

Rome Hath No Fury: A Gendered Analysis of Atia and Servilia in HBO/BBC's *Rome*

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Abstract

Atia of the Julii and Servilia of the Junii reflect a number of stereotypically ‘feminine’ gendered characteristics as they have been depicted in both ancient and modern history. The HBO/BBC television series *Rome* relies upon historically gendered traditions of ‘a woman scorned’ and the ‘sexually corrupt and manipulative’ woman in Atia and Servilia’s depictions over the course of the series. This thesis aims to answer the question of how Atia and Servilia represent a blending of ancient and modern interpretations, and further elucidate how women of antiquity are extrapolated from their ancient characterisations and translated into a modern cinematic context.

Declaration

I, Sarah Turner, certify that this thesis has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other university or institution.

Signature:

Date: 10 October 2016

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Introduction

“What have the Romans ever done for us?”: Ancient Rome in Modern Cinema

Modern film has had an extensive relationship with the historical tradition. Permutations of ancient life have stimulated modern fascination, and the world of antiquity has proved inviting for the cinematic medium—and the Roman world is no exception. The depiction of Ancient Rome has had a long tradition in modern cinema, and the setting is often used for the projection of modern anxieties and issues.¹ Romans can be depicted as ‘the other’—that is, the characters are designed to be foreign and detached from the audience, allowing distance to be created between the past and the present. Conversely, they can also be typified as ‘self’—instead of history remaining as a foreign concept, the characters are designed to be relatable, identifiable in some capacity, and inclusive to the viewing audience.² Historically, Romans in film have been portrayed as antagonists, persecutors, and adversaries. They have been shown as enslavers,³ religious oppressors,⁴ and bloodthirsty warriors.⁵ However, *Rome*, the HBO/BBC historical drama that enjoyed a two-season run from 2005-2007, broke with this tradition through its depiction of powerful women and followed in the vein of *Spartacus* (1960) by highlighting otherwise historically unknown individuals. The short-lived television series, set in the 1st Century BCE, portrays the transition of ancient Rome from Republic to Empire.

¹ Sandra R. Joshel, Margaret Malamud, and Maria Wyke, “Introduction,” in *Imperial Projections: Ancient Rome in Popular Culture*, eds. Sandra R. Joshel, Margaret Malamud, and Donald T. McGuire (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 6-7.

² Joshel, Malamud, and Wyke, “Introduction,” 6.

³ *Ben-Hur* (1959) and *Spartacus* (1960).

⁴ *The Last Temptation of the Christ* (1988), *Passion of the Christ* (2004).

⁵ *Gladiator* (2000), *Centurion* (2010).

Rome itself features an assortment of characters from the elite and plebeian classes, based in both historical fact and fiction, whose lives intertwine with the events of the period to recreate a uniquely realistic and complex picture of Rome in the final days of the Republic. Although it is the men who engage openly in *Rome*'s political confrontations, the women are depicted as key figures orchestrating events behind the scenes. As *Rome*'s creators sought to "underscore the women as active players" in the political sphere despite their inability to engage on the public stage, the focus was changed from the historically dominant masculine figures to "marginalised [individuals], [including] wives and mothers".⁶ Because of this, the women of *Rome* are shown to be present and dynamic in the political processes and civic disruption that occurred during the transition from Republic to Empire.

Rome contains a number of well-crafted female characters, but 'Atia of the Julii', played by Polly Walker, and 'Servilia of the Junii', played by Lindsay Duncan, stand out over the course of the show. The series itself does not shy away from presenting the connecting lives of underrepresented women, exhibiting an interwoven series of relationships, alliances, and antagonists that differ markedly from the oft-depicted political lives of Roman men, and, as such, Atia and Servilia feature prominently in the events surrounding the fall of the Republic. Both Atia and Servilia reflect a number of stereotypically 'feminine' gendered characteristics in the way they have been depicted in both ancient and modern treatments. In order to identify the potential influences that have shaped the depiction of 'Atia of the Julii' and 'Servilia of the Junii', this thesis will delve into the characterisations, actions, motivations, and

⁶ Antony Augoustakis, "Women's Politics on the Streets of *Rome*," in *Rome, Season One: History Makes Television*, ed. Monica S. Cyrino (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2008), 118.

behaviours of both women as presented by the creators of *Rome*, as well as investigate the ancient source tradition on both women. It will also explore the depiction of Atia and Servilia's female contemporaries in the historical sources, and briefly compare the representations of women in modern receptions (e.g., Livia in *I, Claudius* (1976)) in addition to those seen in *Rome*.

Atia's relationships with political leaders, such as Julius Caesar, and other prominent male members of society are integral to the progression of the narrative, and the behaviours and the actions of her two children, Octavia and Octavian, are also used to further Atia's own character development throughout the course of the show. It is particularly notable that Atia, the traditionally conservative mother of the man whose Principate would usher in the age of the emperors, was designed to be one of the most controversial, multifaceted, and intriguing characters of the series. Much like Atia, 'Servilia of the Junii' is a vital presence in the lives of many of the Roman Republican men with whom she has a connection. Servilia is characterised as a vengeful, jealous, and bitter woman who seeks out revenge against those she feels have wronged her. Servilia's affair with Caesar, and the subsequent fallout from their breakup, underscores the narrative of *Rome* and drives the rivalry and antagonism between Atia and Servilia that is seen throughout the series. While the historical Servilia is tangentially attached to the assassination narrative of Julius Caesar,⁷ *Rome*'s creators chose to show 'Servilia of the Junii' as a primary instigator of these events, giving the fictional Servilia a level of influence not reflected in the ancient

⁷ See Cic. *Att.* 14.21.

source tradition. Atia's behaviour can be described as masculine',⁸ whereas Servilia acts in a manner that is traditionally coded as 'feminine'. In the case of Servilia, it is Caesar's rejection that instigates her quest for revenge against the Julian family, and it is her manipulative and conniving behaviours exhibited over the course of *Rome* that demonstrate Servilia's embodiment of "a woman scorned".

This thesis aims to demonstrate to what extent the characters of 'Atia of the Julii' and 'Servilia of the Junii' represent a blending of ancient and modern interpretations. It also seeks to further elucidate how women of antiquity are extrapolated from their ancient characterisations and translated into a modern cinematic context. It will be argued that the HBO/BBC television series *Rome* relies upon the historically gendered traditions of 'a woman scorned' and the 'sexually corrupt and manipulative woman'—both of which pervade the characterisations of Atia and Servilia over the course of the series. The first chapter, 'Atia of the Julii' will examine the evidence on the historical Atia and compare it with the representations of 'Atia of the Julii' in *Rome*. It will also survey the relationships Atia had with her children, and how her characterisation as a supportive mother in the historical tradition is translated into the manipulative archetype of the *femme fatale* in the series. Finally, Atia's control over her own sexuality will be discussed, as well as the influence she commands from the confines of her *domus*. The second chapter, 'Servilia of the Junii', will examine the historical source tradition surrounding Servilia and the impact that her ancient characterisation has on the character depicted in *Rome*. It will discuss the trope of 'a woman scorned' as it is seen in both ancient and modern depictions, as well as how

⁸ Monica S. Cyrino, "Atia and the Erotics of Authority," in *Rome, Season One: History Makes Television*, ed. Monica S. Cyrino (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2008), 132.

Servilia's characterisation as such impacts on *Rome*'s own narrative. It will also describe the relationships that Servilia had with her own son, Brutus, and Atia's daughter, Octavia. Finally, it will discuss the use of Servilia's *domus* as a hub for conspiracy, and Servilia's agency within those walls.

Literature Review

In order to discuss gender and sexuality as they are depicted in both ancient source material and in the television series *Rome*, it is necessary to enter the world of gender studies. The modern concept of gender binaries does not correlate exactly with that of antiquity, nor does the contemporary idea of sexuality. As a result, Michel Foucault's pivotal work on gender and sexuality in *The History of Sexuality* is integral to modern discussions on the ancient source tradition. In the first volume of *The History of Sexuality, An Introduction*, Foucault explored the nature of human sexuality and what it represented to society. He identified the concepts of 'sexuality' and 'gender' as socially constructed labels that are designed to facilitate the understanding and categorisation of the human sexual experience.⁹ He argued that to be considered a "sexed body", one must adhere to a socially constructed set of attributes, experiences, and desires.¹⁰ Although all of Foucault's work is influential in regards to an understanding of human sexuality, it is his third volume, *The Care of the Self*, which is most relevant to the ancient Roman world. In this volume, Foucault identifies a Greco-Roman idea, that is, "the care of the self", which the ancients, he argued,

⁹ See Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume One: An Introduction* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1976).

¹⁰ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 130-131.

deemed to be the foundational principle of all moral rationality.¹¹ Foucault's work focuses more on Greek philosophy than Roman and he does not deal with the importance of Roman political discourse and the centrality of sexual ethics as a moral compass in the society of the Roman Republic.¹² This notwithstanding, the Foucauldian concept of a constructed gender and sexuality has permeated much of the discourse surrounding ancient sexuality and gender, and his work is fundamental to the understanding of these ideas. Critically, the categories of sexuality and gender as they are understood in the modern context prove to be highly regulated, presupposing and further reinforcing a sex/power binary.¹³

Simone de Beauvoir's crucial work in *The Second Sex* has resonated throughout feminist and social theory. Her discussion regarding feminine existentialism explored the Hegelian concept of 'the Other', allowing de Beauvoir to explore the social construction of the 'woman'. Importantly, she stated that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman".¹⁴ The Enlightenment myth perpetuated by de Beauvoir, however, drew criticism, as it relies upon the presupposition of an innate binary of sexes.¹⁵ This notwithstanding, de Beauvoir's notion that women who do not follow the domestic norms set upon them by a patriarchal society resonates through historical scholarship. Another Beauvoirian argument, namely that women are defined by their relationship to the men surrounding them, is applicable to the study of Roman

¹¹ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume Three: The Care of the Self*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1986), 14.

¹² Rebecca Langlands, *Sexual Morality in Ancient Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 1-4.

¹³ Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 130.

¹⁴ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier (New York: Vintage Books, 1949/2009), 330.

¹⁵ Sonia Kruks, "Gender and Subjectivity: Simone de Beauvoir and Contemporary Feminism," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 18, no. 1 (1992): 89.

Republican women, as they themselves were written about by Roman men.¹⁶ The Beauvoirian discussion of the ‘feminine’ being traditionally depicted as ‘the Other’, whilst the ‘masculine’ historically appears as the dominant category, is particularly apposite in the discussion of the gendered portrayal of Roman Republican women both in historical texts and modern interpretations.¹⁷

For further insight into the social construction of gender, it is appropriate to take into consideration the work undertaken by Judith Butler. Butler’s book, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, has been influential in the study of third-wave feminism, women’s studies, and queer theory. Building upon the work of de Beauvoir, Butler argues that gender is not tied to biological sex, but rather is a cultural construct created in an attempt to establish a categorised form of gendered identity.¹⁸ Furthermore, Butler asserts that there is a “problematic binary” attributed to gender that restricts gendered discourse, and that the categories ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ do not directly correlate to one’s determined gender.¹⁹ Butler’s ideas regarding gender are considered to be fundamental not only to modern gender and queer theory, but are also remarkably pertinent to the discussion of the ancient world. As the theories that historians use to analyse gender and sexuality in antiquity rely upon a restrictive modern worldview, they are subject to certain limitations constructed and influenced by contemporary society. These constraints must be assessed in order to understand the foundational aspects of ancient gender and sexuality. By decentralising the Victorian “phallogocentric heterosexual” institutions that permeate modern society,

¹⁶ Kristina Milnor, “Women,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Roman Studies*, eds. Alessandro Barchiesi and Walter Scheidel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 819-820.

¹⁷ De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 330-331.

¹⁸ Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 8.

¹⁹ Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 9.

Butler articulated the need to dismiss “stereotypical gender norms”, whilst also envisaging the potential for future feminist inquiry to free itself from these restrictions.²⁰ Butler’s work also dissected the categories of ‘man’/‘woman’ and ‘masculine’/‘feminine’ and stressed the political connotations of such descriptors.²¹ Butler’s dismissal of an inherently institutional “heterosexuality” allows for the delimitation of gendered possibilities,²² paving the way for a deconstructed analysis of gender and sexual performance as it appears in the ancient source material.²³ Gender itself is not static, but is rather a social construct conforming to a learned belief system of a group of individuals.²⁴ Thus, gender in antiquity should not be understood as reflective of a modern collective identity, but should be examined as performative and as revealing learned behaviours befitting Roman society during the Republic.

Joan W. Scott has further contributed to the notion of combining gender studies with historical examination, particularly in her very influential article “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis”. Scott’s paper, influenced by the Foucauldian concepts of gender and sexuality and Derridan deconstruction theory, involved a linguistic analysis of gender in history.²⁵ Scott argued that gendered language often denotes not only a “perceived difference between the sexes”, but also, most

²⁰ Margaret Nash, “Reviewed Works: *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* by Judith Butler,” *Hypatia* 5, no. 3 (1990): 172.

²¹ Nash, “Reviewed Works: *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* by Judith Butler,” 172.

²² Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 31.

²³ Nash, “Reviewed Works: *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* by Judith Butler,” 173.

²⁴ Judith Butler. “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory,” *Theatre Journal* 40, no. 4 (1988): 519.

²⁵ Joanne Meyerowitz, “A History of “Gender”,” *The American Historical Review* 113, no. 5 (2008): 1347.

importantly, indicates a “primary way of signifying power”.²⁶ Scott implores that the concept of gender be redefined as a “political and social equality” that focuses not only on biological sex, but also modern issues of class and race.²⁷ By doing this, Scott indicates that feminist analysis in modern historical scholarship should be conducted in “specific historical settings”—that is, scholarly feminism must dismiss a “fantastical” image of women in the past and instead focus on the ways in which gender can decode meaning, and understand complex social interactions in antiquity.²⁸ Scott’s concept of ‘masculine’ versus ‘feminine’ acting as a signifier for ‘dominance’ vs. ‘subservience’ allows for a thoroughly ‘gendered’ interpretation of politically influential power plays by women as they are seen in *Rome*.²⁹ Scott argues that by “legitimising” social interactions in a historical period through understanding the concept of gender as a power signifier, historians develop “insight into the reciprocal nature of gender and society”.³⁰ By reading sources in a manner that identifies gender as not only a social construction but also a metaphor for power, this thesis will utilise Scott’s theory to analyse critically the depictions of both Atia and Servilia as they are represented in the historical narrative.

Maria Wyke’s book *Projecting the Past: Ancient Rome, Cinema and History* gives an insight into the reception of antiquity as it is portrayed through the cinematic gaze. Although Wyke focuses on film rather than television, she challenges the concept that modern cinema and film studies should be neglected in the study of Classical Reception, arguing that cinematic representations have “long provided [their] own

²⁶ Joan W. Scott, “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis,” *The American Historical Review* 91, no. 5 (1986): 1067.

²⁷ Scott, “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis,” 1075.

²⁸ Scott, “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis,” 1070.

²⁹ Scott, “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis,” 1069-1070.

³⁰ Scott, “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis,” 1070.

distinctive historiography of Ancient Rome” that has “resurrected the ancient world and reformulated it in the light of present needs”.³¹ Wyke argues that many interpretations are possible from a singular historical figure, and emphasises the need to contextualise cinematic representations by understanding the societal influences that shape them.³² Wyke also seeks to establish the notion that historical film is not just a discourse involving the past, but also one that inevitably is moulded by the influence of modern society, shaping a historiographical story that reflects a melding of antiquity and modernity through a cinematic retelling.³³ Further utilising Reception theory, a collection of essays edited by Sandra R. Joshel, Margaret Malamud, and Donald T. McGuire, Jr., *Imperial Projections: Ancient Rome in Popular Culture*, highlights the influence that popular culture has on the cinematic representation of Ancient Rome. By emphasising that the “Romes created in popular culture” have a substantial influence on those that follow, *Imperial Projections* seeks to elucidate how ‘historical Rome’ has been appropriated and manipulated for the benefit of modern audiences—depending on their context.³⁴ This thesis will discuss how the interpretations of historical figures and the ‘historical Rome’ have influenced the characterisations of Atia and Servilia as they appear in *Rome*. The concept that history is selective and inclusive, simultaneously embracing and cherry-picking from the past to create a history needed for the present, underpins a good number of the findings found within this thesis.

³¹ Maria Wyke, *Projecting the Past: Ancient Rome, Cinema and History* (London: Routledge, 1997), 8.

³² Christoph Catrein, “Reviewed Works: *Petronius Arbiter* und *Federico Fellini: Ein strukturanalytischer Vergleich* by A. Sütterlin; *Projecting the Past: Ancient Rome, Cinema and History* by M. Wyke,” *The Classical Review* 49, no. 1 (1999): 246.

³³ Wyke, *Projecting the Past: Ancient Rome, Cinema and History*, 13.

³⁴ Joshel, Malamud, and Wyke, “Introduction,” 1-3.

Monica S. Cyrino's work on the reception of Ancient Rome is invaluable to this study. Cyrino has both written and edited a number of books on the relationship between modern society and Ancient Rome in cinema, but *Big Screen Rome* and the collection of essays gathered in *Rome, Season One: History Makes Television* and *Rome, Season Two: Trial and Triumph* are particularly pertinent to this thesis. Explaining in *Big Screen Rome* that "films about antiquity bridge the gap between the past and present", Cyrino explains that Ancient Rome provides a backdrop for modern tales to interweave with the historical setting of antiquity in a way that not only entertains, but educates.³⁵ Similarly, the studies in *Rome, Season One: History Makes Television* and *Rome, Season Two: Trial and Triumph* emphasise the relationship between modernity and history in televised representation. Although it can be argued that ancient sources mould modern interpretation, it is evident that more frequently it is modern influences that shape the reading of ancient material. *Rome, Season One* (2008) contains a number of significant analyses on the first season, with the focus strongly on the relationship between past and present. W. Jeffrey Tatum's essay entitled "Making History in *Rome*: Ancient vs. Modern Perspectives" emphasises the sensationalisation of history not only in modern depictions, but also ancient ones, highlighting the ability of screenwriters to fictionalise historical events and individuals in a plausible and believable manner.³⁶ Antony Augoustakis' chapter, "Women's Politics on the Streets of *Rome*" analyses the depictions of Atia and Servilia as they appear in both the ancient source material and their modern cinematic portrayal in the first season of *Rome*. As *Rome* rewrites

³⁵ Monica S. Cyrino, *Big Screen Rome* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2005), 1.

³⁶ W. Jeffrey Tatum, "Making History in *Rome*: Ancient vs. Modern Perspectives," in *Rome, Season One: History Makes Television*, ed. Monica S. Cyrino (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2008), 29.

the traditionally patriarchal history of Rome to accentuate the ‘historically marginalised’ women of the time period, Augoustakis’ work briefly investigates the relationship between the ‘historical’ Servilia and Atia and the ‘fictional’ characters, arguing that the series adapts “traditional gender roles” through the selective reception of history.³⁷ While Augoustakis’ work discusses the politics that drives the two women in *Rome*, it is important to note that there is more to do in terms of analysing the depictions of Atia and Servilia. This thesis aims to build upon previous analyses of both characters and further explore the influences that impacted upon their characterisations. Cyrino’s own chapter, “Atia and the Erotics of Authority” details Atia’s ownership of her sexuality and ‘femininity’ (or even ‘masculinity’) through her influence on the course of history within the show, and is particularly relevant to the focus of this thesis.³⁸ Margaret M. Toscano’s contribution to *Rome, Season One* utilises Scott’s theory regarding gender and power, discussing the power behind characters’ gendered clothing and speech to focus on the influence maintained by the characters of *Rome*. Emphasising the theme of power dichotomies, Toscano explains the ‘legitimacy’ awarded to the show by its playing with the concept of ‘traditional gender roles’.³⁹

Cyrino’s second edited collection, *Rome, Season Two: Trial and Triumph* (2015), like its predecessor, reflects the correlation between past and present. *Rome, Season Two* explores the interdisciplinary relationship between film and the ancient Roman world through a series of chapters dedicated to the explication of Reception theory as it

³⁷ Augoustakis, “Women’s Politics on the Streets of *Rome*,” 117-129.

³⁸ Cyrino, “Atia and the Erotics of Authority,” 130-140.

³⁹ Margaret M. Toscano, “Gowns and Gossip: Gender and Class Struggle in *Rome*,” in *Rome, Season One: History Makes Television*, ed. Monica S. Cyrino (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2008), 161.

relates to *Rome*. Antony Augoustakis' essay on the female body in *Rome* focuses on the desexualisation of Atia and Servilia over the course of the second season, demonstrating an almost 'defeminisation' of the two characters by the creators of *Rome* as Republic transforms into Empire.⁴⁰ Kirsten Day's chapter discusses the "invisible women" of Rome, and focuses on the historical representation of women found in the extant ancient source material. Explaining that *Rome* circumvents these pitfalls as they are historically depicted by providing a complex characterisation of women within the show, Day also underlines the downsides of such a representation, emphasising that the female characters often replicate the "prejudicial portrayals" found in antiquity.⁴¹ This theme is also explored by Alex McAuley in "Gateways to Vice: Drugs and Sex in *Rome*", where McAuley illustrates the cinematic trend of indulging in a modern interpretation of contemporary fascinations through a conveniently distant and 'foreign' 'Other'—as is the case in *Rome*. He argues that 'historical accuracy' is often used as a justification for deviant or taboo topics to be explored through the safety of antiquity.⁴² Although Cyrino's books cover a number of topics they are integral to the discussion in this thesis, as they provide a number of different perspectives on the modern reception of both the televised and historical Rome.

⁴⁰ Antony Augoustakis, "Effigies of Atia and Servilia: Effacing the Female Body in *Rome*," in *Rome, Season Two: Trial and Triumph*, ed. Monica S. Cyrino (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 117-127.

⁴¹ Kirsten Day, "Windows and Mirrors: Illuminating the Invisible Women of *Rome*," in *Rome, Season Two: Trial and Triumph*, ed. Monica S. Cyrino (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 141-154.

⁴² Alex McAuley, "Gateways to Vice: Drugs and Sex in *Rome*," in *Rome, Season Two: Trial and Triumph*, ed. Monica S. Cyrino (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 206-218.

Chapter One: ‘Atia of the Julii’

The Historical Atia

*“Thus it was, as tradition says, that the mothers of the Gracchi, of Caesar, of Augustus, Cornelia, Aurelia, Atia, directed their children’s education and reared the greatest of sons.”*⁴³

Despite the fame of her son, there is very little information provided by the extant source material about the historical Atia, and the majority of that which is available is directly related to Octavian.⁴⁴ As much of the information about Atia comes from biographical accounts of her son, it is perhaps not surprising that most of what is known of her character is anecdotal evidence concerning her interactions with him. Atia was born to the praetor Marcus Atius Balbus,⁴⁵ a native of Aricia whose paternal line contained, according to Suetonius, “many senatorial portraits” (*multis in familia senatoriis imaginibus*), and was closely connected via his maternal family to Pompey the Great.⁴⁶ Octavian’s opponents later twisted these familial connections into taunts, with Mark Antony and Cassius of Parma attempting to defame Octavian by attacking

⁴³ Tac. *Dial.* 28.

⁴⁴ The most thorough collation of information regarding Atia can be found in E. Klebs, “Attius 34,” in *RE* 34, eds. August Pauly, Georg Wissowa, Wilhelm Kroll, Kurt Witte, Karl Mittelhaus, Konrat Ziegler (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 1896), 2257-2258.

⁴⁵ E. Klebs, “Attius 11,” in *RE* 11, eds. August Pauly, Georg Wissowa, Wilhelm Kroll, Kurt Witte, Karl Mittelhaus, Konrat Ziegler (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 1896), 2253-2254.

⁴⁶ Suet. *Aug.* 4.1.

his mother's family.⁴⁷ Her mother, Julia of the Julii Caesares (*RE* 546),⁴⁸ was the younger of the two sisters of Gaius Julius Caesar (cos. 59), making her his biological niece.⁴⁹ Her exact birth date is not specified, though her death is noted as being during Octavian's first consulship in 43 BC.⁵⁰ Her first marriage to Gaius Octavius gave her two children, and following her husband's death in 59 BC,⁵¹ Atia married the "illustrious" consul of 56 BC, Lucius Marcius Philippus (*RE* 76).⁵² Atia's two children to Octavius were Octavia and Gaius Octavian (adopted by C. Iulius Caesar on the dictator's death and later known as Augustus), and Tacitus characterises her as a proud and protective Roman *matrona*.⁵³ Tacitus praises Atia's maternal dedication to her children, particularly Octavian, and her piousness and strict style of upbringing is compared to that of Cornelia, the mother of the Gracchi, and Aurelia, the mother of Caesar.⁵⁴ In his description of these three women, Tacitus elucidates that a "mother could have no higher praise than that she managed the house and gave herself to her children".⁵⁵ The relationship between Atia and her son appears to have been reciprocal, with Octavian showing Atia and his sister, Octavia "marked devotion" throughout their lives.⁵⁶ Following Atia's death in 43 BC during his suffect

⁴⁷ As Suetonius notes in 4.2, Antony disparaged Octavian by attacking his maternal ancestors, while Cassius of Parma taunted Octavian through sexually charged slurs against Atia. For further commentary on these political attacks, see D. Wardle, ed., *Suetonius, Life of Augustus: Translated with Introduction and Historical Commentary by D. Wardle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 94-95.

⁴⁸ F. Münzer, "Julia 546," in *RE* 546, eds. August Pauly, Georg Wissowa, Wilhelm Kroll, Kurt Witte, Karl Mittelhaus, Konrat Ziegler (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 1918), 894.

⁴⁹ Suet. *Aug.* 4.1.

⁵⁰ Suet. *Aug.* 61.2; Cass. Dio. 47.17.6.

⁵¹ Suet. *Aug.* 4.1.

⁵² Cic. *Phil.* 3.6.17; Plut. *Cic.* 44.1; Nic. Dam. 3.5; Vell. Pat. 2.59.3.

⁵³ Tac. *Dial.* 28.

⁵⁴ Tac. *Dial.* 28.

⁵⁵ Tac. *Dial.* 28. It is notable that each of these three women were raising their sons as their husbands were deceased.

⁵⁶ Suet. *Aug.* 61.2.

consulship, it is said that Octavian gave her a public funeral with the “highest honours.”⁵⁷

As is traditionally found within Roman accounts, Atia’s rigid yet devoted nurturing of her children is depicted as the groundwork for Octavian’s successes, as it was Atia who organised instructors for his education that later served him well in his political and military career.⁵⁸ However, Atia did not raise her offspring alone following her husband’s death—Philippus helped Atia take care of the children, with both parents allegedly inquiring about information regarding Octavian’s lessons and activities from his tutors and curators each day.⁵⁹ Their co-parenting is also mentioned later in the historical narrative, as when the young Octavian left the city during the time of the Civil War, it was both Atia and Philippus who sent him to the country for safety.⁶⁰ According to Nicolaus of Damascus, Atia’s influence on her son was present from a young age—Octavian wished to join his great-uncle, Caesar, in the field to obtain military experience, but when he saw his mother opposed to the idea, he allegedly acquiesced to staying at home without argument.⁶¹

Further information about Atia can be found following Caesar’s assassination in 44 BC, in the tumultuous period marking the change from Republic to Empire. Upon hearing that Octavian was seeking to seize Caesar’s inheritance, Philippus wrote to his step-son to persuade him against taking such steps—Atia, however, “looked as if

⁵⁷ Suet. *Aug.* 61.2; Cass. Dio 47.17.6; J. Lea Beness, “Atia,” in *Encyclopedia of Ancient History*, eds. R. S. Bagnall, Kai Broderson, Craige B. Champion, Andrew Erskine, and Sabine R. Huebner (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2013), 922-923.

⁵⁸ Augoustakis, “Women’s Politics on the Streets of Rome,” 119.

⁵⁹ Nic. Dam. 3; Augoustakis, “Women’s Politics on the Streets of Rome,” 119.

⁶⁰ Nic. Dam. 3.6.

⁶¹ Nic. Dam. 4.7.

⁶¹ Nic. Dam. 6.14.

she was between the view of her husband Philippus and her son”.⁶² Maternal inclinations notwithstanding, Atia is depicted as not being entirely without private motivation, with Nicolaus of Damascus indicating her personal desire to see her family succeed: “[Atia] said [Octavian] must show himself a man now [...], and when she saw the glory of fortune and the extent of the Empire devolving upon her own son, rejoiced ...”.⁶³ It is apparent that Atia feared for Augustus’ safety, whilst also wanting her son to prosper politically:

Hence she felt many cares, now anxious when she enumerated all the dangers awaiting one striving for supreme power, and now elated when she thought of the extent of that power and honour. Therefore she did not dare to dissuade her son from attempting the great deed and effecting a just requital, but she still did not venture to urge him on, [...] She permitted his use of the name Caesar and in fact was the first to assent.⁶⁴

Other sources also noted Atia’s wariness of Octavian’s political aspirations—Suetonius told of Atia’s doubts⁶⁵ while Velleius Paterculus asserted that both Atia and Philippus disliked the thought of Octavian taking Caesar’s name.⁶⁶ This notwithstanding, Atia seemingly supported her son’s political endeavours, offering counsel during the tumultuous period following the breakdown of the Republic.⁶⁷ Nicolaus of Damascus described Octavian’s relationship with Atia as one of affection

⁶² Nic. Dam. 18.53-54.

⁶³ Nic. Dam. 18.54.

⁶⁴ Nic. Dam. 18.54.

⁶⁵ Suet. *Aug.* 8.2.

⁶⁶ 2.60.1.

⁶⁷ Nic. Dam. 30.126.

and weakness, and her maternal instincts and desires may have sometimes proved a hindrance to his political plans.⁶⁸ Nevertheless, Atia was still a “model of the conscientious and influential Roman mother” following the death of her husband.⁶⁹

In addition to her personal influence over her son, Atia’s presence was also used as ammunition for political attacks against Octavian over the course of his career—despite strong ties to the Julian family, Antony sought to use Atia’s ancestral history against Octavian following Caesar’s assassination.⁷⁰ Conversely, Atia was also used to solidify and ‘legitimise’ Octavian’s rule, with her appearing almost as a divine figure in pro-Augustan propaganda—Atia’s impregnation by Apollo was posited as Augustus’ link to divinity,⁷¹ following in a long tradition of biographical embellishment of men in leadership roles.⁷²

Atia is remembered in Roman history as a “mother who had a marked influence on the upbringing of her son”.⁷³ The pious figure of Atia as she appears in the historical source tradition was crucial to the development of Octavian over the course of his life, and most of what we know of her is in relation to her son. As much of this revolves around the hagiographical tradition concerning Augustus, it is difficult to discern aspects of the ‘real’ Atia, or draw a rounded character portrait from the historical excerpts. It is the image of an idealised Roman matron that emanates from much of the extant source material.

⁶⁸ Nic. Dam. 30.134.

⁶⁹ For a discussion of Atia’s status as a widow, see Suzanne Dixon, *The Roman Mother (Reprint)* (London: Routledge, 1990), 22-23.

⁷⁰ Cic. *Phil.* 3.15-17; Suet. *Aug.* 4.1.

⁷¹ Suet. *Aug.* 94, Cass. Dio. 45.1.2-3.

⁷² Augoustakis, “Women’s Politics on the Streets of Rome,” 118.

⁷³ Beness, “Atia,” 922-923.

‘Atia of the Julii’

*“The great scarlet woman of the age, absolutely scandalous, and she represented the polar opposite of all the traditional virtues of the Roman matron.”*⁷⁴

Jonathan Stamp’s summation of the character of Atia is a direct contrast with the idealised Roman matron image given by most of the historical sources. Although the character in *Rome* differs significantly from her historic counterpart, some key aspects of Atia remain. Atia is still the mother of Octavian and the niece of Julius Caesar, both of whom are key individuals in the narrative of both the late Republic and *Rome*. As Polly Walker describes her, Atia is “insensitive and wilful and selfish”, but she is a “survivor” who is “protecting her lineage and her family”.⁷⁵ Atia’s character in the show is designed from the start to be provocative, described by HBO itself as “snobbish, wilful, and cunning”, as well as “sexually voracious and totally amoral ...”.⁷⁶ A quick survey of reviews following the show’s release provides a common consensus on Atia’s character—one reviewer calls Atia “*Rome*’s resident Lady Macbeth”,⁷⁷ another labels her as “the series’ designated endearing monster”,⁷⁸ and

⁷⁴ Jonathan Stamp, “Women in Rome,” *Rome: The Complete First Season*, DVD (New York: HBO Studios, 2014).

⁷⁵ Polly Walker, “Rome – this autumn on BBC TWO – press pack phase two,” BBC Press Office, 18 October, 2005. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/stories/2005/10_october/18/rome_walker.shtml>

⁷⁶ Quoted from HBO.com/Rome as seen in Cyrino, “Atia and the Erotics of Authority,” 132.

⁷⁷ Eric Neigher, “Rome: Season One,” *Slant Magazine*, September 21, 2005, <http://www.slantmagazine.com/tv/review/rome-season-one>.

⁷⁸ Alessandra Stanley, “Friends, Romans, Countrymen, Lovers, Haters, Murderers, Barbarians,” *New York Times*, Jan. 12, 2007, http://www.nytimes.com/2007/01/12/arts/television/12rome.html?_r=0.

another deems her an “arch-manipulator, [who] is by turns hateful and charming”.⁷⁹ There is an almost elated unanimity of opinion on the characterisation of *Rome*’s ‘feminine evil’, most of which emphasises her sexual manipulation and cunning scheming.⁸⁰ Atia’s behaviour is provocative from the outset, and succeeded in piquing the interest of many who watched the show. *Rome*’s Atia transcends the maternal figure that is found in the ancient source tradition; she is a character that projects many of the masculine traits celebrated in Roman culture.⁸¹ Atia’s ‘masculine’ ruthlessness and manipulation is deliberately blended with a fiercely ‘feminine’ presence to create a fascinatingly balanced character. It is undeniable that the overtly sexual ‘feminine’ characterisation of Atia was designed (at least in part) to draw in viewers, but there is something about Atia’s control over her own sexuality and power that is distinctly Roman and almost masculinised in nature. While most of Servilia’s impetus throughout the show is centred on the trope of a ‘vengeful female lover scorned’, Atia’s motivations often embody *virtus*.⁸² Given that Atia is depicted as the *materfamilias* of her *domus*, typically strong, courageous and ‘masculine’ behaviour is unsurprising. As Cyrino says, Atia is highly motivated by the success of her family, particularly her son, Octavian:

... Atia’s motivation is quintessentially Julian in nature, in that every action she takes in the series, whether extortion, assault, murder, or guerrilla graffiti, she does in order to secure the shifting political fortunes of her loved ones and, especially, to establish a position of

⁷⁹ James Anthony, “Your next box set: Rome,” *The Guardian*, June 26, 2009, <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2009/jun/26/rome-dvd-box-set-review>.

⁸⁰ Cyrino, “Atia and the Erotics of Authority,” 132.

⁸¹ Cyrino, “Atia and the Erotics of Authority,” 132.

⁸² Cyrino, “Atia and the Erotics of Authority,” 132.

power for her son, Octavian. Atia's purpose is more than merely maternal: it is dynastic.⁸³

Cyrino's assessment of Atia as she appears on the show is apropos: 'Atia of the Julii' is intense, ruthless, and occasionally callous, but ultimately she is fervently dedicated to her cause and her family, and fiercely loyal to those who serve them.

Over the course of *Rome*, it is clear that Atia's 'femininity' is used as a means to assert her family's dominance as a prominent *gens* of the Republic. However, by using the pretence of a need to secure familial success, is it also clear that much of Atia's scheming is an attempt to fulfil her own personal desires, be they vengeance (against Servilia), or political standing (for her son). Atia's longing for personal power is reflected through her consistent attempt to be closely aligned with her maternal uncle, Julius Caesar. Atia's close relationship with Caesar is made abundantly clear from the beginning, starting from the first episode of the first season, "The Stolen Eagle". Caesar implores Atia to find a new Julian wife for Pompey, and Atia gleefully acquiesces, sacrificing her daughter's existing marriage to offer her to Pompey in fulfilment of Caesar's request.⁸⁴ Historically, Caesar did offer his grand-niece Octavia to Pompey,⁸⁵ and although not explicitly stated by Suetonius, it is quite likely that Atia, as Octavia's mother, was involved in this process.⁸⁶ By entrusting such a task to his niece, Caesar simultaneously exhibits a trusting relationship with

⁸³ Cyrino, "Atia and the Erotics of Authority," 132.

⁸⁴ *Rome*, "The Stolen Eagle." Episode 1, Season 1. Directed by Michael Apted. Written by Bruno Heller. HBO, August 28, 2005.

⁸⁵ Suet. *Iul.* 27.1.

⁸⁶ *Rome* also has this around the correct time period, as this offer was made after the death of Caesar's daughter and Pompey's fourth wife, Julia. See Suet. *Iul.* 27.1-2.

Atia, and something of a disdainful one towards his own wife, Calpurnia.⁸⁷ When Caesar returns home from Gaul in “Stealing from Saturn”, Atia’s desire to maintain a strong relationship with Caesar is demonstrated again when she is granted the right to hold a returning party for him at her own villa. Upon seeing Servilia’s name featured on the guest list, Atia sneers: “I’ll not let that woman get between me and Caesar”.⁸⁸ Indeed, Servilia and Caesar’s relationship and its subsequent breakdown proves to be a great cause of concern for Atia as the narrative advances, but her initial reaction is one almost of jealousy—it is Atia’s place to be close with Caesar, and no other woman, including (and perhaps especially) a lover, is to place herself in the way. This notwithstanding, when Atia greets Caesar with her two children, she presents herself with a level of grace and humility, feigning a level of modesty so as to keep up appearances. This relationship is a particularly important one for the character of Atia throughout the first season, and although Caesar breaks off his relationship with Servilia later in the series, his and Atia’s relationship remains strong until the time of his death.

Perhaps the most revealing snippets of information regarding the influences on Atia’s characterisation in *Rome* come from a featurette found on the DVD, “Rome: Women in Rome”. The short featurette contains a number of interviews with Polly Walker, the historical consultant, Jonathan Stamp, and the screenwriter, Bruno Heller, and from them it is possible to glean some manner of understanding about the direction of Atia as she is seen in *Rome*. Walker’s surprise at the dynastic ambitions of women in Republican Rome is apparent as she justifies Atia’s scheming behaviour as being

⁸⁷ Cyrino, “Atia and the Erotics of Authority,” 133.

⁸⁸ *Rome*, “Stealing from Saturn.” Episode 4, Season 1. Directed by Julian Farino. Written by Bruno Heller. HBO, September 18, 2005.

derived from the need to “cloak [these behaviours] with all sorts of subtleties”.⁸⁹ It is clear that the Atia of *Rome* was designed to be an antagonist, as she is labelled an “anti-heroine, an arch-manipulator, and schemer”, as well as a “stirrer of trouble” by Heller.⁹⁰ Heller’s statement that “women appear very little in the history books because men wrote the history books” appears as a justification for the ahistorically imaginative characterisation of Atia, particularly given his belief that “women were incredibly powerful in ancient Rome”.⁹¹ Atia’s sexual power is highlighted by Stamp, who brands her a “scarlet woman”, devoid of the virtues embodied by the traditional Republican matron.⁹² Though Stamp studied “the Roman canon in its original Latin”, and is a graduate from Balliol College at the University at Oxford,⁹³ ‘historical accuracy’ was not his foremost priority:

The first point is it [the production of historical drama] is not educational philanthropy. It’s entertainment. It’s the entertainment business. The past is a rich seam to find stories that will entertain mass audiences. [...] For big undertakings like *Rome*, the real motivation is to entertain people and draw people in, it’s not to educate people.⁹⁴

⁸⁹ Polly Walker, “Women in *Rome*,” *Rome: The Complete First Season*, DVD (New York: HBO Studios, 2014).

⁹⁰ Bruno Heller, “Women in *Rome*,” *Rome: The Complete First Season*, DVD (New York: HBO Studios, 2014).

⁹¹ Heller, “Women in *Rome*.”

⁹² Stamp, “Women in *Rome*.”

⁹³ “Jonathan Stamp (1982) helps bring Rome to the small screen,” *Balliol College Floreat Domus Issue 12* (Oxford, 2006), <https://www.balliol.ox.ac.uk/alumni-and-friends/floreat-domus/2006/jonathan-stamp-1982-helps-bring-rome-to-the-small-screen>.

⁹⁴ Jonathan Stamp, “Balancing Fact and Fiction: The Ancient World of HBO’s *Rome*,” interview by Patt Morrison, *The Villa Council Presents*, March 5, 2009, http://www.getty.edu/museum/programs/villa_council_rome.html.

Stamp's point is pertinent—*Rome* was not designed to 'accurately' represent the fall of the Republic, it is first and foremost a show of entertainment utilising the ancient setting to tell its stories. It is relevant to note that Stamp talks of 'authenticity', rather than 'accuracy', highlighting that "[...] nothing can be 100% historically accurate. Not even a documentary is historically accurate. [...] What you can be is authentic—by which I mean you can try and get the details right."⁹⁵ Such 'authenticity' is evidenced by the fact that *Rome*'s creators used famous (or more fittingly, infamous) Roman women of the Republic to flesh out the character of Atia. Stamp himself claimed women "like Clodia [Metelli]" as an inspiration for Atia's characterisation, but neglects to mention other possible influences specifically.⁹⁶ Monica Cyrino aptly notes that it is surprising that Fulvia, famously married to Publius Clodius Pulcher, Gaius Scribonius Curio, and finally, Mark Antony, is not cited as inspiration—the notorious Fulvia was involved in the "tempestuous [...] end of the Republic", and her "energetic participation in politics" would correspond well with Atia's profile in *Rome*, and the erotically-charged relationship with Antony.⁹⁷ As Cyrino observes: "Fulvia may have been erotically involved with Antony long before she actually married him, [...] this would be consistent with Atia's suggestion in Episode 06 of a potential marriage to her long-time lover."⁹⁸ Although it should be noted that the historical portrait of Fulvia is contaminated by malicious slander from Cicero, as well as propaganda put forward by Octavian, Fulvia's own quests for vengeance mirror those of 'Atia of the Julii', as evidenced by the tale of her mistreatment of the body of

⁹⁵ Stamp, "Balancing Fact and Fiction: The Ancient World of HBO's *Rome*."

⁹⁶ Jonathan Stamp, "When in Rome," *Rome, The Complete First Season*, DVD (New York: HBO Studios, 2014).

⁹⁷ Cyrino, "Atia and the Erotics of Authority," 139. For potential evidence of an affair between Antony and Fulvia, see Cic. *Phil.* 2.48, as cited in Cyrino, "Atia and the Erotics of Authority," 140 (n.16).

⁹⁸ Cyrino, "Atia and the Erotics of Authority," 139.

Cicero.⁹⁹ The vivid and dramatic descriptions of the mutilation of Cicero's body by Fulvia fit into a long tradition of the historiographical treatment of death likely added for the benefit of Roman rhetorical declamations.¹⁰⁰ Velleius Paterculus calls Fulvia a "woman in body alone",¹⁰¹ and indeed the more general attribution of traditionally masculine traits to Fulvia in the ancient source tradition¹⁰² strikes a chord with characterisation of Atia over the course of *Rome*.¹⁰³ Fulvia's absence in the series is notable, but perhaps her 'historical narrative' was deliberately used to lend a level of authenticity to the central character of Atia.¹⁰⁴

Fulvia's alleged desire to control men and their involvement in military affairs is reminiscent of Atia's own familial political aspirations as they are shown in *Rome*. Fulvia's ambitions¹⁰⁵ are likely to have played a crucial part in all three of her

⁹⁹ Cass. Dio, 47.8.4: "Fulvia took [Cicero's] head into her hands before it was removed, and after abusing it spitefully and spitting upon it, set it on her knees, opened the mouth, and pulled out the tongue, which she pierced with the pins that she used for her hair, at the same time uttering many brutal jests." Cf. Jerome, *Apology against the books of Rufinus* 3.42; Suda, Phi 567 Adler on the episode. It is worthwhile noting here that only late sources claim Fulvia's involvement in the death of Cicero and the absence of any mention of her participation in the very detailed early source tradition casts doubt on the whole episode.

¹⁰⁰ Other examples of Cicero's post-mortem mutilation can be found in Crem. Cord. Sen. Suas. 6.19: *multorem capita servaverat*) and App. *B. Civ.* 4.20. For further discussion of declamation, production of history, and the mutilation of Cicero's corpse, see M. B. Roller, "Color-blindness: Cicero's death, declamation and the production of history," *Classical Philology* 92 (1997): 109-130. For a discussion of Cicero's death scene and the historical declamation tradition as it is seen in *Rome*, see Eran Almagor, "Earning Immortality: Cicero's Death Scene in *Rome*," in *Rome, Season Two: Trial and Triumph*, ed. Monica S. Cyrino (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 61-73.

¹⁰¹ 2.74.

¹⁰² Fulvia's masculinity is noted in Plut. *Ant.* 10.3: "She was a woman who took no thought for spinning or housekeeping, nor would she deign to bear sway over a man of private station, but she wished to rule a ruler and command a commander."

¹⁰³ As Cyrino notes, Atia's behaviours and motivations appear distinctly 'masculine'. See Cyrino, "Atia and the Erotics of Authority," 132.

¹⁰⁴ Cyrino, *Atia and the Erotics of Authority*, 139.

¹⁰⁵ Plut. *Ant.* 10.3.

husbands' political careers,¹⁰⁶ although it is in her marriage to Antony where her aspirations became most public.¹⁰⁷ Following the assassination of Caesar in 44 BC, Fulvia represented Antony's interests in Rome as he conducted affairs in Egypt, and she is noted as being "meddlesome and headstrong" in her relationship with Antony.¹⁰⁸ Her interest in being involved in Antony's military activities is documented by Velleius Paterculus, as she is said to have "creat[ed] general confusion by armed violence" in Praeneste following the defeat of Brutus and Cassius in 41 BC.¹⁰⁹ Fulvia's documented relationship with Antony has parallels with Atia and Antony's relationship in *Rome*—as it is noted that Fulvia's sexual involvement with Antony potentially began well before their marriage,¹¹⁰ Atia's suggestion of a strategic wedding in Episode Six, "Egeria" is consistent with this narrative.¹¹¹ The allusion to a politically convenient marriage is a potential nod to the historical record, and Atia's political aspirations align closely with the zest for politics demonstrated by

¹⁰⁶ Charles L. Babcock, "The Early Career of Fulvia," *The American Journal of Philology* 86, no. 1 (1965): 20.

¹⁰⁷ T. Corey Brennan, "Perceptions of Women's Power in the Late Republic: Terentia, Fulvia, and the Generation of 63 BCE," in *A Companion to Women in the Ancient World*, 1st edition, eds. Sharon L. James, and Sheila Dillon (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2012), 358.

¹⁰⁸ Plut. *Ant.* 30.2.

¹⁰⁹ 2.74.2.

¹¹⁰ Cic. *Phil.* 2.48 contains the implication of an early affair between Antony and Fulvia, while she was still involved with Clodius: "He was very intimate with Clodius at the time of his tribuneship; he, who now enumerates the kindnesses which he did to me. He was the firebrand to handle all conflagrations; and even in his house he attempted something. He himself well knows what I allude to." This is elaborated upon by Babcock, "The Early Career of Fulvia," 6, and further discussed by Cyrino, "Atia and the Erotics of Authority," 139. For a discussion regarding the Ciceronian rhetoric surrounding Fulvia, see S. Ige, "Rhetoric and the Feminine Character: Cicero's Portrayal of Sassia, Clodia, and Fulvia," *Akroterion* 48 (2003): 45-57.

¹¹¹ *Rome*, "Egeria." Episode 6, Season 1. Directed by Alan Poul. Written by Bruno Heller & John Milius. HBO, October 2, 2005. Atia suggests a marriage between Antony and herself for military reasons: "Please don't worry, I'm not going soft on you. I'm thinking strategically. If Caesar is defeated, I can't very well form an alliance with the Pompeians. I need protection."

Fulvia in the source material.¹¹² Further correlation between Fulvia and Atia can also be found by examining Fulvia's depiction as a murderer in extant source material. Fulvia's avarice is described in the historical narrative as the main cause for the death of the senator Caesetius Rufus in 43 BC— Fulvia's coveting of a mansion belonging to Rufus is given as the main reason for his proscription by Antony, and both Appian and Cassius Dio characterise her as "cruel" and "greedy" for her suspected participation in proscriptions.¹¹³ This desire to acquire property and accrue wealth is in line with the image of Fulvia promoted by the source tradition of a politically ambitious, occasionally callous woman that is seen in later denigrations of imperial women.¹¹⁴ Atia's desire for authority and prestige corresponds well with this narrative, as her own foray into murder (i.e., the arrangement of Octavia's husband Glabius' death in Episode Three, "An Owl in a Thornbush") is undertaken specifically to strengthen the political power of her immediate family.¹¹⁵

Although *Rome*'s writers and directors created a standalone character who is shown as autonomous in her behaviour, it is clear that the source tradition was used as an influence for the shaping of her personality. Atia is clearly capable of making calculated and pointed decisions that are designed to undercut her political enemies and solidify her familial security in the tumultuous dynamic at the end of the Republic, just as Fulvia did in the historic narrative during the years following Caesar's assassination. Furthermore, Atia's portrayal is also a continuation,

¹¹² Cyrino, "Atia and the Erotics of Authority," 139.

¹¹³ App. *B. Civ.* 4.29; Cass. Dio. 47.8.2-3.

¹¹⁴ Anthony A. Barrett, *Agrippina: Sex, Power, and Politics in the Early Empire* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), 11-12.

¹¹⁵ Atia's violent denial of a reunion between Octavia and Glabius following Octavia's rejection from Pompey is due to Atia's personal desire to strengthen her familial connections through a political marriage. See Cyrino, "Atia and the Erotics of Authority," 136.

intentional or otherwise, of how ancient women are seen, interpreted, and subsequently created for modern media.

Single Mother, Powerful Matron?

There are many differences between the historic Atia and her televised counterpart that are of notable interest. In *Rome*, Atia is politically astute, sexually manipulative, and vindictive in nature, perhaps harkening back to the “great political manipulator” Livia played by Siân Phillips in the television adaptation of *I, Claudius* (1979).¹¹⁶ One of the most notable differences is that the historical Atia remarried following the death of her husband, Gaius Octavius (praetor. 61 BC)¹¹⁷ (*RE* 15) in 59/58 BC,¹¹⁸ giving Octavia and Octavian a stepfather, L. Marcius Philippus (cos. 56) (*RE* 76), and thus a ‘masculine’ influence in their family life—whereas ‘Atia of the Julii’ is decidedly free of marital ties. In fact, *Rome*’s Atia actively rejects remarriage for a large portion of the series, instead engaging in sexual liaisons with Timon and Mark Antony, with whom she shares a deeper bond in the later episodes of Season One. The role of Philippus is notably absent in *Rome*, whereas he is present in the historical narrative—in both Suetonius’ and Nicolaus of Damascus’ accounts, following the

¹¹⁶ Patricia Lennox, “The incredible shrinking matron: Portia, Calpurnia, Volumnia, Virgilia,” in *Shakespeare on Screen: The Roman Plays*, eds. Sarah Hatchuel and Nathalie Vienne-Guerrin (Rouen: Presses Universitaires de Rouen, 2009), 179. The fictional Livia’s plotting of murders in *I, Claudius* is an attempt to secure familial power by promoting her son Tiberius to the throne. For a discussion of imperial women, their power, and the historic Livia Drusilla, see Susan E. Wood, *Imperial women: a study in public images, 40 B.C.-A.D. 68*, (Leiden: Brill, 1999).

¹¹⁷ Suet. *Aug.* 3.1-3; Vell. Pat. 2.59.2; Nic. Dam. 126.3.

¹¹⁸ According to the historical narrative, Gaius Octavius died suddenly on his return to Rome following military successes in Macedonia. See Suet. *Aug.* 4.1; Vell. Pat. 2.59.2; Tac. *Ann.* 1.9.1. It is also said that Octavian died in the same location as Gaius Octavius. Suet. *Aug.* 100: “He died in the same room as his father Octavius [...]”.

assassination of Caesar, Octavian is encouraged by both Atia and his stepfather to refrain from returning to Rome.¹¹⁹ Such accounts reinforce the presence of a masculine head of the household in the historical narrative, something that is noticeably absent in the depiction found in *Rome*.¹²⁰

The absence of Philippus allows the character of Atia to transform from the historically pious and chaste mother found in the Tacitean evidence to the ambitious and sexually-charged woman depicted in *Rome*. The fact that there is not a *paterfamilias* in the household allows for Atia and her family to be politically susceptible. This vulnerability is emphasised, as Atia's desperation for a strong political connection with Caesar underlines many of her actions throughout the first season of the show, setting the scene and providing the impetus for the dramatic and important relationship between herself and Servilia.¹²¹ Her anxieties in this respect are transferred onto her children, as Atia's frustration that Octavian's predilection for books is impacting his 'masculinity', and potentially affecting his future as *paterfamilias*.¹²² As Octavian is being raised in a strictly feminine household without the appropriate masculine father figure, it is up to Atia to use her *materna auctoritas* to guide Octavian into the 'correct' way to become a Roman *vir*.¹²³ In Episode Four, "Stealing from Saturn", Atia disdainfully remarks that her son has a "distinctly

¹¹⁹ Suet. *Aug.* 8; Nic. Dam. 3.5-6.

¹²⁰ Barbara Weiden Boyd, "Becoming Augustus: The Education of Octavian", in *Rome, Season One: History Makes Television*, ed. Monica S. Cyrino (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2008), 93. *Rome*, "An Owl in a Thornbush," Episode 3, Season 1. Directed by Michael Apted. Written by Bruno Heller. HBO, September 11, 2005. Atia is heard in this episode saying she is "all alone".

¹²¹ Boyd, "Becoming Augustus: The Education of Octavian," 92.

¹²² In *Rome*, "Egeria," Atia demands that Octavian "penetrate someone today, or [she] will burn [his] wretched books at the yard".

¹²³ For more on Atia's *materna auctoritas* over Octavian, see T. W. Hillard, "Materna Auctoritas: The Political Influence of Roman Matronae," *Classicum* 22, no. 11 (1983): 12.

feminine *anima*” and orders him to correct it by ingesting goat testicles. In the following episode, “The Ram has Touched the Wall”, Atia calls upon the appropriately virile Pullo to instruct Octavian in the ‘masculine arts’ (i.e., “how to fight and copulate and skin animals”). It is interesting to note that this strict and demanding mothering style exemplifies Atia as a good Roman maternal figure, rather than as a modernistic idealised interpretation of a purely “loving and tender” mother.¹²⁴

Although the Atia we find in the ancient source material reflects the embodiment of a traditional Roman matron more so than her fictional counterpart, it is apparent that both representations of her remain committed to the progression of her son within the political sphere. Indeed, the ambitious Atia, depicted in *Rome*, desperately seeks to further Octavian’s and her family’s position in the ever-changing dynamics of Roman politics.¹²⁵ It is worth noting that Nicolaus indicates that the historical Atia was aware of the dangers regarding Octavian’s rise following the demise of Caesar and initially sought to dissuade her son from attempting to gain power.¹²⁶ This is in direct contrast to the scenario depicted in the first season of *Rome*, where the fictional Atia schemes to strengthen her and her family’s political connections in a number of ways—by fortifying the relationship between her household and Caesar by way of the gift of a

¹²⁴ E. A. Hemelrijk, “City patronesses in the Roman Empire,” *Historia* 53, no. 2 (2004): 225. The image of the mother as an occasionally severe authoritarian in Roman literature appears as a break from the modern stereotype of a *paterfamilias* as disciplinarian and *materfamilias* as nurturer. The epigraphical evidence also shows the emotional importance, in some cases, of ‘mother substitutes’, such as slave nurses. See Dixon, *The Roman Mother*, 133.

¹²⁵ Augoustakis, “Women’s Politics on the Streets of *Rome*,” 120.

¹²⁶ Nic. Dam. 18. Although she attempted to prevent Octavian from leaving, Atia’s *materna auctoritas* was not enough to dissuade Octavian from pursuing his political ambitions. See Hillard, “*Materna Auctoritas*,” 12.

horse delivered by Octavian,¹²⁷ not denouncing her familial connection to the Caesarians but rather taking advantage of it by attending to the needs of *clientela*,¹²⁸ throwing a party upon Caesar's controversial return to Rome,¹²⁹ and insisting upon Octavian's joining of Caesar's army so as to "get some real Pompeian blood on your sword".¹³⁰ Atia also plots for Octavian to lose his virginity in order to make him a *vir*.¹³¹ 'Atia of the Julii' is described as the "anti-hero" and the "arch manipulator" of *Rome*,¹³² and Polly Walker herself laments that her character's gender restricts her political potential: "Atia should have been the emperor, but unfortunately she was born a woman who nevertheless channels all her energy and power into her son".¹³³ While this directly reflects the emphasis throughout the series on the power held by these maternal figures over their politically powerful sons, Walker's statement also reveals her own perception of where Rome's political power truly laid—in the hands of the male players.

Atia and Octavian

It is impossible to discuss the portrayal of Atia in the series *Atia* without delving into the relationships that she holds with both of her children, as one of *Rome*'s long-running narratives relies greatly upon the progression and eventual degradation of their respective relationships. Indeed, Atia's relationships with her children are vital to her depiction in both the historical sources and in *Rome* itself. Atia's relationships

¹²⁷ *Rome*, "The Stolen Eagle."

¹²⁸ *Rome*, "An Owl in a Thornbush."

¹²⁹ *Rome*, "Stealing from Saturn."

¹³⁰ *Rome*, "Egeria."

¹³¹ *Rome*, "Utica," Episode 9, Season 1. Directed by Jeremy Podeswa. Written by Alexandra Cunningham. HBO, October 30, 2005.

¹³² Heller, "When in Rome."

¹³³ Walker, "When in Rome."

with her children in the first season of *Rome* are drastically different in the second season, although, for the most part, her aims in their interactions remain the same, namely for political gain and for the sake of familial progression. She also maintains a thirst for payback against those who have wronged or irritated her, which occasionally involves her children. From the beginning of the series, Atia networks with those around her in order to achieve this and her children are no exception. In the first season, Atia holds a level of power over Octavian and Octavia that she does not wield as easily in the second. Octavian's relationship with his mother during the first series is that of a subordinate as Atia persuades him to do what she feels will enhance the level of prestige held by the Julian family. Over the course of the first season, Octavian is engaged in his own education—he repeatedly appears to be reading or studying, an issue of contention in his relationship with his mother. Her insistence regarding the importance of “experience [over] bookish learning” underpins the transformation undertaken by Octavian during the first season.¹³⁴ However, as Boyd argues, it is Atia who appears initially as the “single most influential figure” over him, something that is drastically different by the end of the series' run.¹³⁵ Octavian is depicted as politically astute—something that Atia responds to on occasion with antagonism¹³⁶—and by the end of the season represents the more conventional masculinised Roman *vir* due to his (sometimes aggressive) sexual conquests and his ascent to the role of *paterfamilias* within his family.¹³⁷ As the series lacks Octavian's

¹³⁴ Boyd, “Becoming Augustus: The Education of Octavian,” 91.

¹³⁵ Boyd, “Becoming Augustus: The Education of Octavian,” 91.

¹³⁶ Boyd, “Becoming Augustus: The Education of Octavian,” 90.

¹³⁷ Boyd, “Becoming Augustus: The Education of Octavian,” 97.

stepfather, Philippus, this paves the way for Atia to appear as the strongest influence over her son during the first season of *Rome*.¹³⁸

The fact that the source material focuses on the relationship between mother and son is clearly a basis for how the Atia of *Rome* interacts with Octavian, as she is portrayed in the show as one of the strongest influences over his character development. Nicolaus of Damascus indicates that Atia held some level of control over her son, appearing similar to the domineering mother that is seen in the first season.¹³⁹ Although Octavian was, in legal terms, a man, Atia was still very much an authoritarian parent.¹⁴⁰ This image of a dominant mother can be seen in Episode Six, “Egeria”, when Atia harangues Octavian to “penetrate” someone instead of burying himself in his education, threatening to “burn his books” in the courtyard if he does not yield to his mother’s will. Pullo takes Octavian to a brothel after their discussion, and Atia rewards Octavian’s virility when she gifts him a toga akin to the *toga virilis*.¹⁴¹ His sexual behaviour is now normal in her eyes and an acceptable marker of Roman archetypal male sexual aggression.¹⁴² Following Octavian’s sexual liaison with the young prostitute, Egeria, however, Atia relents and sends him off to pursue his studies at Mediolanum. Atia’s influence over her son can be seen here, as Atia seeks to masculinise him through bullying him to lose his virginity and what she

¹³⁸ This is a distinct change from the historical narrative found in Nicolaus of Damascus’ account of Octavian’s life. Historically, Octavian was raised by both Atia and Philippus, both of whom took an interest in his studies. See Nic. Dam. 3.5-6.

¹³⁹ 4.10: “His mother prevented him from putting his foot outside the door, except to go where he had previously gone when still a boy.”

¹⁴⁰ Nic. Dam. 4.10: “In other respects, he was treated as a boy.”

¹⁴¹ According to the *fasti* (*Inscr. Ital.* 13.2.209, 279), Octavian assumed the *toga virilis* on the 18th or 19th of October, 48 or 47 BC. (cf. Nic. Dam. 4; Suet. *Aug.* 8.1.)

¹⁴² Boyd, “Becoming Augustus: The Education of Octavian,” 93-94.

perceives as his feminising studiousness.¹⁴³ Atia's desire to see her son masculinised is further reinforced in Episode Nine, "Utica", after Octavian returns from Mediolanum. After shrewdly advising Caesar on civic matters, Caesar rewards Octavian by appointing him as *pontifex*.¹⁴⁴ Atia is overjoyed at this development, and when Octavian states that he would rather focus on his poetry, she dismisses this as insolence and instructs him to take the priesthood. This is demonstrative of Atia's prevalent desire to further promote her son and the Julian line. It is interesting to note what appears in *Rome* that appears to draw from the historical narrative, and what does not. The omission of Philippus from *Rome* allows for a change in direction for the characters of Atia and Octavian. Meanwhile, Octavian's dedication to his education is demonstrative of an aptitude for learning that is found within the source tradition,¹⁴⁵ and Atia's commandeering approach to his life is reflective of the portrayal seen in Nicolaus of Damascus.¹⁴⁶

Octavian's character development over the course of the show is inevitably entangled with the behaviour of his mother, and can occasionally be seen as resulting directly from it. Throughout the second season, Atia's relationship with Octavian sours following the continuation of her relationship with Mark Antony and Octavian's own foray into the politics of Rome. In the second episode of Season Two, "Son of Hades", Octavian denounces Atia's perpetual quest for vengeance against Servilia,

¹⁴³ Boyd, "Becoming Augustus: The Education of Octavian," 91.

¹⁴⁴ Chronologically, Octavian's co-optation to the pontificate is placed correctly in the timeline of Rome. On Octavian's elevation to the pontificate after Caesar's return at the end of 47 BC, see J. Rüpke and A. Glock, *Fasti Sacerdotum: A Prosopography of Pagan, Jewish, and Christian Religious Officials in the City of Rome, 300 BC to AD 499*, trans. D. M. B. Richardson (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 2008), 585 (no. 1012). See also T. R. S. Broughton, "(Recension) G. J. Szemler, *The Priests of the Roman Republic*, 1972," *Gnomon* 47 (1975): 387.

¹⁴⁵ Nic. Dam. 3.6; Vell. Pat. 2.59.4; Suet. *Aug.* 8.2.

¹⁴⁶ Nic. Dam. 4.10.

and her behaviour during their quarrel causes a deep fracture in their relationship.¹⁴⁷ Later within the same episode, they exchange insults when Atia sides with her lover, Antony, over her own son in an argument regarding the late Caesar. The significant change in the dynamic between Atia and Octavian is seen a few episodes later, in “Heroes of the Republic”, when Atia literally grovels at the feet of her son to beg for his forgiveness. Allusions to future Augustan moral doctrine can be inferred when sex scenes between Atia and Antony are interspersed with a speech Octavian gives regarding morality, virtue, and the future direction of Rome in Episode Eight, “A Necessary Fiction”.¹⁴⁸ The implication that Atia’s sexual behaviour and ‘immorality’ directly influence Octavian’s later enforcement of morality laws is an interesting one.¹⁴⁹ Atia’s previous affirmations of her own power as demonstrated by her willingness to use her body as capital are almost diluted when she becomes entangled by her desire of Antony. Whereas the Atia of Season One radiates power and exercises control over those who surround her, manipulating individuals to further her own personal desires, the Atia of Season Two exhibits a level of submission not previously seen before. Perhaps her capitulation is designed to reflect the new restrictions placed on women in *Rome*, as Atia’s eventual victory is decidedly Pyrrhic in nature.¹⁵⁰ Atia’s own personal desire to see herself and her family attain a high level of power and prestige within the Roman state manages to result in her own alienation from her son who leads the charge in the Republic’s eventual downfall.

¹⁴⁷ Augoustakis, “Effigies of Atia and Servilia”, 119.

¹⁴⁸ Day, “Windows and Mirrors: Illuminating the Invisible Women of Rome,” 147.

¹⁴⁹ On the Augustan moral legislation, see J. P. Hallett, “Women in Augustan Rome,” in *A Companion to Women in the Ancient World*, eds. Sharon L. James and Sheila Dillon (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2012), 373-375.

¹⁵⁰ Augoustakis, “Effigies of Atia and Servilia,” 120.

Atia's ending is distinctly different from her beginning, and the change is, in part, because of Octavian. Instead of acting of her own accord, she is sent with Octavia to Alexandria in the penultimate episode of the series: "Deus Impeditio Esuritori Nullus (No God Can Stop A Hungry Man)"—there is a sense of irony in her son using her as a political pawn, instead of her scheming herself.¹⁵¹ Upon her return to Rome following a rejection by Antony, Atia beseeches Octavian to destroy both him and Cleopatra, constituting the final act of the show. Octavian's victory is indicative of a distinctly noticeable shift in Atia's character and fortunes at the close of *Rome*—when Octavian becomes the first Emperor of Rome, she has succeeded in her quest to achieve fame and political power for the family, but in doing so, she has lost her son and herself in the process.¹⁵² Her subjugation at the end of Season Two encapsulates the dramatic change in Atia's character as it is shown over the course of the series. She transitions from being the shrewdly manipulative provocateur of Season One to the silently acquiescent, socially bound Mother to the Emperor in the finale of Season Two. Augoustakis succinctly sums up the transformation:

As Octavian takes over as the sole ruler of a vast empire, the women of *Rome* have to change and become the controlled wives and respectable mothers that exemplify the best of Rome's glorious past and promising future. Worthy female opponents perish together with the Republic: those who will survive have to learn the rules of the game, as they now have become pawns on the new chessboard of Rome's powerful men.¹⁵³

¹⁵¹ *Rome*, "Deus Impeditio Esuritori Nullus (No God Can Stop a Hungry Man)." Episode 9, Season 2. Directed by Steve Shill. Written by Mere Smith. HBO, March 18, 2007.

¹⁵² Augoustakis, "Effigies of Atia and Servilia," 126.

¹⁵³ Augoustakis, "Effigies of Atia and Servilia," 126.

Augoustakis' comment highlights the difference between the historical and the fictional Atia. Whereas the historical Atia represented the 'ideal Roman matron', the character of 'Atia of the Julii' most decidedly did not. The fictional Atia's relationship with her son is not an amicable one, particularly throughout the final season, and her sexual behaviour would be considered deviant and unrestrained, especially given her position as a matron. Considering that the free expression of female sexuality was liable to be attacked in the Republic,¹⁵⁴ it is reasonable to conclude that Atia's characterisation on *Rome* was specifically designed to be an antithesis of the stereotypical Roman matron.

Atia and Octavia

While much of Atia's 'maternal' behaviour is related to the welfare and propulsion of her son into the political world of the Republic, the relationship with her daughter, Octavia, and the latter's characterisation, is also of interest. Over the course of the series, both Atia and Servilia use Octavia as a pawn in their political chess game as they seek their vengeance against the other. Atia and Octavia's relationship as it is depicted in *Rome* is tumultuous, a far cry from the image of the respected matron who tends to the needs of her children that appears in Tacitus.¹⁵⁵ As Octavia's mother, Atia holds a level of influence over her daughter's actions—at least at first. Atia's dominant personality is shown to clash with the initially mild-mannered and vulnerable Octavia, and her command that Octavia is to separate from the husband

¹⁵⁴ See Cic. *Cael.* 1, 48-50, 55 for the vituperation of Clodia in part for her alleged sexually deviant behaviour.

¹⁵⁵ Tac. *Dial.* 28.

she loves, the fictional Glabius, to marry Pompey is in keeping with her character's desire to secure the Julian family's political future. It is interesting to note the change that the creators of *Rome* have made to the historical record with this alteration. It is well known that Octavia was married to C. Claudius Marcellus (cos. 50 BC) (*RE* 216) sometime before the death of Caesar's daughter, Julia, in 54 BC. Given that the historical Octavia's father likely died in early 58 BC,¹⁵⁶ it is not inconceivable that he organised the marriage in consultation with Atia—though it is possible that the arrangements may have been left to Atia (and potentially Philippus) after his death, particularly given that Roman mothers held enough authority to play an important part in familial marital preparations.¹⁵⁷ According to Suetonius, Caesar offered Octavia's hand in marriage to Pompey in order to retain his friendship, despite her current ties to Marcellus, although this offer was not accepted.¹⁵⁸ It is interesting to note that the creators of *Rome* neglected to involve the historical Marcellus, rather creating a fictional Glabius, but continued the source tradition of a potential political arrangement between the Julian family and Pompey in "The Stolen Eagle". It is also notable that *Rome*'s Octavia did not marry Mark Antony to cement a political tie between Octavian and Antony, as she did in the historical record.¹⁵⁹

Octavia's reluctant acquiescence to her mother's request in the series fits the idea of the obedient Roman daughter submitting to the head of the *domus* (in this case, the *materfamilias*). Atia's initial delight at the impending betrothal is short-lived when

¹⁵⁶ Cic. *Qfr* 1.2.7: Octavia's father, Gaius Octavius, was still alive in late 59 BC—Cicero mentions favourable reports on him in a letter to his brother, Quintus.

¹⁵⁷ On the involvements of mothers in the betrothal process, see Plut. *Ti Gracch.* 4.2 on the expectations of Antistia. For further discussion of maternal involvement in the Roman marriage process, see Dixon, *The Roman Mother*, 62-63.

¹⁵⁸ *Iul.* 27.1. Octavia's marriage to Marcellus ended with his death in 40 BC.

¹⁵⁹ Plut. *Ant.* 31.1-3; App. *B. Civ.* 5.64-5.66; Cass. Dio. 48.31.3.

Pompey rebuffs her daughter following their pre-marital sexual encounter. It is worth noting that Pompey is depicted in *Rome* having anal intercourse with Octavia, as contemporary gossip suggested that the historical Pompey enjoyed sodomy.¹⁶⁰ Atia's rage at Pompey's rejection is twofold—she is certainly incensed by the embarrassment inflicted upon her daughter, but perhaps more tellingly, is maddened by the severance of a political proposal designed to consolidate Julian power.¹⁶¹ Atia's self-interest is further demonstrated when she later prevents Octavia from remarrying her love, Glabius, instead seeking a more politically suitable candidate for her to wed. Upon learning of Octavia's secret tête-à-têtes with Glabius, Atia has him killed in Episode Five, “An Owl in a Thornbush”, and the relationship between mother and daughter sours severely. It is Atia's pushing of Octavia to divorce Glabius, and his eventual murder, that allows Servilia to exploit the familial rift for her own gain.

Servilia capitalises on the hostility between Atia and her daughter in order to gain Octavia's trust, developing an erotic connection with her. In Episode Nine, “Utica”, she coerces a reluctant Octavia to seduce her brother, Caesar's confidante, in order to find out information about Caesar. Atia's personal slave, Merula, witnesses the encounter, and informs Atia, who reacts in disgust, threatening to whip her children as punishment for their transgressions. Incest between Octavia and Octavian is not

¹⁶⁰ Martial 11.104.17-18: “*pedicare negas*”. For a commentary on Martial, see Victoria Rimell, *Martial's Rome: Empire and the Ideology of Epigram* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 175. For further discussion of insults, see J. L. Beness and T. Hillard, “Insulting Cornelia, Mother of the Gracchi,” *Antichthon* 47 (2013): 74-75.

¹⁶¹ Cyrino, “Atia and the Erotics of Authority,” 135-136.

present in the extant historical record,¹⁶² despite numerous allegations that Octavian indulged in various other sexual practices that violated sexual norms,¹⁶³ and Octavia herself is portrayed historically as an ‘ideal Roman matron’ in both the written narrative¹⁶⁴ and potential artistic representations.¹⁶⁵ Incest in the Roman Republic was not condoned, nor did it appear to be a routine occurrence, though it was regularly used in political invective in order to undermine an opponent,¹⁶⁶ and Atia’s extreme

¹⁶² However, there is an anecdote in Val. Max. 9.15.2 where a man was condemned to death for claiming that he was the son of the *clarissima ac sanctissima* Octavia, and that her real son, Marcellus, was a changeling.

¹⁶³ See, for example, the catalogue at Suet. *Aug.* 68-69; see also the commentary of Wardle, *Suetonius: Life of Augustus*, 436-443. As Wardle points out on p. 436, these were typical features found in the stereotype of a bad ruler. For further discussion of tyranny in Roman historiography, see J. R. Dunkle, “The Rhetorical Tyrant in Roman Historiography: Sallust, Livy and Tacitus,” *Classical World* 65, no. 1 (1971): 12-20.

¹⁶⁴ Plut. *Ant.* 54.3-5 depicts Octavia raising Antony’s children while he was in Egypt conducting an affair with Cleopatra. Plutarch characterises Octavia’s behaviour as the ‘ideal matron’, whilst lambasting Antony: “For she dwelt in her husband’s house, just as if he were at home, and she cared for his children, not only those whom she herself, but also those whom Fulvia had borne him, in a noble and magnificent manner.” Furthermore, the “wonder of a woman” Octavia (*Ant.* 31.1) appears as a foil for the “meddlesome” Fulvia (*Ant.* 30.2.) in Plutarch’s historical narrative. For a discussion about Roman rhetoric surrounding upper-class women, see Cheryl Glenn. *Rhetoric Retold: Regendering the Tradition from Antiquity Through the Renaissance* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1997), 71.

¹⁶⁵ See the discussion in Wood, *Imperial Women: A Study in Public Images, 40 BC-AD 68*, 51-70. There are two sculptures that are convincing in their characterisation of Octavia: a bust from Velletri, and a marble head from Smyrna. The Velletri bust “expresses the *ethos* of the ideal Roman matron that Octavia, according to her brother’s propaganda represented” (p. 54). This contrasting image is of particular interest when compared to Augustan propaganda used against Cleopatra. For a discussion regarding the images of Cleopatra conjured up for Augustan propaganda, see Barbara Levick, *Augustus: Image and Substance* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), 23-62.

¹⁶⁶ Cicero continuously used a purported incestuous relationship between Clodius Pulcher and his sister Clodia in his political invective in an attempt to destabilize and discredit the former. See Cic. *Dom.* 92; *Cael.* 32; 36. Accusations of incest were scandalous, although politically uncommon. For a discussion on Cicero and incest as an insult against Clodia, see Marilyn B. Skinner, *Clodia Metelli: The Tribune’s Sister*, 63 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). For further information on how the accusation of incest against the *gens Claudia* stuck, see R. A. Kaster, *Cicero: Speech on Behalf of Publius Sestius* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) 409-411.

reaction is perhaps designed to be reflective of that from a modern audience. Historically, incest in ancient Rome was condemned as it is in modern legal and moral codes,¹⁶⁷ and its appearance in *Rome* is indicative of stereotypical sexual deviance previously seen in modern broadcasting. The Romans embodied debauchery and excess on-screen, and the filmic productions of the mid-twentieth century in particular exploited this trope—homoeroticism as it is seen in films like *Ben-Hur* (1959)¹⁶⁸ and *Spartacus* (1960),¹⁶⁹ sexual depravity as it is depicted in Fellini's *Satyricon* (1969),¹⁷⁰ and incestuous behaviour as embodied by Caligula in *I, Claudius* (1976).¹⁷¹ *Rome*'s portrayal of consensual incestuous behaviour between Octavia and Octavian is designed to be confronting, and Atia's volatile reaction to the event is hastily forgotten in following episodes, as she seeks revenge against Servilia, but not against her two children.¹⁷² Atia's reaction to such a shocking event is perhaps surprising in the light of the sexually adventurous character she embodies, but possibly reflects the modern response by the screenwriters of *Rome*.

¹⁶⁷ There were regulations against incest in Rome and it was not societally acceptable behaviour. On attitudes to incest in Rome, see Brent D. Shaw, "Explaining Incest: Brother-Sister Marriage in Graeco-Roman Egypt," *Man* 27, no. 2 (1992): 267-299. For the gravity of the accusation, see F. Hickson-Hahn, "What's So Funny? Laughter and Incest in Invective Humour," *Syllecta Classica* 9 (1998): 1-36.

¹⁶⁸ Monica S. Cyrino, *Big Screen Rome* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2005), 87.

¹⁶⁹ Cyrino, *Big Screen Rome*, 109.

¹⁷⁰ Anise K. Strong, "Vice is Nice: *Rome* and Deviant Sexuality," in *Rome, Season One: History Makes Television*, ed. Monica S. Cyrino (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2008), 223.

¹⁷¹ *I, Claudius*, "Queen of Heaven." Episode 7, Season 1. Directed by Herbert Wise. Written by Jack Pulman. BBC, 25 October, 1976 as cited in Strong, "Vice is Nice: *Rome* and Deviant Sexuality," 223. It is worth noting, however, that incest does appear in the historical tradition between Caligula and his sisters. Suet. *Calig.* 36.1: "To say nothing of his incest with his sisters and his notorious passion for the concubine Pyrrallis, there was scarcely any woman of rank whom he did not approach."

¹⁷² Strong, "Vice is Nice: *Rome* and Deviant Sexuality," 228-229.

Atia and Octavia's relationship in Season Two is more complex, and Octavia's previously meek and malleable demeanour gives way to a more transgressive depiction of a Roman woman.¹⁷³ Octavia's previous 'innocence' is tarnished by the consuming of marijuana with her friend Jocasta, and is reminiscent of a depiction that could be found in modern media—Jocasta even remarks that it is “good stuff” after partaking in the drug.¹⁷⁴ However, it is Atia's reaction to the incident that is interesting in terms of her characterisation. After stumbling upon the two smoking, Atia does not reprimand either woman for indulging in drugs, but rather is annoyed about the smell: “do it outside, if you must”.¹⁷⁵ Following the admonishment, Atia then indulges in some herself. As McAuley aptly notes, the device of a “parent walking in on young adults illicitly using drugs” is a commonly used trope of modern television and cinema, but the parallels with contemporary media are somewhat jarring given the ancient setting in which they play out.¹⁷⁶ In fact, it is the company that Octavia is enjoying that is maligned by Atia rather than their activities—after an anecdotal tale from Jocasta regarding her opinion of Macedonia, Atia takes another puff of the hemp and says:

I am no snob, Octavia. And I don't mind that you bring home a tradesman's daughter, but let's just stop there, shall we? No actors, no gladiators, or that sort of thing.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷³ It is perhaps interesting to note that the majority of Season Two is not written by the predominant screenwriter of the first season, Bruno Heller. This could be an explanation for the change of creative direction over the course of the second season.

¹⁷⁴ McAuley, “Gateways to Vice: Drugs and Sex in *Rome*,” 211.

¹⁷⁵ *Rome*, “These Being the Words of Marcus Tullius Cicero.” Episode 3, Season 3. Directed by Alan Poul. Written by Scott Buck. HBO, 28 January, 2007.

¹⁷⁶ McAuley, “Gateways to Vice: Drugs and Sex in *Rome*,” 212.

¹⁷⁷ *Rome*, “These Being the Words of Marcus Tullius Cicero.”

This sentence, of course, underlines Atia's elite snobbery. Her derision of Jocasta is indicative of a much larger disdain held by privileged members of the Roman Republican elite against the *nouveau riche*,¹⁷⁸ as well as against those such as actors who participated in certain types of performances known as *ars ludicra*—and, of course, gladiators.¹⁷⁹ Upon being confronted with Jocasta's antagonistic jibes, Atia retaliates in her way—with pointed words. Their drug use is acceptable, but arrogance from those who Atia sees to be less than her is not. Meanwhile, marijuana indulgence is seen as a fun, almost light-hearted activity, enjoyed by members of the elite as an amusement to pass the time, and is neither praised nor condemned by Atia as *materfamilias*. Particularly when directly contrasted with the opium usage of Cleopatra (perhaps used as a symbol of 'destructive' and 'hedonistic' 'orientalism'),¹⁸⁰ Atia's reaction to the use of the drug is indicative of both a

¹⁷⁸ For a discussion on the concept of the *nouveau riche* of the Republic, the *novus homo*, and the *nobilitas*, see: Leonhard A. Burckhardt, "The Political Elite of the Roman Republic: Comments on the Recent Discussion of the Concepts "Nobilitas and Homo Novus"," *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 39, no. 1 (1990): 77-99.

¹⁷⁹ For Cicero's disdain of the *ludus talarius*, see *de. Off.* 1.150. The performing arts were banned by the censors L. Caecilius Metellus and Cn. Domitius Ahenobarbus in 115 BCE (see Cassiod. *Chron.* ad 115 BCE [Migne, *PL* 69 (Paris, 1865) col. 1224]; T. R. S. Broughton, *Magistrates of the Roman Republic, Volume 1* (New York: American Philological Association, 1951), 1.531-532. For a discussion on the concept of *ars ludicra* and the disdain that surrounded certain types of entertainment in the Roman Republic, see: E. J. Jory. "Ars Ludicra and the Ludus Talarius." *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 40, no. 66 (1995): 139-152. For the use of 'gladiator' as a term of abuse against Antony, see *Cic. Phil.* 2.7. Cicero also calls Antony a 'worthless gladiator' in *ad. Fam.* 12.22.1.

¹⁸⁰ For the 'orientalism' of opium usage, see the forthcoming article from Valerie Kennedy, "Orientalism in the Victorian Era," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Literature*, ed. Paula Rabinowitz (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016,

<http://literature.oxfordre.com/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190201098.001.0001/acrefore-9780190201098-e-226?print=pdf>.

contemporary parallelism and a disjointed connection to modern reactions on cannabis usage.¹⁸¹

Octavia's foray into the world of drugs can be seen as a foreshadowing of her hedonistic Bacchanalian behaviour in Episode Five, "Heroes of the Republic". Octavia's licentious behaviour is a great disappointment to Atia, who upon discovering Agrippa returning her home, lambasts her: "You stupid drunken slut! It's that bitch Jocasta's fault. She's the one that's led you astray." When Octavia replies, Atia continues: "What do you think your brother will do if he finds out? [...] Whilst he's at the Forum preaching piety and virtue to the plebs, you're sucking slave cock at an orgy."¹⁸² Atia remains preoccupied with familial integrity, horrified at Octavia's affront to the family's honour with her indulgent, profligate behaviour. Furthermore, she implies that the blame for Octavia's descent into dishonourable behaviour is to be placed solely on the shoulders of the newly rich, drug-addled daughter of a tradesman, Jocasta. As the relationship between Atia and Octavia progresses over the course of the two seasons, it is evident that much of their interaction is directly related to the question of the future political fortunes of the Julian family. When Atia is upset with Octavia, it is mostly because her behaviour is seen by Atia to be detrimental to the image of the Julii, and this is befitting her character. The relationships of 'Atia of the Julii' with her children is predominantly for her benefit—not theirs.

Atia's *Domus* as Hub of Power

¹⁸¹ McAuley, "Gateways to Vice: Drugs and Sex in *Rome*," 213.

¹⁸² *Rome*, "Heroes of the Republic." Episode 5, Season 2. Directed by Alik Sakharov. Written by Mere Smith. HBO, 11 February, 2007.

In the first season of *Rome*, many of Atia's activities are undertaken in the comfort of her own home. Atia's *domus* appears central to her power from the outset of the show—in the second episode of the first season, “How Titus Pullo Brought Down the Republic”, Atia's villa provides a clandestine meeting place for Mark Antony, Pompey, Cicero, and Cato to hold secret political negotiations upon Antony's return from Gaul.¹⁸³ By making her abode “the nucleus of political activity”, it is clear from the beginning of *Rome* that Atia sets out to exert her authority from the safety of her own home,¹⁸⁴—in episode three, “An Owl in a Thornbush”, Atia's position as *domina* at a *salutation* suggests her own agency. As the *domus* was such a central locus in life for a Roman woman, it makes sense that much of Atia's dominance stems from decisions she makes in the confines of her own abode—after all, one's *domus* would be where a traditional Roman woman would exercise most of her influence.¹⁸⁵ The Roman *domus* was a highly gendered space, strongly linked with familial social status during the period of the Roman Republic.¹⁸⁶ However, it is not always easy to distinguish the meaning of the word *domus* in the source tradition, as a Roman expressing pride in their *domus* could mean the physical dwelling itself, or the power, or *potestas*, which their kin held in the wider community.¹⁸⁷

How one's home was presented was considered to be a reflection of the level of power and prestige held by its inhabitants, although Cicero does note that “a man's

¹⁸³ *Rome*, “How Titus Pullo Brought Down the Republic.” Episode 2, Season 1. Directed by Michael Apted. Written by Bruno Heller. HBO, 4 September, 2005.

¹⁸⁴ Cyrino, “Atia and the Erotics of Authority,” 133.

¹⁸⁵ Anne Leen. “Clodia Oppugnatrix: The Domus Motif in Cicero's “Pro Caelio,” *The Classical Journal* 96, no. 2 (2000): 142.

¹⁸⁶ Richard P. Saller. ““Familia, Domus”, and the Roman Conception of the Family”, *Phoenix* 38, no. 4 (1984): 337.

¹⁸⁷ Saller, ““Familia, Domus”, and the Roman Conception of the Family,” 347.

dignity may be enhanced by the house he lives in, but not wholly secured by it”.¹⁸⁸ This notwithstanding, one’s ethical and moral character could be measured through the reflection of one’s behaviour within their own *domus*—actions undertaken in private were important to one’s *auctoritas*, and the *domus* was a “symbol of this authority”.¹⁸⁹ It is notable that one’s *domus* was not only closely associated with one’s immediate family, but also exemplified one’s aristocratic lineage, something that was held in high regard during the tumultuous final years of the Republic.¹⁹⁰ Pliny the Elder reinforces the importance of familial achievements in the *domus* in Book 35 of his *Natural History*—wax portraits of ancestors and opulent decorations could often be found in the *atrium* of the home, ancestral records held in archival rooms, and spoils from enemies fastened on the outside of the house.¹⁹¹ This is directly reflected in the *atrium* as it appears in Atia’s villa in *Rome*, with black ancestral busts connected by ruby strings occupying the reddened alcoves, and votive offerings and luxurious statues adorning the red and yellow stucco niches in the walls. Atia’s position as *domina* is reflected in the confines of her *domus*, and such a *domus* convincingly conveys the level of power held by the Julian family at this time. Such pedigrees on public display, Pliny stated, incited descendants to strive for greatness and glory,¹⁹² and Atia’s encouragement of Octavian to seek military prominence is well placed within this backdrop. *Rome*’s historical consultant, Jonathan Stamp, stresses the importance of Atia’s *domus* in a special DVD interview, “When in *Rome*”:

¹⁸⁸ Cic. *de. Off.* 1.139.

¹⁸⁹ Leen, “Clodia Oppugnatrix: The Domus Motif in Cicero’s “Pro Caelio,” 143.

¹⁹⁰ Saller, ““Familia, Domus”, and the Roman Conception of the Family,” 351.

¹⁹¹ Plin. *HN.* 35.2.

¹⁹² Plin. *HN.* 35.2. Sallust also explains the exhortatory nature of status in *Iug.* 4.5-6.

[...] While the characters there are dramatized characters, the world in which they are moving, the context in which they exist, was something that we could flesh out with historical detail ...¹⁹³

While Stamp admits there is an amount of artistic license to be found within the story of *Rome*, the details of the sets lend themselves to a ‘believable’ and ‘authentic’ historical drama. As Stamp further emphasises in an interview with Patt Morrison:

Another thing about detail and authenticity of detail is the ways in which it can help performance because it might give you a little McGuffin, a little thing, that helps you concentrate and focus on what you’re doing [...] If you put someone in a big Roman house like one of the rooms out here and say you’ve just come back from a hard day in the Senate, it doesn’t compute because there’s nothing to refer to—and that’s where the authenticity, the detail might come in. There may be some specific piece of detail that you can throw out there, and an actor will say “That’s useful.”¹⁹⁴

Stamp’s determination to achieve detail and authenticity is visible in the sets and backdrops shown in *Rome*. The colours and design of Atia’s Pompeian-style villa are reminiscent of excavated rooms found in Rome, Pompeii, and elsewhere, and give a level of ‘authenticity’ to the character of Atia through the ‘realism’ afforded by her

¹⁹³ Stamp, “When in Rome.”

¹⁹⁴ Stamp, “Balancing Fact and Fiction: The Ancient World of HBO’s *Rome*.”

domus.¹⁹⁵ Given the emphasis placed on the significance of the *domus* by ancient writers and orators, and the importance of the sets as mentioned by the creators of the show, it is no surprise that Atia's home is a focal political hub over the course of *Rome*. Indeed, the political negotiations between Pompey, Cato, Cicero, and Antony in "How Titus Pullo Brought Down the Republic" regarding Caesar take place at the house of Atia, demonstrating her importance to key players of Rome at this time.

In *de Officiis*, Cicero describes the features he believes are required in a 'proper' Roman *domus*—one's abode must be "spacious", and ready to accommodate the entertainment of "numerous guests" and "crowds of every sort",¹⁹⁶ with a balance between moderation and the "comforts and wants of life".¹⁹⁷ In *De architectura*, Vitruvius accentuates the need for a decorated *domus* for those who receive clients in the *tablinum*¹⁹⁸. Such elaborate decoration can be seen in the "long visual axis" from the *atrium* to the *tablinum* that is shown when Atia receives her clientele in Episode Three, "An Owl in a Thornbush".¹⁹⁹ This scene with Atia as *domina* at the *salutatio* underscores her power. Those walking from the entrance of the house to the *tablinum* would pass through the genealogical display in the *atrium*, as Pliny describes, and would view expensive items exhibited to emphasise the familial status. This deliberately curated public display was designed to provide a "fundamental identity of the family", and symbolically establish a level of societal dominance for the owner of

¹⁹⁵ Alena Allen, "Staging Interiors in *Rome's* Villas," in *Rome, Season One: History Makes Television*, ed. Monica S. Cyrino (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2008), 182.

¹⁹⁶ Cic. *de. Off.* 1.139.

¹⁹⁷ Cic. *de. Off.* 1.140.

¹⁹⁸ *De arch.* 6.5.

¹⁹⁹ *Rome*, "An Owl in a Thornbush."; Allen, "Staging Interiors in *Rome's* Villas," 180.

the *domus*.²⁰⁰ Atia's *domus*, a villa coloured in red and black frescoes adorning the walls, with slight accentuations of gold, is reflective of Atia's own dominant and explosive nature—the Pompeian style is reminiscent of Atia's "Vesuvian" outbursts of personality.²⁰¹

A number of scenes within the first season of *Rome* combine the demonstration of Atia's power with the setting of her *domus*. In Episode One, "The Stolen Eagle", Atia engages in sexual relations with a man, Timon, within the walls of a *cubiculum* in her villa. In doing so, Atia successfully uses her sexuality in an attempt to obtain a white horse to gift to Caesar. This act is demonstrative of her personal private command control over both her own sexuality and the behaviour of others, and, notably, is shown before any display of public power within the narrative.²⁰²

During the same episode, following Octavian's departure to Caesar, Atia performs the sacrificial ritual of the *taurobolium*²⁰³ in an attempt to ensure his safe passage. The depiction of the *taurobolium* is an interesting choice by the creators of *Rome*—it is likely not a coincidence, as the *taurobolium* is the characteristic form of sacrifice in the cult of the Magna Mater.²⁰⁴ It is also interesting to note that during the imperial period, the *taurobolium* was performed publicly and celebrated for multiple emperors,

²⁰⁰ Allen, "Staging Interiors in *Rome*'s Villas," 180.

²⁰¹ Allen, "Staging Interiors in *Rome*'s Villas," 182.

²⁰² Allen, "Staging Interiors in *Rome*'s Villas," 180.

²⁰³ The *taurobolium* was a sacrificial practice involving a bull. On the ritual of the *taurobolium*, see M. Beard, J. North, and S. Price, *Religions of Rome, Vol. 1: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 280, 338.

²⁰⁴ Although the ritual was not initially connected to Magna Mater, the practice became linked with the cult after private inscriptions from the 2nd century mention the Great Mother of the Gods. See Jeremy B. Rutter. "The Three Phases of the Taurobolium," *Phoenix* 22, no. 3 (1968): 226-249.

their families, and the wellbeing of the Empire.²⁰⁵ In the same episode, Atia bathes while discussing new marriage prospects with her daughter, Octavia, under the protection of her own *domus*. Such actions demonstrate Atia's religious beliefs and her personal desire to further cement her familial power.²⁰⁶ In the background scenes of Episode Two, "How Titus Pullo Brought Down the Republic", a number of slaves are seen within the *triclinium* making preparations to serve Vorenus and Pullo at a dinner celebration Atia throws for the safe return of her son. Atia's invitation of visitors into her *domus* reminds one of Cicero's statement that the *domus* should be suitable for the entertainment of guests, and the attendance of multiple slaves strengthens the image of wealth and power.²⁰⁷ The *domus* is also the setting for Atia's role as *domina* when she meets *clientes* at a *salutatio* in the *tablinum* in "An Owl in a Thornbush". Patronage is, of course, a well-known feature of Roman society, and women certainly acted in that role.²⁰⁸ Atia's role as *patrona* is a public display of her own familial authority. Likewise, her actions within her own *domus* exemplify her position as *domina*, particularly when she unleashes her temper against her daughter's husband,²⁰⁹ her slaves,²¹⁰ and even her own children.²¹¹ The party thrown by Atia in

²⁰⁵ Rutter lists the emperors as Antoninus Pius, Marcus Aurelius, Commodus, Septimius Severus, Clodius Albinus, Caracalla, Severus Alexander, Maximinus, Gordian III, Philip the Arabian, Trebonianus and Volusianus, Probus, Diocletian, and Maximian. See Rutter, "The Three Phases of the Taurobolium," 236.

²⁰⁶ J. Mira Seo, "The Gender Gap: Religious Spaces in Rome," in *Rome, Season One: History Makes Television*, ed. Monica S. Cyrino (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2008), 171.

²⁰⁷ Allen, "Staging Interiors in Rome's Villas," 182.

²⁰⁸ On the role of women as patrons, see A. Bielman. 2012. "Female Patronage in the Greek Hellenistic and Roman Republican Periods," in *A Companion to Women in the Ancient World*, 1st edition, eds. Sharon L. James and Sheila Dillon (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2012), 238-248. For a further account of women as patrons in the Roman Republic, see Richard A. Bauman, *Women and Politics in Ancient Rome* (London & New York: Routledge, 1992).

²⁰⁹ *Rome*, "How Titus Pullo Brought Down the Republic."

²¹⁰ *Rome*, "An Owl in a Thornbush."

²¹¹ *Rome*, "Utica,"; Allen, "Staging Interiors in Rome's Villas," 182.

Episode Four continues the theme of power connected to the *domus*. Although Caesar provides the guest list, his chief slave remarks on the honour that is bestowed upon Atia by holding the politically charged celebration of the “Julian takeover of Rome”.²¹²

Conclusion

After analysing the depiction of Atia in *Rome*, it is clear that the creators engaged to a degree with the ancient source material concerning the historical Atia. Both the Atia of the source tradition and the Atia of *Rome* are dedicated to the wellbeing and political progression of Octavian, and the security of the family. It appears as though the image of a dominant mother found in the source tradition has had some influence on the portrayal of the character of Atia, as there are multiple occasions in which she is depicted thus, particularly in the first season of *Rome*.²¹³

However, despite this adherence to part of the traditional depiction of Atia, other influences have clearly affected Atia of *Rome*’s characterisation. The virtuous and chaste *matrona* found in Tacitus²¹⁴ gives way to a sexually manipulative and scheming woman, more preoccupied with political progression than engaging in traditionally feminine activities such as spinning. Images of controlling and politically involved women are certainly present in the ancient source material,²¹⁵ as is the

²¹² Cyrino, “Atia and the Erotics of Authority,” 133.

²¹³ See, for example, Nic. Dam. 4.10, and the interaction between Atia and Octavian in *Rome*, “Egeria.”

²¹⁴ Tac. *Dial.* 28.

²¹⁵ Plutarch (*Cic.* 29), for example, details Cicero’s subjugation by his wife, Terentia. She is characterised as a harsh, politically involved woman with a level of control over her husband, an image likely derived from political polemic. For a

presence of the sexually licentious female.²¹⁶ Both of the former can be seen in ‘Atia of the Julii’. These behaviours contrast with the stereotypically feminine gender norms of Rome, and can be found in the descriptions of a number of Republican women,²¹⁷ particularly, for instance, in the hostile source tradition that surrounds Fulvia.²¹⁸ Such characterisations can also be found in modern retellings—Livia’s position as an arch-manipulator in the BBC’s adaptation of Robert Graves’ *I, Claudius* (1976) is an example of this. Atia’s ambitions for the security of the Julian family and its political advancement shape her behaviour over the course of *Rome*, reflecting the historical Atia’s desire to see her son’s political success.

It is clear that the creators of *Rome* did not set out, with malice aforethought, to misinform the public about the historical Atia, but rather to create a “shadow [ruler] of Rome” who was designed to titillate and intrigue an audience.²¹⁹ In this, audience reception shows that they were remarkably successful. Ultimately, the character of ‘Atia of the Julii’ is influenced by a larger tradition found within the Roman historical material whereby ancient authors invoked images of domineering women in order to demonstrate a deviation from the gendered norms of Rome. Such images, as Hillard argues, were often generated in political polemic and aimed at the menfolk of the women so portrayed. They were, by design, antagonistic. It is perhaps not surprising,

discussion on Terentia and other Republican women, see Tom Hillard, “Republican Politics, Women, and the Evidence,” ‘Republican Politics, Women, and the Evidence,’ *Helios* 16 (1989): 19-48.

²¹⁶ Cicero’s characterisation of Clodia Metelli in the *pro Caelio* shows that alleged feminine profligate sexual behaviour could be exploited in a political setting. For examples of Cicero’s invective against Clodia, see *Cic. Cael.* 1, 48-50, 55.

²¹⁷ For a discussion about the portrayal of Roman Republican women in the ancient source tradition, see Hillard, “Republican Politics, Women, and the Evidence,” 19-48.

²¹⁸ *Plut. Ant.* 10.3; *Cass. Dio* 47.8.4.

²¹⁹ Previously on the HBO website, <http://www.hbo.com/rome>, as seen in Cyrino, “Atia and the Erotics of Authority,” 131.

and certainly disappointing, that *Rome*'s Atia follows in this misogynistic convention—especially in an artistic creation that, at first sight, seems to offer sympathetically powerful images of women's agency.

Chapter Two: ‘Servilia of the Junii’

The Historical Servilia

*“She is intimately connected to really famous men, but we’ve never heard of her.”*²²⁰

While little is known of Servilia’s early life, her adulthood is famously associated with Julius Caesar. As is the case with Atia, most of that which is known about the historical Servilia is related to the men who surrounded her over the course of her life. Being the mother of the assassin Brutus, and the mother-in-law of another, Cassius, as well as the lover of Caesar, this is unsurprising. However, Servilia’s position in a high profile, noble family allowed her to exercise *materna auctoritas* and a level of political influence.²²¹ Born into a patrician family, Servilia was well connected in the latter part of the Republic.²²² She was the eldest daughter of Livia (*RE* 35) and Quintus Servilius Caepio (*RE* 50), the maternal niece of the well-known tribune of 91 BCE, Marcus Livius Drusus,²²³ and also the half-sister of Cato the Younger,²²⁴ over

²²⁰ Lindsay Duncan, “Women in Rome,” *Rome: The Complete First Season* (New York: HBO Studios, 2014).

²²¹ Ascon. 19C: Asconius describes Servilia as exercising *materna auctoritas* over her half-brother, Cato. This is contested by Hillard, “Materna Auctoritas: The Political Influence of Roman Matronae,” 11, who states that this may have been a Ciceronian red herring. This is further reforced in Hillard, “Republican Politics, Women, and the Evidence,” 175. However, as will be discussed later, Rome’s Servilia embodies a level of *materna auctoritas* over her son, Brutus. For a discussion about Servilia’s *materna auctoritas*, see Brennan, “Perceptions of Women’s Power in the Late Republic: Terentia, Fulvia, and the Generation of 63 BCE,” 361.

²²² See F. Münzer, “Servilius 101,” in *RE* IIA 4, eds. August Pauly, Georg Wissowa, Wilhelm Kroll, Kurt Witte, Karl Mittelhaus, Konrat Ziegler (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 1923), 1777-1778.

²²³ Pliny, *HN* 25.52; Plut. *Cat. Min.* 1.2.

²²⁴ Plut. *Cat. Min.* 1.1.

whom she was stated to have exerted *materna auctoritas*.²²⁵ Following the divorce of Caepio and Livia sometime around 98 BCE,²²⁶ her mother married Marcus Porcius Cato (*RE* 12) (tr. pl. 99 BCE), a marriage that produced two children.²²⁷ Servilia and her two full siblings, along with her half-brother and sister, were raised in the house of Drusus following the early death of her mother, although Drusus was murdered in 91 BCE.²²⁸ Servilia's father, Caepio, and her uncle, Drusus, with whom she lived, were noted to have a vehement rivalry,²²⁹ and following Drusus' assassination,²³⁰ Caepio continued to pursue Drusus' followers.²³¹ Ancestrally, Servilia's familial lineage is traceable back to the famous tyrannicide, C. Servilius Ahala, whose own etiological mythology provided inspiration for the assassination of Julius Caesar by Servilia's son, Brutus, many generations later.²³² It was Servilia's relationship to the philosopher and politician, Cato the Younger, which allowed her son Brutus easy access to the man. Brutus was said to idolise his own uncle, as is noted in Plutarch.²³³ Servilia was indeed well connected, both in terms of her famous ancestral line and her ties with prominent contemporaneous Roman statesmen. As she was the eldest of her

²²⁵ Ascon. 19C.

²²⁶ Friedrich Münzer, *Roman Aristocratic Parties and Families*, trans. Thérèse Ridley (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 274.

²²⁷ Plut. *Cat. Min.* 1.1.

²²⁸ E. Badian, "From the Gracchi to Sulla (1940-1959)," in *The Crisis of the Roman Republic*, ed. R. Seager (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 29-34.

²²⁹ Pliny, *HN* 28.148, 33.4; Cass. Dio. 28; Aur. Vict. *De vir. ill.* 66.8.

²³⁰ Drusus' murder is widely documented in ancient sources. See *Rhet. Her.* 31.78; Cic. *Nat. D.* 32.80; Livy, *Per.* 71; Vell. Pat. 14.1-2; Flor. 2.5.2; App. *B. Civ.* 1.36-37; Ampel. 19.6; Aur. Vict. *De vir. ill.* 66.11-13.

²³¹ An example of this can be seen in Caepio's unsuccessful prosecution of Scaurus. See Cic. *Font.* 38; Cic. *Scaur.* 2; Val. Max. 3.7.8; Ascon. 21; Flor. 2.5.5.

²³² Plut. *Brut.* 1.5-6. Furthermore, the coinage of Brutus minted in 54 BC features his maternal ancestor. See Michael H. Crawford, *Roman Republican Coinage* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1974), I.455-456 [no. 433].

²³³ Plut. *Brut.* 2.1.

mother Livia's children, it was she who assumed the role of a *materfamilias* in familial affairs.

Servilia was married twice and bore four children, one of whom would, of course, eventually assassinate her long-term lover, Julius Caesar. Servilia's first marriage, no later than 85 BCE, was to Marcus Iunius Brutus (*RE* 52) (tr. pl. 83 BCE), who carried a bill as tribune to colonise Capua.²³⁴ With him she had one son, Marcus Iunius Brutus, most notorious for his involvement in the assassination of Caesar in 44 BCE.²³⁵ Following her husband's death at the hands of Pompey in 77 BCE,²³⁶ Servilia subsequently married the consul of 62 BCE, Decimus Iunius Silanus (*RE* 163) prior to 75 BCE,²³⁷ with whom she had three daughters, none of whom are mentioned in *Rome*. Her relationship with the tyrannicide notwithstanding, it is perhaps Servilia's association with Caesar for which she is most well known. Although Caesar was reported to have had many love affairs with many famous women of the age,²³⁸ it was Servilia who he reportedly loved "beyond all others".²³⁹ Servilia may have commenced a love affair with the up-and-coming Caesar whilst still married to the statesman Silanus.²⁴⁰ Their relationship persisted over a period of approximately two decades, beginning as early as 63 BCE,²⁴¹ and for the most part, appeared fairly reciprocal in nature. The two did not marry, perhaps in part because of Servilia's

²³⁴ Cic. *Leg. agr.* 2.89, 92-93, 98.

²³⁵ Nic. Dam. 24; Plut. *Brut.* 17.

²³⁶ Cic. *Leg. agr.* 2.92, Plut. *Pomp.* 16, Appian, *B. Civ.* 2.3, Livy, *Epit.* 90.

²³⁷ Suet. *Iul.* 14.1.

²³⁸ Suet. *Iul.* 50.1.

²³⁹ Suet. *Iul.* 50.2.

²⁴⁰ This is conspicuously absent from the narrative of *Rome*, as Silanus, like the three Junia, are not referred to in the show. Silanus was only a few years older than Servilia. As Silanus was an unsuccessful candidate for the consulship of 64 BCE and an *aequalis* of Cicero (*ad Att.* 1.1.2), he was therefore born c. 107 BCE.

²⁴¹ Plut. *Cat. Min.* 24, *Brut.* 5; Suet. *Iul.* 50.2.

age—it is likely that Servilia was born around the same time as Caesar, c. 100 BCE.²⁴² Caesar’s third wife, Calpurnia (*RE* 126), the daughter of the consul of 58 BCE, Lucius Calpurnius Piso Caesoninus (*RE* 90), was far younger than Servilia when she married Caesar, and thus was more likely to provide an heir.²⁴³ There were also major political reasons behind Caesar and Calpurnia’s marriage—it was a clear political alliance intended to ensure the collaboration of Calpurnia’s father as consul in 58 BCE while Caesar was absent campaigning in Gaul.²⁴⁴ However, this did not happen, and their marriage produced no children.²⁴⁵ Plutarch perpetuated the rumour that Caesar had some reason to believe he was the father of Brutus,²⁴⁶ although this is unlikely, as Caesar would have been somewhere around fifteen years of age at the time of Brutus’ birth.²⁴⁷ It is, instead, highly likely that this was gossip too valuable to

²⁴² Münzer, “Servilius 101,” col. 1817.

²⁴³ Münzer, “Servilius 101,” col. 1817. Also see Bauman, “*Women and Politics in Ancient Rome*,” 237 who notes Calpurnia and Servilia’s ages with respect to Caesar. It is interesting to note that *Rome*’s Calpurnia, played by Haydn Gwynne, is considerably older than the historical Calpurnia would have been. The marriage between Caesar and Calpurnia occurred in 59 BCE (Plut. *Caes.* 14.7-8, *Cat. Min.* 33.4, *Pomp.* 47.6, 48.3; Suet. *Iul.* 21; Cass. Dio. 38.9.1). Although Calpurnia’s birth date is unknown, there is no indication of any previous marriage, so was likely in her early teens at the time of her marriage in 59 BCE, at which point Caesar would have been 41. However, the Calpurnia of *Rome* is a more mature matron, similar to Servilia, and appears as a foil for the character of Servilia of the Junii during the first few episodes of the show.

²⁴⁴ M. Gelzer, *Caesar: Politician and Statesman*, trans. P. Needham (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968), 80.

²⁴⁵ Suet. *Iul.* 21.1.

²⁴⁶ Plut. *Brut.* 5.2.

²⁴⁷ As Caesar was born c. 100 BCE, and Brutus c. 85 BCE, this would make Caesar around 15 years old when Brutus was born. For a discussion on dating, see Adrian Keith Goldsworthy, *Caesar: Life of a Colossus* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), 30. It might be noted also that patricide was considered to be among the gravest of crimes during the Roman Republic. Those who were convicted of having committed it were given the *poena cullei*, or ‘punishment of the sack’. See discussions in Lea Beness, “When the Punishment Rivals the Crime: The Sack Treatment and the Execution of C. Villius,” *Ancient History: Resources for Teachers* 28, no. 2 (1998): 95-112, Lea Beness, “The Punishment of the Gracchani and the Execution of C. Villius in 133/132,” *Antichthon* 34 (2000): 1-17, and Richard A.

be ignored by historians at the time, and, as such, has permeated accounts of the assassination tale.²⁴⁸ Servilia was still alive in 42 BCE,²⁴⁹ outliving her lover, her son, and her son-in-law.²⁵⁰ It appears as though she was treated well by Atticus following the death of Brutus.²⁵¹

The historical portrayals of Servilia characterise her as desiring a level of power over the men who surrounded her, and appearing to exert some semblance of *auctoritas* in her family life also. It is noted by Münzer that Servilia was known to run family meetings as though she was in charge of a Senate assembly.²⁵² Servilia's half-brother, Cato the Younger, was vehemently against Caesar, both personally and politically, and their antagonistic relationship is well documented. Cato's resentment of Caesar permeated much of his political career and, according to Suetonius, he openly announced that he would prosecute Caesar as soon as he disbanded his army.²⁵³ When civil war broke out in 49 BCE, Cato sided with Pompey against Caesar and supported Pompey in the Senate, despite his half-sister's connection to Caesar.²⁵⁴ Indeed, Cato's disdain was so strong that he refused to live in a Rome where Caesar was acting like a dictator, instead choosing to commit suicide rather than being pardoned after the

Bauman, *Crime and Punishment in Ancient Rome* (Oxford: Taylor & Francis Group, 2012), 30-32.

²⁴⁸ On the interpretation of Caesar's supposed last utterance to Brutus recorded by Suetonius at *Iul.* 82.2, see J. Russell, "Julius Caesar's last words: A Reinterpretation," in *Vindex Humanitatis: Essays in Honour of John Huntley Bishop*, ed. B. A. Marshall (Armidale: University Press of New England, 1980), 123-128 who argues that the phrase καὶ σὺ τέκνον can be apotropaic or a curse.

²⁴⁹ *Nep. Att.* 11.4; *Plut. Brut.* 53.4; *App. B. Civ.* 4.135.

²⁵⁰ *App. B. Civ.* 4.17.135.

²⁵¹ *Nep. Att.* 11.4.

²⁵² Münzer, "Servilius 101," 1777-1778.

²⁵³ *Iul.* 30.3.

²⁵⁴ *Plut. Cat. Min.* 51.

battle of Thapsus.²⁵⁵ The association between Servilia and Caesar clearly also impacted upon her relationship with her son. It is noted that it was expected that Brutus would fight with Caesar in the civil war, but he instead sided with Pompey despite the latter's part in his own father's murder.²⁵⁶ The mother and son relationship was further strained when Brutus married Cato's daughter, Porcia (*RE* 28)—given Cato's antagonism towards Caesar, and her own relationship with Caesar, their marriage was resented greatly by Servilia.²⁵⁷ Her umbrage at their union appears to have been driven by a fear that Porcia would wield too much influence over her son, and the two women were said to be hostile towards each other.²⁵⁸ From this information, it appears as though the relationship between Servilia and Brutus was somewhat strained, as a result of her efforts at exerting control over her family. However, when Antony located Brutus' body after the battle of Philippi, he had it cremated and sent the ashes to Servilia, suggesting that Porcia was no longer alive.²⁵⁹

The affection Caesar felt for Servilia is attested in the source tradition. During their relationship, Caesar gave her a number of gifts—among them, a “pearl costing six million sesterces”, during his first consulship in 59 BCE, and cheap real estate

²⁵⁵ Plut. *Cat. Min.* 70.5-6.

²⁵⁶ Plut. *Brut.* 4.1-3.

²⁵⁷ Cic. *Att.* 13.16. It is interesting to note that Atticus had an “interest and flair for backstairs politics”, and much of the correspondence between Cicero and Atticus corroborated the stories of the other. See D. R. Shackleton Bailey, *Cicero's Letters to Atticus, Vol. 1: 68-59 B.C., 1-45 (Books I and II)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 5.

²⁵⁸ Cic. *Att.* 13.22. The marriage between Brutus and Porcia can be dated to the middle of 45 BCE (Cic. *Att.* 13.22.4) and it is implied that Porcia and Servilia were jealous of each other's affections towards Brutus. See the commentary in D. R. Shackleton Bailey, *Cicero's Letters to Atticus, Vol. 5: 48-45 B.C., 211-354 (Books XI-XIII)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), 373: “Apparently Brutus' mother Servilia and his new wife Porcia were on bad terms, as Caesar's friend and Cato's daughter might be.”

²⁵⁹ Plut. *Brut.* 53.4; App. *B. Civ.* 4.135. It is also interesting to note that Porcia is also omitted from *Rome*.

following the Civil Wars of 49-48 BCE.²⁶⁰ It was this gift of land that sparked rumours of Servilia's alleged prostitution of her third daughter, Iunia Tertia, to Caesar. Indeed, Plutarch insinuates that Servilia manipulated Iunia Tertia into commencing a sexual liaison with Caesar in order to keep him interested²⁶¹—a Ciceronian witticism as cited in Suetonius supports this,²⁶² and Servilia's own agency is implicated in the source material.²⁶³ Caesar's affection for Servilia is demonstrated in Plutarch's account of Brutus' life. It is noted by Plutarch that, following Pompey's loss to Caesar at the Battle of Pharsalus in 48 BCE, it was Caesar who requested Brutus' life be spared if encountered, and he did this out of concern for Servilia.²⁶⁴ Similarly, Servilia's love for Caesar is also attested in the source tradition. Plutarch tells of Servilia's desire for Caesar through an anecdote, in which Servilia's half-brother Cato, during the debate on the fate of the Catilinarian conspirators, read a lewd communication addressed to Caesar from his sister—this narration implies that their affair was not a well-kept secret; rather it was notorious.²⁶⁵

It is important to note, however, that the two major sources that discuss Servilia and her influence on those around her are Cicero and Plutarch, both of whom embody a significant number of biases within their own writing.²⁶⁶ The Ciceronian Servilia is

²⁶⁰ Suet. *Iul.* 50.2.

²⁶¹ Plut. *Caes.* 50.1-2.

²⁶² The implication given by Suetonius is that Servilia is a *lena* (procuress). See the discussion about *lenones* and their legal vilification in Tom Hillard, "Stereotypes of Women in Power," in *On the Stage, Behind the Curtain: Images of Politically Active Women in the Late Roman Republic*, eds. Barbara Garlick, Suzanne Dixon, and Pauline Allen (New York, Westport, CT, and London: Greenway Press, 1992), 37-63.

²⁶³ Suet. *Iul.* 50.

²⁶⁴ Plut. *Brut.* 5.1.

²⁶⁵ Plut. *Brut.* 5.3-4.

²⁶⁶ Much of Cicero's work is polemic in nature (e.g., Cicero's *Pro Caelio* and *Philippicae*), and Plutarch considers himself to be a biographer, not a historian (Plut.

painted as politically involved both before and after Caesar's death. However, most references regarding Servilia are found in the later Ciceronian corpus. Cicero does not tend to depict Servilia in a positive light, and his letters implicate Servilia in the murder of Caesar.²⁶⁷ Prior to 45 BCE, Cicero refers to Servilia twice in his letters to Atticus, whereby she is described as involved in the search for a husband for Cicero's daughter, Tullia, in 51 BCE and 50 BCE, respectively.²⁶⁸ Prior to Caesar's murder on the 15th of March, 44 BCE, Servilia is again mentioned by Cicero. In his letter to Atticus, dated to the 22nd of June, Cicero asks if Servilia has arrived and whether Brutus has taken any particular course of action²⁶⁹—it is inferred from this letter that Servilia acted as an intermediary and a potential confidante for high profile politicians of the time, in particular Caesar and Cicero.²⁷⁰ Servilia is shown to have had a level of influence in political affairs following Caesar's death, when Cicero states that Servilia promises that she will intervene personally in a withdrawal of appointments made by a senatorial decree regarding Brutus and Cassius.²⁷¹ Although this is not necessarily indicative of an extraordinary level of influence held by Servilia, Cicero indicates a

Alex. 1). For further discussion on the ancient views regarding bias in historical writing, see T. J. Luce, "Ancient Views on the Causes of Bias in Ancient Writing," *Classical Philology* 84, no. 1 (1989): 16-31.

²⁶⁷ Cic. *Att.* 14.21: "What about the mother of the tyrannicide retaining the Neapolitan villa of Pontius?"

²⁶⁸ Cic. *Att.* 5.4: "[...] some fairly satisfactory arrangement might be made with Servius [Sulpicius Rufus], with Servilia to back him." It appears as though Cicero is uneasy with these events occurring whilst he and Atticus are absent from Rome, and does not approve of Servilia's choice of husband for Tullia. See also Cic. *Att.* 6.1: "[...] I much prefer to accept this man from Pontidia, than the other [Servius] from Servilia."

²⁶⁹ Cic. *Att.* 13.11: "Please therefore write and tell me whether Servilia has arrived [...]."

²⁷⁰ Bauman, *Women and Politics in Ancient Rome*, 73.

²⁷¹ Cic. *Att.* 15.11. Servilia's success in this endeavour appears doubtful, as there is no evidence to support her having an effect on the decree whatsoever. As D. R. Shackleton Bailey, *Letters to Atticus: Vol. 6, 44 B.C., 355-426 (Books XIV-XVI)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 259 says, it might be that Servilia was hoping to work with Caesar's old associates following his death. See also Hillard, "Materna Auctoritas: The Political Influence of Roman Matronae," 12.

considerable degree of authority held by Servilia in a letter he sends to Brutus dated to the 27th of July, 43 BCE. In the letter, Cicero remarks that Servilia, *prudentissima et diligentissima femina*, summoned him to her abode for a meeting with Casca, Labeo, and Scaptius, and asked whether they should call for Brutus to attend as well, and says that he will have learnt of these events from his mother's letters.²⁷² This is pertinent, as it demonstrates that Servilia sent letters, passed information, and arranged political meetings at her *domus* and she clearly held some level of sway over the dealings between Cicero and Brutus—it is claimed that Servilia interrupted a meeting to assert she would personally intervene in Brutus' affairs.²⁷³ From this letter, it can be affirmed that Servilia had, following the death of her lover, Caesar, defected from supporting the Caesarians, instead opposing them.²⁷⁴ Although this evidence is anecdotal, it does portray Servilia, a former lover of a man purported to love her above all others, rejecting the memory of him in favour of a different political outcome. This historical depiction is somewhat parallel to the Servilia as she appears in *Rome*, as she too rallies against the Caesarians over the course of the show.

The image of Servilia that emerges from the ancient source material is that of a cleverly manipulative *matrona* who holds a level of sway over men close to her,²⁷⁵ although she is the exception rather than the rule. It is apparent that the relationship

²⁷² Cic. *ad Brut* 24 (I.18).

²⁷³ See Cic. *Att.* 15.11: "At that point your friend Servilia exclaims: "That indeed I never heard anyone—" Here I stopped her." However, Hillard, "Materna Auctoritas: The Political Influence of Roman Matronae," 12 asserts that this would have been unlikely given the circumstances of the meeting. Regardless, it is clear that Servilia's pushy nature was uncommon and took Cicero aback at least in part.

²⁷⁴ Bauman, *Women and Politics in Ancient Rome*, 74.

²⁷⁵ This is not necessarily accurate, and it is important to note that aristocratic mothers held a level of interest in their sons' political careers—Servilia is no exception. However, the characterization of 'Servilia of the Junii' has roots in this image. See Hillard, "Materna Auctoritas: The Political Influence of Roman Matronae," 12.

she held with her extended family was negatively impacted by her closeness to Caesar, although it is clear that she still managed to exert a level of control over some of the activities of her son. As Brennan asserts, “Servilia was *the* representative of Cassius and Brutus in Rome in this turbulent period, and communicated news from Rome to them”.²⁷⁶ Not only did Servilia appear to relay information to prominent Republican men, but she also maintained some influence over their decision-making processes. Although it is assured that the historical Servilia was a dominant political character of the late Republic, particularly in the period after Caesar’s death, she does not appear prevalently in the assassination narrative as a number of her modern incarnations do.

‘Servilia of the Junii’

“They are wives, mistresses, mothers, sisters, and we shouldn’t underestimate the amount of influence that they have.”²⁷⁷

As with Atia, the fictional Servilia, played by Lindsay Duncan, differs somewhat from her historical counterpart. While some aspects of her life remain the same, there are many that change for the sake of the narrative, most importantly the relationship between herself and Caesar. As she is depicted in *Rome*, Servilia is a member of the conservative elite of Rome and the primary antagonist of ‘Atia of the Julii’. Most notably, the actions of Servilia in *Rome* are predominantly driven by her feelings, both romantic and vengeful, towards Caesar and his family. Whereas Plutarch claims

²⁷⁶ Brennan, “Perceptions of Women’s Power in the Late Republic: Terentia, Fulvia, and the Generation of 63 BCE,” 361.

²⁷⁷ Duncan, “Women in *Rome*.”

that she was passionately in love with Caesar,²⁷⁸ *Rome* transforms the respected *matrona* into a hate-filled woman who, following her own rejection by her lover, spurs on her son, Brutus, to perform his assassination as seen at the end of the first season. These changes were a deliberate act by the creators of *Rome*, who wanted to make the show “interesting” by altering the history of some of the characters, including Brutus, in order to focus on a different narrative.²⁷⁹ A Caesar-centric focus, in fact, shapes the depiction of Servilia and was clearly in the forefront of the minds of the creators. *Rome*’s historical consultant, Jonathan Stamp, emphasised the central nature of Servilia’s love affair with Caesar, describing her as the “great love of Caesar’s life, his mistress, and, by all accounts, the only woman he truly loved”.²⁸⁰ The production company, HBO, itself describes Servilia as:

The mother of Brutus, and the erstwhile lover of Caesar. ‘Servilia of the Junii’ is a staunchly Republican aristocrat. Sophisticated, elegant, and subtle, she considers herself several rungs above Atia in the social hierarchy, a fact that chafes Atia.²⁸¹

It is worth noting that HBO’s assertion of Servilia’s social superiority over Atia is correct. Allusion has already been made to the slurs directed towards Atia’s humble origins,²⁸² whereas Servilia was of patrician lineage and the granddaughter of a consul in the maternal and paternal line.²⁸³ In the context of

²⁷⁸ Plut. *Brut.* 2.3-4.

²⁷⁹ Stamp, “Audio commentary for “*The Stolen Eagle*.”

²⁸⁰ Stamp, “Audio commentary for “*The Stolen Eagle*.”

²⁸¹ As seen on HBO.com/rome/cast/character/season2/servilia_v2.html.

²⁸² See page 19 of this thesis.

²⁸³ Q. Servilius Caepio (cos. 106) and M. Livius Drusus (cos. 112, cens. 109), respectively.

the status-conscious Roman elite, Servilia had social superiority over Atia in spades.

While the historical Servilia differs greatly from the fictional ‘Servilia of the Julii’, there are still a number of similarities to be found between the two. In the first series, Servilia is presented as the traditional, aristocratic Roman woman, and a distinct emphasis is put on her relationship with Caesar. Servilia does not have agency in the same way as Atia, but is instead motivated largely by her emotions, both positive and negative, regarding Caesar. Initially, Servilia is shown to have a level of control over familial affairs, as is demonstrated by her power over Brutus in the latter part of the first season, although this control is later utilised to satiate her desire for vengeance.²⁸⁴ Her influence over her son dissipates in the second season following Brutus’ own tragic quest for redemption.²⁸⁵ At the same time, Servilia is driven by pure hatred and vengeance, ending her own life in order to punish ‘Atia and the Julii’. Notably, it is Caesar’s rejection that acts as the catalyst for her descent into a stereotypically jealous and feminised frenzy. As Augoustakis notes:

The decision to turn against the man with whom she shares deep love and affection is portrayed in the series as a painful one ... What constitutes an important aspect of Servilia’s portrayal in *Rome*, however, is the intimate relationship and the extent of her exertion of

²⁸⁴ Stacie Raucci, “Revenge and Rivalry in *Rome*,” in *Rome, Season Two: Trial and Triumph*, ed. Monica S. Cyrino (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 110.

²⁸⁵ Augoustakis, “Effigies of Atia and Servilia: Effacing the Female Body in *Rome*,” 119.

power over Caesar, behind the scenes. To be sure, love can turn into hatred very easily.²⁸⁶

Although it is Caesar with whom Servilia is connected so intimately, it is Atia that truly bears the brunt of Servilia's vengeance over the course of the series. Servilia's character is designed as a foil for Atia, and, as such, she embodies a noticeable number of different traits from her primary antagonist. A survey of reviews reveals a more muted audience reception to that of *Rome*'s fiery first lady. Whereas Atia is described as actively hateful, Servilia is described as "magnificently steely",²⁸⁷ and the "strong female" Roman counterpart to Cersei Lannister.²⁸⁸ It is of interest that Servilia is seemingly referred to far less in reviews than her enemy. In *Rome*, her main impetus after her rejection by Caesar is vengeance, centred on enacting revenge based upon the severance of their relationship. Over the course of *Rome*, Servilia's character devolves from the conservative *matrona* of the Junii into a woman scorned.

While the theme of masculine revenge in *Rome* is based on redemption, echoing the 'swords and sandals' epics of the twentieth century, the feminine version is decidedly different in nature.²⁸⁹ Indeed, *Rome* characterises women's violence as subtle and shadowy, particularly when contrasted with the more masculine violence of physical fighting on the battlefield. Atia and Servilia's deeds are stereotypically 'feminine': egocentric, premeditated, and calculated. While Atia's behaviour is also unprincipled,

²⁸⁶ Augoustakis, "Effigies of Atia and Servilia: Effacing the Female Body in *Rome*," 120-121.

²⁸⁷ Tad Friend, "Power Play: "Rome" returns to HBO," *The New Yorker*, January 15, 2007, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2007/01/15/power-play-2>.

²⁸⁸ Vlad Savov, "Before Game of Thrones, there was Rome," *The Verge*, April 13, 2015, <http://www.theverge.com/tldr/2015/4/13/8398811/hbo-game-of-thrones-rome-drama-series>.

²⁸⁹ Raucci, "Revenge and Rivalry in *Rome*," 106-109.

her motivation differs from that of Servilia—Atia’s incentive for amoral behaviour is “quintessentially Julian”, securing the future of her family, while Servilia’s is based upon the ‘womanly’ revenge typical of erotic rejection.²⁹⁰ While Atia’s behaviour is deemed to be more provocative, Servilia’s is conservative—whereas Atia is portrayed as more ‘masculine’ in nature,²⁹¹ Servilia embodies the traditionally narcissistic ‘feminine’ role of a scorned woman.²⁹²

Hell Hath No Fury Like a Woman Scorned

*“Heav’n has no rage, like love to hatred turn’d,
Nor Hell a fury, like a woman scorn’d.”*²⁹³

From traditional fairy tales like *Beauty and the Beast*²⁹⁴ to the cult TV show *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003),²⁹⁵ the stereotypical depiction of women whose sole desire is to enact vengeance on the men who have rejected them (or others) can be found. A brief survey of ancient mythology also demonstrates numerous examples exemplifying this trope, including Gaia,²⁹⁶ Hera,²⁹⁷ Eris,²⁹⁸ Medea,²⁹⁹ Phaedra,³⁰⁰

²⁹⁰ Cyrino, “Atia and the Erotics of Authority,” 132.

²⁹¹ See the discussion on page 30 of this thesis.

²⁹² Cyrino, “Atia and the Erotics of Authority,” 132.

²⁹³ William Congreve, *The Mourning Bride (Reprint)*, Act III, Scene VIII (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2007).

²⁹⁴ When the wicked fairy fails to seduce the Prince in the traditional fairy tale of *Beauty and the Beast*, she turns him into a Beast as revenge for her rejection.

²⁹⁵ The main character of Anya the Vengeance Demon from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is known as the Patron Saint for Women Scorned. She would appear around heartbroken women to grant them a wish of vengeance against the men who wronged them.

²⁹⁶ Hes. *Theog.* 154-200: When Uranus hid Gaia’s children, the Cyclopes and the Hecatonchires, within her, Gaia conspired with her son Cronus to punish Uranus by chopping off his testicles in revenge.

Izanami-no-Mikoto,³⁰¹ and Brynhildr.³⁰² The tale of a woman scorned is so often aligned and entangled with the masculine—this is evinced in the manner in which she seeks physical and violent revenge in a masculinised way.³⁰³ An example of such can be seen in the characterisation of Clodia by Cicero as a “Palatine Medea”³⁰⁴—it is likely that this, in part, inspired the characterisation of ‘Servilia of the Junii’, as

²⁹⁷ Many tales of Hera are vengeful reactions to activities undertaken by Zeus. Examples can be found in Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* i.855 and Pind. *Pyth.* iv. 253 where Hera sends two serpents to kill the infant Heracles in his cot. Further examples can be found in Ov. *Met.* iii.341-401, in which Hera punishes the nymph Echo for distracting her from Zeus’ affairs, and i.650-730, where Hera sends a gadfly to continuously sting Io as revenge for engaging in an affair with Zeus.

²⁹⁸ The most famous tale concerning Eris, the Greek goddess of Discord, has her initiating the Trojan War as seen in Apollod. *Epit.* 2.3. When Eris is not invited to the forced union of Peleus and Thetis because of her troublesome nature, she takes revenge by causing discord at the wedding by throwing a golden apple to the “most beautiful” Goddess, a title claimed by Aphrodite, Athena, and Hera.

²⁹⁹ In mythology and in Greek drama Medea is portrayed as a vengeful lover—Diod. Sic. 4.54.2-6 depicts the vengeful Medea when Jason abandons her for king Creon’s daughter, Glauce. Medea exacts revenge by murdering Glauce with a poisoned chalice, killing both her and Creon. Euripides’ play *Medea*, of course, characterised her as a woman scorned, seeking revenge for her rejection from Jason, and succeeding by killing Glauce, Creon, and her two children.

³⁰⁰ As seen in Euripides’ play *Hippolytus*, Phaedra, the daughter of Minos and Pasiphaë, attempts to seduce her stepson, Hippolytus. Following her rejection, she tells her husband, Theseus, that Hippolytus tried to rape her. Tales of Phaedra and Hippolytus can also be seen in Ov. *Her.* 4 and Sen. *Phae.*

³⁰¹ After being abandoned in the underworld, Yomi, by her husband, Izanagi-no-Okami, Izanami-no-Mikoto swore to kill 1,000 living individuals each day as revenge for being left behind out of fear. Izanami’s vengeance is known in Japanese mythology as the beginning of Death. See Allan Grapard, “Visions of Excess and Excesses of Women: Women and Transgression in Japanese Myth,” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 18, no. 1 (1991): 3.

³⁰² Norse mythology, in the *Völsunga saga*, tells of a humiliated Brynhildr seeking revenge against Sigurðr following an alleged sexual transgression against her. She then kills herself upon finding out about Sigurðr’s innocence. This was later dramatised in the operatic drama *Götterdämmerung*, by Richard Wagner, where Brünnhilde forces Siegfried into a vow following his alleged treachery, and later arranges to have him killed.

³⁰³ Stacie Raucci, “Revenge and Rivalry in *Rome*,” 109. The character of The Bride in *Kill Bill* is an example of this. For a further discussion of the masculinisation of female revenge, see Kirsten Marthe Lentz, “The popular pleasures of female revenge (or rage bursting in a blaze of gunfire),” *Cultural Studies* 7, no. 3 (1993): 374-405.

³⁰⁴ Cic. *Cael.* 18.

Clodia, “like Medea, a lovesick woman, furious at being abandoned” sought out revenge against the people who wronged her, just as the Servilia of *Rome* does.³⁰⁵

It is not just the ancient world that perpetuated this image of women who seek vengeance to quench their own desire for revenge. There are, of course, many modern media representations of masculinised vengeful women,³⁰⁶ including a number of revenge-centred feature films over the last few decades.³⁰⁷ These often feature women who “take masculinely codified traits such as directness, violence, aggression, independence and control in their stride”, directly challenging the socially appropriate, stereotypically patriarchal ideals of femininity through their actions and behaviours.³⁰⁸

Rome’s own vengeance narratives do not blend ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ behaviours in the same way as other modern depictions, instead depicting a more traditionally ‘feminine’ revenge tale through the characters of Atia and Servilia. The depiction of female revenge as it appears in *Rome* rests on the trope of “women seeking revenge that rests on a stereotype of femininity”.³⁰⁹ This is a central theme

³⁰⁵ Marilyn B. Skinner, *Clodia Metelli: The Tribune’s Sister* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 106.

³⁰⁶ One notable example of this is the depiction of Cersei Lannister in the television series *Game of Thrones*. In the Season Six finale, “The Winds of Winter”, Cersei is shown ascending the Iron Throne in masculine attire following the successful murders of those she felt had wronged her. See Julie Miller, “*Game of Thrones* Finale: the Secret Symbolism in Cersei’s Badass Gown,” *Vanity Fair*, June 28, 2016, <http://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2016/06/game-of-thrones-season-6-finale-cersei-dress>.

³⁰⁷ *Kill Bill* is an example of this. See Judith Franco, “Gender, Genre and Female Pleasure in the Contemporary Revenge Narrative: Baise moi and What It Feels Like For A Girl,” *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 21(1): 1.

³⁰⁸ Franco, “Gender, Genre and Female Pleasure in the Contemporary Revenge Narrative: Baise moi and What It Feels Like For A Girl,” 3.

³⁰⁹ Raucci, “Revenge and Rivalry in *Rome*,” 109.

that runs throughout the series, and Servilia's own search for vengeance is depicted as an entirely 'feminine' vendetta over the course of the show. As Toscano notes, "gowns and gossip", both stereotypically 'feminine' concerns, are used metaphorically to depict the "complexity of power, [and] the interplay of desire and action",³¹⁰ signifying the distinctly 'feminine' and insidious type of vengeance undertaken by the female characters of *Rome*. Through Servilia's manipulation and devious behaviour, she avoids being coded as 'masculine'. Although she desires violence against others, she does not enact it, and as such, "feminise[s] revenge itself" by remaining physically passive, instead of active.³¹¹ It is this stereotypical behaviour of 'deceitful femininity' that allows Servilia to appear as the woman scorned.

Servilia's narrative arc over the course of the series is most definitely an embodiment of this trope, and her revenge is levelled at those she believes have done her wrong—the Julii. Her motivation for retribution begins directly after her rejection by her lover, Julius Caesar, in the fifth episode of the first season, "The Ram Has Touched the Wall",³¹² and only ends when she commits suicide in the seventh episode of the second series, "Death Mask".³¹³ Initiated by the betrayal of her lover, her revenge is twofold against both Atia and Caesar. The former had commissioned the painting of lewd graffiti in Rome depicting her relationship with Caesar, resulting in Caesar's swift termination of the affair. This results in a violent tussle between the two lovers whereby Caesar retaliates against Servilia's slap with a number of vicious blows—before leaving her in tears on the ground. While Servilia and Caesar's relationship

³¹⁰ Toscano, "Gowns and Gossip: Gender and Class Struggle in *Rome*," 154.

³¹¹ Raucci, "Revenge and Rivalry in *Rome*," 110.

³¹² *Rome*, "The Ram Has Touched the Wall." Episode 5, Season 1. Directed by Allen Coulter. Written by Bruno Heller. HBO, September 25, 2005.

³¹³ *Rome*, "Death Mask." Episode 7, Season 2. Directed by John Maybury. Written by Scott Buck. HBO, March 4, 2007.

breakdown is the catalyst for the former's descent into vengeance, it is the rancorous relationship between Atia and Servilia that drives much of the private conflict. It is this acrimonious association that shapes Servilia's vengeful actions in the form of the distinctly 'feminine' curses that she visits upon Atia and the shadowy political manipulation in which she engages.

While it appears that in their ancient Roman context curse tablets, or *defixiones*, were not gender specific in terms of their employment,³¹⁴ *Rome* transforms them into a solely 'feminine' weapon, further emphasising female insidiousness, a characteristic stereotypically attached to feminine-style revenge.³¹⁵ Servilia's *defixiones* are used as a way for her to retaliate without evoking the 'masculine' persona that is typically attached to female revenge. This is also emphasised through gendered religious depictions as they appear in *Rome*. Whereas the androcentric religious practices of *Rome* focus more on the civic and political,³¹⁶ 'feminine' religion is often performed in a personal and emotional context, as seen through Atia's *taurobolium* and Servilia's *defixiones*.³¹⁷ Similarly, the stereotypically private activities of women in *Rome* are made public, and Servilia's curses are no exception, carved into scrolls of lead and rolled up for her slave, Eleni, to place in the outside walls of the houses of her victims. Although her curses are cast against both Caesar and Atia, it is Atia

³¹⁴ For example, there are a number of examples of *defixiones* that have been excavated in Bath, England, that depict an array of curses by individuals of all genders invoking the goddess Sulis Minerva. For a discussion, see John G. Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

³¹⁵ Raucci, "Revenge and Rivalry in *Rome*," 109-110.

³¹⁶ This is seen on multiple occasions throughout *Rome*. The ritualistic face painting of Caesar in Episode Ten, "*Triumph*", is an example of this. See Seo, 2008: 169.

³¹⁷ Seo, "The Gender Gap: Religious Spaces in *Rome*," 173.

whom she seeks to ruin, dedicating every action to destroying her family.³¹⁸ Servilia's *defixiones* are a significant turning point in her characterisation, because they allow the audience to witness religion being debased in a quest for feminised revenge³¹⁹—her desire for vengeance is so strong that it taints her virtue. Servilia's desperation for retribution against Atia is clear in the exceedingly violent sentiments expressed in her curse:

By the spirits of my ancestors, I curse Atia of the Julii. Let dogs rape
her, let her children die, and her houses burn. Let her live a long life of
bitter misery and shame.

As Raucci notes, Atia's downfall will not result in a rekindled romance with Caesar, nor will it "restore [Servilia's] name", but rather, this curse is performed completely out of spite.³²⁰ It is through this malice and vindictiveness that Servilia embodies a woman scorned.

This deliberate vengeance is further reinforced in the finale of the first season, "Kalends of February",³²¹ when it is apparent that Servilia's quest for retribution has finally come to a crucial point in the narrative. It is insinuated that, following the successful manipulation of her son, Brutus, that Caesar's assassination is driven largely at Servilia's scornful behest—she does not physically attack Caesar, but rather works insidiously to ensure his downfall. The retaliation against Atia is also

³¹⁸ Toscano, "Gowns and Gossip: Gender and Class Struggle in *Rome*," 160.

³¹⁹ Seo, "The Gender Gap: Religious Spaces in *Rome*," 173.

³²⁰ Raucci, "Revenge and Rivalry in *Rome*," 109-110.

³²¹ *Rome*, "Kalends of February." Episode 12, Season 1. Directed by Alan Taylor. Written by Bruno Heller. HBO, November 20, 2005.

underhanded in nature, again highlighting the feminised deviousness of Servilia's character. When Atia and Octavian are invited to Servilia's villa on the Ides of March under the pretence of a truce, it is Servilia who emerges triumphant as she rises slowly from her seat to declare victory over her archenemy and declares:

So you see, the tyrant is dead, the Republic is restored, and you are alone. [...] I will make you suffer slowly, slowly and deeply, as you made me suffer. First, I want to see you run. Run for your life. Run to some rat hole in Greece, or Illyria, wherever you like. I shall come and find you.³²²

Servilia's ultimate victory, namely revenge against the lover who rejected her and the woman who undermined their relationship, is realised in the final scenes of the first series. Without using any physical violence against Atia, it is Servilia who, through her taunts and manipulation, enacts revenge on her opponent³²³—it is Servilia who reigns supreme.³²⁴ Although it is evident that Servilia's retribution is not over, and that she seeks to continue her vengeful quest against Atia, her focus changes during the second series following the absence of Caesar.

The second series of *Rome* continues the tale of a woman scorned, as is demonstrated in the marketing surrounding the show. Indeed, the promotional material used by HBO itself perpetuates this trope, with the tagline for Servilia in Season Two given as

³²² *Rome*, "Kalends of February."

³²³ Raucci, "Revenge and Rivalry in *Rome*," 110.

³²⁴ Augoustakis, "Women's Politics on the Streets of *Rome*," 126.

‘Revenge calms the pain of betrayal’,³²⁵ and advertising pitting Atia and Servilia against each other in a battle of female stereotypes. It is telling that HBO chose to market the pair as ‘The Venomous Backstabbing Mother vs. The Suicidal She-Devil’, citing ‘Hell Hath No Fury Like A Woman Scorned’, as it reinforces a stereotypical dichotomy thrust upon its two main female characters.³²⁶ Following the very public shaming of Servilia in “Utica”,³²⁷ she retaliates in kind in her final appearance in “Death Mask”. When Servilia is told of her son’s death at Philippi, she travels to Atia’s villa, where she publicly shouts for justice. Although Servilia never physically strikes Atia, she turns her own body into a weapon of revenge against her, harming only herself. By visibly thrusting a dagger into herself on the doorstep of her enemy, Servilia’s suicide is an act of aggression—and it is a selfish death. Through this public display of hostility, Servilia seeks to inflict the ultimate revenge upon her nemesis through her own physical sacrifice. It is an attempt to find her own salvation in the downfall of another: Atia.³²⁸

Servilia and Brutus

Although the relationship between Servilia and Brutus as it is shown in *Rome* reflects the tension between the two seemingly present in the historical sources,³²⁹ there are a number of differences. Porcia, the wife of Brutus, who is cited as the main source of the tension between Servilia and her son,³³⁰ is not a character in the series, and

³²⁵ Raucci, “Revenge and Rivalry in *Rome*,” 109.

³²⁶ Raucci, “Revenge and Rivalry in *Rome*,” 109.

³²⁷ It is in “Utica” where Servilia is stripped in the streets and has her hair hacked off at the behest of Atia.

³²⁸ Raucci, “Revenge and Rivalry in *Rome*,” 112.

³²⁹ Cic. *Att.* 13.16, 13.22.

³³⁰ Cic. *Att.* 13.16, 13.22.

Brutus' strong connection with Cato the Younger is not featured either.³³¹ Brutus' siblings also do not appear, meaning that he is presented as the sole child of Servilia in *Rome*—presumably this is done so as to keep the dramatic spotlight on Brutus. As such, the dynamic of their relationship is changed from that which is seen in the historical sources, and this is represented by the direction of the narrative over the course of the first season. Brutus himself is characterised in Plutarch as a virtuous man³³² with multiple achievements.³³³ He is presented as devoted and intelligent, with a broad knowledge of Greek philosophy.³³⁴ Although Brutus committed suicide at the battle of Philippi,³³⁵ his death in the series is depicted as a tragic redemption, and is visually reminiscent of Caesar's own murder.³³⁶ Brutus' final actions in his last scenes of *Rome* also mimic those of his brother-in-law, Marcus Porcius Cato,³³⁷ who, while reportedly overwhelmed in battle, chose to fling himself towards the enemy without a weapon in defence of Brutus.³³⁸ While Brutus, as traditionally depicted in Plutarch, is

³³¹ Plut. *Brut.* 2.1.

³³² Plutarch presents Brutus in a very positive light throughout his *Life of Brutus* (e.g., 46.3, 52.5), which can be explained by the nature of the sources used by the biographer. Plutarch utilizes Brutus' own letters (2.4-5, 2.7, 23.1, 29.8), as well as memoirs written by his step-son, Bibulus (13.3, 23.1-6). Plutarch also uses recollections of Brutus' friend Publius Volumnius, a 1st Century BCE Roman philosopher present at Philippi, in his *Life* (48.2). Overall, the generally positive presentation of Brutus in Plutarch's account is likely linked to the pro-Brutus nature of his sources.

³³³ Plut. *Brut.* 33.1.

³³⁴ Plut. *Brut.* 2.2.

³³⁵ Plut. *Brut.* 52.7.

³³⁶ Augoustakis, "Effigies of Atia and Servilia: Effacing the Female Body in *Rome*," 119.

³³⁷ The son of Cato Minor.

³³⁸ Plut. *Brut.* 49.9, *Cat. Min.* 73.3.

a paragon of virtue and the embodiment of the noble Roman,³³⁹ *Rome* has him succumbing to his emotions and submitting to his mother's request for revenge.³⁴⁰

Historically, Brutus' divorce from his first wife, Claudia Pulchra (*RE* 389) in 45 BCE, and his subsequent remarriage to Porcia (*RE* 28) caused the relationship between Servilia and her son to appear strained.³⁴¹ Given that Porcia does not appear in *Rome*, the relationship between Servilia and her son is fractured instead by Brutus' surrender to Caesar, the man who has rejected his mother, as shown in the seventh episode of the first season, "Pharsalus".³⁴² This change is important for the characterisation of Servilia as she appears in *Rome*—in order to emphasise Servilia's role in the assassination of Caesar, Porcia's absence is required, as it is Servilia's own desire for revenge that drives her to motivate Brutus in the finale of the first season. Indeed, it is ultimately Servilia's quest for revenge that appears the true driving force behind Brutus' actions. In the tenth episode of the first season, "Triumph",³⁴³ Brutus realises that Servilia, Quintus Valerius Pompey,³⁴⁴ and Cassius have been circulating a political pamphlet in his name, 'A Defence of Republican Principles Against the

³³⁹ See, for example, M. L. Clarke, *The Noblest Roman: Marcus Brutus and His Reputation (Aspects of Greek and Roman Life)* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981).

³⁴⁰ Refer to Stamp, "Audio commentary for "The Stolen Eagle."": "[Brutus'] family history was pushing him in one direction, [and] his emotions in another."

³⁴¹ Brutus's decision to divorce Claudia in 45 BCE in order to marry Porcia was not a popular one, and potentially was seen by Republicans as a move towards Caesar's direction. See Cic. *Att.* 13.9.2, 13.16, 13.22; Shackleton Bailey, *Cicero's Letters to Atticus, Vol. 5: 48-45 B.C., 211-354 (Books XI-XIII)*, 361-363; M. Lightman and B. Lightman, *A to Z of Ancient Greek and Roman Women*, 71 (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2008), 71.

³⁴² *Rome*, "Pharsalus." Episode 7, Season 1. Directed by Timothy Van Patten. Written by David Frankel. HBO, October 9, 2005.

³⁴³ *Rome*, "Triumph." Episode 10, Season 1. Directed by Alan Taylor. Written by Adrian Hodges. HBO, November 6, 2005.

³⁴⁴ Although Quintus Pompeius was the name of various historical characters from the *gens Pompeia*, there is no historical mention of a 'Quintus Valerius Pompey' in extant sources.

Forces of Tyranny’, and he appears furious with his mother, seeking her out for a private conversation. The two argue, and Servilia sneers at her son, imploring him to fall on his knees in front of Caesar and beg for forgiveness as it has served him well in the past.³⁴⁵ Brutus’ reply stings Servilia: “But not you! Perhaps you did not beg hard enough.” This prompts her to implore him to end Caesar’s life in an emulation of the feats of their ancestors.³⁴⁶ As Futrell notes, it is Servilia who is the driving force behind Brutus in this case:

Brutus is pushed into the conspiracy by his mother’s unrelenting pressure, her castigation of his grovelling submission to Caesar, and, ultimately, by Caesar’s qualified vision of friendship.³⁴⁷

It is a different assassination tale that is told in *Rome*, with Servilia being given a certain agency with her narrative of revenge that changes her relationship with Brutus. It is Servilia’s fury that is given precedence, rather than the welfare of the Republic—a notable departure from the typical narrative provided by the historical retelling of the events surrounding Caesar’s death.

Two of the most noticeable points in the narrative demonstrating a change in characterisation as far as Servilia is concerned can be found in the relationship breakdown between Caesar and herself in the fifth and tenth episodes of the first season, “The Ram Has Touched the Wall” and “Triumph”, respectively. When Caesar

³⁴⁵ This is a reference to the events of *Rome*, “Pharsalus.”

³⁴⁶ *Rome*, “Triumph.”

³⁴⁷ Alison Futrell, ““Not Some Cheap Murder”: Caesar’s Assassination,” in *Rome, Season One: History Makes Television*, ed. Monica S. Cyrino (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2008) 111.

appears to break off their affair, he cites the welfare of the Republic as the predominant reason for doing so. In response, Servilia contemptuously screeches “The Republic!”, an action that prompts the only emotional response from Caesar to be seen during this scene. It is this reaction from Caesar that acts as a catalyst for her own revenge in the later episodes of the first season.³⁴⁸ Following the severance of the love affair, Servilia’s devotion turns to vengeance masked as a concern for the welfare of the Republic, and she has no qualms about using this pretence to manipulate Brutus. Caesar’s own reasons for ending the relationship are later Servilia’s reasoning for the need of his assassination. While the historical Servilia is not given this agency, ‘Servilia of the Junii’ is shown as having direct control of the assassination of Julius Caesar through the manipulation of her own son. Through utilising her “strongest weapon”—her many connections to the members of the Roman nobility—Servilia is able to convince the weak-willed Brutus of the necessity to end Caesar’s life.³⁴⁹ Within the series, it appears, as it does with ‘Atia of the Julii’, that Servilia’s relationship with her son is utilised ultimately for her own benefit. *Rome*’s characterisation of Atia and Servilia, deliberately or otherwise, sends the message that these women are dangerous—and selfish.

Servilia and Octavia

It is important to note that while it is likely that Servilia and Octavia knew each other, there is no extant evidence which records their interaction in the ancient source tradition. That is, *Rome*’s depiction of Servilia and Octavia’s relationship is fictionalised—however, Servilia’s association with Octavia proves integral to the

³⁴⁸ Futrell, ““Not Some Cheap Murder”: Caesar’s Assassination,” 110.

³⁴⁹ Augoustakis, “Women’s Politics on the Streets of *Rome*,” 120.

character development of the former throughout the course of *Rome*. The relationships of Servilia and Atia with Octavia over the course of the first season of *Rome* are remarkably different, although both Servilia and Atia manipulate Octavia as a pawn for revenge against the other. While Atia's relationship with Octavia is maternal and is self-interested at times, Servilia's connection with Octavia is purely a selfish one. After her rejection by Caesar, Servilia's preoccupation is almost entirely that of revenge against members of the Julian family—and in her quest for vengeance, it is Octavia who is manipulated most by Servilia. Servilia seeks to turn Atia's own children against her, and Octavia's docility proves to be valuable in this respect. Although the rapport between Octavia and Servilia breaks down in the second season, Servilia's desires are highlighted through the progression of their relationship in the first season.

Initially, it is Atia who drives the relationship between Servilia and Octavia, although Servilia takes control in later episodes. In the sixth episode of the first season, "Egeria", on the premise of a potential Caesarian defeat in Greece, Atia pursues a truce with Servilia by purchasing a number of extravagant gifts and coercing Octavia into delivering them to Servilia's villa. Although Octavia is reluctant at first, she acquiesces to her mother's request and is greeted coldly by Servilia upon her arrival, who sardonically accepts the gifts offered to her. When Octavia turns to leave, Servilia calls out to her: "I've known you since you were a little girl. You have a good soul. I know that whatever others might do, you are blameless. I know that."³⁵⁰ Servilia then implores her to visit again, saying that she wishes for "no ill will" to be between the two of them. Her comments are designed to win over the meek Octavia

³⁵⁰ *Rome*, "Egeria."

and play her off against Atia, and this is the beginning of the serpentine relationship between Servilia and Octavia. Atia's self-interested olive branch to Servilia is used against her when Servilia enters into a short-lived sexual relationship with Octavia in Episode Seven, "Pharsalus". Although sent to Servilia's house at Atia's behest, Octavia appears to genuinely enjoy the company of Servilia, and the two are seen weaving together in Servilia's villa. Their relationship is initially depicted as an 'honourable' and traditional one with Octavia presented almost as a young girl being tutored by an older, respectable *matrona*. This changes, however, following the news of Caesar's surprise victory and Brutus' temporary disappearance, when Servilia seeks physical comfort with the girl and the two are pictured in bed together near the end of the episode. This homoerotic behaviour is directly contrasted with the weaving shown in the previous scene. It is worth noting that weaving appears (along with other 'womanly' activities, such as spinning) in the ancient evidence as a symbol for the chaste, respectable Roman matron.³⁵¹ An emotional response is elicited from Octavia before their following liaison, calling upon the Magna Mater in her time of confusion. Seo reflects that:

³⁵¹ See, for example, Lynn R. Huber, *Thinking and Seeing With Women in Revelation* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 49. This metaphor also appears in literary and epigraphical evidence. Women were expected to be involved with sewing, weaving, and spinning, and this image pervades the descriptions of the ideal Roman matron. Livia, Octavia, and Julia, for example, wove clothing for Augustus that he wore in public (Suet. *Aug.* 73). This exemplified their adherence to the traditional values expected of imperial women. Livia's domestic virtues were emphasized in order to depict her as a 'good wife'. See the discussion in Wood, *Imperial Women: a study in public images, 40B.C.-A.D.* 68, 77. While epigraphical evidence is limited for weaving (the *Monumentum Statiliorum* shows male and female figures participating in weaving, see *CIL* VI 6360-1 and *CIL* VI 6363), epigraphy depicts the *quasillaria*, or the spinner, as an "exclusively female job with no male counterpart" (*CIL* VI 6339-6346). See the discussion in Lena Larsson Lovén, "Female Work and Identity in Roman Textile Production and Trade: A Methodological Discussion," in *Making Textiles in Pre-Roman and Roman Times: People, Places, and Identities*, eds. Margarita Gleba and Judit Pásztoókai-Szeöke (Oxford and Oakville: Oxbow Books, 2013), 112.

Although the source of Octavia's emotional conflict seems difficult to read — is it an expression of homophobic horror at her own same-sex attraction or guilt at potentially betraying her family through her connection to Servilia?—the message conveyed by her urgent chanting seems clear: Octavia needs help.³⁵²

It is evident that Servilia deliberately takes advantage of the confused Octavia to further her own plan of revenge against the Julian family. By manipulating Atia's daughter, Servilia is able to control her behaviour and turn her against her arch enemy; in turn, she embodies the trope of a woman scorned, using anyone available in order to achieve her endgame of revenge.

This characterisation is reinforced by the nature of the sexual relationship between the two women that is manipulated by Servilia from the outset. Although it is Octavia who is sent by Atia in order to guarantee Servilia's support of Atia's family, Servilia abuses Octavia's innocent nature to achieve what she desires: information. This is clearly demonstrated in Episode Nine, "Utica", when Servilia deceives Octavia in order to obtain Octavian's knowledge about the ailment afflicting Caesar.³⁵³ Following a discussion in which the younger woman offers some concerns about Servilia's relationship with Caesar, Servilia's emotionally manipulative behaviour is deliberate and instantaneous. By admitting Caesar's hold over her, Servilia feigns an appropriate degree of weakness, seeking to convince Octavia to obtain information

³⁵² Seo, "The Gender Gap: Religious Spaces in *Rome*," 172.

³⁵³ Octavian is present during the epileptic attack that is suffered by Caesar in "Stealing from Saturn".

about Caesar from Octavian. Upon Octavia's initial repulsion, Servilia changes tack, and reveals the involvement of Atia in the murder of Glabius. Servilia's persistent attempts to persuade Octavia to seduce Octavian are indicative of the selfishness that pervades their relationship on Servilia's part—Servilia is willing to take advantage of the weak-willed Octavia in order to attain sensitive information about Caesar. It is worth noting that the ancient source tradition is silent about any sexual relationship between Octavia and Servilia, or Octavian and Octavia, and by all accounts, the historical Octavia Minor appears to have been an appropriately chaste Roman matron.³⁵⁴ The incestuous behaviour between Octavia and Octavian is designed to further the vengeful narrative between Servilia and Atia, and marks the end of the relationship between Octavia and Servilia. Servilia's engineering of the historically incongruous act of incest between Octavia and Octavian is used as a narrative device to demonstrate the lengths to which Servilia is willing to go in order to seek revenge on the Julian family. Servilia's resentment towards the *gens Julia* manifests itself as her predominant character trait, and her exploitation of Octavia is an unfortunate, but deliberate undertaking.³⁵⁵ This notwithstanding, the sexual relationship between Servilia and Octavia is visually depicted in a different, more gentle manner to the others in the series, particularly when directly contrasted with the frenzied affair between Caesar and Cleopatra in Episode Eight, "Caesarion".³⁵⁶

³⁵⁴ Octavia is positively portrayed multiple times in Plutarch's *Life of Antony*. Plut. *Ant.* 31.2 describes her as beautiful, intelligent, and dignified, and it is said that she raised not only the children she bore Antony, but also those borne by Fulvia (54.2). It is also said that the Athenians loved Octavia (57.1), and she is described as more beautiful and youthful in appearance to Antony's lover, Cleopatra (57.3). It is also evident that Octavian held Octavia Minor in high regard. He erected a statue (Cass. Dio. 49.38) and named a library in her honour (Cass. Dio. 49.43) after his transition to Augustus.

³⁵⁵ Augoustakis, "Women's Politics on the Streets of Rome," 123.

³⁵⁶ *Rome*, "Caesarion." Episode 8, Season 1. Directed by Steve Shill. Written by William J. MacDonald. HBO, October 16, 2005.

It is this manipulation of Octavia that acts as the catalyst for significant, narrative-driving events between Atia and Servilia in the later episodes of *Rome*. Following her sexually transgressive relationship with Octavian and subsequent punishment by Atia, Octavia severs her relationship with Servilia—but the damage is done. In the final moments of Episode Nine, “Utica”, Atia gets her revenge against Servilia for the manipulation of her daughter, as Merula, Atia’s slave, hacks off her hair while men disrobe her violently in the public street. This is a grave affront to Servilia’s moral sensibilities and strips her of her *pudicitia*.³⁵⁷ As Augoustakis notes, the care of one’s body and integrity was of great importance in the Republic, and the “act of cutting Servilia’s hair signifies something akin to her death”.³⁵⁸ Following her public humiliation, Servilia attempts to salvage her *pudicitia* by covering herself in her ripped clothing—a desperate endeavour to recover what Atia has stolen. After Servilia callously plotted to rob Octavia of her *pudicitia* in a quest for retribution against Caesar, Atia reciprocated by ordering her shadowy associate to strip away publicly the dignity purportedly embodied by Servilia, the respectable *matrona*.

Servilia’s *Domus* as the Home of Conspiracy

Like the villa of Atia, the *domus* of ‘Servilia of the Junii’ is a setting of importance within the narrative of *Rome*, as it is home to the plot against Caesar during the first

³⁵⁷ See Sen. *Helv.* 16.4: “*maximum decus visa est pudicitia*”. The presentation of modesty was important in Rome, but also put women at risk of rape. For a discussion on *pudicitia* and women’s virtue, see Langlands, *Sexual Morality in Ancient Rome*, 74-75.

³⁵⁸ Augoustakis cites the cutting of Dido’s hair in Verg. *Aen.* 4.698-4.706. See Augoustakis, “Women’s Politics on the Streets of *Rome*,” 124.

season.³⁵⁹ Servilia's *domus* reflects her character, and details about her identity and matronal influence can be attained by an examination of the adornments found within it. Whereas Atia's villa is decorated in Pompeian red, Servilia's is more subdued and acts as a quieter visual demonstration of the Junian familial status. Like Atia's, Servilia's villa contains features designed to demonstrate the strength and longevity of the Junian family, for example, ancestral masks adorn the corridors of her *atrium*.³⁶⁰ There is an emphasis on familial power that characterises the identities of both Servilia and Brutus, supported by the visual reinforcements that surround them within the *domus*. The masks appear in the background when Servilia and Brutus offer prayers to their ancestors at an altar before Brutus leaves to assassinate Caesar in Episode Twelve, "Kalends of February". The successes of their Junian relatives, both literally and figuratively, hang over the heads of Servilia and Brutus during this scene, and are a visible representation of the degree of expectation placed upon Brutus by Servilia.³⁶¹ Female figures, standing and moving gracefully, can also be found adorning the walls, appearing in decorative frescoes throughout the villa. Such figures are similar to those found in excavated properties throughout Italy, and convey religious and divine imagery.³⁶² This religiosity befits a Roman *matrona*, and in combination with the ancestral masks, supports the image of a traditionally virtuous and pious elite household.

³⁵⁹ It is interesting to note that there are correlations between Servilia's *domus* hosting the 'assassins' of Caesar and Sempronia's purported participation in the Catilinarian Conspiracy. Sempronia is characterized as an unconventional Roman woman, well-educated but lacking in *pudicitia* (Sall. *Cat.* 25.1-5), and it is said that her house was used by the 'conspirators' whilst her husband was away (Sall. *Cat.* 40.5).

³⁶⁰ Allen, "Staging Interiors in Rome's Villas," 183.

³⁶¹ Allen, "Staging Interiors in Rome's Villas," 183.

³⁶² John R. Clarke, *The Houses of Roman Italy, 100 B.C.—A.D. 250: Ritual Space and Decoration* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1991), 402; Allen, "Staging Interiors in Rome's Villas," 183.

The colours of Servilia's villa, like the decorations within, create the impression that the villa is one belonging to members of the Roman elite. Both the outside and the inside walls are decorated with sky blue stucco, complemented with white and purple accentuations around the alcoves and ceilings. This colouring is indicative of wealth, as blue and indigo pigments were expensive and often only attainable by those with enough money to afford them.³⁶³ Both Pliny the Elder and Vitruvius discuss the pricing of various colours in their respective works, the difficulties in creating them, and the high value attached to both blues and indigos.³⁶⁴ As a result, such colours became synonymous with houses and artwork belonging to the Roman elite. This is supported by archaeological evidence uncovered by excavations in Italy, where frescoes with large quantities of blue have been revealed in some villas, such as the Villa of Livia near Rome, and the Villa Arianna in Stabiae.³⁶⁵ The aristocratic association with blue has also been reinforced through representations in contemporary Anglocentric filmic productions, notably in the home of Marcus Licinius Crassus in *Spartacus* (1960),³⁶⁶ and in the blue-grey Palatine home of the family of Augustus in *I, Claudius* (1976).³⁶⁷ Wealth is also conveyed through the

³⁶³ Pliny the Elder discusses how blue and indigo pigments were made in *Natural History* 33.57.

³⁶⁴ See Plin. *HN* 35.12 for discussions on how blue and indigo pigments (among others) were to be sourced by the owner for the creation of wall frescoes. See Vitruv. *De arch.* 7.11.1 on blue pigments, and 7.13.1 for insights into purple ones.

³⁶⁵ For a discussion on the painted flora found in Livia's villa, see Giulia Caneva and Lorenza Bohuny, "Botanic analysis of Livia's villa painted flora (Prima Porta, Roma)," *Journal of Cultural Heritage* 4, no. 2 (2003): 149-155. For pictures of the frescoes in Villa Arianna, see Peter and Michael Clements, *Villa Arianna*, <https://sites.google.com/site/ad79eruption/stabiae/villa-arianna> (accessed September 18, 2016).

³⁶⁶ *Spartacus*. DVD. Directed by Stanley Kubrick. Los Angeles, CA: Universal Studios Home Entertainment, 1960.

³⁶⁷ *I, Claudius*. DVD. Directed by Herbert Wise. London: Acorn Media, 1976; Allen, "Staging Interiors in Rome's Villas," 184-185.

white marble as it is seen in statues and columns throughout Servilia's *domus*. The decoration of Servilia's villa is drastically different to Atia's, and each is reflective of their persona and individual taste. While Atia belongs to the populist Iulian family, Servilia's heritage is more conservative, and is reflected in the colouring most closely associated with the traditional Roman elite. As Allen notes:

Consciously or unconsciously, the artistic director and set designers of *Rome* have visually perpetuated the conflict between the wealthy, conservative aristocrats in their white and blue villas, Crassus in *Spartacus* and Servilia in *Rome* with the populist villas displaying red and black frescoes from the House of the Mysteries, the villa of Senator Gracchus in *Spartacus*, and Atia's villa in *Rome*.³⁶⁸

Whether intentional or not, the message conveyed by the villas as they appear in *Rome* is one of contrast. Both Atia and Servilia come from distinguished noble backgrounds that manifest themselves in significantly drastically different visual surroundings. Atia's villa appears more dramatically decorated and luxurious, whereas Servilia's reflects her elegant conservatism. It is also noteworthy that few slaves appear in Servilia's *domus*. While Atia's villa contains a considerable number of slaves, Servilia's only appear when necessary—with the exception of her personal attendant, Eleni. Eleni's attire is also reflective of Servilia's wealth and *domus*, as she is clad in blue, wearing blue jewellery, and appears to be well-educated and eloquent.³⁶⁹ While Atia uses her slaves as visible symbols of her wealth and power,

³⁶⁸ Allen, "Staging Interiors in *Rome*'s Villas," 185.

³⁶⁹ Allen, "Staging Interiors in *Rome*'s Villas," 184.

Servilia's restraint in terms of using only one slave indicates a lack of indulgence not demonstrated by her rival.

Conclusion

'Servilia of the Junii', much like 'Atia of the Julii', appears loosely based on her historical counterpart. From an analysis of her characterisation as she appears in *Rome*, it is clear that the creators intended her to be a reflection, rather than a clone, of the Servilia found in the ancient source tradition. In the series, Servilia is clearly one of the Roman elite, appearing initially as a sophisticated matron of the Junii. The Servilia of *Rome*, like her ancient counterpart, has a tense relationship with her son,³⁷⁰ and she acts with a level of authority that can be seen in her interactions with Brutus and Octavia. Caesar and Servilia are romantically linked in *Rome*, and Servilia appears, in the first few episodes of the first season, fiercely loyal to Caesar, mirroring the strong relationship that is seen in the historical tradition.³⁷¹ Furthermore, Servilia's strong-arming of Brutus into performing the assassination of Caesar is demonstrative of the domineering and authoritarian personality reflected in the Ciceronian material.³⁷²

However, like 'Atia of the Julii', 'Servilia of the Junii' also differs substantially from her historical counterpart. While Servilia is involved with Caesar in *Rome*, their

³⁷⁰ See Cic. *Att.* 13.9.2, 13.16, 13.22 which discuss Brutus' marriage to Porcia against his mother's wishes.

³⁷¹ Servilia's notorious passion for Caesar is documented in Plut. *Brut.* 5.3-4. See also Suet. *Aug.* 50.2 for the famous anecdote regarding Caesar's gift of a pearl costing six million sesterces to Servilia in his first consulship.

³⁷² This authoritarian personality is obvious in Cic. *Att.* 15.11. Servilia appears as a strong participant in a family council of the tyrannicides and their friends' strategic planning.

relationship sours rapidly, causing her to seek revenge against him and the Julii. It is this hunger for revenge that becomes an overarching theme and is the impetus behind much of her behaviour throughout the series. In this departure from the historical narrative, *Rome*'s creators transform the ancient Servilia into a vindictive figure—one who is bitter, twisted, and scorned. 'Servilia of the Junii' as she appears in *Rome* exemplifies the trope of 'a woman scorned', following in a long tradition of historical women assigned to such a role. There is no historical evidence for a feud between Atia and Servilia, nor is there proof of a relationship, sexual or otherwise, between Servilia and Octavia. Furthermore, Porcia's absence from the show changes the dynamic of Servilia and Brutus' relationship, providing the creators with an opportunity to characterise Servilia as the manipulative influence on her son. In her selfish willingness to offer up Brutus as a leading figure in Caesar's assassination, and her coercion of Octavia to seduce Octavian in order to obtain political information Servilia cements herself within the series as a presence as malevolent and malicious as Atia. While vengeful women exist in the ancient source tradition (Medea, for instance), it is clear that the creators of the show have again been influenced by a wider misogynistic tradition. It is evident that *Rome*'s creators explicitly intended to substantially change the role of 'Servilia of the Junii' from that of her historical counterpart, and transform her into a worthy adversary of the cleverly manipulative 'Atia of the Julii'.

Final Conclusions

Ultimately, it is clear that the creators of *Rome* sought to design a vivid and entertaining ancient Roman world filled with characters that differed from those previously found in modern cinematic representations of antiquity. The historical advisor of *Rome*, Jonathan Stamp, clearly states that the show was devised to be an entertaining historical drama series, rather than as a documentary. It is obvious that while the ancient sources have been consulted and utilised to some degree, they have rather been adapted and transformed, and the characters in *Rome* are fictionalised versions of historical figures. Stamp's enthusiasm for "authenticity" over "accuracy"³⁷³ can be seen in the minute details found in set design and costume, and in the well-researched rituals performed by the various characters throughout the series' run. It has been argued over the course of this thesis that while the creators of *Rome* sought to create a uniquely different Rome in which to explore the traditional narrative of the fall of the Republic, the characterisations of both 'Atia of the Julii' and 'Servilia of the Junii' appear to follow a long tradition of historically gendered stereotypes. While both 'Atia' and 'Servilia' reflect their historical counterparts to some degree, their narratives and images differ in certain important respects from those presented by the extant source material.

'Atia of the Julii' is posited as *Rome*'s 'scarlet woman', a significant difference from the Tacitean characterisation of her as a virtuous *matrona*. It is clear that the creators of *Rome* consulted the historical narrative to create the character of Atia, as both the historical and fictionalised Atia are dedicated to the political progression of Octavian,

³⁷³ Stamp, "Balancing Fact and Fiction: The Ancient World of HBO's *Rome*."

and the overall wellbeing of her family. The image of the authoritative Roman mother is pervasive in both the source material and in *Rome*, with Atia remaining dominant over her son, Octavian, during his youth. All the same, the traditionally nurturing mother of the source tradition gives way to a sexually manipulative, scheming woman, preoccupied with her own political progression and the destruction of her enemies. *Rome*'s Atia embodies the traits of a controlling and politically involved woman and appears strikingly similar to other transgressive Roman women portrayed in the historical narrative—women such as Terentia, Clodia, and Fulvia. It appears that the creators of *Rome* used the depictions found in the ancient source tradition of strong and politically manipulative women to shape the character of Atia. Many of the Republican women referred to in extant historical material are the subjects of a hostile source tradition, and have clearly broken the stereotypically 'feminine' gender norms of their time. Similarly, 'Atia of the Julii' is masculinised throughout the series, breaking away from the traditional behaviour of a *matrona*. The fact that the creators of *Rome* chose to depict her in her widowhood allows her greater control and manipulation of her children, and gave the series a chance to create a dramatic and memorable role for Polly Walker. It is clear that the writers of *Rome* took the opportunity to create an entirely fictional feud between two strong female characters that was designed to intrigue and titillate an audience. 'Atia of the Julii' reflects a gendered tradition found within the extant Roman historical material whereby the ancient authors used the imagery of domineering women in order to exemplify the dangers of a deviation from the gendered norms of Rome.

While 'Servilia of the Junii' is designed to be a foil for 'Atia of the Julii', she too is designed to be a loose reflection of her historical counterpart. This thesis has

demonstrated that Servilia's characterisation, like Atia's, does not replicate that of the Servilia found in the historical tradition, but rather reflects a more general ancient gendered tradition. 'Servilia of the Junii' is depicted as a sophisticated matron in the beginning of the series, but degenerates into a shell of herself by the end of the series' run. While the Servilia of *Rome* does share some commonalities with her historical counterpart, such as her romantic association with Caesar and her tense relationship with her son, it is clear that her character is transformed by the creators of the series into a vengeful, bitter woman in order for her to act as a dramatic foil to 'Atia of the Julii'. Marketing material created by HBO before the release of the second season perpetuated an innately misogynistic picture of the two women, with both pitted against each other in a highly feminised manner. The rejected Servilia as she appears in *Rome* embraces the tradition of 'a woman scorned', and is a clear departure from her depiction as a lover of Caesar in the extant historical narrative. This dramatic choice by the creators of the series assigns Servilia to a long list of historical women who have been assigned to such a role, such as Hera, Medea, and Clodia Metelli. Furthermore, as there is no historical evidence for a feud between Atia and Servilia, it is clear that the creators of *Rome* desired to take a dramatic departure from the traditional narrative surrounding the assassination of Caesar and the fall of the Roman Republic. The change in characterisation of both women allowed the series to explore a different 'shadowy' side of Rome during this time, but the fictional hostility between Atia and Servilia is intentionally reminiscent of a 'cat fight', and borders on the misogynistic. It is clear that the decision not to include Porcia as a character in the series was a deliberate choice on the part of the creators, as it drastically put the focus on the dynamic between Servilia and Brutus, and allowed the show to depict Servilia as the domineering force in the assassination narrative. Through her manipulation of

Brutus into killing Caesar, and her coercion of Octavia to engage in an incestuous sexual encounter with her brother, Servilia emerges as a malicious and malevolent counterpart to Atia.

It is clear that the creators of *Rome* carefully crafted the characterisations of ‘Atia of the Julii’ and ‘Servilia of the Junii’ in order to forge a different narrative to that traditionally told about the fall of the Republic. Atia and Servilia are shown to be active and present in the civic disruption that occurred during the final days of the Republic, and their characterisations reflect the creators’ desire to emphasise the women as active players during this time. They wanted to create an ‘authentic’ world, one that felt real and tangible, and accessible to their audience. Atia and Servilia are strong, dynamic women who are shown to possess a level of agency, but this is presented in a distasteful manner. Instead of creating a show that focused on the traditionally masculine political manoeuvrings of the late Republic, *Rome*’s creators sought to depict the interwoven, shadowy, oft-neglected lives of underrepresented characters in the historical narrative—especially those of women. In this sense, it projects empowering images of the leading female characters. However, both ‘Atia of the Julii’ and ‘Servilia of the Junii’ reflect a number of stereotypically ‘feminine’ gendered characteristics that have been depicted throughout the larger source tradition, both ancient and modern. Orators, historians, and biographers used women who deviated from the gendered norms of Rome, such as Cicero with Clodia Metelli, to underline whatever point they were making in their work. These women of antiquity are portrayed in an unattractive, unflattering light, and the creators of *Rome* have perpetuated this misogynistic tradition.

The disregard of a modern gender and sexuality binary is crucial to the understanding and interpretation of the ancient representations. By implementing the Foucauldian theory that binaries restrict the understanding of ancient gender, it has broadened the analysis of the historical depictions of Atia and Servilia. Their gendered characterisations as seen in the ancient sources reflect the patriarchal society in which they both lived, and the extrapolation and modern interpretation of these ancient depictions by the creators of *Rome* allowed for Atia and Servilia to act as the dominant parties in the influential power plays that are seen throughout the series. Augoustakis' argument that both women are 'defeminised' in the series is convincing—the creators of *Rome* emphasised their femininity within the first season, and desexualised them over the course of the second. By the end of the series' run, both Atia and Servilia appear as very unattractive characters. Day's discussion of the 'invisible women' of Rome is very apropos—while *Rome* created two complex characters, it almost replicates the traditional prejudicial representation of women as they are seen in antiquity. It is clear that while the creators of *Rome* engaged with the ancient sources, the portrayals of women who did not fit the historical ideal have influenced the depictions of Atia and Servilia in the series. Stamp reiterates the need for 'authenticity' over 'accuracy' and it is the creators' modern interpretation of what is 'authentic' that, in my view, moulds the conception of the characters. Ultimately, the ancient world that is seen in *Rome* is a specifically manufactured creation, a reflection of the modern subjective interpretation of antiquity and its legacy.

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