

RISE

All Roads Lead to Rome, but so few to its Women:
the challenges of writing a feminist historical novel set during
the late Roman Republic

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And finally, thank you to Clodia Metelli, Fulvia Flacca Bambula, and Servilia Caepionis. I am sorry that history has robbed you of your voices, and that men like Cicero will always have the final word. I hope that this work goes some way towards bringing awareness to the incredible lives you lived, and offers some empathy with which to consider your stories.

De Nobis Fabula Narratur

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Abstract

RISE is a historical novel, set during the late Roman Republic. It follows the lives of three protagonists; Servilia, Clodia, and Fulvia, as they experience love and pain, discover their identities, and claim their power. When Servilia encounters a young man from her past, Julius, the lives of her and her son are changed forever. After taking Julius into her bed and, eventually, her heart, Servilia is drawn into the whirling cesspool of Roman politics. Clodia is a fiery young aristocrat, is shackled into marriage with an older man. Unwilling to resign herself to this fate, she engineers events so that she can have everything she wants. Her husband learns that she is not a woman to be controlled. Fulvia is married to Clodia's brother, Clodius. As she learns more about Rome, and the republic that governs it, she begins to forge an identity for herself outside of the role of a wife, and develops a burning ambition that steers her family to a path of power and disruption. RISE uses an interweaving, multi-perspective narrative to give voice to its myriad of female characters, further employing a third-person POV (with varying psychic distance) to explore the themes of power, pain, love, and identity. It offers a much-needed feminist contrast to existing texts, such as Robert Harris' *Lustrum* (2009) and *Dictator* (2015), Colleen McCullough's *Caesar's Women* (1996), and Conn Iggulden's *Field of Swords* (2004) and *Gods of War* (2005).

The critical work will inform the development of the creative work by examining the existing literature and popular works of historical Roman fiction, to establishing how RISE will challenge existing precedents for portraying Roman women, by giving voice to a feminine perspective lacking in the genre as it exists.

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Written by Kaarina Parker

INTRODUCTION

The women's, or feminist, historical novel is capable of being "deployed as a political weapon without losing its integrity as a depiction of an earlier time." (Wallace, 2005, p. 52). While writing *RISE* (the first novel in a planned trilogy), I aimed to do just that; to write a piece of gripping fiction set during a realistic portrayal of a historical period, while also using theme, structure, and character to provide a feminist critique and commentary of the lives of women in ancient Rome.

I will firstly examine the historical and historiographical contexts for my novel. I will describe the late Roman Republic, demonstrating why it is both a challenging and ideal period in which to set a feminist historical novel. I will also assess the existing historiography, and discuss how the characteristics thereof have determined the limits of popular history and historical non-fiction to tell the stories of women. Then, I will establish a theoretical framework of feminist and historical fiction, and the literary context to which my novel responds. I will also, using the literary theoretical framework, analyse the function and capabilities of historical novels, as opposed to historical non-fiction. In doing this, I will find a context for my work within the literary traditions and existing pantheon of historical novels depicting this period of history.

Next, I will discuss the thematic framework of the novel – how themes of love, identity, and power are used to explore and define the lives of three protagonists, and ultimately fulfil the goal of telling a feminist story by giving voice to these women and their struggles. I will then discuss the structure of the text; the choice to eschew the traditional 'three act structure' in favour of a multi-perspective weaving narrative. I will then define and explore the three female protagonists of my novel. I will explore how each woman's story illustrates the themes of the novel, and how the use of third-person subjective voice allows for a more comprehensive

exploration of their motivations and emotions. I will look also at some of the minor characters, both male and female, and how each of their roles in the story works to advance and complement the stories of the three protagonists, while building a more in-depth picture of the historical period.

It should be noted that the subject of this exegesis, the novel RISE, is only the first book in a series. It has been planned as a trilogy, following each of the three protagonists as they continue on their journeys. Though the book is a complete story, with a beginning and an ending, it is not the end of the story I am telling, and this is reflected in the character arcs and narrative trajectory in the book. Though it should feel complete, I hope that it would also leave the reader wanting to continue on with these women, and discover what happens next.

SECTION I: THE HISTORY AND HISTORIOGRAPHY

RISE is set during the late Roman Republic, an era of ever-changing socio-political and cultural landscapes - traditional Roman values warring with a progressive hedonism emerging from the young aristocracy. It was a time of change and challenge, and as such, the perfect arena for women to claim their power and operate as players within Rome's patriarchy (Peradotta & Sullivan, 1984, p. 243). This makes it, in my estimation, the ideal entry point from a storytelling perspective, to tell dynamic women's stories. However, current historical writings about the late Roman Republic, whether fiction or non-fiction, literary or popular, have tended to focus primarily on the lives and achievements of prominent male figures of the time.

The reason for this, I would suggest, is two-fold: firstly, as identified by Wallace (2005), there is a belief "dating back to Thucydides that history should be concerned only with politics and the state, a belief which has helped ensure the invisibility of women within standard histories." (p. 49). This has informed both the historiography of ancient Rome, as well as the historical narratives explored in works of fiction. Holmes (2012) identifies a trend within historical studies, coinciding with the rise of feminism in the 1970s, whereby "classical scholars started to look for material and textual evidence that could offer a window into the lives of ancient women." (p. 5) They, no doubt, would have encountered the second issue: what little historical evidence that survived is written exclusively by men.

As such, the only evidence we have of the lives of women during this time, are impressions of them given by their male contemporaries, influenced by the patriarchy that permeated every sphere of Roman life and identity; politics, culture, religion, military and domestic spaces were all dominated by male presence and control (McDonnell, 2006, p. 167). These two factors, the historical and historiographical, have come to define the modern perception of this period of Ancient Rome, and of the men and women who lived in it.

Specifically, the perception of the three women who are the main protagonists of my novel, RISE: Servilia, Fulvia, and Clodia.

POPULAR HISTORY/NON-FICTION

Mary Beard's *SPQR* (2015) is a work of popular history, a non-fictional account of the fall of the Roman Republic and the rise of the Empire. Beard herself is a renowned classicist and feminist (Nugent, 2018), yet even her own book is a demonstration of the historiographical hinderances of non-fiction to empathetically and satisfactorily tell ancient women's stories.

Unlike many of her peers, Beard (2015) makes a point of identifying the issues in finding primary source material to provide evidence for the lives of any Romans who existed outside of the male aristocracy and political classes, saying "It is only occasionally possible to discover the part in the grand narrative of Roman history. . . that ordinary people, the women, the poor, or the slaves played." (p. 297). The historical accounts we have are informed by the patriarchal values of their society (Beard, 2015, p. 306). She makes this point repeatedly, when she comes to describe the life and reputation of Clodia Metelli:

"She was alternately admired and attacked as the promiscuous temptress, scheming manipulator, idolised goddess, and borderline criminal. . . Colourful as this material is, it cannot be taken at face value. Part of it is not much more than erotic fantasy. Part of it is a classical reflection of common patriarchal anxieties." (p. 306).

The only times Clodia is mentioned or described in the book, are as the lover of the male poet Catullus (Beard, p. 214), sister to the politician Clodius (p. 218), and the victim of the orator Cicero (p. 306). Though she no doubt lived her own rich life, full of intrigue and accomplishments, in this comprehensive biography of her era she can only be attributed to her

male contemporaries. As Wallace suggests (2005, p. ix), a literary approach, in the form of the historical novel, might offer a way to tell the stories of women like Clodia.

W. J. Tatum's book *The Patrician Tribune* (1999) is a comprehensive biography of the life and death of Publius Clodius Pulcher, a notorious populist during the late Republican era. However, in a book of 365 pages, his wife Fulvia is mentioned on just six of them (p.60-61, 70, 239, 241, 244). The book covers the life of Clodius, from his early career in the military, to his death at the age of just 40 (p.240). Fulvia was his wife for most of his adult life, his only wife, who was famously at his side constantly, the two of them often said to be "inseparable" (Cicero, 40 BCE/1993). And yet, in a biographical tale of Clodius' adventures, she hardly garners a mention.

This absence of women from the historiographical Roman narrative is something I am seeking to correct with my novel. In *RISE*, Fulvia is one of three main protagonists. As such, Clodius' story is told through her perspective, allowing both for a more nuanced understanding of the social climate (as a woman had a vastly different experience in Rome to a man), but also an outsider's perspective on Roman politics. As Fulvia's understanding and abilities grow, Clodius becomes a player in her story, rather than the other way around (as is usually shown).

SECTION II: The Literary and Theoretical Context

Where non-fiction and popular history fall short of being effective methods for telling women's stories, in the "lack of records, the inappropriateness of standard periodisation and chronology, and the focus on public events" (Wallace, 2005, p. 2), there is a potential for historical fiction to succeed. Macallister (2017) identifies the challenges facing any author seeking to write a piece of historical fiction, noting that historical fiction calls for a "fine-tuned commitment to not betraying the 'historical' elements for those better fit by the label fiction".

Furthermore, the goal of writing feminist historical fiction "adds another layer of complexity", in the difficulty of "address[ing] society's expectations of women at the time it's set". Macallister argues, that "the very act of centring a novel on a woman's story, of giving her the same respect and attention men's stories have traditionally received, can be feminist."

However, the representation of women and their stories in the current crop of historical fiction set during the late Roman Republic, is limited both by the historical evidence available, as well as by the historiographical idea that men's stories (those concerned with politics, military, the state) are more valuable or interesting, than women's stories (those concerned with the home, motherhood, love). As such, there is little in the way of feminist story-telling to be found in the existing pantheon of historical novels set during the Roman Republic.

HISTORICAL FICTION

The late Roman Republic is a period of history that has been oft visited by authors of historical fiction. However, the existing literature seems entirely concerned with the world of politics and public affairs identified by Wallace (2005, p. 7) as the more traditionally 'male' narrative

offered within historical fiction. This comes with a suppression of female voice and autonomy, as demonstrated in the work of Harris (2009, 2015) and Iggulden (2004, 2005).

Robert Harris' *Lustrum* (2019) and *Dictator* (2015), tell the story of the life and career of the famous Roman orator, lawyer, and politician Marcus Tullius Cicero. The story is told through the eyes of Cicero's personal slave and confidante, Tiro. Though the perspective is Tiro's, many of the opinions given and remarks made are Cicero's own. Harris has, evidently, sculpted his portrayal of Cicero using his well-documented condescension to and condemnation of women in his surviving letters and speeches. This, along with Tiro's being the only point of view used in the narrative, relegates most of the female characters to either villainous or minor inconveniences.

This is easily noted in the cases of Clodia and Fulvia, for example. Clodia is cast as a scheming whore (Harris, 2015, p. 105), who is adored by young men and resented or despised by most women. At the same time, her autonomy is robbed from her in one of her most infamous deeds: it is widely reported amongst ancient sources that Clodia poisoned her husband (Skinner, 2011, p. 88). Though we cannot know the reason, Harris' Cicero seems to find it inconceivable that she could have done so of her own volition:

“That Celer had been murdered he never doubted, although whether Caesar had a hand in it, or Clodius, or both, he never discovered, and the truth remains a mystery to this day. There was, however, no question in his mind as to who had administered the fatal dose.” (Harris, 2009, p. 399-400).

He is happy to blame Clodia for the act itself, but assumes that it must have been at the direction of one of her male peers.

Fulvia, for her part, is treated no better within the narrative. She was a formidable opponent of Cicero's in her own right. She was an active schemer and well versed in the political workings of the Republic (Virilouvet, 2001, p. 70). However, in Harris' novels, she

warrants only passing mentions. In *Dictator* (Harris, 2015), she has only one line of dialogue in the entire novel: “‘Spare us this humiliation,’ cried out Fulvia. ‘We beseech you!’” (p. 383). She is mentioned only twice more, once when she is described by Cicero: “‘I thought we were rid of that shrew at least,’ he complained over dinner, ‘Yet here she is, still in Rome and flaunting herself.’” (p. 414).

Equally, in *The Field of Swords* (Iggulden, 2004) and *The Gods of War* (Iggulden, 2005), of Conn Iggulden’s Emperor series, the characterisation of Servilia is shaped in such a way as to simplify her desires and allow the, presumably male, reader to reconcile her power at the time with her status as a woman. Iggulden rewrites Servilia as a sex worker, serving the upper classes of Rome (2004, p. 40), whose knowledge and leverage amongst the political elite comes from her sexual services, rather than her social prominence and power. Her failings as a mother are frequently highlighted, by both Brutus and Caesar, and often her role as a sex worker is shown to be either symptomatic of, or responsible for, these failings.

Similarly, her relationship with Caesar is shown to be entirely on his terms. As she ages, his attraction to her wanes, and eventually he loses interest. Though she remains bitterly devoted to him, until her devotion turns to spite (Iggulden, 2005, p. 358). This is proposed as her sole motivation for supporting the assassination of Caesar. Once again, we see the role of women diminished in historical fiction, their stories doomed to revolve solely around the men in their lives.

FEMINIST FICTION

Truly feminist storytelling lies in the conscious granting of autonomy and voice to female (and other marginalised) characters; in the selection and omission of certain details, for the

preferencing and prioritising of female stories (Sreekumar, 2017, p. 47). There are not so many examples of feminist fiction set during the late Roman Republic, as there are examples of historical fiction featuring female characters that fall short of feminist storytelling.

One such example is the fourth book in Colleen McCullough's historical fiction series *Masters of Rome*. *Caesar's Women* (McCullough, 1997), provides focuses on Caesar's relationships with the women in his life. However, these women are each only given importance to the story insofar as they are relevant to Caesar's own success. None of them is given a life, personality, or meaning, outside of her relationship to Caesar. This is best demonstrated when Servilia says: "Like us, they're Caesar's women. Doomed to stay behind and wait for our lord and master to come home." (McCullough, 1997, p. 784). It denotes the narrative function of the women in the book – to 'serve' their 'lord and master', to act as vehicle through which *his* story is told.

This is easily seen in the portrayal of Servilia. She is characterised as a "harpy" (McCullough, 1997, 631), a scheming and vicious woman whose motivations lie almost exclusively in her undying love and desire for Caesar: "She loved him. Even the hideous insult of his rejection had not kept her away. Was there anything that could?" (p. 674). Servilia is devoted to him, powerless, seemingly without autonomy, and he treats her terribly. Furthermore, her failings as a mother are often commented upon: "Poor, poor Brutus. Fortune had not been kind to him when she gave him that harpy Servilia as a mother." (p. 631).

Naomi Mitchison's historical novel *The Conquered* (Mitchison, 1923) recounts the Roman military campaigns in Gaul, led by Julius Caesar, during the 50s BCE. Mitchison's approach can best be summed up in the line spoken by the character of Vercingetorix, a defeated Gallic chief who surrendered to Caesar's army: "The conquered is always forgotten." (Mitchison, 1923, p. 85). Mitchison's works are considered to be "culturally sensitive recuperations of ancient times" (Wisker, 2007, p. 159). She achieves this by telling the stories

of the ‘conquered’, by disrupting the patriarchal imperial myths of the Roman Empire, and “rewrit[ing] the histories of imperial Rome. . . [which] underpinned Britain’s own ideologies of Empire.” (Wisker, 2007, p. 160). Mitchison tells the untold stories of this period of history, by “focusing her narratives through the eyes of outsiders, slaves, women, and colonised peoples” (Wallace, 2005, p. 43).

Where Mitchison’s focus lies in the populations of people conquered by the Romans, I am aiming to give voice to the oppressed classes *within* the Republic, in the very heart of the city itself. To tell the untold stories of Roman women.

SECTION III: *The Novel*

There have been very few attempts made to tell the stories of the Roman Republic's women. To me, this is an untapped resource – there is evidence aplenty that there were extraordinary women living during this period: the “public and notorious” (Plutarch, trans. Dryden, 1859, line 5.4) Servilia; the “Medea of the Palatine Hill” (Cicero, trans. Smythe, 1993, p. 8) Clodia Metelli; and Fulvia, whose “desire was to govern those who governed” (Plutarch, trans. Dryden, 1859, line 10.3).

And so, I set out to write a historical novel that would not only defy the expectations of historiographical and literary legacies, but subvert them; through telling comprehensive and compelling stories about these women. All while drawing upon research and historical evidence wherever possible. But the ability to employ creative licence, would allow me to imagine a rich world and existence for these women that would allow me to give voice to their lives and their stories:

“The historical novel has allowed women to invent or re-imagine. . . the unrecorded lives of marginalised and subordinated peoples. . . and to shape narratives which are more appropriate to their experiences than those of conventional history.” (Wallace, 2005, p. 2)

Wallace (2005) identifies the opportunity offered by the historical novel, whereby female writers and readers can “create different, more inclusive versions of ‘history’.” (p.3) Similarly, Macallister (2017) describes historical novels as “the best delivery mechanism for certain stories”, specifically, feminist stories about the lives of women. This is exactly what I have aimed to do with RISE.

As mentioned, RISE is the first novel in a planned trilogy. As such, this novel represents only one part of these characters' journeys. Nonetheless, I have endeavoured to offer the reader both a sense of completion and, hopefully, a desire for more.

THEMES

Wallace (2005, p.7) identifies two main thematic structures for historical novels: the romantic, considered to be a women's genre, and the political, considered to be male. These two different approaches are often correlated with what Wallace (2005) identifies as "the 'popular' and the 'serious' or 'literary' ends of the spectrum" (p.5). She argues that both 'serious' and 'popular' historical novels must be appreciated and compared in order to understand the value that can be found within the genre for women's, or feminist, stories. Equally, Ehirander (2015) argues that playing with tropes and expectations like this can "open possibilities for readers to read subversively." (p. 9).

I aimed to take thematic elements from both traditionally 'masculine' and 'feminine' historical fiction, because, like Ehirander and Wallace, I believe that a truly feminist story can only be found by embracing, exposing, and exploring both. To this end, the key themes of my novel can be identified as: power, love, identity and pain. Each of these concepts is evocative in its own right, though I would argue that 'love' and 'pain' would be more readily identified with the 'women's historical romance' (Wallace, 2005, p.35), whereas 'power' and 'identity' would correlate more readily to traditionally 'male' stories involving politics, war, and affairs of the state. My goal was to embrace both elements; not to value the masculine over the feminine, but rather to show that it was their ability to navigate both that made them exceptional. I chose to employ both elements of more romantic literary traditions within the

historical fiction genre, as well as the political intrigue and violence of the “male world of public and political affairs” (Wallace, 2005, p. 7). This is best demonstrated, I believe, in the narrative and emotional arcs of each of my three main protagonists.

STRUCTURE

I chose to eschew the traditional ‘three-act structure’, oft associated with historical fiction, in favour of a more democratic multi-perspective weaving narrative. As Darwin (2016) points out, the three-act structure is more problematic than useful in long-form fiction, especially when dealing with multiple protagonists (p. 110). The multi-protagonist, multi-perspective weaving narrative that I used for RISE complicates any attempt at employing the three-act structure associated with traditional story-telling. The novel does not build towards one inciting incident or discernible climax – rather, there are multiple narrative threads interweaving that each have their own building tension and climatic point. I wanted to serve each of my protagonists faithfully and equally. Clodia, Fulvia, and Servilia each has their own narrative arc. Though their stories intersect at times, and there are other narrative factors at play (including the political narrative whereby the Republic is slowly collapsing under the weight of the egos at war within it), I wanted each woman to have her own independent story, each with its own focus and structure. As argued by Brayfield & Sprott (2013), the need for the protagonist (or protagonists) is far more crucial to any fictional narrative than an adherence to traditional or expected plot structures (p. 55).

There are four main narrative threads throughout the novel; Clodia, Servilia, Fulvia, and the story of Rome itself (shown in the historical events). The novel is designed to follow the history as closely as possible, while still having the protagonists drive the narrative. And

so, the challenge lay in finding a way to have each woman's story driven by her own desires and motivations, while also involving the historical events. This was most easily done in the cases of Fulvia and Servilia, whose lives were more historically linked with the events of the Republic.

Servilia is the oldest of the three protagonists, and as such is the only one to remember the civil war that wracked the city years earlier. This is something that deeply informs her character – she is ever-anxious about the possibility of another such escalation, and her vigilance extends to both social and political observations. Early on in her narrative, it is established that her son, Brutus, is also a key motivation for her character. Her desire to nurture and protect him is near sacrosanct. Her brother, Cato, is antagonistic to her story, in that his own desires for Brutus' future are at war with her own. Then we have the character of Julius Caesar, who plays the role of love interest and, at times, antagonist in Servilia's story.

As her romantic relationship with Caesar blossoms, and her son seems to flourish, Servilia's story builds towards a climactic point relatively early in the novel (about halfway through, in chapters 21 and 22). Hence, the building tensions in her own story often reflect the tensions building in Rome. The climax of Servilia's story occurs when, during the debates about the Catilina Conspirators, Caesar reveals their affair to the entire Roman senate, without her permission, in order to benefit his career. She confronts him in the following chapter, after a flashback in which she remembers first meeting him as a young man, and ends their romance. The tension building towards this moment (indicated in stolen moments between the two where Servilia senses some darkness in her lover, and the growing divide between them as their lives move in different directions) mirrors the tension building in the Republic, which in turn is also affecting Servilia's state of mind. Servilia is the character closest to the inner workings of the Republic, whose own story is most closely related to that of Rome, and so this is reflected in the structure of her narrative.

Fulvia's story is paced very differently. She arrives in Rome, and into the story, in chapter 11. At this point, Clodia and Servilia are already established protagonists, both offering a different insider's perspective on Roman society. Fulvia, in this sense, is something of an outsider. She does not yet have a sense of identity as a Roman, though she comes to the city with ambitions and avid interests aplenty. The structure of Fulvia's narrative reflects her journey of entering into Rome, then entering into society through her marriage to Clodius, and eventually beginning to craft the beginnings of her own identity. Fulvia's early chapters are very closely related to Clodia's own chapters – the two girls meet and develop a close friendship, and Clodia becomes something of a guide for Fulvia as she begins to navigate society.

However, after her marriage to Clodius, Fulvia's narrative begins to diverge from Clodia's. Though they two remain close friends, and are frequently in each other's lives, the differences in their stories becomes clear. Fulvia's interests in politics and public affairs are not shared by Clodia, and as such the emphasis of Fulvia's chapters and story shifts away from the social intrigue of Clodia's into her own political narrative. The climactic point in Fulvia's story comes in the Bona Dea trial, when Clodius is charged with treason and Fulvia is forced to watch from the side-lines. However, true to her character, she finds a way to exceed her designated role (as dutiful, silent wife) and use her power as a woman to save her husband. She appeals to Crassus as a weeping wife, manipulating his prosaic nature, and securing his financial backing to bribe the jury (shown at the end of chapter 30). Though the trial itself is tension filled, both for Fulvia and for the city of Rome, the true climax of her story comes with her successfully executing her scheme, ensuring Clodius' acquittal. Through discovering the extent of her power, she is also finding her identity.

With Clodia, I wanted to explore the idea of the Greek tragedy, given her frequent comparison to the figure of Medea (from Euripides' play of the same name) (Skinner, 2011, p.

105). The details of this will be discussed further in sections to follow. In terms of structure, however, Clodia's narrative is less a use of the conventions of Greek tragedy, than a commentary thereof. The structure of Greek tragedy was "as rigidly prescribed as the design of a Doric temple" (Hadas, 2006, p. 2). Clodia's story does not prescribe to this rigidity, but rather plays with and comments upon elements from the genre. For example, the structural relationship between the tragic protagonist and the chorus, in the form of a 'call and response'. The tension in Clodia's story rises to two separate points of climax – one comes relatively early on in the novel, in chapter 10, when Clodia confronts her husband and exacts revenge on him. She drugs him, to rob him of his physical power over her, threatens him (chapter 9). Celer flees the city, and Clodia is left to bask in her victory, and enjoy the power she has wrested from him.

The second point of climax, and the part of Clodia's story where she is most powerful (and hubristic), is the very end of the novel, when she kills her husband. In the build up to this horrific act, the women around her (Attia, Fulvia, and Caecilia) form a sort of chorus, watching helplessly as Clodia falls into despair, unable to do anything to stop it. They are the readers (or the audience), watching on helplessly with a sense of doom as Clodia's story builds to its ultimate grisly climax. Gagne and Govers (2013, p. 11) identify the ability of the chorus to "bring attention to the agency" of the protagonist, by responding directly to the protagonist's monologues, while also performing a mimetic function.

CHARACTER ARC AND VOICE

Clodia *The Greek Tragedy*

Clodia Metelli was most infamously described by Cicero as the “Medea of the Palatine Hill” (Skinner, 2011, p. 105). It was nothing less than a slanderous oratory device. However, the comparison between Clodia and Medea is something that I wanted to explore, albeit a more empathetic and complex comparison. To me, Clodia has always been a tragic figure – used and abused by her male peers, who wax lyrical about her beauty one day and wish violence upon her the next. However, she still found ways to reclaim her power even within Rome’s patriarchy. Though she suffered great pain, she wielded great power.

Clodia is the first of three main protagonists to be introduced in the novel. Her voice at the beginning of the book reflects her youth – though she is well educated, shown in her ability to call upon the philosophers and poets in conversation, she is immature. She is stubborn, and makes no attempt to hide how she feels, in either her dialogue or her actions (as seen in chapters 1 and 2).

She is engaged to marry a man nearly twenty years her senior. She makes no attempt to hide her disdain for her new husband, complaining to Appius, Clodius, and Attia about him at length (chapters 1 and 2). Once she is married, it takes very little time for her life as wife of Metellus Celer to chafe at her sensibilities. She mocks him openly and defies him, and in her patrician arrogance, it never occurs to her that there may be consequences for her behaviour. This arrogance is her *Hamartia* – the hubristic, fatal flaw of the protagonist of Greek tragedy (Goold, 1969, p. 89). It leaves her unable to accept compromise of any kind, and without the tools to deal with her vulnerability. When Celer’s control escalates to physical violence, Clodia’s disbelief turns to rage, and quickly to thoughts of revenge. With the assistance of her loyal and loving slave Attia, she plots vengeance against her husband.

When discussing Euripides' *Medea*, and its place within the canon of ancient Greek tragedy, Rutherford (2003) notes that "it is no accident that so many avengers are women ... the 'weaker' sex assert their power and often gain the upper hand over their masters." (p. 47). The element of the Greek Tragedy is very much present in Clodia's story. Though many of the female avengers of Greek tragedy commit their revenge as acts of hysteria (Rutherford, 2003, p. 48), Clodia's own revenge is meticulously plotted out and exacted (shown in chapters 7 and 9).

But her victory is not to last, and when her husband returns to the city, the life and sense of self she has found in his absence is threatened. And so, begins the descent into despair. Clodia's voice, both internal and external, makes clear her feelings. She lacks the reservation and control of Servilia and Fulvia – she wears her emotions at all times. As her frustration and desperation grow, her dialogue becomes more volatile (seen in chapter 32). When Celer confines her to the house (in chapter 30), it seems to finally break her spirit. At this point, her voice falls silent – she says very little, and she is shown instead through her 'chorus' of women.

When she kills her husband, it is a climactic victory. As she watches on at her husband's funeral, this sense of power is reflected in her internal voice, scathing as she observes the mourners and listens to the eulogies (chapter 36). The final line of the book, "She was free", reflects her new position of power. She is free now, in the next novel, to discover her true voice. Where the *hamartia* of a tragic Greek hero would usually bring about their downfall, in the case of Clodia in *RISE*, it might just be what saves her life. (Though, it will have a further, less empowering role to play in her narrative over the next two books.)

Servilia *Servilia's Men*

In contrast to McCullough's 'Caesar's Women', I wanted to present the other side of the coin: 'Servilia's Men'. Rather than Servilia serving Caesar's narrative, having little agency of her

own, few desires outside of earning his love, I wanted to show a fully realised, intelligent, caring woman. A woman who was loved by Caesar, and who treasured her son Brutus, who feuded with her brother Cato, and who became a confidante of her friend Cicero. They are characters in *her* story.

Servilia as a character is measured, intelligent, described by her close friend as “immune to the emotional paralysis that seems to grip others” (Licinia in chapter 26). She loves deeply, but that love comes also a profound anxiety. She fears that which she cannot control – that another civil war might erupt at any moment, and she will be forced again to watch as the world she knows falls into chaos and violence. Her son, Brutus, is a source of both love and fear for her. She wants nothing more than to nurture him, and to protect the naïve kindness and innocence that she sees in him. She fears that he will be sucked into the shark-infested waters of Roman politics, where she knows she cannot save him. Her other great love is Julius Caesar. They had a brief but intense affair when Caesar was a young man (Servilia is ten years older than him). After not seeing each other for more than a decade, they are reunited in Rome and draw to one another once again. Caesar courts Servilia, and once she decides to take him to her bed again, it changes her story forever.

Servilia’s character is conveyed with two distinct voices – her dialogue with other characters (her external voice), and her inner monologue. These two voices often run alongside each other, to demonstrate the measured way that Servilia conducts herself in public, as well as her keen perceptiveness. An example of this is in chapter 4, when Servilia runs into Cicero and Terentia in the forum. Her dialogue with Cicero and his wife is reserved, controlled – she gives little away, but maintains cordiality. However, her internal voice shows the reader what she truly thinks, but knows better than to say. It shows how perceptive she is about both Terentia and Cicero’s characters, as well as her knowledge of the political and legal systems.

The only time we see Servilia's true thoughts and feelings bleed from her internal voice into her dialogue, is when she is speaking to Caesar and Licia. With Caesar, it comes only when she confronts him about the pain he has caused her (chapter 22). It is a powerful moment for her character, whereby she takes hold of the power in their relationship (that Caesar has threatened to wrest from her with his actions in the senate) and breaks off their affair. With Licia, it comes when the two old friends speak candidly about Servilia's state of mind (in chapters 23 and 31). I wanted to demonstrate that these two women have a strong bond, which provides one of the few spaces where Servilia feels safe owning and expressing her emotional truth.

Fulvia *The Heroine's Journey*

Fulvia always dreamed of Rome. Upon her father's death, when she is just sixteen, she and her mother make the journey to Rome so that she might be married, and she might begin her life as a Roman woman. Her character voice when she arrives in Rome is one of idealism – a wide-eyed 'country' girl, who dreams of finding her identity in Rome, becoming a woman of influence. She is filled with awe and wonder for the history and the people of the city – we see this most prominently in chapters 11 and 12. Also, in her relationship with Clodia, her naivety is on display (seen in their conversation as they shop in chapter 14).

After marrying Clodius, and becoming a more involved member of society, her voice begins to shift to reflect her growing confidence and knowledge. She becomes bolder in her opinions, and more openly inquisitive about matters that might be considered 'unfeminine' (such as politics and law, as seen in chapters 19 and 27). Her relationship with Clodius empowers her to do this – theirs is a relationship of equals, which is reflected in the conversations between them (for example, at the end of chapter 19 when they discuss Cethegus). Clodius marvels at his wife's mind, and she in turn grows bolder in her use of it.

There is also a heightened sense of theatricality to Fulvia. Though all the women have it, Fulvia's is a more conscious performance. She is a clever young woman, and learns by watching Clodius and Clodia, that power comes from managing other people's perception of you. This is also a lesson she has learned from her mother, Sempronia, who is an unabashed social climber. Fulvia learns, during her time in Rome, that she can affect other people's perception of her fairly easily. As such, she becomes quite a performative character, playing various roles as they suit her (the pious matron in chapter 29, the distraught wife in chapter 30). There is a chameleonic nature to her character, and her voice helps to convey this – for example, the way that her dialogue shifts with different characters (compare her conversation with Cicero in chapter 30, to her conversation with Clodius in chapter 32).

S.P.Q.R *The Senate and People of Rome*

Though it is never named as a 'character' as such, the city of Rome is an integral part of the story, both the institution and the people. This is something remarked upon by most of the characters, whether it is from an outside perspective (like with the slave girl Anna), from an admirer's perspective (as with Fulvia when she first arrives), or from someone at the very heart of the Republic (characters like Cicero and Clodius offer differing views from a similar place in the hierarchy). The character arc of 'Rome' is in the historical events; the machinations of the senate, the wars being fought both within and without the city's walls, and the ever-changing seat of power.

POINT OF VIEW

Gardner (1985, p.76) identifies the ability of third-person narration to evoke either a sense of closeness or distance from a subject. RISE is told in third-person, shifting along a sliding scale

from total omniscience (psychic distance) to total subjectivity (psychic closeness), depending on the character in question.

The Women

In fulfilment of my goal of telling a feminist story, I used a more subjective third-person narration style for my female characters. In the case of Servilia, the narration remains intimately close to her emotions and thoughts throughout the novel. This serves the function of allowing the reader to understand and empathise with her (Gardner, 1985, p. 77), while also providing insight into her perceptive intelligence. For example, as seen in her interactions with her brother Cato in chapters 8 and 17 – her mind is constantly at work, seeing through her brother's pretence to his true motivations, while also showing her anxiety at his threats of control.

Similarly, with Fulvia, the ongoing psychic closeness with her character allows for the reader to experience Rome through her eyes – both as a naïve admirer when she first arrives (in chapter 11), and as a more capable player by the time the novel ends (for example, her knowledge shown in chapter 34). For both of these women, I think this third-person subjective narration provides the reader with a level of insight and empathy that allows for their stories to be told more wholly, and in keeping with feminist virtues (that is to say, giving voice to their thoughts and actions outside of men). This sits in direct contrast to the precedent set by the existing literature, in which women's perspectives are either ignored (Harris, 2009 & 2015), or centred around men (McCullough, 1997) (Iggulden, 2004 & 2005).

Clodia's relation to the narration is a little more complicated, as a result of her story's use of elements of Greek tragedy. The reader is allowed close to Clodia's mind only when she is feeling powerful, or free. When she is vulnerable, a greater psychic distance develops between her and the reader, and the perspective often shifts to another woman as they see her.

As mentioned earlier, these three women are either Fulvia, Attia, or Caecilia. Together, they form a chorus – capable of providing an empathetic ear to the tragic hero, in some cases, be complicit in their actions (Geddie, 2005, p. 2). When Clodia is at her most vulnerable, and her most volatile, we see her through Attia’s loving and fearful concern, Fulvia’s naïve determination to help, and Caecilia’s childish lack of understanding.

Though the majority of the story is told through or about my three main protagonists, there is a large cast of secondary characters who add richness to the story. Of these secondary characters, some are afforded more psychic closeness than others. For example, as mentioned above, Attia. Attia is Clodia’s slave, and the closest thing Clodia has to a loving mother. She is utterly devoted to her mistress, offering an intimate understanding of Clodia’s suffering that Clodia herself is not able to give. She also gives voice, I hope, to some of the slaves who lived during this time. This is a similar technique to that used by Harris (2009, 2015) who tells his story through the first-person POV of a slave. The difference being, that my slaves and masters in question are all female. There is something to be said, as shown by Wallace (2015), for the “parallels between womanhood and slavery” in Ancient Rome (p. 43).

Another example of this is Anna, a young slave girl working in Servilia’s household. Anna is less blindly devoted than Attia, more critical of her fate as a slave, and of the Roman culture that permits it. Through the psychic closeness of her POV, we see that she begins as a young girl with an attitude similar to that of Fulvia – wide-eyed wonder for the spectacle of Rome. However, as she grows up within the confines of slavery, she begins to question everything around her. When she learns to read, she becomes more empowered to do so. She offers an ‘outsider’ perspective on Servilia’s relationship with Caesar, making her own judgements about the man (chapter 7). Equally, she offers an ‘insider’ perspective on Servilia and Brutus themselves, as she sees them at their most vulnerable, as none of their peers would (chapters 22 and 23).

Some other women who are afforded an intimate POV within the narrative are Terentia (during the Catilina Conspiracy, in chapter 20), Tullia (shedding light on her parent's marriage, and the character of her father in chapter 28), Caecilia (as mentioned, an observer of her mother in chapters 14 and 28), Fabia (who offers a scathing perspective on both Clodia and Caesar in chapters 25 and 26), and Julia (in chapter 35, when we see her keen mind in eavesdropping on the Triumvirate). Giving intimate voice to such a cast of female characters is, I hope, a subversion of the existing historiography and literature – telling the ‘untold’ story (Wallace, 2005, p. 5). We know already what Rome was to the men. I want to show what it was to these women.

The Men

In the interest of prioritising women's stories, there are only two male characters in my novel who are afforded subjective third-person POV, in which the reader is able to intimately know them. The first is Brutus, the son of Servilia (and, possibly also Caesar). The second is Clodius Pulcher, brother of Clodia and husband of Fulvia. These two characters sit in opposition to the “hegemonic masculinity” (McDonnell, 2006, p. 167) that defined Roman culture: Brutus is sensitive and empathetic (as seen in chapters 8 and 13), and shares a very close bond with his mother; Clodius is flamboyant and subversive (see chapter 25 for his escapades in full drag), caring little for the conventions of Roman culture. His bonds with both his sister and his wife run deep.

By contrast, the other men featured as secondary characters (including Cicero, Caesar, Crassus, Appius, Celer, and Cato) are kept at a distance from the reader. When we are following them, it is from an almost omniscient POV – the focus is on their actions, rather than their thoughts and feelings.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, I entered into the act of writing this novel with an important goal: to give voice to these women, who have been silenced by history. I wanted to tell a feminist story, while still paying respect to the history itself, keeping as close to events as possible.

The existing historical evidence, as shown through the historiography, is skewed by the exclusively male voices giving it, which are themselves skewed by the patriarchal values of their society. This has resulted in an emphasis on male stories and voices. The existing literature, when analysed using a theoretical framework of historical fiction and feminism, is shown to suffer similar flaws – there is an utter lack of the preferences of women’s stories.

I aimed to correct this, to subvert existing tropes and expectations laid out by the genre and the historiography, with my novel. To do this, I used a thematic framework that aimed to combine elements of both men’s and women’s historical fiction, which in turn informed the structural choices for my novel. The narrative arcs of my main protagonists, and how their characters are expressed through their voices, were important in establishing a feminist style of storytelling (through the preferencing of autonomous female stories). This is further demonstrated through the choices I made regarding the POV of my characters, namely the amount of psychic distance given to each character through the third-person narration.

It is my sincere belief that, given the context I established, and the employing these narrative techniques, that I have managed to fulfil my goal of telling a cohesive and engaging feminist story, in which female characters are both autonomous and prioritised, while also remaining true to the historical events and world in which my novel is set.

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