

## Sexual Metaphors of Enslavement in Tacitus' *Agricola*

Ostensibly a biography/encomium of the author's father-in-law, Tacitus's *Agricola* also recounts the Roman subjugation of Britain and the contemporaneous tyrannical reign of Domitian in Rome. Scholarship has traditionally treated these British and Roman accounts as two separate, disconnected narratives (e.g., Clarke 2001; Rutledge 2000). Others, however, such as J.H.W.G. Liebeschuetz (1966) and, more recently, Myles Lavan (2011) have observed important parallels between the two accounts and argued they must be read together as one cohesive narrative in which Tacitus casts both the Britons and the senate as slaves to the Principate. In the same way that the conquered Britons are (literally) enslaved to their Roman captors, the senate is enslaved to Domitian. Through this single unified narrative, Tacitus ultimately develops a dichotomy between freedom (*libertas*) and slavery (*seruitus*) to comment on the corrosive effects of the Principate both at home and abroad.

I argue that within the *Agricola* there exists an unnoticed dichotomy between marital concord and sexual exploitation that bolsters this reading of the text as a unified narrative. One aspect of enslavement is sexual exploitation (Lavan 2011), which Tacitus references both explicitly (e.g., *Agric.* 30.5, 31.1) and implicitly within the British narrative. I posit that Tacitus indirectly contrasts this sexual exploitation with the "remarkable harmony" (*mira concordia*) of *Agricola*'s marriage. Since the British and Roman narratives exist in mirrored parallel, the juxtaposition of harmony/freedom with sexual exploitation/slavery applies also to Rome. *Concordia*, like *libertas*, was a distinctly Republican virtue (Saller 1984; Centlivres Challet 2013). In effect, *Agricola*'s marriage not only contrasts the sexual enslavement of the Britons—

and by extension the senate—but also serves as a microcosm of an ideal (if only imagined) Rome in which emperor and senate cooperate in harmony.

In Tacitus' view, slavery poses its greatest threat when the subjected accept their servile condition *willingly*. This conscious resignation to injustice (*patientia*), which characterizes Britons and senate alike, ultimately causes the subjected to become complicit in their own subjugation (Lavan 2011). Tacitus overtly develops this idea of *patientia* through the Britons' eager acceptance of Roman culture at the expense of their freedom (*Agric.* 21). I argue that Tacitus also develops this idea of *patientia* more subtly through language evocative of *seruitium amoris*, the well-established elegiac trope of love as slavery in which the lover becomes the willing slave of his mistress (Lyne 1979, Murgatroyd 1981). Several key passages in the *Agricola* feature this highly sexual elegiac language, with Calgacus' speech at *Agricola* 30-32 being just one example. Since willing submission to injustice characterizes both *seruitium amoris* and *patientia*, the presence of elegiac language once again connects sexual exploitation to slavery.

By subtly contrasting the literal and metaphorical sexual submission of the Britons and the senate with the ideal *concordia* of *Agricola*'s marriage and strategically positioning this polarity within a larger network of slavery metaphors, Tacitus emphasizes the voluntary submission of the Britons to the Romans and, by implication, of the senate to Domitian. This ultimately illustrates the atrophy of Republican ideals under the Principate.

Not only does this paper support recent assertions of the text's unity, it also adds to the meagre body of scholarship on women in Tacitus' corpus, building upon existing discussions of Tacitus' treatment of women in the *Annales* (Wallace 1986). It is also relevant to discussions of intertextuality within the *Agricola*. Although scholarship has recognized the importance of

intertextuality in the work (e.g., Woodman 2014), this distinctively elegiac language has hitherto remained either undetected or completely ignored.

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