

Colleen McCullough and the Evidence

Some Case Studies in the Late Roman Republic

Blake Cook, BA (Macquarie University)

Submitted 9/10/2015 in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Research
Department of Ancient History, Faculty of Arts, Macquarie University, Sydney

Table of Contents

Thesis Summary	v
Declaration.....	vii
Abbreviations, Citations and References	ix
Acknowledgements.....	xi
Introduction	1
Literature Review.....	5
Chapter One: The Divorce of Pompey and Mucia	13
Chapter Two: The 'Bona Dea Affair'	23
Chapter Three: The 'First Triumvirate'	33
Chapter Four: The 'Vettius Affair'	43
Chapter Five: Caesar	53
Conclusion.....	63
Bibliography	65

Thesis Summary

The historical fictions series *Masters of Rome* (1990 - 2007) by Dr Colleen McCullough-Robinson is based upon almost two decades of research into the ancient world, depicting the political and military struggles of the first century B.C.E which ultimately transformed the Roman Republic into the military autocracy of the Principate. This thesis is concerned with how the author has recreated some key historical events surrounding the year 60 B.C.E, that year in which Asinius Pollio saw the beginning of the end for the Republic and which Sir Ronald Syme saw as the beginning of the 'Roman Revolution', from the extant ancient evidence and in the context of modern academic scholarship. This study is thus something of a combination between what ancient historians would recognise as traditional source criticism, in examining how McCullough interpreted the ancient sources, and of a reception study, in that the thesis examines a modern literary representation of antiquity. Although this thesis will examine how the ancient evidence and modern scholarship has influenced the representation of the late Roman Republic in the novel *Caesar's Women* (1996), it is not my intent to merely criticise McCullough's interpretations. Issues of narrative elements such as plot development and characterization will also be addressed for understanding why sources have been interpreted in a particular way. As a conclusion to the thesis, the historiographical significance of McCullough's presentation of history, evoking a Rankean idea of 'the past as it really was', will be examined.

Declaration

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

Date: 29/03/2016

X Blake Cook

Blake Cook

Abbreviations, Citations and References

Abbreviations

Abbreviations of standard Greek and Latin texts follow those set out in the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* (4th ed., 2012).

Citations

Citations of modern scholarship will be confined to footnotes in the short-title convention, with a full reference in the Bibliography

References

Due to the frequency with which I refer to the novel *Caesar's Women*, references to this work will always appear with the full title, so as to avoid a string of *ibid.* and *op.cit.*

Acknowledgements

A work of this size and duration is never a one-man task. It gives me great pleasure to give thanks here to those who have contributed to the finished product. Firstly, Dr Andrew Gillett and Dr Malcolm Choat, who have done an incredible job in coordinating the Masters of Research program in the Ancient History department at Macquarie University, and helping students to navigate through some of the difficulties which a new course structure can offer. To Ric Robinson, for kindly taking the time to send me a copy of Colleen McCullough's bibliography, which has proven to be such a useful and fascinating document. To Dr Alanna Nobbs, for sharing her time and thoughts on Colleen McCullough the author and Roman enthusiast. To Associate Professor Tom Hillard, who was under no obligation to do so, but generously gave up many hours of his time to provide insightful advice and share his thoughts and expertise on many points raised in this thesis. To my supervisor, Dr Lea Beness; mere words seem to be an imperfect way to express the immense feeling of gratitude I feel for her guidance, wisdom, knowledge, and helpful suggestions, without which I could not have completed this undertaking. She has been a great source of strength and inspiration. To all my friends and family, who, despite the odds, managed to put up with me over a period of ten months of academic isolation, and have given me such amazing support. Last but not least, to Dr Colleen McCullough-Robinson herself; though she sadly passed away earlier this year, her *Masters of Rome* series will continue to excite the imagination of readers for many more years to come, just as they did just over a decade ago when a young high school student discovered them for the first time and fell in love with the world of ancient Rome.

Introduction

As a part of my assault on the various sorts of novel, I had wanted to write a true historical novel. By that, I meant a book so carefully researched historically that it would have to be ranked with all the scholarly treatises on the subject: an historical work that never departed from what is known about the period as well as the actual subject and persons.¹

Colleen McCullough thus summed up the approach she took in writing the historical fiction series *The Masters of Rome*, the fourth book of which, *Caesar's Women*, is the focus of this thesis. The series retells the story of the last eighty or so years of the Roman Republic and its transition into a military autocracy, covering the period from 110 B.C.E. and the successive consulships of C. Marius, to 27 B.C.E., the year Octavian formally took on the name 'Augustus'. The novels focus on the political and military upheavals which characterise the period, and the cast of characters is familiar to any historian of the late Republic. Historical figures, such as C. Marius and Octavian mentioned above, Pompey the Great, Marcus Crassus, M. Tullius Cicero and Publius Clodius, to name but a few, are the *dramatis personae*. But the protagonist of most of the series, and for *Caesar's Women*, is C. Julius Caesar, the future dictator and conqueror of Gaul. The novel *Caesar's Women* begins in the year 69 B.C.E., and ends with Caesar's departure to Gaul in 59, the year of his first consulship.

As the quote above makes clear, McCullough had a very strong conception of herself as, if not quite an historian, certainly as an historical *authority*. She spent a total of twenty years researching the period of the Roman Republic, which also included other ancient societies in the wider Mediterranean world, roughly thirteen of which took place before she published the first novel of the series, *The First Man in Rome*.² This authorial persona she created is also evident in not only the 'voice' of the narrator in her novels, an omniscient third person evoking the style of academic historians, but also in other features present in her novels. A glossary is included in each of the books, covering a wide range of subjects from Latin obscenities to Roman political institutions. The 'Author's Note' in *Caesar's Women* is a particularly telling indication of McCullough's conception of herself as an authority:

I work in the correct way, from the ancient sources to the modern scholars, and I make up my own mind from my own work whilst not dismissing opinion and advice from modern Academe.³

¹ C. McCullough, *Life: Without the Boring Bits* (Sydney 2011), p. 200.

² C. McCullough, *Life*, p. 200; 'Author's Note', *Caesar's Women*, p. 787.

³ 'Author's Note', *Caesar's Women*, p. 787.

There's not much in that statement that an historian would have to argue about – which is precisely the point, of course. Here, and elsewhere, she establishes herself as an authority on the period. McCullough famously debated an academic historian during a radio programme on the depiction of pearl-studded napkins in her novels, and held her own.⁴ Relevant to this point is the fact she compiled a bibliography of all the books she had made use of to construct her narrative. It does not list articles and journal papers she made use of, but is an impressive list of authorities from ancient source material to modern works of scholarship, notably the works of Theodor Mommsen, for whom McCullough had a huge amount of respect, and Erich Gruen, of whom McCullough was an admirer.

This conception McCullough had of herself as an historical authority has shaped the way I have decided to approach this reception study of historical events depicted in the novel *Caesar's Women*. Her recreation of events is heavily based upon reading the source material of the period, and reference to, as I quoted above, the opinions and advice of modern Academe. The aims of this thesis are, firstly, to determine to what extent McCullough's claim of fidelity to the ancient evidence can be demonstrated by her recreation of historically significant episodes drawn from the history of the late Roman Republic, and to suggest areas where her narrative has been guided by a particular scholarly interpretation or school of thought. The second aim is to identify what narratological devices have been employed to advance McCullough's narrative, and how these have influenced her reception of the ancient evidence. Though any discussion of evidence requires some evaluation as to the plausibility of a particular interpretation be given, it is not my aim to judge McCullough's merits as an historian, or to simply point out where she might be 'right' or 'wrong' in her interpretation of an event. McCullough herself believed in the possibility of her novels being used alongside academic works to assist in the teaching of history, and Joanna Paul also discussed the merits of using receptions of antiquity to assist in the teaching history, with regard to film.⁵ Thus what I hope to do in the pages below is discuss McCullough's novelisation of the late Roman Republic within the context of the ancient evidence and scholarship, with a view to providing future generations (I hope) with some examples of not only how the ancient evidence and scholarship has been utilised to construct her narrative, but *why* McCullough has chosen to represent certain historical events the way she has. For this reason, I have chosen to approach this thesis through what at first sight may appear to be a rather eclectic collection of essays, in an attempt to cover different aspects of Roman society and culture. The sheer scale of the novels, at seven books in all totalling close to ten thousand pages, covering a period of eighty or so years, means a comprehensive study of the entirety of her series is not feasible within the space of this thesis. However, I do hope to shed some

⁴ ('Toga party in Macquarie Street', May 22, 2004 - <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2004/05/21/1085120115801.html?from=storyrhs>)

⁵ J. Paul, 'Working with Film', *A Companion to Classical Receptions*, [ed.] L. Hardwick and C. Stray (Oxford, 2008), pp. 304-305.

light on McCullough's recreation of ancient Rome, and encourage further study of her novels, by addressing a variety of historical issues.

The first chapter of this thesis consists of a review of the academic literature on the historical events to be discussed, and a discussion of methodology. The fact that there is only the one reception study of McCullough, so far as I am aware, means a study of literature on McCullough herself would be a short review indeed. The variety of topics to be examined, however, also means this literature review gives a rapid, succinct analysis of the scholarship for each of the historical issues to be examined in turn. The diversity of works and subjects, and the parameters of this thesis, necessitate avoiding a lengthy discussion of the literature of a given historical event. In the Methodology section, I will discuss how I intend to approach my study of the novels, taking into account not only the precepts of *Quellenforschung*, required to understand the evidence for each of the topics under discussion, but also the fundamentals of reception study. In particular, I wish to articulate how I intend to study McCullough's novels without falling into the trap of judging McCullough's merits as an historian. Despite McCullough's claims to authority on the study of ancient Rome, her novels are nonetheless works of a writer of historical fiction.

The second chapter is a study of McCullough's representation of the divorce of Pompey the Great and Mucia in 62 B.C.E. The divorce procedure represented by McCullough in the novel will be examined, followed by an analysis of McCullough's depiction of the reason given for the divorce. Finally, the chapter will discuss McCullough's identification of Mucia's paramour as T. Labienus, and the reason why Mucia committed adultery; as depicted in *Caesar's Women*, Mucia was condemned to a rural isolation whilst Pompey was away. McCullough's depiction of Pompey's origins in Picenum as part of an arch of the novels, to pit two 'Great Men', one from the landed aristocracy and the other an outsider, against each other in a struggle for supremacy, will be discussed in the context of Mucia's divorce.

The third chapter is a study of McCullough's recreation of the so called 'Bona Dea Affair' of 62 B.C.E. This chapter consists of a discussion of McCullough's representation of the cultural origins of the cult of the goddess, before moving on to an examination of the motives behind P. Clodius' violation of the rites. Finally, the trial for *incestum* which took place the following year will be examined, and how McCullough has placed her own interpretation upon the evidence for this trial to create a political scenario relevant to the protagonist, Caesar.

The Fourth chapter deals with the representation of the formation of the 'First Triumvirate'. The issues to be examined for this chapter are McCullough's dating of the coalition, the political position

of Caesar at the time, and the aims of the 'Triumvirate', and what scholarship and interpretation of the evidence has influenced her portrayal of this pivotal event in Roman history. The fifth chapter covers the 'Vettius Affair'. As with Chapter Four, this chapter will analyse McCullough's utilisation of ancient evidence and scholarship, but also examine how her independent interpretation of evidence has influenced her unique portrayal of the aims of the affair, and how she has reached her conclusion on who masterminded this strange episode. The final chapter of this thesis is concerned with McCullough's portrait of Julius Caesar, and how her reception of the historical figure, and her portrayal of him as an archetypal hero and 'Great Man', has been influenced by conceptions of Caesar which permeate early modern scholarship, and ideas about 'Western' values such as superior rationality and masculinity.

Literature Review

Due to the diverse nature of the topics to be discussed within this thesis, and the paucity of academic work on McCullough's novels themselves, the literature under discussion here is necessarily heterogeneous. This part of the thesis I have elected to subdivide into sections which deal with each of the topics under discussion, with a final subsection of the only reception study of McCullough's novels of which I am aware – Martha Malamud's chapter 'Serial Romans', from the book *Imperial Projections*. The subsections are necessarily quite succinct, and there is also some inevitable overlap as the same works have examined (to a lesser or greater degree), or have some bearing on, more than one of the historical issues under discussion.

The Divorce of Mucia and Pompey

Whilst this event is well known to historians who have studied the late Roman Republic, from biographies such as those by Van Ooteghem, Leach, and Seager, to prosopographical studies such as Gruen, the details of the divorce have not been discussed in detail.¹ Works dealing with divorce procedure for the late Republic, such as those of Keifer, Treggiari, and to a lesser extent Pomeroy, whilst invaluable to understanding divorce nonetheless do not discuss the divorce of Mucia and Pompey in detail.² Thus my own study combines the two sets of scholarship, to examine both the political implications of Pompey's divorce of Mucia as well as the details of the divorce procedure. Relevant to this chapter are the works on Pompey's origins; Münzer has been influential in his suggestion that the Pompeii were originally from Picenum, however this has been challenged more recently in the biographies of Leach and Seager on the basis of Pompey's tribe, the Clustumina, and on the possible Etruscan roots of the name 'Pompeius', as well as the rather vague references in the source material made by Strabo, Plutarch and Pliny.³ Finally, scholarship on the early career of T. Labienus, Caesar's future lieutenant in Gaul, must be addressed, to properly examine McCullough's reconstruction of an affair between Labienus and Mucia. Syme had considered an early military

¹ J. van Ooteghem, *Pompée Le Grand: Bâtitteur D'Empire* (Bruxelles 1953), p. 273; E. Gruen, *The Last Generation of the Roman Republic* (Berkeley 1974), pp. 85-87, 93, 130; J. Leach, *Pompey the Great* (London 1978), pp. 112-113; R. Seager, *Pompey the Great: A Political Biography* (Oxford 1979), p. 76.

² O. Keifer, *Sexual Life in Ancient Rome*, trans. Gilbert and Helen Highet (London 1934), pp. 29-33; S. Treggiari, *Roman Marriage: iusti coniuges from the Time of Cicero to the Time of Ulpian*, pp. 435-482; S. Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity* (London 1975), pp. 158-164.

³ F. Münzer, *Roman Aristocratic Parties and Families* trans. Therese Ridley (Baltimore 1995), p. 28. Cf. Leach, *Pompey*, pp. 14-15; Seager, *Pompey*, p. 20. Gruen, *LGRR*, p.61, notes Pompey's Picentine supporters without venturing a comment on Pompey's origins. The references in the ancient sources are: Strabo, *Geography*, 5.4.2; Plutarch *Pomp.* 6.1; Pliny, *NH*, 3.110.

career under Pompey a possibility, and was followed by Leach in this suggestion, however the lack of evidence makes this point difficult to argue.⁴ In this regard, reference to Broughton's *Magistrates of the Roman Republic* will be invaluable.

The 'Bona Dea Affair'

Discussion of the 'Bona Dea Affair' is centred around three key points. The first is the cultural origins of the cult. Warde-Fowler, and later Scullard, in their works on Roman festivals, cautiously balanced the possibility of an archaic Roman origin with that of a later Greek influence.⁵ Brouwer, considered the most comprehensive account of the cult, similarly balances the two possibilities in light of the varied nature of our evidence.⁶ Wiseman suggested Greek influences due to the similarities to a Greek *pannychis*,⁷ an opinion which was creatively developed by Mulray to suggest that the Dionysiac characteristics, which permitted transvesticism, influenced P. Clodius' decision to attempt to join the nocturnal rites in December 62.⁸ Mulray's is probably the most detailed discussion of Clodius' motives to date; Tatum gives a summary of views, but does not go further than suggesting that Clodius' curiosity was aroused for one reason or another.⁹ More important for many scholars is the trial which took place shortly afterwards. It remains an open question whether Clodius' acquittal, allegedly secured by bribery, was due to Crassus' wealth, or if Clodius organised the bribery himself.¹⁰ McCullough's account, in attributing the bribery to the wealth of Clodius' wife Fulvia, requires addressing Fulvia's early life, and the date for Fulvia's marriage to Clodius, for which Babcock and Tatum remain the most useful discussions, though due to the nature of the evidence neither scholar can pin down an exact year for the marriage.¹¹

The Vettius Affair

One of the key political issues of the late Republic is, of course, the so-called 'Vettius Affair'. Detailed examination of this affair has largely been limited to works of the mid twentieth century, centred

⁴ R. Syme, 'The Allegiance of Labienus', *JRS*, vol 28 Part 2 (1938), p. 120; J. Leach, *Pompey*, p. 176.

⁵ W. Warde-Fowler, *The Roman Festivals of the Period of the Republic: An Introduction to the Study of the Religion of the Romans* (London 1925), pp. 103-105, 256; H.H. Scullard, *Festivals and Ceremonies of the Roman Republic* (London 1981), pp. 116, 200.

⁶ H.H.J. Brouwer, *Bona Dea: The Sources and a Description of the Cult* (Leiden 1989), pp. 238-239, 258-259, 323.

⁷ T.P. Wiseman, 'The Good Goddess', *Cinna the Poet and Other Roman Essays* (Leicester 1974), pp. 131-132.

⁸ D. Mulray, 'The Early Career of P. Clodius Pulcher: A Re-Examination of the Charges of Mutiny and Sacrilege', *TAPA*, vol. 118 (1988), pp. 166-176.

⁹ W.J. Tatum *The Patrician Tribune: Publius Clodius Pulcher* (Chapel Hill and London 1999), pp. 85-86.

¹⁰ E. Gruen, 'P. Clodius: Instrument or Independent Agent?', *Phoenix*, vol 20 No. 2 (Summer 1966), pp. 121-123; B.A. Marshall, *Crassus: A Political Biography* (Amsterdam 1979), pp. 93, 201-203; Tatum, *The Patrician Tribune*, pp. 83-85.

¹¹ C. Babcock, 'The Early Career of Fulvia', *AJP*, pp. 1-8; Tatum, *The Patrician Tribune*, pp. 60-61.

around an article written by Lily Ross Taylor in 1950. Taylor, shifting the chronology of Cicero's letters to place the affair in July of 59, saw the affair as a ploy by Caesar to eliminate some of his political opponents prior to the consular elections for 58, a view taken up by Gelzer in later editions of his biography of Caesar.¹² Similarly, W.C. McDermott viewed the affair as Caesar's making¹³, followed by Meier,¹⁴ though eliminating his electoral opponents is not a motive. Seager argued against Taylor's chronological placement of Cicero's letters, opting instead for a plot by P. Clodius to drive a wedge between Pompey and Cicero;¹⁵ Walter Allen Jnr. opted for a similar wedge, but pointed the finger at Cicero.¹⁶ As can be seen from this analysis, scholars went off in many different directions with no real consensus on the affair reached, and so it remains up to the present day. Gruen steers clear of a judgement, viewing it as pointless, though he doubts Caesar's involvement;¹⁷ and Tatum in his collection of essays on Caesar's life and times does not mention it. We can only really assert that scholarship tends to view the affair as a cynical political ploy – as opposed to a genuine assassination attempt – whoever was responsible. McCullough herself opts for something of a hybrid of these hypotheses; that it was Caesar's opponents (not including Cicero, however) who were behind the affair, to drive Pompey away from Caesar; but in the context of the approaching consular elections.

The 'First Triumvirate'

Discussion of the 'First Triumvirate', the political alliance formed between Caesar, Crassus, and Pompey, is focused on establishing the date of the coalition. Upon this issue hinges our understanding of the power dynamics at play when the three men decided to join forces, as an earlier dating would indicate Caesar required the assistance of Pompey and Crassus for election, whereas a later date indicates Caesar, having been elected, negotiated the alliance from a position of strength. Mommsen stated Summer of 694 (i.e. 60 B.C.E.), though later scholars such as Syme and Gruen have often opted, on the strength of Cicero *Att.* 1.19, to place the coalition to December 60.¹⁸ Marshall and Stanton argued compellingly not only for an earlier date for the coalition, but also suggested that Caesar did not in fact 'reconcile' Pompey and Crassus; in their view, the two *principes*

¹² L.R. Taylor, 'The Date and Meaning of the Vettius Affair', *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte*, Bd. 1, H.1 (1950), pp. 45-51; M. Gelzer, *Caesar: Politician and Statesman* trans. Peter Needham (Cambridge, Mass. 1968), pp. 90-92.

¹³ 'Vettius Ille, Ille Noster Index', *TAPA*, vol. 80 (1949), pp. 351-367.

¹⁴ C. Meier, *Caesar*, trans. David McLintock (New York 1995), p. 210. Meier makes the ironic comment, "Caesar was naturally in no way involved in the doings of his most important helper. He was after all a mild and generous man."

¹⁵ R. Seager, 'Clodius, Pompeius and the Exile of Cicero', *Latomus*, T. 24, Fasc. 3 (Juillet-Septembre 1965), pp. 519-531.

¹⁶ 'The "Vettius Affair" Once More', *TAPA*, vol. 81 (1950), pp. 153-163.

¹⁷ *LGRR*, p. 96.

¹⁸ T. Mommsen, *The History of Rome: Book V*, trans. William P. Dickson (London 1874, 2005 repr.), p. 183; R. Syme, *The Roman Revolution* (Oxford 1939), p. 35; Gruen, *LGRR*, pp. 88-89.

joined forces independently of Caesar and later supported Caesar as 'their' candidate for the consulship.¹⁹ Thus, Caesar is considered by Marshall and Stanton to have been very much the junior partner, though their argument has not found widespread support. Also to be considered in this context are the aims of the 'First Triumvirate'; in earlier scholarship, the overthrow of the state was the conventional way to speak of the coalition's aims.²⁰ More recently Gruen has argued for purely short-term aims which did not include revolution, but which were adapted as time went on. In his view, the 'Triumvirate' did not spell the beginning of the end of the Republic, rather it was the circumstances immediately preceding the civil war which brought about the Republic's downfall.²¹ Gruen's view has also met with opposition, as scholars of the last decade have suggested Gruen downplays, and thus misses, the significance of the 'Triumvirate'.²² Nonetheless, Gruen has been credited with removing some 'teleological assumptions' which permeated earlier scholarship, in regards to the inevitability of Caesar's dictatorship.

Portraits of Caesar

A generally positive view of Caesar's historic significance permeates many of the very many biographies written about him. The enthusiastic partisanship displayed by Mommsen for his subject was shared to a lesser extent by Mathias Gelzer, who perceived Caesar as something of a tall poppy, intellectually and in breadth of political vision far superior to his noble peers.²³ Only Caesar qualified as a statesman in the true sense, whilst his contemporaries were far too myopic to grapple with the fundamental issues of corruption and empire which crippled the Republic.²⁴ Christian Meier, whilst having no illusions about Caesar's moral failings, nonetheless echoes Gelzer's sentiments on Caesar's abilities and statesmanship.²⁵ Since Meier, works focused on aspects of the life and times of Caesar such as W.J. Tatum's have attempted to reverse the trend in scholarship and place Caesar firmly *within* the culture of the republic; his actions and motivations – and those of his political opponents, and later murderers – could be placed within a context of oligarchic competition and the sense of

¹⁹ G.R. Stanton and B.A. Marshall, 'The Coalition Between Pompeius and Crassus 60-59 B.C.', *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte*, Bd. 24, H.2 (2nd Qtr., 1975), pp. 205-219.

²⁰ Syme, *The Roman Revolution*, p. 35; H.H. Scullard, *From the Gracchi to Nero: A History of Rome from 133 BC A.D 68* (5th ed. London and New York 1982), p. 113.

²¹ Gruen, *LGRR*, pp. 159-161, 498-507.

²² J. von Ungern-Sternberg, 'The Crisis of the Republic', [ed.] H.I. Flower, *The Cambridge Companion to the Roman Republic* (Melbourne 2004), p. 106.

²³ T. Mommsen, *op.cit.* pp. 419-426; Gelzer, *Caesar*, pp. 1, 330.

²⁴ *ibid.* p. 330.

²⁵ *Caesar*, p. 209. Meier presents a rather sinister picture of Caesar when added to the quote concerning Vettius above. "A fearful will, immensely compelling in its controlled strength... a man who had trained himself to project an outward gaiety....to conceal the awful depths of his soul. This required concentration, discipline, and enormous effort - the style of the great statesman, the brilliance of the superior personality."

self-worth so clearly demonstrated in evidence such as the funerary inscriptions of the nobility.²⁶ Caesar was not necessarily alone when he wrote that *dignitas* was more important to him than life itself; his audience was expected to sympathise. But it is the Caesar of Mommsen and Gelzer, and to a lesser extent Meier, who bestrides the world of McCullough's Rome like a colossus.

'Serial Romans'

Martha Malamud's contribution to the collection of essays *Imperial Projections* remains the only reception study of *The Masters of Rome* of which I am aware at the time of writing. Malamud's approach was concerned with identifying "ideological features of the novels",²⁷ and for the most part is not concerned with the kind of *Quellenforschung* Allen Ward applies to *Spartacus*, nor does she share his concern with the political narrative. Malamud's focus on ideological features ignores (deliberately, it must be said – Malamud dismissed McCullough's claims to historical authenticity as "rhetoric")²⁸ the great reliance McCullough placed upon ancient evidence and modern scholarship, especially the latter, in order to recreate the late Roman Republic, and creates a gap, as it were, in the scholarship. The influence of scholars such as Mommsen, Gelzer, and Gruen is paramount in McCullough's portrait of Julius Caesar, not to mention the way in which she interpreted significant historical events such as the 'First Triumvirate'.

²⁶ Tatum, *Always I am Caesar* (Carlton 2006), pp. 26-28.

²⁷ 'Serial Romans', *Imperial Projections: Ancient Rome in Modern Popular Culture* [ed.] Sandra R. Joshel, Margaret Malamud and Donald T. McGuire (Baltimore and London 2001), p. 210.

²⁸ *Ibid.* 216.

Methodology

How to approach historical fiction as a representation of the past is something which has been debated for well over a century. Certainly in the early nineteenth century when Sir Walter Scott wrote *Ivanhoe* and *Quentin Durward*, there was an idea that historical fiction should be as faithful to the source material as academic history; indeed, one of Leopold von Ranke's criticisms of Scott was for the creation of 'historical portraits' in the latter novel which apparently contradicted the evidence.¹ McCullough's conception of the historical novel, which we noted in the Introduction, can be seen to closely resemble that of Scott.

Thus, the first step in this process of reconstruction and explanation is to identify and analyse the historical events and issues as presented within the novels, using narratological methods. 'Characterization' of minor and major characters within the novels will be of particular interest, as a means to provide motivation and causation for historical events,² and plot development; how the events drawn from the sources have been emplotted within the novels and the significance and meaning that can be drawn from their narrative positioning. It should be pointed out here that the main purpose of this essay is not a literary critique of the novels - as such, there is little room to engage in a detailed way with the debates of literary theorists on competing ideas of characterization or emplotment. However, these concepts of characterization and emplotment need to be applied to some degree in order to properly explain how historical events, persons, and authorial persona have been constructed in the novels.

Most of the ancient evidence for the late Roman Republic is in the form of literary sources, for which I have created a chronologically and thematically based database. A comparative analysis of the events as depicted in the novels with what can be drawn from the ancient evidence through *Quellenforschung* will underpin much of the discussion of how McCullough has reconstructed the ancient world. Furthermore, a close analysis of modern scholarship, with reference to McCullough's bibliography, will also inform much of the discussion for each chapter and help determine to what extent McCullough has leaned upon modern scholarship.

¹ A. Curthoys and J. Docker, *Is History Fiction?* (Sydney 2010), p. 62; cf. T. Stevenson, 'Imaginations of Ancient Rome in 19th Century Historical Novels', *Ancient History: Resources for Teachers*, 41-44 (2011-2014), p. 95, who notes that Scott was "respectful to historical method". As Stevenson observes, Scott employed footnotes and appendices in novels such as *Quentin Durward* – which did not stop von Ranke from criticising him for creative licence!

² Without being drawn into the depths of modern debate on how exactly characterization should be defined, the main interest is in the attribution of psychological, social and physiological traits to various characters (noted in Fotis Jannidis, 'Character', *Handbook of Narratology*, ed. Peter Huhn et. al. [Berlin and New York 2009], p. 21).

The heavy focus on McCullough's use of ancient evidence and modern scholarship might appear strange to practitioners of reception, however we must bear in mind that the aim McCullough had in writing the novels, alluded to above, was to recreate the past as *accurately* as she possibly could. Secondly, the potential for receptions such as films or novels to be used in the classroom to assist in the teaching of history or the ways in which it can be presented is well known,³ which brings us back to the focus on ancient evidence and scholarship. The fundamental concept of reception – the shifting meaning of texts – will influence what kind of conclusions will be reached;⁴ there is no desire in this thesis to intimate that McCullough is 'right' or 'wrong' about any given issue. Nor do I think that, in studying these novels, we will necessarily uncover the 'true' meanings of any given ancient texts by stripping away the accretions of meaning which have been attached to them,⁵ up to and including *The Masters of Rome*. As Charles Martindale has rightly observed, if we remove the meanings added over time, we need to replace them with something⁶ - but inevitably whatever we replace them with would be of our own creation.

³ J. Paul, 'Working with Film', *A Companion to Classical Receptions*, [ed.] Lorna Hardwick and Christopher Stray (Oxford, 2008), pp. 304-305; C. Martindale, 'Introduction: Thinking Through Reception', *Classics and the Uses of Reception* (Carlton, 2006), p. 11. On *The Masters of Rome* in particular, 'Toga party in Macquarie Street', May 22, 2004: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2004/05/21/1085120115801.html?from=storyrhs>

⁴ C. Martindale, *Redeeming the Text*, (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 11-13; 'Introduction: Thinking Through Reception', *Classics and the Uses of Reception*, pp. 3-4.

⁵ As has been argued by L. Hardwick and C. Stray, 'Introduction', *A Companion to Classical Receptions*, p. 4.

⁶ 'Introduction: Thinking Through Reception', *Classics and the Uses of Reception*, p.12.

Chapter One: The Divorce of Pompey and Mucia

Late in the year 62, the famous general and conqueror of Mithridates of Pontus and Tigranes of Armenia, Gnaeus Pompeius Magnus, divorced his wife of over a decade, Mucia, the daughter of Q. Mucius Scaevola (cos. 95) and 'sister' to Q. Metellus Celer (cos. 60) and Q. Metellus Nepos (cos. 57). The reason generally accepted for Pompey's action was Mucia's alleged adultery (possibly with Caesar), though we have no concrete evidence to suggest this was the case at the time. The divorce had immediate political ramifications in the city of Rome. Though the divorce was, according to Cicero, strongly approved amongst the aristocracy, the two Metelli were alienated from Pompey, their familial *dignitas* mortally offended; and the elder brother Celer would offer Pompey fierce resistance to his political programme during his consulship.¹ Though now in a position to seek a new marriage connection, Pompey was ostentatiously rebuffed by M. Cato.² The political prospects of Pompey began to look very bleak indeed, and would culminate in his seeking new allies, taking form in the 'First Triumvirate', in order to overcome the opposition so effectively masterminded by the coterie of M. Cato.

The portrayal of Pompey's divorce of Mucia in *Caesar's Women* for the most part sticks to the general outline given above. Early in 62, Pompey writes to Caesar from the East, including a brief recount of a conversation Pompey had with Metellus Nepos (at that time serving on Pompey's staff), the latter of whom "flew so high I wondered if he was ever going to come back down again" when the subject of Mucia's possible infidelities was raised.³ By the time he reaches Italy, Pompey has made his decision and a note of divorce is sent to Mucia; the reason given is adultery.⁴ The culprit – as with much scholarship, McCullough assumes the allegations to be true – is not Caesar, but T. Labienus, Caesar's future lieutenant in Gaul.⁵ However, the rumour is spread that the culprit was indeed Caesar, accounting for the enmity which the two brothers, Celer and Nepos, show towards Caesar, in addition to their new feud with Pompey.⁶ The reason given in *Caesar's Women* for Mucia's adultery is that Pompey had given orders for her to remain at his home in Picenum during his absence, something even McCullough, despite the fact she attributes these orders to Pompey, notes was unusual by the standards of the time, instructions which led to a great deal of boredom and

¹ Cic. Att. 1.12.3. For Celer's opposition to Pompey, cf. Cic. Att. 1.19.4 & 2.1.8; Dio. 37.49.2 - 37.50.6.

² Plut. Cat. Min. 30.2-5, Pomp. 44.2-4.

³ *Caesar's Women*, p. 527.

⁴ *Caesar's Women*, p. 566.

⁵ *Caesar's Women*, p. 257.

⁶ *Caesar's Women*, pp. 566, 633-634.

resentment on Mucia's part.⁷ Labienus' motives also lie in a certain resentment felt towards Pompey, for not advancing his career as far, or as fast, as he felt his talents deserved; a *nouus homo*, he is completely dependent upon Pompey for advancement.⁸ These are the main points of McCullough's account of the divorce, and I will now address them in turn.

Divorce Procedure

In her study of Roman marriage and divorce practices, Susan Treggiari notes three main ways in which the initiation of a divorce was represented in the Republic. The term *repudiare*, which largely begins to be used in the Principate to refer to divorce, seems to have been only used for the break-up of engagements prior to this time.⁹ *Divertere/divortere* is similarly a term gaining currency in the Principate, but rarely used in the Republic.¹⁰ According to Treggiari, the third most common phrase for divorce in the Republic was *nuntium (re)mittere* ('to send a message').¹¹ A similar process of repudiation as the latter is expressed in the much older work of Otto Keifer, the work upon which McCullough most heavily relies for her understanding of divorce procedure, though Keifer does not define different divorce categories.¹² As noted above, in *Caesar's Women* Pompey merely sends Mucia a note informing her she has been divorced. How is this reflected in our source material? Cicero, our contemporary observer, provides us with only minimal detail on the divorce: he simply makes the statement '*diuortium Muciae uehementer probatur*' (Att. 1.12.3). Cicero's formulation is rather vague here – Atticus was presumably in no doubt about what Cicero meant, though it is tempting to question whether Cicero meant 'the divorce of Mucia is strongly approved' or 'Mucia's divorce (of Pompey) is strongly approved'. If a *matrona* was *sui iuris*, as it is plausible to suggest that Mucia was (if indeed Q. Mucius Scaevola (cos. 95) was the father of Mucia, as is often assumed by scholarship, in the absence of explicit evidence),¹³ she could initiate the divorce herself.¹⁴ Nor does this alone give us any indication of how the divorce was brought about. Considering the preceding sentence, '*... Pompeium nobis amicissimum constat esse*', we can assume Cicero refers to an action taken by Pompey. Dating the letter to early 61 suggests that Pompey had divorced Mucia according

⁷ *Caesar's Women*, pp. 257, 634.

⁸ *Caesar's Women*, pp. 255-260.

⁹ *Roman Marriage: iusti coniuges From the Time of Cicero to the Time of Ulpian* (Oxford 1991), p. 436.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* p. 438.

¹¹ *Ibid.* p. 438.

¹² Otto Keifer, *Sexual Life in Ancient Rome*, trans. Gilbert and Helen Highet (London 1934), p. 30. For Keifer, divorce in most cases (bar from a *confarraetio* marriage) was simply a repudiation by the husband; he did not note the different phrasing used by various authors to differentiate between different methods of divorce, as Treggiari has done. For Keifer's work appearing in McCullough's bibliography, s.v. 'Life and Thought', *Bibliography for the "Masters of Rome" series by Colleen McCullough* (unpublished document), p. 38.

¹³ Eg. By D.R. Shackleton-Bailey [ed.], *Cicero's Letters to Atticus* (Cambridge 1965), p. 299.

¹⁴ Keifer, *Sexual Life in Ancient Rome*, p. 33; Treggiari, *Roman Marriage*, p. 439, 442-44; see also S. Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity* (London 1975), p. 158. This was, as Treggiari and Pomeroy note, a rare enough occurrence.

to the practice of the late Republic; he sent her a written notice. Since at the time of the divorce he was outside of Rome, we can rule out a verbal delivery. Our other sources confirm this assumption. Asconius refers to Pompey having divorced Mucia for '*impudicitia*' (in *Scaur.* 20), though again we have no detailed information on what the notice contained. Suetonius uses the more dramatic formula, '*... exegisset uxorem*' (*Div. Iul.* 50.1), which could indicate a message had been sent, but not unequivocal – it could equally refer to a verbal delivery. Dio merely states that Pompey had divorced Metellus' (i.e. Celer's) 'sister', without going into detail on the divorce itself (37.49.3). Plutarch is the only source who states outright that Pompey sent Mucia a notice of divorce (*Pomp.* 42.7). There is no major disagreement between the sources, despite a certain lack of detail, and McCullough's use of the *nuntium (re)mittere* formula, based upon Plutarch and perhaps a reading of Cicero that I have outlined above, is on a sound footing in this instance. The reason for this focus on minutiae will become apparent as the chapter progresses; for now it is important to establish how the procedure Pompey used to divorce Mucia can be drawn from the ancient evidence.

The Reason for the Divorce

The procedure of divorce being established, we now have to ask the question; what reason did Pompey give publicly for divorcing Mucia? Much of our understanding of this event hinges on what Pompey had written in the notice to Mucia; did he mention adultery? Cicero's brief reference is suggestive but by no means conclusive; the fact that the divorce was strongly approved of (by Cicero at least) is no real indicator that Pompey specifically referred to adultery. As Pomeroy has observed, in a work which also appears in McCullough's bibliography, divorce based upon moral grounds was rare in the Republic in any case.¹⁵ In fact, strictly speaking, Cicero's letter does not refer to adultery at all.¹⁶ Cicero's approval of Pompey's divorce may conceivably be due to the severed connection between Pompey and one of Cicero's most vocal critics, Metellus Nepos.¹⁷ Asconius is the first to refer to a *crimen impudicitiae*,¹⁸ though this does not establish that this was mentioned in the divorce notice, even if Mucia's alleged infidelity had become widely known. Nor indeed is Suetonius

¹⁵ Treggiari also makes the same observation, see above note for references from both authors. Keifer seems to have made a similar point when he mentions the increase in 'frivolous' divorces (see n. 59 below), though rather more obliquely. For Pomeroy in McCullough's bibliography, s.v. 'Women', *Bibliography for the "Masters of Rome" series by Colleen McCullough* (unpublished document), p. 56.

¹⁶ Though Plutarch cites a letter of Cicero's, now presumably lost, in which the reason is given as adultery (*Pomp.* 42.7). Shackleton-Bailey, *op. cit.*, p. 299, suggests that Plutarch's statement may rest on "an inaccurate recollection of this passage" (i.e. *Cic. Att.* 1.12.3).

¹⁷ This view is raised but ultimately rejected by W.J. Tatum, *The Patrician Tribune: Publius Clodius Pulcher* (Chapel Hill and London 1999), pp. 63, though McCullough would not, of course, have been able to have made use of Tatum. Nepos had attempted to prevent Cicero giving the customary valediction at the end of his consulship, and the two men had clashed in the *curia* early in 62, cf. *Cic. Fam.* 5.1 & 5.2. Cicero at the time felt compelled to petition Clodia Metelli and Mucia, as well as some *amici* of Nepos, to request they hold him in check. Interestingly, it doesn't appear that Cicero made any such request of Nepos' *frater* Celer. Clodia and Mucia may be accounted for by Cicero's friendship with Atticus and Pompey respectively; that Cicero never petitioned Celer may suggest their relationship was not as close as Cicero made it out to be.

¹⁸ *Scaur.* 20.

much more help, despite the (possibly apocryphal) anecdote that Pompey referred to Caesar as 'Aegisthus'.¹⁹ As the only source who specifically mentions Pompey's notice to Mucia, Plutarch is the most help here. What Plutarch has to say changes the situation quite dramatically; despite the fact that Pompey knew that Mucia had been unfaithful to him (with whom is not established by Plutarch, who does not mention Caesar). Plutarch states that Pompey "neither wrote at the time, nor afterwards declared, the grounds on which he put her away".²⁰ Plutarch claims to have drawn the reason for the divorce from Cicero's letters; not one, alas, which has survived into the modern corpus, though it is clear that Plutarch elsewhere makes use of Cicero, and there is no reason to doubt him in this instance. The obvious question would then be, if Pompey knew of the adultery, why would he not divorce Mucia for this reason? According to Roman custom it was a perfectly legitimate reason to do so – adultery was considered a very serious breach of the *affectio maritalis*.²¹ For this reason, it appears many scholars had not grasped the significance of the distinction Plutarch specifically makes mention of between the text of Pompey's divorce notice and the rumours current at the time, until Treggiari in 1991: what Pompey wrote and what Pompey may have mentioned to Cicero were two different things.²² McCullough's re-creation of the event, like that of many modern scholars, blurred the lines. In part this can be traced to the scholarship listed in her bibliography, works which all pre-date the publication of Treggiari's research;²³ in addition, Treggiari's own works do not appear in McCullough's bibliography.²⁴ This does not necessarily mean McCullough relied entirely upon scholarly interpretation of Plutarch, and was not 'working from the sources' as such; but her understanding of divorce procedure, gleaned primarily from Keifer, prompted her to read Plutarch in a similar way: namely, that Pompey's divorce of Mucia required a reason to be given, and, as Plutarch states that Cicero (a contemporary and thus a valuable witness) wrote that the reason was understood to be adultery, Cicero's opinion (albeit transmitted by Plutarch, but repeated by Asconius and Suetonius) is preferred to the statement of Plutarch himself, writing well after the

¹⁹ The brother of Agamemnon, who carried on an affair with Agamemnon's wife Clytemnestra while the king was away during the Trojan War. Clytemnestra later murdered her husband when he discovered her infidelity. The allusion to the Mycenaean king, and the usurpation of his position as ruler of the state, suggests Suetonius' anecdote post-dates the civil war between Caesar and Pompey which broke out in 49, and which was later seen as the struggle for mastery of the state between the two *principes*.

²⁰ *Pomp.* 42.7 (trans. Bernadotte Perrin).

²¹ Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves*, p. 159 (though Pomeroy's argument is more evident in her discussion of Augustus' legislation); Treggiari, *Roman Marriage*, p. 462, 464; S. Treggiari, 'Divorce Roman Style; How Easy and How Frequent Was It?', *Marriage, Divorce and Children in Ancient Rome* [ed.] Beryl Rawson (Oxford 1991), p.40; M. Skinner, *Sexuality in Greek and Roman Culture* (Carlton 2005), p. 203.

²² *Roman Marriage*, p. 437.

²³ Eg. E. Gruen, *The Last Generation of the Roman Republic* (Berkeley 1974), p. 85; Pomeroy, *op.cit.* p. 159; J. Leach, *Pompey the Great* (London 1978), p. 112-113; R. Seager, *Pompey the Great: A Political Biography* (Oxford 1979), p. 76. For McCullough's use of Seager, and Leach, sv. 'Biographies', 'Pompeius Magnus', *Bibliography of the "Masters of Rome" series by Colleen McCullough* (unpublished document), p. 17; for Gruen, s.v. 'Histories of the Roman Republic', *ibid.*, p. 29. This view is also held by other biographies of Pompey, however: cf. J. Van Ooteghem, *Pompée le Grand: Bâtisseur d'Empire* (Bruxelles 1954), p. 273.

²⁴ As Treggiari's *Roman Marriage* was published in 1991, when McCullough had already started writing (*The First Man in Rome*, the first novel of the series, was also published in 1991) and was no longer as heavily invested in research, it is probable she did not include it because she had already finished the research on that aspect of Roman culture for her novels. Thus the absence of Treggiari may not have been a conscious choice on the part of McCullough.

event. Agreement with, and amongst, relevant scholarship can only have reinforced the author's confidence in her own reading. An additional reason for McCullough's re-creation, however, is concerned with her characterization of Pompey, to be discussed below.

The Characterization of Pompey

Upon returning to Italy at the end of 62, Pompey had two main political goals; to secure land for his veterans, and to have his eastern *acta* ratified en bloc. Unlike the situation in 71, Pompey was not using the threat of his army, and dismissed his troops upon landing at Brundisium.²⁵ The fight ahead would be fought through largely constitutional means, and retaining the support of men like the two Metelli would be essential, especially if the process dragged on into 60; the opposition of L. Lucullus (cos. 74), Q. Catulus (cos. 78), C. Piso (cos. 67) and M. Cato (tr. pl. 62, pr. 54) made this a very real possibility. In 60 Celer would be eligible to hold the consulship, and Nepos the praetorship. However, the allegations of adultery against Mucia changed the situation. It is often seen as a fatal miscalculation on Pompey's part to have divorced her, apparently not realising how this would affect her brothers.²⁶ McCullough takes a similar view, seeing Pompey as someone not sufficiently subtle to go far without a Philippus or a Caesar to guide him through the ins and outs of senatorial politics, an opinion which echoes that of Mommsen:

For nothing was he less qualified than for a statesman. Uncertain as to his aims, unskilful in the choice of his means, alike in little matters and great short-sighted and helpless...²⁷

McCullough's opinion we can glean from a quick assessment made by Servilia (Brutus' mother) to Caesar:

"Were he a Roman, he would never have done what he did to the senate before he became consul. He has no subtle streak, no inner conviction of invincibility. Pompeius thinks rules and laws were meant to be broken for his benefit. Yet he hungers for approval and is perpetually torn by conflicting desires. He wants to be the First Man in Rome for the rest of his life, but he really has no idea of the right way to do that."²⁸

Mommsen was a scholar for whom McCullough had the highest regard, and this is also evident in how closely her treatment of Pompey parallels that of the German scholar, as indeed it does elsewhere.²⁹ A different view on Pompey's political manoeuvring, such as that held by Seager, is that

²⁵ See T.R.S. Broughton, *Magistrates of the Roman Republic: Volume II: 99 B.C. – 31 B.C.* (New York 1952), p. 176, for sources.

²⁶ Van Ooteghem, *Pompée*, p. 290; Gruen, *LGRR*, p. 85; Leach, *Pompey*, pp. 112-113

²⁷ T. Mommsen, *The History of Rome Book V*, trans. William P. Dickson (London 1864), p. 9.

²⁸ Caesar's *Women*, p. 633.

²⁹ 'Author's Note', *Caesar's Women*, p. 794.

Pompey's hubris blinded him to the political realities of Rome; the alliance with the Metelli having served its purpose, he divorced Mucia, seeking an alliance with Cato, who, to Pompey's astonishment, was not keen on the idea.³⁰ Intriguingly, however, the episode recounted by Plutarch upon which Seager based his hypothesis is not re-created by McCullough in *Caesar's Women*, which is a further indicator of how McCullough characterized Pompey. The Pompey of *Caesar's Women* is blind to the fact that his divorce could have political ramifications with regard to the Metelli,³¹ or that it could open up an opportunity to attempt a conciliation with Cato, one of Pompey's most effective political opponents, through a marriage alliance. The divorce notice sent to Mucia is re-created as a blunt, ill-considered and emotional response to Mucia's infidelity. Pompey is unable to see past the injury done to himself, and the divorce notice is a reflection of that fact. But Pompey's poor handling of the divorce is also a reflection of the author's conception of Pompey as a non-Roman, a point we will return to shortly.

The Allegiance of Labienus

The only ancient evidence we possess for Caesar having an affair with Mucia is Suetonius (*Div. Iul.* 50.1), as noted above. However, McCullough rejects Suetonius' evidence in this case. Not because Caesar was such an honourable and upright man, necessarily – his philandering is notorious throughout the novels – but because in light of the 'First Triumvirate' formed some years later, she seemed to have viewed it as implausible that Pompey would ally himself so closely with Caesar if the latter had indeed seduced his wife – or vice versa.³² Thus, she selects a surprising culprit: T. Labienus.³³ As far as evidence goes, there is no unequivocal statement which supports this theory. McCullough writes in *Caesar's Women* that Labienus had become disillusioned with Pompey for two main reasons. The first is that Pompey had not made use of Labienus during his campaigns against the pirates, nor in the eastern campaigns against Mithridates and Tigranes.³⁴ The second is that, due to unexpected delays in Pompey's political programme caused by the siege of Jerusalem, Labienus'

³⁰ *Pompey*, pp. 76-79. Cf. *Plut. Cat. Min.* 30.2-5 & *Pomp.* 44.2-4 for Plutarch's account.

³¹ Note the surprise in a (fictitious) letter McCullough has Pompey write to Caesar, "For years Celer and his little brother Nepos were my loyalest adherents. But ever since I divorced Mucia they've been my worst enemies. Honestly, Caesar, you'd think Mucia was the only wife ever divorced in the history of Rome! I had every right to divorce her, didn't I? She was an aduItress ..." (*Caesar's Women*, p. 599).

³² McCullough has Caesar and Pompey discuss the issue of Mucia's (alleged) adultery before Caesar leaves for Spain in 61; Pompey has by this time come to realise the truth, that it was Labienus and not Caesar who had been involved with Mucia (*Caesar's Women*, pp. 586-588).

³³ Skinner makes the interesting observation that "anxieties over social changes in late Republican Rome precipitated by continued civil unrest, including a loss of confidence in patronage ties and the weakening of accepted class boundaries, appear to find concrete expression in tales of well-born adulteresses attracted to social inferiors." (*Sexuality*, p. 203). Not that McCullough could have possibly made use of Skinner's observation, but the alignment of ideas gives food for thought; McCullough certainly saw Labienus as socially inferior to Mucia, on account of his lack of consular ancestry.

³⁴ *Caesar's Women*, p. 257.

role as far as Pompey was concerned had changed; instead of being responsible for proposing Pompey's agrarian settlements as tribune for 63, so far as Labienus was aware early in the year 63, he would merely propose that Pompey be allowed to wear triumphal regalia.³⁵ For a *nouus homo* with ambitions to reach the consulship and take on a military command, these were serious blows to his career.³⁶ Indeed, because of the delegation to Labienus of such a minor task on Pompey's behalf, the latter no longer sees any reason to finance Labienus' career. We have no evidence to suggest Labienus had served with Pompey in the East,³⁷ though Syme considered this a possibility;³⁸ McCullough lists Syme's paper in her bibliography, but appears to have rejected the possibility Labienus had an early military career under Pompey.³⁹ The lack of evidence has been noted, and McCullough was alert to this. In addition, for the purposes of the development of this sub-plot of her novel, Labienus needs a compelling reason to be disillusioned with Pompey for the Labienus/Mucia affair to be plausible. According to Velleius, Labienus (along with T. Ampius), was indeed responsible for the bill to allow Pompey triumphal regalia,⁴⁰ contrary to the account of Dio that Caesar proposed the bill;⁴¹ on this point McCullough has favoured the interpretation of Gruen, perhaps, in addition to her profound respect for the scholarship of Gruen, because the bill appears to lack the kind of statesmanly vision with which she associated the lawmaking of Caesar.⁴² McCullough's chronology for the year 63 pushed her to the unusual step of defending what she referred to as a 'cardinal sin'; the *perduellio* trial of C. Rabirius she moves to December of 63, despite the evidence of Cicero *Att.* 2.1.3,⁴³ and indeed despite the absence of scholarship which supports her reconstruction. Nor does McCullough attribute to Labienus the formulation of the bill to return the election of priests to the mind of Labienus; in *Caesar's Women*, the mastermind of that bill is Caesar, though Labienus proposes the bill (on Caesar's suggestion).⁴⁴ Thus, according to McCullough, when Labienus contemplates his year as tribune early in 63 prior to Caesar's helpful suggestions, his prospects for a

³⁵ *Caesar's Women*, p. 257.

³⁶ cf. T.P. Wiseman, *New Men in the Roman Senate* (London 1971), p. 236 (no. 220).

³⁷ For Labienus' known career, see Broughton, *MRR II*, p. 578; *MRR III*, p. 116.

³⁸ 'The Allegiance of Labienus', *JRS*, vol. 28 Part 2 (1938), p. 120. In their accounts of Pompey's campaigns against the pirates, then against Mithridates and Tigranes, neither Seager, *Pompey*, pp. 44-49, nor Leach, *Pompey*, pp. 66-77, mention Labienus serving on Pompey's staff. Leach later concedes that Labienus, "probably owed his early military career to Pompey's patronage" (p. 176), though where or when this early military career might have taken place is not made clear – no doubt due to the lack of evidence.

³⁹ For the appearance of Syme's papers in McCullough's bibliography, s.v. 'General Reference Works', *Bibliography for the "Masters of Rome series by Colleen McCullough"* (unpublished document), p. 3.

⁴⁰ Velleius, 2.40.4.

⁴¹ Dio. 37.21.4.

⁴² *LGRR*, p. 80. Cf. McCullough's reasoning for moving the Rabirius trial of 63 to December, with regard to the character of Caesar: "He comes across as a man who always had very good reason for his actions. To place the trial of Rabirius before Catilina smacks of, if not caprice, then at least pure naughtiness on Caesar's part." (*Caesar's Women*, p. 787). See also the chapter 'Caesar', pp. 53-61, of this thesis.

⁴³ In which letter Cicero outlines a list of his consular speeches. The list is chronological; the first speech Cicero states was given on the Kalends of January (i.e. January 1st), the last speech the Nones of December (December 5th). The *pro Rabirio* Cicero places fourth in the list, out of a total of ten. No exact date for its delivery is given by Cicero (though it seems quite clear the list is arranged chronologically), which enabled McCullough to reconstruct the chronology of 63 without directly contradicting what is mentioned in the sources (tenuous argument though this might be), see 'Author's Note', *Caesar's Women*, pp. 785-792.

⁴⁴ *Caesar's Women*, p. 270-271.

memorable term in office look grim indeed. His talent for command came to be respected by Caesar during the Gallic Wars, and perhaps Labienus felt that he deserved a chance to prove himself earlier. The fact that, in the source tradition, it was under Caesar's aegis that Labienus had the chance to shine may be an indication of Pompey losing interest, and as Syme noted Labienus did not attempt to stand for the consulship *in suo anno* for 57 or 56.⁴⁵ That McCullough believed Labienus felt under-appreciated is, I believe, a reasonable enough re-construction. It need not drive one to have an affair with their patron's wife, however. Labienus' reasons are twofold; Labienus, in McCullough's view, was highly ambitious. The extent of his *dolor* is a reflection of the scale of his now thwarted ambition. In his case such a dramatic form of revenge is not inconceivable. But the second reason requires further discussion; Labienus was from Picenum.

Pompey and Picenum

Geography – that is to say, Mucia's geographic isolation from Rome – plays a large part in McCullough's reconstruction of Mucia's alleged infidelity, in line with the way she wished to emphasise the regional differences between Pompey and Caesar, a particular dramatic ploy of her own and an important arch for the entire series of her novels. Witness, for example, her recreation of an imagined first impression of Pompey by the young Julius Caesar:

And Caesar, sitting in the corner, took in his first experience of Gnaeus Pompeius Magnus unobserved. To look at, not a true Roman, that was certain; the Picentine taint of Gaul was all too obvious in his snub nose, his broad face, the dent in his chin. To listen to, not a true Roman, *that* was certain. His total lack of subtlety was amazing.⁴⁶

It was in Picenum that Mucia and Labienus were carrying on their affair as depicted in *Caesar's Women*. Why is this the case? McCullough first establishes Pompey's origins in Picenum, something which has come to be accepted by some authoritative historians who have studied Pompey's life and career, notably Friedrich Münzer, whom McCullough made use of in her research for the novels.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ 'The Allegiance of Labienus', p. 120-123. This is based upon the view that Labienus must have been praetor by 59, since Labienus intended to stand with Caesar for the consulship of 48 (Hirtius, *BG*, 8.50), and Labienus was with Caesar in Gaul during the latter's entire tenure of the province; thus he was not praetor between 58 and 49). Syme's view has found support in Gruen (*LGRR*, pp. 174, 382). Broughton *MRR* II does not include Labienus as a praetor on the list of magistrates between 61-51, but in the Index of Careers notes the possibility (p. 578). That Labienus did not seek office for 57 or 56 may indeed, as Syme argued, be an indication of a lack of support, and an unwillingness to contend against men like Q. Metellus Nepos, L. Marcius Philippus and Cn. Domitius Ahenobarbus if we accept the above hypothesis. Since McCullough's novel does not cover the majority of the year 61 – when Caesar is in Spain – Labienus' praetorship, conjectured or otherwise, is not mentioned for that year, nor she does she attribute a praetorship to him for 60 or 59.

⁴⁶ *Fortune's Favourites*, p. 387.

⁴⁷ Münzer, *Roman Aristocratic Parties and Families*, trans Therese Ridley (Baltimore 1999, first published in German 1920), p. 50; Syme, *Roman Revolution*, p. 28; Van Ooteghem, *Pompée*, p. 27 ("Le Picenum, où naquit Pompée"). Münzer cites Gelzer, *Nobilitat*, p. 125 in support of his argument for Pompey's Picentine origins, though the English translation of Gelzer (*The Roman Nobility*, trans. Robin Seager (Oxford 1975), p. 93-95, only states that Pompey was the patron of a large part of Picenum. Mommsen does not refer to Pompey's birthplace, though he notes the relatively recent arrival of the Pompeii in the consular *fasti* (*History of Rome*, pp. 7-10); in the discussion of

The evidence on which Münzer's reconstruction is based is somewhat flimsy, however. Plutarch notes that Pompey inherited a great deal of land and *clientelae* from his father in Picenum;⁴⁸ but this by no means confirms Pompey's origins.⁴⁹ It is equally possible that Plutarch is merely referring to vast holdings the family has in the region, perhaps more so considering the fact that Plutarch does not refer to Pompey's birthplace at this point in the *Life*. In this light we should understand Cicero's references to Picenum.⁵⁰ Strabo and Pliny make purely geographical observations about Picenum, in which neither (unsurprisingly, given their subject) makes mention of the Pompeii.⁵¹ The fact that Pompey's own tribe was the Clustumina, rather than the Velina (the main tribe of Picenum), would also argue against placing Pompey's origins in Picenum.⁵² More telling in understanding McCullough's decision to make Pompey a Picentine is perhaps the list provided by Gruen of Picentine senators who are known to have given support to Pompey throughout his career,⁵³ though we must fall short of designating Picenum as Pompey's birthplace on this basis; supporters from Picenum are to be expected considering Plutarch's observation. Nor, it must be pointed out, did Gruen himself go so far as to suggest Pompey was born in Picenum when he listed the Great Man's Picentine supporters. The name 'Pompeius' has been argued to have Etruscan roots,⁵⁴ though accepting this cannot constitute proof of a Picentine extraction. Despite the objections of the more recent scholarship such as Leach and Seager of which she made use, McCullough's interpretation of the origins of the Pompeii can be traced back to scholars such as Münzer and Syme. None of this leads into the assumption Pompey had his residence in Picenum, or that Mucia would also have resided in Picenum during his absence on campaign. However, it is an important arch of the novels to portray a struggle for power between two 'great men', one from the landed aristocracy, and one an outsider to the aristocracy. In this vein the series depicts a struggle between Marius and Sulla, Pompey and Crassus, then Pompey and Caesar. It follows, then, that Pompey's place of residence – his home – is in Picenum, rather than Rome. Thus McCullough has Pompey make the off-putting remark about Mucia, that he "keeps her in Picenum".⁵⁵ This state of affairs continues up until the divorce. It is this geographic isolation which drives Mucia to an extra-marital affair, but one

Picenum in the context of Caesar's occupation of Italy during the civil war, Mommsen makes no reference to any special attachment Pompey might have had to the region (pp. 346-348). For Münzer in McCullough's bibliography, s.v. 'General Reference Works', *Bibliography for the "Masters of Rome" series by Colleen McCullough* (unpublished document), p. 3.

⁴⁸ *Pomp.* 6.1.

⁴⁹ Syme, *The Roman Revolution*, p. 28, in saying that the Pompeii 'probably' derived their origin from Picenum, is undoubtedly drawing his thoughts in this regard from Münzer (in the passage cited above, n. 47), to whose "supreme example and guidance" he glowingly refers in his Preface (viii), though Münzer only cites Gelzer (see n. 47 above), doubtless on the grounds that this reference is intended to be only an affirmation of the observation that Picenum was "a region where they possessed large estates and wide influence".

⁵⁰ *Att.* 7.13.1, 8.3.4 and 8.8.1.

⁵¹ Strabo, *Geography*, 5.4.2; Pliny, *NH*, 3.110.

⁵² L.R. Taylor, *Party Politics in the Age of Caesar*, p. 200, n. 10, notes Pompey's influence in the region but does not say that he was born there; Gruen, *LGRR*, pp. 63-64, makes the same cautious observation as Taylor. More direct in refuting Pompey's origins in Picenum are Leach, *Pompey*, pp. 14-15; and Seager, *Pompey*, p. 20.

⁵³ Gruen, *LGRR*, p. 61.

⁵⁴ Münzer, *Roman Aristocratic Parties and Families*, p. 50; Syme, *Roman Revolution*, p. 28; Leach, *Pompey*, p. 15; Seager, *Pompey*, p. 20.

⁵⁵ *Fortune's Favourites*, p. 738.

conducted within Picenum, rather than in the city of Rome, and thus with a Picentine; one who feels equally resentful of Pompey's rather off-hand treatment.

Conclusion

McCullough's understanding of late Republican divorce procedure, though based on scholarship, derives from Otto Keifer's now somewhat outdated contribution to the field, despite her use of Pomeroy, and lacks the more nuanced understanding which Treggiari contributed shortly after McCullough had begun publishing her novels. However, in the *Masters of Rome* series, McCullough rightly does not depict the kind of court cases, settlements and custody battles which are often the features of a divorce in modern times. In the example of Pompey's divorce of Mucia she depicts what to modern eyes can appear to be the almost nonchalant attitude to divorce held by the Roman aristocracy of the late Republic, namely divorce initiated through the expedient of a simple notice. In the particular case of Pompey and Mucia, however, McCullough's re-creation of the divorce is heavily influenced by the view she held of Pompey as a non-Roman. From this premise one can trace all of the elements of the divorce: Pompey's lack of subtlety, and his inability to handle such a potentially dangerous political issue diplomatically - or perhaps better to say, to even perceive that such a situation demanded a delicate touch. McCullough's Pompey is unable to grasp social niceties because the society he moves within - Roman society - is not truly his own. This also explains the location of Mucia's affair with Labienus, in Picenum, and with a Picentine, rather than in Rome, though, as we have seen, McCullough established a credible back-story for Labienus which would explain that man's motivations. In addition, it is completely in character for McCullough's non-Roman Pompey to not only isolate Mucia to the countryside, without considering how she might feel about this, but to bluntly divorce her for adultery without a thought for how her relatives might react. In the novels, the baron of Picenum thinks in a way a world apart from his Roman contemporaries. However, despite the prestigious scholarship which hypothesises that Pompey himself was a Picentine, and which has no doubt guided McCullough's own characterization of Pompey, any future student reading McCullough's novels, or indeed of the career of Pompey the Great, must be wary of the weak evidentiary foundations upon which this assertion stands.

Chapter Two: The 'Bona Dea Affair'

On the night of December 5th, 62 B.C.E, the rites of the Bona Dea were celebrated at the *domus publica*, at that time the residence of the praetor Julius Caesar. At some point during the night, the patrician Publius Clodius Pulcher allegedly gained entry into the house by disguising himself as a woman, and in doing so violated the rites of the goddess which forbade the presence of men during the ceremonies. The result of this violation was the creation of a special court in the following year to try Clodius for *incestum*, a charge usually reserved for the violation of a Vestal Virgin. After a prolonged struggle over the constitution of the court, a trial finally took place in 61. Through notorious bribery (so it was alleged), Clodius was acquitted. This briefly sums up the basic elements of the 'Bona Dea Affair', as it has come to be known. But several questions present themselves. The first question that comes to mind is, why would Clodius intrude on a ceremony which he had no right to attend? Understanding this issue hinges in part upon a second question, which is what kind of ritual the Bona Dea was, a Greek import, or a Roman ceremony dating back to the time of the kings? A third aspect of this strange episode to be examined is the trial itself. Who supported Clodius during the struggles over the constitution of the court, and who sought to bring him down? And were there ulterior motives behind the prolonged debate in the senate? These three essential points, and how McCullough has addressed them in the novel *Caesar's Women*, will be examined below, beginning with how McCullough understood and conceived of the Bona Dea and the December rituals associated with the goddess.

The Cultural Origins of the Bona Dea

In discussing the significance of the 'Bona Dea Affair' of 62, one of the most basic questions which needs to be addressed, and which continues to be a vexed issue, is what the cultural origins of the festival were. In *Caesar's Women*, McCullough sums up the cult of the Bona Dea in the voice of the omniscient narrator:

Bona Dea was the Good Goddess, as old as Rome herself and therefore owning neither face nor form; she was *numen*. She did have a name, but it was never uttered, so holy was it. What she meant to Roman women no man could understand, nor why she was called Good. Her worship lay quite outside the official state religion, and though the Treasury did give her a little money, she answered to no man nor group of men. (*Caesar's Women*, p. 543)

The rites of the Bona Dea are described here as something as old as Rome itself; the goddess has no statues, which is identified as a Greek custom, thus putting her on a par with the *numina* which date far back into the regal period.¹ In fact the beginning of McCullough's statement here very closely reflects that of Cicero in the *de Haruspicum Responsis*, '*quod sacrificium tam uetustum est quam hoc quod a regibus aequale huius urbis accepimus?*'.² As with all of Cicero's political speeches, this was a speech heavy with rhetorical embellishment. Cicero's intention to demonise Clodius required that he emphasise just how hallowed a religious tradition Clodius had violated. Not that McCullough was prone to accept the orator's opinions without question – quite the contrary.³ But there is something to be said for the fact that Cicero's audience had to accept what he was saying for the speech to have the desired effect. The possible archaic Roman origin of the goddess has been suggested by some eminent scholars in the past. Warde-Fowler wrote a seminal work in 1925, working through the festivals of the entire Roman year, in which he noted the mention by Pliny (*NH* 14.88) of *lac* (milk, though it was actually wine) stored in a *mellarium* (honey-pot), suggested an early agrarian origin with connections to an earth-goddess;⁴ many years later H.H. Scullard wrote a similarly authoritative work on Roman festivals, and made a similar observation.⁵ Both modern works appear in McCullough's bibliography, and it is clear that these authors, though their judgements were cautious in accordance with the varied nature of our evidence, have influenced her interpretation of the ancient evidence for the cultural origins of the Bona Dea cult in Rome.⁶

McCullough's portrayal of the rites of the Bona Dea also includes elements of self-flagellation and frenzy which are strongly indicative of a Greek influence on the goddess' origins and rituals. In *Caesar's Women*, wine is drunk by the participants to heighten the pain of self-flagellation into a kind of ecstasy,⁷ along with the presence of dancing girls and music, details which can be drawn from Pliny.⁸ In light of these details it is tempting to invoke ideas of a Dionysian revel which would appear to contradict the belief the Bona Dea cult was Roman in origin. These 'Dionysian' features are noted by both Fowler and Scullard (though not referred to as such) and Wiseman also notes similarities to a Greek *pannychis*, though none of these authors suggest that the Bona Dea was a Dionysian revel.⁹

¹ *Caesar's Women*, pp. 543.

² Cic. *Har.* 37.

³ See 'Author's Note', *Caesar's Women*, p. 786. "I wish I could say I always believe Cicero, but I don't."

⁴ W. Warde-Fowler, *The Roman Festivals of the Period of the Republic: An Introduction to the Study of the Religion of the Romans* (London 1925), pp. 103-105, 256.

⁵ H.H. Scullard, *Festivals and Ceremonies of the Roman Republic* (London 1981), pp. 116-117, also 199-200. In light of the notorious (though possibly apocryphal) anecdotes about the early custom of Roman men kissing their female relatives on the mouth to check if they had been drinking wine, it is an interesting question Scullard poses.

⁶ s.v. 'Chronology', *Bibliography of the "Masters of Rome" series by Colleen McCullough* (unpublished document), p. 19.

⁷ *Caesar's Women*, pp. 546 & 558.

⁸ *NH* 14.88.

⁹ Fowler, *Roman Festivals*, pp. 103-105; Scullard, *Festivals*, p. 116; T.P. Wiseman, 'The Good Goddess', *Cinna the Poet and other Essays* (Leicester 1974), pp. 131-135.

David Mulray, however, has argued, in an examination of the cult in the context of P. Clodius' early career, that it was in fact just such a Dionysian revel;¹⁰ noting the similarities between the Dionysian revels of Greece and citing the evidence of Festus' notice in the *Breviarium* (60L) that the Bona Dea was a Roman incarnation of Damia, he suggests the Dionysian character of the Bona Dea cult had parallels in Roman festivals which permitted a degree of transvesticism. Thus, according to Mulray, Clodius' intrusion of the rites could be explained by a certain liberality on Clodius' part.¹¹ McCullough's conception of the cult does not go this far; indeed it is unlikely that she read Mulray's paper on the subject.¹² The absence of Festus' *Breviarium* in McCullough's bibliography, and the unequivocal representation of Bona Dea as a goddess of Roman origin, may be a further indication that she was not familiar with all of the evidence suggesting a Greek origin for the Bona Dea.¹³ For the novelist, the 'Dionysian' elements thus need not be evidence of a Greek import, as was suggested by Warde-Fowler and Scullard. It may be that in order to heighten the drama of Clodius' revenge, and have the affair appear more in keeping with the grand scale of Clodius' acts of vengeance (to be discussed below), she portrayed the Bona Dea as an almost unequalled hallowed tradition. However, I believe McCullough would have also favoured the (albeit, cautious) suggestion of Scullard, a well-known name in the studies of Roman history and society, over that of Mulray – had she indeed read his article. Wiseman does not appear in her bibliography, nor indeed does the comprehensive account of the Bona Dea cult by Brouwer, which also incorporates an impressive body of inscriptional evidence that demonstrates how complex a problem the Bona Dea's cultural origin really is.¹⁴ Nonetheless, McCullough's recreation of the cultural origin of the Bona Dea can be aligned with statements made by Cicero, Pliny, and Plutarch, and the suggestions of Warde-Fowler and Scullard.

¹⁰ D. Mulray, 'The Early Career of P. Clodius Pulcher: A Re-Examination of the Charges of Mutiny and Sacrilege', *TAPA*, vol. 118 (1980), pp. 166-173.

¹¹ *Ibid.* p. 167. However, cf. H.H.J. Brouwer, *Bona Dea: The Sources and A Description of the Cult* (Leiden 1989), pp. 238-239. Brouwer is wary of the "great value" attached to Festus' identification of Bona Dea as Damia by scholars, as Festus is the only source to make this connection.

¹² Though this is not, of course, impossible. McCullough specifically stated in her bibliography that she was not including 'innumerable papers' which she had made use of, so Mulray's non-appearance in her bibliography is necessarily conclusive. If she had read Mulray's paper, she was certainly not convinced by his interpretations, either with regard to the Bona Dea or the charge of mutiny.

¹³ Some caution is required here, however. Having read both Warde-Fowler and Scullard, both of whom cite Festus in their respective discussions of the Bona Dea, it would be surprising if McCullough had not herself read a translation of Festus. However, in her bibliography McCullough lists her ancient sources under the heading 'Loeb Classics' (this section, naturally, does not include non-Loeb editions), though some Penguin editions of texts can be found alongside modern scholarship under the headings of various topics ('Biographies', etc.). A translation of Festus was not available at the time of composition in a Loeb edition (and so far as I can gather, is not at the present time), nor in a Penguin edition for that matter. However, McCullough did not work exclusively from Loeb and Penguin, as is demonstrated by her use of a typed translation of Valerius Maximus, which was not available in Loeb (*Life: Without the Boring Bits*, p. 189, though Valerius Maximus is now in a Loeb translation).

¹⁴ Eg., *Bona Dea*, pp. 258-263, 323.

Clodius and Pompeia

As for so much of ancient history in general, our sources for women are very scarce, and for Pompeia, the granddaughter of L. Sulla the Dictator and wife of Caesar until his divorce of her in 61, they are both so scarce and so brief in their references to her as to make it very difficult to mine them for much information at all. References to her only appear within the context of the Bona Dea scandal.¹⁵ In *Caesar's Women* McCullough establishes Pompeia's prior connection to P. Clodius through her inclusion in the 'Clodius Club', a group of young noble men and women centred around P. Clodius who, at this point in the novels, take pleasure in shocking their conservative peers. Pompeia's friends are notably Publius Clodius himself and his sisters, the wives of Metellus Celer (cos. 60), Marcius Rex (cos. 62), and Lucullus (cos. 74). By extension Pompeia knows some of the other members of the 'Clodius Club' - Decimus Brutus (cos. 42), P. Fonteius (Clodius' momentary adoptive father in 59), M. Antonius (cos. 44) and C. Scribonius Curio (tr.pl. 50, pr. 49).¹⁶ This is all largely prosopographical speculation on the part of the novelist, built upon the idea that, if indeed there was an assignation for the night of the Bona Dea, as the later speeches of Cicero alleged and which has probably influenced later authors such as Plutarch and Cassius Dio,¹⁷ then some sort of prior acquaintance must have existed; and that, following on from this idea, the acquaintance must have taken place in regular society with various *amici* of Clodius present. As with most scholarship, McCullough rejects the idea that Clodius and Pompeia were having an affair, probably on the basis of Cicero *Att.* 1.12.3 and 1.13.3 (neither of which mention an affair, though in the latter it is mentioned Caesar divorced his wife) but she does take the idea of prior acquaintance from Plutarch and Dio, who believed that they had an assignation on that fateful night of December 5th 62. McCullough's unusual reconstruction is rarely to be found amongst scholarship,¹⁸ and it is another demonstration of McCullough's confidence in her independent reading of the sources to draw out information which can be woven into her narrative.

¹⁵ Asconius *Mil.* 49b; Schol. Bob. 85; Plut. *Mor.* 206 = *Regum.* 91.3, *Caes.* 9.2-3, 10.1-8 and 14.16, *Cic.* 28.2-4; Appian *Sic.* Frag. 7, *BC* 2.14.1; Dio 37.45.1-2.

¹⁶ *Caesar's Women*, p. 535. P. Fonteius is not actually referred to as being in the 'Club' as such (only his acquiescence in the matter of Clodius' adoption in 59 gains him this honour), but is certainly a part of Clodius' circle in 62.

¹⁷ *Cic. Har.* 37 and 44; Plut. *Caes.* 9, 10 & 14, *Cic.* 28, *Mor.* 206 = *Regum.* 91.3; Suet. *Div. Iul.* 6.2; Dio. 37.45.1-2. Plutarch (*Pomp.* 42.7) and Dio (39.10.2) both claimed to have made use of Ciceronian material in composing their own works on the late Republic.

¹⁸ Mulray is the only scholar I have found who accepts a prior connection between Clodius and Pompeia not based on a love affair, 'The Early Career of P. Clodius Pulcher', pp. 175-176, though in a rather circular argument which is dependent on accepting his main thesis that Clodius openly attended the Bona Dea rites as opposed to sneaking in. A connection between Clodius and Pompeia can be proposed on the flimsy basis of Pompeia's brother Q. Pompeius Rufus (tr. pl. 52) being an *amicus* of Clodius by the time of the latter's death, but this is pure speculation and realistically cannot be expected to account for the relationships of ten years prior; nor can Pompeius Rufus be found among Clodius' supporters during the trial of 61. Cf. E. Gruen, *The Last Generation of the Roman Republic* (Berkeley 1974), pp. 273-276, 339. The similarity between the views of McCullough and Mulray is quite superficial, however; I hold to my earlier contention that McCullough had most likely not made use of Mulray's paper.

The motivation behind Clodius' profanation of the Bona Dea rites is one which has been the subject of considerable scholarly discussion. The idea of an affair between Clodius and Pompeia is not generally considered a satisfactory explanation;¹⁹ surely, if there was such amorous feeling between the two, there were less potentially explosive times for an assignation? As stated above, in *Caesar's Women* Clodius and Pompeia have essentially the same circle of friends; however, Pompeia's social life – and the clandestine goings-on of the 'Clodius Club' – suffer from the strict surveillance which Aurelia carries out on the wife of Caesar.²⁰ This can be drawn directly from Plutarch's *Caesar*,²¹ although it is interesting to note the other sources do not mention this. For Plutarch, this surveillance seems to account for the choice of the Bona Dea rites as a time for an assignation, despite Aurelia's presence there; it may be that Plutarch believed the dancing and music may have provided enough cover for Clodius and Pompeia.²² For McCullough, however, this surveillance is a motivation for revenge. In *Caesar's Women*, Clodius, tired of the constant presence of one of Aurelia's freedwomen, Polyxena,²³ who has been sent to keep an eye on Pompeia, secretly decides to strike back at Aurelia by profaning the rites which she (in reality if not officially) is hosting at the *domus publica*:

"Aurelia", he said between his teeth. "It's high time someone cut her down to size."²⁴

Exactly what McCullough's Clodius was hoping to achieve, however, I am not sure; was it purely that the rites were profaned, and sooner or later Aurelia would realise this through some manifestation of divine displeasure? Or was Clodius hoping to be able to brag of this deed later on? Or was it simply the achievement of personal satisfaction? Perhaps the last is most likely, especially considering McCullough's characterisation of Clodius as a man driven by revenge, with a mental list of those who have wronged him. The aim of Clodius' personal vendettas, as depicted in *Caesar's Women*, was nothing short of the total destruction of his enemies' careers. Thus Lucullus is ousted from his command in the East through a mutiny instigated by Clodius, Cicero is exiled, and the kingdom of Ptolemy of Cyprus is annexed by Rome.²⁵ Aurelia presents a different case in that she has

¹⁹ Mulray discusses this point at some length, arguing that the love affair proposed by Cicero (not in his letters to Atticus, however) and later writers was part of a stock standard folk tale (*op.cit.* pp. 166-169).

²⁰ *Caesar's Women*, pp. 537-538.

²¹ *Caes.* 9.3.

²² Mulray, 'The Early Career of P. Clodius Pulcher', p. 166.

²³ 'Polyxena' is not attested in the ancient evidence as a freedwoman of Aurelia, though it does demonstrate that McCullough was aware Greek slaves had been freed in Rome at this time. Despite the Homeric resonances of the name, there is very little detail in the novels about the character of 'Polyxena' to suggest it was intended as anything more than a classical Greek name.

²⁴ On the hostess of the Bona Dea, see Plut. *Caes.* 10.1; *Caesar's Women*, pp. 543. McCullough characterizes Pompeia as rather dim and incapable of organising an important event such as the December rites for the Bona Dea; thus in *Caesar's Women* it is Aurelia who does the actual work of organising the event. The hand-drawn portrait of Pompeia included in the novel McCullough described as copied from a "wonderfully vacant looking bust" (*Caesar's Women*, p. 793; for the portrait itself, p. 418).

²⁵ *Caesar's Women*, pp. 156-185 (the mutiny against Lucullus), 187-189 & 765-766 (the annexation of Cyprus, because Ptolemy had refused to pay the inflated ransom Clodius demanded for himself, in imitation of Caesar), 635-637 & 765 (the exile of Cicero because he had broken Clodius' alibi at the *incestum* trial). Metellus Celer (cos. 60) had also incurred Clodius' lasting enmity for his refusal to accept

no 'official' career as such, but the hosting of the Bona Dea rites is depicted as enormously important to her; a violation of the rites would certainly ruin such a momentous occasion. In part, this characterization of Clodius can be drawn from the enmity which developed between him and Cicero, when the latter broke Clodius' alibi during the trial of 61.²⁶ In any case, Clodius' purpose in McCullough's novel was not to get caught during the act itself, which of course is precisely what happened.

Clodius' Trial

Two aspects of the trial of P. Clodius for *incestum* as presented by McCullough deserve consideration here. The first is that she puts an interesting spin on Clodius' acquittal; rather than being the result of heavy bribery by the politically astute M. Crassus, in *Caesar's Women* Clodius makes use of the wealth of his wife Fulvia, whom Clodius had married in 66 shortly after his return from service in the East (portrayed as just prior to the prosecution of P. Sulla and P. Autronius for *ambitus*), to bribe the jurors.²⁷ It is generally accepted in scholarship that it was Crassus who was responsible for the bribery of the jury in 61, based upon a reference to '*Caluum ex Nanneianis illum, illum laudatorem meum*' in *Att.* 1.16.5. This is the view taken by Marshall,²⁸ however it has been challenged, most significantly for the purposes of this thesis by Gruen,²⁹ whose scholarship McCullough had a high regard for. In her recreation of the trial McCullough has no doubt followed the interpretation of Gruen in making Clodius out to be an 'independent agent', though it is fair to say the novelist also understood the vague nature of Cicero's reference, and Marshall's *Crassus* appears in her bibliography as well Gruen.³⁰ Moving on to the portrayal of Fulvia's wealth in *Caesar's Women*, Cicero makes much of this in the *Philippics*, going so far as to recount a story of Fulvia's grandfather

Clodius' candidature for the office of Tribune of the Plebs (pp. 637-638); his death is highly suspicious, with the appellation 'Clytemnestra' given to his widow Clodia (pp. 697-698), though I don't believe McCullough intended this to be Clodius' revenge - murder seems a little too straightforward for McCullough's Clodius.

²⁶ Cic. 1.16.4; Plut. *Cic.* 29.1.

²⁷ For Clodius's marriage to Fulvia, *Caesar's Women*, p. 201; for bribery of the jury using Fulvia's money, *Caesar's Women*, pp. 635-636.

²⁸ *Crassus: A Political Biography* (Amsterdam 1979), pp. 92-93.

²⁹ *LGRR*, p. 275. Cf. T.P. Wiseman, 'Two Friends of Clodius', *CQ*, vol. 18 no. 2 (Nov. 1968), pp. 297-298; P. Clodius: Instrument or Independent Agent?', *Phoenix*, vol. 20 no. 2 (Summer 1966), pp. 121-122; W. Jeffrey Tatum, *The Patrician Tribune: Publius Clodius Pulcher* (Chapel Hill and London 1999), pp. 82-85.

³⁰ cf. Marshall, *Crassus* 'Appendix III: *Caluum Ex Nanneianis*', pp. 183-187 for an excellent discussion of different interpretations offered by scholars on identifying 'Caluus'. If McCullough had any doubts, Marshall's discussion highlights just how complex an issue it is. For Marshall and Gruen respectively in McCullough's bibliography, s.v. 'Biographies', 'Marcus Crassus', 'B.A. Marshall *Crassus: A Political Biography*, Hakkert, Amsterdam 1976) Bibliography of the "*Masters of Rome*" series (unpublished document), p. 16; and 'Histories of the Roman Republic', 'E. Gruen, *The Last Generation of the Roman Republic*, California U.P., Berkeley 1974', p. 29 (McCullough's spelling of 'Berkeley').

throwing money from the *rostra*,³¹ and in this case McCullough has accepted the opinion of the orator; for the novelist, Fulvia was wealthy enough to buy a jury.³²

Due to the paucity of evidence, however, the date of Clodius' marriage to Fulvia remains in dispute; the earliest reference we have to Clodius' marital status is upon Cicero's return from exile, giving us a *terminus ante quem* of 57.³³ As noted above, McCullough places the marriage to Fulvia shortly after Clodius' return from service in the East, just before the prosecution of P. Sulla and P. Autronius for *ambitus* in 66.³⁴ McCullough seems to accept the interpretation of Charles Babcock that, if Clodius was the brother-in-law of the Pinarius referred to in Cicero's *de Domo*,³⁵ then Clodius was married to a Pinaria – who is identified by Babcock as Fulvia herself.³⁶ However, in giving an account of Fulvia's ancestry, McCullough writes that Fulvius Bambalio and Sempronia married in 101, with Fulvia being born in Sempronia's fortieth year (c. 83) – making her eighteen or close to when she married Clodius.³⁷ Placing Clodius and Fulvia's marriage in 66 raises another interesting question: considering the religious nature of the charge against Clodius, would Fulvia have been required to give testimony at the *incestum* trial? One would think, either in exonerating Clodius, or much less likely (but more sensationally) she confirmed Clodius' presence, Cicero would have commented upon it. Since McCullough does not cover the trial itself (Caesar has left for Spain by this time) how that played out is left to the reader's imagination. Having provided the funds to bribe the jury, presumably Fulvia, if she was required to give testimony, is regarded as having given testimony contradicting that of Aurelia and the other *matronae* present.³⁸

It would be quite unusual for McCullough to have overlooked the evidence of Cicero's *De Haruspicum* with regard to Clodius' marriage, and the interpretations placed upon it. I believe McCullough has simplified Fulvia's ancestry so the non-specialist reader isn't bogged down in details which, though fascinating to the prosopographer, distract from her main point (details which, I might add, are difficult to piece together even for the interested prosopographer). Since *Caesar's Women* ends in 59 with Caesar leaving for Gaul, and the next novel *Caesar* opens in 54, the

³¹ Cic. *Phil.* 3.16.

³² The apparent poverty (at least by the standards of the Roman elite) of the Claudii Pulchri is noted by Varro, *De Re Rustica* 3.16.1-2; however for an alternative (and compelling) interpretation see Tatum, 'The Poverty of the Claudii Pulchri: Varro, *De Re Rustica* 3.16.1-2', *CQ*, vol. 42 no. 1 (1992), pp. 190-200. McCullough accepts the difficult financial straits of the Claudii during the 70s and 60s.

³³ Cic. *Dom.* 118, 134, 138, *Phil.* 2.48.

³⁴ *Caesar's Women*, p. 201.

³⁵ Cic. *Dom.* 118, 134, 138.

³⁶ Charles Babcock, 'The Early Career of Fulvia', *AJP*, vol. 86 no. 1 (Jan. 1965), p. 6; this interpretation is largely accepted by Tatum, *The Patrician Tribune*, pp. 60-61.

³⁷ *Caesar's Women*, p. 197. The significance of McCullough's removal of Sempronia's two previous husbands, who are essential to Taylor and Babcock's constructions, we will return to shortly.

³⁸ Our evidence for the conduct of the trial is scanty, based only on Cicero's later recount of events to Atticus. The testimony of Aurelia and Caesar's sister Julia (the absence of Caesar's daughter Julia is intriguing, though it may be due to her age) is noted in Schol. Bob. 89, though McCullough does not mention the presence of Caesar's sister. The scholiast also notes testimony, extracted under torture, from Pompeia's slaves – one of whom, it appears, was Habra, who also appears in Plutarch's retelling (*Caes.* 10; *Cic.* 28). Plutarch further notes a slave of Aurelia who, when she questioned the disguised Clodius, perceived his masculine voice.

intervening period where Pinarius the brother-in-law of Clodius makes his appearance in history is absent; there's no narratological reason for McCullough to complicate Fulvia's ancestry by reference to a character who is only known by this reference to Clodius, and would thus have little if any influence on events in the books. The main purpose of McCullough introducing Fulvia is that Fulvia is a descendant of C. Gracchus, that doomed champion of the people whose name continued to hold significance in the final decades of the republic. The marriage to a descendant of C. Gracchus is a narrative device, providing the catalyst for Clodius' later career; though Clodius is presented in *Caesar's Women* as awkward among his noble peers and more comfortable with members of the non-senatorial classes,³⁹ prior to marriage with Fulvia he never truly considers the *popularis* career which he later so successfully, if notoriously, pursued.

The political battle over the *incestum* trial is the second aspect of the Bona Dea deserving attention. In McCullough's reconstruction of the political manoeuvring prior to the trial, the struggle over the constitution of the court is represented as a ploy of the *boni* to hold Caesar in Rome long enough to make a formal charge of debt against him.⁴⁰ Thus their main concern is portrayed as a short-term political gain, rather than the violation of religious rites. Q. Fufius Calenus, one of the tribunes in 61, is portrayed as working on behalf of the *boni* to achieve their aim of having Caesar prosecuted, by vetoing the formation of a court.⁴¹ The story recounted by Suetonius, Plutarch, and Appian of Crassus going guarantor for Caesar's debts before he left for Spain (and where Caesar shamelessly exploited the local inhabitants to restore his financial solvency) accounts for McCullough's depiction of a Caesar dangerously in debt,⁴² and Cicero mentions the delay in allocating the praetorian provinces.⁴³ The designation of Q. Fufius Calenus as a *bonus*, however, is an unusual interpretation. Cicero refers to Calenus '*leuissimus tribunus*', and it is clear from Cicero's letters that Calenus was collaborating with the consul, M. Pupius Piso, to have a favourable court try Clodius.⁴⁴ Modern scholars, including those made use of by McCullough such as Leach and Gruen, have thus tended to view Calenus as the *amicus* of Clodius, and the attempt of senators such as L. Lucullus, M. Cato, and Q. Catulus to try Clodius as a genuine attempt to "rake up the muck", as Balsdon put it, and bring Clodius down through the *incestum* trial.⁴⁵ The compromise that was eventually proposed by Q. Hortensius would also militate against a *boni* scheme to prevent Caesar reaching his province.⁴⁶

³⁹ *Caesar's Women*, p. 169.

⁴⁰ *Caesar's Women*, pp. 564-565.

⁴¹ *Caesar's Women*, pp. 564-565.

⁴² Suet. *Div. Iul.* 54; Plut. *Caes.* 11, *Crass.* 7; Appian *BC* 2.8.1.

⁴³ Cic. *Att.* 1.13.5.

⁴⁴ On Cicero's characterization of Fufius Calenus, *Att.* 1.14; on the cooperation of Calenus and Piso, *Att.* 1.16.5.

⁴⁵ J.P.V.D. Balsdon, 'Fabula Clodiana', *Historia*, Bd. 15, H.1 (Jan. 1966), pp. 67-69; Gruen, *LGRR*, 248-249; J. Leach, *Pompey the Great* (London 1978), pp. 114-116; W.M.F. Rundell, 'Cicero and Clodius: The Question of Credibility', *Historia*, Bd. 28, H. 3 (3rd Qtr., 1979), pp. 303-306; W.J. Tatum, *The Patrician Tribune: P. Clodius Pulcher* (Chapel Hill and London 1999), pp. 76-77.

⁴⁶ Cic. *Att.* 1.14.5.

McCullough's independent interpretation of the ancient evidence, however, is in this case heavily influenced by the need of the novelist to make the trial interesting and intelligible to the reader. Thus, it must be made relevant to the protagonist, Caesar, through whose gaze the reader views the political machinations, rather than be focused on the plight of Clodius, a minor character in the novel. After all, it is through Caesar that the modern reader relates to the world of McCullough's Rome.

Conclusion

In examining McCullough's re-creation of the 'Bona Dea Affair', this chapter inevitably has addressed a variety of historical issues. Her understanding of the cultural origins of the goddess favours the account of Cicero, and makes use of the interpretations offered by Fowler and Scullard, though without the benefit of Brouwer's detailed study. Though there are clearly other schools of thought on the origins of Bona Dea, McCullough is nonetheless drawing her re-creation from two eminent scholars. Recreating Clodius' motivations for entering the *domus publica* is more problematic, and requires a particular characterization of Clodius, yet can still be traced back to the evidence of Plutarch and Cicero. Ultimately any question of motivation comes down to such characterizations, and considering the colourful career of Clodius, and in particular the revenge visited upon Cicero in 58, McCullough's assessment of the motives of the future tribune is not incompatible with the ancient evidence. Moving on to the *incestum* trial, a thorny issue (for this writer at least) is her assessment of Fufius Calenus and the political aims of the *boni*. Even if any collaboration had existed between them, I don't believe *amicitia* between Clodius and Calenus can be ruled out, which is what is implied when McCullough writes that Calenus was a tribune representing the *boni*. The issue a novelist faces is making a complex political scene intelligible, and interesting, to a non-specialist reader, which on this occasion has probably prompted McCullough to polarise the political situation into a 'Caesar/Anti Caesar' struggle. Whilst from the perspective of the historian her reconstruction raises serious questions, one can see why it was perhaps necessary to present events in this way. A similar line of reasoning can be applied to her reconstruction of the marriage of Clodius and Fulvia, another historical can of worms which would no doubt have led to further criticism from reviewers of the novel had McCullough attempted to recreate Babcock's interpretation in its entirety. McCullough's high regard for Erich Gruen's scholarship has probably influenced her decision to dismiss the identification of Clodius' saviour as Crassus, but scholars have also shown compelling reasons why Crassus should be exonerated. It follows that it is entirely plausible the wealthy Fulvia

should have secured her husband's acquittal, and in doing so enabled him to leave his mark on history in the years to come.

Chapter Three: The 'First Triumvirate'

The so-called 'First Triumvirate', the political alliance between Crassus, Pompey and Caesar, has endlessly fascinated scholars of the late Roman Republic. As Sir Ronald Syme observed many years ago, the consulship of Metellus and Afranius became a date heavy with historical significance.¹ But for such a fundamental historical event, our understanding of the alliance and its formation continues to be beset with controversy. In writing of the period of Caesar's lifetime, and with her focus on political events at Rome, McCullough took on the unenviable task of presenting an account of the 'First Triumvirate' free from the safety net of footnotes upon which the academic historian relies. That is to say, the nature of her novels demand an unequivocal and unqualified presentation of the date of the alliance, its immediate and long-term goals (especially with regard to Caesar's election to the consulship in 59), and of course the motivation of the participants — that timeless question of whether it was indeed Caesar who reconciled the two *principes*, with an eye for his own advancement, or whether it was Pompey and Crassus who effected Caesar's election by throwing their weight behind him. McCullough takes what historians would recognise as an 'orthodox' view, though with some interesting variations. Her characterization of Caesar forms a significant part of her portrayal of the 'First Triumvirate', and there will be some unavoidable overlap with my chapter on her reception of Caesar. However, to avoid repetition, elaboration on this point will be kept to a minimum; the reader will find the points raised on this topic discussed at greater length in Chapter Five below.

To give the reader an introduction to McCullough's depiction of the formation of the 'First Triumvirate', I will briefly summarise some main points of her reconstruction here. In the novel *Caesar's Women*, the formation of the so-called 'First Triumvirate' is a process which occurs relatively slowly over the latter half of the year 60 B.C.E, rather than taking place at a single, historically significant meeting. The first step towards the coalition is a letter Pompey sends to Caesar (at this time *propraetor* in Spain) in the latter half of May, almost begging Caesar to return to stand for the consulship of 59 after the series of political defeats which occurred after Pompey's landing in Brundisium in 62; Pompey's eastern *acta* and the agrarian settlement for his veterans have met with a united and insurmountable opposition.² Upon Caesar's return, the two men agree to a political compact, but this does not yet involve a close relationship with Crassus.³ An interesting

¹ *The Roman Revolution* (Oxford 1939), p. 35.

² *Caesar's Women*, pp. 597-604.

³ *Caesar's Women*, pp. 607-611.

point to which we will return is the acceptance, without hesitation, of the fact Caesar will be elected senior consul; the agreement has no requirement of Pompey throwing his support behind Caesar for the election, since the latter does not need it — naturally this also means Caesar does not require support from Crassus either.⁴ The ‘Triumvirate’ only really takes shape with the allocation of the consular provinces, where the consuls for 59 are given the task of surveying, for the proconsulship following their consulship, the *silvae callesque* (woods and forests) of Italy.⁵ Intended to hamstring Caesar after his inevitable consulship (and incidentally attacking Pompey’s reputation through a fictitious tale of a damaged vineyard),⁶ the move also provokes Pompey and Caesar into joining forces with Crassus at Caesar’s suggestion. The latter realises — it is implied — that he cannot acquire the province of his choice without Crassus’ invaluable support in the Senate and with the knights.⁷ In return, of course, Caesar will have to legislate to renegotiate the Asian contracts of the knights.⁸ By the time of the consular elections, Caesar has the support of Pompey and Crassus, though purely for the purposes of passing legislation. Towards the end of the year, Caesar decides to spread word of an agreement he has reached with Pompey by pretending to request the advice and assistance of someone he knows is a notorious gossip: M. Tullius Cicero.⁹

The Date of the ‘First Triumvirate’

The above is a condensed summary of McCullough’s portrayal of the formation of the ‘First Triumvirate’. We will now address each of the issues raised above in turn. McCullough’s dating of the coalition to prior to the consular elections for 59 essentially follows the chronology provided by Livy (*Per.* 103), Plutarch (*Caes.* 14 & *Pomp.* 47), Appian (*BC* 2.9), and Dio (37.54.3 – 37.58.4). So far McCullough’s chronology seems to be on sure ground. However, dating the coalition prior to December of 60 would appear to contradict Cicero’s statement, made in December, that Caesar ‘...cum Pompeio Crassum coniungeret’ (*Att.* 2.3.3). We have noted McCullough’s reasoning above, that Caesar only informed Cicero after he had made the compact to spread word of an alliance with Pompey, and we need only reiterate a common theme of this thesis, which is McCullough’s low opinion of Cicero’s importance in Roman politics and his judgement of the ‘behind the scenes’ dealings. It has also been suggested in the past that Caesar’s offer to work with Cicero, ‘...*omnibus in*

⁴ *Caesar’s Women*, p. 602.

⁵ *Caesar’s Women*, pp. 645-650. For the debate on the *silvae callesque*, pp. 640-644.

⁶ McCullough invents a fictional speech for Bibulus in which Bibulus recounts the fictitious case of a Publius Servilius, who has tragically lost his vineyards because of “scallywag shepherds” who allowed the cattle of “Gnaeus Pompeius mistakenly called Magnus” to stray on to his (Servilius’) property, because of the insufficiently demarcated stock routes.

⁷ *Caesar’s Women*, pp. 649 & 651.

⁸ *Caesar’s Women*, pp. 645-651.

⁹ *Caesar’s Women*, p. 652. “If apprising Cicero what was in the wind didn’t spread the news far and wide, nothing would.”.

rebus meo et Pompei consilio usurum daturumque operam (Att. 2.3.3), was simply a ruse, thus calling into question the validity in dating the 'Triumvirate' to the end of 60.¹⁰ As Marshall and Stanton have pointed out, Cicero's language is vague enough to warrant various interpretations, and for this reason Att. 2.3.3 is a source we cannot use with certainty in this instance.¹¹ Another pair of suggestive letters by Cicero is Att. 1.17.11 and 2.1.3; in the former, written at the end of 61, Cicero tells Atticus that Caesar was planning to form a compact with L. Lucceius via Q. Arrius, '*... Lucceium scito consulatum habere in animo statim petere... Caesar cum eo coire per Arrium cogitat*'. In June of 60, Cicero writes (Att. 2.1.3) that he will tell Atticus how Lucceius is getting on once he has seen Caesar; it would appear that Lucceius and Caesar had come to some sort of agreement by then. It is not unreasonable to take this a little further, and assume that Caesar had also come to an agreement with Pompey at this time;¹² certainly this would account for Caesar, via Balbus, promising to take the advice of both Cicero and Pompey in Att. 2.3.3. The absence of any letters referring to the political activities of Caesar and Pompey in-between June and December make a more exact date problematic. The role Arrius plays in Att. 1.17.11 has been construed by Marshall and Stanton to mean Crassus and Pompey had formed an agreement prior to the elections which did not require Caesar's diplomatic arts, in light of Cicero's statement about Arrius, '*...qui fuit M. Crassi quasi secundarum*' (Brut. 69.242).¹³ However, McCullough does not mention a prior sounding out of Lucceius at the end of 61 by Caesar, and thus the significance of Arrius' early involvement is not part of her narrative; in a point we will return to later, she believed Caesar was capable of — and indeed, did — win the consular election on his own merits. The dominant view that Pompey and Crassus were at loggerheads until Caesar's reconciliation also holds sway for McCullough, making any prior arrangement implausible. The accounts of Velleius and Suetonius, placing the formation of the coalition in Caesar's consulship, are difficult to credit if we accept that Caesar's agrarian law be dated to January 59. There simply was not enough time for the three men to thrash out a political agreement, as well as for Caesar (and presumably Pompey and Crassus) to work out the details of the agrarian settlements and the makeup of the agrarian commission. It has also been observed that Suetonius and Velleius are, in places, muddled in their chronology of Caesar's career.¹⁴ McCullough's account of the formation of the 'Triumvirate' relies largely upon the chronology of the three Greek writers and what seems to have been the account of Livy, at least in terms of placing the coalition prior to the consular elections. Her use of Cicero appears to incorporate a particular reading of Att. 2.1.3, but she does not accept the formulation of Cicero at Att. 2.3.3 as referring to the final

¹⁰ B.A. Marshall, *Crassus* (Amsterdam 1979), p. 103, though not universally accepted — cf. E. Gruen, *The Last Generation of the Roman Republic* (Berkeley 1974), p. 88 n.19.

¹¹ B.A. Marshall & G.R. Stanton, 'The Coalition between Pompeius and Crassus 60-59 B.C', *Historia*, 24 (1975), p. 210.

¹² Gruen, *LGRR*, p. 88, also 141-142; Marshall and Stanton, 'The Coalition between Pompeius and Crassus', pp. 215-216.

¹³ Marshall and Stanton, 'The Coalition between Pompeius and Crassus', p. 217.

¹⁴ Marshall and Stanton, *ibid.* p. 211.

negotiations of the 'Triumvirate'; nor indeed does she accept that Caesar was searching for allies in late 61. For McCullough, the coalition formed with the allocation of *silvae callesque* as consular provinces; this political defeat represented the most compelling reason for Caesar to ally himself with Pompey and Crassus, and conversely for Crassus and Pompey to support Caesar. As McCullough saw it, until the allocation of consular provinces, Caesar had little to gain by way of alliance with Pompey and Crassus except to court a huge amount of ill-will from those opposed to the measures. In doing so, McCullough has opted not to follow the guidance of Erich Gruen, a scholar for whom she had the deepest respect.¹⁵

Caesar's Election to the Consulship

Placing the formation of the 'Triumvirate' prior to the consular elections for 59 raises the question of whether Caesar required the backing of Crassus and Pompey in order to be elected. As we noted above, McCullough writes that Caesar needed no help to be elected, as his own name and reputation were sufficient. This perspective on Caesar's election can be drawn from Suetonius *Div. Iul.* 19.1, and Dio 37.54.3.¹⁶ Yet the fact, mentioned by Suetonius, that Caesar was standing in conjunction with Lucceius (probably drawn from Cicero, *Att.* 1.17.11 & 2.1.3), and using the latter's money to bribe the voters, suggests Caesar's election was not a foregone conclusion. The idea that Caesar was facing serious (and from his point of view, dangerous) opposition to his consulship, is generally followed by modern scholarship.¹⁷ As was so often the case in the elections of the late Republic, money was not a factor to be ignored, and Caesar's rivals quickly countered in kind.¹⁸ McCullough's characterization of Caesar does not quite allow for bribery to be a part of his political arsenal, however—though it is made use of by his rivals (and many of his political allies too). In accordance with the evidence of Suetonius (*Div. Iul.* 19.2) she has M. Cato declare bribery to be in the interest of the Republic, but it is in reaction to Caesar's inevitable and bribery-free election.¹⁹ It is easy to say there is little difference between the Cato of McCullough and the Cato of Suetonius here; but the nuances speak volumes. In McCullough this is not even a 'fight fire with fire' situation, but an unqualified display of flexible principles. But to return to Caesar: without the use of bribery, and

¹⁵ McCullough regarded Gruen as one of her 'heroes', T. Hillard, *pers. comm.* 27/9/2015, recalling a personal conversation with McCullough when she met with Gruen at Macquarie University in 1993. I am very grateful to Assoc. Prof. Hillard for sharing this anecdote.

¹⁶ Mommsen suggested Caesar *may* have been elected regardless, *The History of Rome: Book V*, trans. William P. Dickson (London 1874), p. 182; Gruen, *LGRR*, p. 87, on the basis of Cic. *Att.* 2.1.6, suggests Caesar had "good prospects", though '... *Caesarem cuius nunc ulti ualde sunt secundi*' may be a literal reference to Caesar having already set sail from Spain.

¹⁷ See, eg., C. Meier, *Caesar*, trans. David McLintock (New York, 1995), pp. 185; T. Stevenson, *Julius Caesar and the Transformation of the Roman Republic* (London and New York 2015), pp. 73-74.

¹⁸ Suet. *Div. Iul.* 19.2.

¹⁹ *Caesar's Women*, p. 626, based on Suet. *Div. Iul.* 19.2.

having antagonised the influential faction headed by Cato, how could he have hoped to not only secure election as consul, but even to secure the senior post?

This question is difficult to draw out of McCullough's recreation of the consular elections, and the political scenario in which the historical Caesar found himself. Given the proposition that Caesar had no intention to bribe, in McCullough's mind he must have had wide popular support in the tribal assemblies to secure his own election. This aspect of Caesar's political appeal is not lost on McCullough, but the portrayal of it is centred within the city of Rome.²⁰ Influence in the urban tribes is thus easy to understand, but the support of a majority of the remaining thirty one – or perhaps, excluding Caesar's own tribe, thirty – rural tribes need some explanation. If the *boni* were so opposed to his election, as an "organised and massive opposition"²¹ suggests, surely they could marshal the numbers in their tribes to keep Caesar out of office? At this time Caesar had not yet promulgated the agrarian legislation which had the potential to boost his support across the rural tribes. Yet the peculiarities of Roman voting would mean that, with both Caesar and M. Bibulus elected, most voters cast ballots for both men.²² The backing of Pompey and Crassus, as has been argued by Marshall and Stanton, was probably essential to Caesar's election.²³ Whether or not one agrees with the theory that Caesar was in political hot water by the time of lodging his *professio* and desperate to please Pompey and Crassus, the fact remains that, with bribery out of the question, it is unlikely Caesar could have been elected on his own merits; among his *inimici* were influential consulars such as Q. Lutatius Catulus (cos. 78) and C. Calpurnius Piso (cos. 67), his fellow candidate Bibulus, and the charismatic Cato. The allocation of the *silvae callesque* as consular provinces was, as McCullough saw clearly, a defensive measure which indicated the strong possibility of Caesar's election;²⁴ the denial of Caesar's petition to stand *in absentia* may also be seen in this light, but I am not convinced this was due purely to Caesar's own appeal to the voters. This point leads into the question of just how secret the 'triumvirate' was, to provoke such defensive measures; the *lex Sempronia* stipulated the allocation of consular provinces almost eighteen months ahead of the consul heading out to his province, putting the *silvae callesque* debate in or around June of 60. As I have noted above, Cicero was aware of an agreement between Lucceius and Caesar in December of

²⁰ *Caesar's Women*, p. 503-504 (in 62, when Caesar is briefly suspended from office), p. 772 (in 59, after proposing his extortion law to the senate).

²¹ *Caesar's Women*, p. 628.

²² As noted by Gruen, *LGRR*, p. 141.

²³ Marshall & Stanton, 'The Coalition between Pompeius and Crassus', pp. 208-209.

²⁴ The Latin, as well as the source for this tradition, will be found in Suet. *Div. Iul.* 19.2. This clever senatorial feint has been well discussed in modern scholarship. See, e.g., M. Gelzer, *Caesar: Politician and Statesman*, trans. P. Needham, Cambridge, Mass. 1968), p. 65, n. 2. It was once argued that the reference to *silvae callesque* was actually to real provinces (consisting principally of forests and pastures); see J.C. Rolfe, 'The So-Called Callium Provincia', *AJPh* 36.3 (1915), 323-31—but that is mostly rejected (see, e.g., H.E. Butler and M. Cary [eds], *C. Suetoni Tranquilli Divus Iulius* [Oxford, 1927], p. 63). Even more interestingly, P. Willems, *Le Sénat de la république romaine. Sa composition et ses attributions* (Louvain, 1883), pp. 2, 576, n.5, suggested that the phrase *id est silvae callesque* be deleted (on the grounds that it was probably a gloss added by a later grammarian little in touch with the institutions of that epoch). That, too, is advice little heeded.

61, which seems to have been cemented by June of 60, and had assurances that Caesar intended also to take Pompey's advice in all matters by December; this would suggest that not only had Caesar and Pompey come to some agreement prior to the elections for 59, but that this agreement had either leaked back to the opponents of Caesar and Pompey, or that they had perceived some sort of alliance had been formed, by the time the consular provinces were to be allocated.²⁵

Caesar as the Mastermind of the 'First Triumvirate'

With this brief look at the political context in mind, we now turn to a fundamental question regarding the 'triumvirate'; was it Caesar who reconciled Pompey and Crassus, or had the two other dynasts come to an arrangement beforehand? McCullough, following the 'orthodox' line of scholarship, and inheriting a view of Caesar which presupposes his superiority to his peers, accepts that it was Caesar who united the three *principes* into a coalition. Our source tradition complicates the issue, however. The vagueness of Cicero's formulation at *Att.* 2.3.3 has been noted above; and the orator is alone amongst our earliest sources in appearing to attribute the coalition to Caesar's diplomatic arts. Livy and Velleius only mention the three *principes* forming an alliance, not that Caesar was the unifying force behind it.²⁶ Blaming, or crediting, Caesar for the formation of the fatal alliance would thus appear to be a later tradition, found in Plutarch, Suetonius, Appian and Dio.²⁷ Following on from this, some alternative views have been formed, revolving around an earlier arrangement between Pompey and Crassus; though McCullough chose not to follow the two interpretations below, a brief discussion of them will be useful. Allen Ward has suggested, on the strength of *Cic. Flacc.* 32, and *Plut. Pomp.* 43, that Crassus met Pompey in Asia in early 62, and in language reminiscent of the 'triumvirate' itself, suggests the two men worked out a *modus operandi* where neither would work against the other's interest.²⁸ The view put forward by Marshall and Stanton, building upon the idea of a prior agreement between Crassus and Pompey, is that Pompey

²⁵ Marshall, *Crassus*, p. 102; cf. Stevenson, *op.cit.*, p. 73.

²⁶ *Livy Per.* 103; Velleius 2.44.1. cf. Horace's allusion (*Odes* 2.1.1–4) to Asinius Pollio's theme, *inter alia*, of '*graves amicitiae principum*'. This is too vague an allusion on which to build a reconstruction of Pollio's account. It is worth mentioning, however, that Andrew Drummond (in T.J. Cornell [ed.], *The Fragments of the Roman Historians* [Oxford 2013], pp. 1, 437) makes the interesting suggestion that Horace's allusion to Pollio's *History* in terms of 'a civil conflict beginning from Metellus' consulship' alludes also to Metellus Celer's role "in encouraging the pact with Caesar by obstructing Pompey and opposing the revision of the Asian tax contract that had been vigorously supported by Crassus." Drummond continues: "responsibility for what followed did not lie solely with the dynasts."

²⁷ *Plut. Pomp.* 47, *Caes.* 14, *Luc.* 42; *Suet. Div. Iul.* 19.2; *Appian BC*, 2.9; *Dio.* 37.54.3 – 37.58.4. This is not to overlook the fact that Plutarch, Suetonius and Appian (and perhaps also Dio), all had access to Asinius Pollio and other contemporary sources. For their attested use of Pollio, see Pollio frgs 3a & b; 4a, b & c; 6 Cornell (= *Suet. Div. Iul.* 30.2–4; *Plut. Caes.* 46.1–2; 46.2–3; *Pomp.* 72.4; *Appian BC* 2.82.345–6; *Suet. Div. Iul.* 55.4, respectively). For a strong argument that fragment 3 derives from Pollio, see A. Drummond (in T.J. Cornell [ed.], *The Fragments of the Roman Historians* [Oxford 2013]), pp. 3, 522–523. For the argument that Plutarch was heavily dependent upon Pollio, see C. Pelling, *Plutarch and History* (Swansea 2002), pp. 112–24; 28–9. Interestingly, the tradition that Caesar brought Pompey and Crassus into an alliance is not to be found in Lucan, *BC*, 1.84, or, much later, Florus, *Epit.* 2.9 – 13.

²⁸ *Marcus Crassus and the Late Roman Republic* (Columbia and London 1977), pp. 193–197. Cf. *Suet. Div. Iul.* 19.2 for Suetonius' very similar formulation.

and Crassus united their interests when faced with the defeat of their respective political aims, repeating the alliance they formed prior to their consulship in 70.²⁹ No go-between was required then (though, surprisingly, McCullough places Caesar in that role based upon her reading of Mommsen),³⁰ thus one was not required a decade later.³¹ Cicero's mention of Q. Arrius acting as a go-between for Caesar and L. Lucceius in the consular elections is thought then to have demonstrated an arrangement between Crassus and Pompey which did not depend upon Caesar's involvement – Caesar was simply the chosen candidate of the two *principes*, whose interests had once again coalesced.³² The pleasure Crassus took in Pompey's plummeting popularity during 59³³ is taken to reflect the ongoing animosity between the two men,³⁴ though it may indeed be simply a case of an internal dynamic, since Caesar was by that time showing marked favour to Pompey by calling upon his new son-in-law to speak first in the senate, rather than Crassus.³⁵ The key to McCullough's interpretation lies ultimately in her conception of Caesar as the superior intellect of the three *principes*, and also to a large extent on the psychological superiority Caesar gains over Pompey from that first coalition formed in 71. Pompey had been awed by Caesar's political acumen, and Crassus had also been very impressed by Caesar's skill in negotiating with the Great Man:

Fortune's Favourites, p. 741:

... for a moment Pompey felt himself back on the field at Lauro, helpless to prevent Quintus Sertorius from running rings around him. (once Caesar has explained to Pompey the political ramifications of essentially blackmailing the senate in allowing him to stand for the consulship *in absentia* through the threat of civil war in 71).

Thus, Caesar's *Women*, p. 648:

"It has always amazed me how clearly you see, Caesar, even back in the days when I thought Philippus would be the one to get me what I wanted. He didn't, you did. Are you a politician, a mathematician, or a magician?"

²⁹ 'The Coalition between Pompeius and Crassus', p. 213.

³⁰ *Fortune's Favourites*, pp. 737-743; Mommsen, *op.cit.* pp. 84-86, and 182. Mommsen speaks of a union of the "democrats" (Caesar's 'party'), the "military chiefs" (Pompey and Crassus) and the "great capitalists" (the *ordo equester*) in 71; the coalition of 60 is given the marginal heading "The Second Coalition of Pompeius, Crassus and Caesar". The union in 71 was, in Mommsen's conception, a coalition of socio-political forces rather than a union of three men in particular, in contrast to the union of 60; thus Mommsen's marginal title for 71 is "Coalition of the Military Chiefs and the Democracy", rather than a title which specifically mentions Caesar, Pompey and Crassus. McCullough has, I believe, been 'led up the garden path' so to speak, into believing Caesar had an influential role to play in 71. However, it is an example of just how highly she valued the opinion of the German historian that she eschewed more modern interpretations in favour of Mommsen. I am very grateful to Assoc. Prof. T. Hillard for his thoughts and suggestions, which were invaluable in making sense of this complex issue, and for tracking down a copy of the German edition to confirm the marginal title was Mommsen's.

³¹ Marshall & Stanton, *The Coalition between Pompeius and Crassus*, pp. 213; Marshall, *Crassus*, p. 49-51, 100.

³² Marshall & Stanton, *ibid.* p. 208-211.; Marshall, *ibid.*, pp. 100-101.

³³ Cic. Att. 2.21.3.

³⁴ Gruen, *LGRR*, pp. 92-93.

³⁵ Marshall & Stanton, 'The Coalition between Pompeius and Crassus', pp. 213-214; Marshall, *Crassus*, pp. 105-106.

Fortune's Favourites, p. 743 (Crassus to Caesar, after the latter has seen Pompey in 71 when both generals were camped on the Field of Mars):

"I didn't think of half that! I don't say I wouldn't have worked it all out eventually, but you must have done it between my tent and his..."

In McCullough's mind, it made perfect sense to interpret the available evidence for the 'First Triumvirate' in light of Crassus and Pompey's deep respect for the political acumen of Caesar; and Caesar's superior intellect meant he was the only one of the three who truly understood the compelling need for the alliance. The latter of these points, with regard to the events of 60/59 and Caesar's role in reconciling Pompey and Crassus, can be easily traced back to the view of Caesar held by Mommsen and Gelzer, and to English scholars such as Syme,³⁶ though McCullough seems to have allowed herself to have been misled by her reading of Mommsen into believing Caesar's acumen prevailed as early as 71. Though McCullough had access to the biographies of Crassus by Ward and Marshall, and was thus certainly aware of an alternative scholarship which argued Caesar may not have reconciled Pompey and Crassus, she has opted for the interpretations of those who may be termed the 'big names' of scholarship mentioned above, whose views of Caesar as the superior intellect coincided with her own.³⁷

The Political Goals of the 'First Triumvirate'

Having established McCullough's account of Caesar's election to the consulship as a result of his own eligibility for the magistracy, and not as a result of the political backing of Pompey and Crassus, we come to what McCullough understood to be the aims of the 'First Triumvirate'. In earlier modern scholarship, and in some more recent scholarship, it has been the norm to speak of the 'Triumvirate' as a coalition intended to dominate the political affairs of the Roman Republic in its final decade; historians of the calibre of Syme and Scullard certainly considered the 'Triumvirate' to be the end of the "free state".³⁸ This understanding of the 'Triumvirate' is drawn from a particular reading of Cicero's letters, where the orator draws a sorry picture of a Rome dominated by three *principes*, hated by a majority for the most part too terrified to actively oppose them;³⁹ later sources have clearly drawn from Cicero or a similar tradition, and, especially in light of the civil wars and the

³⁶ Mommsen, *The History of Rome*, p. 184; Gelzer, *Caesar*, p. 68; Syme, *The Roman Revolution*, p. 35; L.R. Taylor, *Party Politics in the Age of Caesar*, pp. 131-132; Gruen, *LGRR*, pp. 88-89; Seager, *Pompey the Great*, p. 83.

³⁷ For McCullough's use of Ward and Marshall's biographies of Crassus, see s.v 'Biographies', 'Crassus', *Bibliography for the "Masters of Rome" series by Colleen McCullough* (unpublished document), p. 16.

³⁸ Syme, *The Roman Revolution*, pp. 35-36; Scullard, *From the Gracchi to Nero*, pp. 112-113.

³⁹ Cic. Att. 2.6, 2.8, 2.9, 2.14, 2.18.

careers of Caesar and Octavian, give a comparable picture of Roman politics at the time.⁴⁰ However, McCullough's understanding of the aims of the 'Triumvirate' rests upon the perception, inherited from the analysis of Gruen, that the 'Triumvirate' had only short-term goals which required *ad hoc* arrangements throughout 59 and later, in order to protect the dubious legality of Caesar's legislation;⁴¹ furthermore, it was a coalition intended to work within the framework of the Republic. To maintain one's *dignitas* and *auctoritas*, whether inherited or self-made (or both) was perfectly within the norms of aristocratic competition, indeed was an essential feature of it.⁴² To argue for a long-term plan of domination is to perhaps take our sources at face value. It may also be plausibly argued that McCullough's conception of Caesar prevented her from turning the hero of her novels into an anti-hero of the Francis Underwood variety, always plotting for supreme power.⁴³ But this can only be taken so far; McCullough's use of scholarship is evident throughout the novels, and in her interpretation of the 'triumvirate' as a short-term coalition, she has the backing of some respected scholarship, in particular that of Gruen.

Conclusion

It is fair to say that the 'First Triumvirate' will attract ongoing debate among historians interested in its conception and significance. Though the nature of McCullough's narrative puts her in the position of making clear-cut judgements on less-than-clear issues, she nonetheless presents a thoughtful and considered approach to the evidence for this historically significant event, and one which is plausible and often supported by eminent scholarship. The scholarly authority of historians such as Syme, Gelzer, Scullard, Gruen, and particularly Mommsen (who won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1902), is well known by those who study the Roman Republic, and the authorial persona McCullough developed as an authority on the Roman Republic was founded in large part upon her use of, and reliance upon, these 'big names' in scholarship. And it is true to say that the views of these eminent scholars on Caesar's creation of the 'First Triumvirate' influence scholarship up to the present day.⁴⁴ However, many of her constructions can, and in the above text, some have been, challenged, but this is equally true of the historians upon whose work she relied. As with so many histories written

⁴⁰ Velleius 2.44.1-3; Lucan, *BC* 1.84; Appian, *BC* 2.9; Plut. *Pomp.* 47, *Caes.* 14, *Luc.* 42; Dio. 38.56.1-4; Florus, *Ep.* 2.12-13.

⁴¹ Gruen, *LGRR*, pp. 83, 88-89.

⁴² W.J. Tatum, *Always I am Caesar*, pp. 25-28.

⁴³ My reference here is to the 1989 novel by Michael Dobbs, subsequently the basis for a BBC television mini-series in the 1990s, and recently made into a Netflix television series (to date, three seasons 2013-2015), about an unscrupulous and fundamentally amoral politician who will stop at nothing to get to the top.

⁴⁴ J. von Ungern-Sternberg, 'The Crisis of the Republic', trans. Harriet I. Flower, *The Cambridge Companion to the Roman Republic*, ed. Harriet I. Flower (Cambridge 2004), p. 102; K. Bringmann, *A History of the Roman Republic* (Cambridge 2007 repr.), p. 231; Tatum, *Always I am Caesar*, pp. 39-40.

of the late Republic, the figure of Caesar casts a long shadow over how McCullough understood the political dynamic of the coalition, and her interpretation of the sources is heavily influenced by a belief in Caesar's unmatched genius. Though this is not unusual in some modern historical works, as a novelist McCullough's bias comes across in the text as much more assertive than an academic study. Yet despite a certain degree of teleology in her conception of Caesar, the 'triumvirate' is portrayed as a reaction to immediate political concerns, and concerned exclusively with short-term goals. McCullough sought to narrate the formation of the 'First Triumvirate' in the context of a Rome which had no idea of the struggle and turmoil to come. This seems rather banal for a date which Syme believed was heavy with history, but it is also a comment on how historical significance is created, and the power of hindsight.

Chapter Four: The 'Vettius Affair'

A strange plot in midsummer or Autumn 59 further documents the tensions of that year. An informer of little repute, L. Vettius, announced a conspiracy of leading nobles to murder Pompey. Among those named were Bibulus, the older and younger Curiones, two Lentuli, Aemilius Paullus, and M. Brutus. The testimony was garbled and readily discredited. Paullus was not even in Italy; and Bibulus had himself earlier given Pompey warning of the plot. Vettius was chained and imprisoned. But Julius Caesar and the tribune P. Vatinius dragged him out on the following day to pursue and intensify the questioning. The informer changed his story; Brutus' name was dropped and new ones were added: Lucullus, Domitius Ahenobarbus, C. Fannius, C. Piso, M. Laterensis, and some sly hints about Cicero. Few could be induced to credit the insinuations, no charges were brought against the alleged plotters, and Vettius was soon thereafter found dead in prison. The meaning and motivation of the affair will probably never be known. Excessive speculation is pointless.¹

Thus Erich Gruen sums up the essentials of the so called 'Vettius Affair' which occurred during Caesar's first consulship. Gruen's observation on the pointlessness of excessive speculation has not, of course, been any impediment to continued speculation; indeed Gruen is not above conducting some speculation of his own.² Nonetheless, who it was that initiated the 'Vettius Affair', and ultimately who was responsible for Vettius' murder, remain unsolved issues in historical scholarship. To say that McCullough has adhered to the view of any one scholar does not do justice to the complexity of her recreation of this strange event. As depicted in *Caesar's Women*, the 'Vettius Affair' is a scheme concocted by Caesar's political enemies, collectively referred to as the *boni*. Vettius approaches M. Calpurnius Bibulus, Caesar's consular colleague, and offers his services as a false informer;³ the scheme is developed further by M. Porcius Cato, who suggests Vettius be used to spread a rumour that Caesar intended to assassinate his close political ally and new son-in-law, Pompey the Great.⁴ The scheme goes pear-shaped when Vettius gives a series of different and unlikely names under questioning in the Senate – completely omitting Caesar's name – and again before the People, when questioned by Caesar and the tribune of the plebs Vatinius.⁵ Having been imprisoned by Caesar, Vettius is murdered during the night, on the orders of (or by the hand of?) his patron C. Calpurnius Piso (cos. 67).⁶ The death of Vettius causes suspicion to be raised that Caesar was behind Vettius' murder, due to the possibility that the incumbent consul would inherit a great

¹ E. Gruen, *The Last Generation of the Roman Republic* (Berkeley 1974), pp. 95-96.

² *Ibid.* p. 96.

³ *Caesar's Women*, p. 731-733.

⁴ *Caesar's Women*, p. 732.

⁵ *Caesar's Women*, pp. 755-756.

⁶ *Caesar's Women*, p. 758.

deal of Pompey's *clientelae* and political connections upon the Great Man's death; thus Caesar, according to this logic, feared that he would be condemned by Vettius' testimony.⁷

McCullough's reconstruction of the 'Vettius Affair' rests on some fundamental points which it will be necessary to address in order to understand how she has reached the novel conclusions that she has.

- Vettius was in fact a client of C. Calpurnius Piso (cos. 67);
- following on from this point, that it was thus a scheme of the *boni* aiming to split Pompey from Caesar;
- the popularity of the *boni* had fallen, or rather the dynasts appeared to have regained some popularity in the lead up to the elections (at that point anticipated for July).

To address the issue of Vettius as a client of the consul of 67; it should be noted from the outset that there is no direct statement or set of circumstances related in the ancient evidence to confirm this. Indeed, if it were the case that Vettius was Piso's client, one might reasonably have expected Cicero to have mentioned this when recounting events to Atticus, or, indeed, for Piso himself to have played a more prominent role in the events as narrated by Cicero (who was a contemporary witness to the proceedings).⁸ Whether or not Piso was behind the affair, surely the patron would have been expected to have a public role to play at a time when their client was being cross-examined in the Senate and before the Assembly. But as Cicero as a source for the affair is incomplete – he only provides us with the initial questioning of Vettius, it is from the later sources that we learn of Vettius' fate – we may concede that perhaps, in this case, we cannot expect Cicero to provide us with all the details we desire.

Vettius as the Client of C. Piso (cos. 67)

To understand why McCullough has portrayed Vettius as Piso's client requires going back to the debates in the *curia* during early December of 63, once the conspiracy of Catilina had been uncovered. In *Caesar's Women*, during one of these debates two of Caesar's *inimici*, Q. Lutatius Catulus (cos. 78) and C. Calpurnius Piso (cos. 67), accuse of Caesar of being complicit in the conspiracy.⁹ As depicted by McCullough, the accusations are made on the spur of the moment, both *inimici* driven by personal feuds with Caesar to denounce him in the *curia*; Catulus because Caesar had recently defeated that eminent consular in the election for *pontifex maximus*, Piso because Caesar as president of the Extortion Court had come close to convicting Piso, who had only escaped

⁷ *Caesar's Women*, pp. 761-762.

⁸ *Att.* 2.24.2-4.

⁹ *Caesar's Women*, p. 394.

conviction through bribery. Part of this reconstruction can be drawn straight from Sallust's account of the two *inimici* denouncing Caesar;¹⁰ Piso's acquittal in Caesar's court requires a little elaboration, however. In the ancient evidence, two charges against Piso are recorded in the sixties; one in 68 and the second in 63. In the first case, the trial was aborted due to bribery (rather ironically, given the charge was *ambitus*); in the second case, Piso was defended by Cicero and acquitted.¹¹ According to Sallust, however, Caesar's role consisted of providing some assistance to the prosecution, rather than being president of the court.¹² Thus Gruen places Caesar in the role of complainant in his discussion, and Alexander hesitantly places Caesar in the role of prosecutor.¹³ Caesar's presidency of the court is questionable, given Sallust's description; nonetheless, whatever Caesar's actual role in the case of 63, it was of benefit to the prosecution. It may be too much to suggest McCullough has confused the two trials, since they do occur as separate incidents in the novel;¹⁴ however, the fact that in *Caesar's Women* Piso escaped condemnation through bribery (as opposed to the advocacy of Cicero) is an interesting repetition of Piso's corruption in 68, and it is on account of her characterization of Piso as a villain, which comes into play in her reconstruction of the 'Vettius Affair', that she chooses to place Vettius in the role of client to Piso. This will be discussed further below.

Having established the enmity that existed between Piso and Caesar by the end of 63, it is pertinent to discuss Vettius' role as informer the following year. It is in McCullough's reconstruction of the denunciations of Caesar in 62 that we first learn that Vettius is Piso's client, when Caesar breaks up the *quaestio* of Novius Niger which was commissioned to uncover Catilinarian supporters.¹⁵ When Caesar peruses the letter Vettius has produced as evidence of his complicity, he remarks that it reminds him of Piso's literary style – which is to say, it was very poorly written.¹⁶ The ancient evidence attests to Vettius' role as *index* in the year 62, including his denunciation of Caesar and his claim to have a letter in Caesar's own handwriting.¹⁷ What is more difficult to establish is a connection to Piso based on the documentary evidence; Suetonius makes no mention of Piso in connection with this incident. What McCullough has done in this case is connect the original denunciation of Piso in 63 with that in 62 made by Vettius – the charge of conspiracy, and the political ineptitude of the man behind them. In neither case could Piso make the charges stick; in 63, because it was a spur of the moment ploy with no real planning behind it, and in 62 because Piso

¹⁰ Sall. *Cat.* 49.2.

¹¹ Cf. M. Alexander, *Trials in the Late Roman Republic* (Toronto 1990), pp. 96-97 (Piso's trial in 68) and p. 112 (Piso's trial in 63).

¹² *Cat.* 49.2.

¹³ Gruen, *LGRR*, p. 266; Alexander, *op.cit.*, cf. n. 190.

¹⁴ *Caesar's Women*, pp. 80 (for mention of Piso's bribery). See n. 190 for mention of Piso's trial in 63.

¹⁵ *Caesar's Women*, pp. 509-512.

¹⁶ *Caesar's Women*, p. 515.

¹⁷ Suet. *Div. Iul.* 17.1-2.

had not reckoned on Caesar's invoking the custom of not indicting one's superiors in a court of law, despite the attempt to produce evidence.¹⁸

The third foundation of McCullough's conception of Vettius' role as Piso's client is her characterization of Piso. We have seen above that McCullough believed Piso had twice escaped criminal charges due to bribery. His physical appearance in the novels could hardly be more villainous, McCullough describing Piso as one of swarthy appearance and discoloured teeth,¹⁹ which is perhaps not surprising given that the source is clearly Cicero's *In Pisonem*, which I will quote below:

For that complexion, like that of slaves, and those hairy cheeks and discoloured teeth, did not deceive us: your eyes, your eyebrows, your brow, in short your whole countenance, which is, as it were, a sort of silent language of the mind, led men into error²⁰

The target of Cicero's attack here is L. Calpurnius Piso (cos. 58), a relative of C. Piso; just as Cicero sought to cast L. Piso as a villain with this description, so too McCullough used the same description to cast C. Piso as a villain. Combined with his earlier crimes, and his escapes from justice due to bribery, C. Piso becomes something of a stereotype villain in the novel, in contrast to Cicero's own description of Piso as '*consul fortis constansque fuerat, incolumis est rei publicae conseruatus*'.²¹ In fact, the only character who comes off worse than Piso in the series is M. Brutus, Caesar's future murderer. Vettius' role as a client of Piso is a reflection of Vettius' own characterization due to his actions as a false informer; in this case, villainy attracts villainy. Ultimately, Vettius' failure to produce results for Piso and his political allies in 59 results in Piso's murder of Vettius.²² Whilst McCullough's contention that Vettius was Piso's client makes for a logical plot development for the narrative, based as it is upon actions dictated by characterization, it is not a sustainable historical argument. It is however a clear demonstration of the fine line between artistic imagination, and the historical imagination.²³ It is also a demonstration of the confidence McCullough placed in her own interpretation of the ancient evidence, that she would come to conclusions not supported by scholars such as Gruen, for whom she had the highest regard and who is listed in her bibliography.²⁴

¹⁸ Suetonius refers to Novius Niger as *quaestor* (which may perhaps be a corruption of *quaesitor*). McCullough refers to Niger as an ex-aedile (*Caesar's Women*, p. 507), which may be a logical conclusion given the role Niger had in heading the commission, and if we read Suetonius' term as *quaesitor*, but is otherwise unattested.

¹⁹ *Caesar's Women*, pp. 105 and 758.

²⁰ Cic. *Pis.* 1.1.

²¹ Cic. *Flacc.* 98.

²² *Caesar's Women*, p. 758.

²³ A quote from R. Seager, *Pompey the Great* (Berkeley 1979) will serve here, "Though Clodius' name does not appear in Cicero's allusions to the affair, to regard it as his brainchild makes excellent sense." (pp. 99-100).

²⁴ s.v. 'Histories of the Roman Republic': *The Last Generation of the Roman Republic*, E. Gruen, California U.P., Berkeley 1974), *Bibliography of the "Masters of Rome" series by Colleen McCullough* (unpublished document), p. 29.

Cicero as Evidence

As I have discussed above, McCullough believed that Vettius was the client of C. Piso. It follows from this that the Vettius Affair was masterminded by those whom she termed the *boni*. To better understand how McCullough has come to this conclusion, we must turn now to an examination of the ancient evidence, beginning with the contemporary account of Cicero. In his letter to Atticus recounting the affair, Cicero observes, '*Vettius ille, noster index ut Caesari perspicimus*'.²⁵ That is, Vettius appears to Cicero to be acting on Caesar's behalf, to discredit Caesar and Pompey's detractor Young Curio, as well as some of his other political opponents such as Bibulus, Domitius Ahenobarbus and Lucullus. Lily Ross Taylor relied heavily upon Cicero's observations to propose that Caesar was indeed behind the affair, and was followed later by Gelzer in his biography of Caesar. Mommsen and Meier both argued that Vatinius acted on Caesar's behalf in concocting the scheme.²⁶ Cicero's equivocation, however, (*ut perspicimus*) has suggested to some scholars that the orator may not have been fully aware of what was happening 'behind the scenes', as it were. Robin Seager suggested, in a provocative but largely unsubstantiated analysis, that the affair was the brainchild of P. Clodius Pulcher, the future *popularis* tribune.²⁷ Gruen, despite his aversion to excessive speculation, nonetheless argued that Caesar probably was not behind the affair, since he had Vettius remove Brutus' name from the list of conspirators.²⁸ For McCullough, it is Gruen's view which holds the most sway in her reconstruction, in that he exonerates Caesar; but other factors were at work. The novelist's opinion of Cicero as a force in politics was not a favourable one; at one point she refers to Cicero (through Caesar) as a "grasshopper with an undisciplined tongue",²⁹ in reference to Cicero's often fluid relationships with various *factiones* and the tendency, as portrayed in the novels, to talk himself into trouble. Perhaps more tellingly, she believed Cicero only managed election to the consulship of 63 because the odious Catilina was a candidate.³⁰ In *Caesar's Women* Cicero is neither a part of the scheming of the *boni*, nor close enough to Caesar, Pompey nor Crassus to be aware of how those three men are manipulating events. He is an outsider. And this perception of Cicero, along with McCullough's highly favourable view of Caesar, leads her to disregard the political judgements underlying Cicero's observations in his letter to Atticus. McCullough is selective in her use of Cicero, making use of material such as the list of names Vettius has produced under questioning, that Vettius was questioned both in the *curia* and before the Assembly, and the

²⁵ Att. 2.24.2.

²⁶ T. Mommsen, *The History of Rome Book V*, trans. William P. Dickson (London 1874), pp. 190-191; C. Meier, *Caesar*, trans. David McLintock (New York 1995, first published in German 1983), p. 210.

²⁷ 'Clodius, Pompeius, and the Exile of Cicero', *Latomus*, T. 24, Fasc. 3 (Juillet-Septembre 1965), pp. 525-531; also *Pompey*, cf. n. 23 above).

²⁸ *LGRR*, p. 96.

²⁹ *Caesar's Women*, p. 658.

³⁰ *Caesar's Women*, pp. 242-243.

reference to Bibulus' warning to Pompey (a point we will return to shortly), but only on account of the fact that this could be said to be a matter of public record. The fact that McCullough did not accept Mommsen's interpretation, considering the huge respect she had for the German scholar, is surprising.³¹ But McCullough had her own reasons. The novelist did not doubt Cicero's eyes and ears. But she certainly doubted the conclusions he drew. As she so tellingly remarked in her Author's Notes to *Caesar's Women*, 'I wish I could say I always believe Cicero, but I do not.'³²

Bibulus and Cato as Masterminds of the Vettius Affair

The recreation of the Vettius Affair in *Caesar's Women* puts Bibulus and Cato in the role of masterminds for the scheme.³³ The warning which Bibulus is recorded as having given in some of our ancient evidence is deployed by McCullough as a red herring on the part of the two men, intended to divert suspicion away from Bibulus once Vettius is questioned.³⁴ It is indeed the case that Bibulus is mentioned in multiple accounts in the ancient evidence; by Cicero, Dio, and thirdly by Appian. Cicero and Dio, however, believed that the inclusion of Bibulus' name damaged the credibility of Vettius as an informer, on account of his earlier warning to Pompey.³⁵ Appian is a little more difficult to understand, however. The Greek writer's account has Vettius running into the forum, crying out that he had been sent by Cicero, Bibulus and Cato to murder Caesar and Pompey, and that he had been provided with a dagger by Bibulus' lictor Postumius.³⁶ Appian's description of events is melodramatic in the extreme. But underlying Appian's melodramatic description are elements of the Ciceronian account (the naming of Bibulus, mention of the dagger Bibulus provided) and the tradition Dio was using (Cicero as one of the initiators of the plot). Indeed, Cicero's role as a plotter is also noted by Plutarch, who dismisses the idea as a clear fabrication.³⁷ In modern scholarship, the warning of Bibulus noted by Cicero and Dio is treated as genuine; there is no work of scholarship which seriously entertains the idea Bibulus and Cato masterminded the Vettius Affair.³⁸ The fact that Cicero records the date that Bibulus' warning was made suggests to me it occurred in some official capacity; it had certainly become part of the public record.³⁹ Thus McCullough's recreation of the Vettius Affair is in this sense a step away from scholarship, as it appears to favour the details given

³¹ See 'Author's Note', *Caesar's Women*, p. 794.

³² *Caesar's Women*, p. 786.

³³ *Caesar's Women*, p. 731-733.

³⁴ *Caesar's Women*, pp. 732-733.

³⁵ Cic. Att. 2.24.3; Dio. 38.9.3.

³⁶ BC 2.12.

³⁷ Luc. 42.7-8.

³⁸ Though L.G. Pocock, *A Commentary on Cicero In Vatinius* (Amsterdam 1926, repr. 1967) cautiously suggested it was equally possible that the 'aristocratic party' or Caesar were responsible for the affair (pp. 183-185).

³⁹ Cic. Att. 2.24.2.

by Appian (minus Vettius' theatrical entry into the forum) over the accounts of Cicero and Dio. Elements of previous studies remain, however. The idea that a red herring was deployed can be found in the study of McDermott,⁴⁰ and, in a very different analysis of the affair, in the reconstruction of Seager.⁴¹ It may be from the latter that McCullough picked up the idea for a red herring, since she had access to Seager's biography of Pompey.⁴² Could Bibulus have decided to use his own name to divert suspicion? Quite possibly, though our sources as they stand now are unlikely to give us a definitive answer, as Gruen observed some years ago. As with her placement of C. Piso as Vettius' patron, McCullough's interpretation of those responsible for masterminding the Vettius Affair is a demonstration of her confidence in interpreting ancient evidence without the backing of modern scholarship.

Aims of the 'Vettius Affair'

In examining McCullough's recreation of the Vettius Affair, one of the basic questions to be answered is, was there an actual plot to assassinate Pompey the Great? Münzer argued, on the basis of the list of suspects provided in Cicero *Att.* 2.24, that the appearance of names such as M. Brutus and Aemilius Paullus indicated a real plot organised by those who had seen relatives executed when Pompey put down the revolt of Lepidus in 78.⁴³ However, this view has not gained a wide acceptance in modern scholarship, much of which is concerned with understanding the Vettius Affair as a political machination intended to split apart a particular political combine, playing on Pompey's well documented fear of assassination.⁴⁴ Such is McCullough's view of the affair. Drawing on the analysis of Taylor (adopted in later editions of Gelzer's biography of Caesar, whose work is listed in McCullough's bibliography),⁴⁵ that the rumour of a plot could be an attempt to discredit political opponents, McCullough portrays Bibulus and Cato attempting to drive a wedge between Caesar and Pompey, a political alliance recently cemented by the marriage of Pompey to Caesar's daughter Julia.⁴⁶ In *Caesar's Women*, Pompey's fear of assassination comes into play with the widespread

⁴⁰ W.C McDermott, 'Vettius Ille, Ille Noster Index', *TAPA*, Vol. 80 (1949), p. 365.

⁴¹ 'Clodius, Pompey and the Exile of Cicero', pp. 527-529; *Pompey*, pp. 99-103.

⁴² s.v. 'Biographies, Pompeius Magnus': 'Pompey – A Political Biography, Blackwell, Oxford 1979', *Bibliography of the "Masters of Rome" series by Colleen McCullough* (unpublished document), p. 17.

⁴³ *Roman Aristocratic Parties and Families*, trans. Therese Ridley, (Baltimore 1999), p. 308.

⁴⁴ For a discussion of the ancient evidence for Pompey's fear of assassination, cf. B.A. Marshall, 'Pompeius' Fear of Assassination', *Chiron*, Vol. 17 (1987), pp. 119-133.

⁴⁵ M. Gelzer, *Caesar: Politician and Statesman*, trans. Peter Needham (Oxford 1968), pp. 90-92. Taylor's article does not appear within McCullough's bibliography; the similarity between the original analysis of Taylor and some elements of McCullough's recreation suggest to me the novelist had come across Taylor's views through Gelzer. For Gelzer in McCullough's bibliography, s.v 'Biographies: Caesar', *Caesar: Politician and Statesman*, trans. Peter Needham, Harvard U.P., Cambridge, Mass. 1968), p. 14.

⁴⁶ *Caesar's Women*, p. 732.

belief that Caesar, now Pompey's father-in-law, was Pompey's political heir;⁴⁷ thus, Caesar had much to gain by way of inheriting Pompey's vast *clientelae* and political connections should the Great Man suddenly perish – especially in the light of Caesar's agrarian legislation which provided land for Pompey's veterans.⁴⁸ Indeed, Cicero is portrayed within the novel as attempting to convince Pompey of Caesar's intent to assassinate the Great Man, a possible reference to his later claims that he attempted to drive Pompey away from Caesar.⁴⁹

Political Context

The political context of the 'Vettius Affair' continues to remain something of a mystery. The chronology of Cicero's letters to Atticus in 59, upon which the dating of the Vettius Affair depends, would appear to prove that the 'Vettius Affair' was not intended to influence the curule elections for 58; the Loeb edition of Cicero's letters edited by Shackleton-Bailey dates *Att.* 2.24 to Autumn, which would put the affair in September, October or November.⁵⁰ However, the view put forward by Taylor in her analysis of the affair is that *Att.* 2.24 should be moved to July, between *Att.* 2.19 and 2.20.⁵¹ Taylor's re-arrangement of the chronology of Cicero's letters has proven influential; as noted above, Gelzer later accepted Taylor's hypothesis, and Gruen also conceded the possibility the affair took place in midsummer.⁵² Both Gelzer and Gruen were influential in shaping McCullough's understanding of historical events, and it is no surprise to find that McCullough also dates the Vettius Affair to July.⁵³ In *Caesar's Women*, then, the Vettius Affair was intended to influence the curule elections. The reason for Bibulus and Cato's hatching of the scheme is that they feared the influence Pompey, Caesar and Crassus could exercise in the elections through their combined *clientelae* and financial resources; this makes perfect sense. Thus, the timing of the affair is crucial; as depicted in *Caesar's Women*, public opinion had swung away from the *boni*, just prior to the elections, hence their use of Vettius.⁵⁴ This point is difficult to establish from the evidence, since Cicero makes several observations on the falling popularity of the triumvirs, such as that in *Att.* 2.18.1. Indeed, Taylor's analysis, upon which McCullough indirectly relies, is in large part dependent upon Cicero (which explains why Taylor thought Caesar was behind the affair, to remove his

⁴⁷ *Caesar's Women*, p. 732.

⁴⁸ See Broughton *MRR II*, pp. 187-188 for sources on Caesar's agrarian legislation in 59.

⁴⁹ *Cic. Phil.* 2.23.10; *Caesar's Women*, pp. 761-762.

⁵⁰ *Cicero: Letters to Atticus* (Cambridge, Mass. 1999), p. 211.

⁵¹ 'The Date and Meaning of the Vettius Affair', pp. 45-48.

⁵² *LGRR*, p. 96.

⁵³ *Caesar's Women*, p. 754.

⁵⁴ *Caesar's Women*, p. 754.

detractors). Nor does McCullough elaborate on why the popularity of the *boni* had fallen.⁵⁵ The ancient sources, to my mind, do not give any real indication that Bibulus or Cato were particularly unpopular during June or July of 59. To be fair, however, our sources for the period are hardly complete; it is not inconceivable that a dip in popularity occurred shortly before the elections, unattested though such a view must remain. The plot development of the novel requires a catalyst for the Vettius Affair; since Caesar is not held responsible by McCullough (nor Clodius, nor Cicero, for that matter), it is Bibulus and Cato that need a compelling reason – and at the same time, an intelligible reason – to initiate the Vettius Affair. What could be more natural for a politician than to devise a scheme to recover their public support?

Conclusion

As we mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, in recreating the 'Vettius Affair' McCullough has not followed one particular interpretation. She has certainly drawn on some common interpretations of scholarship, in recognising the 'Vettius Affair' as a political scheme rather than a genuine assassination plot; and her use of red herrings in Vettius' list of conspirators can be traced back to Robin Seager's biography of Pompey. We come close to the mark with Taylor's placement of the affair in the context of the elections, via Gelzer and Gruen, but again McCullough veers away from accepting the entirety of Taylor's analysis by exonerating Caesar, and his tribune Vatinius. Some of the great Caesarian biographers such as Meier and Gelzer accepted Caesar's role in manipulating the Vettius Affair, and even Mommsen believed it was the work of Vatinius, for which Caesar must bear the responsibility. Perhaps, as Taylor observed many years earlier in regards to the scholars of her own day, McCullough's opinion of Caesar's genius made her unable to accept that the future dictator could be responsible for such a bungled affair. In any case, McCullough does go very much against the grain by exonerating Caesar and attributing the scheme to Bibulus and Cato, but in doing so creates an original episode in her historical novel, and one which can be demonstrated to have been drawn from the ancient sources in many, if not all, of its aspects. Some conjecture remains, of course. Ultimately, it is not the job of the historical novelist to simply regurgitate source material, regardless of how heavily they invest in creating the persona of an authority on the historical material of their subject. That McCullough considered her judgement as good as that of Mommsen or Badian in recreating the historical past is demonstrated in the independent reading of source material, but it should not blind us to the fact that she was first and

⁵⁵ *Caesar's Women*, p. 754.

foremost a novelist, albeit one having a formidable knowledge of the historical period she wrote about.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ *Life: Without the Boring Bits*, pp. 186-189. McCullough believed that her guesses were "as educated as anyone else's from Mommsen to Badian".

Chapter Five: Caesar

Gaius Julius, dearly loved husband, our son is senior consul today, and he will make a mark for the Julii Caesares no other Julius Caesar ever has. And Sulla, what would Sulla have thought? The other man in her life... I miss them both. Yet how good life has been to me. Two daughters well married, grandchildren, and this - this *god* for my son.¹

So reflects Caesar's mother Aurelia, addressing her deceased husband, upon Caesar's election to the consulship for 59 B.C.E. It is an unusually sentimental tangent for the generally austere and business-like Aurelia, but one which captures the essence of how the author of these words conceived the hero of her novels. This is not to say that McCullough actually thought Caesar was a god, a true *diuus Iulius*; but her impression was that he certainly functioned on a plane far above his peers. The rather less sentimental judgement of McCullough's Caesar by Martha Malamud is as someone "impossibly perfect".² Perhaps so. Nonetheless, McCullough's presentation of Julius Caesar evokes certain representations of Caesar which have been debated in the many centuries after his death, as different receptions present him as a statesman, a genius, a destroyer or a victim. The aim of this study is to address how Caesar is portrayed in the novel *Caesar's Women*; that is, up to his departure for Gaul as proconsul. This necessarily excludes the Caesar of the Gallic Wars, and his death at the hands of Brutus, Cassius, and the rest, but incorporates the events of his consulship and his political activities as praetor, focusing on personal characteristics attributed to Caesar by McCullough. Despite the exclusion of what may be seen as the more dramatic periods of Caesar's life, *Caesar's Women* reveals important facets of McCullough's conception of Caesar which will be addressed below. Three aspects of Caesar will be discussed, focusing on McCullough's conception of him as an archetypal masculine hero - his superior rationality, his extraordinary strength (both physical and mental), and his masculinity.

¹ *Caesar's Women*, p. 657.

² 'Serial Romans', *Imperial Projections: Ancient Rome in Modern Popular Culture* [ed.] Sandra R. Joshel, Margaret Malamud and Donald T. McGuire (Baltimore and London 2001), p. 219.

The Supreme Rationality of Caesar

Throughout the series *Masters of Rome* Caesar is portrayed as an individual of supreme rationality. This applies to all aspects of his life, from the personal to the political. His keen, almost omniscient understanding of the political machinations of the day is without equal. As discussed elsewhere, according to McCullough it is only Caesar (aside from those who organised the scheme) who understands who was responsible for Vettius' murder during the Vettius Affair, and what the implications of that murder were, Caesar himself being blamed for the act in the absence of an actual suspect.³ Similarly, it is Caesar alone who recognises the need for himself, Pompey and Crassus to form an alliance (the 'First Triumvirate') in late 60 B.C.E., and how to overcome the opposition of the *boni* to achieve their various political aims – this, despite his relative youth and, compared to Pompey and Crassus certainly, his inexperience.⁴ Caesar's ability to see events clearly is unique in both cases. Yet, I find it hard to believe that McCullough thought Pompey and Crassus not politically savvy enough to see the need - or perhaps, better say the potential benefit - of uniting their forces in 60/59. Both were men who had fought hard throughout the highly charged atmosphere of the late 80s, 70s and 60s to achieve preeminent positions in the state. In McCullough's view, the difference between them and Caesar was not political savvy alone; as it is portrayed in the novel *Caesar's Women*, following the near universal view of Crassus and Pompey's enmity,⁵ it was their animosity which prevented them from taking the logical step of uniting their forces to overcome the opposition of the *boni*.⁶ Caesar himself was quite above such a debilitating flaw, as an example from *Caesar's Women* will show. As tribune (in 62) Cato laments the fact his own allies amongst the *boni* fought him in the *curia* when he introduced a bill to distribute grain at a reduced price, yet Caesar (at this time praetor), who understood the genuine need for the bill, supported it, despite being Cato's avowed enemy.⁷

The contrast between Caesar's rationality and the apparent lack of rational thought by his enemies, and even some of his political allies, is most apparent in McCullough's portrayal of the debate over

³ *Caesar's Women*, p. 761.

⁴ *Caesar's Women*, pp. 645-650 (Caesar and Pompey agree on the coalition with Crassus), also 650-651 (Caesar brings Crassus around to the idea). Bruce Marshall has rightly (I believe) argued against the near universal acceptance of the view that Caesar was the mastermind of the coalition, *Crassus: A Political Biography* (Amsterdam 1976), pp. 99-103; B. A. Marshall & G.R. Stanton, 'The Coalition between Pompeius and Crassus 60-50 B.C.', *Historia*, Bd. 24 H. 2 (2nd Qtr., 1975), pp. 205-219. For a more detailed discussion of McCullough's reconstruction of the 'First Triumvirate', see pp. 33-42 of this thesis.

⁵ See T.R.S. Broughton, *MRR II*, p. 126 for sources on the Pompey-Crassus rivalry during their first consulship in 70.

⁶ For a more detailed discussion of the roles Pompey and Crassus played in the formation of the 'First Triumvirate' as depicted in *Caesar's Women*, see pp. 27-34 of this thesis.

⁷ *Caesar's Women*, p. 564. For Cato's promulgation of a bill for cheap grain see Plut. *Caes.* 8.5-8, and *Cat. Min.* 26.1. However, Plutarch views this as a foil against Caesar's dangerous supporters gathering outside the *curia* while Caesar was being questioned regarding some allegations raised against him. Taking place in 62, this is probably a reference to Curius' denunciation of Caesar in the *curia*, for his alleged involvement in the Catilinarian Conspiracy of 63 (cf. Suet. *Div Iul.* 17.1-2). McCullough presents Cato's bill as a practical but suspiciously popular measure which was opposed by his erstwhile political affiliates amongst the *boni*, yet, as we have noted, in her reconstruction supported by Caesar – who makes an ironic reference to Cato adopting *popularis* tactics and changing his political outlook.

the agrarian legislation put forward during Caesar's consulship. As written by Dio (38.2.4), in *Caesar's Women* Caesar's consular colleague Bibulus vows that the people of Rome would never see the bill passed during his consulship, no matter how badly they wanted it.⁸ The obstruction of Bibulus in this case is contrasted with the force for change that is Caesar; Mathias Gelzer's observation that fundamental questions about the future of the Roman state were embodied in the two consuls is taken up by McCullough here.⁹ But McCullough's Bibulus takes matters one step further, in declaring Caesar to be evil, invoking the superstitious fear of a daemonic force.¹⁰ This prompts a fascinating observation from Caesar when speaking to Servilia later that day:

"But the sort of things Bibulus came out with today put the differences between us on an inhuman plane. As if we were two forces, I for evil, he for good. Exactly how it came out that way is a puzzle to me, except that perhaps total lack of reason and logic must appear to the onlooker as a manifestation of good. Men assume evil needs to be reasonable, logical. So without realising what he did, I believe Bibulus put me at a disadvantage. The fanatic must be a force for good, the thinking man, being detached, seems evil by comparison."¹¹

It is interesting to note here that even Bibulus' victory over Caesar in the assembly, based on an irrational perception of evil held by the audience, is itself born not from rational planning but a spontaneous superstitious outburst. In *Caesar's Women* Bibulus cannot even be credited with a working political strategy. Caesar is defeated not by reason, but by the complete lack of it - or perhaps better to say, its polar opposite.¹² This contrast of Caesar's reason (and, earlier in the series, that of Marius and Sulla) with the blind fanaticism of his enemies applies to a large extent throughout the novels. The reader of McCullough is inclined to identify with the reasonable Caesar over his passionate, but totally misguided, adversaries; especially since the character of Caesar is the filter through which the reader understands the incident. For some contemporary observers, however, the obstruction of Bibulus was honourable and praiseworthy;¹³ and the value of the obstructionist tactics is noted by modern scholars.¹⁴ The vehement opposition to Caesar by Bibulus, Cato and others does not have to be regarded as irrational. The result in *Caesar's Women* is a casting of Caesar's opponents as a weak and irrational 'Other'.

⁸ *Caesar's Women*, pp. 670-671.

⁹ *Caesar: Politician and Statesman*, trans. Peter Needham (Cambridge, Mass. 1968), p. 71.

¹⁰ *Caesar's Women*, p. 669.

¹¹ *Caesar's Women*, p. 672.

¹² *Caesar's Women*, pp. 669-671

¹³ Cic. Att. 2.20.4.

¹⁴ E. Gruen, *The Last Generation of the Roman Republic* (Berkeley 1974), pp. 91-92.

Caesar the Superior Statesman

This concept of Caesar's superior rationality also extends to his political vision for Rome's future, as contrasted with that of his political rivals. The clash over the agrarian legislation of Caesar's consulship is just such an example. The issue at stake is identified as both a military one, in view of the need to reward Pompey's veterans after their term of service, but also a social one, in terms of moving a sizeable portion of Rome's population onto farms around Italy.¹⁵ As has become the habit of scholars even today, the identification of this social aspect is attributed to Caesar alone, despite the fact it is on Pompey's initiative the legislation is promulgated - there is no real indication that Pompey (or Crassus for that matter) had any part in working out the details with Caesar. Indeed, Cicero's amendments to the agrarian bill of Flavius concerning the rights of property holders, which came to be adopted by Caesar in 59, are not mentioned as an influence here by McCullough either.¹⁶ As for the opposition to the agrarian bills, as noted in some of the later ancient sources the opposition was unable to provide a coherent argument as to why they opposed the measures;¹⁷ yet surely there were fundamental issues at stake? Cicero notes the loss of home revenue, by that time now reduced significantly due to the abolition of port dues;¹⁸ McCullough was certainly aware of this, but, following Dio, she does not permit the opposition to vocalise such a reasonable argument.¹⁹ The potential for a massive increase in *clientelae* for Pompey and Crassus as head of the land commission,²⁰ and the possibility of increased influence in the tribal assemblies that this entailed (something which Plutarch seems to be suggesting at *Cat. Min.* 31),²¹ would also have been expected to be central to the debates on the agrarian programme of Caesar's consulship. The potential displacement of civilian-farmers for soldier-colonies also comes to mind. Instead, in *Caesar's Women* the opposition is galvanised by the fact it was Caesar who promulgated the bills.²² This denies the *boni* any real sense of statesmanship – having read, amongst other works, *From the Gracchi to Nero*, McCullough was certainly aware of Scullard's view of the 'overriding of civilian by military needs', that fatal legacy of Marius;²³ yet it is clear in this instance that she has been

¹⁵ *Caesar's Women*, pp. 664-665. Dio notes the social need at 38.1.2-3. In his view the city was overpopulated, which led to outbreaks of violence, and the countryside of Italy had been ruined by warfare (from the Social War and the civil war between Sulla and Marius).

¹⁶ Cf. *Att.* 1.19.4.

¹⁷ Dio. 38.1.2, 38.2.1-3.

¹⁸ *Att.* 2.16.1.

¹⁹ The abolition of port dues is mentioned in *Caesar's Women*, pp. 609, 655. On p. 655 it is even mentioned in the context of the debate on Caesar's agrarian legislation; but it is not an issue raised by Caesar's political opponents (nor by Cicero, who of course mentions the port dues in his letter to Atticus cited above [n. 18]). It is only raised by Caesar himself, who mentions it as a criticism of Nepos' measure.

²⁰ For the role of Pompey and Crassus in heading the agrarian commission, cf. Broughton, *MRR II*, pp. 191-192.

²¹ L.R. Taylor, *Party Politics in the Age of Caesar* (Berkeley 1948, 2nd ed. 1966), pp. 52-54. Especially after the enfranchisement of Italy south of the Po, the geographic distribution of tribes was a patchwork across Italy. The settlement of veterans, bound to support Pompey and Crassus as heads of the agrarian commission, concentrated around Capua and belonging to the more influential rural tribes weakened the influence of other senators in the tribal assemblies.

²² *Caesar's Women*, p. 669. "I oppose [Bibulus says] because you're promulgating it, Caesar, for no other reason!"

²³ H.H. Scullard, *From the Gracchi to Nero: A History of Rome from 133 B.C to A.D 68*, 5th ed., (London and New York 1982), p. 115.

influenced by historians such as Mommsen and Gelzer, even Scullard himself (despite the quote above, he still saw Caesar's agrarian reforms as necessary) in viewing the opposition as standing in the way of necessary progress.²⁴

What appears odd to the reader of *Caesar's Women* in the context of the events and issues of Caesar's consulship is the universal acceptance of Caesar's extortion law during his consulship - the *boni* seem less rational than ever when they support the *lex Iulia de repetundis*, yet oppose the agrarian legislation simply because Caesar proposed it.²⁵ The opposition becomes a personal attack on Caesar, inspired by fear and perhaps a little envy, rather than part of a political debate.²⁶ When Martha Malamud observed that the McCullough represented Romans of the Republic as 'infantilized egoists',²⁷ this is the sort of behaviour she had in mind - action driven by a basic impulse of anger. However, as we have shown above, and as we will continue to observe below, there is one significant exception to this rule of 'infantilism' - Caesar himself.

The Characterization of Caesar

"They giggle uncontrollably. They fall into terrible screaming rages. They turn red and stamp their feet."²⁸ Martha Malamud thus summarises behavioural characteristics McCullough attributes to the noblemen responsible for the fate of the Roman Republic. Indeed, Crassus squawks when Caesar gives up his triumph to declare his candidacy for the consular elections of 59 B.C.E.²⁹ Yet Malamud misses an important exception when making this point about McCullough's Romans. Not once in the *Masters of Rome* series does the future dictator giggle, squeal, squawk, scream, stamp his feet in childish frustration or give in to what Malamud termed 'infantilising behaviour'. Other characters may scream in rage, but Caesar roars and thunders;³⁰ where Cicero giggles, Caesar gives a laugh.³¹ As

²⁴ T. Mommsen, *The History of Rome Book V*, pp. 185-186; *From the Gracchi to Nero*, p. 153. As noted above, however (n. 14), the tactical value of this kind of opposition should not be underestimated. Scullard's *From the Gracchi to Nero* appears in McCullough's bibliography, s.v 'Histories of the Roman Republic', *Bibliography of the "Masters of Rome" series by Colleen McCullough* (unpublished document), p. 29.

²⁵ *Caesar's Women*, p.669. The *lex Iulia de repetundis* aimed to regulate the conduct of governors within their provinces, and curb some of the worst excesses of Roman officials. Cf. Broughton *MRR II*, p. 188 for sources on the law.

²⁶ Modern political debates have their share of back-flips, re-contextualisation of statements, and gaffes, which can make it difficult to understand precisely what a given political leader stands for, and can certainly give a (hopefully false) impression they only stand for what is expedient. This may account for McCullough's interpretation of the political perspective (or lack thereof) of the *boni*, though we must be careful about applying modern parallels.

²⁷ 'Serial Romans', p. 211.

²⁸ *ibid.* 210.

²⁹ *Caesar's Women*, p. 616.

³⁰ *Caesar's Women*, p. 512 (as praetor, when Caesar storms into the *quaestio* of Novius Niger), pp.749-750 (in the senate, once Pompey has persuaded the senate to allocate Further Gaul to Caesar and Cato protests).

³¹ *Caesar's Women*, p.698, "When the story [of Metellus Celer's death] was done, the thought popped into Cicero's mind; he giggled. "Clytemnestra!", he said." It is a reaction somewhat at odds with Cicero's account of his emotional state at the time of Celer's death in the *Pro Caelio* (24.59) 'cum me intuens flentem significabat interruptis ac morientibus uocibus quanta inpenderet procella mihi', but perhaps more in keeping with the difficult relationship demonstrated by the exchange of letters with Celer in *Fam.* 5.1 and 5.2. Cicero had good reason for playing up his relationship with Celer in the *Pro Caelio*, where a large part of his speech was devoted to the total character

we saw above, he is perfectly capable of profound philosophical insights which demonstrate a deep understanding of human nature – or at least a complex if perhaps debatable conception of it – something which Malamud's assessment does not take note of. He loses his temper on occasion, it is true, yet never loses control in the way Cato does,³² nor allows his rage to cloud his thought processes, behaviour which characterizes Brutus' mother, Servilia.³³ Cicero's provocation (as Caesar saw it) during the defence of his consular colleague C. Antonius Hybrida, where Cicero laments the state of affairs with the 'triumvirate' dominating politics in Rome, results in a coldly planned political revenge – the transfer of Clodius to the *plebs*.³⁴ This is not Caesar lashing out wildly to repay an eye for an eye, however; it is anger translated into a methodical execution of policy.³⁵ The contrast of behaviours between Caesar and the other characters who inhabit the stage of McCullough's drama is a telling one. Not being prone to these 'infantilising' behaviours, Caesar is characterised as the epitome of masculinity, a cut above his peers.

Caesar's Masculinity

This traditional masculinity of Caesar is an interesting contrast to the "ill-dressed" feminized individual, the man who was noted for wearing unusually long sleeves on his tunic.³⁶ The Caesar we meet in McCullough's novels is plainly dressed in comparison to his contemporaries, and Malamud notes the sharp comparison in *Fortune's Favourites* between Caesar "dressed for the road", and King Nicomedes dressed for the boudoir, complete with maquillage.³⁷ Caesar's apparent interest in the fashions of the day – or at least his own interpretations of them – are notably absent. The only fashion statement Caesar makes is during his consulship, where his toga displays the purple stripe of his Julian ancestors, "as it was in the time of the kings";³⁸ that is, according to McCullough, an ordinary purple colour, rather than the Tyrian purple which was closely associated with ancient conceptions of royalty. The statement is political, rather than an expression of individuality; here is a man who honours the *mos maiorum*, 'the way of the ancestors', and shirks the trappings of an

assassination of Celer's widow Clodia. Cicero's association with Celer, whom he praised in extravagant terms, redounded to Cicero's own credit (so long as the audience believed him), enhancing his *dignitas* as Caelius' defense counsel. For further examples in *Caesar's Women* of giggling Roman noblemen, p. 112 (Cicero again), pp. 171 and 691 (P. Clodius), and p. 624 (Celer himself). For Caesar's reaction in a comparable situation, *Caesar's Women*, p. 653.

³² When Caesar is reinstated to his office as praetor after his brief suspension. "Cato literally screamed... turned to one of the pillars outside Jupiter Stator and punched it until the others managed to hold his arm down and pull him away. 'I will not rest, I will not rest, I will not rest', he kept saying..." (*Caesar's Women*, p. 506).

³³ *Caesar's Women*, p. 518.

³⁴ Cic. Att. 8.3.3, Dom. 13.35, and 29.77, Sest. 16, Prov. 42; Appian BC 2.14.1; Dio. 38.12.1-2, and 39.11.2-3. McCullough's telling is at *Caesar's Women*, pp. 689-693.

³⁵ *Caesar's Women*, pp. 690-691.

³⁶ Suet. Div. Iul. 45.2.

³⁷ 'Serial Romans', p. 218.

³⁸ *Caesar's Women*, p. 654.

extravagant society in favour of the simplicity of the ancestors of late Republican Rome.³⁹ Not that McCullough's Caesar in all respects resembles Martial's ideal of what a Roman man should be;⁴⁰ it is something of a surprise to find that this masculine Caesar has a horror of body lice which leads him to have all of his body hair plucked every day,⁴¹ by Roman standards an effeminate trait.⁴² But even this demonstrates his masculinity according to McCullough; Servilia is amazed to find Caesar's body "hairless, like the statue of a god".⁴³ The connection which Roman writers like Martial made between depilation and effeminacy McCullough has chosen to downplay in the novels, depicting it instead as an eccentricity on Caesar's part which does not detract from his inherent *uirtus*. Masculine Caesar most certainly is, but unlike Martial's ideal he is never dirty, unclean or unkempt; nor was McCullough's Caesar ever in the habit of scratching his head with one finger, a peculiarly Roman indicator of effeminacy.⁴⁴ He comes across in fact as a very twentieth century individual, even something of a handyman when he fixes Crassus' door-lock,⁴⁵ but not quite the man whom Tatum joked was "history's first metro-sexual".⁴⁶

Caesar's Physical Presence

We now turn to Caesar's physical strength, or perhaps better to say his physical *presence*. Whilst Caesar's strength is noted in *Caesar's Women*, it is much less advertised than in the earlier novels which are written about his youth. The concept of Caesar's presence, however - his impact on those around him through the sheer force of his personality - gains momentum in *Caesar's Women*. There are two instances I would like to highlight here, both of which occur during Caesar's consulship. The first is during the senatorial debate on the agrarian bills, when opposition is mounting against him and Bibulus proposes a *senatus consultum ultimum* to drive Caesar out of the city:

The eyes so like Sulla's passed from face to face, lingered on Cicero with the ghost of a menace in them not only Cicero felt. What a power the man had! It radiated out of him, and hardly any senator there didn't suddenly understand that what would work on anyone else,

³⁹ Cf. A. Corbeill, *Controlling Laughter: Political Humour in the Late Roman Republic* (Princeton 1996), pp. 194-195; A. Corbeill, *Nature Embodied: Gesture in Ancient Rome* (Princeton and Oxford 2004), pp. 134-135. McCullough cannot have made use of Corbeill, yet her portrayal of Caesar wearing an ordinary purple stripe on his toga seems to suggest she was in some way aware of the political significance of a Roman's attire, as part of, as Corbeill puts it, "political codes of external appearance." (*Nature Embodied*, p. 135).

⁴⁰ *Epigrammata*, 10.65.

⁴¹ As noted by Suetonius, though more as rumour than fact (*Div. Iul.* 45.2).

⁴² Corbeill, *Nature Embodied*, pp. 134-135.

⁴³ *Caesar's Women*, p. 58.

⁴⁴ Plut. *Caes.* 4.8. A male scratching their head with one finger was an undesirable behaviour, indicating effeminacy, in ancient Rome, cf. Corbeill, *Nature Embodied*, pp. 134-135. Plut. *Pomp.* 48.7 provides another instance of this behaviour used as slander, by Clodius against Pompey.

⁴⁵ *Caesar's Women*, pp. 719-720.

⁴⁶ *Always I am Caesar* (Carlton 2008), p. 33.

even Pompey, would never stop Caesar. If they called his bluff, they all knew it would turn out to be no bluff. He was more than merely dangerous. He was disaster.⁴⁷

The reference to the similarity of Caesar's eyes to Sulla's is a trait within the novels only – though Plutarch notes that Sulla had a terrifying stare⁴⁸ – a reference to the fear Sulla was able to inspire simply through his gaze and the terrifying personality which he stamped upon his dictatorship via the proscriptions. The ability to bend others to their will through an awe-inspiring personal magnetism is a feature common to both Roman dictators in McCullough's novels, though in Caesar's case it is depicted differently. Sulla's charisma stems from what might be termed an innate evil, Caesar's comes from power itself without being diluted by connotations of evil (or good for that matter). The perception by others of some indefinable power radiating from Caesar is probably the most significant of Caesar's attributes in the novels, as it defines him as an essential Great Man. The fantasy, as Malamud termed it,⁴⁹ of the masculine reader is personified in McCullough's Caesar:

Caesar got to his feet and lifted his arms toward the ceiling, fists clenched; Crassus suddenly saw how thick the muscles were in those deceptively slender limbs, and felt the hair rise on the back of his neck. The power in the man!⁵⁰

For McCullough, Caesar presents a form of greatness which is not diluted by that evil which she felt lurked inside Sulla; nor is there a hint of that spurious aspect of greatness which Christian Meier attributed to Caesar, which is perhaps not all that surprising given that Meier's biography does not appear in McCullough's bibliography.⁵¹ The view of a corrupt and degenerate oligarchy ruling the Republic, which McCullough drew largely from Mommsen,⁵² *ipso facto* defines the innate power of Caesar as a good thing. Not because Caesar himself is such a moral paragon (although that ability to always put his opponents in the wrong, noted by Gelzer, comes across very strongly),⁵³ but because he stands as the opponent of the corruption, fanaticism and poor statesmanship which for McCullough defined the *boni* of the late Republic.

⁴⁷ *Caesar's Women*, p. 686.

⁴⁸ For Sulla, cf. Plut. *Sulla* 2.1; Suet. *Div. Iul.* 45.1 notes Caesar's eyes were '*nigris uegetisque*', but unlike Sulla's, not terrifying.

⁴⁹ *Op.cit.* p. 227.

⁵⁰ *Caesar's Women*, p. 746. Meier, *Caesar*, notes this about Caesar, "here was a man who had trained himself to project an outward gaiety that derived from his aloof and disdainful inner self and to conceal the awful depths of his soul." (p. 209). Yet Meier was still impressed by Caesar's abilities, "Caesar is the whole and complete man." (p. 17).

⁵¹ *Ibid.* p. 18. s.v. 'Biographies', 'Caesar', *Bibliography of the "Masters of Rome" series by Colleen McCullough* (unpublished document), p.

14.

⁵² *The History of Rome: Book V*, pp. 185-187, 288, 417-418.

⁵³ M. Gelzer, *Caesar*, p. 78.

Conclusion

This has been a brief sketch of McCullough's reception of Julius Caesar, and much more could (and hopefully will be) written on the subject. By focusing on this phase of his early career, I hope to have illuminated aspects of Caesar's character which have a personal resonance for a reader of McCullough's novels, rather than the more abstract (but no less important) ideas of liberty and tyrannicide, or the concept of Caesar the great conqueror, and so on. The fantasy of McCullough's Caesar is very much a Western, masculine one, built upon a contrast of behaviours with peers. What I have written of here is more concerned with Caesar's characteristics – his gifts and abilities as a man – as McCullough has presented them, than with her account of his 'historically significant' deeds. The drive to imitation by mediaeval and renaissance popes like Julius II or Leo X⁵⁴ is echoed in the present day, but on account of Caesar's perceived personality and abilities.⁵⁵ Mussolini's reception of Caesar, whilst incorporating the superior personality which he attributed to Caesar, was founded upon the idea of Caesar the Dictator, rather than Caesar as a *man*.⁵⁶ What McCullough puts forward in *Caesar's Women* is a vision of Caesar as the best of humanity, a person she believed was "probably the most gifted man that ever walked the earth".⁵⁷ She draws strongly on the views of Caesar's genius held by Mommsen and Gelzer,⁵⁸ but rejects even their acceptance of Caesar's occasional political ineptitude, or the qualifications of Caesar's greatness observed by Meier.⁵⁹ In *Caesar's Women* McCullough has bequeathed an unashamedly partisan view of Caesar of which the modern day historian is naturally suspicious, reflecting as it does an old-fashioned and (dare I say) outdated concept of a heroic, historical *exemplum*. McCullough would have said the best of humanity is worthy of imitation, and her selective use of the ancient sources to reflect the best of Caesar – as she saw it – is her vehicle for presenting such a figure to her readership.

⁵⁴ Nicholas Temple, 'Julius II as Julius Caesar', *Julius Caesar in Western Culture* [ed.] Maria Wyke (Carlton 2006), pp. 110-127, esp. 113; from the same edition, John Osborne, 'St. Peter's Needle and the Ashes of Julius Caesar: Invoking Rome's Imperial History at the Papal Court ca. 1100-1300', pp. 95-109.

⁵⁵ The different uses Caesar has been put to in modern political commentary fall outside the scope of this chapter, but I would simply note here the difference between what I would term positive imitation (which I mean by the above) and the imitation perceived by others, such as newspaper cartoons depicting George W. Bush as a modern Caesar invading Iraq.

⁵⁶ Jane Dunnet, 'The Rhetoric of *Romanita*: Representations of Caesar in Fascist Theatre' (*Julius Caesar*, [ed.] Maria Wyke), p.249

⁵⁷ <www.smh.com.au/entertainment/books/lunch-with--colleen-mccullough-20120105-1pllr.html>

⁵⁸ *Op.cit.* p. 419, "His remarkable power of intuition revealed itself in the precision and practicability of all his arrangements." Mommsen also refers here to Caesar as a "man of genius". Mommsen's discussion of Caesar is illuminating, but largely concerned with Caesar as the perfect statesman (pp. 419-426); Gelzer, *Caesar*, pp. 1, 68-69.

⁵⁹ Meier, *op.cit* (see n. 285 above). On Caesar's political follies, Mommsen *op.cit.* p. 168 (Caesar's involvement in the Catilinarian Conspiracies "an ascertained fact"); Gelzer, *Caesar*, pp. 90-92 (Caesar's flawed attempt at discrediting his opponents via the Vettius Affair).

Conclusion

What I have undertaken with this thesis is to demonstrate not only the great influence modern scholarship has had on McCullough's representation of a pivotal time in Western history, but to also demonstrate where she has preferred her own interpretation of the ancient evidence and what narratological factors have influenced her to do so. It is unusual for a reception study to have such a heavy focus on the use of ancient evidence and modern scholarship, but I believe in the case of McCullough's novels it is especially pertinent. The pride she took in the scale of her research, at close to twenty years, her close adherence to the ancient evidence and the extensive bibliography she amassed, cannot be ignored in a study of her novels. McCullough intended her novels to be ranked with academic treatises and used to assist in the teaching of history, and that is what has been the driving force behind the approach I have taken to this thesis.

Characterization and plot development were, I hope to have shown, fundamental in the way McCullough has interpreted key historical events represented in the novels. The characterization of Caesar, the hero of the novels, as a man far more rational, intelligent, and masculine than his peers, bears strongly upon McCullough's recreation of the 'Vettius Affair', for example. It is unthinkable for McCullough that Caesar could have been responsible for masterminding what turned out to be such a hare-brained scheme. By contrast, Caesar's less rational, myopic opponents are cast as just the type of politicians who would mastermind such a pathetic plot. Pompey the Great is another interesting example. His rural origins, not to mention his Gallic ancestry, make him almost something of a yokel in McCullough's Rome. This characterization leads into the disturbing decision he makes to confine his wife Mucia to a rural isolation, prompting her to conduct an affair with T. Labienus. P. Clodius, driven by a thirst for revenge against Aurelia, violates the rites of the Bona Dea. Characterization is a major part of how McCullough recreates historical events in the late Roman Republic. This is partly what makes McCullough's novels so interesting, however. Depicting historical characters with their quirks and (sometimes infantile) motivations transforms them from mere names on a page to people we can relate to, or be repulsed by. Historical causation is given a more human, and less mechanical, representation.

It has not been my intention throughout this thesis to suggest that McCullough blindly followed any particular historian's interpretation of events. As with academic history, however, there are clear indications of where she has been influenced by one historian or school of thought over another. The clearest case is in regards to her use of Mommsen. His enthusiasm for Caesar was certainly shared by McCullough. But the sheer weight of his name, the only ancient historian to have won the

Nobel Prize, not to mention the scale of the work he undertook, certainly influenced the great respect McCullough had for his judgement. Nowhere is this clearer than in her recreation of the coalition of 71/70. To my knowledge, no historian since Mommsen has suggested Caesar had such an active role (or any role at all for that matter) in uniting Pompey and Crassus at that time. Yet McCullough favoured Mommsen over more recent scholarship, notably Erich Gruen. McCullough's enthusiasm for Gruen is perhaps best explained by the contributions the American scholar made to the field of prosopography, in particular *The Last Generation of the Roman Republic*. By drawing together the disparate sources for a large cast of Roman noblemen, and providing a detailed analysis of their careers and significance, Gruen's major work was very influential in enabling McCullough to enliven the cosmos of her imagined Rome with a cast of historical characters lifted straight from the pages of history. Though McCullough's use of Gruen has been demonstrated in a number of instances throughout this thesis, she did not always agree with Gruen's interpretations. This is also true of scholars such as Gelzer, Syme and Scullard. McCullough's use of the works of these scholars was considerable, and yet, especially in regards to her recreation of the 'Bona Dea Affair', she departed from the guidance of these scholars to form some fascinatingly independent interpretations. This is where McCullough's persona as an authority on the late Roman Republic comes into play; McCullough had enough confidence in her own ability to read into the sources to form her own judgement and to eschew scholarship entirely in some cases.

What I hope to have achieved with the writing of this thesis is a detailed discussion of how McCullough has recreated the world of the late Roman Republic in her novels, through both her guidance from scholarship and from her own literary techniques as a novelist. McCullough intended her novels to be used as an educational aide in the teaching of history, as with so many receptions of antiquity. As I have found with my own experience, the first step towards an academic interest in antiquity is often to connect with a reception of the past, rather than to pick up a copy of (for example) the weighty tome that is Mommsen's *History of Rome*. This collection studying a variety of topics portrayed in *Caesar's Women*, will, I hope, provide future students and teachers with a foundation point from which to direct discussion of representations of history within the classroom, and make the best of use of McCullough's novels for the study of history more generally. There is ample potential for the *Masters of Rome* series to draw in future students to ancient history and, with the proper tools, to understand how McCullough has represented the late Roman Republic, to pursue academic careers in the field.

Bibliography

Alexander, M.C., *Trials in the Late Roman Republic: 149 BC to 50 BC*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto (1990).

Allen Jnr., W., 'The "Vettius Affair" Once More', *TAPA*, Vol. 81 (1950), pp. 153-163.

Babcock, C., 'The Early Career of Fulvia', *AJP*, Vol. 86, No. 1 (Jan., 1965), pp. 1-32.

Balsdon, J.P.V.D., 'Fabula Clodiana', *Historia*, Bd. 15, H. 1 (Jan., 1966), pp. 65-73.

Bringmann, K., *A History of the Roman Republic*, trans. W.J. Smyth, Polity Press, Cambridge (2007).

Broughton, T.R.S., *Magistrates of the Roman Republic: Volume II*, American Philological Association, New York (1951).

--- *Magistrates of the Roman Republic: Volume III*, American Philological Association, New York (1952).

Brouwer, H.H.J., *Bona Dea: The Sources and A Description of the Cult*, E.J. Brill, Leiden (1989).

Butler, H.E. and Cary, M., *C. Suetoni Tranquilli Divus Iulius*, Clarendon Press, Oxford (1927).

Corbeill, A., *Controlling Laughter: Political Humour in the Late Republic*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey (1996).

--- *Nature Embodied: Gesture in Ancient Rome*, Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford (2004).

Cornell, T.J. [ed.], *Fragments of the Roman Historians*, Oxford University Press, Oxford (2013) .

Curthoys, A. and Docker, J., *Is History Fiction?*, UNSW Press, Sydney (2nd ed. 2010).

Flower, H.I. [ed.] *The Cambridge Companion to The Roman Republic*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne (2004).

---Holkeskamp, K.J., 'Under Roman Roofs: Family, House, and Household', pp. 113-138.

---von Ungern-Sternberg, J., trans. Harriet I. Flower, 'The Crisis of the Republic', pp. 89-109 .

Gelzer, M., *Caesar: Politician and Statesman*, trans. Peter Needham, Basil Blackwell, Cambridge, Mass. (1968, first published in German in 1921).

--- *The Roman Nobility*, trans. R. Seager, Blackwell, Oxford (1969, first published in German in 1912).

Gold, B.K., "'The House I Live in is Not My Own': Women's Bodies in Juvenal's *Satires*", *Arethusa*, Vol. 31, No. 3 (Fall 1998), pp. 369-386.

Gruen, E.S., 'P. Clodius: Instrument or Independent Agent?', *Phoenix*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (Summer 1966), pp. 120-130.

--- *The Last Generation of the Roman Republic*, University of California Press, Berkeley (1974).

Hillard, T.W., 'P. Clodius Pulcher 62-5 B.C.: 'Pompeii Adfinis et Sodalis'', *Papers of the British School at Rome*, Vol. 50 (1982), pp. 34-44.

--- 'The Sisters of Clodius Again', *Latomus*, T. 32, Fasc. 3 (Juillet-Septembre 1973), pp. 504-514.

Jannidis, F., 'Character', *Handbook of Narratology*, [eds.] P. Huhn et al., Walter de Gruyter, Berlin and New York (2009).

Kelly, D., 'An Unforgotten Episode in the Life of Caesar', *Ancient History: Resources for Teachers*, Vol. 41-44 (2011-2014), pp. 66-77.

Keifer, O., *Sexual Life in Ancient Rome*, trans. Gilbert and Helen Highet, Abbey Library, London (1934).

Leach, J., *Pompey the Great*, Croom Helm, London (1978).

Malamud, M., 'Serial Romans', *Imperial Projections: Ancient Rome in Modern Popular Culture*, [ed.] Sandra R. Joshel, Margaret Malamud and Donald T. McGuire, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London (2001), pp. 209-228.

Marshall, B.A., *Crassus: A Political Biography*, Hakkert, Amsterdam (1976).

Martindale, C., *Redeeming the Text: Latin poetry and the hermeneutics of reception*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge (1993).

--- 'Introduction: Thinking Through Reception', *Classics and the Uses of Reception*, [eds.] Charles Martindale and Richard F. Thomas, Blackwell Publishing, Carlton (2006).

McCullough, C., *Fortune's Favorites*, Arrow Books, Sydney (1993, 2003 repr.).

--- *Caesar's Women*, Arrow Books, Sydney (1996, 2003 repr.).

--- *Life: Without the Boring Bits*, HarperCollins, Sydney (2011).

McDermott, W.C., 'Vettius Ille, Ille Noster Index', *TAPA*, Vol. 80 (1949), pp. 351-367.

Mommsen, T., *The History of Rome: Book V*, trans. William P. Dickson, Dodo Press, Gloucester (1874, 2008 repr.).

Meier, C., *Caesar*, trans. Peter McIntock, HarperCollins, New York (1995, first published in German 1982).

Murray, D., 'The Early Career of P. Clodius Pulcher: A Re-Examination of the Charges of Mutiny and Sacrilege', *TAPA*, Vol. 118 (1988), pp. 155-178.

Münzer, F., *Roman Aristocratic Parties and Families*, trans. Therese Ridley (Baltimore 1995, first published in German 1921).

van Ooteghem, J., *Pompée Le Grand: Bâtitteur D'Empire*, Bruxelles Palais des Academies, Bruxelles (1953).

Osgood, J., 'Caesar and Nicomedes', *CQ*, New Series, Vol. 58, No. 2 (Dec., 2008), pp. 687-691.

Hardwick, L., and Stray, C., [eds.], *A Companion to Classical Receptions*, Blackwell, Oxford (2008).

--- Hardwick, L., and Stray, C., 'Introduction: Making Connections', pp. 1-9.

--- Paul, J., 'Working With Film', pp. 303-314.

Pomeroy, S.B., *Goddesses, Whores, Wives & Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity*, Pimlico, London (1975).

Richlin, A., *The Garden of Priapus: Sexuality and Aggression in Roman Humour*, (Revised Edition, first published 1983), Oxford University Press, New York and Oxford (1992).

Rolfe, J.C., 'The So-Called Callium Provincia', *AJPh*, Vol. 36 No. 3 (1915), pp. 323-331.

Rundell, W.M.F., 'Cicero and Clodius: The Question of Credibility', *Historia*, Bd. 28, H. 3 (3rd Qtr., 1979), pp. 301-328.

Scullard, H.H., *From the Gracchi to Nero: A History of Rome from 133 B.C to A.D 68*, 5th ed., Routledge, London and New York (1959, 5th ed. 1982).

--- *Festivals and Ceremonies of the Roman Republic*, Thames and Hudson, London (1981).

Seager, R., 'Clodius, Pompey and the Exile of Cicero', *Latomus*, T. 24, Fasc. 3 (Juillet-Septembre 1965), pp. 519-531.

--- *Pompey the Great: A Political Biography*, 2nd ed., Blackwell Publishing, Carlton (1979).

Shackleton-Bailey, *Cicero: Letters to Atticus*, Harvard University Press, Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge, Mass., (1999).

Skinner, M., *Sexuality in Greek and Roman Culture*, Blackwell, Carlton (2005).

Stanton, G.R., and Marshall, B.A., 'The Coalition between Pompeius and Crassus 60-59 B.C', *Historia*, Bd. 24, H. 2 (2nd Qtr., 1975), pp. 205-219.

Stevenson, T., *Julius Caesar and the Transformation of the Roman Republic*, London and New York, Routledge (2015).

--- 'Imaginations of Ancient Rome in 19th Century Historical Novels', *Ancient History Resources for Teachers*, vol. 41-44 (2011-2014).

Syme, R., 'The Allegiance of Labienus', *The Journal of Roman Studies*, Vol. 28, Part 2 (1938), pp. 113-125.

--- *The Roman Revolution*, Oxford University Press, Oxford (1939).

Tatum, W. J., 'The Poverty of the Claudii Pulchri: Varro De Rustica 3. 16. 1-2', *The Classical Quarterly*, Vol. 42, No. 1 (1992), pp. 190-20.

--- *The Patrician Tribune: P. Clodius Pulcher*, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill and London (1999).

--- *Always I am Caesar*, Blackwell Publishing, Carlton (2008).

Taylor, L.R., 'Caesar and the Roman Nobility', *TAPA*, Vol. 73 (1942), pp. 1-24.

--- 'The Date and Meaning of the Vettius Affair', *Historia*, Bd. 1, H. 1 (1950), pp. 45-51.

--- *Party Politics in the Age of Caesar*, University of California Press, Berkeley (1949, 2nd ed. 1966).

Treggiari, S., *Roman Marriage: Iusti coniunges From the Time of Cicero to the Time of Ulpian*, Oxford University Press, Oxford (1991).

- 'Divorce Roman Style: How Easy and How Frequent Was It?', *Marriage, Divorce and Children in Ancient Rome*, [ed.] Oxford University Press, Oxford (1991), pp. 31-47.

Ward, A.M., *Marcus Crassus and the Late Roman Republic*, University of Missouri Press, Columbia, Mo., 1977.

--- 'Spartacus: History and Histrionics', [ed.] Winkler, M., *Spartacus: Film and History*, Blackwell, Carlton (2007), pp. 87-111.

Warde-Fowler, W., *The Roman Festivals of the Period of the Republic: An Introduction to the Study of the Religion of the Romans*, Macmillan and Co. Ltd., London (1925).

Willems, P., *Le Senat de la republique romaine. Sa composition et ses attributions*, Ch. Peeters, Louvaine (1883).

Windschuttle, K., *The Killing of History: How a Discipline is Being Murdered by Literary Critics and Social Theorists*, Macleay Press, Sydney (1994).

Winkler, J. J., *The Constraints of Desire: The Anthropology of Sex and Gender in Ancient Greece*, Routledge, New York (1990).

Wiseman, T.P., 'Two Friends of Clodius', *CQ*, vol. 18 no. 2 (Nov. 1968), pp. 297-302.

--- *New Men in the Roman Senate*, Oxford University Press, London (1971).

--- *Cinna the Poet: And other Roman Essays*, Leicester University Press, Leicester (1974).

Wyke, M., 'Projecting Ancient Rome', *The Historical Film: History and Memory in the Media*, [ed.] Marcia Landy, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick & New Jersey (2001), pp. 125-142.

Wyke, M.[ed.], *Julius Caesar in Western Culture*, Blackwell Publishing, Carlton (2006).

--- Dunnett, Jane, 'The Rhetoric of *Romanita*: Representations of Caesar in Fascist Theatre', pp. 244-265.

--- Osborne, John, 'St. Peter's Needle and the Ashes of Julius Caesar: Invoking Rome's Imperial History at the Papal Court ca. 1100-1300', pp. 95-109.

--- Pelling, Christopher, 'Judging Julius Caesar', pp. 3-26.

--- Temple, Nicholas, 'Julius II as Second Caesar', pp. 110-127.

Electronic Resources

'Toga Party in Macquarie Street, (SMH interview with Colleen McCullough May 22nd 2004)

<http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2004/05/21/1085120115801.html?from=storyrhs>