obsequium neque Seianus audebat auctoritati parentis antire: tunc velut frenis exoluti proruperunt.*

48. *Ann.* 5.3: *magno senatus pavore ac silentio, donec pauci quis nulla ex honesto spes (et publica mala singulis in occasionem gratiae trahuntur) ut referretur postulavere, promptissimo Cotta Messalino cum atroci sententia. sed aliis a primoribus maximeque a magistratibus trepidabatur: quippe Tiberius etsi infense invectus cetera ambigua reliquerat.*

49. Tacitus (*Ann.* 4.45) describes her as *simulationum nescia* (incapable of deception) and incapable of disguising her tone of voice or manner as she dined at a banquet after Sejanus had warned her that Tiberius intended to poison her. Agrippina rejected fruit offered by Tiberius and in so doing offended the *princeps*.

50. Vidén 1997, 108 and Levick 1972, 172.

51. *OLD*, s.v. "atrox," 1a, 1b, 6, and 7.

52. Ginsburg (2006, 23) follows Kaplan in this argument; however, Ginsburg sees Tacitus as echoing the description of Agrippina Maior when he used similar adjectives to describe her

daughter Agrippina Minor. Although I agree with Ginsburg that Tacitus characterizes Agrippina Minor's behavior as inappropriately masculine, I do not think this is true of Agrippina Maior. While Agrippina Minor appears to have sought power for herself, notably as co-regent with her son Nero, Agrippina Maior did not. The latter tried to protect and promote the interests of her children, which was consistent with behavior expected of a traditional *matrona*.

53. Hemelrijk 2004, 185, 189.

54. Syme 1981, 40. I do not agree with Saavedra (1998), who sees Agrippina Maior's desire to remarry as the reason for her ruined reputation. According to Rawson (1986, 31–2), under Augustus upper-class widows under the age of 50 were required to remarry within a period of two years. Tiberius's refusal to allow Agrippina to remarry seems arbitrary or motivated by political reasons rather than any moralistic qualms; cf. Treggiari 1991, 112, 127, 172, and 500.

55. OLD, s.v. "atrox," 7 and s.v. "pervicax," 1a.

56. Ann. 6.25: *Agrippina aequi impatiens, dominandi avida, virilibus curis feminarum vitia exuerat*.

57. Translation from Woodman 2004, 178.

58. The ambiguity as to whose point of view is represented here recalls Fowler's (2000, 44–7) discussion of how implicit embedded focalization (i.e., who speaks?) in a literary text generates ambiguity and uncertainty. Does Tacitus merely continue Tiberius's train of thought, or does Tacitus insert his own authorial voice? How we answer this question has potentially dramatic effects on the way in which we read the narrative.

59. Mellor 1994, 76 and Hayne 2000, 38.

60. Lindsay 1995, 4: "In all Agrippina produced nine children, of whom only six survived to adulthood." The surviving children were Nero, Drusus, Caligula (Gaius), Agrippina Minor, Drusilla, and Livilla.

61. Traub 1953, 256 on Ann. 2.72.

62. Sluiter and Rosen 2004, 4–8.

63. Ann. 1.12: *nec ideo iram eius lenivit, pridem invisus, tamquam ducta in matrimonium Vipsania M. Agrippae filia, quae quondam Tiberii uxor fuerat, plus quam civilia agigaret Pollionisque Asinii patris ferociam retineret.*; Dio Cassius 57.2.5: Ἀσίνιος δὲ δὴ Γάλλος παρορησίᾳ αἰεὶ ποτε πατρὶα καὶ ὑπὲρ τὸ συμφέρον αὐτ' ἠρώμενος.

64. Horace describes Cleopatra VII as *deliberata morte ferocior* at Ode 1.37.29, which implies admiration for both her courage as well as her proud refusal to be paraded, alive, in a Roman triumph.

65. Ann. 2.43: *Cn. Pisonem, ingenio violentum et obsequii ignarum, insita ferocia a patre Pisone qui civili bello resurgens in Africa partis acerrimo ministerio adversus Caesarem iuvit . . . sed praeter paternos spiritus uxoris quoque Plancinae nobilitate et opibus accendebatur; vix Tiberio concedere, liberos eius ut multum infra despectare.* Ann. 4.21: *actum dehinc de Calpurnio Pisone, nobili ac feroci viro. is namque, ut rettuli, cessurum se urbe ob factiones accusatorum in senatu clamitaverat et spreta potentia Augustae trahere in ius Urgulianiam domoque principis excire ausus erat.*

66. Traub 1953, 257–60.

67. Ann. 1.69: *femina ingens animi munia ducis per eos dies induit.*

68. McDougall 1981, 107.

This essay represents the further development of a chapter on Agrippina Maior in my 2004 doctoral dissertation, "Manipulating Memory: Remembering and Defining Julio-Claudian Women" (University of Wisconsin). I delivered an earlier version of this paper at the annual meeting of the Classical Association of the Middle West and South at Madison, Wisconsin in

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