FEMININE IMPERIAL IDEALS IN THE CAESARES OF SUETONIUS

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Grant R. Parker

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor
of Philosophy in the Department of
Classical Studies in the Graduate School
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ABSTRACT

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Abstract

The dissertation examines Suetonius’ ideals of feminine conduct by exploring the behaviors he lauds or censures in imperial women. The approach comes from scholarship on the biographer’s practice of evaluating of his male subjects against a consistent ideal. This study argues that Suetonius applies the same method to imperial women. His tendency to speak of women in standardized rubrics (ancestry, marriage, the birth of children) suggests that he has a fixed notion of model feminine behavior, one that values women for being wives and mothers.

Chapter 1 argues that because Suetonius’ Lives center on male subjects, his picture of women is fragmented at best. The biographer uses this fragmentation to manipulate his female characters. Livia, for instance, is cast as a “good” wife in the Augustus, but as a “bad” mother in the Tiberius. Suetonius’ often inconsistent drawing of women reveals that he uses them primarily to elucidate certain aspects of their associated men. Having a “good” wife, mother, or sister reflects well on an emperor, while having a “bad” one reveals his lack of authority.

Chapter 2 explores the role of mother. Atia serves as the “good,” silent type and Livia and Agrippina the Younger the “bad,” meddling type.
Chapter 3 investigates the role of wife. Livia exemplifies the “good,” loyal wife who is not politically active, while Agrippina the Younger illustrates the “bad,” sexually manipulative wife who murders her husband to advance her son.

Chapter 4 looks at members of the wider imperial family, noting that Suetonius writes more about sexually promiscuous women, such as Drusilla and Julia, than those women, like Domitilla the Younger, who followed social norms by marrying and bearing children. As a result, the Caesares are slanted towards negative portrayals of women.

Chapter 5 “reassembles” the fragmented picture of women. The small role that Suetonius writes for Poppaea reveals his independence from Tacitus. The biographer’s portrayal of Livia and Agrippina subverts ideals espoused on imperial coins and statues. Overall, the most important role for women in the Caesares is that of mother. By focusing on his portrayal of women, this study also sheds light on Suetonius’ use of rhetoric and stereotypes.
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List of Abbreviations

Ancient Sources:

Augustus (Aug.)
RG  Res Gestae Divi Augusti

Catullus (Cat.)
Carmina

Cicero (Cic.)
Cael.  Pro Caelio

Cons. ad. Liv.
Consolatio ad Liviam

Dio, Cassius (Dio)
Roman History

Gellius, Aulus (Gell.)
NA  Noctes Atticae

Herodian (Hdn.)
Roman History

Horace (Hor.)
Carm.  Carmina

Josephus (Jos.)
AJ  Antiquitates Judaicae

Juvenal (Juv.)
Satires

Livy
History of Rome

Lucian
Alex.  Alexander
Dial. Mort.  Dialogi Mortuorum

Martial (Mart.)
Epig.  Epigrams
Nicolaus of Damascus (Nic. Dam.)  
*Bios*  
*Life of Augustus*

Ovid (Ov.)  
*Am.*  
*Amores*  
*Ars am.*  
*Ars amatoria*  
*Her.*  
*Heroides*  
*Trist.*  
*Tristia*

Pausanias (Paus.)  
*Description of Greece*

Pliny the Elder  
*NH*  
*Natural History*

Pliny the Younger  
*Ep.*  
*Epistulæ*  
*Pan.*  
*Panegyricus*

Plutarch (Plut.)  
*Alex.*  
*Alexander*  
*Ant.*  
*Antony*  
*Caes.*  
*Caesar*  
*Cic.*  
*Cicero*  
*Cons. ad Ux.*  
*Consolation to his Wife*  
*Crass.*  
*Crassus*  
*Luc.*  
*Lucullus*  
*Mor.*  
*Moralia*

Sallust (Sall.)  
*BC*  
*Bellum Catilinae*

*Scriptores Historiae Augustae (SHA)*  
*Car.*  
*Caracalla*  
*Comm.*  
*Commodus*  
*Had.*  
*Hadrian*  
*Macr.*  
*Macrinus*  
*Sev.*  
*Septimius Severus*  
*Ver.*  
*Lucius Verus*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Work</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Seneca the Younger (Sen.) | Apocol.  
Brev. Vit.  
De Ben.               | Apocolocyntosis  
De brevitate vitae  
De beneficiis        |
| Silius Italicus (Sil. It.)    |                             | Punica                                     |
| Soranus         | Gyn.                        | Gynecology                                 |
| Statius (Stat.) | Silv.                       | Silvae                                     |
| Suetonius (Suet.) | Aug.  
Caes.  
Cal.  
Claud.  
Dom.  
DVI  
Gal.  
Gramm.  
Iul.  
Nero  
Otho  
Tib.  
Tit.  
Vesp.  
Vit. | Divus Augustus  
Caesares  
Caligula  
Divus Claudius  
Domitianus  
De viris illustribus  
Galba  
De Grammaticis  
Divus Iulius  
Nero  
Otho  
Tiberius  
Divus Titus  
Divus Vespasianus  
Vitellius |
| Tacitus (Tac.)  | Ann.                        | Annales                                    |
|                 | Dial.                       | Dialogus                                   |
|                 | Hist.                       | Historiae                                  |
| Valerius Maximus (Val. Max.) |                             | Memorable Doings and Sayings               |
| Velleius Paterculus (Vell.)   |                             | Roman Histories                            |

x
Modern Reference Works:

BMCRE


CIL

*Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*. 1862-. Berlin: Akademie der Wissenschaften.

FGrHist


ILS


Lewis & Short


LSJ


OLD


PIR²

|------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
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1. Introduction: the Fragmented Woman

“Women have their uses for historians.”

This study explores Suetonius’ depiction of imperial women in the Caesares with the aim of uncovering Suetonius’ ideals of feminine conduct. Above all, it looks at which behaviors the biographer lauds or censures in imperial women. This line of inquiry grows out of recent Suetonian scholarship (outlined below, Section 1), which has demonstrated that the biographer evaluated all twelve emperors against a consistent and (relatively) clearly articulated ideal. The same, I shall argue, also applies to imperial women. As with the principes, Suetonius speaks of female members of the imperial family in a standardized set of recurring rubrics (e.g., ancestry, marriage, the birth of children), which suggests that he has a fixed notion of how the ideal woman ought to behave—she ought to be a wife and continue the dynasty by bearing children. In other words, women ought to comport themselves in such a way that they fit into pre-defined categories.

The fact that all the women in the Vitae appear under more or less uniform topic-headings also encourages comparisons across the Lives, which practice again echoes Suetonius’ treatment of the principes. Because the biographer speaks of them in nearly identical contexts, one can easily see, for example, how Livia compares to Agrippina the
Younger as a wife or mother, or how either woman stacks up against Agrippina the Elder. Thus, Suetonius’ choice of rubrics makes known what he expects from imperial women, while the comparisons encouraged between the Vitae indicate how well each woman has performed her job.

First, however, some background information on the author will be useful. Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus was born some time between 68 and 71 CE.1 Our main sources of information on the biographer’s life are an inscription from Hippo Regius in North Africa (Marec and Pflaum 1952=AE 1953, 27-8 no. 73), references to Suetonius in Pliny’s letters (see below, Section 1.2), a paragraph on his disgrace in Hadrian’s court in the Scriptores Historiae Augustae (Had. 11.3, see Section 1.1 below), and internal allusions to the biographer’s life in the Caesares and De viris illustribus (e.g., Cal. 19.3 on Suetonius’ grandfather as a source for Gaius’ bridge across the bay of Baiae, and Otho 10.1 on his father’s position as military tribune in a legion loyal to Otho during the uprising of 69 CE).

---

1 His exact date of birth is uncertain. Most scholars favor a date falling some time between 68 and 71 CE: e.g., Macé 1900, 35-45 (68-9 CE); Jones 1968, 129 (67-72); Sanders 1944, 115 (70-1); Townend 1969, 79 (70); Syme 1977, 44 (70), cf. Syme 1958, 778 (not later than 72); Bradley 1991, 3705 (70). In the range of possibilities, Baldwin 1975, 67 argues for the earliest date (61 CE) and Mommsen 1868, 43 the latest (77).
Of these sources, the Hippo inscription is the most detailed in regard to the biographer’s imperial career. The restored text reads (from Bradley 1991a, 3705):


The people of Hippo Regius, by decree of the decurians and with public money, [dedicate this] to Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus…son of…, a flamen, adlected among the jurors by the divine Traianus Parthicus, priest of Volcan, a studiis, a bibliothecis, ab epistulis of the emperor Caesar Traianus Hadrianus Augustus.

Since the inscription was set up in Hippo Regius, this North African town is usually assumed to be the biographer’s birthplace or at least his family’s patria if they had moved to Rome or Italy.² If Suetonius were not connected to the town, it is uncertain why the people of Hippo would dedicate an inscription to an imperial clerk, with public money no less.

² See Bradley 1991a, 3705 n. 19 and Wallace-Hadrill 2004, 5 n. 8 for an overview of scholarly opinions on Suetonius’ place of birth. Bradley (3705) suggests that Suetonius was probably born in Hippo, but that he was in Rome before 97 (the most likely date of Ep. 1.18, in which Pliny mentions a court case involving his friend). Bradley adds that the biographer might even have been educated at the capital; cf. Gramm. 4, in which Suetonius mentions that in his youth he heard the teachings of a grammarian named Princeps. Townend 1961b, 107 (cf. 1967, 79) interprets Gramm. 4 to mean that Suetonius was educated in Rome. Bradley (3705 n. 22) calls Townend’s conclusion “logical,” but still cautions that Townend “too confidently” takes Gramm. 4 as proof of Suetonius’ Roman education. Like Townend, Wallace-Hadrill 2004, 5 also states that “[Suetonius] passed a good part of his formative years in Rome.”
From the Hippo inscription we learn that Suetonius, in addition to holding some honorific priesthoods (flamini, pontifici), was adlected to the board of jurors by Trajan (inter selectos [iudices] a divo Traiano Parthico). He also held the relatively prestigious imperial posts of a studiis (an official responsible for doing research for the emperor before he replied to requests; also, perhaps, in charge of writing speeches for the emperor or giving him oratorical advice),\(^3\) a bibliothecis (keeper of the imperial libraries), and ab epistulis (imperial secretary, especially for the emperor’s correspondence). The inscription makes unclear if all these positions were held in quick succession under Hadrian, or if the first one (or two) were held under Trajan and only the last one (or two) under Hadrian.\(^4\) It is, however, certain that Suetonius was ab epistulis under Hadrian because it is from this office that the biographer was dismissed by Hadrian, perhaps around 122 CE (SHA Had. 11.3; see Section 1.1 below).

Suetonius, therefore, had a distinguished equestrian cursus. As a studiis, a bibliothecis, and ab epistulis, he would have been in close personal contact with the emperor himself as well as with the imperial family (cf. SHA Had. 11.3 on Suetonius’

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\(^3\) See Bradley 1991a, 3711 on the duties of the position.

\(^4\) For a summary of scholarly opinions on the order and dates of Suetonius’ posts, see Bradley 1991a, 3710 and 3705 n. 18; and Wallace-Hadrill 2004, 5-6.
contact with Hadrian’s wife, Sabina). He also had a prominent literary career. Pliny, for instance, considered Suetonius to be his “contubernalis” (Plin. Ep. 1.24.1 and 10.94.1), a word that literally means “tent mate” in military language but was often used metaphorically between masters and pupils, mentors and their charges (cf. Plin. Ep. 5.10 in which Pliny encourages Suetonius to publish an unidentified work; and Ep. 1.24 in which Pliny calls his friend scholasticus). Fergus Millar points out that Pliny’s letter (Ep. 1.18) to Trajan recommending the childless Suetonius for the ius trium liberorum emphasizes Suetonius’ literary accomplishments. Suetonius, therefore, was eminent in both his imperial and literary endeavors.

In addition to the Caesares, we also have portions of Suetonius’ De viris illustribus, another biographical series. These Lives, which were most likely written before the Caesares, are divided into books on great poets, orators, grammarians, and philosophers,
among other categories. The *Suda* (s.v. Τράγκυλλος Τ 895), moreover, names ten philological and antiquarian essays by Suetonius; another six can be reconstructed from references in other works. To judge from the titles listed in the *Suda* and the works known from other sources, Suetonius’ essays show interest in history and philology, e.g. *On names for clothes, On physical defects, On games, Institution of offices, On kings*. These additional writings help to establish Suetonius as an intellectual with antiquarian leanings. The *De viris illustribus* also reveal the author’s penchant for biography as a genre, and especially his preference for biographical sequences.

In terms of Suetonius’ dates of birth (c. 68-71 CE) and death (some time after 122, when he was dismissed by Hadrian), he was a contemporary of Tacitus (c. 56-118) and Plutarch (c. 50-120). Barry Baldwin (1983) sees rivalry between Plutarch and Suetonius, but his views have not been widely accepted. More commonly noted are correspondences between Suetonius’ *Caesares* and Tacitus’ *Annals*. Some scholars

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8 See Wallace-Hadrill 2004, 7-8 on the order of composition: “[Suetonius’] reputation as [a] biographer was already made before he started the Caesares.” Wallace-Hadrill goes on to suggest that Suetonius’ promotion to *ab epistulis* might have been in recognition of the *Illustrious Men*.

9 See Wardle 1994, 12-3 for a complete list of all sixteen works.

10 His date of death is uncertain. Bradley 1991a, 3712 declares that a date of c. 130 is “as good as any.”

consider Suetonius to have been in direct contest with Tacitus. Others, however, argue that the overlap between the *Annales* and *Caesares* has more to do with common sources than with competition. To my mind, we simply cannot know to what degree Suetonius was directly influenced by either Plutarch or Tacitus. With all three authors, it is unclear when their writings were published, if it is even accurate to speak of ancient “publishing” (see Section 1.1 below on the publication of the *Caesares*). Furthermore, we do not know when, or if, any of these works were given in oral performance before they were circulated in written form. Suetonius could possibly have heard or read Tacitus’ *Annals* in Rome, but how would he have known Plutarch’s *Lives*?

Although I consider it unsafe to talk about direct rivalry, I still think it is helpful to compare and contrast the three authors (together with the third-century historian Cassius Dio) in terms of what information they include or exclude in their works. It is also enlightening to see how they differ in their presentations of the same characters. Thus, even if we cannot establish a line connecting the authors, we can still read their

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12 E.g., Gascou 1984, 281-93 (Suet. challenging Tac. on Claudius’ death) and Wallace-Hadrill 2004, 2 (Suet. “undoubtedly looking over his shoulder at Tacitus”).

13 E.g., von Albrecht 1997, 1393 (Suet. might have heard recitations of the Ann., but similarities in the texts might also owe to common sources) and Syme 1958, 502 (“The biographer may, or may not, have drawn upon the senatorial historian”).
works against Suetonius’ *Caesares* to help isolate and define Suetonius’ methods, aims, and characterizations.

### 1.1 Reframing Suetonius

The 1980s and ‘90s saw what Keith Bradley has termed the “Rediscovery of Suetonius.”\(^{14}\) The scholarship of this period sought primarily to redress the traditional interpretation of the *Caesares* as a compilation of gossip, sex, and scandal.\(^{15}\) Although these studies made many useful contributions, three stand out in particular. First, it was stressed that Suetonius intended to write not history, but rather biography. Accordingly, he should not be judged incompetent for recording some events out of

\(^{14}\) The quote comes from the title of Bradley’s (1985) review article on Wallace-Hadrill 2004 (1983) and Baldwin 1983.

sequence or ignoring others, especially if the deeds in question do not relate directly to his biographical subject.\(^{16}\)

Instead of condemning the biographer for historical license, the scholarship of the late twentieth century showed that Suetonius uses the arrangement of his text as a rhetorical tool: by placing an anecdote in a positive or negative rubric or series of paragraphs, he is able to color its interpretation.\(^{17}\) To use an example pertinent to this study, Suetonius criticizes Drusilla’s having been made Caligula’s heir by recording the information in a passage on *stuprum* (see Chapter 4, Section 1). On a related note, the biographer’s lax chronology also allows him to link by theme events that were really separate in time. For instance, the marriage of Nero to Claudius’ daughter Octavia (*Claud.* 27.2) is reported in the paragraph following Agrippina’s wedding to Claudius.

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\(^{16}\) See esp. Wallace-Hadrill 2004, 8-10 on this point: “Rather than let biography become history, [Suetonius] would write not-history” (9). Also Bradley 1985b, 263: once Suetonius had shown either adherence to or deviation from the ideal, all other embellishment was technically unnecessary. In general, Suetonius has scanty information on the provinces, foreign powers, wars, laws, and finances. In other words, his focus is Rome (the seat of the emperor’s power) and the head of state himself (rather than the broader government). He also steers clear of grand historical themes like the nature of Roman rule, the decline of liberty, and the increase in luxury, which inform the works of historians like Sallust and Tacitus.

\(^{17}\) See. n. 31 below on the rubric system. On rhetoric in Suetonius, Lewis 1991, 3641-74 argues that the *laudatio* and *vituperatio* of Latin rhetoric (using Cicero and Quintilian as examples) have much in common with the *Caes.* See also Bradley 1991a, 3702-4 and Cizek 1961, esp. 355-6 on how Suetonius uses the organization of his text (esp. the arrangement by rubrics and *divisio*) to advance certain ideas. Cizek speaks of a *noircissement progressif*, which means that the *Vitae* move from good, to bad, to worse, guiding the leader to a negative assessment of the subject. Newbold’s (1997) statistical analysis also shows in numerical terms just how skewed some of the biographies are towards negative material.
(Claud. 26.3), although four years separated the two nuptials. Suetonius, however, collapses the weddings, thus implying that Agrippina had a hand in arranging the imperial marriage of her son (see Chapter 2, Section 2). On the whole, the biographer uses both the topical organization of his text and its loose chronology to advance a particular interpretation of his material.

The second major contribution of the “Rediscovery” scholarship is that Suetonius’ Lives revolve around the concept of a model emperor, with Augustus coming closest to the ideal (see Section 2 below on the traits of the model emperor). Suetonius’ method, as these investigations have shown, is to present virtues and vices (especially through illustrative anecdotes arranged under thematic headings), and then to weigh the two categories against each other: the “good” emperors have more virtutes than vitia, and vice-versa for the “bad” principes. In consequence of this last observation, the more titillating stories in the Caesares can no longer be taken as evidence of the

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18 See esp. Wallace-Hadrill 2004, 142-74; Bradley 1981, 1991a; Lewis 1991, 3626-74; and Gascou 1984, 718-73. In addition to Augustus, the other “good” emperors are Vespasian and Titus. The “bad” principes are: Tiberius, Caligula, Nero, Galba, Otho, Vitellius, Domitian. The Iul. and Claud. are more ambivalent in the sense that they are less overtly hostile than Lives of “bad” emperors, but then again neither man is openly praised like the “good” leaders. However, in the end, both the Iul. and Claud. lean towards a negative assessment.

19 It is important to keep in mind that Suetonius’ biographies are not panegyrics. Even his “good” emperors have faults, but these are outweighed by their virtues. See von Albrecht 1997, 1394 on ancient biography often overlapping with encomium, but with Suetonius being less encomiastic than other biographers.
biographer’s own lewdness or penchant for gossip. Rather, tales such as Tiberius’ trysts on Capri (Tib. 43-4) or Nero’s male-male marriage to Sporus (Nero 28) are better read as part of Suetonius’ larger program of evaluating imperial merits and malfeasance. Thus, the scholarship of the 1980s and 90s persuasively argued that Caesares are not a collection of carelessly assembled rumors. Instead, it showed that all twelve biographies follow the same carefully arranged pattern and, more importantly, have the shared aim of determining how close the subject comes to the ideal.

The third most noteworthy contribution of recent Suetonian studies is that the biographer is no longer seen as being as dependent on imperial archives, as once believed. Because Suetonius is known to have held the posts of a studiiis, a bibliothecis, and ab epistulis, it was once argued that he had special admission to imperial libraries and records. Suetonius’ discharge by Hadrian (SHA Had. 11.3, over inappropriate contact with Sabina) was thought to have ended that access, with the result that all the biographies after the Divus Iulius and Divus Augustus decline in length and quality. In

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20 Cf. Duff 1927, 508: “A great deal of [the Caesares] partakes of the nature of a chronique scandaleuse based upon tittle-tattle about the emperors and complied by a literary man with the muck-rake, too keen upon petty and prurient detail to produce a scientific account of his subjects.” Syme 1958, 502, likewise, called the Caesares a “chronicle of ancient folly and depravity.” Paratore 1959 put forth the thesis that Suetonius wrote for the “man in the street” with low tastes, as opposed to the senatorial audience of Tacitus and Pliny.

21 E.g., Townend 1959 and 1967, 87-91; Syme 1980, 116-7, 121 (although Syme argues for loss of access to archives not because Suetonius was dismissed, but because he traveled to the provinces with Hadrian). Footnote cont. next pg.
comparison to the first two Lives, the four remaining Julio-Claudian biographies are shorter and skimpier on overtly cited sources such as imperial letters and laws. The Vitae of the last six emperors (Galba, Otho, Vitellius, and the three Flavians), however, are very thin indeed.  

More recent studies, however, have rightly questioned the degree to which Suetonius used imperial records in the Iulius and Augustus in the first place. In addition, the biographer does, at times, consult official documents outside the first two Lives, which citations make it hard to maintain the thesis that he had lost his access to central records (e.g., sic enim in fastos actaque in publica relatum est, Tib. 5; ego in actis...invenio, Cal. 8.2). There is also the problem of establishing the order in which he

Macé 1900, 210-1, 361, in contrast, suggests that Suetonius either lost interest in his subject matter after the Iul. and Aug., or that Septicius Clarus (the praetorian prefect to whom the Caes. are dedicated) pressured him to finish the collection quickly. Von Albrecht 1997, 1393, adds (implausibly) that Suetonius perhaps sought to inspire leniency from Hadrian with a quick publication.

E.g., the Aug. is comprised of 13,986 words; the Cal. of 7,824; the Otho of 1,672; the Vesp. of 3,226; and the Tit. of 1,498.

De Coninck 1983, 213-5 and 218-9 (cf. ibid. 1991) has shown that Suetonius’ use of archival material was generally haphazard, even in the Iul. and Aug. Accordingly, his lost access to imperial records would have had very little impact on the later Lives. On Augustus’ letters, Wallace-Hadrill 2004, 91-6 and Baldwin 1983, 47-9 argue that almost all of the information cited by Suetonius has parallels in other authors—thus, the biographer does not seem to have had special access to exclusive material. Rather, it is more likely that there was a published collection of Augustus’ correspondence, or at least a set of letters in limited circulation.

Although see Wallace-Hadrill 2004, 61-2 and Townend 1959, 285 on the fact that references to documents in the Julio-Claudian Lives after the Aug. tend to relate exclusively to those emperors’ early years—i.e., Footnote cont. next pg.
composed the *Vitae*: earlier studies assumed that Suetonius worked in series starting with the *Iulius*, and then lost his imperial post some time after the *Augustus*. However, we quite frankly do not know the order in which the biographies were written—in fact, it has even been proposed that the *Iulius* and *Augustus* were composed last. The date of Suetonius’ dismissal is likewise uncertain, which further complicates the theory that losing his archival access negatively impacted the later *Lives*. In the end, if we know neither when he was removed from Hadrian’s court, nor when he was writing any

during Augustus’ lifetime. Thus, one can argue that Suetonius had seen these records earlier when he was working on the *Aug*. Reference to documents virtually ceases after the *Nero*.

Bowersock 1969. The proposal has generally been rejected, in part because of the evidence of the preface. According to the testimony of John Lydus, who saw the now-lost preface of the *Caes.*, the collection was dedicated to the praetorian prefect C. Septicius Clarus (Lyd. *De Magistratibus* 2.6). Since Clarus fell from Hadrian’s favor together with Suetonius (SHA *Had*. 11.3), it is generally assumed that the preface pre-dates that dismissal (c. 122). It is possible, however, that the dedication applies only to the *Iul.* and *Aug.*, which were composed first, and that the rest of the series was completed later: there is some (though rather shaky) internal evidence (*Tit*. 10.2) that Suetonius was still working on the *Titus* after Domitia’s death (some time between 126 and 130). For an overview of the order of composition and date of the *Caes.*, see Wallace-Hadrill 2004, 1 n. 1 and 62; Baldwin 1983, 46-51; and Bradley 1991a, 3710-29, esp. 3724 n. 102.

The SHA (*Had*. 11.3) puts it with the events of 122 CE when Hadrian was in Britain. Chronology, however, is as much a problem in the SHA as it is in the *Caes*. Baldwin 1983, 42 observes that this paragraph in the SHA is really thematic, on the topic of Hadrian’s jealousies. A number of similar anecdotes are given in the same passage (11.4-7, mostly about anonymous people), which makes any one of them hard to date. See ibid., 43-6 for more problems with the SHA passage, esp. on some textual variants and the internal logic of the scene. Crook 1956-7, 18-22 dates the dismissal to as late as 128, which means that it might not have occurred until after the completion of the *Caes*. (see n. 25 above on the date of Domitia’s death). To throw another wrench into this interpretation, it is also possible that all twelve of the *Lives* (not merely the first two) were dedicated to Septicius Clarus before the dismissal, i.e. when Suetonius still had his supposed archival access. See n. 25 above on the dedication and also the overview of Bradley 1985b, 255 on different interpretations of the composition of the *Caes.* in reference to the dismissal.
specific Vita, it is hard to say with confidence that Suetonius’ dismissal lead to a decline in the Lives. What is more, the downward slope of the Caesares is total. Literary sources, in addition to documentary ones, also fall off in the later Vitae, yet it is implausible to argue that Suetonius had lost all access to books.27

Instead of seeing Suetonius’ discharge as the reason behind the downward trend in the Vitae, the latest scholarship has proposed that the Lives reflect the biographer’s own tastes. The De viris illustribus reveal that Suetonius was interested in the literature of the late first century BCE and early first century CE—i.e., the very time period that overlaps with the tenures of Caesar and Augustus. For example, he wrote biographies of poets such as Vergil, Horace, Catullus, and Tibullus;28 orators such as Cicero; and grammarians active in the days of Caesar and Pompey. Thus, it follows that the Lives of Caesar and Augustus are the longest of the imperial Vitae: Suetonius not only favored this age, but he also had considerable knowledge of it from his research for the Illustrious Men, which most likely predates the Caesares.29 More importantly, Caesar and Augustus


28 The Vita of Vergil is transmitted with Donatus’ commentary on the Aeneid, however the Life almost certainly comes from Suetonius’ DVI: Naumann 1981.

29 See Wallace-Hadrill 2004, 50-9 on the content of the DVI, esp. as it centers on figures of the late Republic and early Empire. He goes on (59-66) to tie the interests of the DVI (which predate the Caes. in Wallace-Hadrill’s reconstruction) to the emphasis on Caesar and Augustus in the Caes. Wallace-Hadrill concludes Footnote cont. next pg.
laid the groundwork for the principate, thus giving the biographer another reason to
write about them in particular depth.\textsuperscript{30} The \textit{Iulius} and \textit{Augustus} act as a sort of preface to
the work as a whole. Suetonius does a particularly good job of elucidating his methods
and ideals in those biographies, after which it is unnecessary for him to keep repeating
such programmatic statements in the remaining \textit{Vitae}.\textsuperscript{31}

These comments about Suetonius’ scanty use of archival materials are pertinent
to the present study because they call attention to the role of the biographer’s interests

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\textsuperscript{30} Murison 2001, vi. See Baldwin 1983, 50 for the suggestion that Suetonius begins the imperial \textit{Lives} with
Caesar, who was not technically an emperor, because the career of Augustus cannot properly be understood
without Caesar’s precedent. Bradley 1991a, 3723-4 also points out that although the last six \textit{Lives} are shorter
and more poorly documented, they still follow the same pattern as the earlier \textit{Vitae}. Thus, it is hard to argue
that Suetonius grew sloppy or tired of the project (see Macé in n. 21 above).

\textsuperscript{31} Especially clear are his statements on writing by rubric rather than by chronology: \textit{neque per tempora sed per
species...quo distinctius demonstrari cognoscique possint} (Aug. 9). Suetonius also explains that he divides his
\textit{Lives} between public and private, and even defines what he means by those terms: \textit{quoniam qualis in imperiis
ac magistratibus regendaque per terrarum orbem pace belloque re p. fuerit, exposui, referam nunc interiorem ac
familiarem eius vitam quibuscumque moribus atque fortuna domi et inter suas egerit a iuventa usque supremae vitae diem}
(Aug. 61.1). The \textit{Iul.}, additionally, makes plain what happens to \textit{principes} who abuse power: they are justly
slain (\textit{ut et abusus dominatione et iure caesus existimetur, Iul. 76.1}). Suetonius proceeds in \textit{Iul.} 76-9 to spell out
the precise ways in which Caesar’s power was excessive (he sought too many and too great honors, he bent
the law, his public utterances were arrogant, he had no respect for the Senate, he acted like a king). One
could argue that this prefigures the \textit{Lives} of Caligula, Nero, and Domitian, who were likewise killed for
similar abuses of power. Thus, the \textit{Iul.} establishes a “bad” imperial precedent and the \textit{Aug.} a good one at
the outset of the \textit{Caes}. 

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and aims in shaping the *Caesares*. It was previously thought that Suetonius was heavily dependent on his sources, both archival and historical.³² Now, however, it is clear that the biographer’s own ideas and tastes helped to define the outline and content of his *Lives*. Therefore, because Suetonius is not merely rehashing his sources, which fact is also evinced in the rhetorical arrangement of his text, there is room to talk about how this particular author sees the ideal *princeps* or the model imperial woman. As I shall argue in the chapters that follow, there are a number of times when Suetonius differs from Tacitus and Dio in his handling of imperial women, although all three authors likely had access to similar sources.

### 1.2 The Ideal Emperor

One particularly fruitful development in Suetonian scholarship has been to explore the biographer’s concept of the model ruler. Studies in this vein have tended to hold out two primary influences, namely the *Res Gestae Divi Augusti* and Pliny’s

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³² E.g., D’Anna 1954, 179-214; Townend 1967, 92-6; and Schanz and Hosius 1959, 50-2 all see Suetonius as a copier whose style is dependent upon his sources.
Panegyricus. To begin with the more direct of the two, Pliny was personally known to Suetonius and could even be called the biographer’s “mentor.” We know from Pliny’s letters that he, among other things, helped Suetonius buy an estate (Ep. 1.24), secured for him a military tribunate (3.8, which the biographer declined), encouraged Suetonius to publish an unidentified work (5.10), and asked Trajan to grant his childless friend the ius trium liberorum (10.94). Suetonius might even have accompanied Pliny to Bithynia-Pontus in the latter’s governorship (c. 110-112). Considering these many personal connections, there is good reason to believe that Suetonius knew the Panegyricus, which Pliny delivered in the Senate in 100 CE in thanks for his consulship of that year. Even if

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33 See Lewis 1991, 3626-74; Bradley 1991a, 3717-29 and 1985b, 262; Wallace-Hadrill 2004, 155-6 (esp. Pliny); Baldwin 1983, 269-70 (esp. Pliny); della Corte 1967, 77-90 (who sees Suetonius as being influenced by the senatorial Pliny, but, as an equestrian, distancing himself from his mentor); and Wardle 1994, 19 (esp. Pliny).

34 Cf. Pliny Ep. 1.24 (contubernium) and 10.94 (in contubernium adsumpsi; cf. Pliny’s affection for Suetonius stated later in the same letter, tantoque magis diligere coepi). See n. 6 above on the term contubernalis.

35 It is unclear to which work Pliny is referring. Wallace-Hadrill 2004, 59 convincingly argues that it was neither the DVI nor Caes. More likely, Pliny was talking about one of the essays attributed to Suetonius in the Suda (s.v. Τράγκυλλος T 895), or one of the other Suetonian tracts that are known from excerpts or references in other authors. See n. 9 above.

36 Syme 1958, 660 and 779 (cf. 1981, 107), followed by Townend 1961b, 100; Sherwin-White 1966, 689; and Millar 1977, 90. However, the evidence for such a conclusion is thin and depends, in part, on a modern emendation to one of Pliny’s letters (10.94, reading nunc for hunc in the phrase hunc proprius inspexi—nunc would mean that Suetonius was “now” with the ex-consul in the province). See Bradley 1991a, 3709 n. 47 for a summary. Bradley himself concludes (3708-9) that Suetonius’ presence in Bithynia is consistent with what we know about the man and his career, “but only the possibility of such a situation can really be said to exist.” Wallace-Hadrill 2004, 6 proposes that after Pliny’s death in the province, Suetonius’ career was helped by Septicius Clarus, the dedicatee of both Pliny’s first book of letters and Suetonius’ Caes.
he did not know the speech firsthand, one can still conjecture that the biographer, as part of Pliny’s inner circle, was at the very least familiar with his mentor’s views on Trajan and/or the principate at large.37

Although the *Panegyricus* is above all a speech in praise of Trajan, Pliny frequently compares and contrasts his subject to the ideal emperor or its antithesis, the abuser of power (usually Domitian in Pliny’s case).38 Thus, the speech as a whole speaks broadly about what an elite second-century Roman wanted or rejected in a *princeps*.39 The oration, moreover, was delivered at the beginning of Trajan’s reign, which timing means that the speech, as Keith Bradley observes, “has to be seen as a prescriptive, not just commemorative, document, a statement of what the ideal ruler ought to be as much as a panegyric of Trajan himself.”40 Prominent among Pliny’s standards is that the

37 Cf. Bradley 1991a, 3709: “By the time of Pliny’s...death, Suetonius...will have formed his own ideas about the nature of Trajan’s regime, but equally he could hardly have been unaware of Pliny’s own views of the *optimus princeps*, and as a member of Pliny’s literary coterie he is likely to have heard the recitals of the enlarged version of the ‘Panegyricus.’” See ibid., n. 49 for evidence of Pliny’s performance of the work after 100.

38 Cf. Pliny’s statements along the lines of “earlier emperors did x, but you do y”: e.g., 7.4 (adoptions of Tiberius and Claudius compared to Trajan’s); 16.3 (Domitian’s sham triumphs versus Trajan’s real ones); 48 (people and senators no longer afraid of *princeps* as they were under cruel Domitian). Near the beginning of the speech, Pliny also declares *boni principes quae facerent recognoscerent, mali quae facere deberent* (*Pan*. 4.1), which statement also gives a sense of a wider discourse about the principate in general.


40 Bradley 1991a, 3717.
emperor be fair, generous, and pay heed to the Senate and People of Rome.\footnote{Cf. the concise summary of Radice 1968, 168: the Pan. “is rather a sort of manifesto of the Senate’s ideal of a constitutional ruler, one chosen to rule because he is qualified to do so, with emphasis on his obsequium to the people’s will and his sense of service to his country.”} In this way, one of the most important aspects of the \textit{Panegyricus} is that it offers a corrective to the more hostile views of Pliny’s contemporary and fellow-senator, Tacitus. While Tacitus portrays sole rule as a seat of deception and corruption, Pliny is more ostensibly accepting of the principate as an institution and even sings its praises when it is run well.\footnote{Hammond 1938, 116.}

In general, Suetonius’ point of view is more in line with Pliny’s than Tacitus’, for he too advances the idea of a model ruler and condones the principate as a governmental form.\footnote{See Wallace-Hadrill 2004, 110-12 and 139-41 on Suetonius’ political views: the biographer generally favors the traditional social hierarchy where the Senate is on top, the knights are important, freedmen are kept in their place, and the Roman people are given their due. He describes the \textit{princeps} as a figure who can bring stability by maintaining this social order (139): “The vision is of the ideal emperor as a sort of overseer of a vast and complex mechanism, which he must service, keep in efficient working order, improve, adapt and polish until he can hand it over gleaming and resplendent to his successor.” As Wallace-Hadrill shows (140), Suetonius often describes Augustus as an emperor who was always bringing things like the calendar, Senate, and assemblies back to their pristine states. Wallace-Hadrill concludes (141): “The overall effect is a very un-Tacitean picture of the principate...The theme of its innate hypocrisy and incompatibility with \textit{libertas} disappears...The root conception of the principate is optimistic.”} More specifically, Bradley has shown that there is a high degree of correspondence between the language and structure of the \textit{Panegyricus} and \textit{Caesares}. The two texts overlap considerably in moral and political terms such as \textit{civilitas},
liberalitas, moderatio, and indulgentia, to name only a few. They also treat their material topically rather than chronologically. Bradley cautions, however, that both these features ultimately derive from the Res Gestae, which was fundamental in shaping the notion of the ideal princeps (see, e.g., RG 34.2 on Augustus’ virtus, clementia, iustitia, and pietas). Additionally, there are links between these three texts (the Panegyricus, Caesares, and Res Gestae) and the imperial coinage of the first and second centuries CE, which employs nearly identical moral language. On the whole, the Panegyricus shows that a specific set of imperial virtues, which were first given voice by Augustus and then repeated on coins, had crystallized by Pliny’s and Suetonius’ day to become an imperial ideal. To put it in other words, certain merits came to be associated with the principate itself; later, individual principes could either be judged for failing to conform to these ideals, or praised for abiding by them. The coins also reveal how sympathetic Pliny and Suetonius were to the principate: they do not question or condemn sole rule, but rather describe it in the emperors’ own terms.

44 Bradley 1991a, 3715-29.

45 See Bradley 1991a, 3715-29; Mattingly 1923, passim lii-cix; and Syme 1938, 219 on the correspondence between coin legends and Pliny’s language in praise of Trajan.

46 Bradley 1985b, 260-1.
The *Res Gestae*, therefore, influence the *Caesares* indirectly by providing a model of the paradigmatic *princeps*. On a more immediate level, it has also been proposed that Suetonius consulted the document directly.\(^47\) However, as Bradley rightly concludes, “The details he may have taken from these works [i.e., the *Panegyricus* and *Res Gestae*]…are of less significance than his use throughout the ‘Caesares’ of a framework of reference that is essentially the same as theirs.”\(^{48}\) Thus, Suetonius’ *Caesares*, which were once debased as a *chronique scandaleuse*, are now properly recognized as belonging to a wider discourse on imperial virtues, one that goes back to Augustus himself and is reflected throughout the early Empire on coins.

Suetonius, in summary, was writing within an established tradition. He praises emperors who are moderate, and condemns those who do any activity to excess (especially spending money, eating and drinking, having sex, and being exceptionally cruel).\(^49\) Along the same lines, he approves of *principes* who are generous to the people (i.e., those who give games, do not squander the treasury’s money, and engage in a

\(^{47}\) Macé 1900, 135-63; von Albrecht 1997, 1393.

\(^{48}\) Bradley 1991a, 3721.

\(^{49}\) See Wallace-Hadrill 2004, 152-7 on moderation being a key theme in the *Caes*. He notes that other virtues like *clementia*, *civilitas*, and *liberalitas* all have to do with this core principle (clemency is restraint from excessive punishment, civility from bad behavior, and liberality from greed or selfishness).
program of urban building), and disparages those who advance any one group beyond their station (particularly freedmen).\textsuperscript{50} Therefore, like Pliny’s *Panegyricus*, the *Caesares* also reveal what an elite second-century Roman expected from an emperor.

The influence of the *Res Gestae* and *Panegyricus* on the *Caesares*, however, goes only so far. One problem is that both Augustus’ self-presentation and Pliny’s oration deal primarily with “good” *principes*, but the *Caesares* contain a number of “bad” ones (or, at least, emperors of whom Suetonius disapproves). While it is true that the notion of the model emperor is still operative here (i.e., that the “bad” *principes* are “bad” precisely because they stray from the ideal), it is also true that Suetonius’ depiction of the imperial abuser of power resonates with the historiographical and rhetorical tyrant. Most often, the tyrant is said to be guilty of cruelty, lust, promoting fear, reducing citizens to a state of servility, and disregarding the law.\textsuperscript{51} All these charges, not coincidentally, are the hallmark vices of Suetonius’ hated emperors.\textsuperscript{52}

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\textsuperscript{50} Wallace-Hadrill 2004, 101-3 and 119-20 observes that when Suetonius writes about the people’s reactions to an emperor or about the *beneficia* an emperor gave to the populace, the biographer always keeps the following order: senators, equestrians, plebs, slaves, and foreigners. This structure, to Wallace-Hadrill, reveals Suetonius’ approval of traditional social hierarchy. The biographer, Wallace-Hadrill concludes, is critical of emperors who work outside this order, favoring one group over another.

\textsuperscript{51} Lateiner 1989, 172-9 is a useful source on the charges often leveled against tyrants. He charts all the accusations made against tyrants by Herodotus, including cruelty, lust, promoting fear, reducing citizens to a state of servility, disregarding the law, etc. Since the tyrants’ faults are largely the same across the *Histories* no matter when or where the despot lived, Lateiner argues that Herodotus models his characters on types rather than individual acts and events. On the tyrant stereotype in Republican and Imperial Roman

\textsuperscript{52} Footnote cont. next pg.
Thus, in the same way that there was a tradition of a “good” emperor, so too was there an established convention of the “bad” leader, one that appears just as frequently (if not more often) in the Caesares. Although the stereotype of the tyrant has been noted from time to time in Suetonian scholarship, it has typically taken a backseat to the positive models offered in the Res Gestae and Panegyricus. However, because “bad” emperors (Tiberius, Caligula, Nero, Galba, Otho, Vitellius, and Domitian) by far outweigh the “good” ones in the Caesares (Augustus, Vespasian, and Titus), it is high time that the negative model of the tyrant was more fully incorporated into Suetonian scholarship.

historiography, see, e.g., Dunkle 1967 (esp. on Sallust, Cicero, Livy); Dunkle 1971 (on Sallust, Livy, and Tacitus); Steel 2001, esp. 30-31 (Cicero models Verres on the tyrant type; see the same point in Dunkle 1967, 160-7); Roller 2001, 242-7 (on Seneca’s depiction of Nero as a tyrant). Almost all of these portraits center on greed, excess, cruelty, and sex.

Vitellius can serve as an example: e.g., Vit. 3.2 (he spent his boyhood and early youth with Tiberius on Capri inter Tiberiana scorta, a reference to inappropriate sex acts), 7 (greed, thievery), 10 (cruelty, arrogance), 11 (neglecting law), 12-3 (feasting, luxury, cruelty).

On Suetonius’ use of the tyrant type, see Jones 1995, 145 at 22 (saevitia, libido and avaritia as tyrannical tropes as they relate to Domitian); Bradley 1991a, 3728 (Domitian as the clearest illustration of tyranny in the Lives); Barton 1994b, esp. 53-8 (the tyrant stereotype in the Nero, with other examples from the Tib., Cal., and other Lives); Goddard 1994 (Suetonius’ use of the stereotype of tyrants eating to excess, mostly on Nero with comparisons to other Lives); Elsner 1994 (the description of Nero’s building projects in Suetonius and Tacitus as drawn from the topos of the greed and excess of tyrants); Wardle 1994, esp. 71-4 (Suetonius taking this type from esp. from Livy and Sallust; in Cal., examples of crudelitas, superbia, avaritia and libido); and Lindsay 1995, 14-9 (tyrant type in the Tib., incl. saevitia, sex, drinking, stinginess).

See n. 18 above on the ambivalence (leaning towards a negative assessment) of the Iul. and Claud.
1.3 The Ideal Imperial Woman

As the “Rediscovery of Suetonius” studies have shown, the writings of Pliny and Suetonius reflect the picture of an ideal emperor (and its opposite) that had been fixed by the second century CE. Was there, however, a corresponding image of the model imperial mother, wife, daughter, or sister?

On a literary level, the female equivalent to the Panegyricus and Res Gestae are texts like the anonymous Consolatio ad Liviam, written for Livia in 9 BCE upon the death of her younger son Drusus. In this poem, Livia is cast as the ideal devoted mother who mourns the loss of her son. The poet, however, does not conceive of Livia as being an ordinary, private mother, but rather writes that she and Augustus were grooming Drusus for imperial duties (e.g., Caesaris illud opus, voti pars altera vestri, 39—note the second person plural vestri, which refers to Livia and Augustus collectively). Her important and public role as the “first lady” of Rome is stressed again towards the end of the poem (349-56):

\begin{quote}
Imposuit te alto Fortuna locumque tueri
Iussit honoratum: Livia, perfer onus.
Ad te oculos auresque trahis, tua facta notamus,
Nec vox missa potest principis ore tegi.
Alta mane supraque tuos excurse dolores
\end{quote}

The text is transmitted with Ovid, but it generally thought to be spurious.
It is striking that Livia is referred to as a feminine Romana princeps (356), a phrase that clearly alludes to a more political, rather than domestic, power. Yet even so, the poet still praises her for conforming to conventional standards of female behavior, especially for having led a chaste life, having submitted to her husband’s will (actumque pudice/ omne aevom et tanto tam placuisse viro?, 41-2), and having been a devoted mother. The poet, additionally, calls attention to the fact that Livia kept an “upright mind” and generally shunned “vices” (quid, tenuisse animum contra sua saecula rectum/ altius et vitii exercuisse caput?, 45-6). Although these vices are not spelled out, Livia’s avoidance of sexual indiscretion is implied by the poet’s repeated use of words like pudice (41) and

56 Cf. Purcell 1986, 78 on the distinctiveness of the poet’s language: “Is the expression princeps femina an absurd hyperbole?”
That Livia is lauded for surrendering to her husband also suggests that wifely freedom is transgressive.

As with the Panegyricus, the Consolatio should be read as prescriptive in nature. The poet recognizes Livia’s high and powerful position, but at the same time still encourages her to maintain more traditional female virtues like chastity and obedience to her husband.57 On the whole, the poem illustrates well the tension between public and private inherent in imperial women, what Nicholas Purcell has called “the frontier between the domestic and the public, between affairs of state and of the family, between politics and household management, between forum and atrium.”58 Imperial women are private people in the sense that they do not hold office themselves, yet the Consolatio makes clear that they lived under public gaze and that their actions could impact the Roman citizenry directly.

57 Cf. 47-51: Livia harmed no one, though she was in the position to have done so (fortunam hubuisse nocendi, 47). The poet, however, goes on to say that Livia’s power (vires, 49) does not extend to the Campus Martius or Forum, i.e. to the meeting places of the voting assemblies and Senate. Rather, she uses her authority within the appropriate sphere of her household (quamque licet citra constituisse domum, 48). See Purcell 1986, esp. 78-82 and 94-7 on the traditional nature of the virtues ascribed to Livia in the Cons. He contrasts these with more critical descriptions of her in the works of historians like Tacitus and Dio, who focus on her ambition and political interference. For a fuller expression of wifely ideals, see the so-called Laudatio Turiae (CIL 6.1527= ILS 8393), a 1st c. BCE epitaph to an unnamed wife from her husband. The husband praises her for loyalty, chastity, frugality, modesty, piety, and obedience.

58 Purcell 1986, 80.
To turn to expressions of ideals in more material forms, imperial women of the early Empire were often featured on coins just like their male counterparts. On some of these numismatic issues, women are depicted in association with, or even in the guise of, female deities who personify concepts like Pietas, Concordia, Securitas, and Victory. These terms, it should be noted, are not just arbitrary attributes, but are rather virtues that have a direct bearing on the Roman state. They are, furthermore, conspicuously similar to the sorts of concepts that are associated with imperial men.

On other coins, imperial women are represented in more individualized portraits, rather than in the mantle of goddesses. In these cases, the corresponding legends often espouse ideals similar to the notions personified by the deities (e.g., Salus

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59 E.g., RIC2 I, 97 nos. 50-1: sestertii from Rome, 21-2 CE; the obv. legend reads SPQR IVLIAE AVGVST (i.e., Livia); the obv. image is of a carpentum, the front and sides of which are decorated by Victories and other figures (NB: a carpentum is a carriage associated with Vestal Virgins); the rev. features Tiberius’ imperial title around the central abbreviation SC (Senatus Consultum). Also RIC2 I, 10 no. 33: sestertius from Rome, 37-8 CE; the obv. features a bust of Gaius with his imperial title in the legend; the rev. shows his three sisters, standing, each identified by name AGrippina, DRUSilla, and IVLIA (i.e., Livilla) with the abbreviation SC below them; Agrippina holds a cornucopia in the guise of Securitas, Drusilla a patera and cornucopia in the guise of Concordia, and Julia Livilla a rudder and cornucopia in the guise of Fortuna.

60 See Alexandridis 2004, 18-28. Although she notes that there is some individual variation, Alexandridis finds that fecunditas, concordia, pudicitia, and castitas are among the virtues most commonly associated with imperial women on coins. Common deities include Salus, Fides, Concordia, Ceres, Venus, and Vesta, all of which relate to the virtues above. This language/imagery, as she shows, echoes funerary laudations (such as the Laudatio Turiae, see n. 57 above) and consolation literature (e.g., the Cons. ad Liv. above), as well as Pliny’s Panegyricus. Alexandridis emphasizes the important role of imperial women in dynasty building, which accounts for the popularity of terms that stress fertility and sexual propriety.
Augusta, Fortuna, Pietas). Because the legends on these coins are linked to individualized representations, the virtue-laden terms come to be associated with the female portrait subjects themselves.

Not all of the values connected with women on coins are abstract, however. Domitia, for example, figures on a series of sestertii and dupondii with her son (b. 73, name uncertain), who died during childhood and was subsequently deified (d. 81). On the obverse of these coins is a portrait head of Domitia, who is identified by name in close association with her husband—that is, as his wife: DOMITIAE AVG IMP CAES

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61 E.g., *RIC* II, 124 no. 70: *denarius* from Rome, c. 80-81 CE; obv. features a laureate portrait of Domitilla and the legend DIVA DOMITILLA AVGVSTA; on the rev. is an image of a peacock and CONCORDIA AVGVSTA (NB: the peacock is a symbol of Juno, who was both queen of the gods and the patron goddess of matrons); cf. 124 no. 73 which is of the same obv. type (Domitilla), but has the rev. image of seated Pietas with a child in front of her and legend reading PIETAS AVGVSTA. Also *BMCRE* III, 106-7 nos. 525-8: *aureus* (525) and *denarius* (526-8) from Rome, c. 112-15 CE; the obv. shows a bust of Plotina with the legend PLOTINA AVG IMP TRAIANI; the rev. shows Vesta draped, veiled, and holding the *palladium* and a scepter with Trajan’s imperial title as legend; cf. 107 no. 529 for same obv. type (Plotina), but with the rev. image of an altar and a veiled Pudicitia standing in front of a curule chair with ARA PVDIC added to Trajan’s imperial title in the legend.

62 Bradley 1991a, 3720: the “observable reality” is that the ideals enumerated in numismatic legends come to be associated with the emperor whose image is on that coin. Similarly, Mattingly 1923, lxxii argues that Plotina’s coins use the same religious imagery as Livia’s (see n. 61 above for two examples of Plotina’s coins, and n. 59 above for Livia’s). Both women are associated with Vesta and Pudicitia, which paints them as chaste matrons.

DIVI F DOMITIAN AVG. On the reverse of these types is the legend DIVI CAESARIS MATER S C, with a range of corresponding images: Domitia holding a scepter and sitting with her child, Domitia performing a sacrifice over an altar, or Ceres holding grain and a scepter. Though the reverse images vary, they all connote that Domitia was a fruitful, pious mother who made an important contribution to the imperial line. The recurring image of the scepter, in particular, clearly associates Domitia with imperial power in her role as wife of the emperor and mother of his divine son.

In addition to coins, some imperial women were also awarded public statues (i.e., honorary images erected by decree of the Senate or emperor). For example, Dio (49.38.1) records that Octavian granted such statues jointly to his wife Livia and sister Octavia in 35 BCE (along with freedom from tutela and sacrosanctitas), and that the Senate erected a second statue to Livia in 9 BCE in consolation for Drusus’ death (i.e., in

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64 *RIC* II, 209 no. 440. All of the coins in this series (five of which are listed in *RIC*) have roughly the same legend naming Domitia, but the abbreviations differ slightly. Cf. *RIC* II, 150 n. 1, the obv. legend of which features Agrippina as mother of the emperor: AGRIPP AVG DIV CLAUD NERONIS CAES MATER. The rev. shows facing busts of Nero and Agrippina. The imperial mother, thus, is given equal prominence with the emperor. See also *RIC* II, 108-9, nos. 7, 13, 21 for similar issues under Caligula of the emperor and his mother Agrippina the Elder: AGRIPPINA MAT C CAES AVG GERM.

65 Domitia and child: *RIC* II, 209 nos. 440 and 440a. Domitia sacrificing: 209 no. 442. Ceres: 209 no. 443. These are the identifications according to *RIC* II. It is possible in some cases that the female figure is not Domitia, but a personified deity. Even if the identifications are uncertain, Domitia’s role as a mother to a divine child is still spelled out in the legends.
her role as mother; 55.2.5). In addition, the *Senatus Consultum* of 19 CE, which lays out the funerary honors granted to Germanicus, calls for a number of women to be included on his marble arch (the text of the decree is preserved in the *Tabula Siarensis*, fragment a, ll. 18-21): 67

*Supraque eum ianum statua Germanis Caesaris po-/neretur in curru triumphali et circa latera eius statuae Drusi Germanici patris ei]/us naturalis fratris Ti/berii Caesaris Aug/(usti) et Antoniae matris ei/[us et/ Agrippinae uxoris et Lil/viae sororis et Ti/berii Germanici fratris eius et filiorum et fil iarum eius].

A statue of Germanicus Caesar in a triumphal chariot should be placed on top of this arch, and around its sides statues of his father Drusus Germanicus, the natural brother of Tiberius Caesar Augustus, and of his mother Antonia, and of his wife Agrippina, and of his sister Livia, and of his brother Tiberius Germanicus, and of his sons and daughters.

It is remarkable that these women were to be featured on the arch in the first place, which sort of monument was normally the reserve of male triumphantors. It is

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66 See Flory 1993, who finds only one solid example of a public honorific statue of a woman before 35 BCE, that erected to Cornelia, mother of the Gracchi, in the late second century. Coarelli, however, has argued that the remaining statue base inscribed to Cornelia is Augustan in date; the statue itself, which is now lost, might have been older: see summary in Flory 1993, 290. There are, in addition, stories about other statues of women (e.g., Fufetia, who gave the Campus Martius to the Romans; Plin. *NH* 34.25), but there is little external evidence to support them. Flory concludes that the dedications of Livia’s and Octavia’s statues in 35 BCE were a relatively new phenomenon in Rome. They show the increased prominence of women in the dynastic scheme of the Empire.

67 Text from Crawford 1996 (vol. I), 515 no. 37.
also noteworthy, in light of the present study, that the women’s relationship to
Germanicus is spelled out each time: matris, uxor is, sororis, filiarum. It seems, therefore,
that there was at least some concept of what role an imperial mother, wife, sister, or
daughter should play. We should also observe that there is a hierarchy to this list: the
mother is given primary placement over the wife; Germanicus’ own children are
included, but these come after his sister. Thus, each type of woman has her own place.
This ranking is evinced also by Consolatio ad Liviam in commemoration of the death of
Germanicus’ father Drusus, the “natural brother of Tiberius Caesar Augustus”
mentioned above. In the poem, Livia is portrayed as the ideal mourning mother, and
Antonia as the paradigmatic loyal wife. The two women are mourning Drusus equally,
but the author conceives of them as playing different parts. He also addresses his
poem to the mother, rather than to the spouse, which practice suggests both that Livia
was a more important figure as the wife of the emperor, and that mothers were more
important figures than wives.

On Antonia, esp. Cons. ad Liv. 299-342. The poet describes Antonia as a daughter-in-law worthy of Livia
(Drusi digna parente nurus, 299), which shows Livia’s primacy in the poem. See Alexandridis 2004, 29-31 on
the correspondence between consolation literature and the virtues associated with women on imperial coins.
She uses the Cons. ad Liv. as an example.
There is not room to catalogue here the many honors paid to imperial women. Nonetheless, a few further illustrations are particularly instructive. First, the women of the imperial family were fully incorporated into the imperial cult, and many received divine honors after death. Livia, for example, was made a priestess of the cult of her divine husband and was also worshiped during her lifetime in the East, both as an individual (*thea Livia*) and in assimilation with other goddesses. Later, she was divinized in 42 CE during the reign of her grandson Claudius. Her dual roles as overseer of the cult of Divus Augustus and as a divinity herself are illustrated by an onyx cameo dating to some time after 14 CE. The gem shows Livia simultaneously acting as a priestess and goddess, sitting on a throne and holding a bust of the deified Augustus. Livia, thus, is recognized as being both a keeper of the state cult and as worthy herself of homage.

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69 Livia is associated, e.g., with Hestia/Vesta, Demeter/Ceres, Hera/Juno, and Aphrodite/Venus in both eastern in western provinces. At other times, however, she is simply called *thea*. She is also assimilated, though less often, with the goddesses Fortuna, Athena, Iustitia, and Pietas, among others (see Hahn 1994, 34-65). See also Severy 2003, 114-5 on Livia’s prominence in the imperial cult, especially in the East. Severy also notes the inclusion of other women of Augustus’ family, especially Octavia and Julia.

70 Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, inv. IX A 95=fig. 184 in Zanker 1990, 235. As Zanker observes, the mural crown and tympanum recall Magna Mater/Cybele, the sheaths of wheat in her hand are attributes of Ceres, and the gown slipping off her shoulder is in the style of Venus. However, she also wears a *stola*, the symbol of a Roman matron, which tones down Venus’ sensuality. Zanker associates this cameo with a large statue of Livia as Ceres Augusta from the theater in Leptis Magna.
Although Livia was tied to a range of divinities (as can be seen in the cameo, where she is given the attributes of Cybele, Venus, and Ceres), Agrippina the Younger was most often assimilated to Demeter/Ceres. Judith Ginsburg argues that this close connection was most likely meant to promote the image of Agrippina as fecund, especially after her marriage to her aging uncle. The picture of Agrippina (or any imperial lady, for that matter) as a fertile woman was a particularly attractive one because, as Ginsburg writes, “the stability of the regime depended in no small part on its ability to assure an unproblematic succession.”71 The Demeter/Ceres reference, therefore, adverts not only to Agrippina’s potential to produce children with her new husband, but also to the fact that she had already borne a son. As this assimilation shows, Agrippina was portrayed as the model imperial wife and mother in the sense that she could (and did) bear children to carry on the line.

The association of imperial women with goddesses was not confined to far-off provinces. A number of coins, for example, depicted living imperial women as divinities, even on issues minted in Rome.72 Deceased women who had been divinized


72 A point made by Zanker 1990, 234. See also Ginsburg 2006, 99 on the fact that living imperial men are rarely assimilated with divinities on coins, but imperial women frequently are.
were also worshipped in the capital. For example, Caligula’s sister Drusilla was deified shortly after her death in 38 CE, the first imperial woman to receive the honor. Her brother erected a statue to her as Drusilla Panthea (the “Universal Goddess”) in the Temple of Venus Genetrix in the Forum Iulium. What is more, he made Drusilla’s image equal in size to the goddess’ own cult statue.\textsuperscript{73} By locating her statue in the Temple of Venus the Ancestral Mother in Julius Caesar’s Forum, Caligula makes a claim about his sister’s (and thus, his own) place in the Julian line.

The fact that some women were part of the imperial cult in the provinces, and that others were worshipped in Rome shows that the female members of the imperial family were visible and important figures.\textsuperscript{74} The imperial cult helped to hold the Empire together: it established Roman authority in places distant from the capital city and made the emperor—and his family—a part of the local fabric. The worship of imperial \textit{divae} in Rome also promoted the emperor and his relations by showing that the line of the Caesars passed through favored women. Thus, imperial women were celebrated above

\textsuperscript{73} Wood 1995, 460. See ibid., n. 18 for assembled references to inscriptions to the divine Drusilla in Asia Minor.

\textsuperscript{74} Cf. Zanker 1990, 235-6: “Whether the goddess was Venus, Diana, Ceres, Concordia, Pietas, or Fortuna Augusta, she could always be intimately linked to the imperial house through the hairstyle or facial features of one ‘princess’ or another.” Thus, even if the women were assimilated to deities, they still had individual and recognizable features.
all for the role they played in building and maintaining dynasties. As a result, a vital part of their image was the fact that they were mothers, wives, sisters, and daughters.

The majority of examples cited above are first century in date. Most have to do with the dissemination of idealized representations of imperial women through coins and statues, and the propagation of certain virtues in association with these depictions. Above all, the widespread nature of these images shows that the women of the imperial family were conspicuous, public personages. The citizens of Rome (and to a lesser extent, the provinces) would have been used to seeing them, not only in sculptural form but also in the flesh at official events.

It follows, then, that by the second century (if not earlier) there came to be certain expectations of how imperial women should behave and what role they should play in the Empire. These expectations, as I argue below,

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75 E.g., Livia accompanied Augustus to the circus and sat with him in the imperial box (Aug. 45.1). To celebrate Tiberius’ ovatio, Livia and Julia gave a banquet for the women of Rome (Dio 55.2.4). Caligula’s sisters Drusilla, Livilla, and Agrippina the Younger were included in his official oaths (Cal. 15.3). An image of Livia was drawn by an elephant-chariot in the Circus (Claud. 11.2); Dio (60.5.2) adds that she received games, a statue in the Temple of Augustus, sacrifices from the Vestals, and her name in the oaths of women. Caligula honored the memory of his mother Agrippina the Elder in a similar way: he appointed sacrifices to her each year, as well as games in the Circus, and provided a carriage to carry her image (Cal. 15.1). Some women, furthermore, were given public funerals and eulogies: e.g., Iul. 6.1 on Caesar’s aunt Julia; Aug. 8.1 on Augustus’ grandmother Julia; Cal. 10.1 on Caligula’s mother Agrippina the Elder. Atia, similarly, was given a public funeral (Dio 47.17.6), the first woman in Rome to receive such an honor (Flory 1996, 290). Dio also writes (54.35.4-5) that Octavia’s body was laid in the Temple of Divus Iulius, where Augustus gave the eulogy; Drusus gave another on the rostra. Like her mother Atia, she too was given a funus publicum.

76 See Boatwright 1991, esp. 514-5 on the centrality of women in the imperial ideology of the early second century. Boatwright stresses that the abstract ideas of the “imperial marriage” and “imperial household”
are reflected in the *Panegyricus*. More importantly for the present study, they also inform Suetonius’ portrayal of his female characters. Both authors have a clear concept of what imperial women should—and should not—do.

One of the key differences between the *Res Gestae* on the one hand, and the *Panegyricus* and *Caesares* on the other, is that the former sticks to public deeds, while the latter delve into the emperor’s domestic life. In his oration, Pliny praises Trajan not only for his military and political acts, but also for his impeccable private life. He singles out Trajan’s wife, Plotina (*Pan*. 83), and sister, Ulpia Marciana (84), as particularly worthy of comment. It is important to keep in mind that the *Panegyricus* was composed by a consul and delivered before the Senate. Even in that setting, however, the women of the emperor’s family are considered to be appropriate topics. Thus, the *Panegyricus* were given prominence over the individual women themselves. This observation strengthens my contentions (more on this below, Section 4) that the role of the mother, wife, daughter, etc. is most important in the *Caes*. and that the *Lives* contain types of women rather than individualized portraits.

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77 Bradley 1991a, 3718.

78 However, there are, in effect, two *Panegyrictici*. One is the shorter, original version delivered orally in the Senate in 100 CE. The second is the expanded, written version that comes down to us today, which is perhaps three times longer than the original (Morford 1992, 576; cf. Plin. *Ep*. 3.18 on expanding the speech). It is unclear exactly which parts have been augmented. Thus, it is possible that some of the information on the women was either lacking, or was much shorter in the first performance. The expanded speech, however, was circulated to Pliny’s friends (*Ep*. 3.13) and was also given in recitals after 100 (cf. *Ep*. 3.18.4 on Pliny giving a performance to his friends over the course of three days, which suggests that he read the longer version: Morford 1992, 576-7), so the entire oration as we have it would have been known as well.
shows that by the second century, talking about the emperor’s private life was not seen as “gossipy” or in poor taste. Rather, it was thought to have direct bearing on his public duties and \textit{persona}.\textsuperscript{79} In other words, how a \textit{princeps} acted in his domestic space was regarded as revealing of what sort of man he “really” was. To turn our attention to the women, Pliny’s oration shows particularly well that by the second century certain ideals came to be attached to the women of the emperor’s family in the same way that they were linked to the emperor himself.

Because the feminine imperial ideals expressed in the \textit{Panegyricus} have such a bearing on the present study, it is helpful to summarize briefly Pliny’s comments on Plotina and Marciana, with an eye towards the specific behaviors he lauds in them. Beginning with Plotina, Pliny’s first comments on the imperial wife (\textit{Pan}. 7.4-5) have to do not with Plotina individually, but are rather generalized statements about the proper place of the emperor’s spouse. Though they are not aimed at Trajan’s wife, these remarks still pertain to her because they establish early in the speech the appropriate limits of wifely influence. Later, when Pliny eventually speaks about Plotina (83), he

\textsuperscript{79} See Boatwright 1991, 514 on the importance of marriage to the emperor’s public \textit{persona} in the early second century. She uses Hadrian and Sabina as her example, which obviously has bearing on Suetonius. See also Wallace-Hadrill 2004, 17-8 on the emperor’s private life in the \textit{Caes}. (with “private” defined as the emperor’s family, friends, personal characteristics, habits, and inclinations). Wallace-Hadrill stresses that Suetonius is not gossiping (as he has often been charged), but that personal life has a very fitting place in biography.
will portray her as falling within the boundaries of suitable conduct that he outlined at the beginning of the oration.

In specific terms, in the opening chapters of the speech Pliny contrasts Trajan’s exemplary adoption by Nerva, which was brought about because of Trajan’s good deeds and decent character, to the coerced adoptions of Tiberius and Nero, which were arranged “to please a wife” (itaque adoptatus es, non, ut prius alius atque alius, in uxoris gratiam, 7.4). Next, he asks the rhetorical question: “If you are looking to transfer to one man the Senate and People of Rome, its armies, provinces, and allies, would you take your successor from a wife’s lap?” (an Senatum Populumque Romanum, exercitus, provincias, socios transmissurus uni, successorem e sinu uxoris accipias, 7.5). Though Pliny does not name the uxor(es) here (or the principes, for that matter), it is nevertheless clear from the context that he is talking about Livia and Agrippina (and Tiberius and Nero). What is also plain is that these wifely actions are condemned by the panegyrist: the “good” adoption, in this case, is the one in which a woman had no part. The rhetorical question in 7.5 also makes unambiguous that, to Pliny’s mind, imperial wives have no place in the official business of the Senate and People of Rome.

Pliny’s next mention of the imperial spouse occurs several paragraphs later, where he talks about Plotina (83). The introduction to this “private” portion of the
speech, the two paragraphs on the emperor’s wife (83) and sister (84), is particularly informative (83.1-3):

Habet hoc primum magna fortuna, quod nihil tectum, nihil occultum esse patitur: principum vero non modo domus, sed cubicula ipsa intimosque secessus recludit, omniaque arcana noscenda fama e proponit atque explicat. Sed tibi, Caesar, nihil accommodatius fuerit ad gloriæ, quam penitus inspici. Sunt quidem præclara, quæ in publicum proferis; sed non minora ea, quæ limine tenes. Est magnificum, quod te ab omni contagione vitiíorum reprimis ac revocas, sed magnificentius, quod tuos. Quanto enim magis arduum est, alios praestare, quam se: tanto laudabilius, quod, cum ipse sis optimus, omnes circa te similès tui effecisti.

The great consequence of high office is that it allows no privacy, no concealment: indeed, it opens up not only the houses of the principes, but also their very bedrooms and innermost recesses, and it exposes and expounds every secret to rumor. But for you, Caesar, there could be nothing more suitable to your glory than to be scrutinized so thoroughly. Your public deeds are indeed excellent; but, no less excellent are the more minor acts that you do in private. It is remarkable that you restrain and hold yourself back from all contamination of vices, but it is even more remarkable that you do that same for the members of your family. For it is much more difficult to be responsible for others than for oneself: you are all the more worthy of praise because you, since you are the greatest yourself, make all those around you be like you.

After this introduction (83.1-3), Pliny progresses to Plotina (83.4), and then to Ulpia Marciana (84). As we can see from the opening lines of the paragraph, the panegyrist views Plotina and Marciana as extensions of Trajan. He is most interested in the women not as individuals, but for what they say about the emperor. The same, as I shall argue throughout this study, is also true of Suetonius. Like Pliny, the biographer too turns to imperial women primarily to illuminate his male subjects. In general, a “good” wife,
mother, sister, or daughter shows that the emperor keeps his domus (and, by extension, the state) in line, while a “bad” woman reveals general immorality, corruption, and a lack of imperial authority.

Pliny continues to think of Plotina in broad and comparative terms even when he begins to speak about her more directly. He writes that many distinguished men have been disgraced by their wives (multis illustribus dedecori fuit...uxor, 83.4), either because the women were poorly chosen in the first place, or because the husbands were too weak to divorce them. Although this comment need not be a pointed reference, the uxorious Claudius and the lustful and murderous Agrippina and Messalina still lurk in the background. Domitian and Domitia also come to mind: Domitia was rumored to have had an affair with an actor, but Domitian overturned his divorce from Domitia because he could not bear to be separated from his wife (cf. Suet. Dom. 3). On the whole, Pliny paints the consequences of having a “bad” wife as dire and far-reaching. He goes on to say that the reputations of these eminent men suffered publicly on account of their domestic woes (ita foris claros domestica destruebat infamia, 83.4). Their failure as husbands, furthermore, led them to be unsuccessful as citizens (et ne maximi cives haberentur, hoc efficiebat, quod mariti minores erant, 83.4). All these sweeping generalizations have been leading up to Pliny’s main point, that Plotina is different: Tibi
uxor in decus et gloriem cedit (83.5). Rather than bringing infamia on Trajan, she augments his gloria; instead of being a source of shame (dedecori) she contributes to his honor (decus). Pliny, thus, links an emperor’s success directly to the quality of his domestic life, and especially to the “good” behavior of his wife.

Pliny concludes the section on Plotina by praising her for maintaining her former standards now that she is empress (constanter, 83.6). In particular, he lauds her modest lifestyle (eadem quam modica cultu, quam parca comitatu, quam civilis incessu, 83.7). Although Pliny does not make an explicit comparison, Plotina’s departure from the lavish and excessive ways of the Julio-Claudians is the subtext to this remark. In addition to her constancy, Pliny also commends Plotina for revering not Trajan’s power, but Trajan himself (non potentiam tuam, sed ipsum te reveretur, 83.6). Again, her reverence is in contrast to the wives we saw at the beginning of the speech (i.e., Livia and Agrippina) who abused their husbands’ authority in order to advance their sons (7.4-5).

Although Pliny frequently speaks of Trajan and Plotina as a team working in tandem (estis, fuistis, probatis, coepistis, invicem, uterque, 83.6), he ends the passage on

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80 Note that tibi comes before uxor: Trajan is at issue, not Plotina. Similarly, in 83.4 the multis illustribus precede the uxor.

81 E.g., Dio (62.27.4-28.1) writes that Poppaea put gilded shoes on her mules and bathed in the milk of 500 asses. The courts of Caligula and Nero are generally described by Tacitus and Suetonius (Pliny’s contemporaries) as reveling in excess and luxury. Thus, the women associated with those emperors (Agrippina, Livilla, Drusilla, and Poppaea) are also linked to these traits.
Plotina by praising the emperor for molding and shaping such a good wife: “This is the work of a husband who has trained and prepared his wife; there is sufficient glory to a wife in obedience” (mariti hoc opus, qui ita imbuit, ita instituit: nam uxori sufficit obsequii gloria, 83.7). Thus, Plotina and Trajan might combine for a series of second person plural verbs making a collective “you,” but Pliny really sees Trajan as the leading force in the marriage. The princeps, ultimately, is credited with Plotina’s good behavior.

Pliny’s treatment of Ulpia Marciana is much the same. She is acclaimed for following Trajan’s example in being sparing and honest (ut in illa tua simplicitas, tua veritas, tuus candor agnoscitur, 84.1). Pliny also praises her for not being overly jealous of Plotina, her brother’s wife. It is a tribute to both women, he writes, that they can share a home with no signs of rivalry (84.3). These remarks suggest that Marciana properly recognizes that she is only the emperor’s sister—i.e., that the imperial wife holds a more prominent place. More importantly, Marciana understands that Trajan himself—not female members of the imperial family—has “real” authority. To summarize Pliny’s

82 Pliny is also speaking, in part, about the women’s birth. Marciana was technically of higher birth than Plotina, so he praises the imperial sister for not being overly jealous of Plotina’s new-found eminence (cf. his statement that Marciana and Plotina make it hard to tell if good birth or good training are more conducive to leading an upright life: dubitare cogatur, utrum sit efficacius ad recte vivendum, bene institui, aut feliciter nasci, 84.2; see Boatwright 1991, 515-7 on the status of Plotina and Marciana). However, Pliny’s persistent focus on jealousy throughout Pan. 84 also implies inequity between the roles of imperial wife and sister. Thus, to some extent he seems to be praising Marciana for deferring to Plotina despite her higher birth.
praise, he commends Marciana for not being overly desirous of wealth or influence. In general, Pliny’s tribute gives voice to the ideal of imperial women as retiring figures who keep out of politics. Both Plotina and Marciana are lauded above all for knowing that their proper place is in the domestic sphere, where they ought to defer to the princeps as a paterfamilias figure.

On the whole, Pliny’s Panegyricus shows that elite Roman men recognized the high position of imperial women, but at the same time considered the imperial domus to be the appropriate sphere of their influence. One must bear in mind that the Panegyricus (100 CE) is largely prescriptive in nature: thus, Pliny is more encouraging Plotina and Marciana to be reserved than he is actually commending them for any actions of their own. It is somewhat ironic, however, given the extensive circulation of the statues and coins cited above, that Pliny calls for the women to be so inconspicuous. But at the same time, the Panegyricus can also be said to reflect those very images, in which imperial women are most often portrayed as idealized wives and mothers who are fertile, loyal, and chaste.

83 Cf. his remark that both Plotina and Marciana recognize that they are no more than private persons: neque enim unquam periclitabuntur esse privatæ, quae non desierunt, 84.6. He also praises both women for refusing the title of Augusta and instead being content to be known as “Trajan’s wife” and “Trajan’s sister” (84.6).
1.4 Imperial Women in the Caesares: a Fragmented Picture

I established above that Suetonius’ biographies revolve around virtue and vice, where one category is weighed against the other as a means of assessing the subject (Sections 1 and 2). The particular *vitia* selected by the biographer derive, in part, from the historiographical and rhetorical tradition of the tyrant. The *virtutes* featured in the *Caesares*, on the other hand, echo the heavily moral language of Roman coin legends. Suetonius also highlights more or less the same merits (and in a similar topical arrangement) as the *Res Gestae* and *Panegyricus*, both of which speak about the model *princeps*. Although the influence of these works on the *Caesares* may be direct, all three texts also reflect wider imperial ideals that were in circulation in the first and second centuries CE.

This dissertation picks up on these themes and expands them to include imperial women. Although a number of studies have explored Suetonius’ portrayals of the *principes*, there has been no full-length inquiry into his depictions of imperial women.84

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84 Baldwin 1983, 346-8 touches on women in his book-length study of Suetonius, but he spends only 3 pages on the subject in his 552 pages of text. Thus, his analysis lacks depth. For example, Baldwin observes (348) that “there are too many literary and philosophical stereotypes afflicting the portrayal of women in Greek and Roman literature to allow any easy correlation between what is publicly written and privately believed.” As a result, he chooses not to confront these tropes head-on. Instead, he cites in a footnote (348 n. 66) numerous references in the *Lives* to words like *femina*, *mulier*, and *puella*, saying that he offers the passages to the reader and will “leave it to him” (note the masculine pronoun) to decide what Suetonius thinks about women! This analysis is problematic, not least because so many of Suetonius’ references to women...
When other investigations have looked at imperial women of the first century, they have tended to give priority to Tacitus’ *Annals* or Dio’s *History*, both of which have a more narrative style. This trend is reasonable, to some extent, because Suetonius’ practice of writing *per species* (Aug. 9, which is usually translated as “by rubric”) means that his biographies are at times disjointed. There is no continuous narrative, for example, contextualizing Livia’s wedding to Augustus or Julia’s exile. As a result, it can be difficult first to establish even the basic “facts” of Suetonius’ accounts, and second to discern what he is “doing” with the women in the passages.

And yet, even given these obstacles it is still a worthwhile and legitimate question to ask what ideals Suetonius held for imperial women. As I have shown above, women do not correspond to obvious nouns like *femina*, *mulier*, and *puella* (where, for example, is *uxor*, *soror*, *filia*, or *avia*?). Because Suetonius is writing about individuals, he often uses proper names or feminine pronouns, which would not come up in a word search for synonyms of “woman.” Riemer’s (2000) essay is more thoughtful, but she focuses on only one feminine role, that of wife. In addition to wives, however, the *Caes.* are full of mothers, sisters, daughters, granddaughters, and nieces. Outside of these two studies, women have been peripheral to Suetonian scholarship. Commentaries on the individual *Lives* reference them, but a commentary, by nature, is not a comprehensive discussion. Such works naturally talk primarily about the biography at hand without offering a wider view of Suetonius’ treatment of women in other *Lives*. See also Barrett in n. 89 below. Although he astutely notes that Suetonius uses women mainly to highlight certain attributes of his male subjects, Barrett’s book is not about Suetonius, but rather Livia as an historical figure. Thus, he is most interested in the wider historiographical tradition about Livia (especially as regards the faithfulness of its picture), of which Suetonius is merely one part.

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85 E.g., both Dixon 2001 and Ginsburg 2006 favor Tacitus over Suetonius. The *index locorum* of Bauman’s book *Women and Politics in Ancient Rome* (1992) has approximately three times as many entries for Tacitus as for Suetonius. When Suetonius is cited in these works, his biographies are typically used to corroborate Tacitus or else to call attention to some contrast with Tacitus’ account. See Bradley 1985b, 255 on the fact that Suetonius often lives in Tacitus’ shadow in modern scholarship.
female members of the imperial family were closely associated with abstract virtues on coins and in sculpture. Pliny’s *Panegyricus*—as well as Tacitus’ *Annals*, replete as it is with “behind the scenes” looks at palace life—also make clear that Romans of Suetonius’ day used both public and private criteria to assess their *principes*. The question thus arises of what ideals Suetonius held for imperial women. The exploration of this topic is also worthwhile because, on the broadest level, it is always welcome to include another voice in the discussion of how Roman men viewed women in general, and women in power more explicitly. As I shall show below, Suetonius often differs from the more hostile views of Tacitus, who tends to see imperial women as darker, meaner figures who usually get their comeuppance. Suetonius, in contrast, is at times more lenient. Livia, for example, is the model wife in Suetonius’ *Augustus*, a stark contrast to her depiction as a plotting husband-poisoner in the *Annals* (1.5) and in Dio’s *History* (56.30.1-2). In another striking contrast, Tacitus has Agrippina initiate the incestuous affair with her son (*Ann. 14.1*), whereas Suetonius writes that Nero inflicted the relationship upon his mother (*Nero 28.3*). Considering these startling differences, it promises to be a gainful enterprise to investigate the women in Suetonius’ biographies in greater depth.

Yet, the often disjointed nature of Suetonius’ *Lives* complicates the investigation of imperial women in the biographies. In general, when studying the *Caesares* one of the most effective analytical tools is to hone in on rubrics that repeat throughout the *Lives.*
These recurring topics (for instance, *spectacula*, education, and foreign campaigns) are most revealing of the standardized criteria by which Suetonius judged his male subjects.\(^86\) This approach, which has been profitably applied to the male biographical subjects, can also be used with imperial women. Among Suetonius’ standard rubrics are the emperor’s ancestry, birth, and childhood, which feature his mother and, frequently, his grandmother and great-grandmother as well.\(^87\) Also included is information about his wider family, including his sisters, nieces, aunts. Every *Life*, moreover has passages on marriage, where we see the emperor’s wives, and the birth of his children, where his wife appears again and also his daughters if applicable. The regular passages on the emperors’ sexual tastes also feature women, who in some cases of alleged incest are also members of the imperial family (Nero with his mother Agrippina, for instance, or Caligula with his sisters Drusilla, Livilla, and Agrippina). Thus, women are consistently woven into the fabric of the *Lives*. As with the *principes*, the repetition of passages that feature women playing the same set of clearly defined roles implies that the women are

\(^86\) Bradley 1991a, 3715 and 3720-9; ibid. 1985b, 260.

\(^87\) Grandmothers: *Aug.* 8 (Julia); *Tib.* 5 (Alfidia); *Cal.* 1.1, 10, 15 (Antonia the Younger, paternal); *Cal.* 7, 16.2 (Julia Augusti, maternal); *Claud.* 3-4 (Livia); *Otho* 1.2 (unnamed); *Vesp.* 1.4, 2.1, 5.1 (Tertulla). Great-grandmothers: *Cal.* 7, 10.1, 15, 23.2 (Livia); *Otho* 1.1 (unnamed).
being evaluated both against each other, and against a larger standard of ideal feminine conduct.

The observation that women are built into the organizational structure of the *Caesares* is important for a number of reasons. First, it tells us where to look for them in the biographies. Additionally, it also guarantees that women will appear regularly in all twelve *Lives*. The fact that women materialize only under specific and narrow topical headings, however, also means that they tend to play prescribed parts. For example, Julia appears exclusively as a daughter in the *Augustus* (65, 101.4) and solely as a wife in the *Tiberius* (10.1, 11.4, 50.1), even when Suetonius talks about one and the same event: the fallout from her affairs. In the *Augustus*, the biographer addresses only Augustus’ response to his daughter’s adultery, without even mentioning the husband to whom Julia was unfaithful. He saves for the *Tiberius* the information that Julia’s adultery led to her divorce, even though Augustus himself issued the repudium in Tiberius’ name (*Tib.* 11.4). As a result, the biographer’s picture of Julia is highly fragmented. There is no continuous narrative that connects the adultery, divorce, and exile, events that must have happened in quick succession as part of the same package. More importantly for the present concerns, Suetonius does not show Julia simultaneously playing her dual roles of daughter and wife (or even her triple role, for she was also a mother who was separated from her children during her exile), as she most certainly did in “real” life.
Instead, in the *Caesares* Julia is a daughter here, and a wife there, with no overlap between these two facets of her life.

The disjointed picture of women that emerges from the *Caesares* has in part to do with the “Law of Biographical Relevance.” The phrase, first applied to Suetonian studies by Gavin Townend (1967), means that what happens under one emperor will not appear in the *Life* of another because it does not have strict bearing on the second biographical subject.\(^8^8\) Agrippina the Elder, for instance, was banished under Tiberius. Accordingly, the *Vita* of her son Caligula contains practically no information about the event, despite the fact that Agrippina is a bigger character in the *Calígula* than in the *Tiberius*. Instead, in the *Calígula* we hear only about the effect of Agrippina’s expulsion on the biographical subject: because he was still underage, Caligula had to live first with his great-grandmother Livia, and then with his grandmother Antonia (*Cal.* 10). However, the *Calígula* does not explain why Agrippina was banished. For that, one must turn to the *Tiberius* (52.3-53.2). Applying the rule less strictly, Julia’s divorce from Tiberius can be said to belong more properly to her husband’s *Life*, rather than to her father’s, even if Augustus issued the order.

\(^8^8\) Townend 1967, 84, who takes the term from Stuart’s 1928 study of Greek biography.
While one consequence of this method is that Suetonius’ overall picture of some women is incoherent, it also means that the biographer has opened up doors that allow him to manipulate his characters for maximum effect. Livia is the best example of this practice. Suetonius presents her as the ideal wife in the *Augustus*, but in the *Vita Tiberii* she is depicted as a conniving mother. These two portrayals are made less overtly contradictory by the fact that they appear in separate books. If Suetonius were writing a narrative history in the manner of Tacitus’ *Annals*, however, these two depictions could not easily coexist (Tacitus, in fact, makes Livia more consistently bad as a wife and as a mother). In the case of Livia, the fragmentation works to her benefit, since Suetonius separates her “good” wifely activities from her “bad” mothering. Her variable portrayal also impacts the men, for the positive picture of Augustus is enhanced by his having a loyal wife, while the negative image of Tiberius is underscored by his vile, scheming mother. The fact that Livia is presented as distinctly different personalities in the two *Lives* suggests that the constancy of her character is not Suetonius’ concern. Rather, he is more interested in the light that Livia sheds on each of the biographical subjects: in the *Life* of the “good” Augustus she is an ideal wife, while in the *Vita* of the tyrannical Tiberius she is a “bad” mother.89

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The following chapters investigate imperial women in their most prominent, recurring roles in the *Caesares*: mothers (Chapter 2), wives (Chapter 3), and sisters, daughters, granddaughters, and nieces (Chapter 4). The fourth chapter explores all four relationships together because these more peripheral family members are relatively marginal in the *Lives*: while all twelve emperors had mothers and wives, fewer had sisters, daughters, granddaughters, and/or nieces. In each chapter I have focused my discussion on a few illustrative examples of women performing the role(s) in question, although I am always careful to note how these samples compare or contrast to other women in the *Lives*. Throughout the study, I am more concerned with Suetonius’ aims and methods than with the historicity of his account. This dissertation, in other words, is historiographical rather than historical in focus.

I have favored women like Livia, Agrippina the Younger, and Julia the Elder who appear in more than one *Life*. It is easier with them to show how Suetonius

Footnote cont. next pg.

the portrait of the emperor in question, usually in terms of the influence they had over them, or their place in their dynastic plans. This does not imply that Suetonius was slighting towards the imperial women. Rather, he saw the literary advantage of focusing almost exclusively on his main subject.”

90 Cf. the words of Erich Gruen in the introduction to Ginsburg 2006, 9: the calculated account of Agrippina in Tacitus, Suetonius, and Dio “may intersect or overlap with history, but it is not to be confused with history.”

91 Livia is in: Aug. (wife), Tib. (mother), Cal. (great-grandmother), Claud. (grandmother), Gal. (patron), Otho (patron). Agrippina appears in: Tib. (52.2 as unnamed child of Germanicus, hence Tiberius’ great-niece), Cal. (sister), Claud. (niece and wife), Nero (mother), Otho (3.1, Otho was an intimate of her son; helped to kill Footnote cont. next pg.
handles their characters, especially in terms of any inconsistencies, since he writes about them in a range of situations and playing a variety of roles. Livia, for instance, appears as both a wife (Augustus) and mother (Tiberius), and Agrippina as a sister (Caligula), niece (Claudius), wife (Claudius), and mother (Claudius and Nero). With these Julio-Claudian women, furthermore, there is ample comparative material in Tacitus and Dio which, especially when Suetonius differs from them, helps to reveal the biographer’s methods.

In contrast, it is much harder to say anything of substance about the more minor characters like Galba’s mother Mummia Achaica (Gal. 3) or Vitellius’ wife Petronia (Vit. 6), each of whom appears in only one scene, in a single Life, and in a solitary role. These women, furthermore, are hardly mentioned in other extant histories, so it is difficult to determine if Suetonius has cast them as especially vicious, loyal, or having some other trait because we simply do not know the historiographical traditions about them, if there were any. While it is important to observe that Suetonius’ biographies include some

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women whom other ancient historians seem to have ignored, the scanty portraits of these women do not lend themselves to an in-depth analysis.92

Having explored each of these feminine roles in the chapters, the conclusion (Chapter 5) will “reassemble” the fragmented pieces to see what those pictures say about Suetonius’ general views on imperial women.

Throughout this study I have used the text of the new Loeb edition of Suetonius (in two volumes), first revised in 1998 and reprinted in 2001. These volumes offer an insightful introduction by Keith Bradley. Donna W. Hurley updated the 1913 translation by Rolfe and added additional notes on the text and translation. G. P. Goold revised the De viris illustribus to reflect the recent work of Robert Kaster (1995) on the De grammaticis et rhetoribus. The Latin text of the Caesares, however, remains essentially that of Maximilian Ihm in the Teubner series (1907). All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

92 He is the only extant author to mention, e.g., Otho’s great-grandmother and grandmother (Otho 1.1; cf. Murison 2001, 90: “the identity of the princeps’ grandmother remains a mystery”). He also talks about Galba’s wife, who cannot be positively identified for lack of information about her (Gal. 5.1; see Murison 2001, 37 at 5.1 on the uncertainty over her name).
2. *Optima Mater*: the Imperial Mother

In the shorter, non-Julio-Claudian *Lives*, the emperor’s mother regularly makes her longest and most important appearance in the opening genealogical section of the biography. There, Suetonius comments on her social standing and/or descent and reports the birth of her child(ren). The biographer usually records only the birth of the children, without any further information on the mother’s relationship with them during their childhood. If the mother reappears outside the genealogy in these *Lives*, it is with her adult son (e.g., Vit. 7.2, 14.5). More frequently, however, she simply disappears after the biography’s first chapters. The fact that imperial mothers so regularly drop out of the *Lives* after giving birth suggests that Suetonius values a mother’s contribution to her son’s lineage more than her nurturing of the child. It also

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1 Gal. 3.4 can serve as an illustration: *uxores habuit Mummiam Achaiam, neptem Catuli proneptemque L. Mummi, qui Corinthium excidit...ex Achaia liberos Gaium et Serviu m procreavit, quorum maior Gaius attritis facultatibus urbe cessit, prohibitusque a Tiberio sortiri anno suo proconsulatum voluntaria morte obiit.* On the emperor’s mother: Gal. 3.4; Otho 1.3; Vit. 3.1; Vesp. 1.3; Vesp. 3, on the mother of Titus and Domitian.

2 E.g., Gal. 3.4, after which Mummia Achaica is not mentioned again (cf. Gal. 2 on Galba’s maternal lineage); Vesp. 3, after which nothing more is said about Flavia Domitilla in the *Tit.* or *Dom.*

3 In some individual instances there is good reason for the mother’s disappearance. Flavia Domitilla (mother of Titus and Domitian), for example, died before Vespasian’s principate (*Vesp. 3*), so it is understandable that she does not play a big role in the *Tit.* or *Dom.* (it is unknown when she died, but it must have been after the birth of Domitian in 51 but before Vespasian’s accession in 69). However, in the *Tit.* and *Dom.* there are still no references to her relationship with the boys in their youth. Titus (b. 42) is approximately twelve years older than Domitian, so even if his mother died shortly after giving birth to his brother, Titus still would have known Domitilla in his youth.
implies that the biographer envisions a small role for mothers in their sons’ principates, which confinement speaks ill of such dominant women as Livia and Agrippina.

The longer Julio-Claudian Lives are somewhat different from the shorter Vitae when it comes to imperial mothers. In the Julio-Claudian Lives, the emperor’s mother always reappears with her adult son later in the biography, though to varying degrees. In Caesar, Augustus, Caligula, and Claudius, Suetonius says very little about the mother of the emperor, much like the shorter Vitae I discussed above. These mothers appear in their sons’ ancestries (with the exception of Aurelia, because the Caesar does not have an ancestry), and then resurface here and there with their adult offspring. Tiberius’ and Nero’s mothers, on the other hand, loom large, appearing frequently outside the opening rubric on ancestry.

On the whole, Suetonius is nearly silent on “good” mothers like Aurelia, Atia, and Agrippina the Elder. He writes at length only on the “bad” ones, especially Livia and Agrippina the Younger. It is important to note that in the Caesares, a “bad” mother does not always correspond to a “bad” emperor. Suetonius, for example, is critical of Caligula, yet we hear very little about his mother, Agrippina the Elder. In the few

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4 Cf. the same treatment in of the emperor’s mother in Vit. 7.2 and 14.5 after the genealogy in Vit. 1-2. The opening chapters of the Iul. are lost, which would certainly have contained his genealogy. See Winterbottom 1983, 399-404 on the transmission of the Caes. In the sixth century, John Lydus saw a full copy, complete with the author’s preface and presumably the opening of the Iul. By the ninth century, however, the first quaternion (i.e., the preface and first chapters of the Iul.) of the archetype had been lost. Although the Caes. come to us in over 200 manuscripts, they all go back to this single, damaged, ninth-century archetype, which is no longer extant.
scenes in which we do see her (e.g., *Cal.* 7-8, 10, 12.3, 15.1), she comes across well. For instance, Suetonius says that she bore a “charming child” (*insigni festivitate*), who died in early childhood (*iam puerascens, Cal.* 7). Augustus and Livia were so taken with the boy that they set up statues of him. Livia placed hers, an image of the youngster in the guise of Cupid, in the temple of Capitoline Venus (*Cal.* 7). Augustus, on the other hand, kept his figurine in his bedroom, where he kissed it affectionately whenever he entered the room (*Augustus in cubiculo suo positam, quotiensque introiret, exosculabatur, Cal.* 7). Considering Suetonius’ esteem for Augustus, the emperor’s warmth for the child reflects well on Agrippina.

The subtext to the story about the “charming child” is that Agrippina was capable of having “good” children. Therefore, the fact that Gaius was “bad” was not a foregone conclusion—and it certainly was not his mother’s fault. A similar theme appears in this same *Life* in regard to the emperor’s father: Suetonius describes Germanicus as worthy of praise, yet paints his son as entirely abominable.°

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° *In aede Capitolinae Veneris* (*Cal.* 7) means either the Temple of Venus Erycina (Hurley 1993, 16 at 7; Lindsay 2002, 63 at 7; Richardson 1992, 408 “Venus Erucina, Aedes”), or that of Venus Victrix (Wardle 1994, 124 at 7), both of which were on the Capitoline. Cf. *Gal.* 18.2: *locu Capitolinae Veneri dedicavit*. Hurley argues that the Temple of Venus Erycina would be a fitting place because this *aedes* was most closely associated with the Trojan myth, “and so the dedication of a statue of Gaius-Cupid there was consistent with the claim of the gens Julia that its descent was from Venus through Trojan Aeneas.”

° Suetonius declares that Germanicus had “all the virtues of body and mind” (*omnes corporis animique virtutes, Cal.* 3.1). After this, the biographer refines his declaration by saying that Germanicus was attractive, brave, and learned (esp. 3-4). His son, however, was none of these things. Caligula was “sound of neither Footnote cont. next pg.
passages (Cal. 7 on Agrippina and Cal. 3-4 on Germanicus) treat the parents favorably. In general, Suetonius distances Agrippina and Germanicus from Gaius in an effort to contrast the decency of the parents to the depravity of the son. The effect of this comparison is to make Caligula seem all the more deviant for having strayed so far from the excellent record of his family. In this way, the same argument can be made about the elder Agrippina that David Wardle has advanced about Germanicus: in the genealogy of the Caligula, Suetonius “whitens” the parents (both parents, I argue) in order to “blacken” the son. To my mind, Agrippina is as much a part of this construction as Germanicus is. She, a wife and mother descended from Augustus who bore her husband nine children, is just as laudable a figure in Suetonius’ biography as her husband is.

Thus, if the qualities of the mother do not correspond absolutely to those of her son, we must ask what makes a “good” mother in the Caesares and what a “bad” one. I explore these questions below by using individual examples of the two most prominent,

body nor mind” (valitudo ei neque corporis neque animi, 50.1), a phrase that clearly echoes his father’s description. In addition, the emperor was also unattractive (50), unaccomplished in military matters (43), and paid little attention to education (53), with each vice corresponding to his father’s virtue.

7 Wardle 1994, 89 and 96 at 1.1 argues that by making such a gulf between father and son, Suetonius creates a chiaroscuro effect. The biographer uses this technique to make Caligula appear to be even worse because he has strayed so far from his father’s good qualities. Suetonius accomplishes this shading in two ways: just as he “whitens” the father (see ibid., 89 and 96-126 on Suetonius’ suppression of some of the more unflattering stories about Germanicus), so too does he “blacken” the son. Cf. Hurley 1993, 1-19, who comes to similar conclusions.
contrasting types of mothers in the Lives: Atia serves as an illustration of the “good,” silent mother who does not interfere in her son’s duties (Section 1), while Livia and Agrippina the Younger typify the “bad,” meddling mother accused of advancing her son at the expense of others (Section 2). In both sections, I explore the ways in which these characterizations correspond to well-worn types of women rather than to individualized portraits. Because these studies focus primarily on birth (Atia) and adoption (Livia and Agrippina), Section 3 examines the role of the imperial mother later in her son’s reign, after he has attained the principate.

In the end, what will become clear from all of these examples is that Suetonius uses the imperial mothers primarily to highlight certain characteristics of his male subjects: Augustus, he suggests, enjoyed divine blessings from conception, which auspicious beginning attests to the emperor’s majesty; Tiberius and Nero, on the other hand, owed their power to their mothers’ machinations, which meddling serves to undermine the sons’ imperial authority. Suetonius, lastly, uses Tiberius’ and Nero’s ill-treatment of their mothers to highlight the emperors’ brutality. It is ironic that Tiberius and Nero lash out at the very women who put them in power. The biographer, however, uses the emperors’ abuse of even these women to call attention to the men’s lack of pietas, another hallmark vice of these emperors.
2.1 The Good, Silent Mother: Atia

Atia appears in the *Augustus* only three times after the genealogy. The brevity of her appearance is striking because the *Life* of her son is Suetonius’ longest biography. In part, her quick showing owes to the fact that she died before the height of her son’s reign (*Aug.* 61.2; 43 BCE), with which the bulk of the *Vita* is concerned. The scenes in which she does appear, however—especially her reaction to the news that her son was made Caesar’s heir (*Aug.* 8) and the portents connected with her pregnancy (94)—serve as an illuminating counter-example to the intrusive Livia and Agrippina. While both of the latter women are accused of scheming to advance their sons, Atia plays no role in Augustus’ rise to power. Rather than engineering his adoption, she is credited above all with putting her son on the path to greatness through her blessed pregnancy (*Aug.* 94).

The fact that Atia’s actions contrast so precisely to the “crimes” with which Livia and Agrippina are charged suggests that Suetonius holds her out to be a positive model of motherhood against the more negatively drawn Livia and Agrippina.

Perhaps the most informative scene featuring Atia in the role of mother (and, in fact, the only episode in which she interacts with her son except for his birth) is set in the aftermath of Caesar’s assassination. Suetonius writes that after the death of the dictator, *Aug.* 4 on the genealogy, including information on her descent and the births of Octavia and Octavian. Her other appearances are 8 (adoption of Octavian by Caesar), 61.2 (her death), and 94 (portents during her pregnancy).
Atia’s maternal uncle, she and her husband, L. Marcius Philippus, tried to deter Octavian from standing as Caesar’s heir (*dubitante matre, vitrico vero Marcio Philippo consulari multum dissuadente, Aug. 8.1*).\(^9\) Atia, clearly, was apprehensive (*dubitante*) about her son’s safety after her uncle’s violent murder. Yet despite her concern, she remains in the background as the anxious mother (*dubitante matre*), while Marcius Philippus does all the active, vigorous discouraging (*vitrico…multum dissuadente*, a singular participle that applies to Philippus alone).\(^10\) Atia, in the end, merely expresses a mother’s apprehension without ever getting in the middle of the political situation. Arguably the most important part of this passage is that Augustus’ mother did not succeed in stopping him from claiming his inheritance.\(^11\) She and her husband worried over and advised Octavian, but did not obstruct him from what Suetonius portrays as Augustus’ higher calling (cf. *Aug*. 94 on the numerous signs that Octavian was marked to rule from conception).

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\(^9\) Atia married Marcius Philippus after the death of her first husband C. Octavius, who died when Augustus was a small child (*quadrirus putrem amisit, Aug. 8.1*).

\(^10\) See Gray-Fow 1988 on Philippus’ relationship with Octavian. He finds that “this particular stepfather may not have been quite as uninvolved in his stepson’s ambitions as he was at pains to suggest to his contemporaries” (184). This passage from Suetonius (*Aug*. 8) is evidence of the sort of involvement Gray-Fow sees.

\(^11\) The ablative absolute is concessive: *ceterum urbe repetita hereditatem adiit, dubitante matre, vitrico vero Marcio Philippo consulari multum dissuadente, Aug. 8.2*. “[Octavian] did, however, return to Rome and enter into his inheritance, despite the fact that his mother was hesitant and his stepfather, the consul Marcius Philippus, tried earnestly to deter him.”
Considering that it was through Atia’s family connection that Octavian was elevated in the first place, it is conspicuous that Suetonius uses only two words to describe her in the inheritance scene (dubitante matre). The effect of the biographer’s sparse presentation is to draw attention away from Atia’s role in the advancement of her son, which, in turn, distances her from scheming mothers like Livia and Agrippina who plot their sons’ adoptions. Conversely, it also prevents unfavorable comparisons between Augustus and emperors such as Tiberius and Nero, who owed their power to their mothers.

Though Suetonius plays down Atia’s link to Caesar in Augustus 8, he credits her later in the Life with giving birth to the divinely blessed ruler of the world (Aug. 94). Thus, Atia is important in the Augustus not for the real and direct political link that she provided her son, but as a vessel for the godly baby.\(^\text{12}\) Of the fourteen portents in Augustus 94, Atia is prominently featured in three and tangentially in three more, which

\(^{12}\) Aug. 94, the largest collection of portents in the Caes. (taking up 100 lines of text in the Loeb ed.), revolves around signs that Augustus was marked to rule. All fourteen omens center on his birth and young life up until Caesar’s death. The biographer’s tone is pro-Augustan (e.g., his comment that the signs reveal Augustus’ future greatness and perpetual good fortune: quibus futura magnitudo eius et perpetua felicitas sperari animadvertique posset, 94.1). The main point of the long paragraph is to “prove” that Augustus was Caesar’s rightful heir (cf. Dio’s placement of similar omens in 45.1-2 with Caesar’s decision to adopt his great-nephew). Those with Republican leanings are also sidelined by signs that Rome was fated to have a single ruler (regem populo Romano, 94.3), and provincials, too, are given “confirmation” that Augustus’ power was intended to spread far and wide (dominium terrarum orbi, 94.5; see Grandet 1986, who proposes that Asclepiades of Mendes’ account of Atia and the snake, 94.4, came into circulation c. 30-27 BCE as a justification of Roman rule in Egypt.). Thus, the fact that Suetonius puts more weight on Atia’s giving birth to Augustus than on her connections with Caesar is part of a larger program in the Life to paint Augustus as especially favored by the gods, irrespective of his great-uncle.
means that she is tied to roughly half of the total omens (six of fourteen).\textsuperscript{13} I use only one of these presages as an example, Atia’s impregnation by a snake in the Temple of Apollo, paying particular attention to how Suetonius casts the emperor’s mother in this scene (94.4):

In Asclepiadis Mendetis Theologumenon libris lego, Atiam, cum ad sollemne Apollinis sacrum media nocte venisset, posita in templo lectica, dum ceterae matronae dormirent, obdormisse; draconem repente irrepsisse ad eam pauloque post egressum; illam expergefactam quasi a concubitu mariti purificasse; et statim in corpore eius exstississe maculam velut picti draconis nec potuisse unquam exigi, adeo ut mox publicis balineis perpetuo abstinuerit; Augustum natum mense decimo et ob hoc Apollinis filium existimatum.

I have read [the following story] in the books of Asclepiades of Mendes\textsuperscript{14} called the Theologumena: Atia, when she had come in the middle of the night to the solemn rites of Apollo, having had her litter set down in the temple, fell asleep while the rest of the matrons also slept. Suddenly, a snake glided up to her and, after a little while, went away. When she awoke, she purified herself as if having lain with her husband, and immediately a marking in the form of a serpent appeared on her body. She was never able to get rid of this mark, with the result that soon she

\textsuperscript{13} Atia is a key player in 94.4 (impregnation at the Temple of Apollo); 94.4 (dream while pregnant); 94.5 (day of Augustus’ birth). She is more tangentially linked to the following: 94.3 (portent before Augustus’ birth that “nature was pregnant with a king”); 94.6 (the infant Octavian left in the care of a nurse; his cradle disappeared and was found later in a high tower facing the rising sun); 94.12 (Octavian had his future foretold by Theogenes in Apollonia, based on the time of his birth).

\textsuperscript{14} Although “Asclepias” is the form favored in most Suetonius translations, “Asclepiades” is the normal form of the name (so, Carter 2003, 201 at 94.4 and Lorsch 1997). The Latin genitive supports either nominative. The Suda (s.v. Ἡράκλεις Η 450) talks about an Asclepiades who knows the wisdom of the Egyptians, especially in relation to their gods, and who wrote a “harmony” (symphonia) of all religions as well as a book on Egyptian lore. This interest in religion certainly has parallels with the author mentioned in Aug. 94. Carter 2003, 201 at 94.4, in fact, suggests that Suetonius is actually citing the symphonia. Athenaeus (3.83c) also mentions an Asclepiades who was the author of an Egyptian History (=FGrHist 3.306). Schwartz (RE s.v. Asklepiades, 26) considers Athenaeus’ historian to be the same as Suetonius’ author.
stopped going to the public baths entirely. Augustus was born in the
tenth month after that and, on account of this, was thought to be the son
of Apollo.

First off, it is important to observe that there are a number of parallels to the
snake story, most notably the serpent-impregnations attached to the mothers of
Alexander the Great and Scipio Africanus. Augustus, accordingly, is situated within
the larger heroic tradition. The fact that snake-impregnations are a heroic trope,
however, also means that Atia herself has a place among the mothers of great men.
Certainly, some of the son’s prestige rubs off on the mother. In *Augustus* 94.4, in
particular, Atia is personally touched by the god.

In her study of the portents associated with Augustus’ birth, Robin Lorsch finds
that Suetonius’ adaptation of the snake tale is more detailed than any earlier version of
the trope. The reason for the biographer’s care, she concludes, is to “give the story an

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15 On Alexander: Plut. *Alex.* 2.6-3.2; Lucian *Dial. Mort.* 13 and *Alex.* 7; Paus. 4.14.4-7. Cf. Aug. 94.5, another
portent tying Augustus to Alexander, this time more directly. Bertrand-Ecanvil 1994, 499, in her careful
comparison of Dio 45.1-2 and Suet. *Aug.* 94, concludes that Alexander is more prominent in Suetonius’
portents than in Dio’s. See also Zanker 1990, 42-3 on Octavian’s use of the image of Hellenistic kings and 47-
51 on these portents. On Scipio (Jupiter in the guise of a serpent): Livy 26.19.7; Sil. It. *Pun.* 13.634-4; Gell. *NA*
6.1.1-5; and Val. *Max.* 49.1-4.

16 See Lorsch 1997, 790 on the snake-sires of Alexander, Scipio, Aratus (ruler of Sicyon, 3rd c. BCE), and
Aristomenes (legendary king of Sparta), which legends put the Roman *princeps* in the “heroic tradition.”
She observes (799) that the Scipio tradition was revived under Augustus, most likely in order to link the two
men: “Such a comparison would have been very helpful to Augustus. Scipio was a republican military
hero, credited with saving Rome.”
individuality that keeps it from appearing as a simple repetition of the earlier *topos."*17

Suetonius, in other words, has tried to authenticate Atia’s divine encounter, which contact, in turn, substantiates Augustus’ celestial parentage.18 Three features of the biographer’s account stand out in particular. First, Suetonius sets the meeting between Atia and the snake not in a hidden chamber or mysterious location, the usual setting for a serpent-impregnation, but at the Temple of Apollo in the middle of a crowded festival. Such a specific setting, as Lorsch writes, “has a public and concrete quality about it,”

17 Lorsch 1997, 790-1.

18 There is, of course, the problem of the relationship between Suetonius and his source, Asclepiades of Mendes. Lorsch 1997 goes back and forth between phrases such as “Suetonius’ details,” on the one hand, and the “voice” of the “narrator” or “author,” on the other hand. In the latter terms, she makes unclear whether she means the biographer or Asclepiades. In some cases, at least, she credits to Suetonius the differences between Aug. 94 and other serpent-impregnations. Lorsch talks about Asclepiades in 798-9, but never clearly defines what she sees as the relationship between the Egyptian and Roman authors. In my view, Suetonius still has his own authorial voice even if he consulted Asclepiades. For example, he and Dio (45.1-2) record many of the same portents about Augustus’ birth and early life, which suggests a common source. Suetonius, however, often “spins” these signs to make them more favorable. For instance, when Augustus ripped his tunic at his *toga virilis* ceremony, Dio writes (45.2.5-6) that this event was a bad omen in itself, and that everyone present took it as a fateful sign; Octavian, however, alleviated everyone’s fears by saying that it meant that he would one day have the whole senatorial order at his feet. When Suetonius reports the same event (Aug. 94.10), he says only that “there were those who interpreted [the ripped tunic] as a sure sign” that Augustus would have the senators at his feet (*fuerunt qui interpretarentur, non alius significare*, 94.10). Suetonius’ version, which omits the possibility of a negative interpretation, is “spun” in the emperor’s favor. See also Bertrand-Ecanvil 1994, who observes that Suetonius’ portents feature more Alexandrian imagery than do Dio’s (n. 15 above). In addition, Suetonius’ biography is very pro-Augustan. It is no accident, I believe, that all the changes to the snake-impregnation story are in the favor of the biographical subject. Cf. the *propria persona* at the beginning of the anecdote (*lego*), which language is unusual for the biographer. Suetonius might be both indicating his approval of the tale and attaching himself to it. See also the general comments of Bradley 1991a, 3704: “There is no need...to believe that in forming and communicating opinions Suetonius was merely the victim of his sources—no matter that [some of Suetonius’ pictures of his subjects]...are in essence the same as those in other extant accounts.”
which serves to validate the encounter. Second, the biographer records that the snake left indelible marks on Atia’s person, which fact, again, is not part of the standard tradition. Third and finally, he states that Atia purified herself when she awoke, an action not typically featured in other snake rendezvous.

All in all, these added details act as “proof” that Atia was not merely dreaming (for Suetonius states that she fell asleep at the temple: *obdormisse*, 94.4), but that she really did interact with the snake. The marks, for example, are manifest and lasting. The purification, moreover, not only confirms the encounter, but also makes clear that it was sexual in nature (*quasi a concubitu mariti*, 94.4), thereby corroborating the interpretation that Atia was impregnated by the god. When taken together, Suetonius’ unique touches mean that he, more so than other authors writing in the same tradition, has carved out an individual role for Atia as a mother.

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19 Ibid., 795-6. She furthers that Atia’s impregnation took place in “the god’s home as it were” not in a mortal’s bedchamber. “Such a location offers more distinction and luster...At the same time it is important to note that this detail is not based in any reality—as far as we know no such festival occurred at the appropriate time” (796). Furthermore, this anecdote makes unclear which Temple of Apollo is referred to. Therefore, the setting is in some sense specific, but at the same time it is also one that is hard to corroborate.

20 Ibid., 796-7.

21 Ibid. Lorsch adds that, in general, the purification story “suggests an intimate knowledge of Atia’s practices on the part of the narrator, which makes his veracity seem unquestioned.” She notes, in addition, that the actions ascribed here to Atia are somewhat out of synch with standard religious practices, for Atia is said to have purified herself after entering the temple and having contact with the god. Usually, purification is required before such acts. In *Aug.* 94, however, the emphasis is on Atia’s purification after the sex act.
Overall, Suetonius gives Atia a more prominent place in the portents of her son’s birth than he does in Octavian’s childhood and adolescence (recall the brief mention of the hesitant mother in Aug. 8). One can conclude from this presentation that the biographer places the most weight on the lineage and birth that the imperial mother gives to her son, with all its astrological consequences. After that, her major contribution, Suetonius’ text suggests that the mother ought to watch quietly from the sidelines without interfering.

The small role that the biographer gives the imperial mother comes clearer when reading Augustus 94.4 against the same portent recorded by Dio (45.1.2). Dio writes that Atia “emphatically declared” that the encounter with the snake took place (δεινῶς ἰσχυρίζετο, 45.1.2), while Suetonius puts no words in her mouth at all. Dio, furthermore, places the omen in the context of Caesar’s adoption of his great-nephew, while Suetonius lumps all the signs together at the end of the Life (i.e., after Augustus had become princeps). In general, Dio’s arrangement suggests that Atia’s claims influenced Caesar’s choice of his heir, while Suetonius both distances Atia from Augustus’ adoption and silences whatever lobbying she might have done on her son’s behalf. As we saw in Augustus 8 above, Suetonius again presents a silent mother who does not interfere in political affairs. It is also illuminating to compare the biographer’s portrayal of Atia in Augustus 94 with his description of Livia in Tiberius 14.2. While Atia passively receives the omens associated with her pregnancy, Livia goes in search of signs that she is
carrying a boy. In general, these details mirror the sort of mother each woman becomes:

Atia is unobtrusive, and Livia meddlesome. It is significant, moreover, that Atia is attached to grander, better portents than is Livia, which tie puts a stamp of approval on Atia’s more unassuming conduct.\textsuperscript{22}

On the whole, Suetonius’ relatively scanty picture of Atia contrasts with the fuller one in the \textit{Life of Augustus} (βιος Καίσαρος) by Nicolaus of Damascus.\textsuperscript{23} Even in that text’s fragmentary state (only portions of it survive, covering events from the emperor’s birth to the aftermath of Caesar’s assassination), Nicolaus still says more about Atia than Suetonius does in the whole of his long, extant \textit{Life}. Because both texts belong to the same genre, comparing the two works is an especially fruitful enterprise.\textsuperscript{24} The Footnote cont. next pg.

\textsuperscript{22} Atia is given signs that she is carrying a divine baby who will be the ruler of the world (Aug. 94). Livia’s omen, in contrast, is that a cock with a fine crest hatched from an egg, which is taken as a sign that her baby is a boy (Tib. 14.2). Another sign received by Livia in Tiberius’ infancy is that her child will be a king, but without a crown (14.2). The presages attached to Augustus tend to be more regal and stately, and are also more numerous.

\textsuperscript{23} Nicolaus was a contemporary of Augustus with ties to Herod. Most scholars believe that his \textit{Bios} was written during Augustus’ lifetime (see White 1988, 342-3 and Toher 1985b, 199-200 for summaries of opinions on the date of the work). Toher himself concludes (206) it was written after Augustus’ death. Suetonius, in contrast, was active in the second century under Hadrian.

\textsuperscript{24} There is, however, a skeptical line of scholarship (e.g., Bellemore 1984, xi and xvii-xx; Leo 1901, 19) which argues that the paragraphs on Caesar’s assassination and Octavian’s raising of troops (37-139) belong not to the \textit{Bios}, with which they are traditionally associated, but to Nicolaus’ universal \textit{History}, or even to the work of a later excerptor. The problem with the text is discussed by Toher 1985a, 90-8, who concludes that the digression on Caesar’s assassination might have been inserted by an excerptor as a “bridge,” but that the original \textit{Bios} most likely contained a description of Caesar’s death anyway. Thus, Toher sees no problem with accepting that portion of the text as reflective of what was in the original \textit{Life}. I am not in a position to judge the validity of these arguments, but even those who doubt that the final paragraphs belong to the biography still attribute to the \textit{Bios} the earlier fragments on Octavian’s youth (1-36; e.g., Bellemore 1984, xi Footnote cont. next pg.}
comparison is made even more productive by the fact that the biographers share a similar point of view: both approve of Augustus and portray Atia sympathetically. Thus, reading the two texts against each other is like comparing “apples to apples;” it can reveal much about the individual variations of the authors.

The biggest difference between Suetonius’ and Nicolaus’ Atia is that Nicolaus shows her as more involved in the life of her young son. For example, the Greek biographer states that after Octavian received the *toga virilis*, Atia still treated him like a child (παις, παιδικῶς; Nic. Dam. 10-1). According to Nicolaus, she kept the same strict rules about letting her son go out of the house, maintained the same standards of behavior, and made her son sleep in the same room—that is to say, in her house, not in his own abode (cf. 12 in which women are attracted to the charming and handsome Octavian, but his mother’s watchful eye “protects” him from their advances).

Nicolaus is also part of the tradition (also seen in Tac. *Dial*. 28.5) that Atia played a prominent role in Octavian’s education (6). Though Suetonius, too, writes of Augustus’ studies, he makes no mention of his mother’s involvement in them (*Aug*. 84).25 In even sharper distinction, Nicolaus’ Atia encourages Octavian to return to Rome

and xvii-xx), many of which passages I discuss here. Furthermore, I am primarily interested in the divergent ways in which Suetonius and Nicolaus portray Atia’s relationship with her son, so in the end it matters little if the passages belong to the *Bios* or *History*.

25 The same is true of Caesar’s mother: there was a tradition in which Aurelia oversaw her son’s education (Tac. *Dial.* 28.5), but Suetonius mentions nothing of her in his passage on Caesar’s studies (*Iul*. 4). In

Footnote cont. next pg.
after Caesar’s assassination, telling him that he must make his mark as a man and put his plans into action according to fortune and circumstance (38). Suetonius’ Atia, by comparison, worries in the background (dubitante matre, Aug. 8.2) without saying a word.

Although Nicolaus’ Atia could be called “bossy,” recalling Suetonius’ Livia and Agrippina, she is still portrayed in a favorable light by the Greek biographer, who also thinks highly of his subject. Nicolaus repeatedly says that Octavian had a fine traditional upbringing, one that was firmly morally grounded (e.g., 4-6, 36). Therefore, Atia’s strictness comes across as “good” in Nicolaus’ Life because it produced such a splendid and upright son. As Mark Toher summarizes her character in the Bios, “[Atia] plays the role of the ideal Roman mother to Octavian’s ideal Roman son and youth.” He accounts like the Dial. Atia and Aurelia are lumped together with Cornelia the mother of the Gracchi. The point is that dutiful mothers in the “good old days” of the Republic used to oversee their sons’ education, but parents in the Empire are not so involved with their children. Thus, in this moral presentation a mother’s involvement in the education of her son is taken as a “good” action.

Nicolaus records a range of reactions to the news that Octavian was made Caesar’s heir (51-7): Octavian himself was eager to take his bequest, his mind on vengeance and greatness (53); Philippus, in contrast, tried to dissuade him (53); Atia, Nicolaus remarks, was between the two of them: on the one hand she was delighted at the news that her son would have fame and fortune, but on the other hand she was apprehensive for his safety. In the end, she neither deterred, nor encouraged him (52, 54; though cf. her earlier comments in 38 about her son’s making his mark as a man). Nicolaus’ presentation shows overlap with Suet. Aug. 8.3 (esp. the doubtful mother and dissuading stepfather), but the Greek biographer’s account is longer and more nuanced.

See Dixon 1988, 168-70 on the idea that keeping a watch on one’s son was good. Dixon considers Nicolaus to be part of this tradition. She concludes that Atia’s strictness was “both particularly commendable and somewhat unusual” — elite mothers were not usually so involved in their sons’ daily activities, especially after the boys had come of age.
stresses that she is a central character in the Greek biography, one who is directly credited with her son’s greatness. In contrast to Nicolaus’ presentation, it would be a stretch ever to call Atia a central figure in Suetonius’ Vita.

In the end, both biographers portray Atia in a positive light, but they do so in different ways: Nicolaus makes her a strong source of guidance, while Suetonius has her being concerned without being active or pushy. Nicolaus’ Bios shows that one cannot argue that Atia plays such a small role in Suetonius’ Augustus because she is not the subject of the Vita. She is not the biographical subject of the βίος Καίσαρος either, but Nicolaus still writes her a fairly large part. Rather, the key difference between the two biographers is that Nicolaus is interested in Augustus’ young life (during Atia’s lifetime), while Suetonius is focused on his principate (after her death in 43 BCE).

28 Toher 1985a, 87.

29 On Atia being a source of guidance in Nic. Dam., cf. 14: Octavian wants to join Caesar on campaign in Libya, but his mother is against it. On learning of her opposition, Octavian makes no argument against her and decides to stay at home. Also 134: Octavian did not tell his mother about his plans to campaign in Campania, “in case she should prove an impediment to his great designs because of her motherly affection and womanly sensitivity for him” (translation Bellemore 1984, 64). Compare this to Suet. Aug. 8.3, where Atia is merely hesitant about Octavian’s inheritance, but takes no active role in dissuading him.

30 The same can be said of Aurelia, who plays a bigger role in the Bona Dea affair in Plutarch’s Life of Caesar (9-10) than she does in Iul. 74. Again, Aurelia is not Plutarch’s biographical subject, but she is still written a larger role than in Suetonius’ Iul.

31 The difference between the authors is reflected in the fact that Suetonius calls his subject “Augustus” throughout, even in passages on his birth (Aug. 94). Nicolaus, although he was writing c. 25-3 BCE (Bellemore 1984, xvii) or even later (see Toher in n. 23 above)—i.e., after Octavian took the name of Augustus in 27 BCE—still calls the young man “Caesar.”
Where the two Lives do overlap, however (e.g., on Augustus’ education and his return to Rome after Caesar’s assassination), it is evident that Nicolaus makes Atia a more central figure than Suetonius does, which discrepancy reveals the Roman biographer’s tendency to silence “good” mothers.\textsuperscript{32} This observation is notable because both authors most likely made use of the same source material, namely Augustus’ own autobiography.\textsuperscript{33} Yet, they put their shared source to different use, Nicolaus highlighting Atia’s supervision and Suetonius Augustus’ independence from his mother.

\textbf{2.2 The Bad, Interfering Mother: Livia and Agrippina the Younger}

I observed above (Section 1) that Atia’s small role in Suetonius’ \textit{Augustus} can be attributed equally to her death early in her son’s career, and to the fact that the

\textsuperscript{32} In addition to Atia and Aurelia (n. 30 above), Agrippina the Elder is also given a smaller role in Suetonius’ account than in other traditions. Tac. \textit{Ann}. 1.40-4, for example, plays up the sad image of the devoted, pregnant mother together with her small child (the future emperor Caligula) in the Roman military camp in Germany. According to Tacitus, their joint presence turned some soldiers from mutiny. \textit{Cal}. 9 tells the same story, but speaks only of Caligula. On the fact that Suetonius has written Agrippina out of the scene, Hurley 1989, 322 observes: “The discrepancy with Tacitus, who writes about both Gaius and Agrippina together, is conspicuous because their narrations are so similar otherwise.”

\textsuperscript{33} Augustus’ autobiography is usually considered to have been Nicolaus’ principal source (see summaries in White 1988, 342-3 and Toher 1985b, 200-1; Toher, however, questions the extent to which it was used). \textit{Aug}. 85 shows that Suetonius clearly knew it too—he even gives a break-down of its contents. As a result, most scholars believe Suetonius to have drawn on Augustus’ \textit{De vita sua}: e.g., Gasco 1983, 176-80; Baldwin 1983, 124; Carter 2003, 5; Flory 1988, 358 n. 38; Bellemore 1984, xxii. He especially seems to have consulted Augustus’ autobiography in \textit{Aug}. 2.3 (\textit{ipse Augustus…scribit}) and 62.1 (\textit{ut scribit}).
biographer intentionally minimizes her intrusion. More specifically, Atia’s death in Octavian’s first consulship means that she is immune from suggestions that she tampered in his principate. Livia and Agrippina, in contrast, lived to see their sons rule, thus making it easier for Suetonius to suggest that they meddled in imperial affairs.

All in all, Livia and Agrippina are very similar characters in the *Caesares*, two expressions of the same maternal type.\(^34\) In both cases the women are most notoriously accused of compelling their imperial husbands to adopt—and, hence, put in the line of succession—their sons from a previous marriage. Suetonius, as we shall see below, ultimately vindicates Livia from this charge, but he raises the gossip about her all the same. For the most part, the biographer’s portrayal of these two women is informed by the “wicked stepmother” stereotype, a common trope in Roman rhetoric: this sort of woman sees to it that her own child inherits more than her husband’s kin.\(^35\) While the

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\(^34\) Cf., e.g., Charlesworth 1927 and Barrett 1996, 17 on Livia and Agrippina as similar types in Tac. *Ann*. The similarities between Livia and Agrippina can be extended to include Suetonius’ *Caes.*, which are typically given short shrift next to Tacitus’ *Ann*. Dixon 2001, 111, begins to explore Suetonius’ characters by noting that the nagging Livia in *Tib*. 51-2 resembles the carping Agrippina in Tac. *Ann*. 14.11 (and, I would add, Suet. *Nero* 28 and 34), but Suetonius is not the subject of Dixon’s study so she does not pursue the analysis. See, in addition, the literature on the *saeva noverca* trope cited below (n. 35), which includes both women.

\(^35\) Noy 1991 and Watson 1995 give an overview of the type in many genres, esp. myth, rhetoric, poetry, and historiography. The “wicked stepmother” has a long afterlife in European folktales, as is illustrated by the Snow White and Cinderella stories. On the *saeva noverca* type in Roman historiography (esp. in Tacitus and Dio—Suetonius is usually mentioned only peripherally in these studies), see Noy 1991, 353-4 (Livia and Agrippina); Lindsay 1995, 103 at 21.3 (Livia in Suetonius); Barrett 2001 and 2002, 241-2 (Livia); ibid. 1996, 15 (comparing Livia and Agrippina); Watson 1995, 176-206 (Livia and Agrippina); Ginsburg 2006, 106-12 (Agrippina, with reference to Livia); Dixon 2001, 110 (Livia). Calhoon 1994, 312-34 also draws attention to the fact that wicked stepmothers are often accused of poisoning their foes just as Livia and Agrippina are.
biographer could read the deeds of these two women in a positive light as evidence that they acted in the interests of their sons, their actions are instead interpreted negatively: Livia and Agrippina are not applauded for having advanced their children, but are rather rebuked for having interfered with their husbands’ affairs. Though the forced adoptions reflect poorly on the women, Suetonius primarily uses them as a means of shaming the sons: Tiberius’ and Nero’s imperial authority is undercut by the fact that they owe their accessions to their mothers.

To begin with Livia, Suetonius portrays Tiberius as resentful of Augustus’ grandsons (especially Gaius and Lucius, the children of Julia and Agrippa), who were being groomed as the emperor’s successors. When Tiberius retired to Rhodes “at the height of his success and in the prime of his age and heath” (tot prosperis confluentibus integra aetate ac valitudine, 10.1; 6 BCE)—that is, at the very time he should have stayed in Rome—Suetonius proposes three explanations for this strange and sudden (repente, 10.1) behavior. The first two, quickly elucidated reasons are that Tiberius could no longer charged with doing. The fact that the same topos is applied to Livia and Agrippina in the histories of Dio and Tac. (e.g., novercae Liviae dolus, Ann. 1.3.3; Livia…gravis domui Caesarum noverca, 1.10.5) means that Suetonius is in line with convention.

Esp. Noy 1991, 354 on the tendency for negative interpretations of a mother’s actions in situations where her husband has his own offspring.

Cf. Pliny Pan. 7.4, who praises Trajan for having been adopted by Nerva not in order to please a wife, as some other emperors before him had been (i.e., Tiberius and Nero; the wives are Livia and Agrippina). “No stepfather made you his son,” he continues (itaque adoptatus es, non, ut prius alius atque alius, in uxoris gratiam. adscivit enim te filium non vitricus).
endure his wife, Julia Augusti, and that he wanted to augment his prestige through absence. The latter idea is that the people would miss Tiberius, especially if there was a crisis which needed his command, and would come to appreciate him more upon his return. The third, longer rationalization is given in oblique speech: “some think” (quidam existimant, 10.1) that because the grandchildren of Augustus were now of age, Tiberius voluntarily turned over the secondary position to them, wanting to seem “neither to oppose, nor to obstruct” the emperor’s primary heirs (aut obstare aut obtrectare, 10.1). 38 Suetonius continues that Tiberius himself put forth this third reason, but only later (quam causam et ipse, sed postea, reddidit, 10.2). The biographer’s language (sed postea; and also quidam existimant...ipse...reddidit, which statement distances Suetonius from the idea) suggests that he considers this rationale a cloak for something that was not so well-meaning at the time.39

In the following narrative on the retirement (Tib. 11-13), Suetonius does not openly commit to either of the first two motives for Tiberius’ departure (i.e., wanting to

38 A similar version is given in Vell. 2.99; perhaps Velleius is part of the quidam existimant, or perhaps Vell. and Suet. shared a common source. Cf. Dio 55.9.7 and Tac. Ann. 1.53.1-2 on the motive of wanting to escape Julia, and Dio 55.9.7 on the gossip that Tiberius was jealous of Gaius and Lucius. Ultimately, Dio states that the “truest” reason for Tiberius’ retirement was his fear of Augustus’ grandsons (55.9.6), while Tac. privileges his fleeing from Julia.

39 Lindsay 1995, 83 at 10.1: “Suetonius clearly does not believe this most positive version.” However, while I point to the biographer’s language (esp. his comment that the explanation came later, and the reported speech which distances him from the explanation), Lindsay suggests that the protests of Livia and Augustus (Tib. 10.2) serve to undermine Tiberius’ words.
escape Julia or to enhance his reputation through absence). The third reason, the graceful exodus to make way for Augustus’ grandsons, he discounts by making clear that it was advanced only later. Though the biographer does not explicitly endorse any of the offered explanations, it nevertheless becomes evident over the course of Tiberius 11 through 13 that Suetonius sees Tiberius’ jealousy of Gaius and Lucius as the leading cause.  This episode is important in relation to Livia because it sets up the idea that Tiberius’ lack of advancement created discord between him and Augustus. It also establishes the fact that the emperor preferred to look to his own blood-relations for heirs. Thus, Livia is positioned to intervene between Tiberius, Augustus, and his kin, having to compel her husband to change his mind to the benefit of her son.

Though Augustus initially begged his stepson to stay in Rome (10.2), their relationship grew strained, according to Suetonius, over the course of Tiberius’ absence. For example, when Tiberius asked Augustus for permission to return to Rome to visit

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40 E.g., Suetonius writes that Tiberius hesitated in Campania when he heard that Augustus was sick, and left only on account of the rumor that he “was waiting as if for the chance of fulfilling his greatest hope” (11.1)—i.e., succeeding Augustus (see Lindsay 1995, 85 at 11.1 on how Suetonius uses this scene, which Lindsay finds historically unlikely, to blacken Tiberius). Finally, Suetonius states that when Tiberius’ grants of power expired (after which Gaius had room to advance), Tiberius “confessed at last” that he had retired to Rhodes to avoid suspicion of rivalry with Augustus’ grandsons (confessus tandem, nihil aliud secessu devitasse se quam aemulationis cum C. Lucioque suspicionem, 11.5). The phrase “confessed at last” implies that the biographer sees competition with Gaius and Lucius to have been the real reason for the sojourn at Rhodes all along. See also Lindsay’s general comments on Tiberius’ retirement (1995, 84 at 10.1): “The whole section is structured in such a way as to suggest that Tiberius had a stubborn and self-centered approach.”
his family (c. 1 BCE, five years after he left in 6 BCE), the emperor denied the request. Instead, he turned Tiberius’ retirement into exile (cf. *remansit igitur Rhodi contra voluntatem*, 12.1), advising his stepson to forget the family whom he had earlier abandoned with such relish (*etiam admonitus est, dimitteret omnem curam suorum, quos tam cupidé reliquisset*, 11.5). Suetonius is the only author to record that Augustus denied Tiberius’ request, which information plays up the tension between the two men (cf. Tiberius’ resultant anxiety and trepidation: *obnoxium et trepidum*, 12.2). The biographer, additionally, paints the relationship between Tiberius and Gaius as particularly hostile, which antagonism stresses the bad feelings between his subject and Augustus’ heirs.

Enter Livia, who must reconcile her husband and his kin to her son as stepmothers are often portrayed as doing. According to Suetonius, Livia was instrumental in changing Augustus’ mind about Tiberius. “With difficulty,” he writes,

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41 The context for Tiberius’ request is also important to consider. His tribunician powers were set to expire (1 BCE), which opened the door for Gaius to take *imperium* in the East—i.e., the stretch of Empire where Tiberius was now living (Levick 1999, 40). Thus, Tiberius was newly vulnerable when he wrote to Augustus. According to Suetonius, Tiberius said that it was the perfect time for him to return to Rome because the emperor’s grandsons were now older and more securely in line for the principate, which made Tiberius safe from accusations of jealousy (*sibi securo iam ab hac parte, conroboratis his et secundum locum facile tutantibus*, 11.5). Suetonius, again, returns to the advancement of Gaius and Lucius over Tiberius, a central theme of *Tib*. 10-13.

42 Lindsay 1995, 87 at 11.5, adding that the refusal of Tiberius’ request “may be an invention of Suetonius.”

43 E.g., *Tib*. 12.2 (Gaius as a source of anxiety to Tiberius, *maioris sollicitudinis causa*); 12.2 (Tiberius feels that Gaius is estranged from him, *alieniorem sibi sensit*); 13.1 (a man told Gaius at a dinner party that if Gaius said the word, he would bring him the head of “the exile,” an act that made Tiberius fear for his life).
she eventually obtained the title of Envoy of Augustus for her son “in order to conceal the shame [of his exile]” (*vix per matrem consecutus, ut ad velandam ignominiam quasi legatus Augusto abesset*, 12.1). As a means of disparaging Tiberius, Suetonius makes this irregular position (*quasi legatus*) even more suspect by the fact that it was obtained by a woman (*per matrem*). More importantly, the *legatio* lays the groundwork for the idea that Livia generally interceded on her son’s behalf. Indeed, when Tiberius finally won his return (2 CE), he did so, Suetonius explains, “with very insistent prayers of his own and with those of his mother” (*suis quam matris inpensissimis precibus*, 13.2).

Augustus may have allowed his stepson’s homecoming, but the biographer stresses that it was not without the approval of “his eldest son,” Gaius (*nisi ex voluntate maioris fili statuere*, 13.2). The fact that Gaius and Augustus were willing to have Tiberius return may perhaps suggest that the enmity between the men was not as great as Suetonius presents it. Nevertheless, the biographer underlines the hostility between

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44 Cf. Barrett 2002, 52, who uses the *legatio* as an illustration of the limits of what Livia could get from Augustus. He suggests that Livia was not in a position to secure her son’s return, only to win him a small favor.

45 Lindsay 1995, 87 at 12.1.

46 There still must have been some hard feelings, however, because the conditions of Tiberius’ return were that he was to be excluded from public office (*permittente ergo Gaio revocatus est, verum sub conditione ne quam partem curamque rei p. attingeret*, 13.2). Conversely, it might have pleased Augustus and Gaius more to have Tiberius in Rome where he could be watched more closely (cf. *Tib*. 12.3 on suspicions that Tiberius was plotting a rebellion from Rhodes). See Levick 1999, 45-6 who argues that the Rhodian sojourn brought Tiberius’ political career “to a humiliating end” and forced him to retire into private life. Although Levick believes that there was once tension between Tiberius and Gaius, she argues that by 2 CE Gaius would have Footnote cont. next pg.
the rivals by contrasting Tiberius and “his mother” (*matris*) to Augustus and “his son” (*maioris fili*). As Hugh Lindsay observes, “Suetonius appears to be fleshing out speculation over how Tiberius came to return to Rome” since the process was most likely not ever made public. The most interesting part of the biographer’s narrative, in light of the present study, is the emphasis he places on Livia’s interference.47 All in all, the Rhodian episode acts as a precursor to the adoption (*Tib*. 21), and even to Tiberius’ principate itself, by painting Tiberius as a disagreeable outsider who is dependant on his mother’s machinations.

Later, after the deaths of Lucius (2 CE) and Gaius (4 CE), Augustus took Tiberius as his son and, hence, successor. Suetonius rehearses the leading opinions about Tiberius’ adoption (4 CE, after the death of Gaius) before making a final judgment of his own. First, he writes that he knows the common opinion (*scio vulgo persuasum*, 21.2) that Augustus expressed regret over foisting such an heir on the Roman people. He is also probably not have seen Tiberius as a threat. Also Barrett 2002, 52 on Gaius as “magnanimous” in restoring Tiberius.

47 Cf. Lindsay 1995, 89 at 13.2: “There is emphasis again on the machinations of Livia on behalf of Tiberius.” See also Barrett 2002, 52, who suggests that Livia most likely had little say in Tiberius’ return. The decision, he argues, was almost certainly a political one made by Augustus and Gaius (Augustus, in Barrett’s view, was very much his own man and was not easily pressured by his wife). Suetonius and Dio (55.10a.10), however, link Livia directly to her son’s restoration, which highlights her meddling. Dio and Tac. (*Ann.* 1.3.3) even go so far as to suggest that Livia had a hand in the deaths of Lucius and Gaius (2 CE and 4 CE, respectively, shortly after Tiberius’ return in 2 CE) in order to elevate her son, who was adopted in 4 CE after Gaius’ passing.
aware of the report (ne illud quidem ignoro aliquos tradidisse, 21.2) that the princeps disapproved of Tiberius’ austerity, but that Livia prevailed on him to adopt her son (sed expugnatum precibus uxoris adoptionem non abnuisse; cf. Tac. Ann. 1.3, 1.10.6). Another common view, Suetonius records, is that Augustus chose his stepson as his heir in order to boost his own image—Augustus’ stock would undoubtedly go up when he was compared to the dour Tiberius (cf. Tac. Ann. 1.10.7; Dio 56.45.3).48

In the end, Suetonius concludes he cannot believe that Augustus, who was otherwise “so cautious and wise” (circumspectissimum et prudentissimum, 21.3), would make such a momentous decision without careful consideration.49 Augustus, he continues, must have weighed Tiberius’ faults against his virtues, deciding that there was enough merit in the man to rule (21.3). Suetonius spends the rest of Tiberius 21, another 173 words (!), supporting his analysis by appending extracts of Augustus’ letters that speak favorably of Tiberius. His point is to demonstrate that Augustus had always considered Tiberius an asset to the imperial domus, which fact substantiates the biographer’s claim that the emperor did not make a rash or pressured decision in

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48 Goodyear 1972, 167 at 1.10.7 postulates that Suetonius is reacting especially to Tacitus on the ideas that Livia brought about the adoption and that Augustus wanted to improve his own image by being compared to Tiberius. Goodyear, however, cautions that the biographer might have also found the traditions elsewhere: he notes that Suetonius has additional information that Tacitus lacks, especially that Augustus used to stop his “light speech” whenever the dour Tiberius came in the room (Tib. 21.2).

49 Cf. Pliny’s rhetorical question in Pan. 7.5: “If you are looking to transfer to one man the Senate and People of Rome, its armies, provinces, and allies, would you take your successor from a wife’s lap?”
adopting his stepson. All in all, the number of first-person verbs in *Tiberius* 21 is striking (e.g., *scio*, *ignoro*, *adduci*), for Suetonius typically writes in the third person with the emperor as the subject. As the verbs show, Suetonius chooses to confront the various traditions about Tiberius’ adoption head-on in his own authorial voice.

It is important to note that Suetonius draws his conclusion not from anything that Tiberius did “right,” but from his conviction that Augustus did nothing “wrong.” That Augustus’ actions, rather than Tiberius’, are really at issue in *Tiberius* 21 can be seen in Livia’s changing apppellations: in connection with her son’s adoption, Suetonius refers to Livia as Augustus’ wife (*uxoris*, *Tib*. 21.2); yet, when she lobbies her husband for her son’s return from Rhodes, he calls her Tiberius’ mother (*matris*, *Tib*. 13.2; cf. *per matrem*, 12.2). As these examples show, Suetonius’ focus in *Tiberius* 21 is on Augustus, whom the biographer seeks to absolve of the charge of being under his wife’s thumb. Though it is Tiberius’ *Vita*, Suetonius is less concerned with Tiberius’ rise to power from his subject’s point of view.

Overall, the problem with Suetonius’ analysis in *Tiberius* 21 is that in this *Life* Livia interferes in everything but the adoption: she has a hand in restoring her son from Rhodes, she clears away any potential rivals after her husband’s death,\(^50\) and she

\(^{50}\) Suetonius states that Tiberius’ first act as *princeps* was to conceal Augustus’ death until the new emperor’s only serious rival, Augustus’ grandson Agrippa Postumus, could be removed (*excessum Augusti non prius palam fecit, quam Agrippa iuvene interemptio;* cf. Tac. *Ann*. 1.6). It was unknown (*dubium fuit*, 22), the Footnote cont. next pg.
regularly meddles in her son’s principate. The biographer clearly wants to defend Augustus, but the way in which he does so means that his depiction of Livia is inconsistent. However, Livia, it must be noted, appears in Tiberius 21 primarily to illuminate Augustus’ character. Thus, Suetonius is ultimately more concerned with the light that she can shed on her husband in this specific context than with the consistency of her overall portrayal in the Vita of her son.

In addition to the fact that Livia is suddenly unobtrusive in the adoption scene, Suetonius had also previously highlighted the tension between Augustus and Tiberius, especially in the Rhodian retirement episode we saw above. Yet in connection with Tiberius’ adoption, he excerpts letters testifying to Augustus’ warm feelings for his biographer states, whether Augustus left the order to remove the potential “source of instability” (materiam tumultus, 22), or whether Livia herself issued the command “in the name of Augustus, either with or without Tiberius’ knowledge” (an nomine Augusti Livia et ea conscio Tiberio an ignaro, 22). The passage is weighted towards Livia’s guilt, as she makes up two of the three options: 1) Augustus left the order, 2) Livia issued it in the name of Augustus with Tiberius’ knowledge, or 3) Livia issued it in the name of Augustus without Tiberius’ knowledge (note Suetonius’ repetition of Livia as a suspect: Livia et ea). It is interesting that the biographer does not seriously consider Tiberius’ responsibility because both Tacitus (Ann. 1.6) and Dio (57.3.5) see the new princeps as the main perpetrator. Rather, according to Suetonius, the guilty party is either Augustus or Livia, with the passage weighted towards the latter; Tiberius’ degree of knowledge seems to be of secondary concern (cf. Levick 1999, 65: “Livia is suggested as the main actor by Suetonius, while Tacitus and Dio put the blame squarely on the shoulders of Tiberius”). The biographer’s antagonism towards Livia becomes even clearer when re-reading the opening sentence of the paragraph: “Tiberius did not make the death of Augustus known until Agrippa was cut down.” From this line, it seems that Suetonius believes that Tiberius did, in fact, know of the order to kill Agrippa. Yet even so, he still raises the possibility that Livia alone commanded his death.

51 E.g., Tiberius’ claim that she sought a share of his power (partes sibi aequas potentiae, Tib. 50.2), and his warning for her to stop meddling in affairs unbecoming of a woman (majoribus nec feminae convenientibus negotiis abstineret, 50.3).
stepson. In general, Suetonius manipulates Tiberius’ relationship with Augustus to serve whatever purpose he has at hand. Here, he stresses the strained bond when he wants to highlight Tiberius’ volatility and outsider status (Tib. 10-13). There, however, he renders the relationship affectionate to further his claim that Augustus made an informed—and not coerced—decision about the adoption (Tib. 21). The biographer applies the same technique to the emperor’s mother: the Rhodian scene underscores Tiberius’ dependency on Livia and, hence, his weakness, while the adoption paragraph stresses her lack of involvement in an effort to portray Augustus in a positive light. In the end, these inconsistencies reveal that Suetonius uses his minor characters as tools to bring out different aspects of his biographical subjects.52 The secondary figures—who are mostly women, incidentally, because they are never biographical subjects in the Caesares—are changeable and malleable depending on the use to which the biographer puts them at any given time.

Unlike Livia in the Tiberius, Agrippina’s character is more consistent in the Claudius: she both compels her uncle to marry her, and forces him to adopt her son. It is important to mention that Suetonius’ presentation of Agrippina as mother is divided between the Claudius and Nero. In the former, the biographer relates Nero’s youthful adoption by Claudius (when Nero was twelve years old), while in the latter he focuses

52 Augustus, though an important emperor, is a “minor character” in the Tiberius in the sense that he is not the biographical subject of that Life.
on Nero’s birth and adult reign, including Agrippina’s role as his regent. Livia’s motherhood, in contrast, is largely confined to the Tiberius; in the Divus Augustus, she is predominantly a wife. These same differences appear in the adoption scenes. With Livia, Suetonius conveys little more in the biography of her husband than the fact that the adoption took place (nepotem Agrippam simulque privignum Tiberium adoptavit in foro lege curiata, Aug. 65.1—note that Livia is not even mentioned). He saves for the Life of her son the “real” description of the event (Tib. 21). With Agrippina, however, the opposite is true: she sees to Nero’s adoption in the Vita of Claudius (Claud. 27.2, 39.2, 43), but relatively little is said of it in her son’s biography (Nero 7.1).

There are two ways to account for Suetonius’ varying placement of the adoptions. First, although he follows a roughly similar outline for all his Lives, Suetonius is no slave to his formulaic model. He regularly varies his Vitae lest the serial biographies grow dull and repetitive. This same tendency could account for the adoptions: the biographer had told of Tiberius’ adoption in his own Life, so he writes of Nero’s in that of his adoptive father.

53 E.g., while a family tree normally opens each Life, the Cal. and Claud. have “mini-biographies” of the subjects’ fathers, which allows the biographer to avoid repeating information he has already given about the Julio-Claudian family in the Iul., Aug., and Tib. The Flavians’ stemma is also reported once, in the Vesp. Suetonius does not restate this information in the Vitae of Vespasian’s sons, Titus and Domitian. See also von Albrecht 1998, 1395 (“[Suetonius]’ rubrics…do not conform to a fixed pattern in the various biographies”) and Wallace-Hadrill 2004, 68-9 on variation in the Lives.
Though style and structure may be factors, it is more likely that the dissimilar arrangement has to do with the author’s view of his subjects. Suetonius thinks highly of Augustus, so he does not want to stain his Life by raising the possibility that Livia compelled him to adopt her son. Therefore, he mentions Tiberius’ adoption in the Augustus (without as much as a word about Livia), where he stresses above all its public, legal setting (in foro lege curiata, Aug. 65.1—i.e., as opposed to an arrangement that was made “behind closed doors”). The biographer saves all the rumors about Augustus’ doubts and Livia’s interference for the Vita of the disfavored Tiberius, although even there, as I have shown above, Suetonius still defends Augustus. In the Claudius, however, Suetonius depicts that emperor as being under the control of his wives and freedmen (Claud. 25.5, 29.1; cf. Vit. 2.5), so it adds to this picture to suggest that Agrippina forced him to adopt her son. Nero’s adoption, therefore, belongs in the Life of the husband, not the son.

Seeing that Nero’s forced adoption plays into Suetonius’ characterization of Claudius as passive and Agrippina as controlling, let us turn to that event. I explore the marriage of Agrippina to Claudius elsewhere (Chapter 3, Section 2). Suffice it to say here that, according to the biographer, the wily niece seduced her aging and uxorious uncle to become his fourth wife, and he her third husband (Claud. 26.3; 49 CE). As Suetonius presents it, Agrippina’s dynastic machinations began right away. In the
passage immediately following her wedding to Claudius (Claud. 26.2), the biographer records Nero’s marriage to the emperor’s daughter Octavia (27.2):

Octaviam Neroni privigno suo collocavit, Silano ante desponsam...e generis Neronem adoptavit...Silanum non recusavit modo, sed et interemit.

[Claudius] gave Octavia to his own stepson Nero, after she had previously been betrothed to Silanus...Of his sons-in-law, [Claudius] adopted Nero...he not only refused [to adopt] Silanus, but also killed him.

Suetonius’ language stresses familial ties—Claudius married his daughter “to his own stepson” (privigno suo; cf. Claudius’ marriage to fratris sui filiae, 26.3)—which wording makes the incestuous marriage arranged by Agrippina spill over onto her son.\textsuperscript{54} The biographer also narrates the wedding of Nero and Octavia (27.2) shortly after that of Agrippina and Claudius (26.3), although more than four years separated the two events (Agrippina was wed on January 1, 49 and Nero in June 53).\textsuperscript{55} This arrangement unites

\textsuperscript{54} Cf. Dio 60.33.2: Claudius had to adopt Octavia into another family before Nero could marry her; otherwise, the bride and groom would seem too closely related. Claudius had already adopted Nero (February 25, 50) by the time of his wedding to Octavia in 53, so the marriage was technically between brother and sister, not between step-siblings as Suetonius suggests. In Claud. 27.2, Suetonius reverses the order of the adoption and marriage.

\textsuperscript{55} Octavia and Nero were betrothed in 49, the same year in which Silanus was forced to suicide and Claudius and Agrippina were wed. However, their marriage did not take place until 53 because both the bride and groom were too young to wed in 49. At the time of their marriage in 53, Octavia was 13 or 14 (around the youngest age for a Roman bride) and Nero not yet 16 (still young for a Roman groom). Octavia had been betrothed to Silanus since 41 (in her early childhood), so she had been pledged to him for a number of years but had not yet married him in 49.
the two unions even further, linking Agrippina again to the imperial marriage and consequent adoption of her son.

Suetonius, moreover, stresses that Octavia was already engaged to L. Junius Silanus, which makes clear that Claudius violated a previous pledge in organizing Nero’s nuptials. Though the biographer does not elucidate the relationship, Silanus was the great-great-grandson of Augustus. Accordingly, he was no ordinary suitor—a tie with Silanus is not one that would ordinarily be broken. In fact, Claudius, as Suetonius explains, had previously advanced the young man by heaping honors on him at an early age (*triumphalia ornamenta Silano, filiae suae sponso, nondum puberi dedit*, 24.3).56 Thus, the biographer insinuates that some sudden change—namely, the emperor’s marriage to Agrippina—altered Claudius’ intention. The arrangement of the *Claudius* bears out this implication: Agrippina’s first appearance in the *Vita* (26.3) falls between Silanus’ honors (24.3) and his death (27.2), making her the symbolic break between the emperor and his daughter’s fiancé (see the discussion of *Claud*. 29.1 below, in which passage she is tied to Silanus’ death directly). Agrippina’s son also takes Silanus’ place as Octavia’s betrothed, which arrangement links her to Silanus’ disgrace even more closely. Suetonius, in

56 He was the son of Aemilia Lepida (the daughter of Julia the Younger) and M. Junius Silanus Torquatus (cos. ord. 19 CE). Cf. Augustus’ speech in Sen. *Apocol*. 10.4, where he complains to the Senate that Claudius killed his great-great-grandson: *ab nepotem L. Silanum*. See also CIL 14.2500=ILS 957 on Silanus’ many honors: by the age of 18 he had received *ornamenta triumphalia*, the praetorship, and quaestorship (cf. *Claud*. 24.3, Dio 60.31.7, and Tac. *Ann*. 12.3.2 on his many honors “long before the usual age,” as Dio writes). Birley 2005, 215-6 no. 3 gives a summary of his career.
addition, records Silanus’ downfall in the very same sentence as Claudius’ adoption of Nero despite the lapse of time between the events. Such an arrangement gives the impression that Silanus’ death was really the elimination of a rival in order to make way for Nero.57

Indeed, it is in the death of Silanus that Agrippina’s hand is most clear. The young man’s demise is related twice by Suetonius, once in connection with Nero’s marriage and adoption as we saw above (27.2), and again in a rubric on acts (mostly murders) that Claudius was compelled to perform by his wives and freedmen (29). All of the slayings in Claudius 29 are political in nature, including Silanus’ forced suicide (though, as usual, Suetonius does not make the facts surrounding the deaths entirely clear).58 The topical sentence of the paragraph reads (29.1):

57 Once more (see n. 54 above) Suetonius ties together two actions that were separated by time: Silanus was forced to suicide on January 1, 49 and Nero was adopted on February 25, 50. The biographer, however, collapses the two events which gives the impression of cause and effect. See Hurley 2001, 191 at 27.2.

58 Claudius put to death, e.g., Appius Silanus (stepfather of Messalina; 29.1), whose aristocratic family had ties to the Julio-Claudians. He was killed in Claudius’ quashing a coup in 42 CE after Gaius’ death (Wiseman 1982, 60-3; McAlindon 1956, esp. 119-23). In addition, Julia Livilla (his niece, daughter of his brother Germanicus; 29.1), whose consular husband M. Vinicius had made a move for the principate after Gaius’ death (Jos. AJ 19.251-2; see Swan 1970, McAlindon 1956, 123-5, and Hurley 2001, 197-8 on 29.1). Also among Claudius’ victims was Cn. Pompeius (his son-in-law; 29.1-2), who was of an aristocratic family with ties to both the Julio-Claudians and Cn. Pompeius Magnus. No source clearly states why Pompeius was killed, but both husbands of Claudius’ daughter Antonia were murdered (Pompeius himself and Faustus Sulla, Claud. 27.2) so fears of a coup or worries over dynastic succession probably had something to do with it (Hurley 2001, 188-9 at 27.2; McAlindon 1956, 125-8).
Under the control of these [freedmen], as I have said, and his wives, he acted not like an emperor, but a servant, distributing offices, the control of armies, pardons, or punishments according either to the interest or desire of each of them.

Although the freedmen are placed first in this sentence (his), the emperor’s wives still have prominence because they are identified by a proper noun rather than by a pronoun (his versus uxoribus). Secondly, the wives are separated off from the liberti by ut dixi, so that uxoribusque addictus stands on its own as a unit. Libidine, furthermore, evokes the women’s hold on their husband. Thus, even though the freedmen are also said to have exerted influence on Claudius, Suetonius still emphasizes the authority of the emperor’s wives.

On Silanus, Suetonius continues (29.2):

Silanus…morique initio anni coactus die ipso Claudi et Agrippinae nuptiarum.

Silanus…was forced to kill himself on the first of the year [49 CE], the very same day as the wedding of Claudius and Agrippina.59

59 Tacitus and Dio shed more light on Silanus’ forced suicide. Tacitus writes that Agrippina, through her henchman Vitellius, accused Silanus of incest with his sister, which charge drove Silanus from political office and the Senate (Ann. 12.4, 12.8). Like Suetonius, Tacitus also points to the significance of the suicide on the wedding day, suggesting that Silanus chose the day to heighten popular hatred of the couple (die nuptiarum Silanus mortem sibi conscivit, sive eo usque spem vitae produxerat, seu delecto die augendam ad invidiam, Ann. 12.8.1). Dio (60.31.8) echoes Suetonius in saying that Claudius had become a slave to his wives, and on their (i.e., Messalina’s and Agrippina’s) wishes he killed both his sons-in-law (i.e., Cn. Pompeius and L. Footnote cont. next pg.
As the opening lines of the paragraph imply, Agrippina was the real force behind Silanus’ downfall (uxoribusque adductus, 29.1). Suetonius ties Agrippina to the crime even more closely by pointing out that Silanus’ death took place on her wedding day. It is notable that Silanus’ downfall was linked to Nero’s adoption in Claudius 27.2, but it is here associated with Agrippina’s nuptials (29.2). Suetonius’ changing contexts connect the four events (Agrippina’s marriage, Silanus’ death, Nero’s marriage, and his adoption), which arrangement implies that they were all part of the same scheme. All in all, Agrippina is portrayed as a woman with a plan: she did not marry Claudius until an imperial connection was opened up for her son, and she would not stop even at murder to achieve this goal.

At the end of the Claudius, Suetonius returns to the notion that Agrippina engineered the adoption of her son. In his later years, Claudius, according to the biographer, was reflective. In particular, the emperor is said to have regretted his marriage to Agrippina and adoption of Nero (sub exitu vitae signa quaedam nec obscura paenitentis de matrimonio Agrippinae deque Neronis adoptione dederat, 43). In this sentence, the marriage and adoption are clearly considered part of the same package, and

Silanus, though Silanus, technically, was only betrothed to Octavia. In the previous sentence, Dio explained how honored Silanus had been by Claudius before Agrippina’s interference (60.31.7). He continues (60.31.8) that Agrippina sought to elevate Nero, so she wanted to be rid of Silanus to free Octavia for a new marriage. The pretext on which Silanus was killed, according to Dio, was treason. He mentions nothing of the charges of incest that Tacitus reports.
Claudius laments both equally. Even so, Agrippina still gets primary placement. This passage can be compared to Claudius 39.2 (on Claudius’ absentmindedness and blindness), where Suetonius once more links the marriage and adoption by using them in two sequential examples. Again, he places Agrippina first.60 Suetonius repeatedly puts Agrippina in the leading position most likely because her marriage (49 CE) came before Nero’s adoption (50 CE). The biographer, however, simultaneously implies that Agrippina is the greater of the emperor’s two woes. Having Agrippina open the list also advances the idea that she engineered the adoption—without her marriage, Nero never would have been elevated.

During this period of regret at the end of his life, Claudius supposedly met with his natural son Britannicus. The emperor, according to Suetonius, hugged his son tightly (artius complexus, 43) and urged him to grow up so that he might one day receive an “explanation from [Claudius] himself of everything that had been done” (hortatus est, ut cresceret rationemque a se omnium factorum acciperet, 43).61 By connecting this exchange

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60 Also of note in Claud. 39.2 is Suetonius’ comment plainly disapproving of Nero’s adoption: little is worse, he writes, than adopting a stepson when one already has a son of one’s own (quasi parum reprehenderetur, quod adulto iam filio privignum adoptaret, 39.2). Despite the fact that he speaks primarily of Claudius here, the sentiment still resonates with Agrippina’s character: Suetonius also gives the sense that little is worse than a stepmother trying to promote her son when her husband already had a son of his own.

61 See Claud. 46 for a similar sign of regret: Claudius, foreseeing his death, begged his two sons to get along (cf. the squabbling between the two boys in Nero 7.1). Additionally, he asked the Senate to look after the boys in their youths. Thus, Claudius, in the biographer’s presentation, seems to have a premonition not
to Claudius’ regret of his marriage to Agrippina and adoption of Nero, which is narrated in the same paragraph (paenitentis de matrimonio...deque...adoptive, 43), Suetonius implies that the emperor’s “explanation” is that Agrippina, not Claudius himself, is to blame for Nero’s rise at Britannicus’ expense.62

The biographer continues that not long after this meeting with Britannicus (non multoque post, 44.1), Claudius made his will and had it sealed by the magistrates. With the will being linked to Claudius’ exchange with his son and regret over his marriage to Agrippina, Suetonius’ text insinuates that the emperor changed his testament, presumably to right a wrong by reinstating Britannicus.63 The biographer uses the will to segue to Claudius’ death at Agrippina’s hands, which is recorded in the same paragraph (praeventus est ab Agrippina, 44.1).64 The role of the changed testament is to supply Agrippina with a motive: she struck down her husband because she feared that only of his own death, but also of Britannicus’ downfall at Nero’s hand (Nero 33.2). Thus, he tries to protect his son from the dangerous situation in which he has placed him.

62 Hurley 2001, 234 at 43 rightly argues that Suetonius implies that Claudius will explain “his reasons for doing away with Messalina, for adopting Nero and for diminishing Britannicus’ stature.” For another sign of Claudius’ regret, cf. his declaration when Britannicus received the toga virilis: “May the Roman people at last have a real Caesar!” (ut tandem populus R. verum Caesarem habeat, 43). Hurley’s commentary is again helpful on this “cryptic” scene. She suggests that the quote is not authentic, but attributed to Claudius later. Claudius either means 1) that a natural son—not an adopted one—will succeed his father, which had never happened at Rome, or 2) that “Britannicus would be worthy of the role, a true ruler and so a ‘true Caesar’.” Either way, “the issue was legitimate succession” (Hurley 2001, 235 at 43).

63 Hurley 2001, 235 at 44.

64 See Chapter 3, Section 2 on Claudius’ death. I argue there that despite the various details given in Claud. 44, Suetonius still fingers Agrippina alone.
he was trying to undo the adoption that she had arranged by replacing Nero with Britannicus.\textsuperscript{65}

Agrippina’s fear over her son’s place is stressed again in Suetonius’ report that Claudius’ death was kept secret until Nero’s succession could be arranged (\textit{mors eius celata est, donec circa successorem omnia ordinarentur, 45}).\textsuperscript{66} This clandestine activity suggests that there were problems with the transfer of power, most likely because of the changed testament. Agrippina, it is implied, had to “fix” the setback behind the scenes and restore her son’s authority.\textsuperscript{67}

\textsuperscript{65} \textit{Claud.} 44.1 echoes Tac. \textit{Ann.} 1.5-6 on Livia’s hearing of Augustus’ trip to visit Agrippa Postumus, after which she killed her husband. Tacitus implies that Livia feared that the emperor was trying to reconcile with Agrippa in order to oust Tiberius. The similarities between the scenes suggest a high degree of typecasting: the meddling imperial \textit{noverca} poisons her husband in order to elevate her son.

\textsuperscript{66} Both Levick 1990, 76-9 and Hurley 2001, 235 reason that Claudius’ will was never published (according to Tac. \textit{Ann.} 12.69 and Dio 61.1.2) because it might have laid out a significant role for Britannicus. Neither believes that the will elevated Britannicus over Nero, but that it more likely made Britannicus equal to his stepbrother. As both authors point out, the detail of the changed will could be a later story hostile to Nero, the point being that he was never meant to be emperor. However, one must also consider Agrippina’s image: the unpublished will makes it easier to suggest that she was scheming behind the scenes, and allows her to be cast as a \textit{saeva noverca} and “king maker” (see n. 69 below). See also Rebuffat 1998 on coins issued in the East c. 51-5 CE (i.e., after Nero’s adoption in 50) with images of both Nero and Britannicus. Rebuffat (esp. 344-5) points out that the coins paint a different picture than the one in literary sources (esp. Tacitus, Dio, and Suetonius), where the two boys are almost always portrayed as being at odds and Britannicus is usually considered to have been pushed very far down the ladder. The coins show that Britannicus always played an important role in Claudius’ imperial iconography and that both the rivalry between the boys and the scheming of Agrippina are most likely overstated.

\textsuperscript{67} Cf. \textit{Nero} 8-9: after Claudius’ death was made public, Agrippina had control of her son’s public and private affairs as his regent. Here too, Suetonius implies that Agrippina was the one wielding power and acting on Nero’s behalf during the time of Claudius’ death.
In general, *Claudius* 45 resonates with *Tiberius* 22 in which Tiberius and Livia are said to have concealed Augustus’ death until Agrippa Postumus could be removed. Both scenes, furthermore, have similarities with Livy’s portrayal of Tanaquil, who likewise hid the death of her royal husband, Tarquinius Priscus, until she could arrange the elevation of his adopted son, Servius Tullius (1.39-41). The fact that a similar story plays out in all three cases suggests that Suetonius employs a high degree of characterotyping in the *Lives*: the scheming *saeva noverca* becomes a “maker of kings” by seeing her child advanced over her imperial husband’s own kin. Thus, a “bad” type of mother emerges from the *Caesares*, not just bad individual women, but a mother who plays too great a role in imperial affairs.

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68 See n. 50 above, especially on Suetonius’ stress on Livia’s issuing Postumus’ death order.

69 On the similarities between Livia, Agrippina, and Tanaquil in the works of Suetonius and Tacitus, see Lindsay 1995, 104-6 at 22 (esp. Suet., on Livia); Hurley 2001, 240 at 45 (esp. Suet., on Agrippina); Calhoon 1994, 245-57; Ginsburg 2006, 32; Goodyear 1972, 128 (esp. Tac.); Martin 1955, 127 (esp. Tac.); Ogilvie 1970a, 161-4 (Ogilvie argues that Livy himself borrowed the idea from the Hellenistic tradition of concealing deaths; see also Bauman 1994, 180-1 and 184-6 for Hellenistic parallels). Bauman 1994 moves in the opposite direction: he believes that the accounts of Tanaquil by Livy and Dionysius of Halicarnassus (4.4.8) borrow from contemporary “facts” about Livia (she really did hide Augustus’ death in Bauman’s view), not that accounts of Livia have been informed by Tanaquil. As even further evidence that this type is a trope, cf. SHA *Had*. 4 on Plotina arranging the adoption of Hadrian after Trajan’s death.

70 The situation with Tanaquil is slightly different than that of the other women: Servius was not her natural but adopted son. Still, however, Servius is her favored candidate and she attempts to elevate him at all costs over other outside challengers and her own sons. Livy, furthermore, stresses that Tanaquil raised the boy as her own (1.39).
2.3 The Relationship between the Imperial Mother and Son

Because the mother of the emperor so regularly drops out of the biographies after the genealogical introduction, it is difficult to form a picture of what Suetonius considers to be the proper relationship between a grown princeps and his mother. Some scenes clearly speak of affection, for example when Aurelia kisses Caesar as he leaves for the pontifical elections (Iul. 13; cf. Aug. 61.2 on Augustus’ devotion to Atia and Vesp. 2 on Vespasian’s devotion to the grandmother who raised him). Others anecdotes, however, show a colder, harsher mother, such as the younger Antonia’s disparagement of Claudius for being a “monster of a human being, not finished by nature but only just begun” (mater Antonia portentum eum hominis dictitabat, nec absolutum a natura, sed tantum incohatum, Claud. 3.2).

Because Claudius’ grandmother Livia and sister Livilla belittle him in similar ways (Claud. 3), Antonia is not necessarily singled out as any harsher than the other women. Suetonius, however, proceeds over the next few paragraphs to reveal the opinions of the family’s men (Augustus, Tiberius, and Caligula; Claud. 4-7), whom he paints as more confident in Claudius than were his female relations. Thus, the biographer implies that the men saw Claudius’ potential and the women did not. Accordingly, Antonia (together with Livia and Livilla) comes out badly in the end for not foreseeing her son’s imperial future. Suetonius, in this way, suggests that a mother
ought to have some confidence in her son and perhaps even affection for him, as long as these do not translate into actively plotting his rise.

Two scenes featuring a grown man and his mother stand out, however, because they highlight a son’s abuse of his mother, namely Tiberius’ neglect of Livia in her old age (Tib. 50) and Nero’s murder of Agrippina (Nero 34). That Livia and Agrippina are the wronged mothers is ironic because Suetonius elsewhere credits them with contributing to their sons’ success. The biographer, broadly speaking, has these two mothers do double duty: they discredit the authority of their sons by manipulating the imperial succession, and they also underscore their sons’ brutality by falling prey to them. There is a slight tension, however, between Tiberius’ and Nero’s dependency on their mothers on the one hand, and their rejection of the women on the other. This discrepancy can be explained by the fact that Suetonius uses the mothers primarily to call attention to certain characteristics of their sons: here the men need their mothers, which fact reveals their weakness, but there they shun the women and are, in consequence, painted as cruel.

In the Tiberius and Nero, one overarching theme between the mothers aiding their sons and then suffering at their hands is that the women are constantly meddling. Neither Livia nor Agrippina stops with making her son emperor; both continue to interfere in politics during his reign. Indeed, it is Livia’s intrusion that supposedly pushed Tiberius over the edge. According to the biographer, Tiberius claimed that his
mother sought an equal share of his power (velut partes sibi aequas potentiae vindicantem, Tib. 50.2). Later in the same passage, he also is said to have frequently warned her not to intrude in affairs unbecoming of a woman (50.3). To some extent, Suetonius exonerates Livia from these charges by including them in a paragraph on Tiberius’ cruelty to his family members (cf. the topical heading: odium adversus necessitudines, 50.1). Velut, furthermore, means that Tiberius alleged that Livia wanted an equal share of power; Suetonius, however, distances himself from the veracity of the charge. But even if the biographer defends Livia to a degree, he still writes that the mother and son had frequent meetings and long, confidential talks (congressum eius assiduum…et longiores secretioresque sermones, 50.2), which shows that Livia was, in fact, playing a major role in her son’s principate just as Tiberius had claimed.

Another way in which Suetonius partially shields Livia is by stating that Tiberius, despite his rebukes, was often in need of his mother’s advice and sometimes even followed it (quibus tamen interdum et egere et uti solebat, 50.2). This remark cuts two ways. On the one hand, Livia comes across in a negative light for trying her hand at

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71 See Lindsay 1995, 149-50 at 50.1 on the ways in which Suetonius has exaggerated Tiberius’ ill treatment of his family members.

72 See Levick 1999, 271-2 n. 32 for a tally of Livia’s achievements. She was, in fact, politically active. Also Calhoon 1994, 168 on the material objects, both public and private, that feature Tiberius, Livia as “Julia Augusta,” and sometimes the Senate as well. This evidence “points to the unprecedented official nature of their partnership.”
imperial politics, but, on the other hand, Tiberius is also denigrated for needing a woman’s guidance. Suetonius’ comment reveals particularly well the conflicted and weak nature of the emperor who both requires his mother’s aid and rejects her interference.

According to Suetonius, the specific breaking point between Livia and Tiberius was this: Livia repeatedly (saepius, 51.1) urged her son to appoint among the jurors a certain man recently made a citizen. Tiberius said that he would oblige, but only if he could make a mark next to the juror list saying that he had been forced to do so by his mother (exortum...a matre, 51.1). Livia, enraged (commota, 51.1) at her son’s response, “took out from a secret place” some of Augustus’ old letters (veteres...codicillos...e sacrificio protulit, 51.1) in which the emperor had complained of Tiberius’ bitterness and insolence (acerbitate et intolerantia, 51.1). This anecdote deserves a close reading.

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73 Cf. Tac. Ann. 5.3: After Livia’s death, Tiberius became an even greater despot because his mother was not there to restrain him. This passage contains the same idea as Suet. Tib. 50, i.e. that Tiberius needed his mother’s counsel. Cf. Nero 6.4 on the snakeskin bracelet that Agrippina required (ex voluntate matris) Nero to wear after snakes supposedly scared off assassins sent by Messalina. Suetonius writes that Nero, after his relationship with his mother had soured, discarded the bracelet only to search for it again in his time of extreme need (i.e., during the uprising before his death). Nero 6.4 advances the same message as Tib. 50.2: although the bad emperor rejects his mother’s aid, he really needs her help.

74 I follow the suggestion of Hurley 1998, 380 n. 102 that, although a sacrarium is literally a shrine (perhaps to Augustus), Suetonius probably means that the letters had been hidden away. See also de Conink 1991, 3682, who adds that this detail casts doubt on the idea that all the private papers of an emperor were stored in a central archive.
Even though Suetonius had somewhat defended Livia in *Tiberius* 50, he paints her here (51) as a nag. The comparative *saepius* gives the impression of Livia hounding her son “again and again” to elevate her undistinguished client, which wording lends credence to Tiberius’ claims that his mother sought power and meddled. Livia, furthermore, does not come out well in the aftermath of the conflict. “Enraged” (*commota*)—not just “angry”—she blackmails her son with old letters that she had been hoarding, perhaps for this very use. In fact, Tiberius himself is aggrieved with Livia for hiding these epistles for so long and then producing them for such a spiteful purpose (*hos et custoditos tam diu et exprobratos tam infeste adeo graviter tuli*, 51.1). Undeniably, it is inappropriate for Livia to turn to the authority of her dead husband to try to trump that of her son, who was now Rome’s emperor.

These letters also recall the tradition recounted (and at the time rejected) by Suetonius that Livia had persuaded Augustus to adopt Tiberius despite her husband’s reservations about his demeanor (*Tib*. 21.2). Though Suetonius had earlier discarded this notion on the grounds that Augustus was certainly more careful in choosing his

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75 Cf. *Aug*. 40.3 on Livia’s asking Augustus to do a favor for a man from Gaul. Augustus, like Tiberius, denies her request (*negavit*). However, in *Tib*. 51.1 Suetonius puts more emphasis on Livia’s nagging (*saepius*). It is noteworthy that Augustus is praised for not giving in to Livia’s pressures, while *Tib*. 50-1 ultimately paints Tiberius as cruel to his mother.

76 Tiberius is described in roughly the same way in both passages: *morum eius diritatem* (*Tib*. 21.1); *de acerbitate et intolerantia morum eius* (*Tib*. 51.1).
heir, he now seems to validate those rumors. This is an important development because it suggests that Livia might, in fact, have had a hand in engineering the adoption, from which allegation Suetonius had been so keen to protect Augustus in Tiberius 21. At the very least, it implies that Livia had worked to change Augustus’ mind about Tiberius. All in all, the re-appearance in Tiberius 51 of the gossip that Augustus had qualms with Tiberius’ deportment calls attention to the fact that Tiberius was dependant on his mother, which, in turn, makes his rejection of her more pointed.

After relating the anecdote about Augustus’ letters, Suetonius adds that some think that this disagreement was “among or even the foremost cause” of Tiberius’ departure to Capri (ut quidam putent inter causas secessus hanc ei vel praecipuam fuisse, 51.1). It is interesting that the biographer ascribes Tiberius’ retirement not to the emperor’s desire for leisure and sexual pleasure (as does Tacitus), but to his wish to avoid his overbearing mother.77 Suetonius, it seems, has taken Tiberius’ later inattention to his mother (see below) and extrapolated back that she was the reason for his departure in the first place.

77 Although Tacitus initially suggests that Tiberius was compelled by Sejanus to retire to Capri (Ann. 4.41), he later writes that Tiberius had tolerated Sejanus for so long that his departure probably had more to do with other factors, such as the emperor’s desire to shun society and lead a dissolute life (4.57). The historian adds (4.57) that some think that Tiberius was ashamed of his appearance in his later years, so he wanted to be away from the limelight to prevent people from looking at him. Dio, however, follows Suetonius that Livia was to blame (57.12.6).
At the end of the Tiberius, even though Suetonius depicts Livia as being partly responsible for driving off her son, he ultimately criticizes Tiberius for not attending to his mother in her later years: “In the whole of the three years that his mother lived after he left [Rome], he only saw her once, on one day, and for a very short time” (quidem triennio, quo vivente matre afuit, semel omnino eam nec amplius quam uno die paucissimis vidit horis, 51.2). Suetonius’ extreme and dramatic language stresses the inadequacy of Tiberius’ actions (toto, semel omnino, nec amplius quam uno, paucissimis). To cap it all off, Tiberius, he writes, neither visited his mother in her final illness, nor attended her funeral after holding out hope of his coming (adventus sui spem facit, 51.2). In the end, Livia’s corpse had putrefied (tabido corpore, 51.2) to such an advanced state that the rites of interment went on without him (contrast Tiberius’ actions to the funerary honors that Augustus paid to his mother, Aug. 61.2). Suetonius is the only author to record the gruesome detail of Livia’s rotting corpse, which feature serves to demonstrate just how cold Tiberius was to his mother. The implication is that Tiberius’ poor treatment of Livia went above and beyond what Suetonius considers to be acceptable behavior of a son towards his mother.

Like Tiberius, Nero, too, is depicted as being extremely aggressive towards his mother. Although he initially made her his regent, giving his mother “oversight of private and public business” (matri summam omnium rerum privatarum publicarumque permisit, Nero 9), he later bristles at her intrusion. The reason Nero killed his mother,
Suetonius states, is that he had tired of her surveillance and criticism of his words and deeds (matrem facta dictaque sua exquirentem acerbius et corrigentem, 34.1). Thus, Agrippina, according to Suetonius, did not actually “do” anything specific to prompt her murder other than be a general source of interference and annoyance.

In contrast to the sweeping picture painted by Suetonius, Tacitus singles out Agrippina’s disapproval of Nero’s new love Poppaea as the impetus for Agrippina’s murder (Tac. Ann. 14.1). This same dislike of Poppaea might underlie Suetonius’ statement that Agrippina had disparaged her son’s “deeds” (facta, 34.1), but even if the biographer does reference Poppaea, he makes only an allusion. He never identifies a precise transgression as the cause of Agrippina’s downfall in the same way that Tacitus does. Instead, Suetonius leaves Nero’s irritation with Agrippina vague, a presentation that makes the emperor seem crueler and more bloodthirsty than he does in Tacitus’ history. In Suetonius’ Nero, no one incident propels the emperor to violence. Rather,

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78 Although Tacitus says that the murder was a long time in the making (diu meditatum scelus, 14.1.1), Agrippina’s disapproval of Poppaea is what finally sets Nero in motion to kill his mother, with Poppaea urging him on. Roughly the same version of events is given in the epitome of Dio (61.11-2).

79 See Heinz 1948, 30-3, who shows that Tacitus, Suetonius, and Dio all convey the same basic information about the murder of Agrippina. Heinz concludes, however, that Suetonius presents variations in detail that portray Nero even more unfavorably than do the other two authors. Also Boatwright 2008, who compares the three versions of Agrippina’s murder given by the same authors. Like Heinz, Boatwright also sees the three writers as drawing from common material. She notes that, especially in comparison to Tacitus, the reasons given for Agrippina’s death in Suetonius’ Nero are “relatively banal.”
Nero seems simply “determined to kill [his mother]” (*perdere statuit*, 34.2) for no justifiable reason.80

In Suetonius’ account of Agrippina’s death, Nero’s attempts first to harass and then to kill his mother were many (34.1-2). His diligence implies cold-bloodedness: he would not let failure deter him from his goal of eliminating his mother. It is also unsettling that Nero pretended reconciliation (*reconciliatione simulata*, 34.2) and affection on the fateful day. He is said to have dined with Agrippina and even “kissed her breasts” (*papillas quoque exosculatus*, 34.2) before knowingly sending her to her death (cf. his later examination of her corpse, complete with comments on the good and bad qualities of her physique; 34.4). The latter detail of the kiss recalls the incestuous relationship between mother and son (*Nero* 28.2), another crime that Nero, according to Suetonius, inflicted on his mother.81 In both the incest and murder scene, Suetonius casts Nero as the aggressor and Agrippina as his victim.

80 Cf. Suetonius’ comment that Nero killed whomever he wished for whatever reason: *nullus…modus interimendi quoscumque libuisse quacumque de causa*, Nero 37.1.

81 In Suetonius’ account (*Nero* 28) it is Nero who initiates the incestuous relationship with his mother. Tacitus, in contrast, makes Agrippina the instigator (*muliebris inlecebras*, Ann. 14.2.1). Dio also gives evidence of the tradition we see in Tacitus when he writes that Agrippina sought her son in order to keep him from Poppaea (61.11.3-4). Dio, however, unlike Tacitus or Suetonius, adds that he doubts the authenticity of the story in the first place. He opines that the incest story might not be true, but rather invented to slander each party since incest was the type of action of which both parties were capable (61.11.4). In the end, Suetonius is the only extant source to suggest that Nero began the incestuous affair. Having Nero instigate the relationship plays into the biographer’s portrayal of this emperor as especially depraved and cruel.
Overall, Tacitus vilifies Agrippina in his account of her murder, while Suetonius makes her out to be the injured party. To Tacitus, Agrippina, who both seduced her son and sought power for herself, was a woman deserving of death (note that she is the sexual aggressor in Tac. Ann. 14.1). Suetonius, on the other hand, paints Agrippina as the victim in Nero 34 in the sense that she appears to be undeserving of her son’s spontaneous and excessively harsh treatment of her. Agrippina’s general blamelessness in the Nero—she was not behind Claudius’ murder (Nero 33 focuses only on Nero’s role in it), she did not initiate the incestuous affair (28.3), and she did nothing overtly reprehensible to prompt her murder (34)—contrasts with Suetonius’ unfavorable portrayal of her in the Claudius, where she actively seduced, manipulated, and murdered her uncle-husband (see Chapter 3, Section 2 on their marriage). It is also important to keep in mind that Nero’s forced adoption appears mainly in the Claudius rather than in his own Life (Section 2 above), which arrangement distances Agrippina from the deed in the Vita of her son. Agrippina is not, by any means, a model of virtue in the Nero, but she is still more passive, innocent, and worthy of sympathy here than she is in the Claudius.  

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82 Boatwright 2008 shows that Tacitus (Ann. 14.1-13) places blame on Agrippina and Nero equally, even though Agrippina is the one murdered at Nero’s hand. Boatwright finds that Tacitus is critical of Agrippina’s political ambitions above all.

83 On Agrippina not being blameless in the Nero, cf. Nero’s father’s joke that “nothing that is not vile and a public menace could be born from him and Agrippina” (quicquam ex se et Agrippina nisi detestabile et male... Footnote cont. next pg.
The reason for Suetonius’ variable treatment of Agrippina is that he seeks to make the emperor cruelly aggressive in the *Nero*. This endeavor is less effective when Nero’s victims are of questionable moral standing themselves. When his victims are innocent, on the other hand, Suetonius is better able to accentuate the princeps’ viciousness. In the *Claudius*, in contrast, Suetonius depicted Claudius as weak and submissive to women. Thus, a strong, insistent, sexually controlling Agrippina lent credence to the biographer’s interpretation in that *Life*. Suetonius, therefore, sacrifices the consistency of Agrippina’s character to whatever program he has at hand, namely submission in the *Claudius* and brutality in the *Nero*.

Again, however, as we saw with Livia in *Tiberius* 50 through 51 above, the biographer’s implication is that even if Agrippina annoyed her son or interfered in his principate, Nero’s cruel treatment of her still crossed a line. Both the *Tiberius* and *Nero* suggest that even “bad” imperial mothers deserve to be treated fairly by their sons. Such a sentiment is interesting because it is in contrast to Tactius’ relatively hostile attitude toward Livia and Agrippina, who tend to “get what they deserve” in the

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*pseudo nasci potuisse*, 6.2). This statement, recorded at the beginning of the *Life* in connection with Nero’s birth, comes to fruition in the biography. Suetonius is both foreshadowing Nero’s poor performance as emperor, and tying the emperor’s vices to his lineage and upbringing. Also 7.1 (Agrippina got her young son to give false testimony against Lepida in an effort to ruin her) and 9 (Agrippina was in charge of all of Nero’s public and private business at the beginning of his reign, which is not appropriate for a woman; cf. Tiberius’ criticism of Livia for being too involved in government, *Tib*. 50-1).
In the end, it is not so much that Suetonius has greater sympathy for women than does Tacitus, but rather that he more obviously and regularly uses women as victims to highlight men’s crimes.

2.4 Conclusion

Because Suetonius writes at greatest length on “bad” mothers like Livia and Agrippina, it is tempting to brush aside all other women as comparatively unimportant. However, one can argue that the more minor mothers such as Aurelia, Atia, and Agrippina the Elder are “good” precisely because they are so silent and unassuming. In other words, Suetonius casts these women in a positive light simply by making them the opposite of the interfering Livia and Agrippina. In the Caesares, therefore, a mother’s brief appearance should not necessarily be taken as a sign of her insignificance, but rather as a signal that she is performing her job well by being appropriately unobtrusive. The disappearance of most mothers after the genealogy (these could be called the

84 See, e.g, Tac. Ann. 5.1 on Livia being a good match for her scheming husband and hypocritical son (mater impotens, uxor facilis et cum artibus mariti, simulatione filii bene composita). Boatwright 2008 convincingly argues that Tacitus maligns Agrippina in his account of her death (Ann. 14.2, see n. 79 above). Rutland 1978, 15-6 also offers a summary of Tacitus’ presentation of women as forces of “unreason, emotion, and deception” in the Annals. Barrett 2001, 171 in addition, notes that Tacitus’ picture of Livia is more hostile than Suetonius’ and Dio’s.

85 The opposite is also true: with the majority of other mothers playing a small role in their sons’ principates, the meddling of Livia and Agrippina is all the more obvious.
entirely unobtrusive mothers) also implies that Suetonius sees imperial women as important primarily for the lineage that they convey to their sons.86

Of all mothers, Livia and Agrippina receive the longest treatment in the Lives. They are also portrayed as the two mothers who meddled most in their sons’ affairs. Thus, the greater attention that Suetonius pays to these mothers corresponds directly to the women’s increased involvement in politics. The impact of this presentation is that the Caesares are dominated by “bad” mothers. In consequence, the Lives do not have a highly visible, positive model of motherhood in the same way that they hold Augustus to be the ideal emperor. On the contrary, the “good” mothers, as I suggested above, are indirectly lauded for being inconspicuous.

On the whole, Suetonius’ Caesares features mothers interacting with their sons at only two stages of the men’s lives, their births and adulthoods. Yet, there is a large expanse of time between these two poles—the emperors’ childhood and adolescence—where mothers hardly appear at all, despite the fact that Suetonius regularly includes at least a few paragraphs in each Life on his subject’s early years. The biographer’s treatment of the emperors’ educations can serve as an example. In the Caesares, no

mother, not even a meddling one, is said to have played a role in her son’s instruction.\textsuperscript{87}

That there were such depictions commonly around is suggested by Tacitus’ \textit{Agricola}, wherein Agricola’s mother Julia Procilla is praised for her upbringing of her son (Tac. \textit{Agr.} 4.2-4):\textsuperscript{88}

\begin{quote}
\end{quote}

[4.2] His mother was Julia Procilla, a woman of exceptional virtue. Brought up in her lap with affection, he passed his boyhood and youth in the cultivation of [4.3] every respectable skill. He was protected from the enticements of wrongdoers not only by his own good and irreproachable character, but also by having, when still young, Massilia as the scene and director of his studies, a place where Greek courtesy and provincial frugality were mixed and brought together well. [4.4] I remember that he himself used to say that in his early youth he would have drank in a keener fondness of philosophy, beyond that which befitted a Roman and

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{87} Tac. \textit{Ann.} 12.8, for example, says that Agrippina hired Seneca to instruct Nero (\textit{at Agrippina…veniam exilii pro Annaeo Seneca, simul prae tum imperiat…utque Domitii pueritia tali magistro adolesceret et consiliis eiusdem ad spem dominationis uterentur, quia Seneca fidus in Agrippinan memoria benefici et infensus Claudio dolore iniuriae credebatur}). Suetonius, too, writes about Nero’s youthful studies, but he connects Seneca’s employ with Nero’s adoption by Claudius, which presentation suggests that Claudius hired the tutor. Agrippina, moreover, does not appear in the long passage (\textit{Nero} 7.1): \textit{undecimo aetatis anno a Claudio adoptatus est Annaeoque Senecae iam tunc senatoris in disciplinam traditus}. Cf. also \textit{Nero} 52 on the emperor’s studies. Again, Seneca appears in the passage, but not Agrippina.

\textsuperscript{88} Cf. Tac. \textit{Dial.} 28-9, which also stresses the importance of the mother in raising and educating her children. Tacitus’ character Messalla ties the decrease in maternal involvement to a decline in men’s oratorical skill.
\end{footnotesize}
a senator, had not the good sense of his mother held back his excited and fervent spirit.

In many ways, Tacitus’ account of Julia Procilla recalls Nicolaus of Damascus’ portrayal of Atia. Both women are commended for watching over their sons and keeping them on the “straight and narrow.” Suetonius, in contrast, does not give his maternal characters such advisory roles. When he speaks about education, he usually refers to more advanced “liberal studies” and instruction in law and oratory, which is not the level of education in which a mother would have any say.

In addition to Tacitus, a number of other contemporaries of Suetonius also highlight the importance of maternal involvement with young children. For instance, Quintilian, who wrote under Domitian, devotes a section of his *Institutio Oratoria* to early childhood education (1.1). In one passage in particular (1.1.6), he stresses the need for educated mothers. Here, Quintilian uses Cornelia as an example, saying that she

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89 *Claud.* 41.2 comes closest to Tacitus’ depiction of Julia Procilla and Nicolaus’ portrayal of Atia. Suetonius reports that Claudius planned to write a history starting with the death of Caesar, but his grandmother Livia and mother Antonia dissuaded him (*correptus saepe et a matre et ab avia*). The subtext to their disapproval is that Claudius would have to favor one side over the other in the Civil War, which would be unseemly since Claudius was both a Julio-Claudian and a descendant of Antony (his mother Antonia was Antony’s daughter). Livia’s and Agrippina’s advice, however, is given a hostile air in the *Claud.* (*correptus*), which is counter to the portrayals of Julia Procilla in Tac. *Agr.* and Atia in Nic. Dam. Cf. *Claud.* 3 on the animosity of Livia and Antonia towards Claudius.

90 E.g., *Iul.* 4 (Caesar’s instruction from the famous orator Apollonius Molon); *Aug.* 84 (devoted to liberal studies and oratory; cf. 85-6 on writing and speeches); *Claud.* 41 (influence and instruction of Livy and Sulpicius Flavus; cf. 3 and 50 on Claudius’ general devotion to liberal studies); *Gal.* 5 (learned law among other liberal studies).
contributed greatly to the eloquence of her sons, Gaius and Tiberius Gracchus. To use another example, Favorinus, who like Suetonius was active under Hadrian, calls for mothers to form closer bonds with their children by nursing (Gell. NA 12.1), as does his contemporary Soranus (Gyn. 2.18-19). Favorinus traces a decline in morals through the increased use of foreign, servile nutrices and the resultant decrease in maternal attention.91 Lastly, Plutarch praises his wife, Timoxena, for her extraordinary devotion to her family, making clear that she raised her own children under her own roof (Cons. ad Ux. 608C-D). Plutarch comments that her behavior was unusual: most other mothers, he writes with disdain, only hold their children after someone else (i.e., a nutrix) has cleaned and prettied them.

In contrast to these works, Suetonius’ Caesares are relatively uninterested in a mother’s relationship with her young son. Although Suetonius’ biographies are highly ethical, he does not engage in contemporary discourse about the lack of maternal involvement and consequential decline in education or morals. This fact, however, does

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91 Favorinus is most concerned with the transmission of poor health and bad morals through the nurses’ “degenerate and foreign milk” (degenerique alimento lactis alieni corrumpere, Gell. NA 12.1.17). These problems are worse, he states, when the milk comes from a slave woman “of a foreign and barbarous nation,” especially if she is also “wicked, ugly, unchaste, and drunk” (lactem…aut serva aut servilis est et…externae et barbarae nationis est, si improba, si informis, si impudica, si temulenta est, 12.1.17). Ultimately, the philosopher declares that it is a shame that elite Roman parents give their children such “nobility of body and mind” (nobilitatem…corpusque et animum, 12.1.17) only to let their babies be corrupted by a vile foreign nurse (12.1.18). To Favorinus’ mind, the mother who bears a child only to send it away to a nutrix is “unnatural, imperfect, and a half-mother” (contra naturam imperfectum atque dimidiatum matris genus, 12.1.6). A similar approach is taken in Tac. Dial. 28, where Messalla traces a decline in oratorical skill (and, hence, morals) to decreased maternal involvement and the increased use of foreign nutrices.
not mean that Suetonius was indifferent to women. Rather, the biographer’s scanty attention to mothers reflects his more pressing concern for his subjects’ political careers. Suetonius’ main focus is the path by which the emperors gained the principate, especially in regard to their training, the offices they held, and their military experience. It is notable that only two of his twelve subjects were direct descendants of their predecessor (Titus and Domitian were the sons of Vespasian; Titus, however, had no son of his own, so his brother was his successor). The rest were originally outside the line of succession and were elevated either by adoption (Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Nero), or military means (Claudius, Galba, Otho, Vitellius, Vespasian). Thus, the burden is on the biographer to explain how these men achieved Rome’s supreme command. In this scheme, there is little room to talk about the men’s relationships with their mothers.

Instead, Suetonius focuses on the lineage that the emperors’ mothers passed to their sons, since this had bearing on the men’s political careers. Because certain offices and commands were only open to men of particular ranks, it is imperative that Suetonius establish the exact degree of his subjects’ nobility.92 In order to do so, he traces both

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92 Cf. Wallace-Hadrill 2004, 104-5, noting the number of status terms in the Lives: “The biographer is scrupulous about establishing the precise degree of nobility of an emperor’s family” (105). Cf. the abundance of phrases focusing on social rank in the genealogy of the Otho (Otho 1): familia vetere et honorata atque ex principibus Etruriae; patre equite R., matre humili incertum an ingenua; per gratiam Liviae Augustae…senator est factus nec praeturae gradum excessit; materno genere praeclaro; urbanos honores, proconsulatum Africae et extraordinaria imperia severissime administravit; senatus honore rarissimo, statua in Palatio posita, prosecutus est eum et Claudius adlectum inter patricios; Albia Terentia splendida femina.
maternal and paternal descent in his genealogies. Thus, Suetonian mothers are most significant as conduits for ancestries. As a result, they are featured most prominently in the genealogical portions of the *Lives*, and tend to disappear thereafter.
3. *Uxoria Ornamenta*: the Imperial Wife

Together with that of mother, the role of wife is one of the most important and conspicuous positions for a woman in the *Caesares*. Every emperor in the *Lives* was married at least once, and some several more times besides.1 Marriage, accordingly, is one of the few rubrics prominently featuring women that reappear regularly across the *Vitae*.

Perhaps the most essential responsibility for the imperial wife was to produce an heir, a reality often reflected in Suetonius’ biographies. In the majority of *Lives*, Suetonius records an emperor’s marriage and the birth of his children together in the same passage, after which the wife either drops out of the biography entirely, or else plays only a very small part in it.2 Such an arrangement implies that the primary

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1 Otho is, perhaps, the strangest case (*Otho* 3): Nero ordered Otho to marry his mistress Poppaea because Agrippina disapproved of her son’s relationship. The marriage to Otho was supposed to be a sham (*nuptiarum specie*), merely a means of keeping Poppaea close to Nero yet far enough away from his mother. Otho, thus, was technically wed, but his marriage was unusual. Suetonius’ point, possibly, is to mock the effeminate Otho (*vero paene muliebrium*, 12.1; cf. 6.3) by painting him as a cuckold who was unsuccessful with women (see Conclusion).

2 Of the twelve biographies, there are three exceptions to the general rule of wives being lumped together with children. In both the *Aug.* and *Claud.*, wives are recorded in one paragraph (*Aug.* 62 and *Claud.* 26) and children and grandchildren in another (*Aug.* 63 and *Claud.* 27). In the *Iul.*, Suetonius records Caesar’s marriages and children in disparate paragraphs throughout the biography: *Iul.* 1.1 (Cornelia, mother of Julia); 6.2 (Pompeia); 21 (Calpurnia); 52.2-3 (Cleopatra, not technically a wife but bore his child). In the other *Lives*, Suetonius usually reports marriages and children in the same passage (e.g., *Tib.* 7, *Cal.* 25, *Gal.* 5, *Vesp.* 3, *Tit.* 4). On the disappearance of wives, Flavia Domitilla, for example, drops out after *Vesp.* 3 and Lepida after *Gal.* 5. In many of these cases, the wife’s small role can be explained by her death (as with Flavia Domitilla and Lepida above) or divorce (e.g., Marcia Furnilla, *Tit.* 4.2; in addition, Aelia Paetina and Plautia. Footnote cont. next pg.
purpose of the marriage—and, more importantly, the main obligation of the wife—was to create offspring.³ After the birth of children, Suetonius suggests that the wife’s duty is done and she can retire into the periphery. Titus 4.2 is a good example of this practice:

Post stipendia Foro operam dedit honestam magis quam assiduam, eodemque tempore Arrecinam Tertullam, patre eq. R. sed praefecto quondam praetorianarum cohortium, duxit uxorem et in defunctae locum Marciam Furnillam splendidi generis; cum qua sublata filia divorium fecit.

After his military service he worked as an advocate in the Forum, more for glory than as a regular profession, and at that same time he married Arrecina Tertulla, whose father, though he was a Roman eques, had once been prefect of the Praetorian cohorts. Upon her death he took in her place Marcia Furnilla, a lady of a very distinguished family, but divorced her after he had acknowledged a daughter which she bore him.

As this passage illustrates, Suetonius tends to mention only the wife’s name and the number of children she bore her husband, usually without any further comment on the marriage.⁴ In Titus 4.2, for example, the biographer gives no sense of how long the marriages lasted or how Titus felt about his wives.⁵ More surprising, he offers no

³ Roman marriage, in fact, is generally seen in both ancient texts and modern scholarship as being for the purpose of producing children (Treggiari 1991, 8). Suetonius, thus, is in line with the majority view.

⁴ Jones convincingly argues that Suetonius is somewhat confused in Tit. 4.2. Other evidence points to the fact that Titus had two daughters: Julia from Arrecina and another, whose name is unknown, from Marcia. Since little is known of this latter daughter, it is likely that she died young: Jones 1996, 150 at 22, cf. Castritius 1969, 492-4.

⁵ Each marriage seems to have been short: that to Arrecina c. 63-65 CE, and to Marcia c. 65-66 (Jones 2002, 95-6 at 4). See n. 6 below on Titus’ divorce from the latter.
explanation of the future emperor’s sudden divorce from the *splendida* Marcia Furnilla, who had borne him a daughter.⁶ One could even argue that Suetonius’ language is decidedly unemotional: Titus is coolly said to have replaced his dead wife with another woman (*in defunctae locum*) and then straightforwardly to have gotten rid of the latter (*divortium fecit*). After this passage, there is no further mention of Arrecina or Marcia in the *Vita*.

On the whole, the brevity of Suetonius’ presentation of most wives makes his lengthier treatments of Livia and Agrippina the Younger more conspicuous. While the majority of wives are flat characters given a name but no personality, Livia and Agrippina are somewhat more fleshed-out. Livia, in general, is cast as the obliging wife who pleased her husband (*Aug.* 62.2 and 99.1 on their love), while Agrippina plays the part of the murderous and manipulative spouse whose antics drove Claudius to despair (*Claud.* 43 on Claudius’ regret of their marriage). Though these presentations are

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⁶ The divorce, in all probability, was political: since some of Marcia Furnilla’s relatives fell during the Pisonian conspiracy of 65, Titus most likely divorced her in that same year, before Vespasian was chosen by Nero to head the Judaean campaigns in 66 (Jones 2002, 96 at 4). While Marcia’s high birth initially brought prestige to the Flavians, her later connections to conspirators did nothing to advance them in Nero’s court. Titus, after his divorce from Furnilla, had a serious affair with Queen Berenice of Cilicia (*insignem reginae Berenices amorem*, *Tit.* 7.1). According to Suetonius, Titus proposed marriage to her, but ended the affair with a heavy heart when he became emperor in 79 (*Berenicen statim ab urbe dimisit, invitus, invitam*, 7.2). The biographer generally commends Titus for “cleaning up his act” upon his accession, the separation from Berenice being part of his reform. The implication is that it would have been unseemly for an emperor to have been too involved with a foreign queen (cf. *Dio* 66.15.4 on the Romans’ displeasure with the relationship; Octavian’s propaganda against Antony for his relationship with Cleopatra also comes to mind). Titus, after this affair, was a “bachelor emperor” like his father.
themselves schematic (see below), it is still notable that Livia and Agrippina are given some characteristic traits while the majority of other wives are not.

Not only does Suetonius say more about Livia and Agrippina than he does about any other wives, he is also especially clear in each case how the women’s husbands felt about them: Augustus loved his spouse and Claudius bemoaned his. Accordingly, one can argue that the biographer portrays Augustus’ marriage as having been successful (and, hence, his wife “good”), while Claudius’ union is depicted as disastrous (and his wife, in consequence, “bad”). Other wives in the Caesares are merely tallied with no indication of the quality of their relationships with their husbands, as we saw in Titus 4.2 above.

The combined facts that Suetonius writes at greater length on Livia and Agrippina than on any other wives in the Vitae and that he so clearly marks them as “good” and “bad,” make Livia and Agrippina particularly suitable candidates for closer study. Thus, the remainder of this chapter will focus primarily on these two women, though with reference to how they compare to other wives in the Lives. Below, I examine Livia (Section 1) and Agrippina (Section 2) with the particular aim of uncovering the grounds on which the women, in Suetonius’ presentation, earned the affection or antipathy of their husbands. What, in other words, are the traits or behaviors of a “good” wife in the Caesares and what of a “bad” one? In the end, comparing the two women reveals that Suetonius speaks most favorably of wives like
Livia who play a passive role in their marriages. Women such as Agrippina, who are overly controlling of their husbands, on the other hand, are condemned.

3.1 The Good Wife under Her Husband’s Control: Livia

The presentation of Livia’s marriage to Augustus is unique in the *Lives* because Suetonius records the wedding three times, once in the *Vita* of her husband (*Aug.* 62.2), again in that of her son (*Tib.* 4.3), and for a third time in the biography of her grandson (*Claud.* 1). Such a triple-narrative is highly unusual in the *Caesares*, where a particularly important event is, at most, recorded twice. Besides its multiple appearances, it is also notable that both the context of the story and the version of events differ slightly each time. All told, there are two major discrepancies between the three accounts: 1) whether Augustus took Livia or was given her; and 2) whether or not their relationship had an adulterous history, especially as regards Livia’s pregnancy at the time of her wedding.

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7 Von Albrecht 1997, 1404 has noted that Suetonius sometimes writes about an emperor’s death twice, once in his own *Life* and again (with often discrepant details) in his successor’s, especially if the successor had a hand in his predecessor’s downfall. See also Wardle 1994, 80-5 on episodes that Suetonius reports twice. Of the twelve biographies, Wardle counts only twenty-three double narratives, a number of which overlap with the above-mentioned death scenes. For domestic affairs that involve women, however, the technique is very rare indeed. Besides Livia’s marriage, *Claud.* 44 also fits this bill, but it is part of the death narratives noted above. In that passage, Suetonius pins Claudius’ murder on Agrippina, but in *Nero* 33 he speaks of Nero having had a hand in it (see Section 2 below). The divorce of Tiberius and Julia is also reported twice, once in *Aug.* 65 and again, with slightly different details, in *Tib.* 10.1, 11.4, 50.1 (see Chapter 4, Section 3).
Marleen Flory has explored these questions in her article “Abducta Neroni uxor: the Historiographical Tradition on the Marriage of Octavian and Livia” (1998), in which she examines descriptions of the union in Tacitus, Velleius, Dio, Pliny the Elder, Aurelius Victor, and Suetonius. Her study is primarily a Quellenforschung, for she is chiefly interested in when and whence the divergent stories originated. Flory concludes that Antony was the source for the hostile tradition that Octavian “stole” (abduxit) Livia from her husband, adding that the triumvir’s propaganda has deeper roots in the historiographical tradition of the tyrant, against whom lust, aggression, and “wife-snatching” are common charges.

Though Flory refers often to Suetonius (he and Tacitus are the foremost representatives of the hostile tradition), it is not her aim to examine the conflicting accounts of the Livia-Augustus marriage within the Caesares themselves. But what is most striking about Suetonius—and different from all the other authors whom Flory explores—is precisely the fact that his Lives contain multiple, contradictory versions of the same event. Tacitus, by way of comparison, is consistent that Octavian took Livia (Ann. 1.10.5, 5.1.2; cf. 12.6.2), while Velleius (2.79.2, 2.94.1) and Dio (48.44.3) write unswervingly that Nero gave her away. Only Suetonius suggests that Livia was both taken and given. Suetonius’ handling of the wedding, therefore, deserves closer scrutiny, an analysis that takes into account both the biographer’s motives for changing
the story and the effects of these modifications on his overall picture of Livia as a wife. First, however, a summary of the accounts of the marriage in the Caesares is in order.

Beginning with the first version of the wedding, Suetonius reports the marriage in a passage on Augustus’ fiancées and wives (Aug. 62). There, we hear that Augustus divorced Scribonia because he was “sick and tired, as he himself writes, of her obstinate disposition” (per taesus, ut scribit, morum perversitatem eius, 62.2). Thereafter, he “immediately took Livia Drusilla from her husband Tiberius Nero, although she was pregnant at the time” (ac statim Liviam Drusillam matrimonio Tiberi Neronis et quidem praegnantem abduxit, 62.2).8 The paragraph ends with the observation that Augustus “loved and esteemed [Livia] to the end without a rival” (dilexitque et probavit unice ac perseveranter, 62.2). This final declaration of enduring affection instantly softens any potential hostility in the verb abduxit. All in all, the passage, which tallies a string of women (one fiancée and three wives), ends on an uplifting note of marital harmony, one that reflects well on both partners.

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8 Both Tac. (Ann. 1.10.5) and Dio (48.44.1-2) write that Octavian consulted the pontifices before marrying Livia: divorced or widowed women typically had to wait before entering into a new marriage. The pontifices, however, waived this constraint so long as Octavian and Nero agreed on the paternity of the unborn child. Octavian seems to have been proactively trying to combat rumors about Livia’s pregnancy, or at least to have been seeking assurances on a wedding that might have come across as unseemly—he is exculpated by the priests’ blessings on both accounts. The ancient historians, however, are skeptical: Dio writes that the pontifices were under Octavian’s control, and Tacitus calls the consultation a “farce.” Suetonius, on the other hand, omits the scene altogether, which allows him to avoid even raising the question of the marriage’s impropriety due to its haste or Livia’s pregnancy.
Though the marriage is narrated in *Augustus* 62, the next paragraph, on the emperor’s offspring, also has bearing on the nuptials. In *Augustus* 63, Suetonius comments that Augustus had one child with Scribonia (his daughter Julia) and none with Livia, “although he greatly desired [issue]” (*ex Scribonia Iuliam, ex Livia nihil liberorum tulit, cum maxime cuperet*, 63.1). “One baby was conceived [with Livia],” the biographer continues, “but it died prematurely” (63.1). Nothing is mentioned of the child, Drusus, with whom Livia was pregnant at the time of the wedding.⁹ Suetonius certainly does not propose that Augustus fathered the boy, for he explicitly states that the emperor had no children with his wife (a point that will become significant when we compare this passage to *Claud*. 1.1 below). Nor does the biographer stress, as Dio does (48.34.3), that Octavian divorced Scribonia on the very day of Julia’s birth, the haste of which separation Dio attributes to Octavian’s passion for Livia. Instead, in Suetonius’ description, Scribonia is divorced on account of her own shrewishness, and Livia has nothing to do with the dissolution of the marriage. In general, the biographer’s version exculpates the emperor and his future wife: Augustus did not have an affair, and Livia is not a seductress who is responsible for his divorce. These details are important because

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⁹ After his birth, Drusus was sent to be raised in his father’s house (Dio 48.44.4), as was customary in Roman divorces (Treggiari 1991, 467). Perhaps this accounts, in part, for Suetonius’ silence on the boy in the *Augustus*. After Ti. Claudius Nero’s death, however, Augustus (the stepfather) became guardian to both Drusus, age 5, and Tiberius, age 9 (Dio 48.44.5).
they help to reveal that Suetonius portrays the Livia-Augustus marriage more favorably than some other authors.

The next time the reader encounters the Livia-Augustus wedding (Tib. 4.3), both the context and details of the story have changed. In the Tiberius, the union is recounted at the beginning of the Life in a passage on the deeds of the emperor’s father (Tib. 4.3), while in the Augustus it appeared a little over half way through the biography in a paragraph on marriage (Aug. 62, of 101 passages). Both of these changes can be attributed to the fact that Livia was Tiberius’ mother. Thus, information on her belongs early in the Tiberius in the genealogical section. Suetonius, as we can see, dynamically shifts the context—and, I shall argue, the facts—of the story according to his subject’s changing relationship to the featured players.

In Tiberius 4, Suetonius recounts in detail the career of Ti. Claudius Nero, who was perpetually on the losing side politically (i.e., in the anti-Caesarian and anti-Augustan camps). On the whole, Suetonius stresses Nero’s stubbornness and lack of foresight. For example, he comments that when the others had surrendered to Octavian at Perusia, Nero “alone” remained loyal to L. Antonius (solus permansit, 4.2). For the

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10 Ti. Claudius Nero, though he served as Caesar’s quaestor, backed the “tyrannicides” after the dictator’s murder (4.1). Next, he supported L. Antonius at Perusia against Octavian (4.2; cf. Tac. Ann. 5.1 on Nero at Perusia; also Aug. 15 on Augustus’ cruelty to his enemies after the battle). After losing the Perusine War, Nero fled to Sicily only to be rebuffed by Sex. Pompey, another of Octavian’s enemies (4.3). In reaction to Pompey’s cold reception, he went to Achaia and sought allegiance with Antony (4.3), who eventually became Octavian’s foe.
most part, Nero is not a sympathetic character in the *Caesares*. Rather, he comes across as a die-hard revolutionary and rabble-rouser, which qualities do not accord with the imperial leanings of the *Caesares* wherein Augustus is the “good guy.” Tiberius 4 ends with Ti. Claudius Nero surrendering his wife to Octavian (Tib. 4.3):

*Cum quo brevi reconciliata inter omnis pace Romam redit uxor et tunc Livia Drusilla et tunc gravidam et ante iam apud se filium enixam petenti Augusto concessit. Nec in molto post diem obiit, utroque liberorum superstite, Tiberio Drusoque Neronibus.*

He returned to Rome with him [M. Antonius], after a brief peace was negotiated between them all, and gave his wife, Livia Drusilla, who was then pregnant and had already borne him one son, to Augustus who was seeking her. He died not much later, survived by both of his children, Tiberius Nero and Drusus Nero.

The most noticeable change in this account is that Nero actively “gave” Livia (*concessit*) to Augustus (Suetonius often uses *prolepsis* for proper names), whereas the future emperor “took” her from Nero in his own *Life* (*matrimonio Tiberi Neronis…abduxit, Aug. 62.2; cf. Cal. 25.1: abduxisse…exemplo…Augusti*). Drusus, furthermore, makes an appearance in the *Tiberius* as one of Nero’s surviving sons, which fact will become important when we compare this account to the *Claudius*.

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11 Cf. Tac. *Ann.* 5.1: *inter omnis* refers to a peace between Sex. Pompey and the *triumviri*.

12 On Nero giving Livia to Octavian, cf. Dio (48.44.3) and Vell. (2.79.2, 2.94.1), both of whom state that Nero played an active role in the wedding by giving the bride away like a father. Suetonius, in contrast, writes nothing of Nero’s actions beyond the fact that he surrendered his wife.
The third and final time the biographer recounts the Livia-Augustus marriage is in the opening of the *Divus Claudius* (1.1). *Claudius* 1 is not a full-fledged genealogy, but rather a “mini-biography” of the emperor’s father, Drusus. Like most *Vitae*, the “mini-biography” begins with the subject’s birth. The nuptials between Livia and Augustus are relevant in this setting because Drusus was the child with whom Livia was pregnant at the time of her wedding (*Claud. 1.1*):

*Patrem Claudi Caesaris Drusum, olim Decimum mox Neronem praenomine, Livia, cum Augusto gravida nupsisset, intra mensem tertium peperit, fuitque suspicio ex vitrico per adulterii consuetudinem procreatum. Statim certe vulgatus est versus: Τοῖς εὐτυχοῦσι καὶ τρίμηνα παιδία.*

Livia, who was pregnant when she married Augustus, gave birth within the third month to the father of Claudius Caesar, Drusus, who was once called by the *praenomen* Decimus and then Nero.¹³ There was a suspicion that he was begotten by his stepfather [Augustus] through adulterous intercourse. Immediately [after his birth], indeed, a saying became current: “Three-month children are born to the lucky.”

The first thing of note in this section is that “taking” and “giving” the bride are no longer operative. Livia, rather, is the subject of the verb: *she* married Augustus (*cum Augusto...nupsisset*). The change of both verb and subject reflects the fact that Suetonius

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¹³ The picture painted by the sources (esp. *Claud. 1.1*, Dio 48.44.1, and *Tac. Ann. 5.1.2*) is of a pregnant bride who gives birth three months into her new marriage. However, as several scholars have pointed out, the dates for the wedding and Drusus’ birthday do not accord: Livia and Augustus were married on Jan. 17, 38 (Ehrenberg and Jones 1955, 46), but Drusus was born on Jan. 14, 38 (see *Claud. 11.3* on Drusus sharing a birthday with Antony). Barrett 2002, 313-4 convincingly solves the problem thusly: Livia and Octavian were betrothed in her sixth month of pregnancy, but did not marry until after Drusus’ birth. Octavian, presumably, wanted to avoid making even more of a scandal. Antony, in Barrett’s view, presented the wedding of his rival “in the most lurid terms possible,” stressing that Octavian took a pregnant bride.
writes Livia a fairly substantial role in the *Claudius*, one much larger than that of any other grandmother in the *Lives*.\textsuperscript{14} Coupled with this new attention on Livia is the fact that her former husband, Ti. Claudius Nero, is all but gone from *Claudius* 1.1, implicitly present only in Livia’s pregnancy (though even here Augustus is rumored to have played a part) and in the name of her son: *Neronem praenomine*. All in all, highlighting Livia and sidelining Nero allows Suetonius to call greater attention to Claudius’ links to Augustus and, by extension, the principate. This is a successful tactic in the *Life* of Claudius, a “surprise” emperor who was never in the direct line of succession. By connecting Claudius closely to Livia and Augustus from the beginning of the biography, Suetonius will better be able to explain how Claudius rose to power.

The most striking aspect of this account, however, is the rumored adultery between Livia and Augustus, which Suetonius had not previously mentioned in connection with their wedding. He does, in fact, raise the possibility of an affair in the *Augustus*, but not in connection with the marriage or births of children in *Augustus* 62 or 63. Rather, he reports in a paragraph on Augustus’ sex-life (69) that Antony, “besides the hurried marriage to Livia” (*super festinatas Liviae nuptias*, 69.1), charged the future emperor with taking advantage of a consul’s wife. Suetonius mitigates this denigration, however, first by labeling it belligerent Antonian slander (*M. Antonius...obiecit*, 69.1; \textsuperscript{14} On Livia, cf. *Claud.* 3.2 and 4. Claudius also divinized his grandmother (11.2; 42 CE), several years after her death under Tiberius (29 CE).
maledictis, 71.1), and second by stating that all such criticisms can “very easily be refuted” by the purity of Augustus’ life (*facillime refutavit et praesentis et posterae vitae castitate, 71.1*). Therefore, the notion that Augustus’ marriage to Livia was either rushed or stemmed from adultery is actively refuted and attributed to a single hostile source in the *Augustus*, but is left unchallenged and presented as a more widespread belief in the *Claudius*. One can conclude from this presentation that Suetonius has shielded Augustus from criticism in his own *Life*; he offers the more potentially damaging gossip only at a remove from the first emperor in the *Claudius*. Not only does this arrangement protect Augustus, but it also allows the biographer better to cast the marriage of Livia and Augustus as ideal in the *Divus Augustus*.

Having summarized and compared these disparate accounts, we can draw conclusions from them. Perhaps the oddest part of Suetonius’ three narratives is that he presents what has convincingly been identified as an antagonistic tradition (wife-snatching) in the *Life* of Augustus, an emperor whom he generally likes. In the *Vita* of

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15 Conversely, shifting the attention onto Claudius, one can also argue that the presentation of *Claud*. 1.1 has more to do with Claudius than Augustus: it is generally in Claudius’ favor to have gossip in circulation that he was a direct descendant of Augustus. Cf. *Cal*. 23.1: Caligula did not want to be considered a descendant of the lowly Agrippa, so he propagated stories that his mother, Agrippina the Elder, was the daughter of an incestuous union between Julia and Augustus.

16 Flory 1988, 343-4, 349 on the hostility and tyranny in *abduxit*. Barrett 2002, 24 likewise reads the verb as antagonistic and part of unfavorable Antonian propaganda. See also Evans-Grubbs 1989 on abduction marriages in Late Antique law: these sorts of unions are met with disapproval in the Theodosian Code, where they are portrayed as the antithesis to “proper” marriages arranged by the families of the bride and Footnote cont. next pg.
the less-esteemed Tiberius, however, and at a remove from Augustus’ own biography, he states that Livia was given to her new husband. Why not present the hostile version in the Tiberius and the favorable one in the Augustus? It is clear that Suetonius has attempted to shield Augustus from criticism by delaying any real discussion of the wider pregnancy rumors until the Claudius, so why not further this protection of the emperor by attaching him directly to the tradition that Livia was surrendered, or even that she married Augustus of her own accord (nupsisset, Claud. 1.1)?

Although the language of the Augustus (abduxit, 62.2) is generally part of a hostile tradition, having the princeps “take” his wife also means that he has control of her. For a woman as headstrong as Suetonius’ Livia, domination is a good thing (cf. Tib. 1 for a history of willful Claudian women). Indeed, the theme of Livia’s mastery continues throughout the biography of her husband. For example, when she asks for citizen’s rights for a Gaul from a tributary province, Augustus refuses her and states bluntly that

groom; rape is sometimes (though not always) involved. That abduxit has a forceful tone in the Caesares can be seen in its other uses: Aug. 69.1 (abductam, Antony’s slander of Augustus, of a noble woman seized from her husband and violated); Cal. 24.1 (abduxit, Caligula of his incestuous sister, taken from her husband Longinus); Cal. 25.1 (abduxisse, Caligula of Livia Orestilla, taken from her husband Gaius Piso); Cal. 25.2 (perductam, Caligula of Lollia Paulina, taken from her unnamed husband); Otho 3.1 (abductam, Nero of Poppaea Sabina, taken from her unnamed husband); Dom. 1.3 (abduxit) and 10.2 (abductam, both Domitian of Domitia, taken from her husband Aelius Lamia). Cf. Nero 35.1 (“so that Nero might obtain” Statilia Messalina, qua ut poteretur, he killed her husband). It is no surprise that such charges are leveled only against the vilest emperors: Caligula, Nero, and Domitian. Antony’s slander in Aug. 69 confirms that the word is pejorative in Suetonius’ usage. The warning of Waters 1964, 59, however, should also be borne in mind (on Dom. 1.3): “abduxit may mean a number of things and does not exclude the possibility of a gentlemen’s agreement.” While this is true, Waters’ is a revisionist reading at heart. To my mind, all the uses of the verb in Suetonius’ Lives have a negative and forceful air.
he will not be pressured into making such decisions: he declares that he would “more readily suffer the loss of some revenue than cheapen the honor of Roman citizenship” ([affirmans facilius se passurum fisco detrahi aliquid, quam civitatis Romanae vulgari honorem], Aug. 40.3). Livia, in consequence, comes across as the type of woman who would demean Roman citizenship through personal favoritism; the state, however, is “saved” by the fact that her husband resisted such overtures and put his wife in her place. Suetonius, in this way, confronts another tradition: that Livia wielded power behind the scenes. In response to this contention, the biographer makes clear that Augustus, even if he had a strong wife, was still in control.

In the Tiberius, however, Livia’s character is slightly different. There, she is not a dutiful wife, but a meddlesmother who interferes in her son’s principate. It is no coincidence that in the Tiberius, Livia was given to her husband and not mastered by him.¹⁷ Suetonius also saves for the Tiberius some of the more unflattering details of Augustus’ and Livia’s marriage, a tactic we saw him employ above with the pregnancy rumors. For instance, when Tiberius learns that Livia directed the people and soldiers (!) during a fire near the Temple of Vesta, he warns his mother that the sort of freedom

¹⁷ Suetonius, additionally, stresses Ti. Claudius Nero’s ultimate defeat in the Tib. by having him surrender his wife. It is significant, I would argue, that Tiberius, who was a poor emperor in Suetonius’ estimation, descended from a politically conquered father. Cf. the biographer’s stress in Nero 2-5 that the emperor was sprung from a wholly vile male line.
she was used to in her husband’s principate will not be tolerated in that of her son (50.2).\textsuperscript{18} This sort of conduct, however, is news to the Suetonian reader—the biographer did not actually report any such incidents of wifely freedom in the \textit{Augustus}.\textsuperscript{19} There Livia was, for the most part, kept in line (cf. \textit{Aug.} 73 on her spinning and weaving, conventional activities of the loyal wife). Where the reader does see her trying her hand at politics in the \textit{Augustus} (40.3, seeking citizenship for the man from Gaul), she is rebutted by her husband.

The biographer also reserves for the \textit{Tiberius} Livia’s public honors. He omits from the \textit{Augustus} the tributes she received during her husband’s principate (among them \textit{sacrosanctitas}, public statues, and legal emancipation), but he mentions many official proposals in honor of Livia during Tiberius’ reign (such as naming a month after her, \textit{Tib.} 26.2; adding the epithet “son of Livia” to Tiberius’ imperial titulature, 50.2; and granting her the designation “\textit{parens patriae},” 50.2), all of which were rejected by her

\textsuperscript{18} The sentence is worth quoting in full (\textit{Tib.} 50.2): “But he frequently warned her to abstain from affairs of importance that were unbecoming of a woman, particularly after he learned that she herself had been present at a fire near the Temple of Vesta and had urged the people and soldiers to greater efforts, as she was accustomed to doing during the reign of her husband” (\textit{sed et frequenter admonuit, maioribus nec feminae convenientibus negotiis abstineret, praecipue ut animadvertit incendio iuxta aedem Vestae et ipsam intervenisse populumque et milites, quo enixius opem ferrent, adhortatam, sicut sub marito solita esset}). For other examples of Livia’s interference in Augustus’ principate (all, notably, recorded in other \textit{Lives} besides the \textit{Aug.}), cf. \textit{Tib.} 21.2 (rumor that Augustus was overcome by his wife’s pleading to adopt her son; ultimately rejected by Suetonius); 22 (possibility that Livia wrote a letter in her husband’s name after his death); \textit{Gal.} 5.2 and \textit{Otho} 1.1 (Livia as patron to up-and-coming politicians).

\textsuperscript{19} Riemer 2000, 147.
One can only speculate as to Suetonius’ motive for passing over the real honors that Livia was given in the Augustus, but reporting failed proposals in the Tiberius. Although the “Law of Biographical Relevance” might suggest that tributes to Livia fall outside the scope of Augustus’ biography, the fact remains that they do have a place in the Tiberius. A case, therefore, could certainly be made for their pertinence to the Augustus as well. In the end, it seems that Suetonius actively suppressed the bequests in the Augustus, only to highlight them in the Tiberius. One must ask, then, why and to what effect Suetonius’ coverage of Livia is so variable.

In general, calling attention to such high (and, for the most part, unprecedented) honors to Livia indicates that she possessed power and influence, which sort of representation Suetonius resists in the Augustus. In the Tiberius, on the other hand, these tributes fit the biographer’s picture of Livia as an intrusive and power-hungry mother. Having Tiberius reject honors to his mother also makes the emperor seem mean, another theme of that Life. It is notable that in both cases, these characterizations reflect the

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20 On the honors Livia received in her husband’s lifetime, Dio 49.38.1 (sacrosanctity, freedom from tutela, public statue; 35 BCE, joint honors with Octavia) and 55.2.5 (statue, ius trium liberorum; 9 BCE, in consolation for Drusus’ death). See also Flory 1993 and Purcell 1986, especially on cults in the Greek East.

21 In addition, it highlights Tiberius’ unwillingness to cooperate with the Senate, who advanced the proposals. Cf. Calhoon 1994, 167: “Once again, an attitude that in other circumstances would have been praised as one of respectable restraint in the best republican tradition was distorted and misrepresented as evidence of Tiberius’ hatred towards his mother and his family at large” (similarly Lindsay 1995, 151 at 50.3).
manner in which Livia’s husband acquired her in each Life: in the Augustus, Livia was taken (i.e., mastered) by her husband and is, accordingly, relatively tame and apolitical; in the Tiberius, on the other hand, Livia was never conquered and is an intractable mother with great authority. Suetonius, in the end, fluctuates between Livia’s having been taken or given as it suits her changing role in each Life. To put this observation in other terms, Livia’s character is altered in response to the male biographical subjects: the esteemed Augustus has a well-disciplined and subservient wife, while the reviled Tiberius has an obstinate and prying mother.

After the question of whether the bride was stolen or surrendered, the second quirk of the Livia-Augustus union in the Caesares is that Suetonius’ picture of Livia as a mother and grandmother is largely unfavorable, yet he is adamant that Augustus treasured her as a wife. On top of the statement that Augustus loved Livia to the end without rival (Aug. 62.2), the biographer also reports that the emperor died kissing his wife and telling her to “live mindful of their marriage” (repente in osculis Liviae et in hac voce defecit: Livia, nostri coniugii memor vive, ac vale!, 99.1). It is striking that Augustus’ final words have to do not with the future of the empire or his successor, but with his spouse.22 On the whole, this romantic and touching scene (which, it should be noted, is

22 Though, to be fair, Augustus had already held a lengthy private consultation with Tiberius (Aug. 98), so presumably all the pressing business of state had been done.
a stock representation of marital happiness)\textsuperscript{23} is unusual for the Caesares, in which declarations of love are infrequent.\textsuperscript{24} It is also atypical of other accounts of Augustus’ death. Velleius, for example, writes that the emperor passed away in Tiberius’ company (2.123.2), while Tacitus (Ann. 1.5) and Dio (56.30.1-2) suggest that Livia poisoned her husband. In the Augustus, in contrast, no mention is made of poison, and the emperor dies in the company of his beloved wife. It is slightly jarring, however, that a woman so vile (at least as she appears in the Tiberius and Claudius) was so deeply loved by such a “good” emperor.\textsuperscript{25} To what, then, does Suetonius ascribe Augustus’ love of Livia?

\textsuperscript{23} Scenes of a spouse dying while kissing or in the embrace of his/her partner are stock illustrations of marital concord, especially in consolation literature (see Hawley 2007, 14 n. 55; Treggiari 1991, 484-5; and Wardle 2007, 456-7, all with references to the wider trope including the place of Aug. 99 within it). For an epigraphic example, see the epitaph recorded in CIL. 6.6593, which sort of monuments are full of idealistic language and concepts: “While alive I pleased my husband as his first and dearest wife. On his mouth I bestowed my final cold kiss. He, crying, closed my dying eyes. After death a woman finds sufficient distinction in this proud claim.” On a related note, Livia was also spoken of as a univira by poets, although she had been married twice (Hor. Carm. 3.14.5; Ov. Trist. 2.161-4). This, too, is a marital ideal attached to the couple. Along similar lines, Wardle 2007 argues that Augustus’ death scene in Aug. 99 is to be read as the paradigmatic passing of a good emperor: the princeps dies with his mind at ease, in loving company, showing concern for others, and certain that he has led a good life, all of which are wider ideals. Note also the observation of Wood 2000, 76 that Augustus’ dying words (as recorded by Suetonius) make a neat hexameter, a suspicious quality in the impromptu speech of a dying man. She proposes that the words were “concocted after the fact for the benefit of the living”—i.e., that they intentionally play into notions of the perfect marriage.

\textsuperscript{24} See Bradley 1985a, 90 esp. n. 35 on the rarity of expressions of love in elite Roman marriages in general, and the corresponding infrequency of such claims in the Caes. Bradley helpfully collects the references to tender feelings in Suetonius’ biographies.

\textsuperscript{25} See Claud. 3.2 on Livia’s cruel slander of her grandson Claudius. Suetonius pits Livia, Antonia, and Livilla (all of whom thought ill of Claudius; Claud. 3) against Augustus, Tiberius, and Caligula, all of whom advanced him (Claud. 4-7). The biographer’s point is that the women did not have the focus that the men brought to the question.
In some regard, the question of Augustus’ affection for his wife also goes back to the manner by which he acquired her. In myth, drama, and poetry, relationships initiated by men usually fare better than those commenced by women.26 In the Aeneid, for example, Dido’s play to get Aeneas to marry her and stay in Carthage ends in disaster. Phaedra and Medea, likewise, meet bitter ends when they pursue Hippolytus and Jason, respectively. The marriage of Agrippina and Claudius is another product of female sexual aggression, and it too was doomed (below, Section 2). The Sabine women, in contrast, come to favor their captors, and Zeus, lastly, sought Europa, to whom he gave famous children and a throne in Crete.27 Hence, successful matches with favorable outcomes tend to have been initiated by men in the Greco-Roman mind, just as Augustus’ marriage was with Livia in his Vita.

26 There is, of course, a line between a male-initiated relationship and a sex act forced on an unwilling partner. For example, Appius Claudius’ seizure of Verginia could be called hostile (Livy 3.44-59), as could the rape of Lucretia (Livy 1.57-60). Indeed, both of these instances are portrayed as aggressive acts by Livy. The historiographical and rhetorical tyrant is also frequently accused of raping women and children (Doblhofer 1994, 28-40 and Gammie 1986). There are other male-initiated affairs, however, such as the ones cited in this paragraph, which ancient authors portray as successful relationships. See also Hawley 2007, 8-10 on the active male lover and passive female object in poetry. As Hawley shows, many poems idealize the resistance or reluctance of the woman—the idea is that the object of the lover’s desire can be captured and won over by his kisses. Women, in contrast, tend to meet with disaster when they pursue men.

27 See Lefkowitz 1993, who argues that “rape” is not always a fitting translation for the abduction and seduction one often sees in Greek myth. She suggests that the hostility implied in the English word “rape” is not the intended focus of such tales, which often end favorably for the victim (it is worth noting that Lefkowitz is upfront on the fact that the women’s feelings are not of concern to the authors of these stories: 25). Though Lefkowitz’s aim is different than mine, she still shows that in Greek mythology the outcome is generally favorable when male gods seek women. See 24-5 on Europa, which Lefkowitz reads as an ultimately positive story because of its relatively good result.
It is especially notable that in the *Augustus*, Suetonius does not ascribe the emperor’s love for Livia to sexual attraction, even when discussing the origins of their relationship. Tacitus, in contrast, states that Octavian snatched his bride because he was desirous of her beauty (*exim Caesar cupidine formae aufert marito*, 5.1.2). Dio’s *History* also has erotic overtones. According to his account, the *triumviri* divorced Scribonia because he was “already in love with Livia” (*ἤδη γάρ καὶ τῆς Λιουίας έρᾶν ἡρεχτο*, 48.34.3). Stressing the beauty of the victim or the passion aroused by her is, in fact, typical of wife-snatching scenes, so it is striking that this element is lacking from Suetonius’ *Augustus*.

In contrast to Tacitus and Dio, Suetonius makes no mention of either Livia’s attractiveness or a sexual magnetism between the spouses. Their love, rather, is portrayed as higher, purer, and more lasting. Hints of a sexual relationship appear in *Claudius* 1.1 (i.e., at a distance from Augustus’ *Life*), but even there the biographer asserts neither that Augustus sought Livia because of her comeliness, nor that their affair stemmed from the emperor’s lustfulness, which motives are readily attached to the wife-

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29 Wardle 2007, 458 notes that on his deathbed Suetonius’ Augustus tells Livia to be mindful of their marriage—not of him or their love, but of the institution. Cf. Ov. *Her.* 20.8 where Acontius tells Cydippe that he loves her “like a promised spouse, not like a lover” (*debitus ut coniunx, non ut adulter amo*).
snatching Caligula and Domitian.\textsuperscript{30} Thus, even when entertaining an intimate, adulterous side to Augustus’ and Livia’s relationship, Suetonius does not paint their coupling as sexually driven as he does with the “bad” principes—Suetonius’ Augustus (and, it should be added, his Livia) is still ultimately “good,” even while walking the line between appropriate and inappropriate behavior.

Just as the biographer does not cite passion as the spark behind the relationship, neither do politics come into play as they do in regard to some other betrothals and marriages in the Lives.\textsuperscript{31} The apolitical nature of the Livia-Augustus union is especially obvious when read against the emperor’s earlier wedding to Antony’s stepdaughter Claudia, which is narrated in the same paragraph (Aug. 62.1): according to Suetonius, the armies of Antony and Octavian requested that the two men be joined by a matrimonial tie, so Octavian obliged by taking Claudia as his wife. Their marriage is

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\textsuperscript{30} Caligula is said to have abducted the married Lolliia Paulina because he had heard of her grandmother’s beauty (25.2). See Cal. 24 and 36 on his general sexual depravity. Domitian’s seizure of Domitia is set against his wider habit of stealing other men’s wives (\textit{contractatis multorum uxoris}, \textit{Domitiam Longinam Aelio Lamiac nuptam etiam in matrimonium abduxit}, 1.3), which implies lust. Later in the Life, the emperor’s sexual appetite is stressed (\textit{libidinis nimiae}, Dom. 22). See Vinson 1989, 438: “[Domitia] is…represented as the victim, not agent, of imperial \textit{libido} when she is lumped together [in Suet. Dom. 1.3] with the nameless hoard of respectable matrons debauched by Domitian after his father’s accession.”

\textsuperscript{31} On political marriages and engagements, see e.g., \textit{Iul.} 21 (Caesar betrothed Julia to Pompey, breaking her engagement to Servilius Caepio even though Caepio had helped Caesar against Bibulus); \textit{Iul.} 27 (to retain the alliance with Pompey after Julia’s death, Caesar offered him his great-niece Octavia and proposed to marry Pompey’s own daughter); \textit{Tib.} 7.2 (Tiberius was “forced” to divorce his congenial wife Vipsania and enter into a hasty marriage with Augustus’ daughter Julia); \textit{Otho} 1.3 (Otho’s father arranged an engagement between his daughter “of scarcely marriageable age” and Germanicus; \textit{Otho} 1, in general, talks about the Othones moving up the imperial ladder).
also said to have ended for political reasons when Octavian fell out with Claudia’s
mother Fulvia during the Perusine War (*cum Fulvia socru orta dimisit*, 62.1).\(^{32}\)

With Livia, however, the biographer makes no mention of affairs of state, a fact
that is especially arresting next to the tendency of modern historians to stress the
political expediency of the match above all, usually with only a nod towards affection.\(^{33}\) Perhaps Suetonius hesitates to ascribe political motives to the marriage because they
would cheapen the union, which survived virtually all the vicissitudes of Augustus’
career—in the *Caesares*, politically driven matches are usually portrayed as short-lived
and unhappy.\(^{34}\) Suggesting that Augustus got a “leg up” politically from his wife also
strips grandeur from the emperor and does not correspond to Suetonius’ generally
approving presentation of this leader.

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\(^{32}\) Octavian’s youthful engagement to the daughter of Caesar’s supporter, P. Servilius Isauricus, appears in
the same paragraph as well, and is likewise politically driven (62.1).

\(^{33}\) The thrust of these arguments is that the aristocratic Livia gave the upstart, revolutionary young Octavian
some weight with the old nobility. Ti. Claudius Nero is typically said to have been willing to ingratiate
himself to Octavian, who was rising fast. E.g., Syme 1939, 229; Levick 1999, 14-5; Barrett 2002, 21-7; Carter
2003, 182-3 at 62.2.

\(^{34}\) A number of engagements, for example, are said to have lapsed over political changes, usually the sudden
opportunity to ally with someone else who was more useful at the time (e.g., *Iul. 1.1, Iul. 21, Iul. 27, Aug.
62.1, Cal. 12.2, Claud. 26.1, Otho 8.1*). Thus, Suetonius portrays political engagements as fleeting and
changeable arrangements. The marriages of Tiberius and Julia (*Tib. 7*) and Nero and Octavia (*Nero 35*), in
addition, were also political from the start and Suetonius depicts them both as miserable and relatively brief.
I suggest that the biographer presents Livia and Augustus as rising above the political fray.
In the Tiberius, in contrast, the biographer lists the Livia-Augustus marriage as the final step on Nero’s disastrous political path—surrendering his wife is told in the same breath as being Caesar’s quaestor and forming an alliance with Antony (Tib. 4). In the Life of her son, however, Livia plays a more political role than she did in that of her husband. Thus, it suits Livia’s portrayal in Vita Tiberii that her marriage was political from the start.

So if the emperor’s marital happiness had neither sexual nor political roots in the Augustus, to what does the biographer assign the princeps’ love? It is certainly not to Livia’s child-bearing abilities, which were commonly associated with wifely duty and marital happiness in the ancient world. The ideal of the wife becoming a mother can also be seen in the Caesares as well. Suetonius, for instance, credits Tiberius’ happiness with Vipsania equally to her congeniality, and to the fact that she bore her husband children, which concepts are related side-by-side as part of the same package (Tib. 7.2). Tiberius’ initially affectionate marriage to Julia, on the other hand, is said to have fallen

35 Of note is the Laudatio Turiae (CIL 6.1527= ILS 8393) in which the husband reports that his wife offered him a divorce because she failed to live up to the wifely ideal by producing children (col. 2, ll. 25-39). In the Caes., see Iul. 52.3 on the expectation that imperial wives should bear children: Caesar ordered a bill to be drawn up saying that he, as dictator, could marry anyone he wished, and as many wives as he wished, for the purpose of begetting children. Nero also attempts to divorce Octavia on the charge of barrenness (Nero 35.2). Although Suetonius suggests that this claim was malicious and false, barrenness is nevertheless presented as valid grounds on which the emperor could make a complaint. As I suggested above, Suetonius’ tendency to speak of wives in connection with the children they bore also implies that giving birth was the goal of an imperial marriage.
apart after the death of their infant, which broke the “bond” (pignore, Tib. 7.3) between the spouses.36 Caligula, in a more extreme case, did not make Caesonia his wife until after she had given birth, even though, as the biographer notes, the princeps deeply loved her (et ardentius et constantius amavit...uxorio nomine [non prius] dignatus est quam enixam, Cal. 25.3).37 It is interesting that in the Caligula Suetonius speaks of imperial wifehood as a title or designation that the emperor could bestow upon a woman—in this case, only a fertile one (uxorio nomine...dignatus est); it has nothing to do with love.38 Livia, however, produced no viable children for Augustus. Thus, following the logic of the Tiberius, they had no “bond,” and following that of the Caligula, Livia failed in the most important duty of an imperial wife.

36 The passage is worth citing in full (Tib. 7.3): “He lived with Julia at first in harmony and mutual love, but he soon grew so distant and somewhat cold that he even ceased to live with her thereafter once the bond of their common offspring was broken, the child who was born at Aquilia and died in infancy” (cum Iulia primo concorditer et amore mutuo vixit, max dissedit et aliquanto gravius, ut etiam perpetuo secubaret, intercepto communis fili pignore, qui Aquileiae natus infans exstinctus est). Secubo can either mean “to sleep apart” (OLD, s.v. (a): especially from a lover) or generally “to live alone or in solitude” (Lewis & Short, s.v., 2). It is unclear if Suetonius means that Tiberius thereafter kept a separate residence, or merely stopped having sex with his wife. Either way, they do not have an intimate relationship.

37 The non prius is supplied by Roth in his Teubner edition (1898). I keep the emendation, which makes good sense.

38 That is to say, Caligula’s love for Caesonia was not sufficient reason to make her a wife—she had to have children first. Caesonia had three children by other marriages before she wed the emperor (Cal. 25.3). The childless Caligula, it seems, was taking no chances—he only allied himself with a woman of proven fertility (Hurley 1993, 104-5 at 25.3). For a similar idea that imperial wifehood was an honorary designation, cf. Nero’s statement that Octavia ought to have been happy with the “insignia of wifehood” (uxoria ornamenta, Nero 35.1). It is interesting to note that Tacitus talks of wifely power (potentia uxoria, Ann. 12.3.1), while Suetonius writes of a more abstract place of visibility and importance for the wife, but no real authority.
Livia, however, had tried to give her husband children. Suetonius records her miscarriage (Aug. 63), which is “proof” that both spouses attempted to fulfill the aim of having children, even though they were ultimately unsuccessful. Despite the fact that Augustus, according to the biographer, was “greatly desirous” of having children with his wife (Aug. 63.1), it is notable that the princeps is still said to have loved Livia without them. Augustus’ warm feelings suggest that giving birth was an important and expected duty of the imperial wife, but that infertility could be tolerated so long as the woman had earnestly tried to produce children, and provided that other aspects of the relationship made it worth saving.39

Though Augustus and Livia lacked the “bond of a common child” (communis fili pignore, Tib. 7.3), theirs was still a happy marriage (at least in Suetonius’ presentation) primarily because it was an affable relationship.40 The biographer, who talks about the

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39 Again, the Laudatio Turiae (n. 35 above) provides a parallel: the husband in the inscription angrily rejects his wife’s offer to divorce him because of her infertility. Here, too, the idea is that the marriage was good enough to maintain on other grounds, even if no children would come of it. Cf. Tac. Ann. 5.1, who writes that although Livia and Augustus had no children of their own, she was joined to the blood of her husband (sanguini Augusti…adnexe) through the marriage of Agrippina the Elder and Germanicus, from which match they shared common great-grandchildren (communis pronepotes habuit; cf. communis fili pignore, Tib. 7.3). Thus, the notion of children being a “bond” between spouses is part of Tacitus’ presentation as well. He, however, makes a greater effort than Suetonius does to connect Livia and Augustus directly via their respective offspring.

40 See Bradley 1985a, 83 on the ideal marriage in the Caesares, to which, he concludes, Augustus comes closest. Bradley argues that a ‘good’ marriage in Suetonius’ eyes is one of “enduring union…to a suitable woman.” My findings are generally in line with Bradley’s: it is not Livia’s sexual attractiveness, her political ties, or her ability to have children that endear her to her husband, but the cordiality of their partnership. On the notion that enduring unions are praised in the Lives, see n. 34 above for my suggestion that the Livia-
rapport between spouses elsewhere in the *Lives* (with the very repetition of the topic implying that it is a meaningful one), portrays the relationship between Livia and Augustus as having been particularly affectionate. The stock that he places in marital harmony can be seen most clearly by comparing Livia’s and Augustus’ marriage to the emperor’s failed union with Scribonia. Although modern historians see political motives behind the divorce, Suetonius chalks up the separation to Scribonia’s unreasonableness (*morum perversitatem eius*, 62.2). That the biographer ignores politics altogether, especially when he had readily assigned Octavian’s split from Claudia to such factors (62.1), suggests that he found incompatibility to be sufficient grounds for Augustus marriage is presented as more long-term and stable than fleeting and changeable political matches.

In addition to the statements of love cited above, cf. *Aug.* 84.2 on Augustus caring enough about their conversations to record them; also *Claud*. 4, a long series of letters on family affairs addressed tenderly to *mea Livia*. In both of these passages, the two spouses appear to value each other’s opinions and to have an agreeable relationship. On the ideal of *concordia* between spouses see e.g., *Plut. Mor.* 139D (11), 139 E-F (13), 143E (39); *Stat. Silv.* 5.1.44; *Pliny Ep.* 4.19 and *Pan.* 83, all of whom are rough contemporaries of Suetonius. The congeniality between Livia and Augustus is also part of Tacitus’ account. However, Tacitus, with his typical acidity, remarks that Livia was “affable beyond that which was approved by women of antiquity” (*Ann.* 5.1.3). On rapport between spouses (i.e., tender feelings not attributed to lust) in the *Caes.*, e.g., *Tib.* 7.2 (*bene convenientem*); *Tib.* 7.3 (*concorditer et amore mutuo vixit*); *Cal.* 25.3 (*ardentissimam et constantissimam amavit*, though an erotic element is present); *Nero* 35.3 (*dilexit unice*); *Gal.* 5.1 (could not be tempted to any other match after his wife’s death, not even with Agrippina); *Otho* 3 (*adeo dilexit*); *Tit.* 7.1 (*insignem...amorem*); *Dom.* 3.1 (after divorcing Domitia, Domitian could not bear the separation so he recalled her; this, perhaps, attests affection, but it also has lustful undercurrents). On animosity between partners: *Aug.* 62.1; *Tib.* 10.1; *Tib.* 50.1; and *Nero* 35.1.

Scribonia was the sister of L. Scribonius Libo, Sex. Pompey’s father-in-law. Octavian most likely married her in hopes of forging an alliance with Sex. Pompey after defeating Fulvia and L. Antonius at Perusia. Octavian, however, fell out with Pompey in 39, which was, not incidentally, the same year in which he divorced Scribonia (Carter 2003, 182 at 62.2).
ending a marriage—in the case of the carping Scribonia, no further explanation is needed. To flip the equation around, congeniality, like that between Livia and Augustus, is part of the biographer’s recipe for an enduring relationship. It is important to keep in mind that Suetonius has suppressed nearly all of Livia’s political activities in the *Augustus*, saving her interference for the *Tiberius*. Thus, Augustus’ love for Livia and their marital *concordia* hinges on the fact that she conforms to the image of the ideal, loyal, subservient wife in his *Life*. 43

Another road into understanding the success of the Livia-Augustus relationship is to read it against the marriages of Claudius. In his *Vita*, Claudius is repeatedly said to have been dominated by his wives and freedmen (*Claud*. 25.5, 29.1; cf. *Vit*. 2.5). It is interesting that spouses are almost always lumped together with *liberti* in this context, a grouping which implies that wives and freedmen are just the sort of subordinates who ought to have been under the emperor’s control. Augustus, by way of comparison, took consultation with Livia (*Aug*. 40.3, 84.2, *Claud*. 4), but he was never submissive to her in the way that Claudius is said to have been to his wives. Thus, Suetonius presents the

43 Cf. Plut. *Mor*. 142E (33): women win honor and respect by submitting to their husbands; but when women strive to get the upper hand, they become a source of reproach to both themselves and their husbands. Plutarch adds that a man should control his wife with kindness and should not treat her like a slave, which will make the wife submit all the more lovingly. This advice for a happy marriage resonates with the sort of relationship Suetonius attributes to Augustus and Livia. Shelton’s (1990) study of the ideal wife in the letters of Pliny also sheds light on the *Caes.*: Pliny praises a wife above all for surrendering to her husband’s interests, concerns, and preferences. Cf. Pliny *Pan*. 83.7-8, in which Plotina is praised for following Trajan’s lead and allowing herself to be molded by him.
male-dominated partnership as a prosperous marriage (pleasing to the husband, that is), while a husband’s compliance to his wife makes for a miserable match (cf. *Claud.* 26.2 and 43 on Claudius’ unhappiness). Political interference on the part of the wife also contributes to Claudius’ misery, while Livia’s lack of involvement is central to her depiction as the model wife in the *Augustus*.

**3.2 The “Bad” Wife Who Controls Her Husband: Agrippina the Younger**

I argued above in Section 1 that, broadly speaking, “good” relationships are initiated by men while “bad” ones are prompted by sexually aggressive women. This is never clearer in the *Caesares* than in Claudius’ wedding to Agrippina, which came about through female seduction. This marriage, however, comes with a twist: not only did Agrippina seduce her future husband, but her prey was her uncle as well. Thus, Agrippina is doubly tainted—and the marriage doubly doomed—both for her sexual forwardness and for the union’s incestuous nature.

As with Livia above, we again start with Agrippina’s wedding. In the *Caesares* in general, the means by which an emperor acquires his wife offers insight into Suetonius’ perception of the power-structure behind the relationship. The actions of the bride, to put it another way, foreshadow what sort of wife she will become. First, however, it will be helpful to locate the Agrippina-Claudius marriage within the matrimonial tradition.
It is essential to understand the legal aspect of the marriage because Suetonius uses the union’s novelty as ammunition against the couple.

Although Romans regularly practiced cousin marriages, they considered it taboo to marry too closely within the family.\textsuperscript{44} The marriage to a cousin was acceptable to the Roman mind because there was a relative diversity of parentage in those situations.\textsuperscript{45} Marriage between brothers and sisters, on the other hand, crossed the line and was forbidden (see Gaius \textit{Inst.} 1.58-63 on marriage law; marriage between ascendants and descendants is labeled \textit{nefarias et incestas} and that between collaterals \textit{prohibitae}). This is where a union with a niece is a grey area: one’s niece is the offspring of one’s sibling.

In order to marry Agrippina, Suetonius reports that Claudius compelled some senators (left unnamed) to propose a law that uncles could marry the daughters of their brothers (\textit{Claud.} 26.3); the daughters of sisters were excluded, however, because “the womb seemed more closely shared” (see Gaius \textit{Inst.} 1.62, who confirms the introduction of the law by Claudius and the ban against marriages to a sister’s daughter).\textsuperscript{46} The fact

\textsuperscript{44} In general, see Treggiari 1991, 37-9 (“Rules of Kindred and Affinity”) for the legal restrictions on endogamous marriages.

\textsuperscript{45} Though marriage between cousins was originally outlawed, over time unions between both first and second cousins became permissible; by the first century CE, marriage between cousins was certainly no longer objectionable. In fact, Augustus promoted cousin marriages within his own family for “imperial” purposes (Treggiari 1991, 38).

\textsuperscript{46} Hurley 1993, 187 at. 26.3 for the quote. See also Treggiari 1991, 38: even after Claudius’ reform, men could not marry the daughters, granddaughters, and great granddaughters of their sisters.
that such pains were taken to ensure the legality of Claudius’ marriage to Agrippina is evidence that uncle-niece marriages were outside the Roman norm.

Although Claudius changed the law about uncle-niece marriages, Suetonius is still uncomfortable with the practice. He remarks that before Claudius, such weddings were considered incestuous (coniugiorum...quae ad id tempus incesta habebantur, 26.3). With this language, Suetonius raises and, more importantly, promotes a particular interpretation of the marriage (incesta). Later, he openly states that the nuptials were contra fas (39.2), at which interpretation he had only hinted in Claudius 26.3.47 In this second context, Suetonius reports that Claudius, when he was planning his unlawful (contra fas) wedding with Agrippina, used to declare in his speeches that she was “his daughter and nursling, born and brought up in his own lap” (non cessavit omni oratione filiam et alumnam et in gremio suo natam atque educatam praedicare, 39.2). The emperor’s words, which are almost certainly not authentic (or, at the very least, are highly

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47 Suetonius’ disapproval of uncle-niece relationships comes clear again in Dom. 22, where such a coupling is once more presented in a negative light. See Vinson 1989, 453 on the fact that both Pliny and Suetonius criticize Domitian for his relationship with Julia, though it was no longer a crime for an uncle to be involved with his niece after Claudius’ legal reform. Although I agree that the Domitian-Julia relationship is frowned upon by both authors, Vinson, in my opinion, does not put enough stress on the fact that Domitian and Julia were never married—their affair was adulterous because Domitian was wed to Domitia. Suetonius also explains that the relationship began when Julia was still married to another man. Thus, there are other grounds on which the Roman authors disapprove of Domitian’s and Julia’s actions. Adultery was never legal for a woman.
misconstrued), are used by the biographer to make his subject look especially bad. In particular, Suetonius pushes the relationship even farther down the path of transgression by equating a niece with a daughter. The effect of his language is to taint Claudius (and, by extension, Agrippina) by attaching the emperor to an even more heinous form of incest, one that Claudius never actually committed.

The biographer continues that the princeps encouraged other people to imitate him by marrying their nieces, but in general “no men were found who would follow [Claudius’] example” (non repertis qui sequerentur exemplum, 26.3). The subtext to this statement is that no one followed suit because the practice was wrong. The only people to mimic Claudius, Suetonius goes on to write, were “a certain freedman and a chief centurion, whose marriage Claudius himself attended with Agrippina” (excepto libertino quodam et altero primipilari cuius nuptiarum officium et ipse cum Agrippina celebravit, 26.3; cuius is singular and applies only to the primipilari). It is notable that Suetonius leaves these two men anonymous. Tacitus, in comparison, lists one man by name, Alledius Severus, whom he describes as an eques Romanus (12.7.2; according to Tacitus, only one person followed Claudius’ example, not two). Because chief centurions were given

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48 Hurley 2001, 223 at 39.2. The topical heading of the paragraph is Claudius’ oblivionem et inconsiderantiam (39.1). Thus, the message of the anecdote is that the emperor was blind to the indecency of his own marriage, which he distastefully flaunted in his orations.

49 Suetonius seems to have a point. Treggiari 1991, 38 notes that uncle-niece marriages never became common. Indeed, she found no other examples of such unions.
equestrian status upon discharge, this man is usually taken to be the same as Suetonius’ 
*primipilaris*.\(^50\) Thus, Tacitus and Suetonius most likely write about the same man, but the 
historian names him where the biographer leaves him nameless.

By taking attention away from individual identities, Suetonius is better able to 
highlight the men’s social rank. The gist of his presentation is that no one of status 
wanted to marry his niece. It is especially conspicuous that Suetonius opts for the 
military identification (*primipilari*) over the equestrian one favored by Tacitus, 
presumably because the former lacks the luster of the latter—the fact that only a 
freedman (*libertino*) and soldier (*primipilari*) would partake of such an allowance makes 
the marriage of Claudius and Agrippina seem all the more peripheral and unacceptable. 
It is also arresting that the emperor and empress attended the centurion’s marriage in 
person, a detail which again draws attention to the irregularity of such weddings.\(^51\)

Now that it is clear that Suetonius advances a particular interpretation of the 
relationship between Agrippina and Claudius (i.e., it was incestuous and *contra fas*), one 
that works to the detriment of the couple, let us look more closely at how the marriage 
came about. In Suetonius’ presentation, the transgressive marriage was initiated when

\(^50\) Hurley 2001, 187 on 26.3.

\(^51\) Wallace-Hadrill 2004, 104, also stressing the relatively humble status of the two men.
the determined Agrippina seduced the lustful and uxorious Claudius. It will be helpful to quote the few sentences on the courtship and marriage in full (Claud. 26.2-3):

[26.2] Quam cum comperisset super cetera flagitia atque dedecora C. Silio etiam nupsisse dote inter auspices consignata, supplicio adfecit confirmavitque pro contione apud praetorianos, quatenus sibi matrimonia male cederent, permansurum se in caelibatu, ac nisi permansisset, non recusaturum confodi manibus ipsorum. [26.3] Nec durare valuit quin de conditionibus continuo tractaret, etiam de Paetinae, quam olim exegerat, deque Lolliae Paulinae, quae C. Caesari nupta fuerat. Verum inlecebris Agrippinae, Germanici fratris sui filiae, per ius osculi et blanditiorum occasiones pellectus in amorem, subornavit proximo senatu qui censerent, cogendum se ad ducendum eam uxorem, quasi rei p. maxime interesset, dandumque ceteris veniam talium coniugiorum, quae ad id tempus incesta habebantur. Ac vix uno interposito die conficit nuptias.

[26.2] But when he learned that in addition to other shameful and disgraceful deeds [Messalina] had even married Gaius Silius, and that a marriage contract had been signed in the presence of augurs, he put her to death and declared before an assembly of the Praetorians that seeing that his marriages had turned out badly for him, he would remain unmarried, and if he did not keep his word, he would not refuse to be killed by their hands. [26.3] He was not strong enough to endure and indeed he started thinking about another match right away, even with Paetina, whom he had earlier driven off, and with Lollia Paulina, who had been the wife of Gaius Caesar. But having been coaxed into love by the enticements of Agrippina, the daughter of his own brother Germanicus, through their [familiar] right of kissing and the opportunities for endearments, at the next meeting of the Senate he incited some senators to propose that he be compelled to take her as his wife on the ground that it was in the greatest interest of the res publica, and also that this right be given to others to contract similar marriages, which up to that time were considered incestuous. And so he married her after scarcely a single day.

The context for these remarks is particularly important to bear in mind. Suetonius presents the Agrippina-Claudius marriage in a rubric on the emperor’s betrothals and marriages (Claud. 26). Agrippina comes at the end of a long list of
women: she was the fourth spouse of Claudius, who had been engaged two more times besides. Accordingly, there are a total of six women in Claudius 26. Such an arrangement emphasizes Claudius’ uxoriousness, which trait, in turn, lends credence to the idea that he was easily driven to marriage with Agrippina. It also means that the uncle-niece union is put in the context of a whole string of matrimonial failures, thus presaging Claudius’ later regret for marrying Agrippina (Claud. 43, which also contains a general lament of his fate of having had bad wives; cf. 26.2). The oath to the praetorians (esp. quatenus sibi matrimonia male cederent and confodi, 26.2), furthermore, alludes to the emperor’s ultimate demise at Agrippina’s hand (44). Thus, in his description of the wedding Suetonius foreshadows the fact that this marriage, too, will be unsuccessful, but this time dangerously so.

On the whole, Claudius 26 is remarkably sexualized. Suetonius types the emperor as weak and submissive to women and Agrippina as ambitious and sexually forward, the perfect foil to her acquiescent and licentious uncle. Although Claudius incites the senators to claim that his marriage to his niece was for the benefit of the state (quasi rei p. maxime interesset, 26.3), Suetonius undermines this assertion. He shows instead that the princeps really chose to wed Agrippina because she had used the privilege of their private meetings to entice her uncle (inlecebris…per ius osculi et blanditiarum occasiones pelluctus in amorem, 26.3; note that the emperor is the subject of the perfect passive participle pelluctus, which voice stresses his subservience). Other
respectable unmarried women, in contrast to Agrippina, would not have been alone with their suitor, and certainly would not have kissed him freely. A niece, on the other hand, had the right (per ius) to visit and show affection towards her uncle, a familiarity which, according to Suetonius, Agrippina abused. In this presentation, the political benefit of Agrippina’s allurements is remote.

Only after a description of their transgressions does the story about the sham in the Senate follow. By showing that Claudius and Agrippina had already engaged in an inappropriate courtship before the senators’ proposal, Suetonius undercuts the political aspect of the match. The fact that Claudius can hardly endure a day’s postponement to the wedding after the Senate meeting (vix uno interposito die, 26.3) also draws attention to his lust. His impatience, furthermore, illustrates the degree to which Claudius was under the control of Agrippina, who will later compel her husband to advance her son (see Chapter 2, Section 2).

One can see the emphasis on sexual persuasion in Suetonius’ Claudius more clearly when reading it against the Annals. Unlike Suetonius, Tacitus goes into more detail on the bride selection process, a procedure that he dubs a “contest among the freedmen” (apud libertos certamine, 12.1.1).52 Tacitus lays out three candidates—Lollia

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52 Certamine may also be rendered “conflict” (the word used by Jackson in his 1963 Loeb translation) but I favor Woodman 2004, 215 on 12.1.1 who reads “competition.” Woodman rightly picks up on the Tacitean idea of one-upmanship among the freedmen, who were all pitching their contenders for their own ends. See Footnote cont. next pg.
Paulina, Agrippina, and Aelia Paetina, the same women mentioned in *Claudius* 26.3—and explains that each of Claudius' three most trusted freedmen favored a different woman. The emperor in the *Annals* appears to have little say in this proceeding, especially next to Suetonius' Claudius who seems to have selected Agrippina on his own, albeit with the help of her enticements.

Of the three freedmen, it was Pallas, Tacitus reports, who backed Agrippina (12.2). Pallas' main reason for supporting her is said to have been Agrippina's position as the mother of Germanicus' grandson, the unnamed Nero. This boy, the *libertus* proclaims, is "thoroughly worthy of an imperial fate" (*dignum prorsus imperatoria fortuna*, *Ann. 12.2.3*), an ironic statement considering that Tacitus' Nero is an abysmal leader. As the freedman sees it, Claudius has the political opportunity to exploit the legacy of his more popular older brother on two fronts, first by allying himself with Germanicus' daughter and second by adopting and elevating Germanicus' grandson. Claudius should also take comfort in the fact that Agrippina was clearly fertile, Pallas adjoins.

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53 Suetonius tells us that Claudius called on the memory of Germanicus whenever he could (*per omnem occasionem, Claud. 11.2*). Shortly after he became emperor, for example, he set up a drama contest in Naples in his brother's name (11.2). Pallas does not mention that Nero's father, Cn. Domitius Ahenobarbus, was the great-nephew of Augustus (Domitius' mother was Antonia Maior, the daughter of Augustus' sister Octavia). Instead, he plays up the Germanicus connection. Watson 1995, 192-4 observes that Pallas does not fully plumb the idea that Agrippina had her own son: really, the presence of her son, when Claudius already had a son of his own, means that the perfect "wicked stepmother" scenario was in the works. It is notable that the other women are judged on how they would be as stepmothers, but Agrippina is not.
Because her fecundity was demonstrated, Pallas ends by arguing that such a noble lady should not convey the distinction of the Caesars to some other house (ne femina expertae fecunditatis…claritudinem Caesarum aliam in domum ferret, 12.1), but should instead keep it within the Julio-Claudian domain where she could have more Julio-Claudian offspring.

Tacitus’ focus on political advantages is in sharp contrast to Suetonius’ stress on sexual indecency. Suetonius, for example, does not itemize the pros and cons of each woman as does Tacitus. The other bridal candidates, in fact, are mentioned only in passing in the Caesares, and none is discussed in terms of what she could offer the imperial institution, as are the women in the Annals. The freedmen, furthermore, are missing from Claudius 26, despite the fact that Suetonius had just stated at the end of the previous paragraph that the emperor was under their control (Claud. 25.5; cf. 28 and 29.1 for the same notion). All in all, the absence of the freedmen from Claudius 26 has two major consequences. First, it gives the impression of the princeps working alone and seeking a spouse to quench his personal desires.54 Second, the nonappearance of the liberti also makes Agrippina seem to be playing for her uncle’s hand by her own design instead of at the insistence of an imperial advisor. The summary effect of Suetonius’ portrayal is to accentuate both Claudius’ lustfulness and Agrippina’s aggression.

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54 Hurley 2001, 184 at 26.3 argues that Tacitus’ version of the Agrippina-Claudius match is probably more realistic than Suetonius’ because the emperor almost certainly sought advice on his marriage, which was an important affair of state.
Agrippina’s forthrightness is even further highlighted by the fact that Suetonius presents Paetina and Paulina as choices that Claudius himself had in mind (de condicionibus continuo tractaret, etiam de Paetinae...deque Lolliæ Paulinae, 26.3), while Agrippina is the only woman actually to pursue the emperor. Again, Suetonius’ presentation differs from Tacitus’, for in the Annals all the women compete for Claudius’ attention alongside the freedmen (nec minore ambitu feminæ exarserant, Tac. Ann. 12.1).

In the end, Agrippina’s hold on Claudius was so extreme that she even controlled his very life. Claudius 44 is a complex paragraph in which Suetonius gives a number of versions of the emperor’s death. Because of its intricacies, I cite the passage here in its entirety, after which it will be easier to comment on its substance (Claud. 44):

[44.1] Non multoque post testamentum etiam conscripsit ac signis omnium magistratuum obsignavit. Prius igitur quam ultra progrederetur, praeventus est ab Agrippina, quam praeter haec conscientia quoque nec minus delatores multorum criminum arguebant. [44.2] Et veneno quidem occisum convenit; ubi autem et per quem dato, discrepat. Quidam tradunt epulanti in arce cum sacerdotibus per Halotum spadonem praegustatorem; alii domesticó convivio per ipsam Agrippinam, quae boletum medicatum avidissimo ciborum talium optulerat. Etiam de subsequentibus diversa fama est. [44.3] Multi statim hausto veneno obmutuisse aiunt excruciatumque doloribus nocte tota defecisse prope lucem. Nonnulli inter initia consopitum, deinde cibo affluente evomuisse omnia, repetitumque toxico, incertum pulitine addito, cum velut exhaustum refici cibo oporteret, an immisso per elystera, ut quasi abundantia laboranti etiam hoc genere egestionis subveniretur.

44.1] Not much later [i.e., after the discussion with Britannicus reported in Claud. 43], he also made his will and sealed it with the seals of all the magistrates. But before he could go any further, he was cut short by Agrippina, whom her own conscience and also informers, no less, were accusing of many other crimes besides these. [44.2] It is generally agreed that Claudius was killed by poison, but when and by whom it was given
is in dispute. Some say that [it was given to Claudius] as he was dining on the Citadel with the priests by his taster, the eunuch Halotus; others that [it was given] to him at a family dinner by Agrippina herself, who offered the drug to him in mushrooms, a dish of which he was exceedingly fond. Even the reports of what happened next are discordant. [44.3] Many say that immediately after swallowing the poison he became speechless, and after suffering excruciating pain all night, he died before dawn. Some say that he first fell into a stupor, then vomited up the whole contents of his overloaded stomach, and was given a second dose of the poison, perhaps in a porridge, under pretense that he needed food to revive him after his exhaustion, or that it was administered in an enema, as if he were suffering from an overabundance [of food] and might be relieved by that form of evacuation as well.

Despite Suetonius’ alternatives, the paragraph is weighted towards Agrippina’s guilt. To begin with, the biographer, before offering other accounts, states with an indicative verb that Agrippina killed Claudius (praeventus est ab Agrippina, 44.1; contrast this to the reported speech quidam tradunt…alii; multi aiunt…nonnulli). Only after this declaration do his discrepant accounts begin. Suetonius’ overall impression is that Agrippina was ultimately responsible for her husband’s death; the only facts at issue are how, when, and where she delivered the poison. The long and grisly description of

55 Gascou 1984, 284 proposes that Suetonius offers these multiple versions in an effort to challenge Tacitus’ more straightforward account in Ann. 12.66 (“critique indirectement,” 284). In Tacitus’ version, Locusta prepares the poison and Halotus serves it, but Agrippina is their employer (cf. ministrorum) and the lone driving force behind the murder: tum Agrippina, sceleris olim certa et oblatae occasionis propera nec ministrorum egens (Tac. Ann. 12.66). There are no expressions of doubt or hearsay in the Ann. as there are in Suetonius’ Claud. (e.g., discrepat; quidam tradunt…alii; diversa fana est; multi…nonnulli). See Hurley 2001, 237 at 44 on Suetonius’ versions and how they differ from Tacitus’ and Gascou 1984, 281-93 for a summary of sources and a comparison of Suetonius with other authors besides Tacitus.
Claudius' demise (e.g., *excruciatumque doloribus*, 44.3), on the other hand, emphasizes the cruelty of Agrippina’s actions.  

In the *Nero*, however, Suetonius gives a different account of Claudius’ death. There, he lays blame for the emperor’s demise on Nero, who played no role in the original account of *Claudius* 44. In the *Nero*, Suetonius bluntly states that his subject “began his string of parricides and murders with Claudius” (*parricidia et caedes a Claudio exorsus est*, *Nero* 33.1; cf. *sustulit ille patrem*, 39.2). Later in the same paragraph the biographer backs off somewhat from this forceful opening declaration by saying that even if Nero was not the main actor, he is nevertheless culpable in Claudius’ death because he had foreknowledge of the plot (*cuius necis etsi non auctor, at conscius fuit, neque dissimulanter*, 33.1). Whether or not Nero was the prime mover, Suetonius still gives Claudius’ stepson a leading role in the emperor’s death in the *Nero*, one that eclipses the previously prominent place of Agrippina in the *Claudius*.  

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56 Cf. *Tib*. 51.2 on Livia’s putrid corpse, which likewise calls attention to Tiberius’ cruelty. Claudius’ protracted and ghastly death, in addition, reflects poorly on the emperor, for it is an undignified way to die. Contrast Claudius’ final hours to Augustus’ peaceful death (*Aug*. 99).

57 Suetonius is fond of the rhetorical technique of making a broad opening declaration like Nero “began his string of parricides and murders with Claudius,” and then refining that remark with individual examples in the paragraph that follows. See Chapter 4, Section 1 on the similar construction of *Cal*. 24 on the topic of Caligula’s incest with his sisters. By opening with a sweeping statement, Suetonius advances a particular interpretation of his subject. In the case of *Nero* 33, he suggests that Nero was a conscienceless killer (*parricidia* and *caedes* are plural), and that he had a hand in Claudius’ death. He only refines this statement later by saying that Nero might not have been the actual murderer (*cuius necis etsi non auctor*, 33.1). However, the prejudicial opening declaration implies that Nero was, in fact, capable of such a crime. The biographer, therefore, indelibly taints his subject before partially exonerating him. In the end, it matters Footnote cont. next pg.
So why, we may ask, does Suetonius finger Agrippina in her husband’s death in the \textit{Claudius} only to lay blame on the emperor’s successor in the \textit{Nero}? Jacques Gascou suggests that Suetonius, perhaps, learned new information while doing research for the \textit{Nero}. The biographer, he reasons, might have come across the quotes attributed to Nero in praise of mushrooms (cited in \textit{Nero} 33.1), which convinced him that Nero really did the deed after all. Another possibility raised by Gascou is that Suetonius wanted to reserve Nero’s role in the murder for his own biography. Thus, \textit{Claudius} 44 and \textit{Nero} 33 might not necessarily be in conflict, but might merely have a different focus and offer varying depths of detail.\textsuperscript{58}

While there are certainly grounds for Gascou’s proposals, his reconstructions do not pay enough attention to Agrippina, who was the chief suspect in the \textit{Claudius}. Instead of looking at Agrippina’s disappearance, Gascou focuses almost exclusively on Nero’s emergence. In his suggestion that one purpose of \textit{Nero} 33 is to bring Nero out from the shadows, Gascou also favors the killer (Nero) over his victim (Claudius). His approach, furthermore, does not place enough stock in the fact that the \textit{Caesares} are full of contradictory scenes, such as the marriage of Livia and Augustus discussed above.

\textsuperscript{58} Gascou 1984, 283.
(Section 1). Surely one cannot argue that Suetonius learned new information each time. I suggest, therefore, that the inconsistencies in Claudius’ death be confronted head-on rather than rationalized or explained away, especially in regard to the role of Agrippina.

Suetonius’ presentation of Nero as Claudius’ killer is uniquely pertinent to the Life of Nero—and, thus, not in the Divus Claudius—because the biographer has a program particular to the Nero in which he paints the emperor as a violent man who was capable of turning against his family.59 In the Divus Claudius, in contrast, Suetonius sought to disparage Claudius, not Nero, and on different grounds. There, Suetonius’ image of Claudius is one of a weak man subservient to his wives and freedmen. In order to make this assessment believable, Agrippina must be a domineering and ambitious sexual predator who controls every aspect of her husband’s life. She must also be strong enough to cut down her husband, and he too weak to stop her. Thus, Suetonius has Agrippina kill Claudius in the Claudius, but the act suits Nero’s character more in the Nero. In general, we can use this scene to observe that Suetonius is more devoted to sketching his characters than to the historicity or internal consistency of his information.60 It is also worth noting that he treats men and women equally on this

59 Cf. Nero’s murder of his mother and aunt in Nero 34, and of a number of his wives and associates in 35.

60 See Cizek 1977, 39-40 on Suetonius’ internal inconsistencies. Cizek is right to argue that these inconsistencies are not proof of Suetonius’ inability (cf. von Albrecht 1997, 1402 on variances: “Doubtless, Suetonius’ works lack a certain depth of thought”). Instead they reveal the many points of view of Footnote cont. next pg.
account: the major male characters are just as inconsistent and changeable as the more peripheral female ones.

Taking a look back at the *Claudius* as a whole, Agrippina’s marriage, which came about through her sexual forwardness, sets her up to be a transgressive and domineering wife. Agrippina’s wholly objectionable character (she practices incest, seduction, and murder; cf. *Claud*. 29 on other murders attributed to her influence) makes clear that assertive wifely behavior is met with disapproval in the *Lives*. Arguably one of the most interesting aspects of the *Claudius* is that the emperor, who was initially seduced by his spouse, comes to repent being under her thumb: “towards the end of his life,” Suetonius states, “he showed signs that were not unclear of regretting his marriage to Agrippina and the adoption of Nero” (*sub exitu vitae signa quaedam nec obscura paenitentis de matrimonio Agrippinae deque Neronis adoptione dederat*, 43). Claudius’ death at Agrippina’s hand is recorded in the next paragraph, a scene that confirms the emperor’s anguish over his marriage.

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Suetonius’ sources, as well as the author’s own curiosity, desire to record a range of views, and his efforts to nuance his biographies.

61 On a smaller scale, cf. *Tib*. 62 (the murder of Drusus the Younger by his wife Livilla and her lover Sejanus) and *Dom*. 14.1 (Domitilla having had a hand in the plot against her husband Domitian; cf. *Dom*. 3.1 on her alleged adultery). In both of these cases, sexually inappropriate wives are tied to the murder of an emperor or imperial son in the line of succession. Thus, aggressive and independent women like Agrippina are dangerous and adulterous.
The *Claudius* closes on a tragic note: the emperor regrets his marriage and knows that he has made poor decisions, but he cannot rectify them; no sooner does Suetonius report Claudius’ complaint (43) than Agrippina kills him (44). In this way, the dramatic ending of the *Life* calls attention to Agrippina’s transgressions once more—even Claudius, whom Suetonius has heretofore painted as unaware and not prone to reflection (*oblivionem et inconsiderantiam*, 39), realizes that he has a “bad” wife. The speed with which Agrippina brings down her husband also accentuates her ambition and ruthlessness. Suetonius implies that Agrippina acted proactively, killing her repentant husband before he could divorce her.62

The emperor’s chief complaint in *Claudius* 43 is that Agrippina has been too domineering, especially in coercing him to elevate her son over his own. It is notable that in Suetonius’ presentation the forced adoption cannot be separated from the wedlock (*de matrimonio Agrippinae deque Neronis adoptione*, 43). However, even if the two actions are inexorably bound, the marriage is still placed first on the list, which position implies that it is Claudius’ central regret. Its primary placement serves the additional purpose of stressing Agrippina’s leading role in advancing Nero, for without his

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62 See Chapter 2, Section 2 for more on Claudius’ death (cf. Chapter 3, Section 2). Suetonius writes that Claudius reached out to Britannicus towards the end of his life (43) and also changed his will (44). The insinuation is that the emperor altered his testament to disinherit Nero, or at least to leave Britannicus a greater share. Because Agrippina’s murder of her husband follows immediately after the story about the will (44), it is implied that she cut down Claudius before he could remove her son entirely. Suetonius closes the death scene (45) with the information that Claudius’ murder was kept secret until Nero’s succession could be arranged, which again points towards Agrippina’s machinations.
mother’s marriage the adoption never would have happened. Thus, *Claudius* 43 shows that in the *Caesares* the “bad” wife cannot escape charges of political maneuvering. Indeed, it is her political toiling that largely makes her “bad” in the first place. Claudius, in the end, is the opposite of Augustus: Augustus died in his wife’s embrace asking her to be ever-mindful of their marriage, while Claudius died at his spouse’s hand regretting his choice of bride.

### 3.3 Conclusion

On the whole, the biographer’s presentation of wives is in line with his depiction of mothers, who are similarly described in approving terms when they play a small role in their sons’ affairs and in hostile terms when they interfere in his principate (Chapter 2). The overlap between mothers and wives is not surprising considering that the ideal wife became a mother. The biographer, therefore, is fairly consistent in the feminine qualities he finds worthy of approval or censure.

It is ironic, however, that the *Lives* are arranged in such a way that wives are consistently tied to their children, with marriages and births most often being reported in the same paragraph. Yet, Livia and Agrippina, the two wives who are given the most space in the *Vitae*, never bore children to their imperial husbands. The fact that Augustus’ and Claudius’ last marriages were not fruitful helps to explain why their biographies are the only two in which the rubrics on marriage and children are separate.
In these Lives, Suetonius must establish Livia and Agrippina as wives independent of childbirth.

The example of Livia in Section 1 is perhaps the best illustration in the whole of the Caesares of how Suetonius changes a woman’s characterization to suit his male subjects. In addition to the examples from the Tiberius and Claudius cited above, Livia is also described in negative terms in the Caligula by the great-grandson who lived with her for a spell in his youth (cf. Cal. 10.1). Caligula, according to Suetonius, called Livia a “Ulysses in a stola” (Ulixem stolatum, 23.2), which is a reference to her scheming. The context of the paragraph, Caligula’s contempt for his family, makes clear that the allusion is pejorative: being clever, crafty, and cunning are not presented as good traits in a woman.63 Livia, furthermore, is credited with being an important patron to Galba (Gal. 5.1) and to Otho’s grandfather, M. Salvius Otho (Otho 1.1).64

63 On the other hand, however, the context of the statement, a paragraph on Caligula’s abuse of his family, could also be read as critical of Caligula for making such a remark about Livia (cf. Viden 1993, 83). Suetonius, for example, goes on to say that Caligula lied about Livia’s ancestry, and even boasted that his own mother (Agrippina the Elder) was born not from the lowly Agrippa, but from an incestuous relationship between Julia and Augustus (Cal. 23). Clearly, then, the passage admonishes Caligula’s behavior, his slander of Livia being part of his monstrous actions. See Barrett 2002, 121, who suggests that Suetonius has put an unnecessarily negative spin on the remark, which was “surely a witty and ironical expression of admiration.” He furthers that the stola is the mark of a matron, which Barrett takes as further evidence that Caligula did not intend the remark to be demeaning. Cf. Jones 1996, 149-50 at 22, who, in a similar fashion, proposes that Suetonius has misinterpreted Domitian’s joke about “bed-wrestling” and taken it as a sign of the emperor’s sexual indecency.

64 Cf. Aug. 40.3 and Tib. 51.1 on Livia’s activities as a patron.
The *Augustus*, however, is almost entirely devoid of her political actions, which are so central to the other *Lives*. In the *Vita* of her husband, rather, Livia is associated with spinning and weaving (*Aug*. 73), a far cry from her other activities. This radical change in her representation primarily owes to the biographer’s thoughts on her husband. Because Suetonius is so keen to portray Augustus favorably, he “tones down” the emperor’s wife in his biography by taking her character in entirely the opposite direction: Livia, who is elsewhere a patron and meddling imperial (grand)mother, becomes a loyal and submissive wife in the *Augustus*. 65 This transformation, which is a particularly drastic one, demonstrates well that Suetonius uses female characters to reflect on his male subjects. It is important to note that women do not always bring out negative traits in their associated men, but that they can elicit positive qualities as well. 66 In the case of Augustus, the emperor is made to look better by the fact that he had a lasting marriage to a loyal and agreeable wife.

Agrippina, in contrast to Livia, is more consistently “bad” in the *Caesares*, but then again she is only tied to “bad” emperors (Caligula, Claudius, and Nero). She has no “Augustus” in whose biography she might be redeemed. In the *Claudius*, in

65 Riemer 2000, 147: Suetonius removes Livia’s political actions from the *Aug.* so the emperor does not come across as a hen-pecked husband.

66 Riemer 2000 focuses primarily on women bringing out negative qualities, especially the weakness and depravity of the men to whom they are tied.
particular, the primary purpose of Agrippina’s character is to draw attention to her husband’s weakness and passivity, so much so that she is accused of killing him. Thus, her domineering nature is of necessity overstated so that it may all the better play off Claudius’ submission. In the end, just as Augustus was portrayed more positively because of Livia’s wifely compliance, so too is Claudius smeared by the fact that he could not control his spouse.

The biographer, as is clear in both these examples, uses an emperor’s relationship with his wife to explore aspects of his character. Power is clearly at issue in his discussions of marriage, especially as regards the princeps’ manliness, assertiveness, and independence. Suetonius, generally speaking, uses the way an emperor runs his house to mirror his running of the state: Augustus, who mastered Livia and lived with her in harmony, governed fairly and peacefully; Claudius, on the other hand, was easily controlled by his inferiors and is said to have lead an unstable state. As further illustrations, Nero, who murdered practically all of his wives (Nero 35), oversaw a violent regime; Tiberius, who mourned his divorce from Vipsania (Tib. 7), was a grim emperor prone to moody flights from the capital; and Caligula, who took the profligate and wanton Caesonia to wife (Cal. 25.3), was an extravagant and immoral leader. Marriage, therefore, is a microcosm of the Empire in the Caesares. Not only does it offer a glimpse into the emperors’ private lives, but it also offers insight into their governing.
Suetonius, though he tends to write small parts for the emperors’ wives, nevertheless depends on the women to aid in his characterizations of his subjects.
4. *Flagitia et dedecora*: Sisters, Daughters, Granddaughters, and Nieces

The most prominent roles for women in the *Caesares* are those of wife and mother. A number of emperors also had sisters, daughters, granddaughters, and nieces, but these women are less visible in the *Lives*. Suetonius’ relative silence about female members of the wider imperial family, however, cannot always be explained by their lack of importance. Caesar, Augustus, and Titus, for example, had only female offspring, so the future of their direct lines depended on these women alone. Caesar, Augustus, and Caligula, additionally, had sisters whose husbands and children played significant roles in both the dynastic succession and day-to-day running of the empire, and yet Suetonius’ coverage of these women is scanty. It is not, therefore, that the women themselves were historically insignificant, but that the biographer writes small roles for them.

In the *Caesares*, sisters, daughters, granddaughters, and nieces tend to appear in only two scenarios: (1) the biographer either mentions such women in terms of the marriages arranged for them by the *principes*;¹ or, (2) he recounts their sexual affairs.²

¹ E.g., marriages of daughters: *Iul.* 21 (Julia’s marriage to Pompey); *Aug.* 63 (Julia’s marriages to Marcellus, Agrippa, and Tiberius); *Claud.* 27 (marriages arranged for Antonia and Octavia); *Otho* 1.3 (betrothal of Lucius Otho’s unnamed daughter, the emperor’s sister, to Drusus son of Germanicus). Granddaughters: *Aug.* 65 (marriages of Julia and Agrippina the Elder arranged by Augustus); *Claud.* 26 (Claudius’ youthful Footnote cont. next pg.

²
There are, additionally, sisters, daughters, granddaughters, and nieces mentioned only in passing. Though some of these are children who died at a young age, such as Nero’s daughter Claudia Augusta (filiam...Claudiam Augustam amisitque admodum infantem, Nero 35.3), others are adult women whom the biographer simply glosses over. 3

Flavia Domitilla the Younger, the daughter of Vespasian and sister of Domitian and Titus, serves as an example of the latter sort. Suetonius records her birth together with her brothers’ in the Vespasian (3.1), and then states that Domitilla died before her father became emperor. Though this wording gives the impression that her life was short and insignificant, in actuality she lived long enough to marry a consul and have a daughter, the Domitilla mentioned briefly in Domitian 17.1. It is especially striking that Domitilla the Younger plays no part in the Domitian considering that she was deified and made Augusta by her brother (cf. Dom. 3.1 on Domitia receiving the same title),

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3 E.g., affairs of daughters: Aug. 65.1 (Julia). Granddaughters: Aug. 65.1 (Julia). Nieces: Tib. 62 (Livilla, Tiberius’ daughter-in-law and niece); Claud. 26.3 (Messalina, Claudius’ wife and great-niece of Augustus); Dom. 22 (Julia Titi, affair with Domitian). Sisters: Cal. 24.3 (Livilla and Agrippina accused of adultery).

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2 E.g., affairs of daughters: Aug. 65.1 (Julia). Granddaughters: Aug. 65.1 (Julia). Nieces: Tib. 62 (Livilla, Tiberius’ daughter-in-law and niece); Claud. 26.3 (Messalina, Claudius’ wife and great-niece of Augustus); Dom. 22 (Julia Titi, affair with Domitian). Sisters: Cal. 24.3 (Livilla and Agrippina accused of adultery).
coins were issued in her image, and she appears in the poems of Statius.\textsuperscript{4} Thus, her omission from the Flavian Lives appears to be calculated, rather than owing to a lack of material or to her own insignificance.\textsuperscript{5}

Domitilla the Younger’s daughter receives the same treatment: this Domitilla (\textit{PIR}\textsuperscript{2} F 418) played an important part in the Flavian dynasty, yet is nearly invisible in Suetonius’ Flavian Lives—this despite the fact that two of her sons were made heir to her uncle Domitian (\textit{Dom.} 15.1).\textsuperscript{6} However, when the biographer reports the elevation of these children, he refers to the boys as the offspring of Domitian’s male cousin Flavius Clemens, omitting that they were also born of the emperor’s niece Domitilla (\textit{Flavium Clementem patruelem suum…cuius filios etiam tum parvulos successores palam destinaverat},

\textsuperscript{4} Domitian also deified his brother, Titus. See Jones 2000, 23-4 at 3.1 on the Domitilla coins. Cf. Statius Sil. 1.1.97-8 on the family members who will meet the emperor in heaven: \textit{ibit in amplexus natus fraterque paterque et soror: una locum cervix dabit omnibus astris}.

\textsuperscript{5} One possible explanation is that the biographer omits Domitilla because the honors paid to her would have reflected well on Domitian, whom Suetonius dislikes. Domitilla also received her honors posthumously, so perhaps Suetonius thought them less important. Against this proposal, however, is the fact that he records the posthumous honors paid to other women such as Livia (\textit{Claud.} 11.2) and Antonia Minor (\textit{Claud.} 11.2). Again, Flavia Domitilla’s tributes appear to have been omitted intentionally.

\textsuperscript{6} Because Titus had only female offspring and Domitian had lost a son, the next generation of Flavii—among them Domitilla (Vespasian’s granddaughter and Domitian’s niece) and her husband T. Flavius Clemens (the grandson of Vespasian’s brother and Domitian’s cousin)—were all the more consequential. Townend 1961a, 55 observes that after the death of Julia’s husband (another cousin called T. Flavius Clemens, \textit{cos.} 82), “the last hopes of the dynasty are centred in his brother,” the Clemens who was married to Domitian’s niece Domitilla. Two children of Domitilla and Clemens were marked for succession and given the names of Domitianus and Vespasianus (\textit{Dom.} 15.1). The boys were given the \textit{toga virilis} somewhat before the normal age, and Clemens was made consul \textit{ordinarius} in 95 at the fairly early age of thirty-five. Domitilla and Flavius Clemens had at least seven children together: \textit{ILS} 1839=McCrum and Woodhead 1961, 69 no. 221.
Dom. 15.1). 7 Thus, like Domitian’s sister, his niece is also largely written out of the Life. The Domitillae, however, are merely two examples of a larger trend in the Caesares, in which many women make only a passing appearance. 8 These manifestations are enough for Suetonius to record the women’s existence, but are not enough to relate anything of substance about them. In the end, little is said in the Caesares about sisters, daughters, granddaughters, and nieces in between the two poles of scanty information on their marriages and sexual indecencies on the one hand, and near disappearance on the other.

Thus, when considering the wider imperial family, one type of woman to emerge from the Caesares is the “good” woman with no agency. She follows the wish of the male head of her family and does her duty by becoming a wife and, presumably, a mother, like the two Domitillae above. 9 Another prominent type is the “bad” woman with agency who seeks her own lover. 10 As we shall see below, imperial women are usually said to have initiated their own affairs, not to have been seduced. In the

7 Context, however, should also be borne in mind. In Dom. 15.1, Suetonius speaks of the death of Flavius Clemens at Domitian’s hand. Thus, it might have seemed more natural to refer to the children as Clemens’ own.

8 See. n. 3 above for references to some women’s brief appearances.

9 See n. 1 above for references to women being married off by the men of their families.

10 See n. 2 above for affairs of imperial women.
Caesares, therefore, women with agency repeatedly put it to improper use. It is important to note that both the “good” and “bad” categories above have to do with sex: either the woman’s fertility is controlled by the men in her family, or she herself is careless with it and seeks a lover outside of marriage. The biographer seems not to envisage any other role for imperial women.

As we have seen especially with mothers in the Lives, Suetonius tends to write more about bad women than good ones. The same is true of his treatment of sisters, daughters, granddaughters, and nieces. When the biographer mentions the arranged marriage of a sister, daughter, granddaughter, or niece—an acceptable activity for a woman—he typically gives only the “bare bones” information that such a wedding was set. With transgressive women, on the other hand, the biographer writes at more length. This discrepancy makes a certain amount of sense: women were expected to marry and bear children, so the biographer cannot give (or does not bother to give) an account of every time a woman did a “normal” activity in accordance with custom.

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11 See Dixon 2001, 152 on stereotypes of women in Roman writing, both literary and historiographical. She observes that women tend to be either “victim-heroines” (i.e., women accused on false charges, those who suffer at the hands of tyrants) or “villains.” Dixon furtheres that good women are “sexless” while bad women “are virtually defined by their transgressive sexuality” (see the similar conclusions drawn by Richlin in n. 80 below). Suetonius falls very much within these parameters (i.e., the “good” passive woman, the “bad” lustful woman), although his good females are not entirely sexless. Rather, they enter into marriages and engage in appropriate sex with their husbands.

12 For an overview of what was expected of daughters in the Late Republic and Early Empire, see the introduction to Fantham’s book on Julia (2006, 1-16). Marriage and motherhood figure prominently.
What is more worthy of comment—but also more interesting and, perhaps, easier to
demonstrate—is when women depart from conventional behavior.13 As a result, the
Caesares are slanted towards women who operate outside the norm.

In general, Suetonius’ presentation of women has affinities with his portrayal of
imperial men. Even with the emperors, the biographer usually writes at more length on
their vices than their virtues. For example, one hears more about the principes feasting in
excess (e.g., Cal. 37, Nero 27, Gal. 22, Vit. 13) than dining in moderation. Again,
Suetonius cannot relate each time an emperor has done a quotidian activity in
accordance with social norms.14 Rather than conforming to conventional behavior, an
emperor’s departure from it is frequently seen as more remarkable, entertaining, and
revealing.15 Along these same lines, Suetonius more often explicitly disapproves of a
bad action than openly praises a good one.16 For example, the biographer is quick to

entertainment should not be entirely rejected, as it tends to be”). One example used by Bradley is that the
Roman reader would likely be fascinated/shocked/entertained by the stories about Tiberius on Capri.
Taking up this line, the transgressions of imperial women could also be entertaining to a Roman audience
and, thus, worth relating at more length. Conventional behavior, in contrast, is usually not so interesting.

14 See, e.g., Murison 2001, vi on the fact that Suetonius often judges an emperor for failing to conform to an
ideal. Both Bradley 1991a and Wallace-Hadrill 2004, 142-74 stress that the biographies revolve around
virtue and vice. Vice, of course, is the departure from proper behavior.

15 Cf. Bradley 1985a, 83 on Suetonius’ ideals being “more visible in the breach than in the maintenance.”

16 On this practice, see Wallace-Hadrill 2004, 24: Suetonius starts with an assumed ideal, so his comments
tend towards those times when an emperor has violated what the biographer holds to be a standard of
behavior. Wallace-Hadrill argues that Suetonius is not on a quest to prove a positive ideal, nor are his Lives
Footnote cont. next pg.
point out when an emperor wore what he considers to be unusual dress (e.g., *etiam cultu notabilem, Iul. 45; vestitu calciatuque et cetero habitu neque patrio neque civili, ac ne virili quidem ac denique humano semper usus est, Cal. 52*). But he does not tend to do the opposite, i.e. praise an emperor for wearing what he deems to be customary clothing, shoes, and hairstyles. On the whole, Suetonius sees conventionality as unnecessary to remark.

In many ways, Suetonius’ treatment of imperial men mirrors his handling of imperial women: the reader hears more about a woman’s bad behavior than her good conduct; the biographer also more clearly and vocally censures inappropriate deeds than endorses proper courses of action. Thus, when Suetonius writes at greater length about some women’s affairs than other women’s marriages, he is not necessarily singling out the female sex in an effort to make women look especially “bad.” On the contrary, he treats imperial women much the same as he does men, albeit much more briefly. With the emperors, however, one always has the portraits of the “good” *principes* like Augustus, Titus, and Vespasian, against which to compare and contrast the

an instruction manual for the current or future emperors wherein good behavior needs to be conspicuously highlighted.

17 Bird’s comments (1982, 44) on Aurelius Victor, a fourth-century Latin biographer, also apply loosely to Suetonius: “Victor’s attitude toward women is intriguing. He never singles out a woman for praise but on numerous occasions he feels impelled to level various charges against them.”
“bad” ones, such as Tiberius, Caligula, Nero, Vitellius, and Domitian. With imperial women, on the other hand, the good woman is typically silent and makes only a fleeting appearance. Thus, there is no fully-developed corrective to the “bad,” adulterous woman in the *Lives* in the same way that there is a model against which to judge a vile emperor.

This chapter explores Suetonius’ presentation of transgressive imperial sisters, daughters, granddaughters, and nieces, mainly because the biographer himself has more to say about them than their well-behaved counterparts. Although the inappropriate conduct of these women is almost always portrayed as sexual in nature, the biographer often chalks up to a scandalous relationship what might have actually been a political and non-sexual association with a male senator or consul.\(^\text{18}\) The affairs of the two Julias, Augustus’ daughter and granddaughter, are a particularly good example of this tendency (Section 3).

In addition, I also read the affairs of imperial women against the extra-marital relationships of the emperors (Section 2), who are routinely said to have seduced or forced themselves on respectable married women (the emperors also had male sex partners, but these are outside the scope of this study). This comparison makes clear that the vast majority of the emperors’ lovers are portrayed as passive victims, while

\(^{18}\) Cf. Barrett 1990, 108: “the traditional device of covering up political intrigue with the claim of sexual indiscretion.”
transgressive imperial women like the Julias, on the other hand, seek their own lovers. In effect, the passivity of the emperors’ mistresses calls even greater attention to the sexual aggression of adulterous imperial women.

Another strain of improper female behavior in the biographies is incest (Section 1). The women guilty of incest can be called ultra-transgressive because they use even inappropriate extra-marital sex inappropriately. With the incestuous Agrippina the Younger, Livilla, and Drusilla, in particular, political ambition underlies Suetonius’ presentation of their affairs. The biographer’s mix of sex and political aspirations in regard to the sisters of Caligula contrasts with his largely apolitical portrayals of other women’s intrigues. The sisters, as a result, come across as even worse than other inappropriate females because they not only take sex to the extreme, but also because they combine it with political design. In the Caesares, therefore, women who seek sex are improper, but women who seek political power are beyond the pale.

4.1 Sisters and Stuprum

Suetonius states broadly in the topical sentence of Caligula 24 that Caligula “lived in habitual incest with all his sisters” (cum omnibus sororibus suis consuetudinem stupri fecit, Cal. 24.1; cf. the plural sororum incesta, 36.1). To illustrate his claim, the biographer reports that the emperor, whenever he was at a well-attended banquet, used to place one of his sisters on the couch next to himself, while his wife reclined above (plenoque
convivio singulas infra se vicissim conlocabat uxore supra cubante, 24.1). I shall interpret the seating arrangements in a moment, after first commenting on the language of this sentence.

The imperfect verb conlocabat stresses the fact that Caligula used this seating pattern often. As a result, it underscores the earlier claim that the emperor’s incest with his sisters was customary (consuetudinem stupri, 24.1). The phrase plenoque convivio, on the other hand, calls attention to the number of witnesses to the siblings’ behavior, which gives Suetonius’ account an air of incontestability: the biographer makes clear that he is not writing about a scandalous affair that happened behind closed doors (and could, thus, potentially be untrue), but one that was open for all to see (and is, accordingly, true). Indeed, Suetonius frequently stresses the unconcealed and public nature of an emperor’s inappropriate sexual conduct as a tool to substantiate his account.

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9 See Wardle 1994, 225 at 24.1 on the language “emphasis[ing] a blatant and frequent action.”

20 E.g., Cal. 55 (Caligula used to kiss Mnester even in the theater); Nero 27 (Nero’s vices increased to such a point that he could no longer hide them and they were now open, palam; sex figures among the vices listed); Nero 28 (Nero married Sporus before a great crowd. Later, he took him to Greek marketplaces on the imperial tour, and then traveled with him throughout Rome, where he kissed the boy on occasion); Cal. 22 (when Galba’s lover Icelus brought him news of Nero’s death, Galba openly greeted the freedman with very ardent kisses, artissimis osculis palam); Dom. 22 (Domitian loved his niece passionately and openly, palamque). Cf. Aug. 94.4 in which the marks on Atia’s skin are described as visible and indelible, which Suetonius uses as “proof” that she had a divine encounter with Apollo.
In the *convivium* passage, it is also notable that Suetonius omits the name of Caligula’s wife (*uxore supra cubante*, 24.1). Caligula was married a total of four times, twice before Drusilla’s death in 38. By leaving the emperor’s *uxor* nameless, Suetonius makes the anecdote float in time and seem generally applicable rather than confined to the narrow limits of any one of the emperor’s marriages. Once more, this language highlights the repeated, habitual nature of the sisters’ intimacies with their brother.

As for the seating arrangements, Gaius, in his role as host, seems to have taken the upper place on the lowest couch. Below him on the couch of two sat one sister (*singulas infra se*) in the location typically reserved for the host’s wife. The other two sisters reclined together on their own couch, each taking turns as to who would sit

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21 The emperor’s wives were: Junia Claudilla (*Cal.* 12.1), Livia Orestilla, Lollia Paulina, and Caesonia (on the last three, *Cal.* 25). Only the first two marriages, however, took place before Drusilla’s death in 38. Caligula’s marriage to Junia Claudilla is particularly hard to date. Suetonius sets it shortly after Caligula’s summons to Capri by Tiberius in 31 (*Cal.* 12.1; cf. 10.1 on Capri; see Hurley 1993, 32 at 12.1 on the vagueness of Suetonius’ language). Tacitus, however, dates Junia’s marriage to mid-33 (*Ann.* 6.20.1) and Dio to 35 (*58.25.2*). Wardle 1994, 143 at 12.1 and Barrett 1989, 32 suggest that Tacitus’ date is preferable. Junia died in childbirth some time after 34 (*Cal.* 12.2) and before Caligula’s accession in 37. The emperor married Livia Orestilla in 37 and divorced her, according to Suetonius, “after a few days” (*paucos dies repudiatum*, 25.1). Dio, however, says the marriage lasted two months (59.8.7). See n. 22 below.

22 Cf. Wardle 1994, 225 at 24.1 (note that Wardle, though he does not say as much, discounts the marriage to Junia Claudilla on the grounds that it happened before Caligula’s accession): “If all three sisters are involved, we must date this to the marriage of Orestilla, which lasted but a few days (25.1). Then the imperfect tense is problematic. If we exclude Drusilla, albeit against the rubric, the longer marriage with Lollia facilitates accepting the imperfect.” Though Wardle is on the right track, I think he is being overly literal. Suetonius, I believe, is making a generalization based on perhaps one event (see n. 65 below on the biographer’s tendency to generalize): Wardle has difficulty locating the multiple banquets in time because they never occurred. The improbabilities of the account strengthen my suggestion (below) that Suetonius amplifies Caligula’s behavior in order to make the emperor look worse.
where (vicissim). Caligula’s wife reclined above her husband (uxore supra cubante), most likely in the last place of the middle couch, the locus consularis, a location usually set aside for a male guest of honor rather than a spouse.\textsuperscript{23} Suetonius, therefore, adduces incest with all the emperor’s sisters from the fact that Caligula placed each of his siblings in the seat usually reserved for a wife.

This anecdote can be read on two levels, one immediate and having to do with sex, and the other more subtextual and centered on female ambition. To begin with the immediate reading, behind this story is the fact that seating arrangements at Roman convivia had sexual overtones. The lower position on a couch was, for a woman, not just abstractly wifely, but also sexual in a more direct way. Matthew Roller, in his article “Horizontal Women: Posture and Sex in the Roman Convivium” (2003), finds that the lower position was the place from which a woman actively “express[ed] a legitimate sexual connection” to the man who reclined above her.\textsuperscript{24} Roller’s work helps to show that Suetonius is talking about sex rather than a more ceremonial position of honor given to the imperial sisters. The fact that the anecdote appears in a paragraph on stuprum underscores this reading. I suggest, therefore, that Suetonius does not simply

\textsuperscript{23} An alternate reconstruction is that Caligula reclined in the middle position on a couch of three, with one sister below and his wife above: Hurley 1993, 97 on 24.1. See also Wardle 1994, 225 at 24.1 and Lindsay 2002, 108 at 24.1, both of whom stress that Caligula placed his sisters in a wifely position.

\textsuperscript{24} Roller 2003, 402.
*imply* incest from the wifely position of the sisters, but that the lower place on a couch had a well-established sexual connotation which the biographer calls to mind and exploits.

The sexual nuances of the banquet seating are also important because they suggest that Suetonius implicates both Gaius and his sisters in the incestuous affair: the emperor is placing his sisters in the position of a wife, but they, in taking it, are also advertising their own “sexual connections” with him. Thus, in the biographer’s presentation, Caligula is depraved, but the women themselves are also sexually forward and step outside the bounds of acceptable sisterly behavior. Roller, along similar lines, argues that an important element of Suetonius’ account is the fact that the siblings—all four siblings, not the emperor alone—were “co-opt[ing] and subvert[ing]” a legitimate activity, dining together on the same couch as one’s spouse. With Caligula and his sisters, however, this customary display of sexual and marital togetherness is pushed into the realm of *stuprum.*

Although the perversity of the emperor (and his sisters) is at the fore of this tale, female ambition is an underlying theme. Suetonius implies that if the sisters sat in the

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25 Roller 2003, 403: “In these passages [Suet. Cal. 24 and Tac. Ann. 11.27, in which Messalina dines on the same couch as C. Silius after her marriage to him while she was still legally wed to Claudius] the diners are assuredly sexually transgressive, but not by virtue of pursuing sexual encounters outside of the legitimate relationship symbolized by the joint reclining posture. Rather, they co-opt and subvert this very symbol of legitimacy itself.”
wife’s location at banquets, they must have taken her place as the imperial consort in other areas as well; the biographer has already suggested that they substituted for her in the bedroom. In general, there is a sense in Caligula 24 that the sisters are partnering with the emperor and replacing his spouse. Earlier in the Life Suetonius reported that the sisters’ names were added to their brother’s in official oaths (C. Caesari sororibusque eius, 15.3)—even for consuls, he adds (item relationibus consulum: “quod bonum felixque sit C. Caesari sororibusque eius,” 15.3)—but now the siblings band together visibly and cause the obvious displacement of the emperor’s wife. The theme of female ambition becomes even clearer over the course of the paragraph when one of the sisters, Drusilla, is made heir to Caligula’s property and, more shockingly, his imperium (below). Especially when taking the emperor’s bequest to Drusilla into account, Suetonius description of the siblings’ intimacies is steeped in political overtones.

In actuality, it is hardly scandalous for Caligula to show respect to his imperial sisters, especially considering that they were practically the only family he had left (cf. Aug. 29.4 on the buildings that Augustus dedicated in the name of his sister Octavia, an act which Suetonius reports in an approving tone and favorable context).26 Gaius, in

26 On the loss of Caligula’s family members: cf. Tib. 39 on Germanicus’ death (in which Tiberius might have played a part) and Tib. 53 on the banishment of Agrippina Maior. Suetonius also accuses Tiberius of bringing down Gaius’ brothers, Nero and Drusus (Tib. 54; cf. 55 on Tiberius’ general wish to destroy the children of Germanicus so as to clear the way for his own grandson, Tiberius Gemellus). Barrett 1990, 85 takes a psychological approach to Caligula. He stresses that the princeps had seen most of his family undone and, in consequence, likely turned to his sisters for comfort.
fact, honored his siblings in other ways as well. For example, he included their names in oaths (15.3; cf. 24.2, the special oath to Drusilla after her death), issued coins with their images, and allowed them divine titles in the provinces.  

He also showed respect to the memories of other family members, such as his mother Agrippina the Elder, brother Nero, father Germanicus, and grandmother Antonia (see Cal. 15 for honors to his family). His sisters, therefore, were accorded great favor, but were not necessarily singled out for special treatment.

It is because of these tributes that many modern scholars discount the claims of incest altogether. Most argue that Caligula merely honored his sisters, but that his  

Wood 1995, 458 tallies the honors granted by Caligula to his sisters, mother, and grandmother, which “mark a string of ‘firsts’:” the first coins devoted entirely to a woman in obverse and reverse (Agrippina the Elder); the first living women to be pictured and named on imperial coins (the three sisters); the first inclusion of women in public oaths to the emperor (the three sisters); the first women to have the honorary rights of Vestals (sisters and grandmother Antonia Minor); the first woman (Drusilla) named as heir to imperium in an emperor’s will; and the first woman (Drusilla) to be deified. Wood argues that later historiographical traditions hostile to the emperor distorted his relationship with his sisters and made it taboo.

Note the inclusion of Antonia and Agrippina the Elder in n. 27 above. Drusilla was the first Roman woman formally divinized in the West (38 CE), even before the mighty Livia (42 CE, a number of years after her death in 29). Drusilla’s divination, however, which took place on Augustus’ birthday (September 23, 38) several months after her death in June of that year, has as much to do with portraying Caligula (via his sister) as part of the divinely-blessed Julian line as it does with marking her as special (Hurley 1993, 99 at 24.1). See Cal. 23 on Caligula’s wish to promote his Julian ancestry; he also later named his daughter after his divine sister. The Roman emperors were fond of making new dedications on special anniversaries: Livia, for example, was deified by Claudius on the date of her wedding anniversary with Augustus (Smallwood 1967, 15 no. 13). See Barrett 1990, 85-8 and Wood 1995, 459-60 on Drusilla’s divination. Wood, in particular, points out that there is no evidence that Caligula took special consultation with his sisters (458). Barrett locates Caligula’s behavior in the tradition of honoring female members of the family, though he sees Drusilla as particularly favored (87, as does Hurley 1993, 97 at 24.1).
highly favorable treatment of them was interpreted by the emperor’s enemies as signs of their intimacy.29 This practice can be seen in Suetonius’ *Caligula*: the biographer turns the honors that the sisters were given at banquets into a sexual matter by including them in his passage on *stuprum*. He could very well have recorded the women’s prominent positions in another non-sexual place, such as *Caligula* 15 where he talks about the tributes paid to the emperor’s family, including the oaths in the sisters’ names.

The *Divus Augustus* is a good counter-example. In that *Life*, Gaius and Lucius are said to have dined regularly in the lower position of Augustus’ couch (64.3), yet the biographer makes no scandal of those seating arrangements.30 While he points out that Caligula demoted his wife in order to elevate his sisters, Livia’s displacement is not mentioned at all in the *Augustus*. On the contrary, Suetonius records the Augustan

29 This position is taken by, e.g., Barrett 1990, 85: “The enormous favours that he heaped on them at the beginning of his reign had a political purpose, but they also suggest considerable affection within the family. It was doubtless this affection that led to stories of incest with all three sisters. Such reports are to be treated with scepticism” (and, similarly, Wood in n. 27 above). Modern scholars who reject the claims of incest include, e.g., Balsdon 1934, 41 (though see Wardle 1994, 224 at 24.1: part of Balsdon’s reason for rejecting Caligula’s incest is that it does not appear in Tacitus. Wardle, however, correctly points out that so much of the *Annals* on the reign of Caligula is missing that this is not a valid criterion. Tacitus, I add, is hardly as objective as Balsdon makes him out to be; just because something is in Tacitus does not mean it is true); Wood 1995, 457-8; and Ginsburg 2006, 12. See also the summary of older scholarship in Meise 1969, 99 n. 46. For the opposing view, Lindsay 2002, 108 at 24.1 remarks that “the story is persistent and thus may be credible.” Hurley 1993, 97 at 24.1, likewise, writes that “sexual involvement cannot be excluded.” Ferrill 1991, 109, too, accepts the tradition.

30 Quite the reverse; Suetonius is more likely pointing out the merit in Augustus’ behavior. He shows that Augustus made the boys, though they were highly honored, sit on the bottom of his couch like children. At Roman banquets, adults reclined while children sat upright on the adults’ couches (Carter 2003, 185 at 64.3). Carter, however, points out that the phrase *in imo lecto* could also mean that Augustus made the boys recline “on the lowest couch” of least honor because of their age. Carter, however, prefers the former explanation.
banquet seating in a passage on the emperor’s traditional family values (e.g., encouraging his daughter and granddaughter to spin wool, and taking charge of his grandsons’ education). In the Caligula, on the other hand, Suetonius chooses the worst possible interpretation of the convivia, one that conforms to the well-established image of the libido-driven tyrant. By talking about honors paid to the sisters in a passage on incest, the biographer also casts a pall over the women for playing such a prominent role in their brother’s principate. For the adopted sons Gaius and Lucius, in contrast, such prominence is acceptable.

Though Suetonius casts a wide net at the opening of Caligula 24, proclaiming that the emperor was habitually incestuous with all three of his sisters, later in the same paragraph he isolates Drusilla as the emperor’s favorite. While Agrippina and Livilla were, apparently, intimate with Caligula only during his principate, Drusilla’s relationship with her brother is said to have begun when the two were children (Cal. 24.1-2):

[24.1] Ex iis Drusillam vitiasse virginem praetextatus adhuc creditur atque etiam in concubitu eius quondam deprehensus ab Antonia avia, apud quam simul educabantur; mox Lucio Cassio Longino consulari conlocatam abduxit et in modum iustae uxoris propalam habuit; heredem quoque bonorum atque imperii aeger instituit. [24.2] Eadem defuncta iustitium indixit, in quo risisse lavisse cenasse cum parentibus aut coniuge liberesue capital fuit. Ac maeroris

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impatiens, cum repente noctu profugisset ab urbe transcucurrissetque Campaniam, Syracusas petit, rursusque inde propere rediit barba capilloque promisso; nec unquam postea quantiscumque de rebus, ne pro contione quidem populi aut apud milites, nisi per numen Drusillae deieravit.

[24.1] Of [his sisters], [Caligula] is believed\textsuperscript{32} to have violated the virginity of Drusilla when he was still a minor, and he was even once caught lying with her by their grandmother Antonia, at whose house they were raised together.\textsuperscript{33} Later, when she was married to the consul Lucius Cassius Longinus, he took her from her husband and openly treated her in the manner of a lawful wife. He also made her the heir of his property and \textit{imperium} when he was ill. [24.2] When she died he declared a period of public mourning in which it was a capital offence to laugh, bathe, or dine together with one’s parents, spouse, or children. Not able to bear his grief, after he fled the city suddenly at night and traversed Campania, he sought Syracuse and then returned from there with speed, his beard and hair having grown long. After that he never took an oath about anything of the greatest importance, not even before the assembly of the people or among the soldiers, except by the divinity of Drusilla.\textsuperscript{34}

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\item \textsuperscript{32} I agree with Wardle’s analysis (1994, 225 at 24.1): “Although the impersonal \textit{creditur} on its own may suggest that Suetonius is recording a tradition impartially, it is used on eleven instances in the \textit{Lives} always of material which merits disapproval. Suetonius wishes the reader to accept the story without his accepting full responsibility for it.”
\item \textsuperscript{33} Cf. \textit{Cal.} 10: Caligula and his sisters lived with many family members after the banishment of their mother, Agrippina the Elder. They resided first with their great-grandmother Livia, and then after Livia’s death in 29 CE with their grandmother Antonia when Caligula (b. 12 CE) was around sixteen or seventeen years old. He left Antonia’s \textit{domus} shortly thereafter (in his nineteenth year, \textit{undevicensimo aetatis anno}, 10; 31 CE) for Tiberius’ home on Capri. The time during which Caligula lived with Antonia is in accordance with Suetonius’ statement that Caligula was still \textit{praetextatus}.
\item \textsuperscript{34} Besides this passage, there are no other attestations to oaths made \textit{per numen Drusillae} (Lindsay 2002, 110 at 24.2). Dio 59.11.3, however, is close: women, when they offered testimony, were to swear by her name.
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Despite the fact that Suetonius marks Caligula’s relationship with Drusilla as special, he goes on to emphasize her brother’s violent treatment of her. He is the only author, for example, to report that the young Caligula “violated” Drusilla’s virginity (*Drusillam vitiasse virginem*, 24.1).\(^{35}\) Being four years her brother’s junior, Drusilla would have been exceedingly young at the time.\(^{36}\) Gaius was still in the *toga praetexta*, according to Suetonius, and was thus around sixteen or seventeen years of age. Drusilla, therefore, would have been twelve or thirteen at the time of the encounter.

The detail of the children’s ages cuts two ways. On the one hand, Drusilla’s youth (and, hence, her defenselessness) accentuates Caligula’s hostility.\(^{37}\) Domitian, by way of comparison, was offered his niece Julia when she was *adhuc virginem* (*Dom. 22*), but he refused her in favor of the older Domitia.\(^{38}\) Caligula, therefore, is said to be aggressive and transgressive where even Domitian refrained. On the other hand, however, Drusilla’s tender age also means that she lost her virginity to her brother

\(^{35}\) Lindsay 2002, 108 at 24.1. Hurley 1993, 97 at 24.1 points out that this anecdote “gives the grandmother the opportunity to disapprove of him, and she is again divorced from responsibility in rearing a *monstrum* (*23.2; 29.1*).”

\(^{36}\) See Hurley 1993, 17 at 7 (with epigraphical references) on the siblings’ dates of birth.

\(^{37}\) Cf. Doblohofer 1994, 28-40 and Gammie 1986, both of whom show that tyrants are regularly accused of raping free women and children.

\(^{38}\) Cf. *Aug. 62.1*: Augustus was married to Antony’s stepdaughter Claudia when she was *vixdum nubilem* (62.1). When he divorced her shortly thereafter, her virginity was still intact even though they were legally wed (*dimisit intactam adhuc et virginem*). Thus, Caligula, when compared to Augustus and Domitian, is especially sexually aggressive with his young sister.
rather than to a proper husband. Thus, Drusilla, who is unquestionably disparaged in *Caligula* 24 alongside her brother, can be said to have failed to live up to the standard for Roman girls of losing one’s virginity to one’s spouse.\(^{39}\) As Keith Bradley shows in his study of marriage in the *Caesares*, Suetonius certainly held this traditional goal as an ideal.\(^{40}\)

In addition to “violation,” Suetonius writes that Caligula later abducted Drusilla from her husband’s house (*abduxit*, 24.1).\(^{41}\) In this context, *abduxit* has a forceful tone. To begin with, it is coupled in the text with violation. The biographer, moreover, claims elsewhere in the *Life* that Caligula snatched away and dishonored other men’s wives (25.1, 36.2), actions traditionally associated with tyrants.\(^{42}\) In both these other episodes, Suetonius appends additional remarks plainly disapproving of the *princeps*’ conduct and

\(^{39}\) See Boatwright 2008 (forthcoming) for a similar approach, though on a different topic (Nero’s murder of Agrippina) and author (Tacitus). She shows that Tacitus maligns Agrippina even while portraying her as her son’s murder victim. Likewise, I think that Suetonius disparages Drusilla even though she was on the receiving end of Caligula’s *libido*. In my reading, there is a sense in the *Cal.* that the sisters are partners in the incestuous affair, not innocent of it.

\(^{40}\) Bradley 1985a, 86-91.

\(^{41}\) Tac. *Ann.* 6.15.1 dates Drusilla’s marriage with Cassius Longinus to 33. She was married to Longinus until some point in early 38 at the very latest, since she was the wife of M. Aemilius Lepidus at the time of her death in June of that year (*Dio* 59.11.1, 59.22.6).

\(^{42}\) See my discussion of marriages and bride-snatching in Chapter 3, Section 1.
painting it as hostile and cruel. His condemnation of the emperor in these other scenes spills over onto Caligula’s abduction of his sister, which likewise comes across as aggressive and mean. The other wife-stealing instances also serve a further purpose: they make the Drusilla story more credible by establishing a pattern of behavior. By making Caligula appear to be in the habit of snatching wives, Suetonius is better able to suggest that the emperor treated Drusilla in the same way.

After Drusilla’s abduction, Suetonius is especially clear that the princeps “openly treated [his sister] in the manner of a lawful wife” (in modum iustae uxoris propalam

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43 Cal. 25.1: “It is not easy to discern if he was more vile in making his marriages, breaking them, or maintaining them” (matrimonia contraxerit turpius an dimiserit an tenuerit, non est facile discernere).

Immediately following this statement is the story that he gave orders that Livia Orestilla be taken from her husband (deduci imperavit). Cal. 36.1: “He spared neither his own chastity nor that of others” (pudicitiae neque suae neque alienae pepercit). Following this is the anecdote in 36.2 that he used to invite women of rank (inlustriore femina) to dinner with their husbands, inspecting them like slaves as they passed his couch. If a woman caught his eye, he would leave the room and send for her, only to return later to critique the sexual encounter.

44 The added detail that Drusilla’s brother took her from a consular husband also serves to highlight the inappropriateness of Caligula’s behavior, for it shows that the emperor had no respect for a leading member of society. Cf. Cal. 36.1, in which the biographer reports the emperor’s abduction of elite women from their husbands. Suetonius is always careful to note the social rank of the emperor’s victims, which brings out the full force of Caligula’s improper behavior: these are just the sort of men and women who should be respected. It is also illuminating to compare Suetonius’ treatment of Caligula and Domitian. Like Caligula, Domitian is also said to have seduced his niece Julia when she was still married to another man, her second cousin T. Flavius Sabinus (alii conlocatam [Iuliam] corruptit, Dom. 22). Sabinus, like Drusilla’s husband, was also a consul (Flavium Sabinum…comitiorum consularium, Dom. 10.5). Domitian, additionally, shared the larger habit of snatching away other men’s wives (contractatis multorum uxoribus…abduxit, Dom. 1.3). The similarities between these episodes reveal the degree to which “bad” emperors are typecast in the Lives. Particularly in the Cal. and Dom., Suetonius uses the action of stealing away an incestuous lover to underscore the lustfulness, urgency, and force of the emperor’s libido.
This, as we shall see below, is not a universal feature of the incest tradition. It is important, therefore, to explore carefully the function and meaning of the phrase in Suetonius’ Life. To begin with a few observations on the biographer’s language, the phrase recalls, and even advances, the sisters’ wifely position at convivia (24.1). There Drusilla sat in the wife’s place at banquets, but here her spousal role is expanded to non-convivium settings. I suggested above that Suetonius stresses that there were witnesses at these banquets (plenoque convivio), which implies that his story about the siblings’ stuprum is credible. The same holds true for this sentence. Propalam, which means that the quasi-marriage was open for all to see, underscores the truthfulness and verifiability of Suetonius’ account. The blatancy of the incestuous match also calls attention to the shame associated with the emperor’s behavior—he openly flaunts what should be forbidden and secret (cf. Caligula’s proud boast that his mother was born from the incestuous union of Julia and Augustus, Cal. 23.1). It is notable that the biographer does the same things in the Domitian, where he again draws attention to the

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45 See Aug. 62.2 (abduxit), Cal. 25.1 (abduxisse), Cal. 25.2 (perductam), and Dom. 1.3 (abduxit): when Suetonius speaks of a woman having been “snatched” from her husband using the verb ab- or perduxit, the “snatcher” invariably ends up marrying the stolen bride. Cf. Gaius Inst. 1.61 on the fact that marriages between brothers and sisters were forbidden in law.

46 Langlands 2006, 354-7 stresses that Suetonius, especially in the Cal. and Nero, portrays the emperor’s sex acts as being public. She argues that the biographer’s point is that these emperors have no sense of shame: what used to be private and nocturnal is now done in the open for all to see.
overt nature of the emperor’s incestuous relationship with his niece to the same effect (\textit{palamque dilexit}, \textit{Dom.} 22; \textit{cf. propalam}, \textit{Cal.} 24.1).

Like the \textit{convivium} episode, the \textit{in modum iustae uxoris} sentence can also be read on two levels, one sexual and the other centered on female ambition. First, context (a paragraph on incest) evokes sex, as does the siblings’ history of intimacy (\textit{in concubitu eius}, 24.1). Sex, furthermore, is a customary and expected part of marriage. Therefore, if Drusilla was treated “in the manner of a lawful wife,” it is implied that part of her duty was to sleep with her brother too.

Alternately, however, Drusilla’s power, aspiration, and influence are all present as well. As Donna Hurley observes, \textit{propalam} means not only that the sexual affair was overt, but also that “there was nothing secret about [Drusilla’s] importance.”\footnote{Hurley 1993, 98 at 24.1. Cf. ibid, 97 on Drusilla helping her wifeless and childless brother to “stabilize his dynastic position.” Hurley remarks (98) that Gaius and Drusilla “remained coupled” after her death. A coin from Smyrna, for example, shows Gaius on the obverse and the divine Drusilla as Persephone on the reverse (Smallwood 1967, 65 no. 222).} In this vein, one interpretation of the openness of the siblings’ relationship is that Drusilla accompanied her brother to official public functions, which puts the emperor’s sister in the position of consort or even partner-in-power (\textit{cf. the pleno convivio} in which she visibly reclined in the wife’s place).\footnote{Cf. Wardle 1994, 226 at 24.1: “The story [about the quasi-marriage] is best taken as a misrepresentation of Drusilla’s performing some public functions when Caligula was wifeless.” See also Ginsburg 2006, 20 on the idea that Tacitus, when he disparages Agrippina for being domineering, has in mind the “political Footnote cont. next pg.} Caligula also treated Drusilla like a spouse when
he willed her his property, an act recorded by Suetonius alone (below). It was routine for a Roman husband to will property to his wife. The fact that _imperium_ was part of Caligula’s bequest, however, insinuates that Drusilla had been preparing for a leadership role while her imperial brother was still alive.

When the _Caligula_ is read against other accounts of the incestuous affair, it becomes clearer that Suetonius’ picture of Caligula and Drusilla couples sex with partnership and power. A comparison with Dio is particularly instructive. Dio writes merely that Drusilla was married to Marcus Lepidus, who was a favorite and lover of the emperor. He tacks onto the end of that statement that Gaius used to have intercourse with Drusilla too (τῇ δὲ Δρουσίλλῃ συνώκει μὲν Μάρκος Λέπιδος, παιδικά τε ἀμα αὐτυὸ καὶ ἐροτής ὅν, συνῆν δὲ καὶ ὁ Γάιος, 59.11.1).49 The Greek historian, as we can see, makes no mention of Drusilla having a wifely position in her brother’s court; in the eyes of the author she is merely a lover, and not even an exclusive one at that (so, too, Jos. _AJ_ 19.204: καὶ ἀδελφῇ γυνοὶς συνήν; cf. the similarly sexual focus of the Suda (s.v.

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49 See n. 41 above on Drusilla’s husbands. Lepidus was Drusilla’s second husband after Longinus.
Γάιος Γ. 12) and Eutrop. 7.12, both of whom write, with no matrimonial overtones, that Drusilla bore her brother’s child.\textsuperscript{50}

In Suetonius’ account, on the other hand, the relationship is portrayed as more formal and public, not a tryst behind closed doors. The difference between Dio and Suetonius is especially striking because Hugh Lindsay argues that Dio perhaps followed the Roman biographer in the idea that Caligula was incestuous with all three of his sisters (\textit{contra} other sources such as Jos. \textit{AJ} 19.204, who indicts one sibling alone).\textsuperscript{51} If Lindsay is correct, it is noteworthy that Dio did not continue the notion that Drusilla was treated more formally in the manner of a \textit{iusta uxor}.

Suetonius’ description of the relationship between Julia and Domitian is also an enlightening comparison, for it too was incestuous.\textsuperscript{52} In the \textit{Domitian}, the subject causes

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\item \textsuperscript{50} I disagree with Lindsay 2002, 109 at 24.1, who refers the reader to Dio 59.11.1 on Caligula treating Drusilla as his wife. Dio, however, speaks only of sex with no matrimonial language. According to the \textit{LSJ} (\textit{συνῆν} (2)), the verb means “to have intercourse, associate with, live with; of a woman, to live with her husband.” \textit{ὁ Γάιος} is clearly the subject of \textit{συνῆν}, so Dio is referring to intercourse, not to a woman living with her husband. Besides, the definition of a woman living with her husband still hinges on sex: the idea is that the proper woman only has sex with her husband. Context also argues for sex. Marcus Lepidus is described as the lover of Gaius, to which Dio adds that Drusilla was too.

\item \textsuperscript{51} Lindsay 2002, 108 at 24.1 proposes that Dio possibly followed Suetonius, or the biographer’s own unnamed source.

\item \textsuperscript{52} Suetonius never states in the \textit{Dom.} 22 that the affair was incestuous, but he calls uncle-niece relationships by that name in the \textit{Claudius} (\textit{incesta}, 26.3; cf. \textit{contra fas}, 39.2). This discrepancy most likely has to do with the fact that Claudius changed the law on incest before his marriage to Agrippina, removing the taboo from such unions. Therefore, by the time Domitian and Julia had their affair, this type of relationship was legal and no longer technically incestuous. Suetonius, however, disapproves of it all the same (e.g., the topical sentence of \textit{Dom.} 22 is on the emperor’s excessive lust, which is frowned upon in the \textit{Caesares}). Pliny \textit{Ep.} 4.11
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the death of his niece by forcing her to abort his child (*etiam causa mortis extiterit coactae conceptum a se abigere, Dom. 22*)—note that Suetonius is unequivocal on the fact that the baby was Domitian’s, *conceptum a se*). The context in which the uncle-niece relationship appears is a paragraph on the emperor’s lusts, including his penchant for concubines and prostitutes (*libidinis nimiae …concubinas…vulgatissimas meretrices, 22*). By placing the Julia episode in such a setting, Suetonius intimates that Domitian’s relationship with his niece was likewise purely sexual (cf. *ardentissime…dilexit*, which sort of erotic language never appears in *Cal. 24*), and even that Julia herself can be equated with other members of the imperial harem. Sex, as we can see, is clearly at the fore of the *Domitian*, much more so than it is in the *Caligula*. The picture that emerges from the *Caligula*, rather, is of the brother and sister in a deeper, more formal and official partnership.

Overall, the phrase *in modum iustae uxor* adds weight to the incestuous liaison of Caligula and Drusilla, which comes across as more serious than a casual or passionate affair. With marriage—even an unreal one—added to sex, the relationship is painted as more long-term rather than a product of a fleeting infatuation. In this way, the phrase resonates with the language we saw above about the habitual nature of the siblings’ incestuous behavior. The biographer also draws attention to the gravity of the bond in its long duration (from childhood), as well as in Caligula’s emotional reaction to

*also censures Domitian for incest even though sex with a niece was no longer a crime: *cum ipse fratris filiam incesta non polluisset solum, verum etiam occidisset, nam vidua abortu perit.*
Drusilla’s death. While Seneca writes that the emperor skipped his sister’s funeral in order to play a game of dice (Cons. Pol. 17.4-5), Suetonius portrays Caligula’s grief as deep, genuine, and perhaps even excessive, which is in line with his losing a beloved partner. Ultimately, by repeatedly highlighting the openness, endurance, and earnestness of Caligula’s and Drusilla’s bond, Suetonius underscores the danger in the affair. The siblings appear not to be on a flight of fancy, but to be subverting the “normal” Roman way of life more deliberately. Drusilla, as a result, is portrayed not simply as a mistress, but as a more serious player in—and even threat to—imperial politics.

An important part of Suetonius’ portrayal of Drusilla as the emperor’s quasi-uxor and partner is his contention that Caligula made Drusilla his primary heir (heredem quoque bonorum atque imperii...instituit, 24.1). This claim, recorded by Suetonius alone, 53 The biographer uses similar language on two other occasions, both of imperial concubines: Nero 28.1 (Nero “all but made Acte his lawful wife,” Acten libertam paulum afuit quin iusto sibi matrimonio coniungeret) and Vesp. 3 (Vespasian, “even as emperor,” held Caenis “almost in the place of a lawful wife,” Caenidem, Antoniae libertam et a manu, dilectam quondam sibi revocavit in contubernium, habuitque etiam imperator paene iustae uxoris loco). The point of both of these passages is that the emperor has put the wrong sort of woman in the important and visible place of imperial spouse (note that Suetonius stresses the women’s freed status: Acten libertam and Caenidem, Antoniae libertam et a manu). The problem with such behavior is that the principes have done so deliberately and for the long term, rather than keeping the freedwomen in their rightful place as part of the harem (cf. McGinn 1991, 338: “Ideally, concubinage did not distract upper-class men from the responsibilities of marriage and family”). Cf. Dom. 12.3 in which Domitian refuses to be courteous to Caenis, though Suetonius, admittedly, uses this scene as an illustration of Domitian’s brusqueness. See also Dio 66.14.3 on Caenis growing rich in Vespasian’s reign by selling priesthoods, offices, and imperial decisions, all undignified behavior for the emperor’s partner. The improper elevation of a mistress became a set-piece in imperial historiography to illustrate the emperor’s corruption. Cf. Hdn. 1.16.4 on Commodus’ favorite mistress, Marcia, whom he “treated just like a legal wife with all the honors due to an empress apart from the sacred fire.”
has especially roused the interest of historians because imperium is not a commodity that could be transferred in a will. Rather, it is a privilege that must be conferred on an individual by the Senate: an emperor could indicate his choice of successor by leaving that person the bulk of his estate, but it was up to the Senate actually to bestow the imperium. In the Caligula, the emperor’s extra-legal actions—both in the sense that he tried to confer his imperium in the first place and that he attempted to pass it onto a woman—highlight the degree to which he abused his power.

That Caligula meant to confer his imperial power to a woman of low moral standing underlines his corruption even further—in Caligula 24, the topical heading of stuprum taints both the maker of the will and the heir. In general, Suetonius’ criticism of Caligula for his inappropriate choice of successor echoes the biographer’s disparagement of his subject for marrying Caesonia. When speaking of the emperor’s wives, Suetonius describes Caesonia as a woman of ill-repute not worthy of being an imperial spouse (luxuriae ac lasciviae perditae, Cal. 25.3). Underlying his remark is the suggestion that the emperor’s poor choice of spouse reflects his own decadence and depravity. Likewise, Caligula’s misguided selection of his heir, a woman who practiced incest, also reveals his corruption. It is notable that in both Caligula 24 and 25 Suetonius uses an unsuitable woman to call attention to the emperor’s crimes.

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54 Mouchova 1968, 29; Hurley 1993, 105 at 25.3.
In addition to comparing his choice of wife to his choice of heir, Caligula’s testamentary actions can also be read against Augustus’. Suetonius reports that Augustus left Livia (who was legitimately his *iusta uxor*) money and property as an heir to one-third of his estate (*Aug*. 101). Tiberius (a male) got the majority. Augustus, in addition, gave his wife other honors, such as adoption into the Julian family and use of a feminized form of his honorary title, Augusta. Never in this description does Suetonius suggest that Livia was given any real authority like *imperium*. Caligula, therefore, can be said to abuse the precedent established by Augustus on many levels: he grants Drusilla too much of his estate, places his sister in the role of wife, and tries to convey *imperium* to her. Drusilla herself is also portrayed in a negative light. She is depicted as transgressing both her role as sister (in that she is too close to her brother) and as a woman more broadly (she is an inappropriate heir to *imperium* and the bulk of the imperial fortune).55 There is also a sense in which Drusilla has crossed boundaries that not even Livia, the archetype of the meddling woman, dare cross.

In an effort to make sense of Suetonius’ account, many modern scholars have argued that Drusilla was supposed to get her brother’s money, with the intention that

55 See Linderski 1988, 190 on the *lex Voconia*: a man belonging to the first census class could not make a woman his heir. Livia had to receive an exemption from the Senate when she was named as an heir to one-third of her husband’s estate. This law helps to show that Drusilla was not in the legal position to receive so much property from Caligula.
she would produce male heirs; her husband Lepidus, on the other hand, was to wield actual power. If this interpretation is correct, it is striking that Suetonius has entirely omitted Lepidus from this anecdote and linked Drusilla directly to the *imperium* instead. The effect of his narrative is two-fold: it calls attention to Drusilla as the emperor’s partner (not just his lover), while simultaneously highlighting her political ambition, both of which, as I have argued, are broader themes of the paragraph as a whole.

All in all, Drusilla’s political ambitions are flagged as inappropriate by the fact that they appear in a passage on *stuprum*. A good comparison to Suetonius’ portrayal of Drusilla is his depiction of her sister, Agrippina the Younger. In the *Claudius*, Suetonius paints Agrippina as the power behind the throne (Claud. 25.5, 29.1), and there, too, implicates her in incest (*incesta*, 26.3; cf. her incest with her brother in Cal. 24.1 and her appearance in his official oaths, Cal. 15). In the *Nero*, similarly, Agrippina is described as the regent for her young son (*matri summam omnium rerum privatarum publicarumque permisit*, Nero 9), and is accused of incest once more (Nero 28.3)—for a third time! In the

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56 See especially Wood 1995, 457, Hurley 1993, 98 at 24.1, and Barrett 1990, 82 on Lepidus wielding power. Dio, as Barrett points out, talks about special privileges awarded to Lepidus by his imperial brother-in-law (59.11.1). Cf. 59.22.6-7, where Dio says that Lepidus was marked as Caligula’s successor after Drusilla’s death. Wardle 1994, 226 at 24.1, however, observes that the emperor could well have made Lepidus his heir if he was really his intended successor. In general, I agree with Wardle that although some scholars have pointed to pharaonic precedents of the brother/sister marriage and rule, “Egyptian influence on Caligula is hypothetical.”
Caesares, as these examples reveal, women who are granted any real power are repeatedly labeled sexually transgressive.57

After narrating Drusilla’s death, Suetonius jumps abruptly to the downfall of Livilla and Agrippina in connection with M. Aemilius Lepidus (Cal. 24.3):

Reliquas sorores nec cupiditate tanta nec dignatione dilexit, ut quas saepe exoletis suis prostraverit; quo facilius eas in causa Aemili Lepidi condemnavit quasi adulteras et insidiarum adversus se conscias ei nec solum chirographa omnium requisita fraudè ac stupro divulgavit, sed et tres gladios in necem suam praeparatos Marti Ultori addito elogio consecravit.

The rest of his sisters he loved neither with as much desire nor honor, with the result that he often prostituted them to his favorites. So that he might condemn them more easily at the trial of Aemilius Lepidus as if they were adulteresses and knew of plots against him, he not only disclosed letters in the handwriting of all of them, letters gained by fraud and seduction, but he also dedicated to Mars the Avenger, with an added inscription, three swords having been readied for his death.

Generally speaking, his description of the undoing of these three individuals is short and lacking in important details.58 The biographer, for example, explains neither the charges on which Lepidus was tried, nor the date of the trial (fall of 39, a few months

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57 See Hillard 1992 for a wider study of the regular condemnation of women with power in Roman literature. Also Richlin 1992, 65 on the fact that “stereotypes of Western royal women are clearly linked to sexuality.”

58 Cf. Syme 1986, 180 on this passage, “Suetonius comes off badly.” Hurley 1993, 100 at 24.3, however, is more sympathetic—she explains that “Suetonius’ biographical method does not allow him to relate systematically the crisis that is touched on here.”
after Drusilla’s death on June 10, 38). In addition, the role that the sisters played in the matter is unclear. Suetionius, more importantly for the present concerns, omits the fact that Lepidus was Drusilla’s second husband. By leaving out their marriage, the biographer is better able to focus on the partnership between Caligula and his sister instead.

Agrippina and Livilla might have been engaged in an incestuous affair with their brother (cum omnibus sororibus...stupri, 24.1), but Suetonius still defends the sisters from Caligula’s harsh treatment of them. He repeatedly emphasizes that the charges of adultery and conspiracy made against Agrippina and Livilla were unfounded and unfair. Suetonius’ skepticism about the sisters’ guilt is in contrast to Tacitus, who

59 Most modern historians have proposed that Lepidus was involved in a plot to overthrow the emperor, either with the aid of Livilla and Agrippina or as part of the intrigue of Cn. Lentulus Gaetulicus, governor of Germania (Dio 59.22 relates Lepidus’ death immediately after the governor’s, though without linking them; Claud. 9.1 talks about Claudius having been sent as an envoy to Germany because of the Lepidi et Gaetulici coniuratio, the only text to unite the two men so clearly). On the trial, see Barrett 1990, 91-113 and also the summaries of scholarly opinions given by Ginsburg 2006, 12-15, Lindsay 2002, 110-1 at 24.3, and Hurley 1993, 101 at 24.3. Ginsburg calls attention to the fact that most ancient authorities deny or question whether the Lepidus, Agrippina, and Livilla conspiracy was real. She also finds the bulk of modern reconstructions of the plot to be unconvincing.

60 Hurley 1993, 101 at 24.3 supposes that the stock of both Lepidus and Agrippina went down in 39 when Gaius and Caesonia had a child. Agrippina, perhaps, was looking to advance her own son, Nero. Thus, she and Lepidus might have plotted to marry and overthrow her brother (cf. Tac. Ann. 14.2, where they are tied in adultery and Agrippina is said to have acted spe dominationis. Also Dio 59.22.8 where Agrippina carries Lepidus’ ashes back to Rome, which also ties them together as a couple. Agrippina’s husband, Domitius, died shortly thereafter and was, perhaps, ill at the time of her association with Lepidus). The role of Livilla, however, is unclear in this reconstruction.

61 Cal. 24.3: quasi adulteras et insidiarum adversus se conscias implies that the charges were fabricated. Suetonius also states that the evidence used against the women was obtained fraude ac stuuro. The phrase quo facilius. Footnote cont. next pg.
writes with confidence that Agrippina engaged in *stuprum* with Lepidus in the hope of gaining power (*spe dominationis*, *Ann.* 14.2; cf. Dio 59.22.7 on Caligula’s intention of making Lepidus his successor after Drusilla’s death—note that Tacitus does not write that Agrippina engaged in incest with her brother; Lepidus, rather, is her partner).

Overall, the biographer’s presentation of the sisters has a slight tension. On the one hand, he does not contest the fact that they engaged in incest with their brother and were prostituted by him, but, on the other hand, he defends the women from charges of adultery and plotting to take Caligula’s life. In addition to this tension, the emperor’s feelings for his sisters are also somewhat conflicting: first Caligula is habitually incestuous with all three of his siblings (24.1), but then he does not feel such great love and desire for Livilla and Agrippina (24.3).62 Suetonius is also imprecise on whether

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62 *Reliquus* can mean either that which “is left, remaining” (Lewis & Short, s. v., I) or “the rest, the other” when an author is talking about a list or parts of a whole (ibid., II). It is unclear which reading is best here: Suetonius could mean that Caligula was so crushed by Drusilla’s death that he no longer had tender feelings for his remaining sisters, Agrippina and Livilla; or, he could be making a list and saying that the emperor had particularly warm feelings for Drusilla, but did not love his other sisters so much. The Loeb translation takes the latter line, as does Barrett 1990, 86. One argument for reading *reliquas* as part of a list is that Suetonius repeatedly stresses that Drusilla was Caligula’s favorite during her lifetime: she was singled out for his affection from an early age (24.1 on their childhood affair; nothing is mentioned of Agrippina and Livilla), and she is marked as the emperor’s heir during his illness (24.1; again, there is silence about the other siblings). Thus, according to Suetonius, even before Drusilla’s death the other sisters were unequal. The biographer, accordingly, seems to be tallying and comparing the sisters rather than suggesting that Caligula altered his opinion of Agrippina and Livilla after Drusilla’s death. Because change over time does not seem to be operative, there is a tension in the passage between *cum omnibus sororibus suis consuetudinem stupri fecit* and *reliquas sorores nec cupiditate tanta nec dignatione dixit*. 

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Caligula actually had sex with Agrippina and Livilla (*consuetudinem stupri*, 24.1) or only prostituted them to his friends (*quas saepe exoletis suis prostraverit*, 24.3).

On the whole, Suetonius’ emphasis is more on Caligula’s cruelty and mistreatment of his sisters than on the women’s own actions, which stress can be attributed to Caligula’s position as the subject of the biography. In *Caligula* 24, Suetonius uses the sisters to paint a particular picture of the *princeps* as a harsh and licentious man: he speaks of the sisters as being incestuous and having been prostituted by their brother in order to underscore Caligula’s sexually depravity, but then he exonerates the women from adultery and conspiracy in an effort to accentuate their brother’s cruelty and aggression. Suetonius seems to want to “have his cake and eat it too,” meaning that he throws out all the sorts of accusations he wishes to level against Caligula (habitual, wide-ranging incest; prostituting his sisters; treating Drusilla like a wife; being cruel to Agrippina and Livilla; scheming up false conspiracies), whether or not they combine for a believable narrative.\(^63\)

There are also other ways to read *Caligula* 24 that do not focus solely on internal inconsistency. For example, one can argue that the emperor’s treatment of his sisters

\(^63\) This observation relates to Steidle’s thesis (1951) that Suetonius practices a high degree of pre-determination in the *Lives*: he fixes upon a particular characterization, and then makes his material serve that end. See the summary of Steidle in Wardle 1994, 87-8 and Wardle’s application of Steidle’s ideas to the *Cal*. See n. 74 below in which Bradley makes a similar observation in regard to Suetonius’ presentation of the emperors’ sex-lives.
plays into the notion of decline in the biography. Caligula is presented as having been initially moderate, but then the Life breaks at chapter 22 after which he is a “monster” (monstrum, 22.1). On a smaller scale, this same principle is at work in Caligula 24: first the emperor has sex with his sisters, but then he is cruel towards them. Mental instability and unpredictability are also themes in the Caligula (esp. 50.2, 51), both of which appear in the emperor’s conduct towards Agrippina and Livilla. In addition, Caligula’ banishment of his sisters generally conforms to the traits of other “bad” emperors in the Lives, who are often excessively and unjustifiably cruel.64

What is more, Suetonius frequently employs the rhetorical technique of making a broad opening statement to launch his rubrics, and then narrowing down the topic with select, individual examples.65 One can see this practice in Caligula 24, where the paragraph starts with the umbrella claim that Caligula was incestuous with all three of

64 Other emperors noted for their excessive and often unprovoked cruelty include Tiberius (Tib. 52, 54, 57, 59), Claudius (Claud. 29, 34), Galba (Gal. 12), Vitellius (Vit. 13), and Domitian (Dom. 10). Dunkle 1967, 169 observes that “cruelty…is probably the most characteristic vice of the tyrant” in Roman political invective and historiography.

65 E.g., Claud. 15: Claudius was inconsistent as a judge; sometimes he was wise, but at other times rash. The rest of the paragraph is made up of individual examples proving these various points. Iul. 50.1: prōnum et sumptuosum in libidines fuisse constans opinio est. To illustrate Caesar’s proclivity for sex, Suetonius lists all of the Roman women with whom Caesar had intrigues (50), followed by all the provincial women (51), and then all the foreign queens (52). Similarly, Vit. 14.1: prōnum vero ad cuituscumque et quacumque de causa necem atque supplicium. This overarching statement is followed by a list of Vitellius’ many cruel deeds. Note that both Iul. 50 and Vit. 14 start with a generalizing prōnum (“he was inclined towards”), followed by examples of the emperor engaging in the said activity. Cf. Bradley 1991a, 3701-2: Suetonius tends to “catalogue, often at considerable length, specific examples (documenta, indicia) of deeds or events illustrating a generalization he has made about the subject of the biography.”
his sisters, but then tapers down to a warm relationship with Drusilla and a more distant one with Livilla and Agrippina. Suetonius, in general, uses this method to advance a particularly hostile and prejudicial interpretation of his subject before partially exonerating him of the charges. The biographer, furthermore, has the habit of turning one or two unique events into statements about general behavior, a pattern which *Caligula* 24 also fits: Suetonius inflates a special intimacy with Drusilla, which is bad enough, into an even more monstrous “habitual incest with all his sisters.” 66 The effect of this generalization is to blacken Caligula to an even greater degree by magnifying his crimes. 67 In *Caligula* 24, Agrippina and Livilla are caught in the crossfire. The biographer’s primary aim is to criticize the emperor by multiplying his indecency, but he also ends up disparaging the sisters by associating them, perhaps unfairly, in the

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66 E.g., *Tib*. 35.2: some women who had affairs started registering themselves as prostitutes to avoid the harsh laws that applied to adulterous matrons—Suetonius takes this broad idea from the one case of Vistilia, on which see Tac. *Ann.* 2.85 (Lindsay 1995, 126-7 at 35.2 and McGinn 1998, 248). *Tib*. 51.2: Tiberius brought down all of Livia’s friends and associates by denying her will—for the hyperbole in this statement see Lindsay 1995, 153-4 at 51.2. *Cal*. 36.2: there was scarcely any woman of rank whom Caligula did not violate; he usually invited them to dinner with their husbands and then snatched away the wives—Suetonius generalizes from one incident recorded by Seneca (*De const. sap.* 18.2) about the wife of Valerius Asiaticus (Lindsay 2002, 130 at 36.2). Cf. McGinn 1998, 248: “Suetonius’ fondness for the rhetorical plural.”

67 In general, the plurality of Caligula’s affairs is part of the same program in which Suetonius emphasizes the routine nature of the emperor’s incestuous dalliances. With both his language and the number of incestuous affairs, Suetonius establishes Caligula’s sexual misconduct as a characteristic trait rather than an isolated indiscretion. See Wardle 1994, 87-95 on ways in which Suetonius manipulates evidence to malign Caligula. As Wardle shows, his narrative is particularly hostile and the emperor repeatedly “blackened.”
habitual incest. The women’s characters, in other words, suffer on account of Suetonius’ attempt to advance a particular interpretation of his male subject.

While most of Suetonius’ *vituperatio* is directed at Caligula, one can still draw a few conclusions from *Caligula* 24 about the emperor’s sisters. First and most generally, Suetonius’ biography suggests that it is “bad” for imperial sisters to be too involved with their brother. Drusilla, for example, has clearly overstepped her bounds by taking up the role as partner and being named imperial heir. All three sisters, in addition, are taken to task for sitting in the wife’s seat at a banquet. It is important to note that Suetonius castigates Caligula not only for elevating his sisters, but also for demoting his wife in favor of his siblings. This presentation implies that it is acceptable in the biographer’s eyes for the imperial wife to have a visible position (cf. *Aug.* 45.1 on Livia watching the games with Augustus from the imperial box), but that a similar role is inappropriate for his sisters. Such a sentiment can be explained by the fact that the emperor’s wife could become the mother of his heir, but his sister (under normal circumstances) could not. The sister, consequently, does not deserve such a prime place.

Again, Caligula can be said to have violated Augustus’ precedent. According to Suetonius, Augustus treated his sister Octavia well and promoted her offspring (cf. *Aug.* 29.4, 61.2, 63), but he is never said to have been inappropriately close with her (cf. *Aug.* 61.2 on his fondness for his sister, which is kept within proper, non-sexual bounds). Augustus, furthermore, is never charged with ousting Livia to put Octavia in her place.
Octavia, on the other hand, does not, in Suetonius’ account, strive for greatness. Rather, she obediently gives in to her brother’s demands, surrendering Agrippa as her son-in-law when asked (Aug. 63.1). The key here is that Octavia submits to her brother, recognizing his superiority; she does not try to match him as a partner.\textsuperscript{68} Thus, just as Caligula fails to live up to Augustus’ ideal, so too do Drusilla, Agrippina, and Livilla miss Octavia’s mark.

4.2 Imperial Mistresses

More or less every emperor in the Caesares has some extra-marital affair (or, more properly, “affairs” plural), even Augustus (Aug. 69, 71). Suetonius, however, defends Augustus by explaining that the emperor’s friends excused his behavior because he pursued his trysts not out of desire, but as a means of keeping tabs on his political rivals via their wives (69.1). The biographer does not give other less favored principes such

\textsuperscript{68} Cf. Pliny Pan. 84 in which the author praises Ulpia Marciana for never forgetting that she is Trajan’s sister (\textit{Soror autem tua, ut se sororem esse meminit!}, 84.1). I take this to mean that Ulpia keeps in mind that she is only a sister, not the emperor himself—or even his wife. A good portion of the passage praises Ulpia for getting along so well with Plotina and for not being jealous of her, which implies that the imperial wife and imperial sister stand on different planes. On the other hand, however, Pliny is also saying that Ulpia keeps in mind that Trajan, a paragon of virtue, is her brother, and she wisely models herself on him.
indulgence. Rather, Suetonius typically condemns extra-marital affairs as indicative of indecency, poor judgment, and the abuse of power.69

Though some of the emperors are said to have kept concubines and others are connected to prostitutes, the majority of emperors in Suetonius’ account have affairs with other men’s wives.70 Of the twelve principes, Suetonius pays the most attention to the intimacies of Caesar. Caesar’s female companions are so numerous that the biographer arranges them in three sequential paragraphs (Iul. 50-2), launching the series with the blanket statement that Caesar was generally prone to sexual intrigues (pronum et sumptuosum in libidines fuisse constans opinio est, Iul. 50.1; cf. the sweeping declaration that Caligula was habitually incestuous with all his sisters, Cal. 24.1). After that universal pronouncement, the biographer organizes Caesar’s lovers by social rank: the first paragraph is on well-born Roman women (plurimasque et illustres feminas corrupisse, etc.)

69 See Baldwin 1983, 505 on the “double standard” in the Caes.: “Augustus is allowed to whirl a consular host’s wife away from dinner for a quick fling in the boudoir without any censure from the biographer; a similar tale concerning Caligula is amplified into a whole series, and classified as one of the monster’s doings. Augustus may deflower virgins procured by his own wife, and Vespasian is permitted to fiddle his accounts to admit the expense of a transient affair. By contrast, Domitian’s affairs and his harmless liking for shaving his concubines or swimming with whores are branded as indicative of libidinis nimiae.” See n. 73 below for more on the biographer’s variable treatment of Augustus and Caligula.

70 On concubines: Nero 28.2, 44, 50; Vesp. 21 (cf. Dom. 12.3 on Vespasian’s concubina Caenis); Dom. 22. Cf. the male form in Gal. 22: Icelum e veteribus concubinis. On prostitutes: Nero 28.2; Dom. 22; Cal. 36.1. For the male variety: Gal. 22 (mares); Tit. 7.1 (exoletorum et spadonum greges). Edwards 1993, 47 observes that “many Roman politicians accused their opponents of seducing the wives of other men.” Thus, Suetonius is taking part in a wider discourse where sex and politics were often mixed.
Iul. 50.1), the second on provincials (ne provincialibus quidem matrimoniiis abstinuisse, 52), and the third on foreign queens (dilexit et reginas, 53).71

It is conspicuous that more or less all of Caesar’s lovers are identified as being either married (e.g., Postumiam Servi Sulpici, 50.1; provincialibus... matrimoniiis, 51; Eunoen Mauram Bogudis uxorem, 52.1), or the mother of another man’s children (e.g., Marci Bruti matrem Serviliam, 50.2; the tres liberos of Mucia, 50.1). Added to the women’s husbands and children is their social status: most are elites (illustres feminas, 50.1; reginas, 52.1), not the sort of women like slaves, actresses, or prostitutes who could be approached with immunity. Thus, the biographer focuses not so much on the fact that Caesar was having sex, but on his sexual partners. In Caesar’s case, the dictator time and again chose paramours who should have been “out of bounds.”

Suetonius’ choice of verbs is also revealing. Caesar is said to have “seduced” the married Roman women (corrupisse, 50.1) and he “did not abstain” from the provincial wives (ne provincialibus quidem matrimoniiis abstinuisse, 51). In Suetonius’ presentation, it is undoubtedly Caesar who acts upon the women, not the women who make advances on Caesar. By repeatedly mentioning the women’s social and marital status, the

71 See Wallace-Hadrill 2004, 101-3 and 119-20 who explores Suetonius’ tendency for hierarchical lists. Foreigners always come last. Thus, the queens are higher up the social ladder than Roman provincials, but the reginae are foreigners so they fall at the end of the list.
biographer suggests that Caesar lacked restraint and, more importantly for a leader, respect for his subjects and Roman social structure at large.\textsuperscript{72}

Although Caesar “seduced” a number of women, his treatment of his mistresses could not necessarily be called violent, which stands in distinction to the behavior attributed to Tiberius, Caligula, Nero, and Domitian. Like Caesar, they too had affairs with respectable married women. But unlike Caesar, their relationships are portrayed as forceful. For example, Tiberius, Caligula, and Domitian all compel high-born ladies to submit to their lusts against the women’s will.\textsuperscript{73} Nero, among other things, obliged

\textsuperscript{72} See Edwards 1993, 47 on the fact that accusations of adultery often “draw attention to a man’s disruptive potential.” We see that notion in the \textit{Iul.} in the sense that Caesar gravitates towards elite wives and mothers and breaks up Roman families (cf. \textit{Iul.} 50.1 on the fact that Caesar was to blame for Pompey’s divorce from Mucia; what makes Caesar’s so reproachable in his enemies’ eyes is that he broke up a marriage that had produced three children, \textit{quod cuius causa post tres liberos exegisset uxorem}). Also D’Ambra 2006, 49: “Elite men could always take their pleasure with slave girls, market women, actresses, or other lowly women considered \textit{infamis}…As long as a husband avoided respectable women as sexual partners…his sexual activities were not worth mentioning.” In the \textit{Iul.}, Caesar’s affairs are worth mentioning precisely because of his poor choice of partners.

\textsuperscript{73} E.g., \textit{Tib.} 45: Tiberius made “women, even illustrious ones” (\textit{feminarum quoque, et quidem illustrium}) perform oral sex on him (\textit{capitibus quanto opere solitus sit inludere}). He turned Mallonia over to the informers for refusing him, after which she was forced to kill herself. Compelling elite women to perform oral sex is especially degrading. In \textit{Cal.} 25, Caligula is said to have snatched away the wives of two elite men, and then punished the wives for trying to return to their rightful husbands. Suetonius also uses the stealing of other men’s wives as an example of Domitian’s early abuse of power (\textit{vim dominationis}, \textit{Dom.} 1.3). \textit{Cal.} 36.2 is similar: Caligula used to invite elite women (\textit{inlustriore femina}) to dinner with their husbands. He inspected the married women like slaves (\textit{mercantium more considerabat}) when they entered, and then carried off whomever he liked to an adjoining room for sex. A conspicuously analogous story is told about Octavian: Antony accused his enemy of taking a well-born lady (\textit{feminam consularem}, \textit{Aug.} 69.1) from a banquet and leading her to his bed-chamber. Likewise, he charged Octavian and his friends with behaving like panderers and accused them of stripping and inspecting matrons and maidens like slave dealers (\textit{matres familias et adultas acetate virgines…tamquam Toranio mangone vendente}, \textit{Aug.} 69.1). In the \textit{Aug.}, however, the biographer refutes these accusations by stating that they belonged to the invective of Antony (\textit{M. Antonius…obiecit}, 69.1; \textit{maledictis}, 71.1). Shortly after this passage, Suetonius writes that the purity of Footnote cont. next pg.
elite, married women to act like barmaids and concubines for his enjoyment (matronarum institorio copas imitantium, Nero 27.3; nuptarum concubinatus, 28.1). In all these cases, the emperor has forced privileged women to behave in a manner not suited to their station. The fact that the same sorts of sexual charges (most notably, wife-snatching and incest) are repeatedly leveled against the “bad” emperors points to character-typing in the Lives.\textsuperscript{74}

Though these passages speak chiefly about the conduct of the emperors, they also shed light on the author’s thoughts on women. The vast majority of the women in these episodes are members of the top tiers of Roman society. The biographer pays very little attention to common women, which indifference mirrors his scanty coverage of men of lower rank. The omission of lower ranking women in this case probably has to do with the fact that the emperor did not have much personal contact with women of that sort. However, it is also true that the emperors’ affronts are more outrageous when

\textsuperscript{74} Richlin 1981, 238 on sex and adultery: “The pages of Suetonius are full of shocking anecdotes, but the similarities between stories about different emperors...ought to warn the reader.” Cf. Bradley 1985a, 81: “Suetonius’ attitude to the sexual and marital details recorded is based less on rational deliberation than on his general estimate of any given biographical subject.” Examples follow (81-2) of the varying ways in which Suetonius presents the sexual relationships of “good” and “bad” emperors.
perpetrated against elites. Upper-class women are those who should be most respected, so it is most telling when an emperor has no esteem even for them.\textsuperscript{75}

The majority of women whom Suetonius implicates in imperial affairs are said to have been forced against their will or seduced. This generally conforms to the ideal of the Roman \textit{matrona} as staunch, upright, and loyal to her husband alone.\textsuperscript{76} Thus, while the biographer’s picture of the emperors is largely shaped by the literary tradition of the \textit{libido}-driven tyrant, his portrayal of the \textit{principes’} elite sex partners is also in line with the matron type. Suetonius plays the two characters off each other: the corruption of the virtuous matron who is taken by force (this sort of woman would not seek a lover on her own) draws attention to the outrages of the vice-ridden emperor.\textsuperscript{77} Though such a picture of the Roman \textit{matrona} is idealized, it nevertheless suggests that the biographer sees such women as important members of society who ought to be respected. This observation is significant because none of these women is imperial in rank, yet the

\textsuperscript{75} Cf. Plut. \textit{Ant}. 54.3-5. Plutarch depicts Octavia as the ideal Roman matron: while Antony was off with Cleopatra, Octavia tended the home-fires and raised his children. Plutarch comments that the adulterous Antony actually did his reputation harm by having Octavia for his wife because “he was naturally hated for wronging such a woman.” Elite women like Octavia deserve respect, even from men in power.

\textsuperscript{76} See Richlin 1981, 229 and 235-7 on the outraged \textit{matrona} in moral \textit{exempla} about adultery. Also Fischler 1994, 117-21 on the Roman matron, with the caution that this is a “socially constructed” (117) idealized type. She emphasizes that key traits of the \textit{matrona were her faithfulness to her husband and devotion to her family.} See also Treggiari 1991, 232-7 and Bradley 1985a, 86-91 on the ideal of chastity for a Roman wife. Both authors are clear on the difference between ideals and actual practice.

\textsuperscript{77} See n. 11 above on Dixon’s “victim-heroine” type who suffers at the hands of a tyrant.
biographer still portrays them as worthy of the emperor’s regard, or at the very least his fair treatment. Yet, it should also be noted that Suetonius tends to present the emperors’ lovers as passive, anonymous, and without a voice for protest. Such women are conquered and lack the agency even to defend themselves. Thus, while the biographer seems to have respect for elite women, he still strips them of selfhood.

What is noticeably uncommon in Suetonius’ account of imperial affairs is the manipulative woman who seduces the man, along the lines of Catullus’ Lesbia who grabs hold of the poet’s passion and then spurns him for other lovers. Sallust, in another example, accuses Sempronia of having a “sexual desire [that] was so inflamed that she sought men more often than she was sought by them” (lubido sic accensa, ut saepius peteret viros quam peteretur, Bell. Cat. 25). Here, sex is clearly mixed with ambition, and Sempronia is plainly in command. Also largely absent is the upwardly mobile mistress who uses sex to land a rich and powerful lover in an effort to get ahead. Cleopatra is often styled thus, as is Caesar’s lover Servilia. Suetonius, in contrast, 

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78 Cf., e.g., Cat. 8 on Lesbia taking the lead and the miserable poet following. It is she who decides that she wants him no more (nunc iam illa non vult, 8.9). Later in the poem, the poet asks a series of rhetorical questions about her next lovers. In Cat. 58, the poet is cast as the heartbroken lover and Lesbia as a whore who meets other men in dark alleys. In the elegies of Propertius, the female mistress also has her male lover under her control. See Wyke 2002, esp. Part 1 (“Love Poetry”), pp. 11-191 on the different types of mistresses in elegy.

79 Wyke 2002, 195-243 on Cleopatra as the meretrix regina. Kleiner 2005, 119, 156, 250 also invokes Cleopatra’s image as a femme fatale, which Kleiner views as nothing more than popular tradition. Cf. Hillard 1992, 54 on Caesar’s mistress Servilia’s being cast as the “scheming concubine” who grew rich from her ties Footnote cont. next pg.
hardly ever speaks of an imperial mistress seeking an emperor, the epitome of the rich and powerful lover. As a result of Suetonius’ focus on the passive female lover-cum-victim, the sexual aggressions of imperial women such as Julia, Drusilla, Agrippina, and Messalina stand out all the more.

4.3 Imperial Women as Mistresses: Julia and Messalina

I observed above that the vast majority of emperors in the Caesares have extra-marital affairs. This is less true of imperial women, who are only infrequently said to have strayed from their husbands. However, when imperial women do engage in adultery, Suetonius portrays it as a major scandal, not a small or justifiable dalliance. This inconsistency reflects the legal reality that the male emperor could sleep with whomever he wished, while the adultery of imperial women was treason.

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to the dictator. See also Ov. Am. 1.8 and Prop. 4.5, both of which feature a lena advising young women to milk a rich lover, a trope that goes back to Roman comedy.

80 Richlin 1992, 66 finds two extreme stereotypes operative in portrayals of royal women: the “first lady” who is the model wife and mother, and the promiscuous adulteress. She notes that just as the perfection of the “first lady” is often overstated, so too is the adultery of the promiscuous woman frequently taken to extremes. Often, the affairs of this sort of woman are depicted as worse, or more frequent, than the dalliances of other non-royal adulteresses. In Richlin’s view, the overstatement of the affairs of royal women owes to the fact that there is more at stake in their adultery: power and dynastic succession. Hence, it is met with an extreme response.
The two Juliae, the daughter and granddaughter of Augustus, and Messalina, the
great-niece of Augustus and wife-cousin of Claudius, are the most conspicuous
adulterous women in the *Lives*.\(^81\) In both cases, it is especially notable that Suetonius
sexualizes the women’s alliances with men outside their families. He never hints, as
most modern historians do, that Messalina, for example, was supporting Gaius Silius in
a quest to overthrow Claudius.\(^82\) Rather, he attributes her relationship with the consul
above all to sexual motives (below). Caligula, by way of comparison, is said to have
“seduced” (*sollicitavit ad stuprum, Cal. 12.2*) Macro’s wife, Ennia Naevia, in an effort to
advance himself up the imperial ladder (*si potitus imperio fuisset*, 12.2): the crafty Caligula
used his lover to “worm his way into” Macro’s favor, which gave him the opportunity to
poison Tiberius without the praetorian’s obstruction (*per hanc insinuatus Macroni veneno
Tiberium adgressus est*, 12.2).\(^83\) Otho, similarly, is said to have pretended love for a rich,

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\(^81\) Valeria Messalina was the great-granddaughter of Augustus’ sister Octavia: her father, Valerius Messala,
was Octavia’s grandson (and Augustus’ great-nephew); her mother, Domitia Lepida, was Octavia’s
granddaughter (and Augustus’ great-niece). Hence, Messalina was doubly Claudius’ first cousin once
removed, as Claudius also descended from one of Octavia’s daughters.

\(^82\) For the interpretation of the marriage as a plot, see the summary in Hurley 2001, 184 at 26.2. For a more
literary study of Messalina, see Joshel 1995, 51. She notes that “unbridled sexuality, violence, and ferocity”
are hallmarks of ancient authors’ characterization of this empress. The ancient picture is in contrast to
modern historians’ tendency to view her union with Silius as a political liaison. Joshel explores Tacitus
above all, though with reference to other authors like Suetonius. See also n. 104 below.

\(^83\) It is unclear how having an affair with Ennia would ingratiate Caligula to Macro. One possible
explanation is that Caligula promised to marry Ennia if he became emperor, which, Suetonius notes, he
guaranteed by an oath and written contract (12.2). If Macro knew about this arrangement (which
knowledge is never actually stated in the text), he might have seen the advantage in surrendering his wife.
Footnote cont. next pg.
old freedwoman in order to “worm his way into” Nero’s court (*libertinam aulicam gratiosam...etiam diligere simulavit quamvis anum ac paene decrepitam: per hanc insinuatus Neroni, Otho 2.1*).

As these two examples reveal, the biographer is quick to attribute political motives to men who have affairs (cf. Augustus’ need to keep surveillance on his enemies through their wives, *Aug. 69.1*). The adultery of imperial women, in contrast, remains purely sexual in the *Lives*. Such a presentation suggests that the biographer cannot conceive of women as political rather than sexual beings. Suetonius, ultimately, is concerned with the use to which women put their sexuality and the consequences their affairs might have on imperial lineage and succession.84

Of all female affairs, those of Julia, the daughter of Augustus, are especially prominent because they appear both at greater length and in two separate biographies, those of her father (*Aug. 65*, 101.4) and her husband (*Tib. 10.1*, 11.4, 50.1). The double

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84 Tacitus shows a similar interest in the use to which an imperial woman put her fertility. In Pallas’ speech on why Claudius should marry Agrippina (*Ann. 12.2*), the freedman argues that Agrippina, a woman of proven fertility and in the prime of her youth, should not convey the distinction of the Caesars to another house, but should keep her fecundity within the Julio-Claudian domain where it could be monitored and controlled. See n. 80 above.
narrative is striking because this technique is relatively rare in the *Caesares*, especially for scenes involving women.\(^8^5\) I begin with the story told in the *Augustus*, in which the biographer first reports Julia’s indiscretions, and then proceed to the discrepant account in the *Tiberius*. Because Suetonius spends the most time on his subjects’ reactions to Julia’s affairs, I explore these responses first. Finally, I examine both the biographer’s arrangement of his text and the emperors’ reactions to the woman to ask what picture of Julia emerges from the *Vitae*.

In the *Augustus*, Suetonius writes that in the year of Julia’s downfall, although “[Augustus] was happy and confident in his offspring and the training of those in his household, Fortune deserted him. He banished the two Julias, his daughter and granddaughter, corrupted by every sort of offense” (*sed laetum eum atque fidentem et subole et disciplina domus Fortuna destituit. Iulias, filiam et neptem, omnibus probris contaminatas relegavit*, 65.1). No mention is made of the fact that Julia had a husband to whom she was unfaithful; her father, rather, plays the role of the wronged man.\(^8^6\)

\(^8^5\) See Chapter 3, n. 7.

\(^8^6\) Perhaps the omission of Tiberius has to do with the fact that Augustus was *paterfamilias*. Julia was not married to Tiberius *cum manu*, so her father still had ultimate legal authority over her (see Linderski 1988 on Julia’s legal status). On the other hand, the “Law of Biographical Relevance” also suggests that Julia’s relationship with Tiberius is outside the scope of Augustus’ biography. However, the lack of any reference to the husband is still odd in a case of adultery.
Augustus, in this account, is not responsible for his daughter’s bad behavior. On the contrary, Suetonius explains that the princeps raised her well and had confidence in her, but she let her father down (cf. Vell. Pat. 2.100.3, who blames Julia for having no regard for her great father and husband). In one anecdote in particular, Suetonius writes that Augustus strictly limited the access of non-family members to his daughter and granddaughter (64.2). An illustration follows in which the emperor turns away his daughter’s male caller at Baiae, despite the fact that the young man, L. Vinicius, was distinguished and of good character (claro decoroque iuveni, 64.2). Suetonius, therefore, even goes so far as to suggest that Augustus tried to protect his female offspring from men’s advances; the women, it is implied, were deceitful and lustful enough to get around him. There is also a sense in Augustus 65 in which the more abstract Fortuna

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87 The caller, roughly the same age as Julia, was the son of L. Vinicius (cos. 33 BCE) and was also related to M. Vinicius (cos. 19 BCE), who was Augustus’ friend and a military commander (Carter 2003, 184-5 at 64.2). Thus, the young man was from a leading family personally known to the emperor. The point of the anecdote, therefore, is that Augustus turned even this sort of suitor away from his daughter, which fact is evidence of how closely he guarded her.

88 Cf. Aug. 64.2 on the emperor encouraging the traditional feminine arts of weaving and spinning among in the women of his household (also 73 on his habit of wearing homespun clothes made by his sister, wife, daughter, or granddaughters). Here, Suetonius paints Augustus as extremely old-fashioned. He is trying to instill the arts customarily associated with loyal wives and matrons in his offspring, despite the fact that they were the richest family in the empire and had a number of slaves to do such work. Again, the point is that Augustus put the women on the proper course, but they themselves deviated from it.
is liable in Julia’s vices, which picture again takes culpability away from her father.\textsuperscript{89} Suetonius, in addition, reports the banishment of the two Julias as one event, though, in reality, a decade separated them (Julia \textit{filia} was exiled in 2 BCE and Julia \textit{neptis} in 8 CE). The effect of combining the exiles is to diminish embarrassment to Augustus by taking away the appearance of perpetual problems in his household.\textsuperscript{90}

A rather different story, however, is told in the \textit{Tiberius}. There, Suetonius writes that, before their marriage, Tiberius disapproved of Julia’s morals (\textit{Iuliae mores improbaret, Tib. 7.2}) because she had flirted with him while she was still married to Marcellus. In another episode, among the reasons given for Tiberius’ retirement to Rhodes is his disgust with his wife, “whom he dared neither to accuse, nor to divorce, though he was no longer able to endure her” (\textit{dubium uxorisne taedio, quam neque criminari aut dimittere auderet neque ultra perferre posset, Tib. 10.1}; cf. Pliny \textit{NH 7.46} on Agrippa also having suffered Julia’s infidelities). In the \textit{Augustus}, however, all of Julia’s

\textsuperscript{89} Cf. Fortuna’s appearance in Tac. \textit{Ann.} 3.24.3: “Although fortune had been good to Divus Augustus in public matters, that of his household was unfavorable on account of the immorality of his daughter and granddaughter.” One suspects a common source.

\textsuperscript{90} In addition to these techniques, Suetonius does not dwell on the Julias’ adultery, but rather moves quickly to the next example of Augustus’ misfortune, the deaths of Gaius and Lucius (65.1).
past history is suppressed—Tiberius seems to know of her escapades (as did Agrippa, according to Pliny), but her father is ignorant of them. It is likely that Suetonius does not include the similar information on Agrippa (Pliny NH 7.46), if he in fact knew it, because Agrippa was not an emperor and, thus, falls outside the scope of the biographies.

The inconsistencies in Julia’s conduct between the Augustus and Tiberius suggest that Suetonius is protecting Augustus from his daughter’s misbehavior. It suits the unsuccessful Tiberius, on the other hand, to have an unproductive marriage to a wicked wife. In the Tiberius, Suetonius’ paints an unflattering picture of his subject as a powerless cuckold: he can take no action against his adulterous wife because he needs the imperial tie with Augustus that Julia provides (10.1, cf. Tib. 11.4 where Tiberius is initially happy at the news of his divorce, but then tries to reconcile Julia with her father in order to protect his own interests). In general, the biographer uses the character of Julia to draw out Tiberius’ volatile and disagreeable nature. In regard to her adultery,

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91 It is likely that Suetonius does not include the similar information on Agrippa (Pliny NH 7.46), if he in fact knew it, because Agrippa was not an emperor and, thus, falls outside the scope of the biographies.

92 See. n. 73 above on Suetonius’ tendency to portray Augustus in a positive light. Leon 1951, 172 posits that Augustus’ ignorance might have been real: “No inferior would have dared to inform him directly.” Hallett 2006, 149, in contrast, proposes that Augustus had been overlooking Julia’s adulteries for years (similarly Lacey in n. 97 below). It is hard to say what “really” happened, but Suetonius suggests that Augustus had been in the dark.

93 It is also notable that Tiberius, according to Suetonius, was “forced” to marry Julia in the first place (coactus est, Tib. 7.2), and that Augustus sent the bill of divorce to his daughter in Tiberius’ name (repudiumque et suo nomine ex auctoritate Augusti remissum, Tib. 11.4). Suetonius, on the whole, stresses Tiberius’ passivity in the marriage and Augustus’ control over his family.

94 First, Tiberius’ “forced” (coactus est, 7.2) marriage to the flirtatious woman is said to have caused him grief (non sine magno angore animi, 7.2; doluit, 7.3); next, the loss of their child makes him grow cold and severe (dissedit et aliquanto gravius, 7.3); finally, knowledge of Julia’s affairs drives Tiberius from Rome at the height of Footnote cont. next pg.
Tiberius’ foreknowledge of Julia’s affairs adds to his misery, which in turn contributes to the characterization of Tiberius as dark, stern, and discontent.

Having established that Augustus comes out well from his daughter’s adultery but that Tiberius’ image is more damaged by it, we may ask what picture of Julia arises from these accounts. Because Augustus, in his \textit{Vita}, has no knowledge of and has even tried to prevent his daughter’s misbehavior, Julia’s personal deviance is underscored. The picture that Suetonius paints is of the whole house having been in line except for the emperor’s daughter, which presentation singles out Julia as especially errant. It is conspicuous that the biographer does not detail the alleged crimes of either Julia, especially considering that he regularly indicates the name, social rank, and/or number of partners involved when writing about the infidelities of imperial males. He also tends to offer some explanation of how the emperors’ affairs began, for instance if a \textit{princeps} stole his lover from her husband, used her for entertainment, or seduced her for political ends (Section 2 above).

In the \textit{Augustus}, on the other hand, instead of looking at the Julias’ actions the biographer writes that the women themselves were stained by offense (\textit{omnibus probris contaminatas}, Aug. 65.1). Suetonius’ lack of hard details becomes clearer when reading the \textit{Augustus} against the history of Velleius Paterculus, who identifies five lovers of the

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of his success (\textit{prosperis confluentibus}, 10.1) to a brooding existence on far-off Rhodes. Julia, in general, brings out the worst in her husband.
elder Julia by name (2.100.4-5). Velleius’ account shows particularly well the degree to which Suetonius focuses on the inappropriateness of the women as individuals with no other details to distract. The end effect in the Augustus is that since the Julias have no “partners in crime,” they alone are to blame for their faults.

What is even more noticeable, however, is the fact that there is no suggestion in either the Augustus or Tiberius that the women were seduced (as the emperors’ lovers are almost always said to have been), which would lessen the degree to which the Juliae themselves were responsible. On the contrary, Suetonius, as we saw above, relates a rumor about the emperor’s daughter approaching Tiberius while she was still Marcellus’ wife. In addition, because no outside motives for the affairs are adduced (such as political machinations, espionage, and the like, which are often attached to the adulterous emperors), the lust and impropriety of the women is called to the fore. The women, consequently, appear to have acted solely out of lust, as was Julia’s wont, the Tiberius suggests. Though modern historians tend to see conspiracy behind both banishments, Suetonius gives the women no place in politics, keeping their affairs firmly within the sexual realm instead.95

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95 On Julia filia, Carter 2003, 185 at 65.1 writes, “Adultery there may well have been; but it was not the heart of the matter” (cf. ibid, 186-7 at 65.3). There is a whiff of a conspiracy in Aug. 19.2, though Carter 2003, 113 at 19 suspects that Suetonius has confused Julia the Elder with Julia the Younger. Both Pliny NH 7.149 and Sen. (Brev. Vit. 14.4.5 and De Ben. 6.32) more clearly link Julia’s adultery to a plot. On Julia neptis, “Historians rightly sense a plot” (Carter 2003, 185 at 65.1). The younger Julia’s husband, L. Aemilius Paullus, was also condemned for conspiracy (Aug. 19.1), though there is no evidence that the two were
What the biographer explains in greater detail than the women’s crimes is their punishments. More, however, is said about Julia filia than Julia neptis: Suetonius’ entire report on Augustus’ granddaughter consists of the two facts that the emperor banished her (65.1) and refused to recognize the child born to her in exile (65.4). He specifies neither the details of Julia’s adultery, nor the father of the baby.96

One explanation for Suetonius’ relative brevity and omission with the younger Julia is his wish to focus on Augustus’ particular devastation at the hands of his daughter, whose legitimate sons, Gaius and Lucius, were his chosen heirs. The biographer reports that the princeps bore the later deaths of his grandsons relatively well, but his sense of shame made him totally unable to speak about Julia in front of the

brought down together (Barnes 1981, 362-3). See Carter for an overview of the evidence and a report of scholarly views on the reasons behind the women’s exiles and also, more recently, Fantham 2006, 85-91 and 108-116. Fantham, in particular, cautions that charges of adultery were leveled against women of rank throughout Roman history, on which topic she has a nice summary (86-7). Like Carter, she does not rule out adultery altogether, but still cautions that the timing of Julia’s downfall was “too convenient.”

96 See Barnes 1981, 362-3 on the child. Most historians assume the baby’s father to have been D. Iunius Silanus, the man with whom Julia was accused of adultery. Barnes points out, however, that it is possible that Julia got pregnant while in exile because Suetonius does not say how long after the banishment the birth took place. In the end, however, Barnes argues that the pregnancy was probably the cause of Julia’s downfall rather than a result of her exile. It is possible that her husband, Aemilius Paullus, had already been condemned for conspiracy by the time of the pregnancy (on him, see n. 95 above), which points towards her lover, Iunius Silanus, as the father. See also Fantham 2006, 108-16 on Julia the Younger, about whom, Fantham notes, historical sources say very little. Cf. Claud. 26.1 (Claudius was engaged in his youth to Aemilia Lepida, but broke off the engagement because her parents had insulted Augustus). Her mother, who is unnamed in Claud. 26.1, was Julia the Younger and the “insult” her banishment for adultery.
The emperor was so upset he “even thought about killing” his daughter, Suetonius adds (etiam de necanda deliberavit, 65.2; cf. the emperor’s remark that he would rather be the father of his daughter’s dead freedwoman than of Julia herself, 65.2). In the end, by drawing attention to the emperor’s intense reaction to the adultery rather than to the adultery itself, Suetonius illustrates the degree to which Julia was operating outside the acceptable range of behavior for both an imperial daughter and a woman more broadly. Augustus’ own mortality is also highlighted by his negative response to Julia’s depravity.

After explaining Augustus’ devastation, the biographer goes on to describe Julia’s punishments: Augustus banished his daughter to Pandateria; denied her the use of wine and luxuries; and forbade her the company of men, whether slave or free, without his permission (Aug. 65.3). Suetonius fails to mention that Julia did, in fact, enjoy the company of her mother, Scribonia (Dio 55.10.14). Perhaps this would seem too

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97 Gaius and Lucius were adopted in 17 BCE. Lucius died in 2 CE and Gaius in 4 CE. Therefore, the boys were already adopted and were still alive at the time of their mother’s downfall. Augustus’ sharp reaction to his daughter’s adultery derives, in part, from the fact that her delinquency reflected poorly on the principate as an institution and called into question her father’s choice of successors. Her behavior, additionally, made light of her father’s moral reforms. Julia was also Augustus’ only child, so removing her (as he was compelled to do, by banishment) meant breaking an important dynastic line. See Severy 2003, who stresses the important role that Julia played in her father’s moral legislation: the emperor depended on her to be a model of Roman motherhood and wifehood. Above all, Severy suggests that Augustus wanted to keep his daughter on a short leash because, without male children of his own, Julia was a man’s link to the imperial family (both for the man himself and for the children he could have with her). Along similar lines, Lacey 1980 argues that Augustus invented the story of suddenly “discovering” his daughter’s infidelities because he had to divert attention from her earlier affairs, which could call into question the legitimacy of Augustus’ heirs.
“soft” on the emperor’s part; Suetonius seems to want to emphasize the princeps’ severity above all.\textsuperscript{98} After five years, the biographer continues, Augustus moved Julia to Reginium on the mainland and was “slightly” less harsh to her (\textit{lenioribusque paulo conditionibus}, 65.3).\textsuperscript{99} He never recalled his daughter, however, though the Roman people “often pleaded” on her behalf and “rather persistently insisted” for her return (\textit{deprecanti saepe p. R. et pertinacius instanti}, 65.3; cf. \textit{Tib.} 11.4, Tiberius also tried to reconcile father and daughter).\textsuperscript{100} Rather than complying with their demands, Augustus’ only response to the \textit{populus} was to “pray in an assembly that they be cursed with such daughters and wives” (\textit{tales filias talesque coniuges pro contione inprecatus}, 65.3; cf. similar cries of woe in 65.4). Augustus’ harsh treatment of Julia continued until his death, when in his will he ultimately denied his daughter and granddaughter burial in the family tomb (101.4). The exclusion of the Julias from the family mausoleum again

\textsuperscript{98} Since Scribonia had not been charged with a crime, she followed her daughter voluntarily and presumably brought her own possessions and slaves, which might have eased Julia’s punishment. Either Scribonia feared for herself in Rome, or she wanted to support her daughter (Fantham 2006, 89). Fantham also makes an argument similar to mine, that Suetonius’ account stresses Augustus’ austerity.

\textsuperscript{99} Probably in 4 CE when Augustus adopted Tiberius after Gaius’ death. Augustus had settled some veterans in the area of Reginium, so there was supervision available (Linderski 1988, 184).

\textsuperscript{100} Suetonius never assigns a clear motive to the people. However, they most likely lobbied for Julia’s return (which Dio records with the events of 3 CE, 55.13.1) because Julia was the mother of Gaius, the heir apparent (Carter 2003, 186-7 at 65.3). Presumably, some thought they could gain from being on Julia’s side. It is notable, however, that Suetonius speaks of the \textit{populus Romanus} broadly, not of any one group looking for special favor. The sense he gives in the \textit{Augustus} is of a mass demonstration against the emperor (cf. \textit{in contione}, 65.3). Carter suggests that Julia and her companions would have been attractive to some because they “stood for something less austere and more ‘popular’ than the ageing Augustus and his grim stepson Tiberius” (187).
shows the extent to which the women were operating outside the bounds of appropriate feminine behavior.

Though Suetonius’ Augustus is strict, his austerity never crosses the line to cruelty. In fact, one could argue that Suetonius’ description of Julia’s punishments reflects well on the emperor because it shows that he complied with the law on adultery: Augustus did not apply the law selectively, but rather held his own family liable to the same standards as everyone else. In Suetonius’ Tiberius, however, that emperor does not follow his predecessor’s lead. Remarking on Tiberius’ harsh treatment of his wife (for he did not maintain his initial generosity in Tib. 11.4, where he allowed Julia to keep her gifts in their divorce), Suetonius states that (50.1):

Iuliae uxori tantum afuit ut relegatae, quod minimum est, offici aut humanitatis aliquid impertiret, ut ex constitutione patris uno oppido clausam domo quoque egredi et commercio hominum frui vetuerit; sed et peculio concesso a patre praebitisque annuis fraudavit, per speciem publici iuris, quod nihil de his Augustus testamento cavisset.

[Tiberius] was so far from showing any kindness or humanity to his exiled wife Julia, which is the least that one might expect, that when she was confined to one town by the orders of her father, he forbade her to leave the house and to have any contact with people; but he stole from her even the small amount of money allowed to her by her father and also

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101 The “bad” Domitian, in contrast, applies the law subjectively: cf. Dom. 3.1 on his recall of Domitia after divorcing her, and 8.3 on his removing an equestrian from the list of jurors for doing the same thing. Domitian, additionally, puts three Vestals to death for acts of incesta (8.3), but practices incest himself with his niece (22). See Vinson 1989 for hypocrisy as a key theme in historiographical treatments of Domitian. Lateiner 1989, 172-9 and Dunkle 1967, 168 also note that tyrants are regularly said to have disregarded the law or applied it only selectively.
her yearly income, under the guise of observing the public law, because Augustus made no arrangement for these in his will.

Here, it is notable that Tiberius is criticized for being cruel to Julia, but Augustus, who was portrayed as severe in his own Life, comes across as relatively kind and indulgent. The context in which this passage appears, a paragraph on Tiberius’ mistreatment of his family members (odium adversus necessitudines, 50.1), helps to show that Suetonius is censuring Tiberius’ behavior and holding it out to be harsh.102

All in all, the arrangement of Tiberius 50.1 is highly schematic: Augustus gave Julia room to roam in the whole town, while Tiberius confined her to a single property; her father let her have company with his permission, but Tiberius allows her none; Augustus supplied his daughter with money, but her husband steals it. The result of this point-by-point presentation is that Tiberius’ own conduct is more at issue than Julia’s. In fact, the thrust of the passage is really the comparison between Tiberius and Augustus, with Julia being merely an illustrative device. It is important to note that Suetonius suggests that the exiled Julia should have been treated with more kindness by the inhumane Tiberius (quod minimum est, offici aut humanitatis aliquid, Tib. 50.1), but he never

102 In regard to Julia’s allowance, Lindsay 1995, 150 at 50.1 argues that Suetonius, “not surprisingly,” takes Tiberius’ strict application of the law as a sign of his cruelty. Though see Linderski 1988, 189-93, who suggests that Tiberius was being mean spirited when he deprived her of the allowance previously given to her by her father—as Augustus’ heir, Tiberius certainly could have maintained what the estate was previously paying. Fantham 2006, 90, on the other hand, suggests that Augustus himself “expressly disinherited the daughter he abominated” by not making a provision for her peculium in his will.
states that Julia was unfairly banished or that she ought to have been recalled. That is to say, his criticism of Tiberius’ severity is not extended to the emperor’s holding of Julia in Rhegium. Though the purpose of this paragraph is to stress Tiberius’ cruelty, one can also argue that the biographer reminds the reader of Julia’s fault once more.

Similar treatment of an imperial woman reappears in the Claudius in regard to the emperor’s wife-cousin, Messalina (on their familiar relationship, see Claud. 26.2: Barbati Messalae consobrini sui filiæ). Just as Augustus was depicted as an uninformed father, so too is Claudius portrayed as an unaware husband: he suddenly learns of his wife’s “shameful and wicked deeds” (flagitia atque dedecora, Claud. 26.2) including her adulterous marriage to C. Silius (cf. also 29 on Claudius’ ignorance). Here, Suetonius accentuates Claudius’ surprise at Messalina’s affair, which stress plays into the biographer’s portrayal of the princeps as frightened, blind, and lacking control.103

As he did with Julia Augusti, Suetonius again says more about the emperor’s reaction to Messalina’s crimes than he does about the woman’s actual deeds. The biographer writes merely that as soon as Claudius learned about the Silius affair, the emperor killed his wife (quam cum comperisset super cetera flagitia atque dedecora C. Silio

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103 Hurley 2001, 183-5 at 26.2 for references in the ancient sources to Messalina’s pre-Silius promiscuity. Suetonius’ Claudius, by contrast, is uninformed of his wife’s history. In fact, there is almost nothing in the Vita about her past affairs. Cf. Vit. 2.5 on Vitellius carrying her slipper under his tunic and kissing it. Though this is painted as excessive flattery on Vitellius’ part, there are still sexual overtones to the scene (e.g., osculabundus; see Ov. Ars Am. 2.210-1 on the lover removing his beloved’s shoes). As with other women, the biographer’s treatment of Messalina is highly fragmented (below).
etiam nupsisse dote inter auspices consignata, supplicio adfecit, 26.2). Although Suetonius states that Messalina’s “marriage” to Silius was in addition to other transgressions (super cetera flagitia atque dedecora), these further indiscretions are not recounted in detail. Instead, they are merely described in broad terms as disgraceful misdeeds. The essence of Suetonius’ presentation is that the substance of Messalina’s actions is less important than their improper nature.

While the “marriage” with Silius appears out of the blue in Suetonius’ Claudius, Tacitus (Ann. 11.12, 11.26-38), Dio (60.31.1-5), and Juvenal (10.329-45; cf. meretrix Augusta, 6.118) all offer a more developed background story to the event, one that focuses on Messalina’s seducing Silius. Tacitus, in particular, offers a complex narrative that weaves together sex and politics (cf. Messalinae potentiam, Ann. 11.26). Suetonius, in contrast, gives no account of how either the affair or the marriage began, only of how the relationship ended—with Messalina’s death. Though there are hints of politics behind the adultery elsewhere in the biography, the biographer never stresses ambition as Messalina’s or Silius’ primary motive.104 Considering that the biographer’s language

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104 Claud. 36 is the closest Suetonius comes to positing a political intrigue behind the affair: Claudius is said to have feared that Silius was seeking his imperium. Suetonius’ Claudius, however, is notoriously suspicious and scared (e.g., Claud. 35). Thus, one cannot be certain whether the biographer means that the plot of Silius and Messalina was a real threat, or merely one perceived by the timid emperor. The latter interpretation is strengthened by the topical sentence of this same passage in which Suetonius proclaims that Claudius feared unfounded conspiracies (quasdam insidias temere delatas adeo expavit, 36). It is also conspicuous that Suetonius omits the Silius matter from his tally of plots faced by Claudius (13). Cf. 29.3, where the biographer writes that he cannot believe that Claudius knew about the relationship and signed the dowry. Footnote cont. next pg.
centers on Messalina’s misconduct (flagitia atque dedecora...male, 26.2; adulter, 36), if any driving force at all can be gleaned from Suetonius’ narrative it is sexual indiscretion.\textsuperscript{105}

The clearest affinity between Messalina and Julia, however, is the fact that Suetonius’ presentation of both women is highly fragmented. While Julia’s story was scattered across the \textit{Augustus} and \textit{Tiberius}, Messalina’s is broken up in the \textit{Claudius} (26.2, 29.3, 36, 39.1) and \textit{Vitellius} (2.5). Like Julia’s affairs and punishment, Suetonius again uses the same events, Messalina’s “marriage” to Silius and death, to different effects in the \textit{Claudius} depending on their context. For example, although Claudius acts decisively in 26.2 in response to his apparently certain knowledge of Messalina’s affair (\textit{cum comperisset}), Suetonius writes of her penalty again in 29.3, this time surrounded by examples of the emperor killing people hastily and on false charges.\textsuperscript{106} In another

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\textsuperscript{105} See Ginsburg 2006, 126-7 on characterizations of Messalina and Agrippina in Roman historiography. She notes that Messalina is most often styled as a \textit{meretrix} “for whom sexual pleasure was a goal” (127), while Agrippina is more closely tied to incest and political machinations. Because the two women are often connected by Roman historians, the marriage to Agrippina following on the heels of Messalina’s death in their texts, Messalina’s lack of political activity (or, more properly, her interference in politics only to serve her sexual goals) highlights Agrippina’s meddling in imperial affairs to satisfy her own ambition.

\textsuperscript{106} \textit{Claud.} 29: of Appius Silanus, his father-in-law, and the two Julias, daughters of Drusus and Germanicus: \textit{crimine incerto nec defensione ulla data occidit}. He also brought down his two sons-in-law, Cn. Pompeius and

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Footnote cont. next pg.
anecdote, the biographer explains that Claudius’ ardent passion (amorem flagrantissimum, 36) for Messalina faded not necessarily because of her affair, but because the emperor feared that Silius sought the principate. This statement suggests that time lapsed between the discovery of the “marriage” and Messalina’s death, which Suetonius had previously collapsed in 26.2. Here in Claudius 36, however, the biographer uses the lag between the two events to highlight Claudius’ uxoriousness. Later still, Suetonius relates a story that Claudius was so absentminded that he asked where the slain Messalina was when she failed to show up for dinner (39.1)—this from the man who decisively put her to death in Claudius 26.2.

Suetonius, as we can see, uses various aspects of Messalina’s downfall to accentuate certain of Claudius’ behaviors, for instance his timidity, absent-mindedness, and excessive devotion to his wives. Like Julia in the Tiberius, Messalina in the Claudius brings out the worst in her husband. In both Lives, Suetonius is concerned above all with the emperor’s handling of his wife’s adulteries, looking especially for signs of cruelty or misapplication of the law on the part of the punisher. The actual deeds of the women are of lesser concern.

Lucius Silanus, for no clearly justifiable reasons. Rather, Agrippina’s selfish desire to elevate Nero lurks in the background. Death, furthermore, was inflicted on trivial grounds upon thirty-five senators and more than three-hundred equestrians (tanta facilitate animadvertit). Messalina’s affair with Silius follows these as last in the list (29.3).
4.4 Conclusion

In general, women appear only occasionally in the *Caesares* and tend to be rather superficial and simplified characters. However, in some cases women actually have an important bearing on the biographer’s depiction and characterization of an emperor. For example, Drusilla, Livilla, and Agrippina do much to shape the image of Caligula as depraved, unconventional, and mentally unstable, which are the hallmark traits of Suetonius’ emperor. Messalina, similarly, furthers the central notions of Claudius being at the whim of his wives, easily duped, and timid, which are again characteristic qualities of this *princeps*.¹⁰⁷

Because the women have been, for the most part, so tangential to the biographies before their “key scenes” (here, their sexual conduct), Suetonius often has to supply background information to explain the women’s actions and importance. It is no surprise that in two of the episodes discussed above, Augustus and Claudius suddenly “discover” the adultery of Julia and Messalina, respectively. Although abrupt exposure serves other purposes as well (for example, it distances Augustus from Julia’s bad behavior and it paints Claudius as blind to his wife’s outrages), it is also a convenient technique that allows the biographer to press ahead with the consequences of the

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¹⁰⁷ See Ginsburg 2006, 126 on Roman historians using adulterous women as a “metaphor for the political weakness of the emperor and illegitimacy of his claim to power.”
women’s actions rather than having to recount their history. In the Caligula, on the other hand, Suetonius goes back to the emperor’s childhood to fill in the gaps (Cal. 24.1 on the affair with Drusilla in Caligula’s youth). As David Wardle observes, this is a highly unusual practice for the latter half of the Caligula (and also, we can add, for other Lives as well), which otherwise focuses squarely on the subject’s actions while emperor.\textsuperscript{108} Suetonius, however, has previously kept the sisters on the periphery, so he has to pull out old information on them to further the scene at hand.

One can push these observations further to suggest that Suetonius himself “discovers” late the women’s importance. Though he relies on women to help shape his depiction of his male subjects, he does not consistently develop them as characters throughout the Lives. Women, rather, suddenly burst on the scene, and only then when the biographer needs them. Such a presentation is somewhat jarring because, despite their sudden appearance, the contributions that the women make to Suetonius’ overall characterizations of his subjects are often meaningful and lasting.

On the whole, the examination of the women above emphasizes the incoherence of Suetonius’ presentation of women in the Lives. Inconsistencies can be found in all three groups (the sisters of Caligula, the Juliae, and Messalina): for example, Caligula practices incest with all his sisters, but then is said to have a special relationship with

\textsuperscript{108} Wardle 1994, 225 at 24.1.
Drusilla and to have prostituted Livilla and Agrippina to other men; Augustus has no knowledge of Julia’s affairs, but she is a persistent adulteress in the Tiberius; Claudius swiftly kills Messalina upon suddenly learning of her infidelities, but then his passion for his wife is said not to have faded because of her affairs.

For the most part, women appear in Suetonius’ narrative with the primary purpose of illustrating a certain characteristic trait of the associated man. Some women’s varied roles (for example, Julia appears as a daughter in the Augustus, but as a wife in the Tiberius; or, Agrippina as a sister in the Caligula, but as a mother in the Nero) make it particularly easy for Suetonius to disassemble them. He can pull out one attribute here (for example, Augustus’ control over his house), and another there (Tiberius’ bad luck with his unfaithful wife), all using the same woman. Although a genealogical tree may have made clear the simultaneous positions of a woman as a wife, mother, daughter, and niece, such multifaceted depictions do not appear in Suetonius’ Caesares.
5. Conclusion: Reassembling the Fragmented Woman

As my choice of examples has made clear, the most prominent women in the *Lives* are Livia and Agrippina the Younger, with Livia appearing in six of the twelve biographies (*Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, Galba, Otho*) and Agrippina in an equal number (*Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, Nero, Otho, and Vespasian*). On the one hand, Livia’s and Agrippina’s numerous appearances in the *Caesares* reflect their general eminence—each woman was the wife of one emperor, and the mother of another. Livia, additionally, was the grandmother, great-grandmother, and patron of yet other *principes* (Claudius, Caligula, Galba and Otho, respectively), and Agrippina an imperial sister (Caligula) and niece (Claudius). It is not surprising, therefore, that Livia’s and Agrippina’s prominence in the *Caesares* mirrors these women’s leading roles in Tacitus’ *Annals*, to restrict ourselves to Latin historiography.

5.1 Suetonius and Tacitus: Poppaea

Although Suetonius and Tacitus both pay great attention to Livia and Agrippina the Younger, not all the women who are spotlighted in the *Annals* are so conspicuous in

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1 See Chapter 1, n. 91 for fuller references.

2 Livia is prominent in *Ann. books 1-5* (see her obituary in 5.1-2), and Agrippina in books 12-15.
the *Caesares*. Poppaea, for example, figures largely in Tacitus (esp. *Ann.* 13.45-6, 14.59-65, 16.6-7), but makes only a passing appearance in Suetonius’ *Caesares* (*Nero* 35.3-5; *Otho* 3).³ In *Nero* 35.3, Suetonius reports her marriage and murder in the very same sentence, which means that Poppaea no sooner appears in the biography than she disappears.⁴ She is mentioned two more times in *Nero* 35, but the references are both made in passing: Antonia is said to have been killed by Nero after Poppaea’s death (35.4); and Rufrius Crispus, another of Nero’s victims, is described as the emperor’s stepson through Poppaea (35.5).⁵

Poppaea’s only other scene in the *Caesares* is also brief. Suetonius narrates Otho’s short-lived marriage to her, which the biographer describes as a ruse (*nuptiarum specie*, 3.1). Otho, a close friend of Nero, was supposed to keep Poppaea near the emperor, but far away from Agrippina, who disliked her son’s mistress: the implication in Suetonius is that if Agrippina believed Poppaea to be Otho’s wife, she would not take action against her. Otho, in this arrangement, would let Nero and Poppaea carry on their

³ The same is true of Agrippina the Elder. Suetonius’ short mentions of her (e.g., *Cal.* 8, 10.1, 12.3, 23) are striking next to Tacitus’ highly favorable and lengthy treatment of her in *Annals* 1-4, where he contrasts Agrippina’s loyalty against Tiberius’ cruelty.

⁴ *Nero* 35.3: *Poppaeam duodecimo die post divorcium Octaviae in matrimonium acceptam dilexit unice; et tamen ipsam quoque ictu calcis occidit, quod se ex aurigatione sero reversum gravida et aegra conviciis incesserat.*

⁵ Cf. *Otho* 3.1 on Poppaea’s previous marriage. There, Suetonius says that Nero separated Poppaea from her husband in order to take her as his mistress.
affair. Otho, Suetonius claims, ended up falling in love with Poppaea (*adeo dilexit*) and refused to give her back to Nero after Agrippina’s death,⁶ thus leading Nero to break up the marriage and banish Otho to Lusitania.⁷ In neither scene (*Nero* 35 and *Otho* 3) does Suetonius develop Poppaea’s character. Rather, in Suetonius’ biographies she comes across as Nero’s pawn; here he marries and murders her, and there he arranges a complicated scheme to keep her as his mistress.

In general, Poppaea’s quick appearance in the *Nero* serves a rhetorical end. *Nero* 35 is flush with the emperor’s victims, nine in all, including two wives (Octavia and Poppaea) and one would-be wife (Antonia, who was murdered for refusing Nero’s

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⁷ See Murison 2001, 98-102, who gives an overview of the “Otho-Poppaea-Nero Triangle” for which we have five extant accounts (Plut. *Gal.* 19.2-20.2; Suet. *Otho* 3; Tac. *Hist.* 1.13.3-4 and *Ann.* 13.45-6; and Dio 61.11.2-4). As Murison observes, untangling these versions, esp. in regard to source criticism, poses “major problems” which “bedevil the study not only of the Year of the Four Emperors but also the reign of Nero” (98). In particular, the accounts differ over how “real” Otho’s and Poppaea’s marriage was. Another problem is that the phrase *diducto matrimonio* (Suet. *Otho* 3.2) has often been taken to mean that Nero dissolved Otho’s marriage. However, Murison points out (101 at 3.2) the mistake in thinking that the *princeps* had the legal authority to annul other people’s marriages at whim. Rather, it is more likely that Nero pressured Poppaea (whether or not she was willing is unclear) to issue a unilateral *repudium* against Otho. Murison blames modern readers for not understanding the Latin (“this phrase tends to be translated misleadingly,” 101), but he has missed the point. It is Suetonius himself who misleadingly suggests that Nero had a hand in the divorce: *quare diducto matrimonio, sepositus est per causam legationis in Lusitaniam, Otho* 3.2. The preceding sentence reports that Otho refused to surrender Poppaea to Nero, who stood outside Otho’s door issuing threats. The next sentence, quoted above, begins with the divorce, and concludes with Nero’s banishing Otho to the provinces—it is, therefore, implied that the divorce and banishment were the fulfillment of Nero’s threats. Poppaea, furthermore, does not even appear in the sentence on the divorce. All in all, Suetonius’ account is exceedingly hostile. He links Nero more clearly to the divorce than he does Poppaea, even if Nero’s role in the matter is not realistic, in order to cast the emperor as aggressive. Cf. *Cal.* 25 where Caligula is likewise accused of breaking up marriages and stealing other men’s wives.
marriage proposal; cf. Statilia Messalina in *Nero* 35.1, whose consular husband was executed in order to free her for a marriage with the emperor). 8 The theme is continued over the course of five paragraphs (*Nero* 34-8) that tally Nero’s many murders. 9 Overall, the biographer is going for “shock value.” Although each murder was separated by time, 10 Suetonius collapses them all in *Nero* 34 through 38 in order to make a vivid impression of wholesale slaughter.

Thus, Suetonius has not only Poppaea, but all the people in *Nero* 34 through 38 come and go quickly in order to stress the idea that Nero was a ruthless killer who amassed a great number of victims. In addition, each person’s brief appearance is used

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8 Eight of these people are said to have been murdered. One, Tuscus, was banished (35.5).

9 *Nero* 34 recounts Nero’s murders of his mother Agrippina and his aunt Domitia, 35 the slayings of his wives and family members, 36 the victims from outside his family, 37 the emperor’s general slaughter of people, and 38 his lack of mercy to the people and city walls of Rome. *Nero* 38 casts the emperor as a “murderer” of the very city itself (*sed nec populo aut moenibus patriae pepercit*, 38.1). In particular, Suetonius writes that Nero set fire to Rome in order to clear a swath for the *Domus Aurea*. Suetonius’ hostility towards Nero can be seen in both the arrangement of the text (putting the fire in the context of Nero’s many murders) and the language of the passage.

10 Using the murders of Nero’s wives as an illustration (*Nero* 35): Octavia died in June of 62 CE (Tac. *Ann*. 14.60-4; see Rudich 1993, 70-4); Poppaea in summer 65 (Tac. *Ann*. 16.7; see Rudich 1993, 135-6); and Antonia some time in late 65 or, more likely, early 66. Because Antonia’s death is not recorded in the *Ann.*, it is likely to have happened in 66 CE after the text of *Ann.* 16 breaks off (Warmington 1999, 66 at 35.4; Rudich 1993, 137). Nero, furthermore, married Statilia in the first half of 66 based on both coin evidence from Ephesus, and the absence of her marriage in the *Ann.* (Bradley 1978, 208 at 35.1). Thus, Antonia probably died after Poppaea’s murder in summer 65, but before Nero’s new marriage to Statilia in the first half of 66: Suetonius’ story is that Nero killed Antonia because she refused his marriage proposal after Poppaea’s death (35.4); if Nero were already married to Statilia, he would not have made the proposal to Antonia. See also Bradley 1985a, 80 on Suetonius’ “preconceived plan to exploit...as detrimentally as possible” the many deaths by lumping them all together.
to suggest that s/he did nothing to deserve his/her fate—a character who appears fleetingly does not have time to commit any grievous crime. In the case of Poppaea more specifically, Suetonius writes that she was pregnant and ill when she was murdered (gravida et aegra, 35.3), information that creates pathos. By making Poppaea doubly unable to defend herself, the biographer highlights Nero’s aggression. Tacitus, in contrast, writes only that Poppaea was pregnant, with no reference to an infirmity (Ann. 16.6.1). The information on her ill-health is, in fact, unique to Suetonius. Its inclusion allows the biographer better to play Poppaea’s weakness against Nero’s brutality. The emperor’s murder of his aunt also comes to mind, for Suetonius similarly explains that Domitia was sick when Nero ordered her death (aegram, 34.5), which he narrates only one chapter before Poppaea’s death. The added information on Poppaea’s illness perhaps serves to tie the two scenes together, thereby establishing Nero as the type of person who exploits the infirmities of women.

Added to Poppaea’s inability to protect herself is the fact that she dies violently by a swift kick (et tamen ipsam quoque ictu calcis occidit, 35.3). In the Annals, Tacitus

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11 Cf. my discussion in Chapter 2, Section 3 on Suetonius (especially in comparison to Tacitus) painting Agrippina as undeserving of her murder at Nero’s hand. Cf. Suetonius’ comments that Nero’s first wife Octavia was put to death on false charges that were denied by all who knew her: sub crimine adulteriorum adeo impudenti falsoque...pernegantibus cunctis (Nero 35.2). Really, the biographer explains, Nero had merely tired of her company (Octaviae consuetudinem cito aspernatus, 35.1).

12 Bradley 1978, 212 at 35.2.
presents an alternate version to the kicking story. He writes that Poppaea may have been poisoned by Nero, although he ultimately dismisses it as an unlikely scenario (Ann. 16.6.1). Suetonius, however, never allows a less violent alternative. Instead, he focuses his report squarely on bodily force, depicting Poppaea’s murder as an act of rage on Nero’s part. According to the biographer, Poppaea had done nothing other than scold (convicis incesserat, 35.3) her husband for coming home late from the races; Nero, bristling at the rebuke, attacked her. Since Suetonius has said that Poppaea was pregnant and ill at the time, it seems reasonable for her to desire her husband’s presence. It also makes sense that she should wish to be undisturbed by his late-night entry. Her grievance against her husband, thus, comes across as rational and understandable, not the sort of behavior deserving of death.13

As the foregoing analysis has shown, Suetonius makes Poppaea’s appearance in the Caesares brief, but when he does write about her he stresses her vulnerability and Nero’s resultant control over her. Suetonius’ picture is sharply at odds with Tacitus’, both in the sense that the historian gives Poppaea a larger role in the Annals, and that he paints her as a mean and domineering figure (e.g., his comment that Poppaea ruled

13 Cf. Nero 34.1, where Agrippina is similarly killed for trivial reasons (cf. Chapter 2, Section 3). Balsdon 1963, 127, however, reads the scene differently. He sympathizes with Nero for lashing out at his nagging wife. Nero, Balsdon adds, was “understandably tired and irritable” at the time, and was “in no sense her murderer because he caused her death.” However, the context of Poppaea’s death in Suetonius’ Nero, the many passages on murder in Nero 34-8, present the emperor’s actions as hostile. Additionally, Suetonius, as I have argued, calls attention to Poppaea’s weaknesses in contrast to Nero’s aggressive brutality.
Nero first as a mistress and then as a wife, *ea diu paelex et adulteri Neronis, mox mariti potens, Ann. 14.60*. In Tacitus’ account, Poppaea urges Nero to murder both Agrippina (14.1) and Octavia (14.60), actions that are made prominent by the fact that they frame the beginning and end of Book 14. According to Tacitus, Poppaea caused the downfall of the two women by making nasty comments aimed at rousing Nero’s anger (e.g., saying that he was nothing more than his mother’s ward, 14.1), and by bringing false charges against them (14.60-1). Suetonius, in contrast, describes Poppaea in fairly positive terms, inasmuch as she is portrayed as undeserving of her violent end. In the *Caesares*, furthermore, Poppaea plays no role in the murder of either Agrippina (Nero 34) or Octavia (35.1-2), which two slayings are attributed to Nero’s own violent nature. In the *Caesares* in general, Suetonius, unlike Tacitus, gives Poppaea no speech and no freedom of action, which emphasizes her passive role as Nero’s victim.

These differences with Tacitus are important to note because they help to reveal Suetonius’ independence as an author. Although Tacitus gives evidence of a substantial tradition about Poppaea, Suetonius does not make her a major character in the *Lives*. Instead, he uses the very briefness of Poppaea’s appearance to underscore Nero’s

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15 Cf. my discussion above on Nero 34-8, which series of paragraphs emphasize Nero’s many victims.
violence.\textsuperscript{16} Additionally, if Suetonius were really interested in sex and scandal, he surely would have written more extensively on women like Poppaea, Acte (Nero’s freedwoman concubine, \textit{Nero} 28.1, 50),\textsuperscript{17} and Messalina (\textit{Claud.} 26.2, 29.3, 36-7).\textsuperscript{18} Instead, he hardly mentions the lurid charges raised against these women by authors such as Tacitus, Dio, Juvenal, and Pliny.\textsuperscript{19}

In the end, we can conclude that Suetonius is a selective author with an agenda. In his effort to paint a particular picture of his male biographical subjects, he highlights some women and sidelines others according to his rhetorical needs. Thus, women in the \textit{Caesares} are in some sense literary tools who are used for very specific purposes. A woman either serves to make a man look good, as do Atia and Livia in the \textit{Augustus}, or

\textsuperscript{16} See the introduction to Chapter 1 on Suetonius’ relationship to Tacitus. The illustration of Poppaea I have laid out above might suggest Suetonius’ general independence from the historian, or it might mean that Suetonius was more deliberately trying to offer a different picture than Tacitus. I find the former more probable. Because Suetonius’ characterization of Poppaea fits so well into his carefully plotted portrayal of Nero, it is unlikely that he planned the whole section around a calculated difference with Tacitus. In the end, both authors highlight the same qualities in Nero (e.g., sexual deviance, immoderation, violence), so their views are more or less the same. There is no real sense in which Suetonius is challenging Tacitus.

\textsuperscript{17} Cf. Tac. \textit{Ann.} 13.1.2-3 and 14.63-4. Tacitus describes Acte as “a slave girl more powerful than her mistress [Octavia]” (\textit{tum ancilla domina validior}, 14.63).

\textsuperscript{18} Cf. the scandalous stories in Dio 60.18.2, Plin. \textit{NH} 10.172, and Juv. 6.114-32 on Messalina prostituting herself and turning the imperial palace into a brothel. Also Tacitus’ lengthy and detailed description of her “marriage” to Silanus (\textit{Ann.} 11.26-38). Suetonius, in contrast, has very little of this information on the “marriage” and almost none of the other sexual misdeeds.

\textsuperscript{19} A similar point is made by Baldwin 1983, 346-7, who adds that “there is surprising little, good or bad” on Cleopatra (346). In addition, “that \textit{femme fatale} Poppaea Sabina is treated with notable reticence, both intrinsically and when contrasted with Tacitus’ purple passage and Dio’s lurid anecdote about her” (347). See n. 18 above for references to Messalina.
bad, as does Poppaea in the *Nero* and Agrippina in the *Claudius*. Thus, Suetonius’ female characters enhance the biographer’s system of judging his emperors according to these leaders’ virtues and vices.

### 5.2 Suetonius and Women

Women are most prominent in Suetonius’ *Caesares* for the lineage they convey to their sons as mothers, and for the marriage connections they provide their husbands as wives. Imperial women, accordingly, are concentrated primarily in rubrics on ancestry, marriage, and the birth of children. Suetonius, as these topics show, has a largely conventional view of women. His biographies reflect many of the feminine ideals such as fertility, loyalty, and chastity that were advertised on imperial coins, statues, and in texts like the *Consolatio ad Liviam*. It is notable that when Suetonius seeks to show how “good” Augustus’ family life was, he resorts to the time-honored tropes of weaving and marital *concordia*. As we have seen in Chapters 2 and 3, his portrayals of women such as Atia, Aurelia, Agrippina the Elder, and Livia (in the *Augustus*) also echo Pliny’s praise of Plotina and Marciana for being unobtrusive and deferring to the emperor.

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Sueto nius’ most prominent female characters, however, namely Livia (in the *Tiberius, Caligula, and Claudius*) and Agrippina the Younger, do not always embody these virtues. Rather, they are expressions of the more vicious side of powerful women in the same way that Tiberius, Caligula, Nero, and Domitian exemplify the worst traits of tyrannical *principes*. Thus, when thinking in terms of the ideals held by the biographer, the same problem arises with the women as with the men: Suetoni us writes at greater length about “bad” women than “good” ones.

Therefore, in the *Caesares* in general, positive ideals frequently give way to negative traits. It is suspicious that Suetonius accuses Livia and Agrippina of more or less the same set of crimes, especially meddling in politics, committing murder, and engaging in indiscriminate sexual activities. The same charges are also leveled against Domitian’s wife, Domitia Longina, which offers further evidence of their schematic nature. For the most

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21 See my discussion in Chapter 1, Section 2 on the influence of the tyr ant trope on Sueto nius’ portrayal of the *principes*.

22 Cf. *Tib.* 22 on Livia’s hand in Agrippa Postumus’ murder. See *Claud.* 44 on Agrippina’s murder of Claudius and the *Life of Passion estus Crispus* in Sueto nius’ *De po etis* for her murder of her second husband, Crispus. Suetonius, thus, accuses her of murder twice. Livia’s sexual conduct is largely above reproach, but Sueto nius still records the gossip that Augustus fathered Drusus while Livia was still married to Nero (*Claud.* 1). Agrippina, however, is connected to incest in *Cal.* 24, *Claud.* 26, and *Nero* 28. Cf. *Gal.* 5 on her attempt to seduce the married Galba. As Ginsburg 2006, 16 states, Sueto nius “offers up a theme repeatedly found in the literary construction of Agrippina: transgressive sexual behavior.”

23 See *Dom.* 3 on her affair with an actor, and *Tit.* 10.2 on her rumored affair with Titus. There, Sueto nius doubts that the affair happened because if it were true, Domitia surely would have boasted about it as she was wont to do with her other shameful deeds, he reasons (* haud negatur, si qua omnino fuisse*, *immo etiam* Footnote cont. next pg.)
part, these negative characteristics subvert the ideals espoused for imperial women in other media: meddling in politics is the opposite of inconspicuousness, murder is counter to *pietas*, and sexual indiscretion is antithetical to chastity and carrying on the dynasty. Tampering with adoptions, moreover, undermines images of imperial women as fertile, nurturing mothers living in spousal harmony. Suetonius thus portrays Livia (at times) and Agrippina the Younger (more consistently) as the opposite of what was expected from imperial women. The fact that their more overtly political activities fall outside the narrow range of the recurring rubrics on ancestry, marriage, and the birth of children also shows the degree to which the biographer considered them to be operating outside the realm of acceptable female behavior: Livia and Agrippina burst through the boundaries in which most other women are contained.

In general, the inconsistencies in Suetonius’ depictions of imperial women reveal his lack of concern for composing a rounded account of the women’s lives. Rather, the women appear in the biographies solely to enhance his portraits of the men. Thus, Livia is “good” in the *Augustus* and “bad” in the *Tiberius* as it suits Suetonius’ changing purpose. The biographer, additionally, splits up between the *Augustus* and *Tiberius* the information on Julia’s affairs and divorce without ever offering a continuous narrative.

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*gloriatura, quod illi promptissimum erat in omnibus probris,* Tit. 10.2). See Dom. 14.1 on her role in his assassination.
What is more, both Livia and Agrippina appear in a range of situations, which shows that Suetonius does not apply a standardized set of rubrics to the women in the same way that he does to the men.

Of the female roles I have highlighted in this study that of mother is the most important in the Caesares. Livia, for instance, is a more prominent figure in the biography of her son (Tiberius) than in that of her husband (Augustus). Although there are rhetorical reasons for weighting her character in this way—her unassuming nature is part of what makes her “good” in the Augustus, while her intrusion enhances her negative portrayal in the Tiberius—Suetonius’ presentation nevertheless suggests that the role of mother is more important than that of wife. In the Claudius, moreover, the biographer centers Agrippina’s wifely actions on her scheming to advance her son, only to return to her motherly role again in the Nero.

The same emphasis on mothers can also be seen in the shorter Lives. The relatively long genealogies that open Books 7 (Galba, Otho, and Vitellius) and 8 (the three Flavian Lives) draw attention to women who bore children. In most of these Lives, Suetonius traces not only the emperor’s mother, but also in some cases his grandmother

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24 Cf. Chapter 1, Section 3 on the Cons. ad Liv., which, as I noted, is addressed to the imperial mother (Livia) rather than to the wife (Antonia). Although Livia, as empress, was the more important of the two women, the poem also implies that the imperial mother is in a more honorable position than the spouse.
and great-grandmother as well. As we have seen in Chapter 3, the majority of Lives also report a woman’s marriage and the birth of her children in the same paragraph, which implies that carrying on the line is the most important duty of the imperial spouse.

In the end, despite the conventionality of Suetonius’ ideals for imperial women—that is, that they should marry, bear children, and remain within the domestic sphere—and despite the schematic nature of his characterizations of some individuals, the Caesares are still important because they show what this elite second-century Roman man expected from the female members of the imperial family. To flip the equation around, one can even say that Suetonius’ conventionality is what makes him significant: he gives voice to ideals that were in wider circulation at the time. Through his texts, Suetonius fleshes out the abstract virtues espoused on coins and statues. Yet, he also exposes the negative sides of imperial women that do not come to life in the other more static and propagandistic media. The Caesares also have a long afterlife, which means

25 Gal. 2-3 (mother, Mummia Achaica, and her line); Otho 1 (great-grandmother and grandmother, both unnamed; mother Albia Terentia); Vit. 2.1 (an unnamed female ancestor, the wife of the founder of the family), 3 (mother Sestilia); Vesp. 1-2 (mother Vespasia Polla, unnamed great-grandmother, grandmother Tertulla). The genealogical information for Vespasian’s two sons, Titus and Domitian, is contained in Vesp. 1-3.

26 Bradley 1991, 3704 makes a similar argument about the emperors. Although Suetonius is working within a tradition about imperial virtues, and although he records much of the same information found in other authors, he is not the “victim of his sources.” Bradley stresses that the Caesares have an “independent element.”
that Suetonius’ portraits have an important place in the tradition about Julio-Claudian and Flavian women specifically, and about imperial women more generally.\textsuperscript{27}

In addition, because Suetonius’ biographies have such an eye for “private” life, sometimes even at the expense of the emperors’ military, political, and economic activities, the \textit{Caesares} include or bring to the fore much information that we would not otherwise know about the imperial women of the first century CE. For example, Suetonius is the only extant author to talk in any depth about how Augustus raised his young grandsons and granddaughters (\textit{Aug.} 64-5). Moreover, \textit{lacunae} in Tacitus’ \textit{Annals} make the \textit{Caesares} a particularly important source for the younger years of Drusilla, Agrippina, and Livilla (\textit{Cal.} 15, 24), not to mention Claudius’ pre-imperial engagements and marriages (\textit{Claud.} 26). Imperial texts like the \textit{Caesares}, additionally, are often more inclusive of women than are Republican era histories. Sallust and Cornelius Nepos, for instance, do not write about women to the extent that Tacitus and Suetonius do, and they do not tend to show women performing multiple roles. Even if these duties are scattered in the individual biographies, Suetonius still shows some women playing a wide range of parts. Livia, for example, is a daughter, wife, mother, grandmother, great-

\textsuperscript{27} Suetonius influenced, e.g., Marius Maximus (whose imperial biographies continued where the \textit{Caesares} left off), the SHA (another continuator), Aurelius Victor, the \textit{Epit. de Caes.}, Jerome, and Einhart. Cf. von Albrecht 1997, 1406: “Suetonius is among those Roman authors who have most influenced subsequent ages.” See ibid., 1406-8 for a summary of his influence from late Antiquity through the Renaissance, when he was widely read. Murison (2001) and Jones (1996, 2000, 2002) do an especially good job in their commentaries in referring the reader to later sources and pointing out Suetonius’ influence on those authors.
grandmother, and patron in the *Caesares*, which roles represent a wide array of her activities.28

By looking at his treatment of imperial women, this study also sheds light on Suetonius’ methods as a writer. Each chapter has shown that the biographer carefully manipulates his female characters in response to his depictions of his male subjects. Although the men are not my focus, I have alluded throughout to the formulaic nature of Suetonius’ portrayals of the *principes*. Claudius, for instance, is typecast as weak and dependent on his subordinates, so his wives Messalina and Agrippina are portrayed as willful and forceful in order to further that description. These observations are meaningful because the degree to which Suetonius uses rhetorical techniques and stereotypes has not always been appreciated in scholarship.29

In addition, showing that the biographer held imperial women to positive and negative standards reinforces the extent to which the biographies revolve around virtue and vice. Thus, my study complements and expands scholarship on Suetonius’ handling of the *principes*. In the end, the fullest picture of the biographer’s

28 See *Tib*. 1-5 on her ancestry, including references to Livia’s own parents. She in a wife in the *Aug.*, *Tib*. (esp. 21), and *Clau*. 1; a mother in the *Tib*. and *Clau*. 1; a grandmother in the *Clau*. (esp. 3-4); a great-grandmother in the *Cal*. (esp. 10, 15, 16, 23); and a patron in *Aug*. 40.3, *Otho* 1, and *Gal*. 5.

29 Wallace-Hadrill 2004, 19, for example, declares that Suetonius is “innocent” of the historian’s “devices.” Suetonius, to Wallace-Hadrill, is “mundane: he has no poetry, no pathos, no persuasion, no epigram.” Likewise Rolfe 1960, xix: “[Suetonius’ language is] plain and concise, with no attempt at fine writing or rhetorical embellishment.”
achievements, techniques, and aims will be achieved by combining these insights on imperial women with an analysis of the biographer’s handling of his male subjects.
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Note: The abbreviations used herein for journals and book series follow the conventions of the American Journal of Archaeology and L’Année philologique.


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Biography

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Molly spent two seasons as a Summer Member of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens (2000, 2004), of which the 2004 session was supported by the W. T. Semple Travel Award from the Classical Association of the Middle West and South. She also participated in the American Academy in Rome Summer Program in Archaeology (2002), funded by the Concordia Foundation Fellowship. Other awards include the Women’s Classical Caucus Travel Grant (2008), and, from Duke University, the Graduate School Conference Travel Fellowship (2007, 2008), Graduate School Summer Research Fellowship (2006), and Preparing Future Faculty Fellowship (2004-5). In 2005-6, Molly was chosen to take part in the Mellon Dissertation Working Group at Duke’s Franklin Humanities Institute. She has presented papers at the Duke-UNC Graduate Colloquium in Classics (2002), as well as at the Annual Meeting of the Classical Association of the Middle West and South (2007, 2008).