

Femina Princeps: In Defence of Ovid's Exilic Livia¹

1

Livia sic tecum sociales compleat annos
 quae, nisi te, nullo coniuge digna fuit,
 quae si non esset, caelebs te vita deceret,
 nullaque, cui posses esse maritus, erat,
 (*Tr.* 2.1.161-164)

Thus may Livia live out allied years with you,
 who, but for you, would have deserved no spouse,
 and if she were not, an unmarried life would befit you,
 for you could have wed no other woman.

2

materiam quaeris? Laudes: de Caesare dixi.
 adiuta est novitas numine nostra dei.
 nam patris Augusti docui mortale fuisse
 corpus, in aetherias numen abisse domos:
 esse parem virtute patri, qui frena rogatus
 saepe recusati ceperit imperii:
 esse pudicarum te Vestam, Livia, matrum,
 ambiguum nato dignior anne viro:
 esse duos iuvenes, firma adiumenta parentis,
 qui dederint animi pignora certa sui.
 (*Ex. P.* 4.13. 23-32)

You ask my matter? You'd praise it: I spoke of
 Caesar. My new try was helped by the god's will.
 For I taught how the form of father Augustus was
 mortal, yet his will departed to the ethereal
 dwellings: how, equal in virtue to his father, he took
 up mastery of empire when asked, which so often he
 refused: how you, Livia, are the Vesta of chaste
 mothers, and it is uncertain whether more deserving
 of spouse or son: how there are two sons, strong help
 to their father, who had given clear proof of their
 spirit.

3

cumque bonis nuribus pro sospite Livia nato
 munera det meritis, saepe data, deis,
 et pariter matres et quae sine crimine castos
 perpetua servant virginitate focos;
 (*Tr.* 4.2.11-14)

And with her good daughters-in-law, Livia
 for her son's safety gives gifts to the worthy gods, as
 oft, and equally both mothers and they, without
 stain, perpetually virgin, watch over the hearth.

¹ All translations are my own; any errors may be attributed to some amorphous, ether-dwelling power.

4

nota tua est probitas testatque tempus in omne
 sit virtus etiam non probitate minor.
 non tibi Amazonia est pro me sumenda securis,
 aut excisa levi pelta gerenda manu.
 numen adorandum est, non ut mihi fiat amicum,
 sed sit ut iratum, quam fuit ante, minus.

(*Ex. P.* 3.1.93-98)

Your probity is known and accounted for in all time;
 may your valor be no less than your probity. There's
 no Amazonian weapon you must take up for me, nor
 grasp a cut shield with your delicate hand. You must
 implore a divine power, not to be amicable to me,
 but merely to be less angry than before.

5

Caesaris est coniunx ore precando tuo,
 quae praestat virtute sua, ne presca vetustas,
 laude pudicitiae saecula nostra premat:
 quae Veneris formam, mores Iunonis habendo
 sola est caelesti digna reperta toro.
 quid trepidas et adire times? non impia Procne
 filiave Aeetae voce movenda tua est,
 nec nurus Aegypti, nec saeva Agamemnonis uxor,
 Scyllaque, quae Siculas inguine terret aquas
 Telegonive parens vertendis nata figuris,
 nexaque nodosas angue Medusa comas...

(*Ex. P.* 3.1.114-124)

It's the wife of Caesar to whom your lips must
 pray, who proves with her virtue that prior ages
 do not overtake ours in praise of chastity: she
 who, with the beauty of Venus and characters of
 Juno, alone was worthy to share the divine
 couch. Why do you tremble and fear to go? Not
 impious Procne nor the daughter of Aeetes must
 your voice address, nor Aegyptus' daughter-in-
 law, nor harsh wife of Agamemnon, nor Scylla,
 who terrifies Sicilian waters with her loins, nor
 the parent of Telegonus, born with changing
 form, nor Medusa, her locks bound with snakes.

6

femina sed princeps, in qua Fortuna videre
 se probat et caecae crimina falsa tulit:
 qua nihil in terris ad finem solis ab ortu
 clarius excepto Caesare mundus habet.

(*Ex. P.* 3.1.125-128)

But a lady ruler, in whom Fortune proves she can
 see, and bore falsely the allegation of blindness:
 other than whom nothing on earth from sun's rise
 to set more illustrious does the world hold, save
 Caesar.

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