

In *Tib.* 51.2, Suetonius reports that Tiberius held out hope of his return to Rome from Capri for his mother's funeral. After a delay of "several" days, however, Livia's body had putrefied, making burial in her son's absence necessary. The biographer continues that Tiberius forbade his mother's deification, disregarded her will, and ruined many of her friends. Although Tacitus (*Ann.* 5.1-2) and Dio (58.2.1-2) also record similar details, the ghastly detail of Livia's putrid corpse is unique to Suetonius.

This paper argues that *Tib.* 51.2 is revealing of Suetonius' methods. We cannot say whether Suetonius invented the anecdote about Livia's corpse, or took it from his source(s). Either way, he reports a seemingly alternative tradition—and one that is "spice[d] up" and "unlikely" (Lindsay 1995, 153)—as fact. Thus, I argue that the biographer is more concerned with the effect of this tale, especially its insight into Tiberius' character, than its historicity. Tiberius' vain promise to attend the funeral and his disregard for his mother's remains are revealing of his dissimulation, lack of *pietas*, and cruelty, all larger themes of the *Life*. That he would rather stay in Capri than do his duties in Rome underscores his devotion to lustful living on the island (cf. *Tib.* 44). Lastly, Tiberius' prohibitions on Livia's honors and his ill-treatment of her estate and dependents pick up on his brutality once more, but also on his parsimony, another of his characteristic vices. Thus, as often happens in biography, historical accuracy is subordinated to moral themes concerning character (cf. Pryzwansky 2009/10; Duff 1999 on Plut.).

We also see in *Tib.* 51.2 an example of the so-called "Law of Biographical Relevance" (cf. Townend 1967, 84). While Dio 58.2.1-3 and Tac. *Ann.* 5.1-2 make clear that Livia received a public funeral, eulogy on the *rostra* by Gaius, and interment in the Mausoleum of Augustus, Suetonius passes over all these details in *Tib.* 51, noting only Livia's cremation upon putrefaction. He records Gaius' eulogy of Livia in *Cal.* 10.1, so he clearly knows of the event. In the *Tib.*, however, this information is suppressed in order to keep the focus on the biographical subject and *his* inadequate response to Livia's passing. Rather than drawing attention to Livia's public last rites, or recounting her high status and life's achievements (cf. the *elogia* in Tac. *Ann.* 5.1), Suetonius centers his account on Tiberius' neglectful treatment of his mother in such a way as to draw out the emperor's vices.

In conclusion, scholarship has stressed the importance of death scenes in Suetonius' assessment of his subjects (Wardle 2007; Wallace-Hadrill 1983, 112-14). Death scenes, more generally, are often used in biography to evaluate character. They reveal, e.g., whether the subject died bravely or cowardly, or the degree to which he was mourned (cf. Nep. *Phoc.* 4; Plut. *Caes.* 66-8). *Tib.* 51 also resorts to the trope of the death scene as revealing of character, but here Suetonius is more interested in the subject's *reaction* to death. The reader will ultimately see that just as Tiberius dishonored Livia in death, so too will the Roman people debase him (*Tib.* 75-6), giving Tiberius his comeuppance.