

The Performance of Marginalized Femininity: Livia's *Amicitia* in Tacitus's *Annals*

I analyze Livia Augusta in Tacitus's *Annals* as performing a marginalized femininity in her use of *amicitia*, a complex relationship of friendship and political alliance (Williams 2012).

Previous scholars have articulated the concepts of gender performance (Butler 1988), hegemonic masculinity (Connell 2005), and multiple masculinities (Connell 2005). The dominant form of femininity is thus the idealized femininity as it is subject to hegemonic masculinity. When females perform aspects of the hegemonic masculinity, they are stigmatized; because of this marginalization, Schippers (2007) argues that these femininities be called "pariah femininities" (95). The Roman ideal of femininity, that of the chaste matron and manager of the *domus*, is typified through literary examples (e.g., Lucretia) and inscriptions, particularly that of the *Laudatio Turiae*, a 1st century BCE inscription. This inscription illustrates masculine and feminine qualities (Hemelrijk 2004), by which we can see the tensions between the idealized femininity that describes women as "wool-workers," which is also seen in other inscriptions, and the pariah, or marginalized, femininity that describes women taking on political roles normally reserved for elite males.

Tacitus's descriptions of Livia highlight her wielding of political power is a performance of a marginalized femininity. While she embodies aspects of the idealized femininity in motherhood, even the descriptions of her within the family and *domus* are characteristic of marginalized femininity – in part because they blend the *domus* and the political sphere. As *mater* ("mother") to Tiberius and Drusus, children of her first marriage to Tiberius Nero (*Ann.* 1.3, 1.10), Livia fulfills one of the tenets of the dominant femininity by producing children. Additionally, Tacitus claims that Augustus was captivated by her *forma* ("beauty") (*Ann.* 5.1).

However, we see a different pattern of feminine performance emerge in Livia's marriage to Augustus. Livia has no children with Augustus, and Tacitus describes her as *noverca* ("the stepmother") to Augustus's adopted sons (*Ann.* 1.3, 1.10). As *noverca*, Livia is negatively portrayed as concerned with gaining control of the burgeoning empire for her son Tiberius.

Livia's political actions represent a femininity performed by elite Roman women that became more visible in the political turmoil of the late Republic and early Principate. Indeed, scholars have long noted Livia's political interference (Rutland 1978; L'Hoir 1994; Milnor 2011). Such political actions are often read as masculine: L'Hoir (1994) argues that Livia is a Roman example of the *dux femina*, a negative female character who usurps power that rightfully belongs to male characters. However, as Schippers (2007) argues, the embodiment of qualities derived from the hegemonic masculinity is itself a pariah femininity. Livia's political authority is centered around her control of the *domus* (home, private sphere) (Milnor, 2011: 467-73) and is similar to the political roles taken up by elite women in the late Republic and early Empire (Hallett 1984).

Moreover, Livia's *amicitia* holds political influence and extends to both women (Plancia [*Ann.* 2.43, 2.82, 3.15, 3.17] and Urgulania [*Ann.* 2.34, 4.21]) and men (Sallustius Crispus [*Ann.* 1.6] and Geminus Fufius [*Ann.* 5.2]). Livia's *amicitia* with other elite Roman woman might not stand out, if not for the fact that the relationship bears weight on the political sphere, specifically in dealings with the courts. Livia's *amicitia* with men, on the other hand, seems purely political, blending the power of the imperial *domus* and the political sphere. Tacitus casts an undoubtedly negative light on this femininity, upholding the idealized femininity of the woman as manager of the *domus* (Milnor 2011), because in his view, the pariah femininity performed by Livia challenged the male power that he saw as inherent to Rome's empire.

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