

## Cornelia: Lucan's Strongest Soldier

Lucan's *Bellum Civile* tells the story of a world where virtue turns to dust, as the civil war between Caesar and Pompey destroys Rome. The old moral philosophies fail, and the characters are left as distorted reflections of the values they should represent. The women of Lucan are frequently studied as monstrosities, retellings of classical counterparts, and accessories to their husbands, and, while these give valuable insight into her character, Cornelia also interacts with virtue as an individual, not a shadow. This study examines her as a complex figure who struggles to achieve greatness within the parameters of feminine virtue but finds her own path to worthiness.

We are introduced to Cornelia as a failing wife, as the other wives in the story, Julia and Martia, compare themselves to her. She represents both the ideal and accursed wife, accompanying her husband in war just as she dooms him (Keith, 2000). The language around Cornelia follows this same tension, grappling with her as a *coniunx* and *indignus*. In viewing how civil war destroys her virtuous Pompey, Cornelia experiences rage, sadness, the loss of logic throughout the story, giving her an independent voice to an understandable reaction to this dark world. She cannot save him, not even able to bury his body.

Despite her seeming failure, Lucan provides another angle to view her virtue as meaning something, as her devotion to Pompey gives her status as a military ally, *comes*, concerned with proving herself to him in the same way Caesar's soldiers aspire to. She wants to be close to him and suffer in his view, calling upon military strategy and violence. By the time she exits the story, she has become a symbol of duty and an example for Pompey's soldiers to follow. In

denying her a fulfilled character as a wife, she gains something else: a place among Pompey's military allies.

Lucan draws from the stories of women left behind by their husbands in pursuit of military glory like Andromache and Creusa, but he goes beyond those characters, giving Cornelia a voice of her own. He twists the epic examples and the historical figures just as the civil war does to the world. By balancing the use of epic precedents and isolated study, I will explore how Lucan creates in Cornelia a new framework for a virtuous woman in war, able to adopt a masculine devotion to Pompey's cause.

## Selected Bibliography

- Bridges, Emma. *Warriors' Wives: Ancient Greek Myth and Modern Experience*. Oxford, United Kingdom; New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2023.
- Bruère, Richard T. "Lucan's Cornelia." *Classical Philology* 46, no. 4 (1951): 221–36.
- Forno, Francesca. "Tratii Eroici per una Relicta. Cornelia nel *Bellum Civile* di Lucano." *Rivista Di Cultura Classica e Medioevale* 60, no. 2 (2018): 417–31.
- Keith, Alison. *Engendering Rome : Women in Latin Epic / A.M. Keith*. Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- Kubiak, David P. "Cornelia and Dido (Lucan 9.174-9)." *The Classical Quarterly* 40, no. 2 (1990): 577–78.
- Mccune, Blanche Conger. "Lucan's *Militia Amoris*: Elegiac Expectations In The *Bellum Civile*." *The Classical Journal* 109, no. 2 (2014): 171–98.
- Mulhern, E. V.. "Roma(Na) Matrona." *The Classical Journal* 112, no. 4 (2017): 432–59.