

**EXEMPLARITY IN EARLY IMPERIAL ROME:
GENDERED USABILITY AND LITERARY
CONSTRUCTIONS OF FEMALE *EXEMPLA***

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Abstract

This thesis aims to demonstrate that there is an implicit conceptual distinction between how male and female *exempla* are constructed within a number of Roman literary texts dating from the first-century CE. Beginning with the idea that *exempla* have been interpreted by recent scholars as existing within a recognisable and mappable system that balances singularity and repeatability in predictable ways, this thesis will establish how female *exempla* are constructed as different to what should be understood as the male 'normative' model.

This is founded upon the application of a methodological framework that emphasises the significance of a defined conceptual space, similar to the idea of the theoretical 'declamatory arena', within which female exemplary behaviour is considered. The thesis will show how this space is used to construct the female *exemplum*, and manipulates the social behaviours and expectations associated with her to a greater extent than is the case with men. This involves the frequent repetition of several rhetorical features, including the deployment of transgressive language that defines the female *exemplum* as 'set apart' from the rest of her sex, intensifying her sense of uniqueness, and focuses on her singularity only. There is also an associated shift along an imagined 'spectrum of operation' – ranging from the 'ordinary' or non-exemplary to the socially transgressive or extreme – within this conceptual space, often occurring more than once within the same episode. This marks out the status of the female *exemplum* as fluid, simultaneously destabilising her position as an *exemplum* within the text and complicating her relevance as repeatable.

Finally, this thesis addresses the implicit assumption that all *exempla* have the potential to be imitated, which in turn ensures that the exemplary cycle continues to be reiterated over time. It contends that this is primarily relevant to men, as female *exempla* are constructed in such a way that intensifies their unique status within society (from other women as well as men), and complicates their usability as *exempla*. As a result, it should be recognised that there is a 'gendered usability' at play when it comes to applying the lessons from female *exempla* to the world outside of the text. In consequence, this thesis argues that the Roman discourse of exemplarity ought to be seen as a system that has clear differences based upon the gender of the *exemplum* in question.

Declaration

No portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or institute of learning.

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Abbreviations

All works and authors are abbreviated in line with the list available in Hornblower, S., Eidinow, E. and Spawforth, S. (eds.) (2012) *Oxford Classical Dictionary* (4th edition).

With one exception, Latin texts and English translations follow the most recent Loeb Classical Library editions.¹ I have used the Teubner edition of Pseudo-Quintilian's *Declamationes Maiores*, supplemented by Sussman's English translation.²

¹ The exception is where I have used Graver and Long's 2015 translation of Seneca's *Epistulae Morales*.

² Sussman, L. A. (1987). *The Major Declamations Ascribed to Quintilian. A Translation*. Frankfurt am Main.

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Dedication

The final year of this thesis coincided with a global pandemic, creating an extremely challenging set of circumstances within which to finish this project. During this time, I lost two people dear to me, whose premature passing proved that to live a full life is what it is to live a life, especially one that is filled with joy and fun. Both were infectious in spreading that joy to others. I dedicate this thesis to both my cousin Paul Burke, and the Intergalactic Party Princess, Vicky Peck.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

‘Private motivations are, to a certain extent, irrelevant.
What matters is the pattern.’

Caroline Criado Perez (2019) *Invisible Women*

1.1 Aims and Scope of the Thesis

The primary aim of this thesis is to demonstrate that, within the Roman exemplary discourse of the first century CE, an implicit conceptual distinction is made between *exempla*, based upon gender. In adopting both a chronological and thematic overview of the exemplary mode, this distinction is revealed as providing the framework for all *exempla*, regardless of genre. Despite the developments in *who* was constructed as an *exemplum*, *how* it was constructed by Roman authors remained consistent over time. Therefore, even though its specific nature was adapted to focus less on the traditional Republican *exempla* of Livy, and more on living role models that could be found from within the user’s social circles, its overall literary form within moral and ethical discourse remained constant.

The main purpose of this thesis is to show how the consistency usually perceived in the exemplary tradition is reduced in tales where the central *exemplum* is female. This is explained by reference to my novel methodology, which relies upon the use of an imagined conceptual space (as envisaged by the reader) to consider and reflect upon what could be categorised as exemplary behaviour in Roman society, as defined by the male author.³

Within this space, there is an exemplary ‘spectrum of operation’ through which exemplary behaviour can be assessed. As I will demonstrate, the majority of female *exempla* tend to occupy varying positions along this spectrum, often within the same

³ This is described in further detail in section 1.5.

episode.⁴ The ability of female *exempla* to shift along this spectrum is contingent upon a repositioning of the female as ‘set aside’ from the rest of her sex – a repositioning that was sometimes temporary (i.e. from one position on the spectrum to another), sometimes multiple (i.e. several shifts in position on the spectrum). Several linguistic tropes indicate when this shift is taking place: these will be explored in further detail in section 1.5.

In conceptualising *exempla* in this way, I will show how Roman men debated and reconstituted *female* exemplary behaviours in particular. This space acts as the mechanism through which the author could explore the meaning of female virtue and exemplarity, and thus potentially offer contemporary Romans a vehicle for considering the behaviour of women more generally. In contrast, the status of a man as an *exemplum* tends to be much more clearly defined (regardless of whether his exemplarity is deemed good or bad), and thus much more likely to leave them fixed in a particular position on the spectrum.

Thus, gender is an integral feature of the depiction of Roman *exempla*, and the thesis brings this to the forefront. I explain this through the use of the term ‘gendered usability’, where, as will become clear throughout the thesis, the rules of engagement vary according to the gender of the *exemplum* in question. This is especially applicable in the study of declamation exercises (which form the second chapter of the thesis), where I argue that the influence of early experiences with female *exempla* and stock characters during these exercises (and the values that they represent) is apparent in the texts that elite Roman males produce later in life.

The thesis uses a selection of texts from the early imperial era to demonstrate this model in action. This historical period was characterised by changes in exemplarity more widely, as authors began to select *exempla* from their own lives that more

⁴ This partially aligns with Langlands’ body of work, which argues that blurred boundaries are often at play in the use of the *exempla* more generally in moral and ethical training, but this thesis builds upon her arguments by reflecting on the extent to which women shift about on this spectrum in comparison with their male counterparts.

closely mapped onto their lived experience. In the context of women, the traditional, Republican model of the female *exemplum* (traditionally embodied in the virtuous model of Lucretia) began to develop from a reasonably simplistic model of sexual virtue, chastity and fecundity, to become a more complex figure that embodied an expanded definition of *virtus*. This was also true of male *exempla*: by the time of Pliny, *virtus* was no longer defined as courage, but now incorporated other personal qualities as well.

The texts chosen – declamation exercises, Valerius Maximus' collection of *exempla*, Seneca's consolations to women, and Pliny's *Letters* – all demonstrate this development towards moral complexity as embodied within the literary device of the *exemplum*.⁵ These texts all use *exempla* in a didactic fashion, and are representative of how *exempla* were used and adapted by authors within the wider moral discourse. Each chapter of this thesis will focus on one type of text, forming a neatly packaged case study that, collectively, is organised to allow a chronological overview that tracks the gradual shift in the utilisation of female *exempla* especially over the course of the first century CE.⁶ In each chapter, I begin by looking at how the 'normative' rhetoric around exemplarity is applied, contrasting the male 'standard' against female examples, via in-depth analyses of selected case studies. This enables me to demonstrate not only how parallels can be made between specific gender types across genres, but also how *exempla* differ to each other when viewed along gendered lines.

The remainder of this chapter will outline the generalities in how Roman *exempla* are constructed and used, referring in the process to modern approaches to how these generalities can be conceptualised. I place particular emphasis on Matthew Roller's

⁵ Roman poetry is not included as it tends to follow its own set of clearly defined rules, and as such would render the scope of the thesis too large.

⁶ The main exception is Chapter Two on declamation, where the case studies have been taken from the Pseudo-Quintilian texts produced in the second century CE. However, given the consistency in the application of the imagined conceptual space to consider female exemplary behaviours across the other selected authors, I work on the basis that rhetorical schools taught this method of framing *exempla* (see section 1.3 below). Therefore, it is important to analyse *how* young Roman elite men learned to construct and manipulate the female *exemplum* as a rhetorical construct, prior to exploring this method in action across my other selected texts.

discourse of exemplarity and Rebecca Langlands' ethical and moral approach. These two scholars should not be viewed as mutually exclusive; as I will show, both are of relevance in considering how there is a cycle and a stability to variations in *exempla* according to gender. Their work is used as the foundation for my own conceptual framework (outlined in detail in 1.5), which seeks to develop further the modern study of Roman exemplarity. First, however, I will provide a brief overview of the function of *exempla* within Roman moral discourse, tracing the changes evident over the course of the early imperial era. This will be followed by an analysis of how the *exemplum* as a literary construct (as the mechanism by which this change occurs) is built.

1.2 The Shifting Nature of Exemplarity Over the First Century CE

As noted by Gowing, the usage of Republican *exempla* by Roman authors became less important over the course of the first-century CE as the Principate became bedded-in.⁷ This is not to deny the usage of Republican *exempla* across a whole variety of texts: authors continued to engage with collections of exemplary deeds, such as that of Valerius Maximus' *Facta et Dicta Memorabilia* that acted as a reference manual, placing well-known Republican heroes alongside 'newer' role models from the late Republic and early imperial era.⁸ Nonetheless, the tendency to move away from traditional Republican heroes like Mucius Scaevola, Camillus, and Cincinnatus (who had been central to the work of historiographers such as Livy during the late Roman Republic and early Augustan era) coincided with the declining relevance of the Republic as a political system in elite circles, even if the idea of it persisted within intellectual circles.⁹ As Kraus has emphasised, the predominance of the emperor as *princeps* – the 'first man' – narrowed the focus for the performance of exemplary deeds to the emperor himself, and simultaneously reduced the spheres of action in

⁷ Gowing (2005) 69-80.

⁸ Bloomer (1992).

⁹ Gowing *op. cit.* The idea of renewing the Republic was later brought explicitly to the fore by what is termed 'the Stoic opposition' to the Flavian emperors. This is covered in greater depth in later chapters.

which other men might demonstrate *virtus* and aspire to achieve *exemplum* status.¹⁰ The number of triumphs awarded to individual generals significantly reduced from the time of Augustus onwards, as the focus of military glory centred on the emperor.¹¹ The civic arena similarly contracted as one of the main areas in which a man might gain notoriety, given the emperor's overall responsibility for the governance of the empire. Although key positions (such as consul and provincial governor) remained available, under the oversight of the emperor the opportunities for renown as a political strategist were reduced. Conversely, this turn towards the emperor and the imperial household as the main focus of exemplary behaviour permitted the inclusion of more women to become role models due to the proximity of these women to the centre of power.¹² After the founding of the Principate in 27 BCE, a programme of marriage and moral reform conferred a new kind of responsibility onto women such as Livia and Octavia – one that focused on securing the line of succession, and situated them as important representatives of domestic stability and happiness.¹³ Therefore, the imperial household began to normalise the identification of contemporary women as moral *exempla*, expanding the exemplary corpus to accommodate more women that, prior to this, had been limited.¹⁴

The first-century CE witnessed several major developments in the public acknowledgement of women's potential to act bravely under certain conditions,

¹⁰ Kraus (2005) 186-89. See Van Houdt *et al* (2003), McDonnell (2006) and Edwards (2007) on the meaning of *virtus* that, via a change of emphasis from military valour to encompass a wider semantic meaning over time, became increasingly linked to performative (civic) duties. This, in turn, was due to the changing available arenas within which *virtus* could be displayed (and exemplary status awarded): with the Principate increasingly capitalising on the military sphere (broadly defined) for glory, the options open to the elite to do the same became fewer, and concentrated increasingly on administrative and political functions exercised through public office; see Roller (2001 and 2018) and Gowing (2005). Despite the move away from military prowess, *virtus* remained attached to the social and political roles, and visibility of, men over women.

¹¹ Sumi (2005) 248.

¹² I have excluded the imperial women from this thesis. This is because the broader changes in female *exempla* that I outline here seem to happen irrespective of universalised exemplary portrayals of the imperial family, including its female members. Future research (as noted in the Conclusion chapter) could test this theory fully.

¹³ Bauman (1992) 99-100.

¹⁴ The most famous example is Cornelia, mother of the Gracchi (Cic. *Brut.* 104, 211; *De Or.* 1.38; Val. Max. 4.4, 6.71; Sen. *Helv.* 16.6, *Marc.* 16.3, Pl. *HN.* 7.122, 7.57, 34.31, Quint. *Inst.* 1.1.6, Tac. *Dial.* 28, App. *BC.* 1.20.83, Plut. *TG.* 1.2-5, 8.5, *CG.* 4.3, 19.1-3). For literature on Cornelia as an *exemplum*, see Hallett (2004 and 2006), Dixon (2007) and Roller (2018) 197-232.

which coincided with the developments within the imperial household. Proscription tales had been circulated since the latter days of the Republic, which emphasised the bravery of individual women in helping their husbands escape death during times of political turmoil and fear.¹⁵ These sat alongside the emergence of ‘martyr narratives’ in the context of Stoic opposition to imperial rule (men and women such as Thrasea Paetus, Helvidius Priscus and Arria), which featured heavily in the works of Tacitus and Pliny the Younger later in the first-century.¹⁶ In addition, it had become far more common during the course of the late Republic for women to be publicly praised by their menfolk at their funerals, a tradition that continued into the imperial era.¹⁷

In other words, publicly acknowledging the bravery and honorary deeds of women had started to become normalised over this period of time. Nevertheless, these deeds were often restricted to narrow spheres of activity, namely in the context of the domestic environment/household that required the mediation of the male authorial voice to make them more widely known, and the extent to which (non-imperial) women may have been inspired by other female *exempla* to imitate their deeds is met with silence in the sources.

As the public arenas (as defined under Republican terms) within which exemplary deeds could be performed narrowed, the Roman exemplary discourse revived itself by looking more intently at a different source of potential *exempla*: from within one’s own social circle. This did not mean that authors no longer cited earlier Republican heroes, but their usage declined in favour of more contemporary examples – including men (and women) from the last days of the Republic. Rebecca Langlands correctly observes that the usage of *exempla* shifts to emphasise the interpretation of the individual reader over that of the wider community during the course of the

¹⁵ Outlined in more detail in Appian, *Bellum Civile* 4.8-45, Dio 47.7.4-5, and referred to briefly by Valerius Maximus (6.7.2-3 9.11.7). See also Osgood (2006) 62-107 for an extended discussion of loyal wives and proscription tales; cf. Parker (1998). The so-called *laudatio Turiae* also publicly documented the bravery of an anonymous wife during this period (outlined in more depth in Osgood (2014) and Hemelrijk (2004), for example).

¹⁶ Discussed further in Chapter Five.

¹⁷ For example, Julius Caesar gave the oration for his aunt Julia (Plut. *Caes.*5.2). Octavian was 12 years old when he gave the funeral oration for his grandmother (Suet. *Aug.* 8.2, Quint. *Inst.* 12.6.1).

first-century CE, a shift that is especially notable from Seneca's writings onwards and their focus on the self.¹⁸ As Barchesi notes, an earlier change in the manner in which *exempla* could be used had already taken place during the Augustan period, with authors such as Livy emphasising their moral value in contrast to earlier depictions that highlighted how heroic actions were performed in the pursuit of self-promotion.¹⁹

1.3 Exemplarity's Social Function²⁰

Roman education used *exempla* from a very young age beginning with *sententiae* (sayings copied and memorised), through to *chreia* (developing these stories through characterisation and context), fables (introduction of moral debate), and finally declamation (complex moral and ethical debate).²¹ The use of *exempla* from the earliest form of school exercises, and especially through their advanced usage within declamation, renders them as a pedagogical tool for inculcating social values, including hierarchies based on status and gender. In other words, the system of exemplarity itself – and its pedagogical emphasis on continued moral and ethical development – was part of the wider socialisation process at play in ancient Rome.²²

¹⁸ Langlands (2008, 2011, 2015, 2018a). Her emphasis on 'meta-literary principles' as a means of describing the performative function of *exempla* in ethical terms applies across all periods and texts covered within this thesis. However, her emphasis on the interpretation of an *exemplum* by the individual reader over the wider community can be applied more prominently with regards to Seneca's works, with their (Stoic) focus on the notion of the self.

¹⁹ Barchiesi (2009) 52. This shift resulted in an increased focus on named individuals as representative of one or more specific virtues, enabling the latter to be understood in concrete (rather than abstract) terms.

²⁰ In this section, I follow the framework used by Langlands (2015) 70, who argues that looking at the macro-level use of exemplarity reveals the underlying principles governing their interpretation and use. In a similar way, I suggest that focusing on the conceptual level allows parallels to be drawn between exemplarity and socialisation practices. I view socialisation as the means by which social and cultural values are taught, internalised, and then reproduced over time, in line with the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, in particular, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* (with J. C. Passeron, 1990), *Language and Symbolic Power* (1991), and *Masculine Domination* (2001).

²¹ Bloomer (2011) 118-119; Webb (2001). It is important to recognise that there was no formal system of education imposed by the state, even though Roman education can be seen as a state-controlled enterprise; Rawson (2003) 84; Corbeill (2001) 262.

²² This also included other public institutions and cultural practices that preserved the cultural memory of the Romans, such as the presence of *imagines* in the *atria* inside the homes of wealthy families and on display at public funerals, as well as triumphs, stage performances and a variety of visual symbols.

Throughout these exercises, *exempla* were used with increasing complexity and flexibility throughout the course of the elite Roman boy's education, in order to develop the expressive abilities of the child (as an expression of the values socialised into him). This was through their storytelling abilities ('textual cohesion') and their capacity to represent the outside world as understood through the individual. These would signify how well they had learned these values (via 'story schemata'), and, in declamation, using different *personae* to understand social interactions and reinforce the hierarchy of society ('categorical thinking').²³

Exempla thus contribute towards an historical understanding of Roman identity. The 'temporal doubleness' inherent to *exempla* – in that they are relevant to explaining the past, as well as providing a model to imitate for future action – renders them significant in ensuring the continuation of societal hierarchies.²⁴ The cumulative effect of *exempla* – whereby new meanings can be accumulated in response to changing circumstances and changing 'audiences' – also intensifies the weight conferred onto them by the male elite.²⁵ This is because even if the meaning of an *exemplum* changes, its position within the socialisation mechanism used by the elite is unchanging. Conferring universal principles onto *exempla* is therefore impossible – their very usage is contingent on their overall flexibility – but it *is* possible to talk of their consistent social function across time.²⁶ As such, the 'audience' must be an

Imagines acted as a direct means through which the individual was reminded of the code of conduct of his/her ancestors, and in doing so, simultaneously reflected back the established values of the wider society to the observer; see Flower (1996) 14 and Webb (2017) for a discussion of women's interactions with *imagines*. *Imagines* also formed a prominent part of elite funerals, with mimes and actors re-enacting famous events of the family ancestors in order to remind and inspire the spectator to follow in their footsteps (Polyb. *Hist.* 6.53). Therefore, visual symbols – also in the form of grand buildings, statuary, painting and so on – were frequently used to reinforce Roman identity, and were often used in combination with spoken reminders, such as the *laudatio funebris*; Mustakallio (2005) 189. Polybius also makes it clear that the younger generations especially were expected to play a key role in public funerals, and we also know from other ancient authors that elite young men gave the eulogy in praise of the deceased (for example, Octavian: Suet. *Aug.* 8.1, Quint. *Instit.* 12.6.1; Tiberius: Suet. *Tib.* 6; Nero: Tac. *Ann.* 12.58, 13.3). The need to honour publicly the family lineage, standing as the representative of its new generation, was an integral part of the Roman moral code, and was therefore a socio-ethical obligation for the elite (Baroin (2010) 19-20).

²³ Bloomer (*op. cit.*).

²⁴ The phrase 'temporal doubleness' comes from Chaplin (2000) 198.

²⁵ See Chaplin (*op. cit.*) 4, 53 on the 'cumulative effect' of *exempla*.

²⁶ Langlands (2015) 72.

active participant in understanding the behavioural *principle* being represented by an *exemplum*, for they ought not to take the *exemplum* as a model to be taken literally and copied exactly.²⁷ On the other hand, to use an *exemplum* does not require debate over the function and social significance of *exempla* more widely: to debate the action and meaning of an individual *exemplum* does not undermine their lasting value as a rhetorical device.

The use of *exempla* within Roman education is attested within various rhetorical and declamatory texts. In the *Institutio Oratoria*, Quintilian is clear why such literary devices are important for moral and ethical training, particularly in the development of the technique of praise and blame (encomia and invective):

quod non simplicis utilitatis opus est. namque et ingenium exercetur multiplici uariaque materia et animus contemplatione recti prauisque formatur, et multa inde cognitio rerum uenit exemplisque, quae sunt in omni genere causarum potentissima, iam tum instruit cum res poscet usurum.

This is useful in more ways than one: the mind is exercised by the variety and multiplicity of the material; the character is moulded by the contemplation of right and wrong; a wide knowledge of facts is acquired, and this provides the speaker with a ready-made store of examples – a very powerful resource in all sorts of cases – which he will use when occasion demands. (Quint. *Inst.* 2.4.20-21)

The suggestion here is that once *exempla* are learned and acquired, they can be brought out whenever needed to assist not only as rhetorical flourishes when giving a speech (such as *prosopopoeia*), but also in helping the individual to decide how to act in any given situation.²⁸ This ‘situational variability’ inherent to *exempla* is part of a shared system of ethical and moral values which ‘places a particular burden on readers of *exempla* as moral agents: in reading an *exemplum*, they need to understand the particular circumstances that made it the right act for that exemplary

²⁷ Langlands (2008) 173.

²⁸ *Prosopopoeia* is the technique of adopting the position and personality of a character in a speech in order to bring that character to life (Quint. *Inst.* 3.49-54). At 12.2.29-30 and 12.4.1-2, Quintilian highlights how the ‘finished’ orator will be expected to draw continually on *exempla* when in court.

figure at that moment, and also to recognise to what extent it is appropriate for them to identify with that exemplary figure.²⁹ To do so, they must subconsciously draw upon the values that have been transmitted to them as a result of the pedagogical process that socialised them in the first place. Therefore, as well as being a literary device used to illustrate the moral values imposed by the male elite, *exempla* are also symbolic of this power of the elite itself (in only being accessible to those privileged to receive an education), and in demonstrating the effectiveness of how it is transmitted.

Engagement with rhetoric, epic, and mythological and historical *exempla* was therefore essential in shaping the development of the young Roman male. This training (for boys) becomes increasingly complex, with declamation in particular – and its utilisation of a defined conceptual space, the ‘declamatory arena’ – exploring questions of Roman identity and, more importantly, male Roman identity.³⁰ Declamation is recognised therefore as a ‘practice of socialisation whose physical, performative elements make it an especially effective inculcator of dominant beliefs and values.’³¹ The continuous redeployment of *exempla* across different genres, and their applicability within literature that was accessible to the educated elite across their lifetime, renders them highly flexible as an ongoing socialisation tool – one that continually prompted the ‘reader’ to think about their position within their wider society.³² In other words, the gendering of *exempla* when constructed by male elite authors contributes towards reinforcing the legitimacy of the dominant masculine elite worldview. In being portrayed as a pedagogical tool, this worldview is concealed at the same time as it is enforced, and simultaneously legitimises it through ensuring that the people residing in this world use these *exempla* to help them conform to the accepted moral and ethical views of society.³³

²⁹ Langlands (2011) 104-5.

³⁰ Gunderson (2003) 19.

³¹ Connolly (2016) 191.

³² By ‘highly flexible’ here, I mean that the various genres and contexts within which *exempla* could be placed were various. The overall reasons for their usage were more limited, however, namely to act as a prompt to think about moral and ethical behaviour, and therefore (in terms of socialisation) to ensure conformity to the accepted societal practices.

³³ Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) 13.

The extant Roman literature does not address the inherently gendered nature of the socialisation process in relation to exemplarity, nor the continued relevance of the *exemplum* as a tool through which to ensure the continued embedding of these social and cultural values.³⁴ The paucity of surviving texts would suggest that this assumption was also made by Roman authors themselves: educational ‘tracts’ (like Quintilian and Plutarch) imply that once the child has been effectively socialised, he carries forward these values unchanged into adulthood. For Quintilian, once the orator has perfected his rhetorical technique and learned to be ‘a good man skilled in speaking’ (*vir bonus dicendi peritus*), he is ready to enter public life ‘fully formed’.³⁵ However, this overall viewpoint assumes that there is no need to review these values, or find new ways of applying, reinforcing or amending them according to societal circumstances (such as war or political upheaval). Yet, this is highly unlikely to have been the case in practice based upon experiences of modern-day societies, and, in particular, as illustrated by the continued reapplication and conceptual variances at play in the usage of *exempla*. Furthermore, Cicero, *De Republica* 6.1, states: ‘Wherefore this citizen must see to it that he is always armed against those influences which disturb the stability of the State’ (*quam ob rem se comparet hic civis ita necesse est, ut sit contra haec, quae statum civitatis permovent, semper armatus*). This suggests that there was at least a latent recognition among the educated elite that the authority of the State could be undermined by external influences that threatened to destabilise accepted social values – values which had contributed towards the glory of Rome.

The reworking of exemplary characters across different literary genres – especially from the early imperial age onwards – suggests that there was a latent understanding by Roman authors that *exempla* could be reviewed and reapplied for different

³⁴ That socialisation took place in the Roman world is understood amongst scholars of Roman education (although not defined in the same way as in modern societies), beginning with the child’s upbringing in the family through to advanced rhetorical education and declamation. See, for example, Bloomer (1997, 2011, 2015), Rawson (2003), Horster (2011), Morgan (1998 and 2011), McWilliam (2013), Caldwell (2015).

³⁵ Quint. *Inst.* 12.1.1.

purposes. By extension, this demonstrates that there was an *ongoing* socialisation process that, at its core, sought to ensure that its citizens adhered to gendered cultural values at *all* stages of their life in Roman society. Most of these mechanisms (such as funeral orations, *imagines*, public benefactions) reinforced rather than reimagined existing socialisation processes (or offered anything significantly new).

This is not to say that authors could not be creative in their utilisation of *exempla*.³⁶ This structural flexibility (in how *exempla* could be placed within different contexts for varying effects) makes the discourse around exemplarity appear unstable, contradictory and contestable.³⁷ Yet it is precisely *because* of this flexibility within the socio-ethical dynamics of *exempla* that they are so effective as a socialisation tool, for they mask the *stability* of the cultural values at play. Even where extreme external circumstances run the risk of introducing new ethical rules that may confer differing moral significance onto existing *exempla*, these rules would still be introduced by the arbitrary power – the male elite – which would also determine the limits to the new rules.³⁸

The possible changing meaning or relevance of an individual *exemplum* over time does not detract from the purpose of the exemplary system itself in enforcing the gendered cultural values imposed by those in power. As this thesis will argue, conceptual variances in the use of female *exempla* in particular – a skill first significantly demonstrated by declamation – continue to reinforce this hierarchy across different texts and genres. Furthermore, in introducing confusion into exemplary female behaviour (evidenced though what I term ‘gendered usability’),

³⁶ Chaplin (2000) 170-1 is incorrect when she states that the meaning of *exempla* can become fixed when they are catalogued – for example, in Valerius Maximus’ *Facta et Dicta Memorabilia*. This is contradicted by Lucarelli (2007) 12-16, 296, who argues that Valerius is reworking aspects of Roman history as part of a larger cultural agenda that focused on helping to heal the wounds of the recent traumatic past. Through a process of historical decontextualisation, Lucarelli demonstrates how even the most problematic figures could become embedded with the Roman exemplary tradition, resulting in new norms of social behaviour and, by extension, a new status quo. Langlands (2008) 184 offers a more appropriate view (in contrast with Morgan) in stating that Valerius exploits the instability of the *exemplum* when categorising them, for in doing so, he often places contradictory examples under the same heading – thereby opening up their interpretative possibilities.

³⁷ Roller (2004) 7.

³⁸ Langlands (2011) 119-120.

this gender hierarchy is simultaneously reinforced at the same time as it is seemingly threatened.

1.4 Theoretical Approaches to *Exempla*

Two important approaches have emerged over the last several years that offer a means by which Roman *exempla* and its wider discourse can be viewed at the broader cultural level.³⁹ These two approaches should not be viewed as mutually exclusive: all *exempla* share clearly defined characteristics that enable them to individually be classified as an *exemplum* within a text, whilst simultaneously performing a broader moral and ethical function in terms of how individuals learn how to act in society. The difference between them, however, is that the first emphasises the relevance, creation and proliferation of *exempla* as a cultural artefact (collectively forming a distinct 'discourse'), whereas the second focuses on the ethical and moral value of the *exemplum* in addition to how it performs within a text (via defined 'meta-exemplary principles').

The first approach, labelled as a 'discourse of exemplarity' and outlined by Matthew Roller, looks at the creation, acceptance, and replication of individual *exempla* within a wider cultural setting.⁴⁰ As such, it offers a clear heuristic device for the manner in which elite Romans created and reinforced the meaning of exemplarity. This is broken down into four constituent parts: (1) the performance of a public action that embodies (or fails to embody) the demonstration of a particular ethical value that is shared amongst a community (the *mos maiorum*); (2) evaluation by a 'primary' audience who judge it as 'good' or 'bad' according to the communities' values (as determined by the dominant group within it), meaning that the deed itself has social and ethical relevance for others to consider; (3) commemoration of the deed, its

³⁹ Although it is difficult to re-create a full picture of how the Romans understood their exemplary system, the development of these approaches provides us with the conceptual means by which we can attempt to understand how this system worked.

⁴⁰ Roller (2004 and 2009); further elaborated on in Roller (2018) 4-23.

original protagonist, and the values it and/or the person represents via a form of 'monument' (of varying forms) that opens the *exemplum* up to a 'secondary' audience who have a shared understanding of the meaning of the *exemplum* (even if they no longer agree with the values represented); (4) subsequent imitation (or avoidance) of the original action, accepting the normative value of the original action, and a tacit acknowledgement that there are shared normative values across time and place that enable the secondary audience to understand the meaning of the original action to its primary audience. The last stage especially is of importance to this thesis: it is through imitation that a deed becomes considered normative and subsequently accepted into the *mos maiorum*, acquiring 'a morally prescriptive or obligatory character' in the process.⁴¹ Thus, through imitation, the extraordinary can be transformed into the ordinary – or at least, it has the *potential* to be valued, copied and integrated into the cultural fabric of society. As this thesis will show, it is the inherent inability of female *exempla* to fulfil this potential that creates a difference in how male and female *exempla* are constructed by Roman authors.⁴²

The second approach is that of Rebecca Langlands, whose categorisation of 'meta-exemplary principles' map out a number of important metaliterary aspects that describe the performative function of *exempla* in ethical terms.⁴³ This emphasises the interpretation of *exemplum* by the individual reader over the community as a whole (the primary focus of Roller's approach), who, via an extended process of ethical training, learn to recognise not only how moral virtues can be tangibly expressed, but also garner 'a more sophisticated and complex understanding of moral ideas' where virtues can be thought of in abstract terms.⁴⁴ This enables *exempla* potentially to become separated from the virtue they are intended to illustrate, where the learner recognises that vice may be illustrated as much as virtue, and as a result seemingly universal rules about moral behaviour can no longer be universally applied to all situations. This moral autonomy is the ultimate goal of the

⁴¹ Roller (2018) 8.

⁴² This is discussed further in section 1.6.

⁴³ Langlands (2008, 2011, 2015 and 2018a). There are some overlaps in her approach with Mayer (1991), Chaplin (2000) and (2015), and Barchiesi (2009).

⁴⁴ Langlands (2015) 72.

learner who engages with *exempla*, and this was the aim of Seneca's revised exemplary system (as we shall see in Chapter Four).⁴⁵

These two approaches arise from the flexible nature of *exempla*, and their changing relevance for the audience as either a community, or as an individual reader. This inherent flexibility generates multiple readings of the actions they demonstrate and the virtues to which they can be attached. Consequently, they can be used and re-used in different contexts, media and situations. This 'situational variability' is part of a shared system of ethical and moral values, one which 'places a particular burden on readers of *exempla* as moral agents: in reading an *exemplum*, they need to understand the particular circumstances that made it the right act for that exemplary figure at that moment, and also to recognise to what extent it is appropriate for them to identify with that exemplary figure.'⁴⁶ Yet the formulation of such systems and the shared understandings ascribed to them are not 'natural': they must be learned and experimented with through processes of socialisation. Hence, an *exemplum* may represent blurred boundaries ('a contested site of exemplarity') in the virtues and behaviours that they represent.⁴⁷ However, this assumes an awareness of the boundaries between an action or behaviour being regarded as either a vice or a virtue, and once again, the use of *exempla* and the application of extremes of behaviour 'allow one to come to a better appreciation of where the boundaries of that [behaviour] lie'.⁴⁸

In contrast to Langlands' approach, Roller's discourse of exemplarity describes a relatively stable system, in spite of its ability to integrate new exemplary figures within it: an *exemplum* had to be both conservative (in order to fit within the existing exemplary discourse and in how it was used), *and* novel (in order to justify the *exemplum*'s inclusion within the system in the first place by virtue of the deed performed). The constant tension between conservatism and novelty – a distinctively

⁴⁵ The clearest description of what can be regarded as a definably 'Senecan' form of exemplarity is given in Roller (2015/2018).

⁴⁶ Langlands (2011) 104-5.

⁴⁷ Langlands (2008, 2015 and 2018a).

⁴⁸ Langlands (2015) 76-77.

Roman feature – paradoxically proved to be the exemplary system’s lifeblood, enabling it to be preserved over the centuries.⁴⁹ This unresolved tension also ensured the dominance of male *exempla* by focusing almost exclusively on masculine spheres of activity as the defined, ‘accepted’, arenas for exemplary deeds, despite the wider acknowledgement of women’s bravery (as noted above).

The ability of both Roller and Langlands’ approaches to be applied simultaneously as descriptions of how the Roman exemplary system worked is testament to its flexible nature. Although Valerius Maximus is able to utilise the flexibility of the *exemplum* to create his own versions of common (and sometimes new) *exempla*, it is with Seneca where we observe a noticeable development, or expansion, of the exemplary sphere. This primarily is through his emphasis on living role models, where the choice of exemplary material available for the ethical learner become unlimited. In using one’s own circle of acquaintances as well as models from the past, the number of potential *exempla* that one could draw upon had the potential to be limitless.⁵⁰ As a consequence, women could now become the focus of exemplary deeds on potentially equal terms as men, given the turn towards the family environment. This is taken a step further by Pliny, whose own exemplary programme seeks to adopt a ‘gender neutrality’ in relation to moral equivalence across both men and women.⁵¹ The success of this venture will be considered within Chapter Five.

1.5 Gendered Usability: Conceptualising the Construction Process

Having outlined the important recent contributions of Langlands and Roller above (that have collectively enhanced our understanding of exemplarity in the Roman world), it is clear that a significant gap still exists within the scholarship regarding exemplarity and gender. I will discuss the complications surrounding female *exempla* in more detail in section 1.6; firstly, however, I will outline the underlying conceptual

⁴⁹ Roller (2015a) 131.

⁵⁰ Mayer (1991) 147.

⁵¹ See Langlands (2014) and section 5.3.1 for further discussion on Pliny’s ‘de-gendering’ of virtue.

framework used throughout this thesis that exposes the differences between male and female *exempla*. These differences show that there is a clear distinction between how male and female *exempla* should be considered by the reader.

1.5.1 The conceptual space

At the core of this framework is the presence of a defined conceptual space across all of the texts surveyed in this thesis. We (as the reader) ought to imagine this space as similar to an individual performance space, or arena. The space is constructed via a symbiotic author-reader relationship: the author constructs it within a text, but it is then contingent upon the reader to recognise when and how this space is being deployed by the author (as revealed by what takes place within it). Therefore, upon encountering an *exemplum* in a text, the reader is asked to identify the relevant 'signals' that indicate the 'opening up' of this space as a medium for thinking about the individual example at hand, following the author's guidance in how to interpret the *exemplum* in question.⁵²

This focus on the reader means that the idea of a conceptual space can be applied to various types of characterisation within Roman literary texts. My approach is based upon Eric Gunderson's idea of the declamatory zoo, which describes a space that, within clearly defined boundaries, allows the reader to observe (at a safe distance) how characters within a declamation exercise act.⁵³ In focusing on how reader engages with the text, it is possible to apply Gunderson's visualisation of a conceptual space onto other textual forms of characterisation, thus enabling other literary devices – such as *exempla* – to be considered in a similar way.

Therefore, on a subsidiary level, this thesis develops the relationship between declamation and exemplarity. This relationship has been clearly articulated by

⁵² It should not be assumed that the authors of these texts studied in this thesis were consciously applying such models: instead, in utilising the idea of this conceptual space in this way, we can use it to think about *what* and *how* these authors tell us about the *exempla* they discuss.

⁵³ Gunderson (2003) - discussed further in Chapter Two.

Langlands, who, despite the seemingly disparate natures of declamation and exemplarity, has identified parallels between the two.⁵⁴ As she notes, when Roman exemplarity is viewed at the macro-level – in other words, as an entire system across various texts, genres and chronologies – the features and underlying patterns that form its governing principles can be revealed by the modern scholar.⁵⁵ For example, exemplarity and declamation both have structural similarities in terms of narrative construction (such as certain linguistic tropes) that enabled authors to convey particular ethical and moral scenarios and outcomes. Furthermore, both systems require the reader to think actively about the moral and ethical outcomes of how the characters in these narratives act, and their potential implications within wider Roman society.⁵⁶ Significantly, these structural similarities rely on conceptual similarities, in that declamation and exemplarity are reliant upon *how* the reader actively engages with the actions and motives of an individual character within a text.

Throughout this thesis, I demonstrate how a clearly defined conceptual space was utilised by Roman male authors to construct their *exempla*, focusing primarily on the female *exemplum*. In using the texts selected from across the first century CE, certain commonalities in the construction techniques used to create *exempla* can be revealed. In undertaking a diachronic analysis of these texts, the wider trends in the construction of *exempla* and the importance of gender in this process can be identified, suggesting that the implications of this thesis are of relevance for other genres and texts, too.⁵⁷ Indeed, this is already apparent in the thesis: in demonstrating the centrality of the imagined conceptual space to texts whose central focus is on exemplary figures (see Chapter Three) *and* to texts whose central focus is

⁵⁴ Langlands (2018a) 160-165 (developing her initial study of *exempla* and declamation in Langlands (2006) 247-280). See section 2.1.3 for further discussion.

⁵⁵ Langlands (2015) 70. However, she goes on to explain that it is the very flexibility of the *exemplum* – its capacity to be remoulded, reused in various ways and in different types of text, and for aspects of its narrative to be changed, potentially every time an *exemplum* is used by an author – that makes identifying absolute universal principles extremely challenging (70-72). Instead, this thesis contends that we *can* think about the broader patterns and tendencies at play in their usage. The primary aim of this thesis therefore is to think about the role that the gender of the *exemplum* in question plays in how an *exemplum* is constructed, and the implications of this in reading first century CE Roman texts.

⁵⁶ Again, this is re-visited in greater depth in 2.1.3.

⁵⁷ See section 6.2 (Conclusion).

different but in which exemplary figures appear (see Chapter Four), the analysis I offer reaches across a plurality of literary forms.

1.5.2 Constructing the female *exemplum*

Having encountered an *exemplum* in a text, the reader places it into the conceptual space, ready to identify and analyse the techniques used by the author in constructing the *exemplum*. There are then two important techniques used by authors in the case of female *exempla* that work to undermine their value (or usability) to the reader. These are the exemplary spectrum of operation, and a rhetoric of transgression. It is the degree to which an *exemplum* undergoes rhetorical manipulation within this space via these techniques that is significant in the context of gender.

The spectrum of operation for *exempla* runs from the ‘non-exemplary’ (or ‘ordinary’) at one end to ‘exemplary’ (or ‘extraordinary’) behaviour, at the other.⁵⁸ The author can be explicit in guiding the reader in where an *exemplum* ought to be situated on this spectrum – they are either ‘ordinary’ (in that their behaviour follows normal social codes), or they show ‘extraordinary’ qualities to varying degrees in how they act.⁵⁹ Nevertheless, some of the most extreme exemplary tales seem unquestioningly positioned at one end of the spectrum; even where the behaviour of an *exemplum* is problematic or requires ethical evaluation by the reader, the author nonetheless guides the reader towards a fixed view of his overall status as an *exemplum* per se.

⁵⁸ This partially aligns with Langlands’ body of work, which argues that blurred boundaries are often at play in the use of *exempla* more generally in moral and ethical training. This thesis builds upon her arguments by reflecting on the extent to which women shift about on this spectrum in comparison with their male counterparts.

⁵⁹ It is important to note that ‘ordinary’ behaviour can include exemplary behaviour that is expected to be adopted by everyone within a certain social group. In other words, there was an expectation that all women act as the ideal wife or mother. This means that a group of ‘exemplary’ women can be used as a contrast to an individual female *exemplum* who is acting in a transgressive manner.

However, in the case of women, their position on the spectrum is rarely fixed. Within a single episode, it can be possible for a female *exemplum* to change positions on the spectrum more than once before a final position is adopted. This repositioning could be temporary (i.e. from one position on the spectrum to another), or sometimes multiple (i.e. several shifts in position on the spectrum). This capacity to shift along the spectrum is what is notable about female *exempla* especially, and offers authors greater rhetorical scope to manipulate these characters within their texts.⁶⁰ The means by which these shifts take place is via the second technique that I have identified as being used by authors, which is the adoption of what I term ‘a rhetoric of transgression’.⁶¹

At its core, this rhetoric is comprised of a specific linguistic terminology that indicates when a shift along the spectrum is being made – namely the *explicit* identification of her exceptionality, or a literal ‘setting apart’ from other women. The first of these is evident through the use of terms that define her as ‘novel’ or ‘unique’ (the word *unicum* pointedly appears several times in descriptions of women), meaning that there is always an underlying sense that a boundary of some form has been crossed. Although this notion of transgression and difference is essential to the very concept of the *exemplum* – as Langlands notes, the transgression of boundaries and challenges to the status quo is an important ‘meta-exemplary’ principle governing *exempla* – it is through the use of *unicum* (or similar words implying novelty) that the author explicitly identifies that a transgression to societal norms has occurred.⁶² In

⁶⁰ I do not suggest that male *exempla* were *not* susceptible to the same manipulations as females, but I do argue that, overall, the female form was subject to repositioning to a much larger extent. It is because of this difference that I argue that the gender of an *exemplum* is integral to its construction and subsequent value to the reader, and the thesis brings this to the forefront.

⁶¹ Throughout this thesis, I take ‘transgressive’ to mean that an individual is deemed to have acted beyond either their own normal forms of behaviour, or has violated an established social code in some way. For consistency, I retain the use of this term throughout this thesis, even though by the time Pliny’s *Letters* (and the moral equivalence between the sexes contained therein; see Chapter Five) are considered the use of the word is more appropriately replaced by ‘exemplary’ or ‘extraordinary’.

⁶² Langlands (2018a) 74-75. The idea of meta-exemplary principles is discussed further in the next section.

contrast, this does not always need to be made explicit in the case of male *exempla* – their exceptionality is already assumed by virtue of their exemplary status.⁶³

The second trope used is an explicit ‘setting apart’ of the individual female *exemplum* from the rest of her sex. Her deeds are either ‘manly’, representing a blurring of the gender divide that, nevertheless, maintains her status as separate and distinct from men, or she is referred to (explicitly or metaphorically) as being ‘set apart’ from other women. As a consequence, female *exempla* are not only different to their male counterparts but are also distinguished from other women, thus occupying a fundamentally ambiguous space that is defined by their exceptionality.

For female *exempla*, therefore, this rhetoric of transgression is present when either one or both of these techniques are being used by the author within an episode to generate a sense of transgression from societal norms. Throughout this thesis I will show how authors often use both in combination to enhance the potency of the *exemplum*. However, paradoxically, this undermines her potential for imitation, for the overall effect is to render women’s status as an *exemplum* open to question. The outcome of the enhanced capacity for rhetorical manipulation of female *exempla* is that the reader can be left feeling confused or unsure over what relevance the female *exemplum* has as a possible model in their own life – i.e. their potential to be imitated is limited.⁶⁴ In other words, it is through the differences at the conceptual level in how Roman *exempla* are utilised that confers a ‘gendered usability’ to them, where, as will become clear throughout the thesis, the rules of engagement vary according

⁶³ Roller (2018) 146 notes that men can be defined as being the first, *primus*, in performing a deed. However, to be the first implies that others will follow; the difference with women is that they are constructed to remain unique, and therefore unrepeatable.

⁶⁴ I make the assumption that, whilst men were likely to have been the main audience for these texts, some educated women would also have read them (or have been read to). The question of female readership has been considered by scholars such as Langlands (2000), (2004) and (2014), and Shelton (1995); for more on women’s education more generally, see Caldwell (2015) and Hemelrijk (1999) and (2015) as starting points.

to the gender of the *exemplum* in question.⁶⁵ The next section will consider the issues around the imitability of female *exempla* in more detail.

To summarise, my conceptualisation of how Roman exempla were constructed illuminates how male authors debated and reconstituted *female* exemplary behaviours. This conceptual space acts as the mechanism through which men could explore the meaning of female virtue and exemplarity in multiple ways, offering contemporary Romans a vehicle for considering the behaviour of women more generally. My diachronic analysis of multiple female *exempla* across several texts will aim to show that these features remained in place over the course of the first-century CE, even as authors increasingly sought to create new and more relevant (to their readership) female *exempla*. At its core, the Roman discourse of exemplarity ought to be seen as a gendered system with clear gendered effects.

1.6 Female *Exempla*: Problems and Contradictions

Despite various scholars touching on aspects of women as *exempla*, the impact of gender specifically on the Roman exemplary system has, to date, not yet been fully unpacked, a gap which this thesis attempts to go some way towards filling. One important contribution upon which this thesis builds is Langlands' study of gender and *exempla* in Valerius Maximus. Here, her primary focus is on how the gender of the exemplary protagonists and that of the reader interact with the process of learning from *exempla*.⁶⁶ Using the main examples of Lucretia and other *exempla* of *pudicitia* at Val. Max. 6.1, as well as women who spoke in public (Val. Max. 8.3), she analyses how gender is used by Valerius as rhetorical tool, and the subsequent effect that this has on the reader (of both sexes) in terms of what lessons they may learn

⁶⁵ This is especially applicable in the study of declamation exercises (which form the second chapter of the thesis), where I argue that the influence of early experiences with female *exempla* and stock characters during these exercises (and the values that they represent) is apparent in the texts that elite Roman males produce later in life. It is through declamation that the male author improved his skill in subtly manipulating these conceptual tools in different ways according to the gender of the *exemplum*.

⁶⁶ Langlands (2000).

from these female *exempla*. However, Langlands stops short of considering in depth the imitability of *exempla* of both sexes, although her study of Hortensia does reveal complications concerning Hortensia's capacity to be imitated.⁶⁷ This thesis therefore builds significantly upon this early work of Langlands, considering the factors at play in how female *exempla* are constructed as problematic. In doing so, it looks more widely at the mechanisms by which they are rendered as transgressors – and inimitable more generally.

A second notable contribution to the study of *exempla* and gender is that of Roller, who, in a separate article to his aforementioned work on the exemplary discourse, reflects upon the paradoxical activity of women at the broader societal level that needs to be acknowledged. For women, their private, domestic behaviour is being brought into the public arena for judgement and admiration. This paradox rests on the inconsistency of two Roman value discourses: that of exemplarity, which publicises and monumentalises deeds, and that of the domestic virtues of women (such as *pudicitia*, *castitas* and *pietas*) that are confined to the private sphere – a paradox which, according to Roller, cannot and should not be resolved.⁶⁸

In asking whether publicly praising women for their domestic virtues (which are themselves part of an idealised moral discourse) then undermines their overall value or significance, Roller suggests that bringing women's deeds out into the public has

⁶⁷ Ibid. 164-204. In her study of Hortensia (Val. Max. 8.3.3), daughter of the great late Republican orator Q. Hortensius, Langlands notes how Valerius portrays her speaking in public as different to the two preceding examples of Maesia (8.1.1) and Carfania (8.3.2). Unlike Maesia – a notable progeny in how she 'bore a man's spirit under the form of a woman' (*quia sub specie feminae virile animum gerebat...*) – and the monstrous barkings of Carfania (*latratibus... monstrum*), Hortensia's speech is deemed praiseworthy by Valerius in how she channelled the eloquence of her father to argue against an injustice on behalf of other matrons in court. Despite her own exemplary abilities, Valerius states that Hortensius' male descendants then failed to follow her example. Langlands (footnote 427, p.185) notes that female-on-male and male-on-female imitation does not have the same status in Valerius' text (as Hortensia successfully imitates her father, but then she is not imitated herself), and remarks: 'There is no need to find this particularly significant for our understanding of the relationship between gender and exemplarity: we can read it instead as saying something about the decline of virtue through time. But it is worth bearing in mind that here female as imitator worked, female as *exemplum* did not.' Yet it is precisely this difference between male and female *exempla* – that women can imitate, but that their gender plays a significant role in their ability to be imitated themselves – that is at the core of this thesis.

⁶⁸ Roller (2014) 182.

the potential to undervalue them as *exempla*.⁶⁹ Even when women's deeds are performed in a public space to begin with, there is always an underlying sense that normal social codes have been breached that have driven a woman to acting in public. This is a facet of exemplarity that only applies to women: in contrast, men's deeds are always regarded as public and for the value of society.⁷⁰ Thus, whilst women are permitted space within a text to demonstrate exemplary behaviour (transgressive or otherwise), they occupy an uncomfortable position within the wider Roman exemplary discourse – which is male-produced, and male-dominated.

However, if one of the key functions of *exempla* is to generate imitability – a key stage in Roller's own discourse – then this 'breaking the rules' in terms of women's activity immediately becomes problematic, and places limitations on the capacity for the deed itself to be imitated. As Chapter Four will show, Seneca wrestles (not wholly successfully) with this particular tension in the *ad Marciam* and *ad Helviam* by bringing the exemplary deeds of the women in both the imperial household (in the *ad Marciam*) and his own (in the *ad Helviam*) into the public arena through the text. His inability to resolve this paradox confirms the continued existence of a rhetoric of transgression that is found in relation to female *exempla* only, and reinforces the gendered usability function of the Roman exemplary system more widely.

Conceptually, exemplarity relies upon a series of boundaries: to name but a few, separations between the singular/particular, 'normal' (or generic) and 'transgressive' (or socially contestable) behaviour, vice and virtue, are all suggestive of the invisible, and often blurred, boundaries at play in exemplarity. In particular, whilst it has been recognised that female *exempla* are often couched in language that emphasises their uniqueness – for instance, the trope of being 'set aside from their sex' is a common one when talking about exemplary women (for example, Sen. *Helv.* 16.5 and *Marc.*

⁶⁹ Roller (2014) 176-180. The next section will discuss this in further detail.

⁷⁰ Of course, men can perform horrific deeds too, for example, T. Manlius Torquatus' beheading of his own son for disobedience (discussed further in section 3.2.2). The difference to women comes from the action being performed in defence of a wider matter – in this case, military discipline which, in turn, is essential in maintaining the stability of the state. Thus, men's actions are rarely viewed as a 'transgression' in the same way that women's are.

1.1, or as acting ‘like a man’, displaying ‘manly courage’) – this has not been extrapolated outwards to map these exemplary women onto Roller’s Roman exemplary discourse.⁷¹ It is the mapping of *virtus* as a masculine attribute onto the very meaning of the Roman *exemplum* that automatically renders women as outliers, or ‘other’, from the very outset. Therefore, authors must work harder to make their ‘truly’ exemplary women not appear as transgressive outliers on this spectrum.⁷²

In consequence, literary representations of an individual female *exemplum* can be regarded as confusing at best: her actions are often not intended to be copied exactly, even if what she represented was viewed as noble and a worthy choice of action. For example, Lucretia’s position as an *exemplum* is secure in that she appears within multiple texts, and her suicide following her rape and its effect on her *pudicitia* – what originally marked her as an *exemplum* to her contemporaries – was accepted as a noble course of action.⁷³ Consequently, she opened the door for suicide to be viewed as the appropriate outcome for the violation of female chastity, representing the purity of the feminine *animus*.⁷⁴ However, the consequences of her suicide – that is, political upheaval and the overthrow of the monarchy – was not viewed as an outcome that other women should deliberately set out to achieve through the wilful violation of their *pudicitia*.

As outlined within Roller’s discourse, there is an implicit understanding among Roman authors that *exempla* are always associated with the potential to be imitable: in other words, that the reader could actively think about how they might act in a comparable way in either similar or different circumstances (situational variability).⁷⁵ Roller’s discourse assumes that female *exempla* fit neatly into each separate stage in the same way that male *exempla* do; yet, as this chapter (and the thesis more widely) aims to demonstrate, this exemplary cycle becomes problematic – or even breaks

⁷¹ Examples of scholars that refer to female *exempla* as ‘unique’ in the context of Seneca (including the slippage between standard gender categories) include Shelton (1995), Langlands (2004), Wilcox (2006), Fabre-Serris (2015), Gunderson (2015), McAuley (2015).

⁷² For women as ‘other’, see Hallett (1989).

⁷³ Outlined in Livy 1.59.

⁷⁴ Langlands (2006) 93.

⁷⁵ Langlands (2018a).

down – during its latter stages when exemplary women are its focus. In particular, the final stage – that of imitation – becomes redundant, or at the very least, is rendered as highly problematic. As a result, the idea that Roman *exempla* have an innate gendered differentiation is reinforced, for the capacity for an *exemplum* to be imitable (without a significant societal rupture) rests solely with male *exempla*.⁷⁶

Hence, there is a ‘gendered usability’ evident in the literary representation of Roman *exempla* that crosses genre boundaries, where female *exempla* (ironically) become usable *as exempla* when they exhibit transgressive tendencies. This becomes apparent to a greater extent when we consider that whilst a male author (and reader) may admire the *virtus* of exemplary women, they are only provided as models for emulation on strictly gendered lines: men act as examples for men and women, but women can only act as potential examples for other women. The persistence of this form of rhetoric undermines the potential of an *exemplum* to be regarded as a model for imitation. Whilst male *exempla* could also be models for avoidance, the main difference for their female counterparts relates to the rhetoric of transgressiveness – in other words, the underlying suggestion that these women have literally transcended their sex.

Consequently, the potential for female *exempla* to be imitable for readers is constantly under threat within the wider exemplary system. It is this subtle nuancing of exemplarity along gendered lines that has not been fully explored within modern scholarship. For example, Langlands’ notion of situational variability needs to be developed further, in order to highlight that certain variations – in this thesis, gendered differentiations – are more likely to manifest in the texts than others. On the other hand, the ‘evaluation’ stage within Roller’s discourse of exemplarity gains heightened emphasis when a female deed is being considered, by virtue of the

⁷⁶ This is what allows horrific deeds (such as Scipio Africanus’ punishment of Roman deserters by crucifixion in Val. Max. 2.7.12) to be afforded space in exemplary collections – in the majority of cases for men, these deeds often require a temporary laying aside of their natural disposition in order to save the state in times of conflict or unrest; see section 3.2.3 for further discussion on this. As I will show, for nearly all female *exempla* (with the notable exceptions of Lucretia and Verginia), this underlying sense of redemption is omitted. Even when it is present, women are still required to give up a sense of their female self, and adopt a masculine persona.

presence of a female (potential) *exemplum* within a dominantly male-centric discourse. Similarly, the form of commemoration (stage 3) must identify the transgression as a transgression in some way, consequently reinforcing the established norms of the existing society that inhibits such behaviour rather than encouraging its crystallisation as a new form of normative action (in other words, the transgression is no longer seen as such).

1.7 Summary of Chapters

This main body of this thesis begins by considering declamation exercises (Chapter Two), which were an essential step in refining the rhetorical technique of the adolescent elite Roman male. As part of his training for a public career, these exercises acted as a vehicle through which socialised norms about society were embedded, but could also be taken to their limits. As a genre, declamation provided a safe 'space' within which extremes of character and situation could be explored using 'stock characters' (for example, on the female side, wicked stepmothers, mourning mothers, cunning prostitutes and raped virgins abound). At the same time, they were also an arena where societal and cultural norms were 'naturalised', ensuring the continuation of the Roman moral discourse. This chapter shows how the utilisation of this space (what Gunderson terms 'the declamatory arena') was employed to think about and define gendered exemplary behaviours. In particular, this arena doubles up as a defined conceptual space within which *exempla* are constructed and manipulated, not only to test the limits of acceptable social behaviour, but also to practice utilising the rhetorical techniques required to frame an individual in exemplary terms. Three case studies will be used – *DMai.* 3 (the case of Marius' soldier), *DMai.* 10 (the case of the enchanted tomb), and *DMin.* 272 (the case of the bereaved traitress) – to explore socialised expectations around gender and exemplarity, including the means by which a female stock character is transformed into a fully transgressive *exemplum* who is 'set apart' from the rest of her sex. The case of Marius' soldier will show how concerns around the sexual and social status of the unnamed soldier is used to reflect upon the repeatable nature of

the male *exemplum*, even as he risks transgression and a potential shift into the feminine sphere.

In Chapter Three, I turn to one of the most complete examples of an exemplary collection known to us, the first-century CE *Facta et Dicta Memorabilia* of Valerius Maximus. This work is a collection of short descriptions of *exempla* categorised under various moral and ethical headings that can be contradictory at times, but which nonetheless still reveal much about the gendered characterisation of exemplary figures. On the one hand, Valerius presents all of his *exempla* as equal: his retains a consistency in their applicability for ethical and moral thinking through how they assist the reader in understanding Roman social and cultural practices and institutions. However, I argue that in doing so, Valerius deploys a conceptual space when constructing his *exempla* that is used as a vehicle for demonstrating the gendered distinctions between male and female *exempla*. After considering the male normative model within his text, I demonstrate these distinctions when applied to two named female *exempla*, Cloelia and Porcia. Despite coming from a 'traditional' and 'contemporary' mould respectively, I show how both of these *exempla* are subject to the same processes of literary construction that framed the gender stereotypes within declamation.

The focus of my analysis in Chapter Four turns to Seneca's two consolations to women, the *Consolatio ad Marciam* and the *Consolatio ad Helviam Matrem*. These are two of the first extended length texts to survive that are addressed to women, both of whom were in his social circle, and represent a major turning point where female *exempla* could be sourced from for the ethical learner. Seneca suggests (both in these consolations and in his *Letters*) that exemplary behaviour can be learned by directly witnessing the behaviour of suitable models in one's own social and family circles, and explicitly illustrates how such an approach can be adopted by members of both sexes. This represents a widening of the exemplary field in terms of the space given to women. However, the models presented to both Marcia and Helvia are still placed on clearly demarcated gender lines, with an expectation that they will look to other women as their exemplary influences. In addition, in his attempts to frame the

addresses of the texts as *exempla* themselves, Seneca ends up introducing a level of paradox that reframes them as a rhetorical device. In doing so, he introduces complications around their own imitability via the application of a female-specific rhetoric of transgression.

In the final substantive chapter (Chapter Five), I consider the women in Pliny's letters, drawn from his own acquaintances and family members. It shows how his *Letters* attempt to confer a sense of gender 'neutrality' to the *exempla* he includes within his letter collection, promoting his female exemplary characters as usable to both sexes, with particular examples being cited as instructive for both men and women equally. In the main, Pliny is successful in his aim; however, in the process of creating some of his exemplary women, declamatory echoes of how the female *exemplum* is rhetoricised within the defined conceptual space can be identified. This is particularly the case in *Ep.* 3.16 (Arria the Elder), *Ep.* 7.19 (Fannia), and *Ep.* 7.24 (Ummidia Quadratilla), as I show.

The Conclusion chapter summarises the main arguments of the thesis, and offers some suggestions for further avenues for research. For example, there is scope for more work on the interplay of continuity and change in/across the exemplary cycle, rooted in the understanding suggested in this thesis that it is a flexible yet patterned process of socialisation. Moreover, building on the focus on gender in this thesis, there is potential for further research on, for instance, pre-imperial women, imperial women, and Christian women.

CHAPTER TWO

Learning to Push at the Boundaries: *Exempla* and Gender in Declamation Exercises

2.1 Introduction

2.1.1 Chapter aims

The practice of declamation represented the final stage in the training of an elite male adolescent for a public career within Rome.⁷⁷ It played an indispensable role in refining rhetorical technique, and, as a visible arena in which the orator could demonstrate publicly his oratorical flair, it was an essential educational tool in ancient Rome as well as being a popular form of elite entertainment.⁷⁸ As noted in the Introduction chapter, declamation was one essential means by which society's ethical and cultural norms were explored through recourse to pushing at the boundaries of what was considered to be 'normal' behaviour.⁷⁹ The success of the declamatory exercise as a socialisation tool (through how embedded societal norms are evidenced) makes it useful as a means of exploring how gendered behaviour is displayed, developed, and distorted, and declamation too is a literary genre in which

⁷⁷ Rhetorical technique was gradually developed as the adolescent progressed towards increasingly complex exercises. This began with *sententiae* (sayings copied and memorised in early schooling), *chreia* (taking one line from which a dramatic context was constructed for one speaker), fables, *progymnasmata* (as an introductory type of declamation) before declamation itself. For more on Roman elite education more generally, see the classic texts of Bonner (1949) and (1977) and Marrou (1956), as well as more recent scholarship from Morgan (1998, 207, 2011), Webb (2001 on *progymnasmata* in particular), Rawson (2003), Bloomer (1997 and 2011), Horster (2011), and Dickey (2016).

⁷⁸ Declamation performances with a public audience were part of the literary culture from the turn of the first-century: see Sen. *Contr.* 1.3.11, 1.6.12, 2.4.12; Suet. *Nero* 10. By Quintilian's time (late first-century), it was being performed in special halls designed for the purpose, Connolly (1998) 143. We also know that some public figures, such as Cicero, practised declamation at home in order to continue refining their oratorical style; see Sen. *Contr.* 1.prf.11-12, Cic. *Att.* 14.12.2, *Fam.* 9.16.7; Quint. *Inst.* 12.11.6, Plut. *Cic.* 4.6-7.

⁷⁹ The type of exercises practised fell into two types: the *controversia*, that used declamatory laws and stock characters and scenarios in order to construct of a narrative on behalf of either the defendant or accused by the declaimer, or the *suasoria*, which took a well-known event and characters from history and explored the motives behind a decision taken. The chapter is concerned only with *controversiae*.

gendered *exemplary* behaviour is witnessed. This makes the corpus of extant declamatory texts valuable in terms of considering how embedded socio-cultural norms around the meaning and execution of gendered behaviours for both male and female exemplary characters were negotiated and used.⁸⁰

Of particular interest for this thesis is the means by which declamatory stock female characters were used to explore more widely the meaning of female virtue and exemplary behaviour. As is discussed in the next section, declamation relied upon the use of stock characters, playing with them under the cover of specific, often outlandish, scenarios and points of (usually fictional) law, before discarding them for later re-use in a different exercise. The world of declamation is therefore a fictionalised one, reliant upon the notion of the declamatory arena – an imaginary performance space with its own characters, laws and scenarios that was situated within the literal performance space of the declaimer.⁸¹ This arena doubles up as a defined conceptual space within which to explore how *exempla* are constructed and manipulated, testing the limits of acceptable social behaviour as well as practising the rhetorical techniques required to frame an individual in exemplary terms.

This chapter aims to do two things. Firstly, I will reflect upon how exemplary behaviour was constructed and experimented with within declamatory exercises, showing how the imaginary declamatory arena doubles up as conceptual space for reflecting upon exemplary behaviours. Secondly, and more importantly in the context of this thesis, this will be analysed within the context of gender, showing how there is a clear difference between how male and female *exempla* are constructed. Three case studies will be used to demonstrate the socialised expectations surrounding gender, the assumptions that are implied when a man is defined as ‘a hero’ (and its associated implications for the continuation of Roller’s exemplary discourse), and the behaviours and rhetoric associated with women in particular

⁸⁰ The main extant texts referred to within this chapter are Pseudo-Quintilian’s *Declamationes Maiores* and *Declamationes Minores* (now widely acknowledged not to be the work of Quintilian himself but which follow the precepts and guidance outlined in his *Institutio Oratoria*), Seneca the Elder’s *Controversiae*, and Calpurnius Flaccus’ *Excerpta*.

⁸¹ To be considered in greater depth in the next section.

when the declaimer attempts to fit exemplary women into the familiar structures of exemplarity. These questions underpin the chapter's three primary case studies taken from across the extant declamatory corpus. The first is that of Marius' soldier (*DMai.* 3), which uses homosexuality and the threat to the social and sexual status of the soldier as *vir* to reflect upon how imitation is retained as inherent to the male *exemplum*, even as he risks transgression and thus potentially moving into the feminine sphere. I then consider the case of the enchanted tomb (*DMai.* 10), where the figure of a bereaved mother is used by the declaimer to demonstrate how and when the common rhetorical motifs linked to female exemplarity should be deployed. My final case study, that of the mother who attempts to retrieve her son's dead body (*DMin.* 272), shows how the declaimer undergoes a step-by-step process to transform the mother into a full female *exemplum*, fully 'set aside' from the rest of her sex and who, by default, has become inimitable.

Collectively, these reveal the underlying concerns within declamation exercises regarding what it means for both men and women to be categorised as exemplary, the common anxieties expressed when women are framed as such, and the potential societal implications (for men) that are raised from this – all of which generate a destabilisation of the position of the female *exemplum* on the exemplary spectrum of operation. As this thesis more widely aims to show, this rhetoric serves to undermine the imitative qualities of female *exempla*, highlighting the gender differences in how Roman *exempla* were constructed.⁸²

⁸² A methodological challenge needs to be acknowledged here. The extant texts that offer the most comprehensive declamations (Seneca the Elder's *Controversiae* and the *Declamationes Maiores* ascribed to the school of Quintilian) fit within the category of 'show' declamations performed by adult declaimers for a specialist elite audience, with Ps-Quintilian's *Declamationes Minores* being regarded as textbook-like in its style through the interspersal of *sermones* by a professional *rhetor* that give guidance and instruction on how to deal with a particular theme; Sussman (1994) 5. However, a recent analysis of the *Declamationes Maiores* by Stramaglia (2016) has demonstrated that it contains features which can identify them as having a pedagogical purpose, revealing the hidden *rhetor* (normally masked by the fictive declaimer, a *persona* analysed in greater depth by Van Mal-Maeder (2007)). The major declamations represent a polished version of what was practised in schools: the techniques and stock characters used were the same, and the only major differences between 'school' and 'show' declamations would have been around the level of sophistication used to express the argument and the artistic level of the performance. How stock characters were used in the major declamations can therefore be viewed as very similar to how the young *rhetor*-in-training would have engaged with them, and therefore my reliance on the *Declamationes Maiores* for this chapter is substantiated in how I view these so-called 'show' declamations as the end product of the Roman educative process.

2.1.2 The conceptual world of declamation

Within recent scholarship, Roman declamation has been conceived as a vehicle that granted its students (and adult declaimers) a 'safe' space to explore extremes of character and situation, and where societal and cultural norms became 'naturalised' internally.⁸³ Having initially been perceived as a 'an absurd form of teaching' that used 'a bizarre, unreal world' and thus largely ignored, declamation's reputation as a complex literary form has, since the late twentieth-century, been restored.⁸⁴ It is now recognised that, in creating an imagined world (which we might term 'Sophistopolis') that was grounded in lived reality, extremes of social behaviour and relationships could be explored to their limits, using cases such as what happens when raped women are given the power of marriage or death over their rapist.⁸⁵ However, far from being an 'absurd' game or a place in which only the fantasies of ancient life were made evident, declamation can be seen as a genre that, as a 'performance occasion', inculcates, 'by sheer repetition, approved values in the still impressionable minds of the next generation of the elite.'⁸⁶ In this way, declamation sustained the 'social reproduction of the conservative elite' by simultaneously reinforcing the social values that privileged this class at the same time as ensuring their continuity via the next generation.⁸⁷

In naturalising moral values through learning what it means to be a Roman man, declamation positions itself as 'a genre of social fiction' that shapes patterns of social

⁸³ For example, see Bloomer (1997), Imber (2008) and Connolly (2011) for discussions about how rhetorical pedagogy (applied to declamation) allowed the wealthy elite to naturally appropriate the values assumed by their class.

⁸⁴ Declamation as absurd: Marrou (1956) 286; as a 'bizarre, unreal world' that relied on lurid topics as a way of keeping students and audiences interested only: Kennedy (1994) 170.

⁸⁵ See Russell (1983) 22 for the idea of 'Sophistopolis' as a 'city of the imagination', where its private life is as turbulent as its public (p.33). Kaster (2001) discusses the motif of declamatory rape as a means of inculcating social values within those that practised declamation.

⁸⁶ Kaster (2001) 325.

⁸⁷ Ibid. 326. See also Morgan (1998) for how literary education – that positioned rhetorical training as the pinnacle – was 'a self-limiting, self-regulating system' (p.45) that relied on a 'cognitive superiority' acquired through education to reinforce the natural right to rule by the elite (p.270).

reality, and therefore opens up its literary possibilities.⁸⁸ Consequently, ‘declamatory fictions play an active role in formulating and negotiating the idiom and the syntax of Roman subjectivity’, and it is precisely this notion of subjectivity that permits declamation to debate the meaning of exemplary behaviour, with transgressive boundaries being positioned and repositioned every time.⁸⁹ Furthermore, declamation’s emphasis on ‘transgression against Roman norms’ (and subsequent reparation) facilitates these types of debates in order to re-establish what is considered as normative.⁹⁰ Gunderson’s metaphor of this space representing a ‘zoo’, with its defined boundaries that allows for observation of ‘animals in the wild’ from a safe distance, is a helpful analogy in this regard. It offers a means of conceptualising how declamation was an ‘arena’ used not only for entertainment, but also for exploring situations that created conflict within the family or between the individual and community. As a ‘faux-wilderness’ with a clear boundary line, the declaimer has the opportunity to arrange what is inside without risk of the ‘animals’ inside ‘biting back’ if not properly controlled.⁹¹

The notion of the declamatory conceptual space is what makes these particular texts valuable when considering how embedded socio-cultural norms around the meaning and execution of gendered behaviours were negotiated and used. Declamation acted as a space for the exploration of ‘situation ethics’: not only through its inclusion of historical *exempla* with their understood moral values, but also in how these values

⁸⁸ Gunderson (2003). Beard (1993) views declamation as a vehicle of Roman ‘mythopoesis’ in how it constructed a fictionalised world where the rules of Roman society could be bent, consequently naturalising these rules. For more on declamation as fictional narrative, see Van Mal-Maeder (2007), or as ‘a genre of social fiction’, see Bloomer (1997) 74; Hömke (2009) focuses on how declamation is a written form of what was essentially an oral practice and tradition. As a socialisation tool, see Bloomer (1997 and 2011), Richlin (1997), Connolly (1998, 2009, 2011, 2016), Imber (2001, 2008), Kaster (2001), Van Mal-Maeder (2007). All of these views, whilst differing on points of detail, nonetheless share a common understanding of the idea that declamation utilised an imaginary performance ‘arena’ – with its own characters, laws and scenarios – situated within the literal performance space of the declaimer.

⁸⁹ Gunderson (2003) 18.

⁹⁰ As Kaster (2001) 328 remarks, it is the job of declaimer to reassert social order using reasoned arguments (‘exercising rational control’ over them).

⁹¹ Gunderson (2003) 19.

were expected to be applied in the lived, real world.⁹² Quintilian, in his handbook of rhetorical training, advocates the use of examples (defined as ‘the mention of an event which either took place or is treated as having taken place, in order to make your point convincing’ (*id est rei gestae aut ut gestae utilis ad persuadendum id quod intenderis commemoratio*)).⁹³ Although Quintilian’s emphasis is on events, he then links events to individual characters and their actions which occurred at a certain time. Therefore, rhetorical training – and by extension, declamation – connects events to examples, defining both as *exempla*.

2.1.3 Declamation and exemplarity: close relatives or worlds apart?

Despite the apparent mis-match between declamation – as a fictionalised world in which extremes of behaviour are acted out – and exemplary narratives, where norms are made and magnified, both genres have an important overlapping role in the education of the elite male youth as a mechanism for exploring tricky moral dilemmas.⁹⁴ Declamation permits the exploration of extremes of vice and virtue, as do exemplary narratives: the difference is that declamation takes place within a fictionalised world full of character types (for example, pirates, pimps, tyrants, and prostitutes), whereas *exempla* claim to be the narratives of events and people that are believed to have taken place.

Rebecca Langlands’ recent work (2018) on Roman exemplary ethics identifies a number of parallels between the operation of declamatory exercises and the way in which exemplary narratives were constructed and utilised as a means of understanding the social, political and cultural fabric of Rome. In expanding our understanding of the declamatory universe to consider its similarities to and

⁹² See Breij (2009) for a discussion of *pietas* in the context of declamatory situation ethics. Van Der Poel (2009) refutes Seneca the Elder’s claims that historical *exempla* are over-used by declaimers, arguing that they are, in fact, essential in supporting an argument (a point verified by Quintilian himself, *Inst.* 5.11.10), and as a result could be used creatively.

⁹³ Quint. *Inst.* 5.11.6.

⁹⁴ Of course, *exempla* are created by the subversion of normal forms of behaviour, cf. Roller (2018). The point here is that exemplary narratives are used as a way of learning about *moral* norms and understanding the nuances at play according to their application in different scenarios (what Langlands calls ‘situational variability’), in addition to the courageous acts.

relevance for exemplary narratives and ethical training, Langlands underscores how declamatory exercises utilised stock characters to develop different points of significance, interpretations, motivations, emotions, and intentions underneath an overarching working consensus.⁹⁵ The utilisation and development of *exempla* across various literary genres was similar, with familiar material (in this case, the individual *exemplum*) being reinterpreted according to context and authorial intention. As Bernstein notes, declamation is a composite genre: it borrows continually from other genres, but then asks its audience to assess the ethical claims at hand.⁹⁶

The links between declamation and *exempla* are currently an underexplored area across scholarship on both declamation and *exempla*, and one aim of this chapter is to demonstrate that declamation exercises reveal how the student learns to construct the typical female *exemplum* in particular.⁹⁷ To do so, I use a re-imagining of the declamatory conceptual space – emphasised as a methodological tool by Gunderson (2003) in particular – as an arena within which both male and female characters are deployed as a mechanism for exploring exemplarity and transgression. This offers a new way of reflecting upon Roman *exempla* in the context of gender. By focusing on the abnormalities present in these exercises, as embodied in the extreme characterisation of stock figures (that make up Gunderson’s declamatory ‘zoo’), the boundaries of what was regarded as acceptable behaviour could be explored and pushed against before reaching a consensus within the *divisio* as to where those boundaries should be settled. By imagining the concept of the declamatory space, therefore, we can begin to understand how other societal norms could be similarly explored within this space – such as expectations around gender and exemplary behaviours.

⁹⁵ Langlands (2018) 162.

⁹⁶ Bernstein (2013) 5.

⁹⁷ An important contribution is Bloomer (2011), who, whilst not specifically referring to *exempla*, nonetheless argues that declamation exercises – and by extension, the stock characters used within them – were a way of learning about morals and situation ethics more widely. Van der Poel’s 2009 study of *exempla* within Seneca the Elder’s declamations concludes that Seneca’s criticisms regarding their overuse (*Contr.* 7.5.12-13) are unfounded – if anything, Van der Poel suggests, we might expect to find more of them within declamations, given their bombastic nature and capacity for imagination (336-343). Larosa (2020) continues with the study of *exempla* within Seneca the Elder’s *Controversiae*, concentrating on his use of mythical heroines (Evadne and Alcestis) as paradigms of conjugal fidelity.

Helping this process is declamation's heavy reliance on stock characters within *controversiae*. These figures were recognised as having their roots in other genres such as Roman comedy, and were based upon social stereotypes (for example, loyal wives, bereaved mothers, disinherited sons, stern fathers, wicked stepmothers, tyrants, pirates, pimps, and more) – figures laden with values and expectations determined by gender, class and status that were widely understood by those who used them.⁹⁸ Using stock characters brought a range of benefits, including the avoidance of smearing the public reputations of living men and women, and their usage tended to circumvent complications that could arise from using hindsight as a strategy for argumentation.⁹⁹ The use of stock characters and knowledge of their definable characteristics meant that the moral and ethical make-up associated with them could be explored and taken to their extremes – or subverted – without focusing too much on the nature of the individual themselves. As Langlands notes, this enabled the learner (as well as the performance declaimer) to exploit the various tensions, contradictions and uncertainties within Roman ethical thought, testing boundaries and moral viewpoints through these exercises.¹⁰⁰ This conferred a sense of disposability onto stock characters, with individual characters being taken up and rhetorically manipulated to whatever degree the declaimer chose, before being discarded until required again in a different scenario.

Stock characters also allowed the student declaimer to speak in different voices, adopting different *persona* and ethical perspectives and utilising rhetorical techniques such as *enargeia*, in order to draw the audience in and believe that they are eye-witnesses to the events being described.¹⁰¹ However, it was always a space in which the male voice had primacy, where, within the declamation halls more

⁹⁸ Imber (2008) 164. Pingoud and Rolle (2016) use the wicked stepmother (*noverca*) figure to highlight how intertextual connections are also drawn upon to assist with character portrayal, with the declaimer relying on the authority of literary traditions to fix these images within the imagination.

⁹⁹ Langlands (2006) 254. The exception to this rule were *suasoriae*, which focused on the arguments employed during the process before which an important decision was made (the outcome of which was already known through historical record), and a very limited number of *controversiae* that used historical characters by association (for example, the exercises focusing on the soldier of Marius).

¹⁰⁰ Langlands (2006) 252.

¹⁰¹ Bernstein (2013) 114-6.

widely, gesture and comportment were tightly controlled.¹⁰² As Richlin remarks, rhetorical schools and the performances within them were ‘a locus of gender construction, a place where manhood is contested, defended, defined, and indeed produced’.¹⁰³

Despite their prominence within the declamatory arena, specific studies concentrating on stock female characters within declamation are largely absent in modern scholarship, which has instead focused on how these stereotypes assist the youth in learning how to become the *vir bonus* and respectable *paterfamilias*, simultaneously training boys to become men and to understand the concept of Roman manliness.¹⁰⁴ By placing women within the declamatory ‘zoo’, their male users deliberately allowed these fictionalised constructs to act transgressively, as well as in ways that the Roman male might anticipate (drawing upon learned behaviour and observation of women in their own environments). In utilising ‘stock characters’, declaimers could reposition both male and female characters within their fictional environment, and imagine situations where they could act in unexpected or surprising ways rather than in a manner stereotypical of their character. For example, wicked stepmothers and mourning mothers are used to simultaneously subvert and reinforce expected feminine behaviours as associated with their stereotype, and therefore act as a means by which women in the ‘real world’ could be understood.

Overall, stock characters were a tool by which the student learned how to speak for other social classes and gender (albeit through very carefully controlled means). Nevertheless, feminine speaking roles were only constructed through techniques

¹⁰² Gleason (1995).

¹⁰³ Richlin (1997) 90.

¹⁰⁴ Notable exceptions to this general rule include Imber (2011), who argues that women are used as the means by which boys learn how to be a good *paterfamilias* – thus her reading focuses on how women are used to support male behaviours within the domestic environment. Caldwell (2015) uses declamation to show how families were preoccupied with the sexual chastity of daughters before marriage, to protect the girl’s future social prospects. Langlands focuses on *pudicitia* in her 2006 work, and as such concentrates primarily on the representation of Lucretia and Verginia – that is, specific female *exempla*. See Sussman (1995) and Imber (2008) for work on the father-son relationship that concentrates on how the boy learns how to become a good *paterfamilias*. Gleason (1995) and Richlin (1997) focus on how declamation enhances notions of manliness.

such as *prosopopoeia* in order to avoid accusations of effeminacy.¹⁰⁵ As Bloomer notes, 'declamation [...] does not simply mimic gendered speech types but represents the right to speak in gendered terms'.¹⁰⁶ Accordingly, the next section demonstrates that declamation also represents the right to construct *exempla* in gendered terms.

2.2 Playing with Gender: Pushing at the Boundaries of the Conceptual Space

2.2.1 Male declamatory heroes and unchallenged imitability

Having established that declamation exercises were used to inculcate social values and assert the masculine point of view, I now turn specifically to how *exempla* are constructed and utilised along gender lines within these exercises.

One of the key differences between how men and women are portrayed as exemplary figures is linked to the status of the stock character of the 'hero'. This term contains a set of culturally-understood values associated with masculinity, *virtus* and bravery – values which do not need to be reiterated to the male student, and so it suffices merely to use the label 'hero' in these exercises. The hero, therefore, is always male; females never achieve this status, although they can enter into the exemplary sphere and be categorised as an *exemplum*. Nonetheless, it is only women who are taken up and placed into the declamatory conceptual space for manipulation *as an exemplum* – in contrast, male figures (including that of the hero), in the main, retain a static, generic status throughout.

One possible explanation for the general paucity of declamation exercises about the specifics of male exemplary behaviour is that, by this point in an elite male's rhetorical training, the continued use of *exempla* since early childhood during their education meant that the exemplary characteristics of men were already understood.

¹⁰⁵ Bloomer (2011) 187.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. 185 (cf. Bloomer (1997) 68).

This is not to say that concerns around correct masculine behaviour had vanished, as several declamations show. For example, the soldier of Marius (Calpurnius Flaccus 3, *DMai.* 3), the hero statue dressed in women's clothes (*DMin.* 282), and the youth dressed in women's clothing (*Contr.* 5.6) discuss what happens when men overstep their own gender boundaries to risk being seen as feminised via visible signs of their femininity (clothing) or a threatening of their manliness via concerns around their own sexual chastity (*pudicitia*), a virtue primarily associated with women.¹⁰⁷

Declamation trains the male student in how to frame the language and cultural assumptions around exemplarity, and utilise the plasticity of the *exemplum* primarily in relation to women only.¹⁰⁸ It is notable that women *do* feature prominently in these exercises, often as characters whose behaviour is seen as threatening to the stability of the home environment or to society more generally (for example, the wicked stepmother, the bereaved mother, traitresses, and sorceresses).¹⁰⁹ In contrast with the strong presence of such women, and the ability to develop and distort their socially expected behaviours to the extremes, there is a lack of similar plasticity in the use of male characters more generally, and – more importantly – a marked omission concerning debates around exemplary behaviour for men within the extant declamatory corpus.

A rare exception to this is in Seneca the Elder's *Contr.* 8.5, where the heroism of both a father and son are disputed. In this exercise, both a father and son become heroes, but the son is disinherited by his father before the father achieves hero status. After this point, his 'reward' is to seek the return of his son, which the son refuses. The father argues that, due to his age, his feats are more heroic in contrast (*Militavi senex*,

¹⁰⁷ The main analysis of male exemplarity and gender will be evaluated within section 2.2.2 on Marius' soldier, where the soldier's status as an *exemplum* (and even as a man) threatens to become destabilised, but avoids becoming a feminised and transgressive figure – ironically through the application of other female *exempla*.

¹⁰⁸ The success of this enterprise will become apparent in the other main texts used in this thesis (the exemplary collection of Valerius Maximus, the consolations of Seneca addressed to women, and the letters of Pliny).

¹⁰⁹ Non-elite male members of society perform a similar function, with slaves, freedmen and other wicked characters such as tyrants, pirates and pimps being similarly utilised (with sons in particular faring badly), suggesting that elite men and their important societal roles (consul, general, politician) were rarely used, if ever.

militavi exanguis, militavi qui iam vicarium dederam, ‘I fought as an old man, I fought when feeble, I fought despite having already provided a substitute’) – placing himself as more deserving of the title of exemplary hero than his son. Here, the trope of intergenerational repeatability (where sons aim to emulate the great exploits of their fathers) is manipulated by the declaimer to reposition the heroic status of the father as equal to, if not greater than, that of the son, the latter of whom had achieved this status first. Nonetheless, across this exercise, the heroic status of both men is not challenged, and so the potential for imitability is retained even as it is inverted across the generations.

The overall effect of exercises such as these is that the idea of the *exemplum* as imitable (‘gendered usability’) is retained along gendered lines. This assumption is evident despite the varying degrees of completeness for these declamation exercises, and differences in when they were produced (i.e. ranging from Seneca the Elder’s *Controversiae* of the first century to the longer expositions of Pseudo-Quintilian’s *Declamationes Maiores*). Across all of these texts it is possible to identify a recurring notion that, despite the space given to women within the exemplary sphere increasing across the first-century CE, the matter of imitation and *exempla* – and more specifically, its application along male lines only – remained an ongoing concern.¹¹⁰

In consequence, declamatory exercises had the potential to allow its practitioners to investigate the meaning and limits of female exemplary behaviour in a much broader manner. Indeed, the absence of imitability permitted such explorations. This extended as far as the boundaries between masculine and feminine behaviour in a more fundamental sense, blurring them in the process. This is evident when women’s courage and bravery are described as ‘manly, or she is regarded as acting

¹¹⁰ Even where imitability appears under threat, such as in *Contr.* 1.8, the emphasis is firmly on the undesirable and indeed the virtually unthinkable nature of such a development. Here, the father tries to prevent his son from performing even more exemplary deeds: while the outcome of this attempt is left open, it is clear that the invocation of a father’s moral compass is intended to convey that males ought to be imitable. Performing more exemplary deeds in this case would have thrown that into question; hence the moral dissuasion.

‘beyond her sex’ (as in *DMin.* 272 below): as such, her *virtus* is rendered in a masculine form. As this thesis demonstrates more widely, such gendered language complicates the idea of imitability, a key stage in Matthew Roller’s Roman exemplary discourse.¹¹¹

2.2.2 The case of Marius’ soldier (*DMai.* 3)

The episode of Marius’ soldier (*DMai.* 3, also referred to briefly in Calpurnius Flaccus 3) occupies an interesting place within declamation. Here, an episode from the historical past is used to think about a problem of the present world in which the declaimer himself resided – that is, of homosexual desire.¹¹² In this case, a soldier of Marius kills a tribune (his superior, who happens to be a nephew of Marius) in response to an attempted sexual attack upon him, and consequently stands trial for murder.¹¹³

The episode subtly debates the meaning of manliness and the ‘normative male identity’ (for the freeborn Roman male citizen), drawing upon complications surrounding sexuality, gender and social status.¹¹⁴ At its core lies the soldier’s refusal to be penetrated and become the ‘depraved’ passive partner (demoting his status from the free *vir*) within a sexual act that requires the man to play the active, dominant role. The danger of homosexual penetration threatens to destabilise the soldier’s individual sense of manliness, striking at the core of his identity as a heroic soldier: as Edwards notes, ‘to be penetrable was to be weak. To be penetrated was to be aligned with the female, the “other”’.¹¹⁵ The threat of being used sexually by

¹¹¹ Roller (2004) and (2018), and outlined in more detail in the Introduction chapter.

¹¹² Gunderson (2003) 156.

¹¹³ Langlands (2006) 265-269 remarks that this declamation exercise is one of the very few instances where we know the actual historical outcome (the soldier was acquitted). This element of hindsight forces the declaimer to be innovative in his line of argument in order to retain a feeling of suspense with each new telling. Rape was a common motif used in declamation exercises for ethical training, featuring in over thirty exercises. In all cases, questions of guilt on behalf of the rapist – always superior in age, rank and gender to the victim – are not addressed (as guilt is assumed), allowing the student to explore the consequences of the act; Packman (1999).

¹¹⁴ Gunderson *op. cit.* 153.

¹¹⁵ Edwards (1993) 75.

another dominant man leaves the soldier vulnerable to being repositioned within the social hierarchy as a slave/prostitute and ‘unmanned’, and thus with being stripped of his own sexual autonomy.¹¹⁶

In this way, the soldier is at risk of being feminised, which would have led to associations of political, social and moral weakness.¹¹⁷ Throughout this exercise, we can once more observe the fluidity of exemplarity within the imagined conceptual space inherent to declamation, a fluidity that is enhanced in this case through its reference to the feminine. The risk of effeminacy is exposed as shameful in the text, both through the explicit acknowledgement that *pudicitia* is normally a female virtue, and the subsequent application of well-known historical female *exempla* to illustrate the feminisation of sexual chastity. At *DMai.* 3.3, the declaimer states:

...pudicitiam in milite etiam laudare erubesco: feminarum est ista virtus; aliter mihi laudandus est vir fortis...

...I am actually ashamed to praise a soldier’s chastity: this is a woman’s virtue. We ought to praise a brave man in other ways...

In the attempt immediately following to do so, the declaimer draws upon the literary motif that linked agriculture and militarism.¹¹⁸ The application of the ideal mother in this context seeks to enhance the soldier’s bravery as a man born of rustic *exempla*, both male (as his father is cited as soldier and a farmer) and female. The image of the ideal Republican mother is one of ‘a very hardy old-fashioned woman, her face deeply tanned from exposure to the sun and cold winds’, who was also ‘her husband’s helpmate in most of the farm chores’ (*praedura priscis moribus mater, frigoribus ac solibus perusta et in plerisque ruris operibus marito particeps*, 3.3). This *severa mater*

¹¹⁶ Walters (1997a) and (1997b) 112-113.

¹¹⁷ Edwards *op. cit.* 65.

¹¹⁸ This linkage was made most explicit in the late second century BCE by the Elder Cato in *de Agricultura*. In this work, Cato argued that farming and waging war were complementary tasks, with one being a form of training for the other. This motif persisted throughout the Augustan era and beyond (as we see with the description of the soldier’s father in this declamation), even as the social standing attached to being in the army was beginning to decline by the late Republic. See Evans (2008) 169-179 for more on this motif, and Alston (1998) and Phang (2001 and 2008) for more on the changing social status of the soldier from the late Republic onwards.

(cf. Horace, *Ode* 3.6.33-44) was a recognisable trope from literature that sought to deplore the decadence of the contemporary imperial era and advocate a return to the traditional values of the Republican past. Therefore, the declaimer's use of this female *exemplum* works to affirm his masculinity, as this rustic trope refers back to a time when such parents produced the true *vir* that fought for the glory of the Republic.

However, the later use of female *exempla* at 3.11 risks effeminising the soldier once more, representing a shift on the exemplary spectrum of operation (and a destabilisation of his potential status as an *exemplum*). This is through the reference to sexual chastity and, in particular, Lucretia's suicide and Verginia's murder at the hands of her father to protect her virginity.¹¹⁹ These *exempla* are used by the declaimer to remind the audience of the value Roman society placed upon *pudicitia* and its links to the salvation of the state.¹²⁰ However, whilst it was the duty of women to protect their *pudicitia* to ensure the integrity of the state, for men it represented the freedom of the *vir* from passive sexual activity.¹²¹ So, whilst Lucretia and Verginia are 'noble examples, they deal with women' (*haec sunt honesta, haec narranda feminarum exempla*, 3.11). As a consequence, the declaimer has repositioned them as 'other' to men in illustrating the effeminacy of sexual virtue. In a cultural system that viewed masculinity as 'an achieved state', to prove the absence of femininity was therefore essential.¹²² In consequence, the soldier is at risk of becoming an *exemplum* for the wrong reasons, based on the risk of becoming feminised as an object of masculine desire rather than his masculine *virtus*.

Unlike the retelling of this episode in other texts where both the soldier and tribune are named, albeit differently (C. Plotius and C. Lusius respectively in Val. Max. 6.1.11-12 and Trebonius and G. Lusius in Plutarch, *Marius* 14.3-5), in these declamations

¹¹⁹ Livy 1.57-59 (Lucretia) and 3.44-58 (Verginia). See Langlands (2006) 265-274 for a detailed analysis of this exercise in the context of *pudicitia*.

¹²⁰ Gunderson (2003) 178.

¹²¹ Fantham (1991) 271.

¹²² Gleason (1995) 59-61. As a system, declamation relied on its avoidance of effeminacy to enhance manliness; Richlin (1997).

both the soldier and tribune are granted anonymity.¹²³ This permits the declaimer to offer lurid details of the case without a literal shaming of named historical individuals; yet, the shame of the assaulted soldier is nevertheless made explicit in the description of the event itself – as Gunderson remarks, the soldier is re-prostituted once again.¹²⁴ Furthermore, no resolution to the case is offered, unlike in Plutarch and Valerius Maximus' version. These features – a lack of clear identity that hints at the 'disposability' of stock characters in declamation, i.e. they are used as vehicles of gendered debate – aligns the soldier closely with female stock characters such as the mother discussed below. Their status as an *exemplum* remains open to question when their exemplary behaviour is viewed in the context of 'appropriate' gendered behaviour. Unlike female stock characters, however, the soldier does not fully cross over the line into becoming transgressive (and fully feminised as a consequence).

The *controversia* of Marius' soldier demonstrates how heroism and exemplary behaviour can *almost* be undermined via the inversion of the trope of manly women (that is, the womanly man, or non-man).¹²⁵ This declamatory exercise acts as a transition figure between different representations of *virtus*: the male form, as demonstrated through military prowess, versus the traditionally-feminised version, embodying *pudicitia*, such as in the *exempla* of Lucretia or Verginius' daughter. This exercise *does* deploy a spectrum of operation for gendered behaviour, but it is through the blurring of gender lines that the simultaneous blurring of exemplary lines is executed. The difference in comparison with female *exempla*, however, is that the declaimer here works hard to ensure that the soldier's social status and masculinity is maintained. It is this adherence to strict gender lines for the male *exemplum* in this particular case – even as female *exempla* are held up for ethical consideration – that ensures his imitability as an *exemplum* remains intact. In contrast, the tribune, whose

¹²³ Valerius Maximus also cites earlier episodes of other military personnel sexually violating freeborn men, at 6.1.10-11, to act as ethical and moral precedents for Marius to draw upon in making his decision.

¹²⁴ Gunderson (2003) 165.

¹²⁵ More widely, the concept of military discipline is also at stake in this exercise. It is essential that tribunes behave as tribunes should, for if *disciplina militaris* fails, then defeat by the enemy is almost guaranteed and civil war becomes an increasing risk; Phang (2008) 4-5 and 93-95, Bernstein (2013) 19-21. It is therefore Marius' job, as the 'judge' of this case, to ensure that this does not happen.

homosexual urges threaten the *disciplina* and *virtus* of the army itself, is turned into a highly transgressive, non-repeatable *exemplum*, having deliberately lowered himself to the social status of a female prostitute. As I demonstrate below, this determination to avoid gender blurring and thus permit the idea of imitability is lacking when it comes to women. Instead, we are often left with paradoxical characterisations of the females in question via a rhetoric of transgression, that results in the destabilisation of their potential to be imitable.

2.3 Forming the Female Variant

This is not to say that imitation itself is applied in the same way when comparing male and female *exempla*. For men, it is assumed that imitation will occur or has taken place – their exemplary status is not challenged, only acquired (the label of ‘hero’ in particular is always fixed). As a result, any debate in relation to their exemplarity rests upon what form of imitation follows, or what repercussions there may be for a specific action. In contrast, the right for the woman’s deed to be classified as exemplary is downplayed (or even ignored – it has to be earned, rather than naturally assumed); in all of these instances, imitability is queried. That is, when women are considered, we once again detect the two main principles that indicate the gendered nature of Roman exemplary discourse: the application of a rhetoric of transgression (being cast as ‘unique’), and the strict potential for imitability to be applied along gendered lines only.

Furthermore, if she is described in exemplary terms, this status remains unstable and therefore debatable, as demonstrated by the language used. This facilitates metaphorical shifts along the exemplary spectrum, sometimes on multiple occasions within the same episode, and/or via a metaphorical, or sometimes literal, application of the ‘standing apart’ trope that we have observed to be part of the ‘rhetoric of transgression’ applicable to exemplary women. Hence for women, even if they are portrayed in ‘exemplary terms’ (which need to be defined), the potential repercussions of the exemplary deed are greater in their impact.

Of course, there are some complexities surrounding imitation (as per Roller's final stage), yet, for example, the case of Marius' soldier demonstrates how the inherent imitability of male deeds is still preserved within potentially transgressive male exemplary episodes. This contrasts with female *exempla*, whose imitation is always rendered as problematic in some way. Therefore, even when we need to be careful when reading and analysing the declamatory exercises, there is an overall trend towards the negative (or highly transgressive) exemplarity of women.¹²⁶

2.3.1 The case of the enchanted tomb (*DMai. 10*)

In this first analysis, I show how female exemplary characters in declamatory works are represented in particular ways, through key tropes and rhetorical mechanisms concerning women more generally. The specific exercise in question is Pseudo-Quintilian's *declamatio maior* 10, 'the case of the enchanted tomb', in which the declaimer deploys the rhetoric of transgression associated with female *exempla*. Despite the fantastical elements of this story (ghosts and sorcery), I contend that there is an important underlying pedagogical purpose to this exercise surrounding the construction of exemplary women, and motherhood in particular.

In this declamation, the scenario is that a woman tells her husband that she sees her dead son in her dreams. Her husband consults a sorcerer who subsequently casts a spell on the tomb, and as a result, her son no longer visits her in her slumber. Accusing her husband of cruel treatment, the declaimer is acting on her behalf. Although the specific gendered rhetoric is less complex overall in comparison with *DMin. 272* (as I demonstrate in section 2.3.2), nonetheless it follows a two-step process which works to enhance the mother's uniqueness as we progress through the exercise. The first step marks her out as different from the rest of her sex, and the second seeks to suggest that she has the potential to be a model for men. This

¹²⁶ This is evident in the re-application of declamatory tropes in oratorical exercises, such as invective (for example, the various speeches of Cicero targeted against women). See the Conclusion chapter for further discussion on this point.

latter step hints at imitability via a potential crossing of gender lines, although this is never fully realised.

The declaimer begins by emphasising the mother's suffering. He acknowledges that all mothers suffer following the loss of their sons or young children (thus assuming that older daughters are not mourned to the same degree), but in this mother's case her suffering is of a unique nature: it is 'neither well known nor common among the rest of mothers' (*neque noto neque publico genere miserabilis non impudenter inter ceteras matres*, 10.1). It is this suffering, the loss of her son twice, that acts as the basis for setting her aside for special consideration:

*...eminere et occupare quendam maerentium principatum
differentia novae calamitatis affectat, quae sola omnium supra
fidem infelix in uno filio iam alteram patitur orbitatem.*

She quite fittingly aspires to stand out and win, one might say, a position of pre-eminence among those so grieving by the distinction of her strange calamity, since, incredibly unhappy over the loss of one son, alone of all other mothers, she now endures his loss a second time. (*DMai.* 10.1)

In identifying the second loss of her son (that is, once the sorcerer has cast his spell), the declaimer starts the process of 'setting her apart' from the rest of her sex. The mother is identified as aspiring (*affectat*) to gain an exemplary status on the basis of her mourning. Here, female grief is cast as akin to a competition that she seeks to win, and the declaimer identifies her grief as different to that of other mothers. This grief is different because she lost her son twice: it is this event that places her beyond (*supra*) other mothers, and categorises her as unique.

Her position as separate to other mothers is hinted at in the sentences that immediately follow this passage. At first, we are told that 'she bore her son's loss the first time quite bravely, as best she could, since it is something shared with all other mothers and happens through the will of God' (*priorem quidem illam, ut communem ceteris et fato accidentem, fortius utcumque tolerabat*, 10.1). Having worked to place the mother firmly at one end of the spectrum of operation for *exempla*, this position

is temporarily destabilised as she becomes one among many as a grieving mother. However, the declaimer then reverses this shift and places her firmly back within the exemplary sphere in the very next sentence: he reveals that, because the son reappeared to her, 'she grieved and wept less than she should have' (*planctibus lacrimisque... parcius utebatur*) during the initial period of mourning. In this way, the declaimer enhances her uniqueness once again: not only does she suffer a second loss that is unique to her alone, but she also did not mourn *enough* following the original death of her son.

Later in the exercise, the declaimer returns to this theme of defining her status as 'separate' to other grieving mothers. In this second passage, the extent of her suffering marks her out as different from other women:

Videtur itaque mulier infelix a dignitatis dolore secedere, quod tam<quam> uxorias in forum querelas et tamquam delicata matronae desideria pertulerit? non enim vestes nec aurum nec ambitiosos quaerit ornatus; contenta est orbitas sordibus suis. ac ne pelicis quidem dolore compellitur, nec tacita gaudia mariti impatientia et muliebri vanitate complorat. sed nec relictum torum desertumque genialem velut contempta vilitas uxoris ulciscitur: alia longe, alia de noctibus cura est [...] quantam enim a marito acceperit iniuriam, scire vultis? sola mater filium perdidit nec potest invidiam facere morti.

Does this unfortunate woman therefore seem to be exceeding a dignified pose of grief because she has conveyed such typically female complaints and what one might call the frivolous petitions of a woman before this court? To be sure, she is not asking for fancy clothes, gold, or gaudy finery; in the loss of her son she is well content with her tattered and filthy mourning garments. She is not driven by resentment for a rival mistress, and she does not complain about her husband's secret sex life with a female's typical intolerance and foolishness. But she also does not avenge a deserted and abandoned marriage bed as a wife scorned and spurned. Different, far different, is her concern about the night-time [...] Well, would you like to know how great a wrong she suffered at the hands of her husband? She is the only mother who lost a son and cannot reproach the angel of death for it. (*DMai. 10.9*)

Here, the mother is again singled out, this time in her status as a wife, as different on the basis of her reason for being in court: not for her is it the 'typical female complaints' (*uxorias querelas*) that would normally relate to possessions and outer appearances. Instead, she is happy for society to see her in mourning, her body battered and bruised from beating her breasts; nor is she driven by vengeance towards an unfaithful husband.¹²⁷ Having stoked up the feelings of pity amongst his audience once more, the declaimer is then confident in re-introducing the notion of her being separated out from her fellow wives: the great wrong (*quantam iniuriam*) she suffered at the hands of her husband is that her second loss was due to his actions, and not from the death itself.

In consequence, the declaimer has succeeded in utilising transgressive rhetoric to enhance her uniqueness as *both* a mother *and* as a wife. Having done so, there is no further suggestion in the text that she should be held up as an object for other women to follow – the context of the declamation itself, with its supernatural qualities, would make this impossible. Nonetheless, the exercise overall *does* reveal how a standard rhetoric of transgression can be applied in the context of women's entrance into parallel declamatory and exemplary spheres. Throughout, the mother is portrayed as emotional, desperate, and enduring the most unbearable form of suffering; in contrast, the father is cruel, and unloving, but also rational. These polar opposites are applied consistently throughout the exercise; however, the father's status as a father in society remains constant.¹²⁸ In other words, whilst he is categorised as *inhumanus* and *truculentus* ('inhuman and brutal', 10.2) he is never compared to other fathers in the process. It is only the mother in this exercise who is rhetoricised and transformed into a figure that goes beyond her sex.

¹²⁷ The declaimer emphasises this motif again towards the end of this section: *mulier, quae sanguinantes ad iudicem porrigit lacertos, quae scisso laniatoque vultu, quae lividis profertur uberibus, magno dolore cogitur, ut hoc potius agat quam cineres osculetur, quam complectatur urnam* ('A woman who bares her bloody shoulders to a juror, who is brought inside the court with her face scratched and mutilated, her breasts black and blue – she is forced by her violent grief to do this rather than kiss his ashes or embrace his urn', *DMai.* 10.9)

¹²⁸ Bernstein (2013) 77 notes that this exercise makes us ask who the rational actor is, moving away from the traditional dichotomy of man = rational and woman = irrational, especially with regard to social and cultural practices around death.

Within the courtroom scenario, it is appropriate that the declaimer aims to emphasise the individual suffering of the mother in question in order to (metaphorically at least) 'win' the case. The exercise relies on social and cultural mores surrounding mourning practices, where women were expected to demonstrate strong emotions (such as tearing their hair, rending their cheeks and beating their breasts).¹²⁹ It also offers an example of how the rhetorical tropes applied to exemplary women more widely within Roman literature begin to be handled and manipulated through these type of declamation exercises. At the same time, the exercise permits the declaimer to speak in the female voice, using *prosopopoeia* to arouse sympathy towards her in the audience and presenting her passions as more honourable than the father's reason.¹³⁰ It is this two-fold manipulation of the female character – of her voice and her rhetorical status – that enables the student to learn how and when it is appropriate to apply transgressive rhetoric to female characters.

2.3.2 The case of the bereaved traitress (*DMin.* 272)

The second declamation concerning women to be considered is that of Pseudo-Quintilian's *declamatio minor* 272: *orbata proditrix* (the bereaved traitress). The rubric for this exercise tells us that a mother went to retrieve her son's dead body under the cover of darkness. She is captured by the enemy and tortured, during which she tells her captors that, firstly, help was on its way to rescue her (a party crushed by the enemy), and secondly – having escaped from her shackles – that a tunnel was being built by her fellow countrymen. Following the defeat of the enemy, she is brought to trial and accused of giving away *consilia publica* (public counsels), and faces death as a punishment. The declamation that follows seeks to defend her conduct and character, and, strikingly, transforms her from a grieving mother stock

¹²⁹ Corbeill (2004) 65-106 notes that mourning ritual was a form of women's work: 'death is an area gendered first *for* women and then *by* women', p.85.

¹³⁰ Van Mal-Maeder (2007) 101-106. The two speeches in the female voice are at 10.4-6. Both the father and the sorcerer are also granted a voice, but the length of the mother's in comparison – more than double the other two combined – suggests that the declaimer is using this exercise predominantly as a means of articulating the female voice.

character created in the tragic mould into a different type of character type, the female *dux* who leads her countrymen to victory. As we will see in the next chapter on Valerius Maximus and the section on Cloelia, the female *dux exemplum* was constructed as a transgressive figure who embodied a number of paradoxes based on gender and leadership.¹³¹

The declaimer indicates within his *sermo* that he will adopt a cumulative approach to setting out his evidence in her defence, taking care to ensure that each of the themes that he outlines (the killing of her rescuers, victory over the enemy, the fate of her son, and finally the primary deed performed by the woman) are taken in turn during the course of his declamation.¹³² However, there is also a second, underlying, cumulative argument embedded within the text that outlines a series of unanticipated micro transgressions in how this mother is characterised. In other words, the *descriptive* accumulation of evidence (*maiolem cumulum*, 272.2) is paralleled by a *moral* accumulation of judgement. These build up, develop and eventually combine to form a fully transgressive character akin to the female *exemplum* whose potential for imitability is undermined, demonstrating to students the rhetorical techniques at play in constructing female *exempla* more widely. As Bloomer notes, the collection of exercises within the *declamationes minores* reflect how declamation was taught, and therefore this specific exercise tells us something about how female *exempla* were constructed and manipulated at the conceptual level.¹³³

The declaimer's second underlying argument utilises the declamatory conceptual space in order to move the grieving mother back and forth along the exemplary spectrum of operation at various points in the text, using a rhetoric of transgression

¹³¹ Section 3.3.2.

¹³² *DMin.* 272.2: *Cetera vero controversiae maiolem cumulum habent: occisum praesidium et oppressus hostis et filius ille et hac causa egressa portas. Haec themata tractanda sunt omnia: sed curae habendum ut suo quidque loco tractetur.* ('The other elements in the controversy are more cumulative: the slaughter of the reinforcement, the crushing of the enemy, the son, the woman going outside the gates on his account. All these themes are to be dealt with, but care must be taken that each is dealt with in its proper place.')

¹³³ Bloomer (2011) 182, also Bloomer (1997) 65.

that is layered up over the course of the exercise. It begins by expressing surprise that a female is being considered on treasonous grounds, namely the giving away of public counsels – a crime which, if found guilty of, is punishable with death.¹³⁴ The reference to the mother's gender triggers the opening of the conceptual space within which her exemplary status – positive or negative – will be considered, with the terms used suggesting that there is potential for a transgression of sorts to take place:

Possum mirari iudices, hac lege ream esse feminam; neque <id> ideo dico quoniam non etiam gravius puniendum sit si mentem prodendae rei publicae, perdendae civitatis in hoc sexu deprehenderimus, sed publica consilia quomodo in feminam ceciderint invenire non possum.

I can marvel, gentlemen, that a defendant under this law is a female; and I do not say <so> because an even more severe punishment is not appropriate if we discover in this sex a will to betray the commonwealth, to ruin the community, but I cannot imagine how public counsels came to the knowledge of a woman.' (*DMin.* 272.3)

The explicit use of *mirari*, alongside *invenire*, immediately casts doubt on the ability of a woman to be aware of state secrets, and establishes from the outset that a woman's place is not within the masculine realm of state politics and associated secrets.¹³⁵ Despite this, the *possibility* that her sex may possess the will to betray the state in order to bring ruin upon her countrymen is raised. If this were the case, the crimes of one woman would be cast as representative of all of her sex, meaning she would stand as an *exemplum* for all women – but one vilified, rather than held up as an inspiration.¹³⁶

The declaimer's next step is to employ a series of counter-factual questions to fend off any accusations that she did betray state secrets. He begins by querying the nature of the secrets she is said to have given away, asking whether to merely state

¹³⁴ *DMin.* 272. *praef.*: *Qui consilia publica enuntiaverit, capite puniatur* ('Let him who gives away public counsels be capitally punished.')

¹³⁵ Bloomer (1997) 65-66.

¹³⁶ Morgan (1998) 137 comments on how women are spoken of as a collective group with shared attributes – a learned behaviour that is reiterated across various forms of rhetorical exercises (and female *exempla* more generally).

that help was on the way (*indicasse venire auxilia*, 272.4) was tantamount to giving away counsels. The relevance of intention on the part of the captor is highlighted: the declaimer makes a distinction between ‘a mind not coerced’ (*animus non coactum*, 272.5) and one heavily influenced by pain, having been tortured. However, these arguments are not sufficient in and of themselves: instead, we must think about her *persona*:

*Sed intellego non eam esse personam de qua loquimur ut satis sit
eximere eam accusationi.*

But I realise that the *persona* of the woman of whom we speak is such that more is needed than to free her of the charge. (*DMin.* 272.5)

Once again, her individual character singles her out for specific investigation in her own right. This is a further rhetorical shift, as standard arguments about intention are no longer enough: instead, her transgression into state matters requires more effort on behalf of the declaimer to defend her. Again, the ‘jurors’ are asked whether confession following torture is deserving of the same level of anger and punishment as deliberate betrayal, and if they persist in thinking that she is truly set apart from all other similar cases (*quod si nullo modo apud quemquam bonorum virorum potest videri simile*, ‘If there can be no manner of similarity here in the view of any decent man...’, 272.6), then the declaimer is required to provide a narrative about the circumstances surrounding her capture, torture and subsequent release. This narrative is full of gender motifs that highlight her status as a mother, and a bereaved mother especially, where it is precisely *because* of her status as a mourning mother that she dared to transgress onto the scene of battle in the first place:

*quae filium in proelium misit, cuius partus et sanguis in proelio stetit,
cuius filius, dum nihil carius habet patria, dum propulsare hostem vel
virtute sua vel sanguine vel postremo corpore ipso morari studet,
spiritum pro nobis in certamine amisit, ita profecto institutus, ita a
matre dimissus, hanc accusari aequum est, cuius misereri satis non
possumus? Nocte egressa est. Quis hunc in matre [quis] miratur
adfectum tamquam novum?*

She sent her son into battle, her child and blood stood in battle, holding nothing dearer than his country, as he strove to repel the enemy by his courage or his blood, or finally to hold them up with his very body, lost his life fighting for us, so trained we may be sure, so taken leave of by his mother. Is it fair that she be accused, a woman whom we cannot pity enough? She went out by night. Who wonders at this emotion in a mother, as though it was a novelty? (*DMin.* 272.7-8)¹³⁷

A paradox is evident here: she is marked as a paragon of state motherhood (sending her son into battle to defend the state), yet her motherhood is simultaneously viewed as ordinary because it meets the traditional expectations of Roman motherhood. Her concurrent transgression and ordinariness initially counterbalance each other, posing the question as to how to judge her character, and move her away from being categorised as unique. Addressing the possibility that those in the audience may regard her as acting in a way merely expected of grieving mothers (as suggested by the final rhetorical question in the passage above), the declaimer immediately moves to lay out the features that are specific to her case and that could make her ‘worthy perhaps of outright admiration’ (*quae forsitan plane admiratione [eius] digna sint*, 272.8). Her courage in the face of darkness, the sight of the horrific and gory aftermath of battle, and her exhortation to the gods (272.8) to help her find the body of her son are explicitly identified, at the same time as she is painted as a tragic, suffering, figure, ‘stupified by her calamities’ (*stupentem malis*, 272.9).

It is these sufferings that explain her capture and consequent confession to the enemy; however, it is the declaimer’s revelation that she confessed only when undergoing torture which marks another shift along the exemplary spectrum, drawing upon a rhetoric of transgression that is associated with female *exempla*. This is dependent on her strong soul that becomes defined as a ‘manly spirit’, as demonstrated by her bravery:

Ubi tantum robur animi, ubi tam firmam solidamque mentem quae non dolore vincatur, non ignibus cedit, non verberibus ingemiscat?

¹³⁷ This bears traces of Greek tragic figures such as Iphigeneia and Jocasta, whose voices are seen as dangerous interventions in the masculine sphere of battle and its aftermath.

Haec vero satis fortiter ac supra sexum suum fecisse credo quod nihil dixit antequam torqueretur.

Where will you find such strength of soul, so firm and solid a mind, as not to be overcome by pain, not to yield to fire, not to groan under the lash? I believe that she behaved bravely enough and beyond her sex in that she said nothing before she was tortured. (DMin. 272.10)

As this thesis will show, the main linguistic trope utilised by the declaimer here is one of several common motifs used in the context of female *exempla* within Roman literary texts, demarcating how *exempla* are constructed more widely. The identification of this mother moving ‘beyond her sex’ (*supra sexum suum*) marks the start of a cumulative shift within the exemplary conceptual space towards transgression, a transgression that women must undergo in order to achieve the status of an *exemplum*. In this case, the implication is that the mother has revealed her latent ‘manly spirit’ in overcoming bodily pain and not giving into fear, successfully resisting any temptation to give anything away to the enemy. It is this underlying masculine part of her *persona* that catalyses her transition into exemplary status.

The final stage of the declaimer’s argument marks the transition into a female *dux* figure, synonymous with *virtus* and the state. It begins with the suggestion that the mother’s capture was linked to divine providence, despite the heavy losses suffered prior to victory (*ut possit videri secundis ominibus et quadam providentia pro nobis deorum immortalium factum ut haec caperetur*, ‘her capture may seem to have occurred under favourable omens and a providence of the immortal gods on our behalf’, 272.12). The mother is singled out as on the side of the gods and, although her life is spared, her capture and subsequent torture is akin to a form of *devotio*. Her subsequent escape is what marks her out as a female *dux*:

Hic, si placet, feminae animum et in amorem patriae adsumptas culpate vires. Discussit vincula illa; quae (ut parcissime dicam) hostis imposuerat, femina, anus, torta rupit. Quaeritis quo animo fecerit? Cogitate quid passura fuerit deprehensa: torta est antequam offenderet. Iterum ingressa nocturnum iter, non confusa tenebris,

non periculo, vicit cursu aetatem, sexum, infirmitatem. Secuti cives quidquid dixerat, quidquid fecerat mater. Salus ergo civitatis et victoria qua nunc gaudemus huic debentur. Hoc est enuntiare?

Here, if you will, find fault with the woman's courage and the strength she put into her love of country. She shook off her bonds; the bonds that the enemy had laid upon her (to use the mildest of words), she broke them, a woman, an old woman, tortured. Do you ask how courageously? Consider what she would have suffered had she been caught – she was tortured before she did anything to annoy them. Again she embarked on the night-time journey; the darkness, the danger did not confuse her. By her courage she triumphed over age, sex, infirmity. Her countrymen followed whatever the mother said, whatever she did. So the survival of the community, the victory in which we now rejoice, are due to her. Is this "giving away"? (*DMin.* 272.14-15)

References to her escape at night are reminiscent of Cloelia, the maiden who freed herself from her captors during the Etruscan invasion of Rome, and who was also categorised by Roman literature as a female *dux* figure.¹³⁸ In contrast with Cloelia, whose youthful virility is emphasised across the various versions of her tale, here the mother's old age and infirmity (following bodily violence) are held aloft. Her escape and return journey from her captors is representative of her own unique form of courage, and marks a triumph over all of her sex, age, and bodily state.¹³⁹ It is the triumph over her sex (*vicit cursu sexum*), i.e. the form of transgressive rhetoric associated more generally with female *exempla*, that marks her last shift on the spectrum of operation and her full transition into the exemplary sphere. This is a transgression enhanced by her influence over her countrymen (*secuti cives quidquid dixerat, quidquid fecerat mater*) and thus influence akin to leadership, a status only permitted to men.

This episode represents a twofold use of women within the declamatory conceptual space – firstly, the demonstration of the multiple rhetorical shifts that are often

¹³⁸ For more on representations of both *virtus* and the female *dux* figure within early imperial literature, see the next chapter on Valerius Maximus.

¹³⁹ As Bernstein (2012) 171 notes, declaimers have a tendency to present victims of torture 'as exemplary figures of virtue' regardless of sex. In this instance, the declaimer works hard to ensure that her virtue is enhanced by reference to her age and infirmity.

present when women occupy this space (moving back and forth along the spectrum of operation), and secondly, in how women are transformed into an *exemplum* via a step-by-step enhancement of the gendered transgressive rhetoric associated with them. The bereaved traitress undergoes a temporary repositioning as set aside from the rest of her sex that becomes permanent over the course of the episode. The application of transgressive rhetoric – phrases such as *supra sexum suum* and *vicit cursu sexum* – demonstrates how what is recognisably a female *exemplum* figure could be constructed using stock characters, following a number of dedicated steps along the way. Throughout, the declaimer utilises the declamatory conceptual space to demonstrate how her exemplary status can be challenged, before finally categorising her as a transgressive *dux* figure, and confirming the flexibility of the status of female *exempla* more generally within Roman exemplary discourse.

2.4 Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, I have demonstrated across several exercises how exemplary behaviour is constructed and manipulated within the imaginary declamatory arena. My first analysis of a female case study (*DMai.* 10) identified the key tropes and mechanisms that declaimers apply to women when they are positioned into the conceptual space that constructs and debates gendered exemplary behaviours. Via a two-fold manipulation of the grieving mother (of her voice and rhetorical status), the student is shown the conditions under which transgressive rhetoric is applied to female characters. My second female case study (*DMin.* 272) continued to demonstrate the multiple rhetorical shifts present when women occupy the declamatory conceptual space (moving back and forth along the spectrum of operation), and went on to show how women are transformed into an *exemplum* via a step-by-step enhancement of the gendered transgressive rhetoric associated with them. Both examples confirm the flexibility of the status of female *exempla* more generally within Roman exemplary discourse.

Furthermore, I established that the use of this space is predominantly reserved for the discussion of *female* exemplary behaviours. Where a male character is permitted to enter the space, it is via the threat of a temporary repositioning of his own gender, as shown in the example of Marius' soldier (*DMai.* 3). This exercise relies on the threat to the social status of the soldier as *vir* to reflect upon how imitation is retained as inherent to the male *exemplum*, even as he risks transgression and thus potentially moving into the feminine sphere.

Exploration of the construction and meaning of an *exemplum* therefore takes place via the usage of female characters in declamation. This is part of a wider trend evident over the first-century AD, as the question of how one could be considered as an *exemplum* and in which spheres of action their exemplary behaviour could be performed was grappled with. At the same time, there was a growing recognition that women's exemplary deeds could be admired as on a par with men's, yet this did not mean that how women became exemplary was clarified. The next chapter on Valerius Maximus and his collection of *exempla* of both genders will show this in action.

CHAPTER THREE

Re-Moulding Women: Female *Exempla* in Valerius Maximus' *Facta et Dicta Memorabilia*

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 Chapter aims

This chapter will explore further the nuances relating to the gendering of Roman exemplarity as found within Valerius Maximus' first century CE collection of *exempla*, *Facta et Dicta Memorabilia*. Building upon the previous chapter's focus on declamation and its manipulation of gender stereotypes in order to exemplify male and female characters, this chapter will show how a similar rhetoric can be located within a different (yet related) genre, that of a collection of exemplary anecdotes. Links between Valerius' collection and declamation rest not only upon the various similarities in the content, rhetorical devices and tropes found in both genres, such as apostrophe and *prosopopoeia*, but also through parallels in how an imagined conceptual space is utilised (most likely, unconsciously) in order to frame and differentiate gendered behaviour.¹⁴⁰ I argue here that Valerius Maximus creates his own conceptual (and literary) space, within which he uses ethical and moral categories both as the structural framework of his text, and as the vehicle for demonstrating the gendered distinctions between male and female *exempla*. In particular, the foundations of his female *exempla* are once more dependent upon a transgressive rhetoric that is primarily associated within female characters – a rhetoric which works to render their position on the exemplary spectrum of operation as unstable, and therefore complicate any potential they have to be truly imitable.

¹⁴⁰ Sections such as those on prodigies (Val. Max. 1.6), dreams (1.7) and wonders (1.8) show clear overlaps with the content of declamatory exercises. Examples of *prosopopoeia* can be found at 3.7.1e and 5.1.3.

In this way, any latent conceptual differences between male and female *exempla* that are originally engaged with during the rhetorical training phase are once again expressed, reflecting the overall success of the Roman socialisation process. Valerius Maximus' text seeks to bring together a wide range of famous deeds and sayings from Rome and elsewhere, harvesting a vast array of sources and producing an encyclopaedic reference work.¹⁴¹ On one level, all of his *exempla* are created equally: as a whole, they are designed to assist the reader in understanding the vast range of social and cultural practices and institutions that make up the Roman psyche, and in grasping the various ways in which important virtues in particular could be expressed.

However, as this chapter demonstrates, there are a number of latent differences in how male and female *exempla* are articulated.¹⁴² I will draw upon several exemplary figures from Valerius' text, male and female, in order to demonstrate how his construction of Roman *exempla* rests upon the central premise that female *exempla* are conceptually distinct from their male counterparts. Due to the application of a rhetoric of transgression that places restrictions on the arenas within which women may act, blurring gender lines in describing the individual female *exemplum* herself, the capacity of female *exempla* to be regarded as imitable (and with the potential to complete Roller's exemplary discourse) is severely inhibited. Through an analysis of two female case studies, the quasi-historical figure of Cloelia and the contemporary 'real-life' example of Porcia, I show how these female *exempla* are subjected to the same processes of literary construction that framed the gender stereotypes within declamatory exercises. In consequence, Valerius is one of the earliest literary 'collectors' of *exempla* to utilise the rhetorical techniques evident within declamation exercises in order to foster the notion of gendered usability, i.e. where female

¹⁴¹ Val. Max. 1.pr.1: *Urbis Romae exterarumque gentium facta simul ac dicta memoratu digna, quae apud alios latius diffusa sunt quam ut breviter cognosci possint, ab illustribus electa auctoribus digerere constitui, ut documenta sumere volentibus longae inquisitionis labor absit. Nec mihi cuncta complectendi cupido incessit* ('I have determined to select from famous authors and arrange the deeds and sayings worthy of memorial of the Roman City and external nations, too widely scattered in other sources to be briefly discovered, to the end that those wishing to take examples may be spared the labour of lengthy search. Nor am I seized with ambition to be all-embracing.'). cf. Pliny, *H.N.*, *Pref.* 33, where Pliny the Elder explains the value of his index; see also *H.N.*, *Pref.* 17-18 and his bold claims about having collected 20,000 facts from a hundred authors.

¹⁴² Although Valerius' collection includes a number of 'foreign' examples (that is, non-Roman) of both sexes, I shall only be considering Roman examples in this chapter.

exempla exhibit a greater degree of flexibility at the conceptual level in contrast with their male counterparts. What makes Valerius particularly interesting is his application of this technique to a new kind of female *exemplum*, Porcia, thus opening the door for later early imperial authors such as Seneca and Pliny the Younger to frame contemporary women as exemplary following a similar kind of rhetoric. These authors are discussed in the subsequent two chapters to this one.

3.1.2 A brief introduction to the text

Containing over one thousand *exempla* across 95 separate categories that cover vices and virtues as well as institutions and social situations, Valerius Maximus' *Facta et Dicta Memorabilia* is 'a multi-thematic anthology with a good dash of miscellaneity'.¹⁴³ Published under the reign of Tiberius, the text was one of several historical reference works to emerge around this time (such as Velleius Paterculus' *Historiae Romanae*) that collected and promoted Roman cultural memory, drawing

¹⁴³ Morgan (2007) 129. The overall purpose of the text has been widely debated, with Bloomer (1992) arguing that it was organised to assist students and practitioners of declamation (building on Carter (1975)). Skidmore (1996) asserts that Valerius' primary ethical purpose was to encourage readers to recognise virtue from vice, but rejects Bloomer's claim that the text was used for rhetorical training, instead suggesting it may have been a form of 'improving literature' that was read after dinner in elite households. Bloomer further argues that Valerius' attempts to codify Roman cultural practices was mainly for the benefit of non-Roman audiences, especially for provincials coming to reside in Rome. More recently, a body of work produced by Langlands (2006, 2008, 2011, 2018a) develops Skidmore's emphasis on ethical learning, situating Valerius' text within a wider moral didactic tradition that had been growing under Augustus. For her, Valerius' text is designed primarily to help Romans think ethically and develop their moral reasoning skills, and as such should be seen as linked to the declamatory tradition in how controversial thinking and reasoning is explored. This approach is the starting point for this chapter. Other scholars such as Maslakov (1984) and Gowing (2005) concentrate on the value of the collection as a text that transmits cultural memory, but for dissimilar purposes, namely how the *exempla* contained within it represent continuity with the past (Gowing) or difference from (Maslakov).

heavily upon a wide range of historical sources and collections of *exempla*.¹⁴⁴ The text is situated within a wider cultural programme of commemoration that began under Augustus, which incorporated various historical and didactic texts with visual media that, collectively, attempted to codify and proscribe Roman cultural memory and moral traditions.¹⁴⁵ This was a period when systems of ethical *exempla* more generally were being codified, meaning that Valerius' style of writing – consisting of clearly demarcated sections under a common moral virtue or cultural institution, prefaced with short, descriptive rubrics that incorporate narrative details and a degree of ethical complexity – fits into this wider programme of social change.¹⁴⁶

Although classical scholarship has only relatively recently paid attention to Valerius' text for its potential educative purposes within early imperial Rome (both through its links to declamation and for ethical and moral training, as discussed in the next section), this masks the relative importance ascribed to it by the ancients themselves, as evident both through references to his work by Seneca, Pliny the Elder and Plutarch, and in the manuscript tradition surrounding it.¹⁴⁷ This indicates that Valerius' collection had ethical and rhetorical value for the ancients, and therefore his depictions of *exempla* are worthy of more detailed study by us, too. More importantly for this thesis, Valerius' collection is not one of famous men only: instead, we see the inclusion of women, ranging from the time of Roman kings up to

¹⁴⁴ The exact date of publication is not known. The late twentieth-century saw some debate among scholars to determine the exact date of publication (for example, Carter (1975), Bellemore (1989), Briscoe (1993)); the consensus now is that Valerius published his work some time around 30 CE (as cited by Langlands (2006) 124). Briscoe (1993) 398-403 argues that the overall lack of references to Augustus and the imperial family in general hints that its publication was likely to have been after the trial of Cremutius Cordus in 25 CE (described in Tac. *Ann.* 4.34-35; cf. Dio 57.24.2-4, Suet. *Tib.* 61.3, Sen. *Ad Marc.* 1.2-4, 22.4-7, 26.1,3). Carter (1975) 35-7 identifies a range of sources used by Valerius in compiling his text, most notably Livy and various works of Cicero alongside other chroniclers such as Coelius Antipater (Val. Max. 1.7.6) and Cato's *Origines* (8.1.2), and suggests that Valerius also referred to other collections of *exempla* used widely within rhetorical schools, such as Cornelius Nepos' *De Viris Illustribus*, Hyginus' *De Vita Rebusque Illustrium Virorum*, Verrius Flaccus' *Libri Rerum Memoria Dignarum* and Varro's *Antiquitates Rerum Humanarum et Divinarum* (referred to Valerius himself at 3.2.24). Welch (2013) 68 notes that Valerius' 'plagiarism' of other authors is part of a wider cultural project to gather and redact historical material to produce a record of Roman tradition.

¹⁴⁵ Visual representations included the *summi viri* of the Forum of Augustus, a collection of over 100 life-sized statues of Rome's great men, ranging from Romulus to Augustus' stepson Drusus – although many late Republican political figures were notably absent; Shaya (2013).

¹⁴⁶ Langlands (2018a) 236.

¹⁴⁷ Plutarch (*Marc.* 30.5 and *Brut.* 53.5) directly cites Valerius Maximus as a source; Pliny the Elder was known to have done so indirectly in his *Naturalis Historia*.

contemporary figures, such as Porcia.¹⁴⁸ With the exception of Antonia (4.3.3) and only brief passing references to Livia (6.1.*praef.*) and Octavia (9.15.2), women from the imperial household have been excluded as *exempla*, a feature that seems out of step with their wider commemorative honours. However, there is a broader tendency within the collection to omit contemporary figures, most likely a decision made from political expediency, with the vast majority of *exempla* dating from a period before the battle of Actium in 31 BCE.¹⁴⁹ Nonetheless, the decision to include women was an important one, and suggests that Valerius viewed women as upholders of Roman morals alongside men – even if, generally, these morals tend to be described along traditionally gendered lines.¹⁵⁰

3.1.3 The ‘interpretative possibilities’ of Valerius Maximus’ *exempla*¹⁵¹

Valerius Maximus collates his *exempla* following a basic underlying rhetorical structure that brings together disparate anecdotes under the same heading.¹⁵² The advantage of such an approach is that this shows the similarities as well as the differences in how a virtue could be articulated, but simultaneously creates a number of seemingly unresolvable tensions and contradictions within a single category.¹⁵³ Maslakov comments that this results in ‘the overall impression of a shapeless pastiche’, but closer inspection reveals a number of basic patterns in how the *exempla* are categorised.¹⁵⁴ For instance, foreign examples (i.e. non-Roman) are

¹⁴⁸ Scholarly studies dedicated solely to the women within Valerius’ text are still scant. Notable contributions on gender and Valerius include Langlands’ doctoral thesis (2000) which focuses on female examples of *pudicitia* in Val. Max. 6.1 (developed further in her 2006 book, pp.123-191) and the tales of three women who speak in public at 8.1. Other studies focus on Maesia at Val. Max. 8.1.1 (Marshall (1990)) and Hortensia at 8.3.3 (Hallett (1984) 58, 234 and Fredlund (2014)).

¹⁴⁹ Gowing (*op. cit.*) 54. As Briscoe (1993) notes, this was in response to a number of high-profile prosecutions against men that were seen to be critical of the imperial regime (see fn. 4 above). Wardle (2000) 492 notes that the imperial family only features in around 50 anecdotes across the whole collection.

¹⁵⁰ For example, Lucretia is cited as *dux Romanae pudicitiae* (6.1.1), even as male *exempla* are also included in this section. It is common for Valerius to include women alongside men within his different categories: what matters to this thesis is the way in which these women are conceptually framed along different lines.

¹⁵¹ Quotation from Langlands (2008) 184.

¹⁵² Bloomer (1992) 25-7.

¹⁵³ Maslakov (1984) 254; Langlands (2008) 162.

¹⁵⁴ Maslakov (*op.cit.*) 255.

collated within their own separate sub-section, and are generally considered as having less rhetorical impact in comparison with their Roman counterparts.¹⁵⁵ ‘Good’ examples are generally separated from the ‘bad’, privileging the former, and some sections follow a general chronology that takes the reader from the foundation of the city of Rome and culminates in contemporary examples – as is the case in section 3.3.1.¹⁵⁶

The work of Rebecca Langlands has comprehensively demonstrated that Valerius was more nuanced in his approach than was appreciated among Classical scholars, with his work containing an ethical complexity and engagement with the reader.¹⁵⁷ In collecting together sometimes disparate examples under the same category and occasionally portraying troubling stories as for the benefit of all (for example, those under the heading of *severitas*), the reader is prompted to think about the moral complexities and ‘interpretative possibilities’ at stake when acting in times of crisis (including applying the benefit of hindsight). This means that, through reference to a series of examples positioned directly next to each other under a single category, a single virtue can be tested to its extremes in order for the reader to find the limits of social and cultural acceptability associated with it.¹⁵⁸ In presenting his *exempla* as a chain of connections joined under the same virtue or category, exemplary deeds can be literally repeated from one hero to the next (a ‘chain of exemplarity’).¹⁵⁹ Yet in doing so, the category itself can appear to break down as we move from one example to the next within a section, once again highlighting the complexities surrounding individual moral categories. By not being overtly prescriptive in telling the reader how to interpret each story, varying responses to a conundrum are permitted as being equally valid – sometimes under very different circumstances – suggesting to the reader that complex reasoning skills are required in order to evaluate the deed performed by the *exemplum* at hand. Thus, slavish imitation of his models is not

¹⁵⁵ By extension, therefore, are seen as morally ‘inferior’; Langlands (2006: 140 fn.44).

¹⁵⁶ Gowing (2005) 56.

¹⁵⁷ Building on the earlier work of Skidmore (1996), as noted in footnote 3 above.

¹⁵⁸ Langlands (2018a) 109-10 – a ‘contested site of exemplarity’. See the Introduction chapter for more on this.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 44.

expected: instead, the reader is expected to think actively and carefully within a framework of situational ethics about how they too might have responded in a similar situation, taking a range of examples as inspiration.¹⁶⁰

However, there remains a further way of reading Valerius' text that focuses on the specific ways in which his *exempla* are constructed and rhetoricised.¹⁶¹ This type of reading (that underpins this thesis) reveals differences ascribed to the gender of the *exemplum*, making some reader interpretations more likely than others.¹⁶² This is assisted by his mode of story-telling, beginning with the removal of a historical context or framework from the vast majority of his *exempla*, which permits Valerius the space to layer on top his own interpretative possibilities.¹⁶³ As Bloomer notes, all *exempla* are, to an extent, dehistoricised: this is what gives them their ethical potency and agility, for they refer to a narrative that exists outside of the text, as such forming part of the community's collective memory.¹⁶⁴ The removal of historical details (such as motivations for action) frees up Valerius to take well-known stories and transform them into 'showpieces of rhetorical invention', where the rhetoric used is more important than the story being told.¹⁶⁵

This is true especially if we consider the impact that gender has on the rhetoricisation of his *exempla* more widely. Whilst literal imitation may not have been an expected outcome following engagement with his work, the literary properties inherent to how his *exempla* have been constructed indicate the presence of a conceptual space that

¹⁶⁰ Langlands (2006) 154-7, 190; (2008) 162-169; 174-5, 184-5; (2011) 100-101.

¹⁶¹ Thus building on the initial work undertaken by Langlands (2000) – see Introduction (section 1.6).

¹⁶² Langlands does consider readership in her work (and the possibility of a female readership especially); (2006) 190 and (2014) 124-125. This thesis extends her work in thinking about the role that the reader (and their gender) plays by considering how *exempla* are constructed and then interpreted, via the use of a defined conceptual space.

¹⁶³ Gowing (2005) 60-1.

¹⁶⁴ Bloomer (1992) 19; also Langlands (2008) 183. Welch (2013) has taken this to mean that Valerius is engaging with a form of 'anti-textuality', where the removal of chronological details serves to make them more universally applicable, and the use of rubrics further generalises the anecdotes, stripping them of their specificity within the text. I contend that this latter point is not the case; Valerius embarks on what Gunderson (2013) calls 'a rhetoricisation of the world in general', where the mode of story-telling becomes more important than the story being told.

¹⁶⁵ Quotation from Gunderson (2013) 208.

is utilised to frame female *exempla* as different and separate to their male counterparts, as transgressors, and as inherently inimitable.

3.2 Reading Valerius' *Exempla* Through a Gendered Lens

3.2.1 The male normative model

Having considered the wider ethical and literary properties of Valerius' *exempla*, it is now time to look more closely at the differences evident in the context of gender. This can be explored via the underlying textual organisation at play that tends to assume a male normative model, as well as through a detailed analysis of how the individual *exempla*, and thus the literary differences at play between male and female characterisations, are constructed.

Firstly, although it is an obvious point to make, male *exempla* overwhelmingly dominate across the whole collection. As noted above, any single section in Valerius' text will often contain a range of examples situated alongside each other that collectively test where the boundaries of a moral virtue lie; yet in providing mostly *male* examples, there is a tendency to assume a *male* perspective in analysing the *exempla* in question.¹⁶⁶ This is not necessarily problematic; a story's main protagonist (including a woman or a foreigner) does not need to be closely identified with in order

¹⁶⁶ This does not mean that only men read the collection, just that they were its likely intended audience. Langlands (2006) 190 states that the inclusion of women at least suggests the possibility of a female readership, given some female *exempla* (such as Lucretia) are shown as moral agents themselves.

to think about the ethical concepts being illustrated.¹⁶⁷ However, it is the organisational principle underpinning the construction of moral categories that serves to distinguish conceptually between male and female *exempla*. At its core, Valerius' text tends to position male *exempla* within multiple ethical categories. To take the most striking example, Cato the Younger appears in sections that focus on very different aspects of an individual's character or deeds: on triumphal law (2.8.1), majesty (2.10.7, 8), natural temper (3.1.2a and b), bravery (3.2.14), 'those born in humble situations who became illustrious' (3.4.6), illustrious men indulging in dress or other style 'more freely than ancestral custom permitted' (3.6.7), moderation (4.1.14), abstinence and continence (4.3.2,12), conjugal love (4.6.5 – being compared with his daughter Porcia), humanity and mercy (5.1.10), 'freely spoken or freely done' (6.2.5), necessity (7.5.6), study and diligence (8.7.2), and 'distinction falling to individuals' (8.15.10). Viewed collectively, one male individual can be cited as an *exemplum* to illustrate directly an individual moral category as well as multiple ones, or be cited by another *exemplum* in order to emphasise their didactic purpose.¹⁶⁸

Secondly, the notion of male *exempla* as inherently imitable is reinforced throughout the organisation of the text. It is not uncommon for them to appear positioned as mirror images within the same anecdote, or for an *exemplum* who appears in one anecdote to be compared to a named male *exemplum* in a separate anecdote (often under the same umbrella category). For example, Postumius Tubertus and Manlius Torquatus are positioned in parallel within the same episode (2.7.6) as equal *exempla* of military discipline, and who enact the same deed in response to their authority being undermined (killing their son). Similarly, three *exempla* are named collectively

¹⁶⁷ Langlands (2006) 190. This ties into Quintilian's advocacy of using 'unequal examples', where subverting the expected order of illustrative examples ("from greater to lesser") enhances the overall rhetorical force of an argument, especially when it comes to *virtus*: *Ad exhortatio nem vero praecipue valent inparia. Admirabilior in femina quam in viro virtus. Quare, si ad fortiter faciendum accendatur aliquis, non tantum adferent momenti Horatius et Torquatus quantum illa mulier cuius manu Pyrrhus est interfectus, et ad moriendum non tam Cato et Scipio quam Lucretia: quod ipsum est ex maioribus ad minora* ('Unequal parallels are particularly useful for exhortations. Courage is more to be admired in a woman than in a man. Therefore, if someone is to be fired to do brave deeds, Horatius and Torquatus will carry less weight than the woman by whose hand Pyrrhus was slain; and if we are speaking of facing death, Cato and Scipio will be less persuasive than Lucretia. This is also an Argument "from greater to lesser."' (Inst. Orat. 5.11.10-11).

¹⁶⁸ Morgan (2007) 127.

at 3.2.6a with the parallels between the valour – despite being from different times – being made explicit:

Eodem et virtutis et pugnae genere usi sunt T. Manlius Torquatus et Valerius Corvinus et Aemilianus Scipio. hi etiam ultro provocatos hostium duces interemerunt, sed quia sub alienis auspiciis rem gesserant, spolia Iovi Feretrio non posuerunt consecranda.

T. Manlius Torquatus, Valerius Corvinus, and Aemilianus Scipio showed the same valour in the same kind of combat. They too slew enemy leaders whom they had challenged. But since they had acted under other men's auspices, they did not place spoils to be consecrated to Jupiter Feretrius. (3.2.6a)

These three heroes are marked out as different to the preceding anecdotes (containing a triptych of Romulus, Cornelius Cossus, and M. Marcellus; 3.2.3-5) in *not* dedicating their war spoils to Jupiter due to having acted under the command of others.¹⁶⁹ Nonetheless, the repetitive nature of their courage that connects the two sets of three is emphasised (*eodem*), even as the final outcome in 3.2.6a varies compared to the three identical deeds placed immediately beforehand. These are only a small number of examples from within the collection that illustrate this point: many other *exempla* referencing direct imitation between two male-centric anecdotes can be found throughout the text.¹⁷⁰

Thus, imitability – and the capacity to keep reiterating the exemplary discourse – is taken to be a normative feature of the organisational principles underpinning this collection of male-dominated *exempla*. Conceptually, the emphasis on repetition reaches its pinnacle when we reflect on the ability of an *exemplum* to self-replicate via direct emulation of an earlier example, based upon identical structural

¹⁶⁹ Val. Max. 3.2.4: *Ab Romulo proximus Cornelius Cossus eidem deo spolia consecravit [...] Cossus quoque multum acquisitum est, quod imitari Romulum valuit* ('Next to Romulus, Cornelius Cossus consecrated spoils to the same god [...] Cossus too acquired much in that he was capable of imitating Romulus'). Val. Max. 3.2.5: *Ne M. quidem Marcelli memoriam ab his exemplis separare debemus* ('Nor must we separate from these examples the memory of M. Marcellus.')

¹⁷⁰ Cf. Cossus' imitation of Romulus in the preceding footnote. This does not always have to relate to the deed performed by an individual – it can sometimes refer to how a (male-led) institution acted in similar scenarios (for example, the punishments given out by the senate at 6.3.3c and the consul M. Curius at 6.3.4 (*id factum imitatus*)).

features.¹⁷¹ The most common form in which this occurs is via intergenerational repeatability between father and sons. Valerius gives considerable weight to two families in his text that illustrate this concept, both of whom both played a prominent role in the Samnite Wars: the Decii and Manlii.

3.2.2 Fathers and sons

Publius Decimus Mus, consul in 340 BCE, and his son Publius Decimus (consul in 295 BCE) represent a straightforward example of how the son has made the correct choice to emulate the deeds of his father. Publius Decimus Mus committed the ultimate self-sacrifice against the Latin enemy by donning a purple-edged toga and veil before devoting himself to the gods, and then mounted a horse before riding directly into the middle of the enemy – acting as the catalyst for Roman victory alongside Manlius Torquatus (1.7.3, 5.6.5).¹⁷² The underlying catalyst for Publius Decius Mus' heroic action is revealed as stemming from recognising the significance of an apparition that appeared before the consul (and his consular colleague Manlius Torquatus; a motif of repetition noted above).¹⁷³ Forty-five years later, his son realises that a similar self-sacrifice is needed to bring about Roman victory, and performs this in exactly the same way, with exactly the same dedication to the gods, ceremonial dress, and manner of death:

*Unicum talis imperatoris specimen esset, nisi animo suo
respondentem filium genuisset: is namque in quarto consulatu,
patris exemplum secutus, devotione simili, aequae strenuae pugnae,
consentaneo exitu labantes perditasque vires urbis nostrae correxit.
ita dinosci arduum est utrum Romana civitas Decios utilius habuerit*

¹⁷¹ Langlands (2018a) 99-100, 116.

¹⁷² Cf. Livy 8.9.5-14. Valerius Maximus' representations of these episodes differ little from that of Livy's, whom was likely to have been his main source.

¹⁷³ This apparition told both consuls that a sacrifice was due to the gods of the Underworld and to Mother Earth, in the form of a general on one side and an army on the other; in response, a sacrifice is made, a commitment given to meet their prescribed fate, and an agreement that whichever of the two in charge of armed forces that appeared to be giving way to the strength of the enemy would sacrifice themselves; cf. Livy 8.6.9-12. Details of the consequent battle are omitted by Valerius, although the key recognisable features of the story more generally are once more consistent with the version told by Livy.

duces an amiserit, quoniam vita eorum ne vinceretur obstitit, mors fecit ut vinceret.

The example of such a general would be unique had he not begotten a son with a soul corresponding to his own. For he in his fourth Consulship followed his father's pattern: with a similar devotion, an equally vigorous fight, and a like end he restored the power of our city from collapse and ruin. Thus it is hard to tell whether the Roman community was more fortunate to have the Decii as generals or to lose them; their lives were a bulwark against defeat, their deaths brought victory. (5.6.6)¹⁷⁴

The repetition here is stark: the son's deed, and the circumstances in which it is performed, act as a mirror image of the father's, meaning that the father is no longer *unicum*. The father is explicitly designated as an *exemplum* for the son, who has digested the lessons of his father's heroic act and of the importance of familial piety (the focus of section 5.6 overall). As a result, the son is able to recognise immediately the correct environment within which imitation of his father should occur. The success of this is reinforced in the final sentence of the anecdote, where both *exempla* are spoken of as if they were constructed as a single *exemplum*, and their value to the community comes from being paired together. Although this could threaten to undermine the individual accomplishment of the elder Decius (by reducing the uniqueness of his individual act), instead the two Decii combined become a far more powerful force – not just of *pietas*, but in showing how Roller's complete exemplary cycle can be successfully replicated. Valerius' positioning of the story of the father immediately before that of the son (5.6.5-6) once again reiterates the overall sense of imitation at play throughout the collection, enhanced by the text's underlying structural principles.

In contrast, the *exemplum* of Titus Manlius Torquatus (used primarily by Valerius as an illustration of the principle of *severitas*) engages with a transgressive rhetoric. Yet there is a key difference with female *exempla*, via the notion of agency. Consul in 340 BCE alongside the same elder Decius above, the military prowess of T. Manlius Torquatus is identified in 3.2.6a, although Valerius omits to provide further details

¹⁷⁴ Cf. Livy 10.28.12-18.

about this specifically.¹⁷⁵ Instead, the severity of the punishment meted out to his son, for disobeying his orders whilst at the same time imitating his father's own courageous deed, is Valerius' primary focus. Section 2.7.6 provides a skeleton outline of the story (likely based on Livy 8.7): the son is challenged to a duel by the Tusculan Geminus Maecius; the son wins and brings back various spoils of victory, but, despite this victory, Torquatus orders his son to be seized by a lictor and executed for disobeying his own orders. Both Valerius and Livy stress that the deed was accepted as necessary in order to preserve military discipline, despite the horror of those who witnessed the execution, and suggest that the attempt of the son to emulate his father's own glorious deeds would have been accepted as correct had the son not chosen to make the incorrect choice to fight in direct opposition to his father's orders.

At the core of this anecdote, the son has succeeded in repeating the heroism of his father. Nonetheless, in punishing him for disobeying his orders, the father has indicated that he has judged the son's deed to have been transgressive. In this instance, the principle of military discipline is much more important than that of filial piety, and must be upheld for the benefit of the state. Consequently, within this single episode, due to his slavish imitation of his father, the son's transgression has shifted his position along the exemplary spectrum of operation in a way that is reminiscent of how female *exempla* are considered. However, later in the collection, Valerius tells us that the community itself was divided in response to the execution:

...Manlio Torquato amplissimam et gloriosissimam ex Latinis et Campanis victoriam in urbem referenti, cum seniores omnes laetitia ovantes occurrerent, iuniorum nemo obviam processit, quod filiam adolescentem fortissime adversus imperium suum proeliatum securi percusserat. miserti sunt aequalis nimis aspere puniti...

...Manlius Torquatus brought back to the city a great and glorious victory over the Latins and Campanians. All the older folk met him in high rejoicing, but none of the younger ones came out to his passing because he had beheaded his son, a young man who had

¹⁷⁵ The reader's knowledge of Livy (and the wider story-tradition surrounding T. Manlius Torquatus, who himself emulates the *severitas* of his own father Lucius; Livy 7.4-5) is relied upon here. See Livy 7.10.

fought most bravely in combat against his orders. They pitied their coeval, too harshly punished. (Val. Max. 9.3.4)

As a result, the son's position on the spectrum has the potential to move away from being defined as a 'transgression', depending on the audience viewpoint. We should remember that the father has broken a different social code (on *pietas*) in order to assert a wider behavioural principle relating to military discipline.¹⁷⁶ The rhetoric deployed in this episode by Valerius suppresses any suggestion that the son's exemplarity rests on being *unicum*, or 'set apart' from the rest of his sex. His error was that he failed to understand the importance of adhering to his superior's command, in the act of successfully performing a comparable deed to those of his father. Therefore, unlike with female *exempla*, the capacity for one male *exemplum* to be imitated by another was assumed to be the normal course of action in the first place, even if the subsequent judgement of the deed rendered it as unrepeatable.¹⁷⁷ In contrast, female *exempla* are framed in a way that suggests their action will only ever be performed the once, and not imitated in any shape or form.

Both of these examples demonstrate how exemplary actions can be literally repeated (son copying the father in making a self-sacrifice or in one-to-one combat), yet may result in an outcome that itself is deemed unrepeatable (as with Titus Manlius' execution). Therefore, even where male *exempla* are used to demonstrate the unrepeatability of a deed, the very fact that those deeds are permitted space in the text to be repeated is an attribute only afforded to male *exempla*.¹⁷⁸ The key difference between males and females is dependent upon *the exercise of individual choice*: men's actions *may* be repeated (as conditional upon the individual

¹⁷⁶ Langlands (2008) 171-3.

¹⁷⁷ Of course, there is a bigger irony here in that this whole episode in itself is repeated: 2.7.6 includes the second parallel *exemplum* of Postumius Tubertus, who also executed his son for disobeying his command, despite the victory of the son against the enemy. Once again, the organisational principle of placing male *exempla* in parallel within the same anecdote reinforces their capacity for imitation.

¹⁷⁸ The suggestion of female intergenerational repeatability is evident within texts such as Seneca's *Ad Helviam* 18.7-8 and Pliny *Ep.* 7.19 (Fannia), as discussed in chapters 4 and 5 of this thesis. However, these texts hint that woman-to-woman emulation is problematic in some way - Helvia needs to be reminded by her *son* about the example her sister can offer as well as her role in acting as an example for her granddaughter, and Fannia's exemplarity is also regarded as the product of her *male kin* as well as her female (*Ep.* 7.19.3). This suggests a blurring of gender lines in the manner outlined above.

circumstances), but women's actions are normally unrepeatable *because of* their gender. This does not make Valerius unique: in fact, it underscores the relative conventionality and conceptual homogeneity in using male *exempla*, even where they may be structurally organised in different ways by different male authors (such as in the creation of a collection of *exempla*). Nevertheless, the flexibility inherent in *exempla* is pushed to greater lengths in the use of female *exempla*, as I shall now briefly demonstrate, which reflects how literary representations of *exempla* are intrinsically gendered.

3.2.3 Transgressing the text: male *exempla*

By their very nature, all *exempla* are transgressors in their own right: to be classed as such, an individual needs to have broken some form of social or cultural norm in order to stand out from their counterparts. It would therefore be surprising if there were no examples given across the texts considered in this thesis which cited male transgressors. Hence, it needs to be acknowledged that, in Valerius' discussions of *exempla*, there are instances of when men appear to inhabit the same conceptual space as women, and adopt an unstable position on the spectrum of operation. I now consider some of these representations: nevertheless, as will become clear, these representations are both much less numerous than their female equivalents, and are also drawn significantly more narrowly in terms of the behaviour they refer to.

As we noted with the Manlii in section 3.2 above, it is possible for the foundations of a man's exemplarity to rest upon an act that, depending on the audience, has the potential to be viewed as transgressive. Two further examples of where male *exempla* seem to contain the potential to adopt a permanent transgressive rhetoric can now be considered. In the first, Q. Fabius Maximus cut off the hands of army deserters who, following the defection to the enemy lines, were later recaptured (2.7.11). Valerius tells us that Fabius 'forced his most merciful nature into severity somewhat cruel, laying clemency aside for the time being' (*mansuetissimum*

ingenium suum, ad tempus deposita clementia, saeviore uti severitate coegit, 2.7.11). In the second example (2.7.12), the elder Africanus, whose natural disposition was to be ‘the mildest of men’, had to ‘borrow some harshness from a cruelty quite alien to himself’ in order to preserve military discipline. In a parallel instance of *severitas* with the preceding example of Fabius, Scipio Africanus punished Roman deserters with crucifixion, an action that has the potential to bring shame on the Roman sense of justice, being a punishment normally meted out to slaves.¹⁷⁹ In both cases, the harsh punishment indicates the potential to turn the *exemplum* in question into a transgressive example, but the narration of these cases suggests that they merely *temporarily* lay aside their natural disposition in order to save the state.¹⁸⁰ In contrast, female *exempla* are described as permanently laying aside not just their disposition but their sex, in order to enter the exemplary sphere. These framings – temporary and dispositional versus permanent and bodily – dictate that *exempla* should be viewed according to their gender.¹⁸¹

In contrast with the organisational principles applicable to male *exempla*, the women that Valerius includes – with few exceptions – are considerably less likely to be directly cited across different sections in his collection. Even where they are, it is never across more than two primary moral categories, which contrasts with named

¹⁷⁹ Val. Max. 2.7.12: ‘...is tamen ad firmandam disciplinam militarem aliquid ab alienissima sibi crudelitate amaritudinis mutuandum existimavit [...] non prosequar hoc factum ulterius, et quia Scipionis est et quia Romano sanguini, quamvis merito, perpresso servile supplicium insultare non attinet...’ (‘for the confirmation of military discipline he thought proper to borrow some harshness from a cruelty quite alien to himself [...] I shall not pursue this action farther, both because it is Scipio’s and because there is no need to insult Roman blood that suffered the punishment of slaves, however well deserved...’).

¹⁸⁰ Valerius himself acknowledges that *severitas* such as this is needed in order to avoid defeat (*vires armes constant; quae ubi a recto tenore desciverint, oppressura sunt nisi opprimantur*; ‘military discipline requires a harsh, brusque sort of punishment because strength consists in arms, and when these stray from the right path they will crush unless they be crushed’, 2.7.14).

¹⁸¹ By virtue of both his position (as leader of the empire) and his assumed divine status, the emperor is always described in terms that separate him out from other men, and, by default, as a transgressor. However, it is never necessary for his gender to be laid aside in order to be classified as exemplary: to be emperor is still to be male, just a divine male.

male *exempla* such as Cato and Pompey.¹⁸² In Valerius' text therefore, multiple male ethical categories can potentially be inhabited by all men; but women tend to inhabit only one discrete category of the various options presented by Valerius. In addition, across the text, women are often a singular example within a section, and where more than one is situated alongside each other, Valerius has to work harder to emphasise their exemplarity.¹⁸³ I will now analyse two of these examples in detail, in order to demonstrate the impact that gender has when constructing female *exempla*.

3.3 Cloelia – The Heroic Virgin

The first case study to consider in detail is that of Cloelia. By the early first-century CE, the young maiden Cloelia was an established folklore figure and a firm fixture within Roman cultural memory, commemorated through texts and as a statue in the heart of Rome. Her story dates from the fifth-century BCE and the capture of Rome by the Etruscans, and her heroic deed (freeing herself and her fellow young girls from captivity) had long been recognised as an *exemplum* of *virtus*.¹⁸⁴ As a young girl whose bravery was viewed as synonymous with this highly masculine quality, Cloelia is a complex and paradoxical figure within the Roman exemplary system. Nonetheless, these paradoxes did not prevent the development of a 'story-tradition' around her (what Langlands terms 'a site of exemplarity'), as we will see in the next section.¹⁸⁵ The flexible nature of Roman *exempla* in general afforded authors the opportunity to create their own representations of her as an individual *exemplum*,

¹⁸² Cornelia, mother of the Gracchi: 4.4.*praef*, 4.6.1; also referred to incidentally at 4.2.3 and 6.7.1. Porcia, wife of Brutus and daughter of Cato the Younger 3.2.15 and 4.6.5, (and analysed in more detail in section 3.4 of this chapter). Veturia, mother of Coriolanus, is cited alongside Coriolanus' wife Volumnia at 5.2.1a and 5.4.1. It is worth noting that even Lucretia – bastion of Roman chastity, and the catalyst for the shift from monarchy to republic – is not mentioned beyond book 1 within Livy (cf. Chaplin (2000) 168). This suggests that it is a rare occurrence generally to cite a female *exemplum* more than once within the same text.

¹⁸³ It is more common to see reference to several female *exempla* within a section when those *exempla* are foreign.

¹⁸⁴ Hallett (1984) 118 gives a date of 508 BCE.

¹⁸⁵ Langlands (2018b) 173-5.

whilst simultaneously retaining those narrative features that make the story recognisably hers.

As I will demonstrate, Valerius Maximus succeeds in finding ways of enhancing Cloelia's transgressive status that are beginning to become familiar in the context of female *exempla*. In doing so, he shows us how even well-established exemplary figures from Rome's mythical-history are always demarcated along gender lines in the context of imitation. By magnifying her inimitability, Valerius reduces any potential for gendered repeatability. This is done in three ways: through his representation of the heroic feat that she performs (as a contrast to other versions in the story-tradition), its wider interpretation, and the rhetorical techniques at play that transform her into a symbol with an educative function for men.

3.3.1 Cloelia: a traditional *exemplum*

As a site of exemplarity within the Roman cultural milieu, Cloelia was firmly embedded within an existing story-tradition that heavily influenced Valerius Maximus' own composition.¹⁸⁶ A number of narrative commonalities are present across all of the extant literary versions that pre-date and include Valerius' collection. These include context (the action takes place during the siege of Rome, close to the river Tiber during the war against the Etruscans), reference to the handing over of a group of hostages that includes Cloelia, her subsequent escape, and, following the introduction of peace, the recognition of her bravery with some form of reward.¹⁸⁷

All of these authors utilise the flexibility of the exemplary genre to introduce small variations in detail to create a version that is distinctly their own. For example, Livy depicts her leading a band of girls in swimming across the Tiber back to the Romans under enemy fire (2.13.6), describes the fury of Porsenna in discovering this

¹⁸⁶ This is not unique to Cloelia: it is the case with many other *exempla* within the collection, both male and female.

¹⁸⁷ Livy 2.13.6-11 and Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Rom. Ant.* 5.33-34. Our other fullest treatment of Cloelia's tale is found in Plutarch's collection of stories about the bravery of women, produced at the end of the first-century CE (*Mor.*250C-F).

deception before his anger is turned into admiration (2.13.7-8), reveals a further act of Cloelia's that is worthy of admiration (freeing half of the young boys taken as hostage, 2.13.9-10), and details the special honour awarded to her afterwards – an equestrian statue. Dionysius of Halicarnassus (*Rom. Ant.* 5.33.1) reveals fewer details overall, but homes in on Cloelia's leadership abilities and how she is able to persuade the other young girls to follow her in swimming away from the enemy guards – although there is no reference to swimming under a barrage of enemy fire. However, as in Livy, reference is made to the ensuing peace and return of the Roman hostages, and the reward given to Cloelia (5.34.3) – this time, her reward comes from Porsenna, who presents her with a war horse, rather than from her own people.¹⁸⁸

As Roller notes, a separate, but related, feature of her general characterisation was her close structural positioning alongside another Roman hero, Horatius Cocles, whose exemplary deed took place at almost the same time as Cloelia's.¹⁸⁹ Valerius chooses to adhere to this literary convention, although the manner in which he does so creates a different effect, as we shall see later.¹⁹⁰ By acknowledging this standard exemplary diptych, Cloelia is granted a place among his catalogue of courageous deeds within the section *De Fortitudine* ('on bravery', 3.2). This is the longest section dedicated to a single virtue within the whole collection, with 37 individual examples illustrating the highly complex and varied ways in which courage – so essential to the very concept of Roman identity – could be expressed. This is evidenced by the volume and variety of the *exempla* offered here by Valerius, which range from mythical-historical feats dating from the foundation years of Rome, all the way to the political conflicts of the late Republic. Some of these tales contain problematic actions, such as the unnamed soldier at the battle of Cannae who, as he lay dying, gnawed at the enemy's face (3.2.11). Read as a whole, however, this rich array of

¹⁸⁸ Dionysius refers to the enemy as 'Tyrrhenians', another small variation in detail (34.3).

¹⁸⁹ Roller (2004) 19. Close textual positioning between Cocles and Cloelia is found in Virgil, *Aen.* 8.646-51; Manilius, *Astronomica* 1.770-790; Pliny, *H. N.* 34.28-29; Florus, *Epitome Bell. Omn. Ann.* 1.4.40.

¹⁹⁰ Valerius chooses to omit the most famous example of self-wounding, Mucius Scaevola (normally found as an exemplary triptych alongside Cocles and Cloelia) from his collection of brave *exempla*, instead reserving him to be the primary *exemplum* of *patientia* (fortitude) in section 3.3. However, an allusion is made to his exemplary deed at 3.2.17, when his descendant and name-sake raises his left hand in a symbolic gesture. Scaevola is the closer pairing to Cloelia in Livy's text, and Cocles is mentioned very briefly by him during Cloelia's exemplary tale.

exempla reveal how *fortitudo* is characterised as a male virtue performed in a traditionally male environment, especially the battlefield.

Notably, four of these exemplary tales relate to women, with that of the young girl Cloelia being situated very near to the beginning of this section.¹⁹¹ As a young adolescent girl, Cloelia's inclusion alongside a vast array of male heroes could seem conspicuous; however, the segue between Cocles and Cloelia (3.1 to 3.2) means that this is minimised via an adherence to the established diptych of these two *exempla*. Having thus permitted Cloelia space in his text, Valerius then produces a version of Cloelia that is definably his, arguably enhancing the transgressive rhetoric associated with her in the process. This entails placing Cloelia into the conceptual space used to emphasise her 'uniqueness' as an *exemplum*, enhancing her inimitability in consequence. The next sections of this chapter will demonstrate how.

3.3.2 Dux vivorum?

Cloelia's *factum* is described as follows:

Immemorem me propositi mei Cloelia facit paene eadem [enim] tempestate, certe adversus eundem hostem et in eodem Tiberi inclitum ausa facinus: inter ceteras enim virgines obses Porsennae data, [hosti] nocturno tempore custodiam egressa, equum conscendit celerique traiectu fluminis non solum obsidio se sed etiam metu patriam solvit, viris puella lumen virtutis praeferendo.

Cloelia makes me forget what I had in mind to say. She dared a famous deed almost at the same time, certainly against the same enemy and in the same Tiber. She had been given hostage to Porsenna with other girls. Passing the enemy guard at night, she mounted a horse and, swiftly crossing the river, freed not only

¹⁹¹ This reflects the section's loose chronological pattern, although the overall chronology of this section loosens as it progresses. The other three examples are Porcia (to whom we will turn in the next part of this chapter), whose exemplary tale falls towards the end of this suite of Roman examples, before two female external/foreign tales bring this entire section to a close. The latter are Hasdrubal's wife, who chastised her husband over his manner of surrender before committing suicide (3.2.ext.8), and Harmonia, daughter of the Syracusan king Gelo, whose nurse disguised herself as Harmonia before sacrificing her own life to protect her mistress – an act which, in turn, inspired Harmonia to give herself up, despite knowing it would result in her murder (3.2.ext.9).

herself from the condition of a hostage but her country from fear – a girl, holding the light of valour before men. (Val. Max. 3.2.2)

We can observe that the central narrative features of her site of exemplarity in Valerius' telling (as outlined in 3.3.1 above) are retained. However, one of the key differences between Livy and Dionysius of Halicarnassus and Valerius Maximus surrounds her leadership. In the former pair of authors, Cloelia is depicted as a *dux virginum* (leader of virgins), who inspires her fellow hostages to follow her example; in Valerius' telling, her leadership of the other hostages is removed completely.¹⁹² This has the effect of emphasising both her individuality as an *exemplum*, and the overall daring of her escape. Although she has been given to Porsenna with the other *virgines*, they are then omitted from participating in her escape. The third person singular perfect verbs (*conscendit ... solvit*) are used to place a spotlight on her and her alone. In changing the narrative to remove her status as *dux virginum* and spotlighting her independent action, Valerius sets her apart from the other girls.¹⁹³

Two further rhetorical techniques enhance the transgressive rhetoric surrounding her status as a *female exemplum*, making her problematic in the context of imitability – and as an *exemplum* in general. These are her transformation into a symbol of *virtus* (*lumen virtutis praeferendo*), and her sexual status as *puella*. I shall now take both of these in turn.

¹⁹² The representation of the female *dux* was a not uncommon literary motif, used in conjunction with certain named female *exempla*, such as Lucretia (*dux Romanae pudicitiae*, leader of Roman chastity; Val. Max. 6.1.1), Dido (*dux femina facti*, 'female leader of the deed' in Virgil *Aeneid* 1.364), and Cloelia in Livy's narrative (*dux agminis virginum*, 2.13.6). As Benoist (2015) notes, the motif of the *dux femina* became normative in the context of a legitimate form of struggle against tyranny, where the intervention of women was deemed acceptable where men before them had failed: Lucretia acts in response to the tyranny of Tarquinius Superbus (Livy, 1.57-59), Dido against her own brother, and Cloelia in response to the siege of Rome by the Etruscans. Tacitus in particular would draw upon this motif in his historical works, casting several women as *dux femina* – normally as a negative characteristic (Agrippina the Elder, *Annals* 1.69; Plancina, *Ann.* 2.55, and Boudicca, '*feminarum ductu bellare*', *Ann.* 14.35.1). See Benoist (2015) for more on the motif of *dux femina* in Roman literature in general, and McHugh (2012) for a considered analysis of Agrippina the Elder as *dux* in Tacitus.

¹⁹³ Virgil (*Aeneid* 8.6.46-51) and Manilius (*Astronomica* 1.770-790) similarly make no reference to a group of hostages, but both poets refer to Cloelia only very briefly within a longer catalogue of warriors, none of whose stories are told in any depth.

3.3.3 Cloelia the *puella*, and the *lumen virtutis*

Since the earliest days of the Roman Republic, the concept of *virtus* was intertwined with Roman elite malehood (linked with its etymological root in *vir*, ‘man’), and how ideal male behaviour was expressed – particularly in politics and state religion, as well as in times of war. To serve the Republic in these fields of action ‘was the only way many Roman males could lay claim to being a man’, and therefore *virtus* was something conferred onto the individual male as a consequence of a public act.¹⁹⁴ Over time, its close association with acting on behalf of the state meant that *virtus* became synonymous with courage and what it meant to demonstrate valour.¹⁹⁵ In turn, this required will, determination and energy, and thus was not in itself a ‘natural’ part of the human psyche – instead, it was something that had to be acquired.¹⁹⁶ Categorising an individual as possessing *virtus* therefore conferred a high social status.

Women were able to possess *virtus*, but are only described as such in exceptional cases.¹⁹⁷ As McDonnell notes, before the imperial era it was more commonplace for women to be described as demonstrating *fortitudo*, *pudicitia*, or *castitas*.¹⁹⁸ As *virtus* was viewed as a masculine trait, a woman who demonstrates this is portrayed as having sacrificed a part of her feminine self in order to assume male characteristics, setting herself aside from the rest of her own sex.¹⁹⁹ Thus, it was common for Roman authors to define such women – including Cloelia – as possessing ‘a manly spirit’, showing ‘a new valour in a woman’ (*novam femina virtutem*, Livy 2.13.11) and ‘possessing a spirit superior to her sex and age’ (Dionysius of Halicarnassus, 5.34.3). Despite allowing women a space in which to gain the status of an *exemplum*, gender

¹⁹⁴ McDonnell (2006) 1-11.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.* 59.

¹⁹⁶ Barton (2001) 37-41.

¹⁹⁷ A notable example is the tomb inscription commonly known as the *Laudatio Turiae*: [*Pro vita rogabas apse]ntis, – quod ut conarere virtus tua te hortabatur* (‘You begged for my life while I was away, something your courage kept urging you to try’). See Osgood (2014) 155-169 for a full translation of the inscription.

¹⁹⁸ McDonnell (2006) 162-165.

¹⁹⁹ Van Houdt *et al* (2004) 10. Langlands (2006) 175-78 offers a clear discussion of how the male *animus* may be separated from the weak female body in context of Lucretia’s *pudicitia*.

hierarchies are still retained in assuming that women are in some way performing masculine actions.

The link that Valerius makes between Cloelia and *virtus* is therefore not a new one. What is different, however, is how he has used the established idea of Cloelia as a ‘manly maiden’ to transform her into a symbol of valour itself.²⁰⁰ We are told that she is *viris...lumen virtutis praeferendo* (holding the light of valour before men): in other words, she not only represents valour itself, but also shows men the way towards finding their own means of performing a courageous act for the state. This acts as an allusion to Livy’s preface to his history of Rome, where Livy states that he will shine a light onto historical examples so that the reader may learn from the past (*hoc illud est praecipue in cognitione rerum salubre ac frugiferum, omnis te exempli documenta in inlustri posita monumento intueri; Praef.10*). Whilst Cloelia may no longer be a *dux femina* figure, Valerius has transformed her into something much more symbolic with greater moral weight: a *dux virtutis*. This is appropriate for a figure who has freed her country from fear (*metu patriam solvit*), and sets her far apart – not only from other female *exempla*, but also from men themselves.

It is extraordinary in the wider context of male heroism and valour that it falls to a female *exemplum* to inspire the *vir*, and thus illuminate valour itself. It is even more extraordinary that this falls to a *puella*. In contrast with other contemporary sources, Valerius diverges from calling her *virgo*.²⁰¹ As Caldwell notes, the selection of the term *virgo*, referring to a girl of almost marriageable age, was a loaded one in the context of Roman social and cultural strictures. It was used to enhance the female adolescent’s virginal status, and was suggestive of her approaching sexual maturity and desirability – a feature that, in the context of civil strife, must be protected at all costs from the enemy.²⁰² Whilst there may have been little difference between the age of a *puella* and a *virgo*, according to Roman custom the terms had separate

²⁰⁰ The term ‘manly maiden’ comes from Roller (2004) 28-41 (cf. Roller (2018) 66-78).

²⁰¹ References to Cloelia as *virgo*: Livy 2.13.7; Manilius, *Astron.* 1.780; Florus, *Bell. Omn. Ann. DOC.* 1.4.10.7.

²⁰² Caldwell (2015) 38-40.

connotations regarding dress codes and legal meanings. Nonetheless, in literary contexts, *puella* denoted a sense of ambiguity around age and sexual status, and tended to be used as a diminutive to *virgo*.²⁰³ In conferring this ambiguity onto Cloelia, her status as set apart – not only from the other men within section 3.2 (including Horatius Cocles, with whom she is normally placed in parallel), but also from his other female *exempla* – is magnified.

In valorising Cloelia as a *puella* as well as a symbol of *virtus* for men, Valerius marks Cloelia as a transgressive figure, and as one separate to other extant literary representations of her. What is more, she transgresses to the extent that the possibilities for emulating or repeating her actions are designed to be for men only. The next chapter on Seneca's *Consolatio ad Marciam* will comment on how he builds on Valerius to remark negatively on the possibilities for women to emulate or repeat Cloelia's actions.²⁰⁴

By themselves, the changes in textual details between Valerius' portrayal of Cloelia with those of other extant accounts, such as Livy and Dionysius of Halicarnassus, demonstrates the broad flexibility inherent within Roman *exempla* that allows them to be reshaped and reworked by different authors to suit their authorial programme. Clearly this is not unique to Valerius, as the variations between descriptions of Cloelia by other ancient authors show. However, the *scope* of the narrative techniques used within just a few short lines demonstrates how even the most familiar of female *exempla* could be manipulated in surprising and innovative ways. The combination of setting her apart literally (from the other hostages) and rhetorically (through transforming her into a symbol of *virtus*, her status as a *puella*) all combine to enhance her transgressive nature as 'unique', and render her as inimitable. This not only enhances her unrepeatability as a female *exemplum*, but also shows how the Roman system of exemplarity contained a heavy bias towards the unrepeatability of

²⁰³ *Op. cit.*, 52-55; Watson (1983) 143. As an example, Catullus 61 uses *puella* and *virgo* interchangeably.

²⁰⁴ Section 4.2.1.

certain *exempla* based on gender. My second case study from Valerius' collection, Porcia, contains echoes of these rhetorical techniques, as I will now show.

3.4 Porcia – A Prototype for the First Century CE Female *Exemplum*

In contrast to Cloelia, who was already embedded within an established story-tradition, Porcia (Val. Max. 3.2.15, 4.6.5) is perhaps the closest example of a seemingly 'new' type female character in Valerius' collection, being an *exemplum* who is constructed from the very recent past. Despite this novelty, her construction maps closely onto the archetype of the traditional female *exemplum*, both in how her exemplary chastity is highlighted, and in the demonstration of a specifically feminine form of *virtus*. These parallels mark Porcia out as a contemporary version of Lucretia, standing as a gendered marker of constitutional crisis both metaphorically (continuing the trope of mythical-historical women intervening in the narrative at moments of key political change), and literally, as Porcia's family connections situate her firmly within the networks of the Republic's political elite.

Valerius is our first extant source that portrays Porcia in this way. Prior to his *Facta et Dicta Memorabilia*, Porcia is mentioned only very briefly in Cicero's letters (Cic. *Att.* 15.11.1, *Ad Brut.* 2.5.7.3), with *Ad Brut.* 18 revealing a hint of her potential to become an the exemplary model for later generations.²⁰⁵ Other later writers would go on to follow Valerius' successful framing of her as a female *exemplum*, complete with her

²⁰⁵ It is possible that the decision to exemplify Porcia, wife of Brutus and daughter of Cato, may have been inspired by the praise of Cato's sister, also called Porcia, written and delivered in the form of a commemorative eulogy by Cicero in 45 BCE (Cic. *Att.* 13.48), the text of which has not survived. In relation to Brutus' Porcia, she is alluded in Cicero's letter of consolation to Brutus, which hints at her potential to be considered as exemplary by future generations: 'To sum up: you have met with a sorrow – for you have lost a thing unparalleled in the world (*id enim amisisti cui simile in terris nihil fuit*) - and you must needs suffer from so severe a wound' (Cic. *Ad Brut.* 18). It is important to note, however, that Cicero does not elaborate on what specifically makes Porcia an *exemplum*, despite hinting at her unique status – Valerius is our extant first source to offer an explanation as to why. Given Valerius' obvious use (and sometimes outright plagiarism) of Cicero in devising his collection, it is not beyond the realms of possibility that a tradition of praising the female family members of famous Stoics, initiated by Cicero, was beginning to emerge, with later authors following this trend. We see this in Seneca's praise of his mother and aunt (as the next chapter will reveal), as well as in Pliny's lauding of Arria and Fannia (Chapter 5).

self-inflicted wounding as well as her death by swallowing hot coals.²⁰⁶ Therefore, Valerius' two vignettes of Porcia are important, because they indicate the manner in which female *exempla* were beginning to be constructed by early imperial Roman writers as similar to, yet different from, the traditional female exemplary models of Lucretia and Verginia. Porcia thus ought to be regarded as a contemporary Lucretia, re-worked to fit a new era. Whilst she displays elements that emulate her earlier Republican exemplary predecessor, she is placed simultaneously within a contemporary context that points towards a 'real life' relevance for Valerius' readership.²⁰⁷

3.4.1 Porcia's exemplary deed

Porcia appears in two separate places in Valerius' text, an attribute which, as noted earlier, is rare for women within his collection, and is indicative of the importance Valerius ascribes to her.²⁰⁸ The first episode falls under the section on bravery (which also included Cloelia), and the second under conjugal love – thus neatly matching the accepted contexts within which female *exempla* may naturally be situated. Porcia's exemplarity – and by definition, her virtue – comes from her loyalty as a wife as well as from her bravery in facing up to the possibility of her death, thus closely adhering to the gendered exemplary attributes of female *castitas* and *virtus* originally exhibited by the primary Roman female exemplary model, Lucretia.

Nonetheless, closer inspection of these episodes reveals the familiar paradoxes applicable to Roman female *exempla* that bring to the fore the gendered transgressive language applicable to such women, and that serve to complicate issues around repeatability. The first episode (3.2.15) brings this language to the front

²⁰⁶ Martial, *Epigrammata* 1.42; Plutarch, *Brutus* 13.2-11, 15.3-9, 53.4-7, *Cato Minor* 73.4, 6; Appian, *Bellum Civile* 4.136; Cassius Dio 44.13.1-14.1, 47.49.3, 79.3. It is the manner of her suicide that becomes the defining feature of her exemplarity, even when it is acknowledged to be false; Beneker (2020) 200.

²⁰⁷ There is little biographical evidence for Porcia: Syme (1987) 190-191 suggests she was born in 80 or 79 BCE, given she already had two children from a previous marriage (Plutarch *Cato* 25) when she married Brutus in 45 BCE. Plut. *Brutus* 17 tells us that one of her sons composed a memorial to his stepfather.

²⁰⁸ See section 3.2.3 in this chapter.

immediately, for in the very first sentence, Porcia is noted as having a masculine mindset that mimicked that of her father, Cato the Younger:

Cuius filia minime muliebris animi. quae, cum Bruti viri sui consilium quod de interficiendo ceperat Caesare ea nocte quam dies taeterrimi facti secutus est cognosset, egresso cubiculum Bruto cultellum tonsorium quasi unguium reseccandorum causa poposcit, eoque velut forte elapso se vulneravit. clamore deinde ancillarum in cubiculum revocatus, Brutus obiurgare eam coepit, quod tonsoris praeripuisset officium. cui secreto Porcia 'non est hoc' inquit 'temerarium factum meum, sed in tali statu nostro amoris mei erga te certissimum indicium: experiri enim volui, si tibi propositum parum ex sententia cessisset, quam aequo animo me ferro essem interemptura.'

His daughter was of no womanish spirit. Learning of her husband Brutus' design to kill Caesar, on the night before the day of that foul deed, Brutus having left the bedroom, she asked for a barber's knife to trim her nails and wounded herself with it, pretending that it had slipped by accident. Called back to the bedroom by the cries of the maidservants, Brutus started to scold her for forestalling the barber's function. Porcia said to him in private: "What I did was no accident; in the plight we are in it was the surest token of my love for you. I wanted to try out how coolly I could kill myself with steel if your plan did not turn out as you hope." (Val. Max. 3.2.15)

In copying her father's spirit – who by Valerius' time was being regarded as the epitome of virtue – Roller's cycle of Roman exemplary discourse continues as daughter copies father, even as this type of intergenerational repeatability involves the crossing of gender lines.²⁰⁹ Porcia's exemplarity, as linked to and arising from her familial ancestry, becomes apparent when we consider where her story is positioned

²⁰⁹ Velleius Paterculus, contemporaneous with Valerius Maximus, likewise demonstrates Cato's elevation to being the *exemplum* of virtue at *Res Gestae Divi Augusti* 2.35.2: *Hic genitus proavo M. Catone, principe illo familiae Porciae, homo Virtuti simillimus et per omnia ingenio diis quam hominibus propior* ('Descended from Marcus Cato, the first of the Porcian house, who was his great-grandfather, he resembled Virtue herself, and in all his acts he revealed a character nearer to that of gods than of men'). This elevation of Cato the *exemplum* started almost immediately after his death, beginning with Cicero's eulogy of Cato that most likely focused on his morals and ideals rather than his anti-Caesarian political stance (Cic.Att.12.4.2, 12.5.2). '[Cicero]... disguised his praise of Cato's republicanism by presenting it in the guise of Stoic philosophy – instead of praising the man himself (which was risky), he praised Cato's philosophy (which was safe)', Drogula (2019) 304-5. Others – including Brutus – would shortly follow suit in composing their own works about Cato, framing Cato as Stoic *exemplum*.

in the text. In section 3.2 ('of bravery'), her tale is nestled between two family episodes, the first about her father (3.2.14), and the proceeding one linked to her great-great-grandfather, Cato the Elder (3.2.16).²¹⁰ Thus, despite this ancestry not being presented chronologically, nonetheless Porcia becomes firmly situated within the genealogy and associated glory of the Cato name.²¹¹ This familial bond is further strengthened by a shared imagery that goes beyond blood ties and the demonstration of bravery – namely the reference to blades. Her father's heroic death is achieved by deliberately falling onto his sword, Porcia's bravery involves self-wounding using a barber's knife, and Cato the Elder's son retrieves his sword from the midst of fierce fighting. By including such a clearly identifiable symbol, Valerius has enhanced the positioning of these three Catos as an exemplary triptych. However, her barber's knife (*cultellum tonsorium*) is not the masculinised weapon of the *ferrum* or *gladius*, and stands in contrast with the powerful symbolism of the sword associated with the other male Catos.²¹²

In deploying the trope of Porcia's manly spirit – the primary asset that permits her a place within her illustrious familial lineage – Valerius once more demonstrates how, in creating and describing female exemplary behaviours, gendered differences between *exempla* are reinforced. This occurs in three ways: her possession of a 'manly' soul, the deceit underpinning her self-inflicted wounding, and the explicit comparison and associated inferiority to her other male ancestors that follows at Val. Max. 3.2.16. The first of these, the use of *muliebris*, was derogatory when applied to men, yet in Porcia's case the term is used deliberately as a paradox to enhance her exemplarity by emphasising that she is *not* of her sex, *not muliebris*.²¹³ Porcia is rhetorically set apart from other women by virtue of being *minime muliebris*, less like

²¹⁰ As Shackleton-Bailey (2000) 248-249 n.24 notes, it is unclear whether the deed performed in 3.2.16 is by Cato the Elder or his son. Nonetheless, this does not detract from the manner of the deed being performed and its acting as a comparison with Porcia, nor of the misfortune being directed towards Porcia's father for not being as lucky as his grandfather in his progeny.

²¹¹ As we noted in the section on Cloelia, it is a common feature for *exempla* to be presented as a triptych, based upon parallel narrative structures. This has been most commonly applied to several male family members across the generations, most notably the Manlii and Decii. The Catonian triptych stands out here as different due to the inclusion of Porcia within a normally-male genealogy.

²¹² Langlands (2006) 183.

²¹³ Santoro L'Hoir (1992) 80-81.

her sex – not completely separate to, but yet still different from other women. In foregrounding this at the very beginning of the episode, Valerius establishes that a female character is about to operate in a way that is unexpected for her sex, deliberately framing her as something other. This signifies the opening up of the possibilities for considering, manipulating and remoulding female exemplary behaviour that we witnessed in the study of declamation in Chapter 2. By identifying that this manipulation is about to begin, Valerius implicitly signals that a number of unresolvable paradoxes are about to emerge surrounding Porcia's gender and exemplary status. These will combine to problematise her status as an *exemplum* within Valerius' collection, and consequently undermine her capacity to act as a model for other women (and men). As a result, her position within the Cato genealogy is less secure than Valerius' structural organisation of this triptych would initially imply.

It is Porcia's manly spirit which Valerius identifies as the only logical explanation for her proceeding actions and her demonstration of agency.²¹⁴ As clearly articulated in Valerius' representations of Lucretia (6.1.1) and Cloelia (3.2.2), women only ever occupy the exemplary sphere when they become a paradoxical figure, combining the gendered attributes of the masculine *animus* and the feminine form within the same body – unlike with men, who have the capacity to do so, but rarely utilise that capacity in practice.²¹⁵ Porcia's manly *animus* is what simultaneously grants her permission to enter the exemplary sphere at the same time as it drives her to perform her specific act of self-harm. So, whilst her *animus* is the catalyst for her act, it is its display via her female body that renders it shocking to Brutus and her maidservants. This transgression, manifest in both her deed as well as the gendered language employed to describe her, immediately sets her apart from her maidservants (her sex) who are all shocked at her act. In this way, Valerius' explicit depiction of the

²¹⁴ Bloomer (1992) 188 states that it is Porcia's blood connection that justifies her inclusion in the collection. Whilst this is true, in my view this justification goes beyond just her bloodline: her lineage also allows her the possibility to become an *exemplum* in her own right, in accordance with the Cato name. To do so comfortably, Valerius frames her as a contemporary Lucretia.

²¹⁵ See Langlands (2006) 138-147 for a detailed discussion of the separation of the female body and male soul in Valerius Maximus' Lucretia.

exemplary paradox of the masculine mind and the feminine body specific to women becomes a contemporary reiteration of the traditional Republican *exemplum* of Lucretia, with its echoes of attempted self-harm.

Yet there is an irony here: Valerius hints at the possibility that Porcia has deliberately set out to fail at imitating Lucretia. Whilst the performance of her act – her self-inflicted wounding – is a demonstration of male *virtus*, it involves trickery and deception in order to pretend that the knife has slipped, suggesting no real intent to kill.²¹⁶ Such deception is worthy of scolding, which Brutus undertakes to do in front of the rest of the household. However, in the same way that Lucretia understood that the only way to preserve her chastity was to kill herself, here it is Porcia who respects the public-private boundary inside the home: she waits until they are alone in private before offering her husband an explanation for her actions.²¹⁷ This explanation proves to be entirely rational in that it seeks to pre-empt any need for her to take her own life should Brutus' plan to murder Caesar fail, and acts as a test of nerve as well as resolution.²¹⁸ In this regard, Porcia's foresight is worthy of note, and her deed acts as a practice run for her ability to *actually* stab herself by her own hand – the focus of her second episode (4.6.5). Brutus' temporary forgetfulness of the proper boundaries of private/public – and Porcia's adherence to them – contributes towards her position as an *exemplum* potentially worthy of emulation in spirit and fitting for the Cato name, in this episode at least. However, the deceitful context within which she is able to acquire a blade in the first place – under the cover

²¹⁶ Later versions of Porcia's self-wounding follow Valerius' lead in having her cut her thigh; Plutarch *Brutus* 5-11 and Cassius Dio 44.13.3-4. Only Valerius suggests it was an act of deliberate deceit; both Plutarch and Cassius Dio remove this element of deception to enhance her fortitude. In doing so, they suggest that this act had to be performed first as test to prove to herself that she would be brave enough to withstand any later pain (either due to the nature of the secrets that Brutus may reveal, as in Plutarch's version, or to resist torture, as emphasised by Cassius Dio).

²¹⁷ Of course, this is ironic: Valerius imagines the form that a private exchange may have taken between Porcia and Brutus, and then removes the private nature of such a conversation in making it public within his text. Both Plutarch (*Brut.* 7-10) and Cassius Dio (*op. cit.*) continue to follow the story-tradition established by Valerius, incorporating – and lengthening – their own versions of her speech to Brutus. In making these speeches longer, these authors succeed in enhancing her loyalty and fidelity towards her husband.

²¹⁸ Her inclusion is extraordinary when we consider her close association with Brutus as the murderer of Caesar. In the main, Valerius avoids citing *exempla* in the context of the civil war of the Triumvirate period, as noted by Bellemore (1989) 69; Bloomer (1992) 191-3; Briscoe (1993) 403; Gowing (2005) 49-55).

of wanting to trim her nails – also confers a sense of femininity onto her act, knowing that she has access to a restricted type of blade, and one associated with maintaining her external appearance at that. Not for her the sword, the weapon of the heroic soldier and, indeed, of the most chaste female *exemplum* of all: Lucretia.²¹⁹

Within just this short episode, Valerius' Porcia embodies a complexity of ethical and moral paradoxes that we would naturally expect to see in all *exempla*, and – crucially – she still reflects the common gendered attributes integral to the depiction of the female *exemplum*. Valerius has to work harder, therefore, to create a new female exemplary model, one similar to the traditional model of Lucretia, and, on the surface at least, her ancestry offers the perfect segue into embodying the 'manly spirit' that appears to be a standard requirement for female *exempla*. Yet Porcia's status as an *exemplum* is then undermined in the very next episode in this section on bravery: her manly spirit, which permitted her to enter the exemplary sphere in the first place, is itself once again set aside as Cato the Elder is regarded as *felicior progenie sua* ('more fortunate in his progeny', 3.2.16). In contrasting the progeny of the two Catos in this way, the Elder is, on the surface, cast as more fortunate than the Younger in the dignity of his offspring as worthy of the father: yet Valerius then leaves it up to the reader to decide whether Porcia's self-inflicted wounding (as a precursor to a potentially noble death) is worthy of greater admiration than retrieving a sword amidst a fierce battle with Rome's enemy. The steer he provides via the words *felicior progenie sua* indicates how he thinks the reader should interpret these two models of courage in contrast with each other, conferring a lesser status onto Porcia as an *exemplum* compared to her Catonian male counterparts. Thus, having set Porcia up as an *exemplum* worthy of admiration, Valerius is unable to resist suggesting an inferiority to this status based upon her sex.

²¹⁹ Langlands (2006) 183: 'Lucretia's death by the sword already has the characteristics of a glorious act simply because of what it is: self-killing using the soldier's weapon in the Roman way.'

3.4.2 Porcia's unique death

This second episode about Porcia continues to enhance her image as a never-seen-before female *exemplum*, this time epitomised through the manner of her death.

This is framed as taking place in consequence of her love for her husband:

Tuos quoque castissimos ignes, Porcia M. Catonis filia, cuncta saecula debita admiratione prosequuntur. quae cum apud Philippos victum et interemptum virum tuum Brutum cognosces, quia ferrum non dabatur, ardentibus ore carbones haurire non dubitasti, muliebri spiritu virilem patris exitum imitata. sed nescio an hoc fortius, quod ille usitato, tu novo genere mortis absumpta es.

Your chaste fires too, Porcia M. Cato's daughter, all ages shall attend with the admiration they deserve. When you learned that your husband Brutus had been defeated and killed at Philippi, you did not hesitate to take burning coals into your mouth, steel being withheld, imitating your father's manly end with a woman's spirit. But perhaps more bravely than he, because Cato perished by a normal form of death, you by a novel one. (Val. Max. 4.6.5)

Appropriately for the remit of this section (4.6), the exemplary emphasis shifts to her wifely *castitas* among other *exempla* that illustrate conjugal love. In the section's preface, Valerius describes conjugal love as an emotion that can be *ardens* and *concitatus*, especially when married couples are firm in their fidelity towards each other. Such love deserves reverence from others, even though Valerius states that this type of love is hard to copy (*ardua imitatu*):

A placido et leni adfectu ad aequae honestum verum aliquanto ardentioriem et concitatioerem pergam, legitimique amoris quasi quasdam imagines non sine maxima veneratione contemplantas lectoris oculis subiciam, valenter inter coniuges stabilitae fidei opera percurrens, ardua imitatu ceterum cognosci utilia, quia excellentissima animadvertenti ne mediocria quidem praestare rubori oportet esse.

I shall proceed from a placid, gentle emotion to one equally honourable but somewhat more ardent and excited, and place before the reader's eyes certain portraits of lawful love not to be contemplated without the greatest reverence, running through

deeds of firm-fixed fidelity between husband and wife, hard to imitate but useful in the knowledge. For even mediocre performance should be no matter for shame to one who perceives excellence. (Val. Max. 4.6. *praef.*)

Here, we are told explicitly that imitability resides on a spectrum – extraordinary examples run the risk of producing mediocre imitators. In itself, this is not an issue: the main idea is that imitation has been attempted in the first place because the value of these examples has been recognised. However, as I now show, the Porcia *exemplum* is constructed in a way that reinforces her otherness to the other *exempla* in this section.

Situated at the end of this section, Porcia once more stands as a contrast to the prior examples that she follows. These focus primarily on the reaction of husbands to the death of their wives and their consequent suicides, in itself a subversion of the types of stories we might have expected to fill this section – what Holt Parker terms ‘loyal wives’ tales’ and stories of wifely self-sacrifice, similar to proscription tales.²²⁰ Although wives do feature in every episode in this section, it is the husband who willingly sacrifices his life out of conjugal love – with the sole exception of Porcia.²²¹ The only other woman to die in 4.6 is Julia, Julius Caesar’s daughter, whose accidental death is caused by a miscarriage brought on at the shock of hearing about the death of her husband Pompey – thus her death is not through her own agency.

Therefore, there is a sense of irony in that it is C. Plautius Numida in 4.6.2 who offers the closest match to Porcia, stabbing himself in the breast, unable to bear his grief. The motif *maritalis flammae* is used to hold up Plautius as a mirror to Porcia in 4.6.5, as he is similarly restrained by his servants from carrying out his intention to die. Yet his death is nonetheless regarded as different to hers: his tool of choice is the more

²²⁰ Parker (1998) 152-173. By the first-century CE, suicide or widowhood were seen as the proper response of the virtuous wife to the death of her husband, as we will see in the Pliny chapter and the *exemplum* of Arria; Beneker (2020) 200. Wifely fidelity – and two proscription tales about loyal wives – are found elsewhere in Valerius’ collection in section 6.7 (‘Of the fidelity of wives towards their husbands’).

²²¹ Hallett (1984) 224-225. The one male who doesn’t kill himself – Admetus, saved by Alcestis who offered to die in his place in Greek myth – is heavily rebuked by Valerius for not doing so (4.6.1).

manly *gladius* in contrast to Porcia, where steel has been withheld (*ferrum non dabatur*) after her earlier antics with the barber's knife. Thus, Plautius is still able to succeed in achieving a manly death and retaining his *virtus*, caused by the enormity of the conjugal flames that resided inside his breast.²²² Similarly, M. Plautius falls upon his sword at the funeral pyre of his deceased wife (4.6.3), also able to achieve a Catonian-style death. It is, ironically, Porcia who is prevented from imitating her father in his manner of death, and instead has to devise a novel one.

Porcia's uniqueness is enhanced by the subtle shift in narrative structure within this section. This shift closes off any sense of imitation between the different *exempla*. For example, C. Plautius Numida (4.6.2) is introduced as being *in consimili amore par exemplum* ('in similar love an equal example') to Tiberius Gracchus in 4.6.1; his namesake M. Plautius has *eiusdem ut nominis ita amoris quoque* ('the same name and the same love', 4.6.3). Even Julia, Caesar's daughter, had *consimilis adfectus* ('a similar devotion', 4.6.4). Instead, Porcia's *castissimos ignes* are singled out as somehow different: no parallels are drawn with her immediate predecessors in the text. Therefore, we are led to expect, from the very beginning of the episode, that something different will follow.

By foregrounding Porcia's *castissimos ignes* at the start of 4.6.5, Valerius not only justifies her inclusion in this section as the chaste and fiercely devoted wife, but also injects irony surrounding the nature of her suicide – a novel form of death involving the swallowing of hot coals. With no *ferrum* to hand, Porcia has to resort to ingenuity by grabbing whatever tool is available to assist in her death and prove her resolve to

²²² See Hill (2004) and Edwards (2007) for more on suicide as a demonstration of *virtus*.

die, initially highlighted in 3.2.15.²²³ Indeed, she has no choice but to die, due to her intimate relationship with a conspirator and knowledge of a treasonous plot.²²⁴ This partly explains why 3.2.15 is used to demonstrate her testing her potential to commit suicide if Brutus' plan had failed.²²⁵ Rather than being admonished as extreme in her style of suicide, instead it is held up for admiration: in echoing Lucretia's agency, Valerius deliberately frames Porcia as an *exemplum* for the future.

Through her suicide, Porcia appears worthy of her father and the Cato name. Valerius' direct address to her at the beginning of 4.6.5 once again brings her family connections to the forefront, alludes to 3.2.15 and her lineage, and suggests that her suicide permits the emulation of exemplary behaviour along inter-generational lines. In 4.6.5 the rhetoric of the first episode at 3.2.16, which suggested that the earlier generations of the Cato family would have been prouder of their sons than her, is inverted, as Porcia finally becomes an *exemplum* truly worthy of the Cato name. Suicide itself becomes firmly synonymous with the Cato name, and with the death of the Republic.²²⁶

However, this is bound up with several paradoxes that complicate her status as a female *exemplum*. Porcia's method of suicide is explicitly *novus* (novel). The domestic setting feminises this exemplary tale, reiterated through her *castissimos*

²²³ Plutarch *Brutus* 53.6 refers to a letter written by Brutus to his friends which implies that Porcia's death preceded his own: 'And yet there is an extant letter of Brutus to his friends in which he chides them with regard to Porcia and laments her fate, because she was neglected by them and therefore driven by illness to prefer death to life' (see also footnote 205). However, at *Brut.* 53.5 Plutarch states that Nicolaus the Philosopher was the first to mention Porcia's manner of death by swallowing hot coals, which Valerius modelled his own version on. It is probable that the extant letter referred to by Plutarch was not genuine; see Beneker (2012) 43. However, Cicero sent a letter of consolation to Brutus, which many scholars have presumed refers to the death of Porcia (*Cic. Ad Brut.* 18). If this is true, then she died before Philippi and Brutus' final defeat, and most likely from illness rather than suicide; see Wilcox (2005b) 250-252. Other sources for Porcia's death include Martial *Ep.* 1.42, *Plut. Cat. Min.* 73.6, Cassius Dio 47.79.3 and Appian, *BC* 4.136, all of which retain the common narrative thread that her death was caused by swallowing hot coals. Thus, the manner of her legendary death became an essential feature of her construction as an *exemplum*, at the expense of actual events (if we take Cicero's letter as referring to Porcia) – unlike her motivation for her self-wounding (see footnote 216).

²²⁴ Pagán (2004) 119-122.

²²⁵ Tempest (2017) 89.

²²⁶ The manner in which Valerius draws upon the virtue of the Cato family seems to be one of the first texts that truly establishes the myth of the Stoic Cato, whose martyrdom is taken to represent the death of the Roman Republic.

ignes and their allusion to the domestic hearth and home. In failing to locate a suitable weapon, she swallows hot coals instead, a deed which, via its novelty, triggers a new exemplary cycle – one where her novel deed marks her as unique from other stories of conjugal love. This is underscored by the contrast Valerius sets up between the terms *novus* and *usitatus* (the everyday, familiar), used to describe her father's death. Porcia's earlier attempt to emulate her father's style of death has failed two-fold: firstly, in failing to use the correct form of blade, and secondly in the blade being withheld altogether. In consequence, she has created her own novel form of Catonian death, but one that is also specifically gendered by virtue of the sex of its performer.

Once more, the gendered language of exemplarity and the clear dichotomy between deeds that are manly against those that are *muliebris* is highlighted. Whereas in 3.2.15 she was set apart by *not* having a womanly spirit that enabled her to sit among the ranks of the Catos, her deed here is rendered as *muliebris*. Intergenerational repeatability is again demarcated along gendered lines: her attempted imitation of her father's suicide is *muliebris*, breaking the connection between father and daughter established in 3.2.15. Thus having originally been defined as manly in 3.2.15 her spirit is now cast in direct opposition, as womanly yet able to perform a manly deed (in imitating her father) – thus setting herself as a unique *exemplum*, one whose *animus* is both masculine and feminine. As a result, she performs a deed that is new and unique – and sets her apart from the rest of her sex.

I suggest that Valerius is not holding Porcia up explicitly as a model for other women (and men) to admire, or indeed emulate.²²⁷ This is the case for the vast majority of his *exempla* within the collection, in line with the work's reflective purpose.²²⁸ Yet I further suggest that Valerius *is* attempting to establish a new literary female

²²⁷ There is one instance where Porcia's death may have been imitated: Servilia, wife of Lepidus, also swallowed hot coals (Vell. Pat. 2.88.3). Valerius is successful therefore in suggesting this type of death was as noble as the sword, for Velleius Paterculus remarks that Servilia 'must be placed on a parity with the wife of Antistius', who plunged a sword into her breast (2.26.3).

²²⁸ As Langlands (2006) 123-5 states, the primary function of the collection of *exempla* here is inspiration rather than emulation.

exemplum, closely modelled on the female archetype of Lucretia, who will be chaste (and actively defends her own chastity), aware of the social behaviours expected of her in both the public and private spaces of the home and elsewhere, and fiercely loyal in her devotion to her husband. Furthermore, this new female exemplary model has a clear understanding of her own individual agency (an attribute normally associated with male *exempla*), playing an active role in her performance of a novel exemplary act (even testing her capacity to tolerate pain) rather than being a passive recipient of her fate. Hints of these characteristics are present in Valerius' depictions of Cloelia, as we have seen earlier in this chapter.

Porcia is a model from more recent times for Valerius' original audience, which lends more potency to her status as an exemplary model in contrast with one such as Lucretia.²²⁹ Whilst Lucretia remained the predominant female *exemplum* at the start of the first century CE (at least in literary texts), contemporary women would gain much greater value from a role model whose sphere of action resided in the more recent present. However, female *exempla* were framed along male lines by male authors. This included a tendency to depict exemplary women in the context of their exemplary ancestors.²³⁰ In his framing of Porcia as a female *exemplum*, Valerius mixes virtuous behaviour and manliness with courage. He also incorporates the motif of physical suffering and mutilation and the capacity for individuals to rise above such tribulations in order to demonstrate their true virtue, an idea that became increasingly important in Stoic thinking throughout the first-century CE (and will be considered in the next chapter on Seneca).²³¹

Although the combination of differing ethical and moral virtues is common to Roman *exempla* in general, the specific gendering in this case arises not only from the deployment of transgressive language – her possession of a manly spirit – but also

²²⁹ Chaplin (2000) 49 discusses how the potency of an *exemplum* is enhanced when they arise from a period of time closer chronologically to the reader rather than from the more distant past.

²³⁰ Pliny (*Ep.* 7.19, 9.13) develops this trope by demonstrating how Fannia, depicted as an *exemplum* herself, has deliberately modelled herself upon her exemplary grandmother Arria, who, like Porcia, was keen to demonstrate her courage in the face of death to her husband. This is explored further in Chapter 5.

²³¹ Langlands (2018a) 280.

from how this in itself becomes reversed between the two episodes to become womanly once more. In the process, she is 'set apart' from the rest of her sex via the performance of a 'novel' deed (swallowing hot coals), and it is this novel death that hints at the beginning of a new exemplary cycle whilst simultaneously being framed as unrepeatable – a feature applicable to female *exempla* in general.

3.5 Conclusion

I have argued in this chapter that Valerius Maximus adopts the same processes of literary construction that were adopted in declamation exercises. He creates his own conceptual (and literary) space, within which he uses ethical and moral categories both as the structural framework for his text, and as the vehicle for demonstrating the gendered distinctions between male and female *exempla*. Through an analysis of the two female case studies of Cloelia and Porcia, I have shown how these *exempla* – despite coming from the 'traditional' and 'contemporary' moulds – are nonetheless subject to the same processes of literary construction that framed the gender stereotypes within declamatory exercises. This rests upon the adoption of a transgressive rhetoric that is primarily associated with female characters, and it is this rhetoric which complicates their potential to be truly imitable. In the case of Cloelia, the scope of the narrative techniques used within just a few short lines demonstrates how even the most familiar of female *exempla* could be manipulated in surprising and unique ways. In contrast, Valerius adopts the traditional female *exemplum* of Lucretia and reshapes her to create the *exemplum* of Porcia, conferring greater ethical significance onto her for his contemporary audience. As we will see in the next chapter, Seneca continues in this vein by permitting exemplary women a more significant space within his consolatory works, and through attempting to negate concerns around their inimitability.

CHAPTER FOUR

Pushing at Exemplary Boundaries: Female *Exempla* in Seneca's *Consolationes* to Marcia and Helvia

4.1 Introduction

4.1.1 Chapter aims

This chapter will explore the importance of gendered exemplarity within two of Seneca's philosophical works, his consolations addressed to women. In doing so, I will show the manner in which these texts engage with the Roman discourse of exemplarity and the various paradoxes and tensions that this system generates.

Of Seneca's three explicitly consolatory works, the *Consolatio ad Marciam* and *Consolatio ad Helviam* are addressed to female recipients, and generate interesting questions about the use of *exempla* – male and female – within the text.²³² As a pair, they are positioned within the heart of Seneca's philosophical programme that utilised the literary characteristics of the *exemplum* to deliver hortatory messages. This was used in combination with the wider conventions of the literary genres found within Seneca's consolations, that themselves form a framing device in how *exempla* are usually deployed in these genres. For example, consolation works often utilised *exempla* as a means of actively demonstrating to the intended recipient how other individuals in similar situations to themselves responded to a similar form of loss

²³² I have chosen not to include Seneca's *Consolatio ad Polybium* within this analysis. Despite the similarities between the three consolations – for example, the consolee has lost a family member (*Polyb.* 1.3.1), the role of Fortune and Nature in suffering loss (*Polyb.* 1.1.4), and the repeated references to members of the imperial household as *exempla* – this particular consolation acts as a plea to the emperor Claudius via his freedman Polybius for a return from exile. As such, it is Claudius himself who is set up as the main *exemplum* of the work. Its blend of panegyric and consolation sets it apart from the other consolations to female addressees, which concentrate more on overcoming grief and bearing suffering in adversity, and it is challenging to make meaningful comparisons between all three, especially surrounding gender and exemplarity. Cassius Dio reveals that Seneca later attempted to suppress the *Consolatio ad Polybium* work 'out of shame' for its excessive flattery of Claudius and his freedman (61.10); no such reaction is recorded in relation to the *ad Marciam* and *ad Helviam*.

under immense pressure and in extremely challenging circumstances. Therefore, *exempla* were used to illustrate individual responses to grief, irrespective of the cause or nature of the loss itself. In this way, Seneca's consolations utilised male and female *exempla* in a manner similar to other prose genres, even where the intended outcome they are designed to facilitate differed.

This chapter demonstrates how Seneca exploited the inherent flexibility of the exemplary system (and of the consolation genre itself) to permit women a significant space within his consolatory works: not only as *exempla* themselves, but as consumers and interpreters of exemplary material. On the surface, he situates female *exempla* alongside their male counterparts on equal terms: female *exempla* are given a more substantive role, acknowledging explicitly that women could be 'readers' of exemplary deeds, and – more importantly – could seek to be inspired by the deeds of other exemplary women in order to perform their own.²³³ Thus, Seneca appears to address potential issues regarding the imitability of women's exemplary deeds by actively demonstrating how his female addressees could seek to learn from – and imitate – other exemplary women. However, at the conceptual level, various gendered nuances are once again brought to the fore when it comes to the utilisation of female *exempla*. In particular, the number of paradoxes that become evident as a result of Seneca's attempts to normalise the construction of female *exempla* collectively serve to undermine their stability, and reinforces the continuation of the rhetoric of transgression within Seneca's work – at the same time as he seems to engage with and normalise the inclusion of women as *exempla* more widely. As earlier chapters have noted, this form of rhetoric is associated primarily with women's exemplarity, embodying gendered language that implies their uniqueness

²³³ Langlands (2004) considers at length the possibility of a female audience for the *Consolatio ad Marciam*, acknowledging that women may have responded to or interpreted this text differently to Seneca's intended male audience: not due to innate biological differences between the sexes, but because 'Roman structures of gender ideology place men and women in different subject positions and different circumstances which may affect their relationship to the text.' Nonetheless, Langlands is clear that Seneca imagines a readership of both sexes beyond the named recipient of the consolations themselves, a view that I share in the case of both consolations addressed to women.

(*unicum*) and subsequent implied lack of imitability, or manliness in terms of the manner and context within which their exemplary performance takes place.²³⁴

This chapter begins with a brief overview of the changing nature of the Roman exemplary system over the first-century CE, considering the important role that Seneca played in this shift. Although Seneca does not outline an explicit theory regarding the construction and intratextual use of *exempla*, it is possible to ascertain how he intended them to be used by considering his other works alongside the consolations (the *Epistulae Morales* in particular). This will be discussed in more detail in the next section. I then look at Seneca's usage of a specific example of a male *exemplum*, Marcellus, in the *ad Helviam* to evaluate how this *exemplum* contrasts at the conceptual level with his usage of female *exempla* in this text. Finally, I look at both consolations to female addressees in turn, in order to explore the various means by which the female *exempla* in these texts are destabilised, underscoring the gendered usability of Roman *exempla*.

4.1.2 Utilising *exempla* within consolations

The genre of *consolatio* often used *exempla* as a means of offering the consoled a model for controlling their grief via tailored examples, and Seneca's use of various *exempla* in all three of his consolations is no different in this respect. This is a feature of the ancient *consolatio*: as a literary form embedded within wider social practices surrounding death and mourning, it could encompass various aspects of philosophical and rhetorical argumentation (including the tools associated with those genres, such as *exempla*) whilst simultaneously providing comfort to the individually named recipient.²³⁵ The benefit of the *consolatio* for Seneca is that it allowed him to outline his various philosophical ideas and blend them with an implicit commentary

²³⁴ Modern scholars unwittingly utilise this rhetoric of transgressiveness themselves when referring to female *exempla* as 'unique'. In the context of Seneca (including slippage between standard gender categories), this includes Shelton (1995), Langlands (2004), Wilcox (2006), Edwards (2007), Fabre-Serris (2015), Gunderson (2015), McAuley (2015).

²³⁵ Baltussen (2013) xiv-xv; Scourfield (2013) 1-18. The individual nature of the consolation meant that content could be tailored to the specific needs of the individual, even as it followed the general principles of the *consolatio* (Cic. *Tusc.* 3.31.75-6; cf. Manning (1974) 75-77).

on other features of Roman elite life, such as exile and politics, within a readily accessible format: that of epistolary consolation. In this regard, Seneca follows Cicero's example in utilising the consolation letter to comment on other aspects of contemporary elite life, as we shall see later in this chapter in the context of Marcellus and late Republican politics. As Wilson remarks, even as consolatory writings are about how to deal with grief, they 'carry underneath a strong ideological imperative concerned with self-definition and the fortification of identity'.²³⁶

Furthermore, the inclusion of women as named addressees may have become more normalised during the first half of the first-century CE, following the examples of Ovid's *Tristia* and the anonymous *Consolatio ad Liviam*. Thus, Seneca's choice of female addressees aligns with his poetic predecessor(s) in that one *consolatio* mirrors the situation of exile (Ovid's exilic poems), and the other targets a member of the imperial household (*Consolatio ad Liviam*).²³⁷ However, one aspect of innovation in Seneca's consolations is his ability to select *exempla* specific to his addressee.²³⁸ The imperial household is identified as the source of *exempla* in the *ad Polybium* (with heavy reliance on the emperor Claudius in particular) and the *ad Marciam*, although both consolations – as well as the *ad Helviam* – encourage the addressee to turn towards their own family, too. Similarly, the main examples that Seneca selects for his consolation addressees come from their own immediate circle (Octavia and Livia in the case of Marcia, and Helvia's sister for Helvia), once again reinforcing the idea that the best models are those closest to hand, with the family as the best source.²³⁹

²³⁶ Wilson (1997) 60.

²³⁷ Given the murky nature of Seneca's banishment from Rome and suggestions of adultery with Claudius' niece Julia Livilla, it was sensible not to address any member of the imperial household directly as addressees of these consolations. Instead, Seneca addressed them to an imperial freedman, a close family friend of the Augustan household, and his own mother, all of whom either had connections to the imperial household, either literally (Polybius) or in a historical sense (Marcia), or who could be used as a means of commenting on his own situation (Helvia). The *consolatio ad uxorem* of Plutarch, as well as Pliny's letters to his wife, show that women as addressees continued to become more common among circulated literature.

²³⁸ Mayer (1991) 158-9.

²³⁹ Shelton (1995) 170 fn.30. Cicero utilised the idea of the *domesticum exemplum*, but usually referred to ancestors and recently deceased relatives to lend rhetorical and oratorical performances moral weight, such as in the *Pro Caelio* 34; see Brinton (1988). Van Der Blom (2010) discusses the implications of Cicero's lack of exemplary family members and illustrious ancestry on his political career and social status, alongside other elite members of Rome.

What is gender-specific across all three consolations is the fact that predominantly female *exempla* are presented as most suitable for women addressees, and male *exempla* for both men *and* women.²⁴⁰ The potential for women to emulate men is a *possibility* only: Seneca is explicit in acknowledging that he has presented a series of male *exempla* for a female addressee at *Marc.* 16.1, but the imagined rebuke about Seneca's own temporary forgetfulness (*oblitus*) to himself hints that *exempla* should be provided for the reader along strictly gendered lines: *Scio quid dicas: "Oblitus es feminam te consolari, virorum refers exempla."* ('I know what you are saying: "You forget that you are giving comfort to a woman; the examples you cite are of men"', 16.1).²⁴¹ Similarly, the inclusion of Marcellus within the *ad Helviam* (9.4-10.1) contains ambiguities around the intended audience, given its emphasis on bearing exile with fortitude – a scenario more applicable to Seneca than to his mother. Nonetheless, considering each text as a whole, the inclusion of *exempla* of both sexes opens out the possibility of a wider audience (beyond the text and its named addressee) that is inclusive of both genders.

²⁴⁰ However, as a general rule, Seneca shies away from using traditional, Republican *exempla*, especially female ones. Whilst reference is made to Lucretia and Cloelia at *Marc.* 16.2, they perform a rhetorical function as citations of virtuous female *exempla*. This demonstrates that such characters remained part of the common cultural discourse around exemplary ethics at this time, but their function here is not to act as a model for emulation. Thus, Seneca offers a subtle critique of these *exempla* in terms of their usability in an applied, real-world scenario. For example, Cloelia is used to chastise young men who gaze upon her equestrian statue from the comfort of their cushioned seats (cf. Langlands (2004) 124: 'for a woman to outperform a man is a shameful thing'): her role is therefore ethical, rather than practical. Several sources attest to the presence of a statue of Cloelia in the centre of Rome – Seneca *Marc.* 16.2, Pliny *HN.* 34.28-29 and Plutarch, *Mor.* 250C-F. Pliny the Elder reveals that the statue's identity was contested in some ancient sources, but – as noted by Roller (2004) 45 – any alternative identification is only ever suggested as a possible variant, with Cloelia always being the preferred person. It is possible that Valerius' reference to *viris... lumen virtutis praeferendo* (3.2.2) is an allusion to the physicality of this statue.

²⁴¹ A similar message is hinted at in the *ad Helviam* (16.1). Gunderson (2015) argues that Marcia is required to forget her gender and adopt a male point of view in order to open up the possibility of entering the realm of virtue: the inclusion of male *exempla* is to aid her in 'thinking like a man.'

4.2 Senecan *Exempla*: Pushing at the Exemplary Envelope

4.2.1 Seneca's exemplary system: living role models and the *praeceptor*

There is no one clearly articulated theory about the use of *exempla* within any of Seneca's philosophical works – who to select, how to engage with them ethically and morally, how to determine what acts are suitable for imitation, and how to reflect upon how one's own actions might be judged by others. Various aspects are considered independently within different works (the *Epistulae Morales* especially), from which we can establish a general idea of what Seneca deemed as the essential features in using *exempla*. These coalesce around two key areas: selecting living role models, and the importance of the *praeceptor* figure.

The first concentrates on the importance of selecting suitable role models from one's social circle to follow their example across various aspects of life, utilising and further developing the ethical and moral skills of reflection gained from using various *exempla* encountered within texts.²⁴² This expanded the meaning of what it meant to be an *exemplum* from someone who performed a deed just once – as was the case primarily with traditional, Republican heroes – to someone who repeatedly demonstrated their right to be deemed as an *exemplum* by living their life virtuously.²⁴³ Seneca is highly attuned to the dangers of admiring individual acts, and how collectively they form a societal moral discourse that may not necessarily be the desired one:

*Aliqua benigna facta, aliqua humana, aliqua fortia nos
obstupefecerant; haec coepimus tamquam perfecta mirari.
Suberant illis multa vitia, quae species conspicui alicuius facti
fulgorque celabat; haec dissimulavimus. Natura iubet augere*

²⁴² This includes all forms of text – literature, monuments, statues, and so on. Examples of where Seneca highlights the importance of selecting role models include *Ep.* 6.4, 7.6, 11.10, 21.1, 25.5, 52.8, 64.9, 98.17, 99.17, 120; *De Tranq.* 1.12; *De Ira* 1.11.5, 1.11.6-7, 1.18.3-6, 2.5.4, 3.8.3, 3.41.1; *De Vit.* 19.2-3, 20.1-2.

²⁴³ However, 'public' men – those in key positions of governance, like Seneca himself – still had a duty to act heroically (*Clem.* 19.3).

laudanda, nemo non gloriam ultra verum tulit; ex his ergo speciem ingentis boni traximus.

Certain acts of generosity or humanity or courage had amazed us. We began to admire them as though they were perfect. There were many flaws in them, hidden by the brilliant appearance of some splendid deed; these we overlooked. Nature tells us to magnify praiseworthy actions, and everyone always carries glorification beyond the facts. Thus it was from these acts that we derived the notion of a mighty good. (*Ep.* 120.5)²⁴⁴

This suggests that the existing Roman moral discourse had its *vitia* ('flaws', 'vices'), buried under the dazzling effect of a single heroic deed.²⁴⁵ Therefore, for Seneca, it becomes the duty of the philosopher to understand and overcome these *vitia* as a means to gaining happiness and a life of virtue. As Roller notes, figures from the past, renowned for only one or two famous deeds, 'provide too little information to us to determine their moral status overall'.²⁴⁶

The same letter goes on to illustrate how the arenas for demonstrating *virtus* – the 'traditional' means by which Republican men and women were recognised as exemplary – were no longer restricted to the military and civic spheres, and could instead be identified across any sphere of activity on multiple occasions:

ac dum observamus eos, quos insignes egregium opus fecerat, ad notare, quis rem aliquam generoso animo fecisset et magno impetu, sed semel. Hunc vidimus in bello fortem, in foro timidum, animose paupertatem ferentem, humiliter infamiam; factum laudavimus, contempsimus virum. Alium vidimus adversus amicos benignum, adversus inimicos temperatum, et publica et privata sancte ac religiose administrantem, non deesse ei in iis quae toleranda erant, patientiam, in iis quae agenda, prudentiam [...] Praeterea idem erat semper et in omni actu par sibi, iam non consilio bonus, sed more eo perductus, ut non tantum recte facere posset, sed nisi recte facere non posset. Intelleximus in illo perfectam esse virtutem.

In observing those who those who had become famous for doing an outstanding deed, we began to notice the sort of person who did do

²⁴⁴ All translations from Seneca's *Epistulae Morales* are from Graver and Long (2015).

²⁴⁵ A sentiment repeated at *Ira* 3.41.2.

²⁴⁶ Roller (2018) 282.

something with nobility and zeal, but once only. We saw him brave in war but timorous in the forum, enduring poverty with spirit but abject in handling disgrace. We praised the deed, but despised the man. Another whom we saw was kindly to his friends, forbearing to his enemies, dutiful and respectful in his public and private behaviour. We observed with what patience he bore his troubles, with what foresight he managed his responsibilities. [...] Moreover, he was always the same, consistent in every action, good no longer from policy but under the guidance of a habit that made him not only able to act rightly but unable to act other than rightly. In him we understood that virtue had been perfected. (*Ep.* 120.9-10)

Thus, at the same time as broader trends were evident in the focus on the emperor and imperial household as the performers of exemplary deeds, Seneca advocated a more sophisticated schema that widened not only who could be considered an *exemplum* by an individual (as opposed to the collective agreement by the wider community), but also on what grounds. This meant that the number of available *exempla* for the individual to consider suddenly had the potential to increase significantly. It also enables authors like Seneca to be creative in choosing what *exempla* to use in his texts, even permitting him to break his own rules on occasion (as we will see with the *exemplum* of Marcellus in the *ad Helviam*). Furthermore, it facilitated the inclusion of more women within the exemplary sphere – even if the arenas within which their exemplarity was noted remained domestic.²⁴⁷

The problem with such an approach is the risk that incorrect examples are chosen by the individual. Seneca attempts to address this with the second feature of his exemplary ‘system’, which is to highlight the role of the *praeceptor*, the wise philosopher who would help the would-be philosopher on his journey towards wisdom. To understand fully the meaning of virtue, careful choices needed to be made in order to prevent the selection of inappropriate or incorrect *exempla*, and the path to happiness was not found by following the crowd like sheep.²⁴⁸ This is where Seneca’s *praeceptor* figure, outlined in detail within his *Epistulae Morales*,

²⁴⁷ The risk of such an approach is that some *exempla* become meaningless to later judging audiences, or are remembered for certain deeds over others originally intended by authors who used them.

²⁴⁸ Sen. *Vit. Brev.* 1.2-5, 2.1-2.

plays an important role in the moral education of the would-be philosopher.²⁴⁹ Specifically, the role of the *praeceptor* was to give advice and precepts to encourage individual moral and ethical growth, as well as protect the learner from the wider populace:

interim omissis argumentis nonne apparet opus esse nobis aliquo advocato, qui contra populi praecepta praecipiat? [...] Non licet, inquam, ire recta via. Trahunt in pravum parentes, trahunt servi. Nemo errat uni sibi, sed dementia spargit in proximos accipitque invicem. Et ideo in singulis vitia populorum sunt, quia illa populus dedit. Dum facit quisque peiorem, factus est; didicit deteriora, deinde docuit, effectaque est ingens illa nequitia congesto in unum quod cuique pessimum scitur. Sit ergo aliquis custos et aurem subinde pervellat abigatque rumores et reclamet populis laudantibus. Erras enim, si existimas nobiscum vitia nasci; supervenerunt, ingesta sunt. Itaque monitionibus crebris opiniones, quae nos circumsonant, repellantur.

Meanwhile, proofs aside, it is surely clear that we need a counsellor to give us precepts to counter those of the populace [...] We are not allowed, I tell you, to travel by the straight road. Our parents and even our slaves lead us astray. No one errs just at his own expense; our folly spreads to our neighbours, and theirs affect us in turn. That is why national failings are manifested in individuals; it is the populace that produces those faults. Each person becomes corrupt in corrupting others. He learns bad habits, then teaches them, and so the worst opinions of each are compounded by contact with the others into one vast pile of depravity. So we should have a guardian to pluck our ear repeatedly, dismiss what people say, and protest against the praises of the many. You are mistaken if you think that our faults originate within us: they are heaped onto us by transmission. That's why the opinions that echo all around us should be driven away by frequent admonitions. (*Ep.* 94.52-55)

This is a highly pessimistic view of how vice especially can manifest within an individual who can subsequently become an *exemplum* for others, having being assimilated into exemplary discourse following the collective agreement of the audience. The audience (or crowd/populace) can make the wrong decision over who

²⁴⁹ The importance of the *praeceptor* role in Seneca's methodology of philosophical teaching is evident in the significance ascribed to the philosopher Areus as Livia's guide (*Marc.* 4.2), as we shall see in section 4.3.2. See Roller (2015b and 2018 pp.265-289) for further discussion of Seneca as *praeceptor*, the person who offers moral advice as well as acting as the ideal *exemplum* for everyday living.

should be classed as an *exemplum* or over what moral attributes are being illustrated, resulting in the reproduction of incorrect virtues.²⁵⁰ As noted in *Ep.* 120.5, the existing Roman exemplary system could ‘get it wrong’ in how virtues were exemplified and in which people, meaning that Seneca’s primary aim in using *exempla* throughout all of his works is to show how they should be used for the goal of achieving virtue.²⁵¹ As Roller notes, he needs to use the conventional rhetoric of exemplarity (and position himself within it) in order to give his own critique persuasive force.²⁵² As a result, Seneca’s choice of *exempla* often appears carefully selected, exhibiting an overall tendency to use exemplary figures from the more recent past – for example, Republican men such as Cato the Younger.²⁵³

This does not preclude him from citing historical figures from as far back as the early Roman Republic, such as Mucius Scaevola, Regulus, and Fabius Cunctator as well as philosophers like Socrates; indeed, they often sit alongside *exempla* derived from the contemporary era, including the late Republic.²⁵⁴ The overall tendency in Seneca’s prose works is to use the more recent exemplary figure in order to assist in achieving his primary aim: the internalisation (via philosophical and ethical reflection) of all *exempla* in order to resist the influence of the wider populace. Seneca’s attempt to situate *exempla* within the stock of internal moral guides who act as an internal *praeceptor* breathes new life into the exemplary discourse. By enhancing the ability of the *exemplum* to ‘speak’ to the would-be philosopher internally within the mind – removing the reliance on external visual imagery acting as a prompt – Seneca uses their rhetorical force to create a sense of ‘living alongside’ these men.²⁵⁵ In contemplating the “memory” of such individuals, they can be re-imagined as personal

²⁵⁰ Echoed at *Ep.* 5.1, 7.1-3; *De Ira* 3.41.2.

²⁵¹ The existing system assumes that it is the community’s responsibility to judge *exempla*, whereas Seneca is shifting the responsibility onto the individual.

²⁵² Roller (2018) 267-274.

²⁵³ First noted in Mayer (1991) 149. Recent scholarship on Seneca’s general use of *exempla* has primarily focused on his *Letters*, as this is where he is clear about their philosophical usage. For example, Griffin (1976), Edwards (1997, 1999, 2007, 2015), Schafer (2011), Davies (2014), Roller (2018) – the latter not limiting itself to the *Letters*, although they are its main focus. Inwood (2005) 340-347 uses *De Ira* as his main illustrative example.

²⁵⁴ Mucius Scaevola: *Prov.* 3.4, *Ep.* 24.2; Regulus: *Prov.* 3.4; Fabius Cunctator: *Ira* 1.11.5.

²⁵⁵ Davies (2014) 83 draws upon the earlier work of Nussbaum (1994), who saw this technique as similar to the role that *imagines* played in visualising the ancestors. See also Edwards (2015) 49.

guides watching over the ethical learner, increasing the potential of a close 'relationship' with the named *exemplum*.²⁵⁶ In essence, Seneca is opposing the tendency of the exemplary system to elevate the significance of one marvellous deed as representative of the moral quality of the individual (acting as a form of shorthand), emphasising instead that the overall *virtus* of a man – as expressed in all areas of his life – is far more important than the value ascribed to an individual action.

The ability to conjure up an *exemplum* in the mind must begin with *liberalia studia* and the specific study of named individuals, before engaging the assistance of a real-world, living *praeceptor* to ensure that the correct examples were stored within the memory bank of the learner (as we saw in *Ep.* 94 above).²⁵⁷ The reason for this is that *quid faciendum sit, a faciente discendum est* ('One must learn what to do from someone who is already doing it', *Ep.* 98.17) as a step towards engaging in deeper philosophical learning. In his letters to Lucilius, Seneca is clear over who should perform this role for him:

Plus tamen tibi et viva vox et convictus quam oratio proderit. In rem praesentem venias oportet, primum, quia homines amplius oculis quam auribus credunt; deinde, quia longum iter est per praecepta, breve et efficax per exempla.

But formal discourse will not do as much for you as direct contact, speaking in person and sharing a meal. You must come and see me face to face – first of all, because humans believe their eyes much more than their ears, and second, because learning by precepts is the long way around. The quick and effective way is to learn by example. (*Ep.* 6.5)

By positing himself as an example for Lucilius to follow, Seneca begins to push at the wider exemplary envelope: as Inwood has observed, it is Seneca's preference for self-exemplification, and for offering his own experience alongside that of others, that is

²⁵⁶ Gowing (2005) 69-100.

²⁵⁷ These named individuals could be from any time, but those from the more recent past were considered to be more useful (*Ep.* 24.11).

uniquely his development.²⁵⁸ As we shall see later in this chapter, a similar model of learning is posited for women, namely Helvia, who, as the mother of a Stoic philosopher, is ideally placed to act as a role model for other women's learning. However, her own learning requires an extra step *before* she can knuckle down with the study of philosophy: that of seeking out comfort and guidance from within the family. Hence, even where women are put forward as having equal potential to participate in Seneca's revised exemplary framework, their overall system of learning nonetheless differs to that of their male counterparts.

4.2.2 Amplifying the role of women

Alongside self-exemplification, and the emphasis on living role models in deepening one's understanding of *virtus*, is Seneca's suggestion (via the consolations to Marcia and Helvia) that women can occupy the exemplary sphere under the same terms as men. In the passages quoted above (addressed to a male recipient), there is nothing to suggest that women cannot be urged to do the same in learning by example, and, indeed, in these consolations it is apparent that they too should seek to learn from living role models. In developing a new kind of exemplary discourse that, on the surface at least, allowed both sexes to aspire to virtue equally (and, by extension, act as examples to each other; *Marc.16.1*), women are granted an increasingly important space within it.²⁵⁹ This is not to say that all gendered lines were broken down when they were used: indeed, Seneca retained socialised hierarchies surrounding gender in his presentation of his female *exempla*, and in his suggestion as to how they might be utilised. This is evident when we look at the specific examples chosen for his addressees, as well as his wider position on *virtus* – moral virtue.

²⁵⁸ Inwood (2005) 341. Seneca's tendency towards self-exemplification has been generally situated within the wider shifts in Stoic thought that took place during the first-century CE in emphasising first-hand experience and the individual outlook on the world (a focus on the self), as outlined by Edwards (1997) 25-27.

²⁵⁹ *Marc. 16.1: Par illis, mihi crede, vigor, par ad honesta, libeat, facultas est; dolorem laboremque ex aequo, si consuevere, patiuntur.* ('Believe me, they [women] have just as much force, just as much capacity, if they like, for virtuous action; they are just as able to endure suffering and toil when they are accustomed to them.')

Seneca's emphasis on attaining moral virtue, despite its abstract nature that permitted it to exist as a concept beyond society, remained predicated on a series of existing social structures and cultural conventions that resulted in a number of hierarchies, such as elite/non-elite, free/non-free, and male/female. As Habinek observes, Seneca's philosophical doctrines masked the deeply-entrenched anxieties of the elite class that rested upon the preservation of these hierarchies, and continued to allow the dominant cultural power – in ancient Rome, the male elite – to sustain its hegemonic position in society via an 'aristocracy of virtue' which, at its core, only truly permitted elite men to aspire to virtue.²⁶⁰ The Stoic definition of virtue was so complex and dependent on the nature of the individual character within different scenarios, that to speak of equality amongst both sexes must necessarily also consider wider societal restrictions on women's ability to exhibit virtue.²⁶¹ According to Seneca, although both sexes have the same capacity for virtue, what made an individual virtuous was their individual disposition, their place within the community, and individual fortune (couched in terms of health and wealth); *Ep.* 120.²⁶² A judgement regarding their virtue must be made from direct observation of a number of actions within different spheres of activity. By default, women were not regarded as equal in the community on social grounds, and were expected to perform their virtue in the domestic sphere only.²⁶³ As a result, their virtue could never be seen as equal to that of men, regardless of any potential they may exhibit to do so according to their individual disposition.²⁶⁴

Furthermore, the dominance of the masculine viewpoint is sustained in other ways. First, it is Seneca himself, as a male philosopher (as well as *praeceptor*), who acts as the mediator between the *exemplum* in the text and the female consolee – he puts forward gender-specific examples that he deems appropriate for his recipient. Secondly, exemplary men are cited alongside (and often immediately before) the women, who are related to these exemplary men and so can, by implication, aspire

²⁶⁰ Habinek (1998) 137-150.

²⁶¹ Manning (1973) 171-5.

²⁶² *Ibid.*

²⁶³ See Wilcox (2006) 79-80 on public and private spaces and the exercise of gendered *virtus*.

²⁶⁴ Manning, *op cit.*

to exemplary status at least partially via their blood (for example, Marcia and her father Cremutius Cordus; Octavia and her son Marcellus).

At the wider rhetorical level – the way in which his *exempla* are chosen and utilised in the text – Seneca pushes at the boundaries of accepted exemplary discourse to permit more space to women. In the case of the *Consolatio ad Marciam*, seven female *exempla* are named: Marcia (*Marc.* 1.1-8), Octavia (2.3-4), Livia (2.3, 3.1-2, 4.1-4), Lucretia (16.2), Cloelia (16.2), Cornelia, mother of the Gracchi (16.3), and Cornelia, wife of Drusus (16.4). Three of these – Lucretia, Cloelia and the first Cornelia – belong to the established canon of ‘traditional’ *exempla* during this era, and are well attested in various sources. In contrast, 17 male *exempla* are cited in total, including Marcia’s father Cremutius Cordus and her son Metilius.

Despite this disparity in volume, nearly all of the male *exempla* are cited in the form of a shorthand to illustrate a certain moral behaviour, as was normal in the exemplary tradition.²⁶⁵ Similarly, the *ad Helviam* contains nearly twice as many male *exempla* in comparison with their female counterparts. There are four female *exempla* in total: Helvia herself, her sister, and two traditional, Republican women: Cornelia (mother of the Gracchi) and Rutilia (mother of the exiled Cotta), both of whom had acquired status as an *exemplum* by this time within Roman literature.²⁶⁶ In both consolations, the ‘traditional’ female *exempla* (Lucretia, Cloelia, the Corneliae, Rutilia) are only mentioned briefly in contrast with Marcia/Livia and Octavia, and

²⁶⁵ These male *exempla* are often clustered into groups of three, as was typical for the rhetorical tradition, and is a common feature of how Seneca uses *exempla* across his philosophical texts: for example, *Ep.* 2.4.4-5 and *Ep.* 98.13 (see Mayer (2001) and Roller (2015a) for further exposition on Seneca’s use of lists in presenting *exempla*).

²⁶⁶ Helvia: *Helv.* 2.4-5, 14.3, 16.1-5; Cornelia: 16.6; Rutilia 16.7; Helvia’s unnamed sister 19.1-7. Two daughters of Scipio are also mentioned, but not as the sole focus of the exemplary anecdote at 12.6 (arguably Scipio himself). Pre-Senecan writers who also refer to Cornelia include Cicero (*Brut.* 104, 211; *De Orat.* 1.38), and Valerius Maximus 4.4.pr. and 6.7.1, along with Seneca’s contemporary the Elder Pliny (*HN* 7.122, 9.57, 34.31; Rutilia is less frequently attested, and is only very briefly mentioned in Cicero (*Att.* 12.20, 12.22)).

Helvia/her sister.²⁶⁷ This means that the latter are able to become the main focal points within the text, with considerable space given to their exemplary natures and behaviours.²⁶⁸

However, the breadth of male *exempla* referred to ranges from Stoic philosophers to Republican heroes to the emperors themselves. The male *exempla* are (listed in the order in which they appear in the text): Antenor (7.6), Evander (7.6), Dimoedes (7.6), Marcellus (9.4-10.1), the emperor Gaius (10.4), Manius Curius (10.8), Apicius (10.8), Menenius Agrippa (12.5), Atilius Regulus (12.5), Scipio (12.6-7), Socrates (13.4), Cato (13.5), and Aristides (13.7).²⁶⁹ All are great men whose exemplarity was well-understood, in direct contrast with the main female *exempla* of both consolations, whose exemplarity Seneca needs to describe for the benefit of the addressees themselves, as well as for the reader external to the text. To be clear, Seneca is demonstrating explicitly that women could be active participants within the Roman exemplary discourse, as 'readers' and as *exempla* themselves. Yet, as we have seen throughout this thesis, the position of women within the Roman exemplary discourse remain incongruous in some ways when explored at the conceptual level, often being described in terms that hints at the transgressive.

In particular, the trope of being 'set aside from their sex' remained common, even in Seneca's two consolations to women, including terms that suggest these women are somehow 'acting like a man' or displaying 'manly courage' – or in defining her as

²⁶⁷ *Exempla* such as Cornelia and Rutilia (traditional, Republican figures) become one-dimensional within the text, as they represent a specific behaviour or virtue. Therefore, their deeds are not required to be elaborated upon (McAuley (2015) 196). This is characteristic of *exempla* (regardless of gender) across texts, as this is part of its structural form that permits different moral narratives to be projected onto the *exemplum*. The difference, however, is that gender enforces different outcomes: as this thesis argues, female *exempla* are always problematic in terms of their imitability due to the circumstances in which their exemplary deed has been performed. Furthermore, their deeds are framed in terms that emphasise their 'manly bravery': hence, their deeds have to be regarded as masculine in nature in order to be understood as exemplary (Vidén (1993)).

²⁶⁸ The *Consolatio ad Polybium*, addressed to a male recipient, only includes male *exempla* – no female *exempla* are cited as models for emulation (nor do Roman exemplary women feature in the *Epistulae Morales*).

²⁶⁹ Other male figures are mentioned in passing as authors or philosophers: that is, Varro, Brutus, Homer, Plato and Zeno.

unicum.²⁷⁰ As we saw in earlier chapters, this ‘rhetoric of transgressiveness’ relies on implicit reference to the masculine definition of *virtus*. So, for a woman to demonstrate *virtus*, she must be rendered automatically as an outlier, or ‘other’, from the very outset, and this is one of the first major points to be made in the two consolations to female addressees.

4.3 Exempla at the Conceptual Level: Gendered Usability in Action

The remainder of this chapter will show how aspects of this normative rhetoric of transgression persist in Seneca’s consolations to women at the conceptual level, even as he seeks to normalise the exemplary (non-transgressive) deeds of elite women by including them at the broader structural level. Firstly, though, a brief analysis of a male *exemplum* that is given significant space in one of the consolations will be considered in order to demonstrate the gendered usability of *exempla* when explored at the conceptual level.

4.3.1 Marcellus in the *Consolatio ad Helviam Matrem*

The *exemplum* of Marcus Marcellus (consul 51 BCE) at *Helv.* 9.4-10.1 acts as a useful contrast to Seneca’s other female *exempla*, especially when we attempt to evaluate how he operates at the conceptual level. From the late Republic, Marcellus was an admired *exemplum* for how to live when in exile, and is one of the main correspondents in Book 4 of Cicero’s *Ad Familiares* that demonstrate Marcellus’

²⁷⁰ *Marc.* 1.1, *Helv.* 16.5. On the same grounds, the use of the term *muliebris* (‘womanly’) retained pejorative connotations in Seneca’s works, being used to describe unmanly behaviour – for example, *Clem.* 19.2 and *Ira* 1.19.3.

resolute personality.²⁷¹ In sections 9 to 10 of the *ad Helviam*, Seneca reveals that he has been influenced by Brutus' book on virtue, the *De Virtute*, that framed Marcellus as the ideal *exemplum* for living in exile happily as a result of reading philosophy.²⁷² Seneca draws upon this text as a form of literary *solacium* (comfort) in helping him come to terms with his own exile, and various scholars have noted how Marcellus is used as an *exemplum* for Seneca and his own situation rather than for Helvia, the addressee of the consolation.²⁷³

It is the failure of Seneca to directly connect Marcellus to Helvia that complicates the question of who Marcellus is intended to be an *exemplum* for. This is not to suggest that Marcellus has no relevance at all as an *exemplum* for Helvia: he exemplifies the idea of seeking consolation in philosophical study for a short period of time as a means of overcoming grief, as Helvia is later urged to do by Seneca at 17.3.²⁷⁴ Nonetheless, it is not immediately apparent why Marcellus is put forward as an *exemplum* for Helvia, especially as this central male *exemplum* seems to have more obvious relevance to the author than to the addressee in how exile can be experienced positively if one uses the opportunity it brings to re-engage with philosophy.

²⁷¹ This book has now been recognised as forming its own coherent narrative as the result of editorial selection of certain letters that outline the dramatic events of August 46 to May 45 BCE (Gibson (unpub.)) These letters all cluster under the overarching themes of exile – particularly relevant for Seneca's own situation – and of mourning for the Republic, which may also be a factor behind Seneca's reference to Marcellus (in mourning for a different kind of political power, under a different kind of emperor). The book's focus on Cicero's extreme grief following the death of his daughter Tullia has long been understood as simultaneously linked to Cicero's grief over the loss of the Republic, which may have been exacerbated by his lack of public standing during this period; for example, Erskine (1997) 37, Hutchinson (1998) 67-77, Martelli (2016) 418). It has been suggested that Cicero's turn towards reading, composing a self-consolation (*Att.* 12.14) and writing philosophy (including those passages in book 3 of the *Tusculan Disputations* that deal with consolation and coping with grief) could be bound up implicitly with attempting to regain some form of political influence, albeit indirectly and via literary circles; see Wilcox (2005a) 270-1, Ker (2009b) 256-263, Hope (2017) 52-53.

²⁷² Brutus' work is lost to us, and this consolation provides the best evidence for what it may have been about. To date, the only scholarly work on the *De Virtute* itself remains Hendrickson's 1939 article, which identifies clear links between the *ad Helviam* and Cicero's depiction of Marcellus in the *Brutus*. *Brutus* 249-250 also exemplifies Marcellus' oratorical skills in tandem with those of Caesar, situating them as an odd pairing. In framing Caesar as an *exemplum* for his oratorical ability only, Lowrie (2008) suggests it is a deliberate strategy on Cicero's part in undermining his political relevance. Seneca arguably builds on this trope in portraying Caesar as blushing at the sight of Marcellus in exile (*Helv.* 9.5).

²⁷³ Fantham (2007) 183.

²⁷⁴ Gunderson (2015) 92.

Furthermore, the selection of Marcellus by Seneca as the primary *exemplum* for living in exile would have been regarded as unusual by contemporary readers. It was far more common for authors to select Republican men such as Rutilius as exemplary figures for how to live in exile, and, indeed, Seneca himself cites Rutilius elsewhere in his works.²⁷⁵ Rutilius, (according to Cicero) was exiled unjustly in 92 BCE, as a result of being accused of colluding with Rome's enemies, and over time had come to represent an *exemplum* of 'innocence and martyrdom'.²⁷⁶ Rutilius was also regarded as the first exile to devote himself to *otium* as a consequence of his exclusion from public life, dedicating himself to philosophical studies and writing.²⁷⁷ Therefore, on the surface Rutilius represents a better choice of *exemplum* for Seneca, who was writing this consolation whilst in the first year of his own banishment from Rome, and still coming to terms with how to live as 'the philosopher in exile'. Given the fact that the reasons for Seneca's own expulsion are unclear, the decision not to use Rutilius, or any other popular *exemplum* representing exile, may reflect a conscious choice to avoid highlighting any possible further reasons for extending his own indefinitely.

However, the Marcellus episode does reveal something about the idea of living role models that we noted above as being important to Seneca's version of exemplarity. Marcellus is used as the ideal of the wise man living happily in exile as a result of his study of philosophy. Philosophy has been used as a source of comfort during tough times due to its power to heal wounds and eradicate sadness, and its influence has resulted in a man that embodies *virtus* through his whole way of being. The power of Marcellus' *virtus* is such that Brutus has been affected by Marcellus' fortitude and resilience, and, paradoxically, is now the one feeling as if he were going into exile upon leaving Mytilene. Furthermore, Marcellus is able to de-masculinise the overtly war-like Caesar by prompting feminine blushing (*erubuit*; 9.6), a wholly unexpected response from one whom had been the subject of legal prosecution at the hands of

²⁷⁵ Rutilius: *Marc.* 22.3-7, *Ep.* 24, 79, 81; *Ben.* 6.37.2; *Vit.* 18.3.

²⁷⁶ Cic. *Brut.* 115. Quotation from Kallet-Marx (1990) 124, although whether Rutilius' innocence was 'unquestionable' (as Kallet-Marx believes) remains debatable.

²⁷⁷ Claassen (1999) 16.

Marcellus (unconstitutionally, as Sulpicius Rufus, Marcellus' co-consul in 51 BCE, makes clear), and so should have been prone to anger instead.²⁷⁸

Finally, Marcellus' exemplary status here is underscored by being the object of admiration from Cato himself, thus rivalling Seneca's very own embodiment of the *sapiens* figure. This suggests that Cato's exemplary relevance to contemporary audiences can now be downplayed in favour of other, more appropriate, *exempla* for particular situations. Despite Seneca's emphasis on Cato as the *sapiens* figure, Cato was nonetheless an *exemplum* (in the traditional sense) on the basis of his one heroic deed, his suicide: in the *ad Helviam*, however, Cato's own exemplary status has been undermined by the constancy in how Marcellus lived his life over the one glorious act.²⁷⁹ How Marcellus lived in exile appeared to be no different as to how he lived in Rome: his happiness has not been affected by a change of place. Marcellus' constancy in character is underlined in *Ad Fam.* 4.4, 4.7-9 and 4.12, where his resistance to Caesar was such that he initially refused to return to Rome, despite having received a formal pardon.²⁸⁰

The physical presence of Marcellus was able to exert an effect on those who observed him living on Mytilene. The relationship between observer and observed is emphasised through Cato's feelings of admiration, Caesar's response of shame, and Brutus' sadness at leaving him behind, having *seen* how Marcellus is living in exile. It is this response of others to Marcellus' living presence that Seneca focuses on in creating Marcellus as a new, different kind of *exemplum*, whose value also comes from his influence as a living role model for his contemporary observers. As a result, Marcellus' exemplary status goes beyond glory based on one specific heroic deed, which could have rested just on his initial response to his banishment: instead, Marcellus the *exemplum* edges towards meeting the criterion outlined by Seneca in

²⁷⁸ Gibson (unpub.) 6; also see Scullard (1970) 125-127 and 146 for a short summary of events surrounding Marcellus' banishment and subsequent recall.

²⁷⁹ This sense of 'undermining' representations of traditional *exempla* continued during the course of the first century, becoming associated with the move towards using *exempla* as counter-cultural devices (see Morello (2018) for a full treatment of this theme).

²⁸⁰ Cicero used his *Pro Marcello* speech not only to give thanks for this pardon, but as a vehicle for outlining various issues surrounding the continuation of the Republic under Caesar.

*Ep.*120 for selecting role models based on their consistency in action and way of living.

Seneca constructs his *exemplum* of Marcellus based upon the model of traditional *exempla*, in that he is using a man from the past who demonstrated his courage during dangerous times. Yet Marcellus also shows how the meaning of *virtus* as embodied within *exempla* has expanded from military honour to incorporate more explicit civic and political characteristics, with Marcellus coming to represent pre-Caesarean Republican ideals. In addition, Marcellus' *virtus* can be viewed as political and, in turn, representing the embodiment of the Republic itself: connecting Marcellus with the return of legitimate Republican government is made clear in Cicero's *Pro Marcello* speech, which was used as a vehicle for outlining a variety of issues surrounding the continuation of the Republic under Caesar.²⁸¹

Although what Marcellus is being used to represent and for whom remains ambiguous, Seneca is clear that Marcellus' status as an *exemplum* is fixed on the spectrum of operation: for example, in the effect he consistently had on his contemporaries. The language used in *Helv.* 9.4-10.1 is unambiguous regarding his exemplary status, being framed as such due to the admiration of others such as Cato – and even Caesar himself (9.5). Nonetheless, there is no engagement with a rhetoric of transgression that suggests he might be *unicum* or 'unique', or that gender boundaries have been crossed. The language used is of *nobilitas* (10.1) and *admiratio* (that can be reversed to also generate feelings of shame, 9.6); however, Seneca is absolutely clear regarding Marcellus' position as *exemplum*. Marcellus' embodiment of either the philosopher in exile or as representing the Republic can be mutually exclusive, or be considered as working alongside each other. While the consequence of Marcellus' actions may have inverted the understanding of exile, the way in which Seneca uses him as an *exemplum* does not introduce any rhetorical paradox at the conceptual level, and his position on the spectrum of operation remains secure. In

²⁸¹ See Connolly (2015) 173-201 for how Cicero used the *Pro Marcello* to outline issues surrounding the Republic and Cohen (2007) 120-124 on Marcellus's return embodying the parallel return of the Republic. See also Tempest (2013).

other words, the main effect of Seneca's innovations is to broaden the ways in which male *exempla* can be observed, and the ways in which individual male *exemplum* can be rendered imitable through the fixing of their status. The contrast between someone like Marcellus and the cases of female *exempla*, discussed next, are thus visible and identifiable, despite the broadening that one can also acknowledge when studying how women are represented.

4.3.2 The *Consolatio ad Marciam*

It is Seneca's multi-layering of rhetorical paradoxes in the cases of Marcia and Helvia that results in a widening of the conceptual space within which Seneca can use his female *exempla*. As the next two sections will show, this renders their position on the spectrum of operation for *exempla* as unstable, complicates their imitability, and retains the rhetoric of transgression common to female *exempla*. Turning first to the *ad Marciam*, the very first sentence of this consolation suggests the influence of such a conceptual space from the outset, applied initially to Marcia herself.²⁸² The implication that she is *tam longe ab infirmitate muliebris animi quam a ceteris vitiis recessisse* ('as far removed from womanish weakness of mind as from all other vices', *Marc.* 1.1) immediately establishes the visualisation of a spectrum of operation that positions vice (*vitium*) and a womanish mind (*muliebris animus*) against *virtus* (which, by default, is a masculine conception if standing in opposition to *muliebris*) at opposite ends. Marcia is imagined as sitting at one end, the masculine *virtus* end, having seemingly transcended her sex and its 'natural' inclination towards moral weakness.

²⁸² Langlands (2004) 120 refers to the clearing of a 'conceptual space in which a female reader may stand' as a space that is utilised during the explanation of how a woman can be seen to acquire virtue. This space is needed to consider complications surrounding the gendering of the Latin language (*muliebris* with its connotations of cowardice and moral weakness, and *virtus* as manhood as well as moral strength), and the subsequent difficulties in using such gendered terms when addressing a woman. A female reader therefore has to stand within this separate space in order to temporarily dissociate herself from the supposedly moral weakness of the female (pp.119-20). Gunderson (2015) 79-87 refers to this conceptual space in a different way (via a 'theatre of virtue'), arguing that Marcia has to imagine herself as leaving her female body in order to occupy that of a man to understand how virtue can be attained. My use of an imagined conceptual space focuses on the extent to which an individual *exemplum* displays contested behaviours that serve to threaten, or cast doubt upon, their exemplary status.

Having established her 'right' to occupy this end, Seneca then reminds her (and by default, us) why she has earned the right to be there: her strength of mind (*robur animi*) and courage (*virtus*) shown during the persecution and subsequent death of her father, Cremutius Cordus, and her 'very great service to Roman scholarship' (*optime... de Romanis studiis*, 1.3).²⁸³ Her actions in saving her father's esteemed works have benefited subsequent generations, preserving the memory of the times themselves as well as the reputation of the author.²⁸⁴ As a public action – one performed for the benefit of the state itself – Marcia's feminised *virtus* is transgressive in that it has transferred from its domestic and private space into the public realm, and has strayed into the masculine business of historical preservation.²⁸⁵ It has also caused Seneca to ignore her sex and her female body, clear visual markers of her gender: *Haec magnitudo animi tui vetuit me ad sexum tuum respicere, vetuit ad vultum...* ('This evidence of the greatness of your mind forbade me to pay heed to your sex, forbade me to pay heed to your face...', 1.5).

Thus, to be considered as exemplary, Marcia's *virtus* has to be rendered in masculine terms in order to enable it to be considered acceptable (as a deed that served the state and explicitly invoked the memory of her father) at the same time as its transgressiveness is hinted at – and serving as an apology for Seneca's own temporary forgetfulness of her sex and female body. To counterbalance this move, Marcia's 'true' gender is highlighted immediately after this repositioning to one end of the spectrum of vice and virtue, by moving her again, pulling her away from virtue and back towards the other end. Even though it was considered 'natural' for women to grieve and weep, excessive grief was nevertheless frowned upon.²⁸⁶ So, at the same time as Marcia's womanly status as a grieving mother is acknowledged, her excessive

²⁸³ *Marc.* 22.4, Dio 57.24.4.

²⁸⁴ As Wilson (2013) 105 notes, one of the key features of Seneca's persuasive strategy in his consolations is his ability to remind the bereaved addressee of their past character and sense of self in conjunction with their surviving relationships, traditional Roman virtues, and the inclusion of *exempla* designed to inspire. We see these features in all three of his consolations.

²⁸⁵ See Gowing (2005) on the importance of preserving memory and its links to power.

²⁸⁶ Limitation of women's mourning: Plut. *Numa* 12.3 (ten months was the prescribed limit); Sen. *Ep.* 63.13; Livy 2.7.4 (one year). See Corbeill (2004), Šterben Erker (2009) and Marincola (2015) as representative of scholarship on classical representations of grieving in the context of gender.

grief and inability to check it, three years after her son's death (*Marc.* 1.6-7), repositions her towards the vice end of the spectrum. That her grief can be regarded as a vice is alluded to by Seneca himself:

Quem admodum omnia vitia penitus insidunt, nisi, dum surgunt, oppressa sunt, ita haec quoque tristia et misera et in se saevientia ipsa novissime acerbitate pascuntur et fit infelicis animi prava voluptas dolor.

Just as all vices become deep-rooted unless they are crushed when they spring up, so, too, such a state of sadness and wretchedness, with its self-afflicted torture, feeds at last upon its very bitterness, and the grief of an unhappy mind becomes a morbid pleasure. (*Marc.* 1.7)

Therefore, Marcia's excessive grief has caused her to lose her (already fragile) acquisition of *virtus*, resulting in an unstable position on the spectrum. Her exemplary status reflects this: she occupies the exemplary end when she is serving the state, yet at the same time her identification as an *exemplum* for others to admire bears traces of transgression.

Despite being presented as definitive *exempla* for grieving mothers, albeit whose grief render them as an *exemplum* to emulate and to avoid, Octavia and Livia nonetheless bear traces of the internalised conceptual debate over what it means to be exemplary. This is subtler in Octavia's case: she is designed to represent negative exemplary behaviour by her excessive grief, and thus her position is somewhat clearer. Octavia is established as a model to avoid: her position as an *exemplum* is therefore not in doubt, even if it is as a 'negative' one. This suggests that the conceptual space is utilised to a greater degree when women are configured as a 'positive' *exemplum*, underscoring the masculine nature of the system where women's position within it – especially when demonstrating *virtus* – has to be justified in some way, hence the nature of the conceptual debate that arises from this discomfort. This debate is removed, or at least minimised – as in the case of Octavia – if she is designed to be a 'negative' *exemplum* (whose behaviour is to be avoided). Her status as a 'negative' *exemplum* rests upon her inability to set

boundaries on her tears and moans, refusal to listen to words of consolation or advice, her stubbornness in resisting relaxation, and violent rejection of any form of commemoration of her son Marcellus (*Marc.* 2.4).²⁸⁷

Hence, Octavia's actions and response to her grief are rendered here as a negative example for Marcia, whose own excessive grief borders on being regarded in a similar fashion. Yet, upon scratching the surface of this vignette, we can once again see traces of the conceptual space utilised to debate exemplary behaviour. The first is in how Octavia and Livia are collectively described – as *maxima et sexus et saeculi tui exempla* (2.2). Octavia's introduction as a *maximum exemplum* of her sex, and indeed of her time, suggests that what follows ought to be laudatory, yet (before we are even told who these examples will be) the clause immediately switches to state that one of these examples will demonstrate behaviour that is tinged with negativity in contrast with the other, who is praised for casting off her grief:

Duo tibi ponam ante oculos maxima et sexus et saeculi tui exempla: alterius feminae, quae se tradidit ferendam dolori, alterius, quae pari adfecta casu, maiore damno, non tamen dedit longum in se malis suis dominium, sed cito animum in sedem suam reposuit.

I shall place before your eyes but two examples – the greatest of your sex and century – one, of a woman who allowed herself to be swept away by grief, the other, of a woman who, though she suffered a like misfortune and even greater loss, yet did not permit her ills to have the mastery long, but quickly restored her mind to its accustomed state. (*Marc.* 2.2)

Only after this point are we told who these women are, and why they are being used as a pairing for female grief. This pairing is underscored by the fact that they are both prominent women of the imperial family, who lived at the same point in time.

²⁸⁷ *Marc.* 2.4: *Nullum finem per omne vitae suae tempus flendi gemendique fecit nec ullas admisit voces salutare aliquid adferentis; ne avocari quidem se passa est, intenta in unam rem et toto animo adfixa. [...] Nullam habere imaginem filii carissimi voluit, nullam sibi de illo fieri mentionem.* ('Through all the rest of her life Octavia set no bounds to her tears and moans, and closed her ears to all words that offered wholesome advice; with her whole mind fixed and centred upon one thing, she did not allow herself even to relax [...] Not a single portrait would she have of her darling son, not one mention of his name in her hearing.')

However, the positioning of the adjective *maximum* (in conjunction with *exemplum*) within the clause has the effect of introducing an element of uncertainty, for whilst its meaning signifies greatness, the clause that immediately follows it clarifies that Octavia's greatness will be cast into doubt. Therefore, she becomes an outlier on the spectrum of operation for *exempla*: she becomes separated conceptually from Livia as well as practically through their different responses to grief.²⁸⁸

Similarly, Livia's exemplarity is also cast as *maximum*, this time from the description that Seneca gives of her public action in response to the loss of her son Drusus and her eventual mastery of her grief. Her actions are posited as the direct opposite of Octavia: Livia concealed her sorrow upon Drusus' internment, and openly spoke of him, seeking enjoyment in his image (*Marc.* 3.2).²⁸⁹ Through her actions, Livia is cast as the exemplary grieving mother, one whose grief can be suitably contained for the benefit of the other men around her, respecting their position as *princeps* (Augustus) and eldest son (Tiberius) respectively, and is mindful of her public role. Livia's status as the *exemplum* that Marcia should choose to admire and emulate is figuratively depicted as a beckoning figure, urging Marcia to follow in her wake (*illa te ad suum consilium vocat*, 'she summons you to follow her'; *Marc.* 4.1).

At *Marc.* 4.3, the philosopher Areus intervenes to frame a secondary *consolatio* within the text.²⁹⁰ His imagined voice overshadows Livia's potential to be situated within a *prosopopoeia*: a male voice is used to ensure Marcia follows the correct path, undermining Livia's potential in the text to become a voice of authority. It then

²⁸⁸ At the same time, however, her position on the spectrum is not because she has acquired man-like attributes (such as a manly *animus*), as we have seen in the *exempla* of Cloelia and Porcia in Chapter 3. The two women are being compared with each other rather than with a man, therefore omitting specific aspects of the transgressive rhetoric that is often applied in these circumstances.

²⁸⁹ *Marc.* 3.2: *ut primum tamen intulit tumulo, simul et illum et dolorem suum posuit, nec plus doluit quam aut honestum erat Caesare aut aequom Tiberio salvo. Non desiit denique Drusi sui celebrare nomen, ubique illum sibi privatim publiceque repraesentare, libentissime de illo loqui, de illo audire: cum memoria illius vixit* ('...yet, as soon as she had placed him in the tomb, along with her son she laid away her sorrow, and grieved no more than was respectful to Caesar or fair to Tiberius, seeing that they were alive. And lastly, she never ceased from proclaiming the name of her dear Drusus. She had him pictured everywhere, in private and in public places, and it was her greatest pleasure to talk about him and to listen to the talk of others – she lived with his memory.')

²⁹⁰ Wilson (2013) 106, who also notes that Marcellus' speech at *Helv.* 9.7-8 is another possible *consolatio* within a *consolatio*.

becomes apparent that Livia's exemplary conduct had to be nurtured in response to philosophical guidance from Areus himself: prior to this point, her grieving behaviour threatened to go the same way as Octavia's, being represented as greater than that of Augustus and Tiberius (*Marc.* 4.2).²⁹¹ Livia's exemplary status temporarily becomes unstable within Seneca's text: she demonstrates that she has the potential to reside in the same outlier section of the exemplary spectrum. This element of doubt reflects the opening out of the conceptual space within which exemplary behaviour is considered, which simultaneously increases the potential for exemplary behaviour posited as for emulation to blur into that for avoidance.²⁹²

In comparison, no similar doubts are apparent in the depiction of the various male *exempla* that Seneca presents in the *Consolatio ad Marciam*. The ability of men to suffer grief is not questioned; even great generals, princes, and the gods themselves have experienced losses considered to be more significant than Marcia's own:

Senserunt ista magni duces, senserunt principes; ne deos quidem fabulae immunes reliquerunt, puto, ut nostrorum funerum levamentum esset etiam divina concidere.

Great generals have experienced such as yours, princes have experienced them; indeed this story has left not even the gods exempt, in order, I fancy, that the knowledge that even divinities can perish may lighten our grief for the dead. (*Marc.* 12.4)

However, their capacity to bear their misfortune calmly is illustrated by Seneca, with no recourse to the opening up of the conceptual space used to consider exemplary

²⁹¹ Areus acts as a metaphor for Seneca's role in guiding Marcia (Ker (2009a) 95), and is the literal embodiment of the *praeceptor*. Gloyn (2017) 27-33 discusses the purpose of the second *prosopopoeia* in the text, that of Cordus himself, who represents the voice that Marcia should respond to the most, given their familial bond. So, Cordus is used as a guarantee against the potential failure of Areus' advice, with his voice providing 'the greatest possible consolatory force' (p.33). Some scholars, e.g. Boal (1973), have termed such an approach 'insensitive', but to do so frames consolations as vehicles for overcoming the emotion of grief only, rather than as carefully constructed pieces of rhetoric. Wilson (2013) 95-97 categorises Seneca's consolations as a form of 'ekphrastic consolatory oration', which neatly accommodates the dramatic flourish of these texts via the use of different persona.

²⁹² Livia is permitted a voice by Seneca at *De Clementia* 1.9, where she is used as a foil to counter the indecisiveness of Augustus in determining the manner of punishment for Lucius Cinna, a member of a plot to assassinate Augustus. However, her speech is short and decisive, typical of women's interventions when they are permitted to speak, with lengthy, dramatic *prosopopoeiae* being granted to men only.

behaviours of females, which subsequently leads to uncertainty over their position on the spectrum of operation for *exempla*. For example, Sulla's resolve did not waver or intensify as a result of his son's death (12.6); Pulvillus acted as if he had not heard the news about his son in order to finish dedicating the temple on the Capitoline, nor allowed his private sorrow to linger (13.1-2); Paulus welcomed the loss of his sons (including through marriage) as a form of payment to Envy in place of a loss to the state (13.3); Bibulus put aside his grief in order to perform the duties of his office (14.2); and Julius Caesar only allowed three days to grieve for the loss of his son-in-law Pompeius, despite being his greatest rival (14.3). All of these examples – and those of Pompeius, Cicero and Cato in section 20 – are presented in a clearly didactic fashion, where no doubt is casted upon the *virtus* of these men, nor upon their exemplary status to begin with.

These male *exempla* have a secure position on the exemplary spectrum of operation: there is no suggestion of transgression (especially beyond their gender), nor of uniqueness or being an outlier. The brevity of these anecdotes must be acknowledged as a potential factor for this: nevertheless, this brevity is also symptomatic of their accepted exemplary status within the wider cultural tradition, where their names alone are representative of some form of shorthand for a specific deed or as illustrative of a particular moral virtue. In contrast, the next section shows that the representation of exemplary women entails a multitude of paradoxes and tensions that combine to generate a range of questions about what it means to be a female *exemplum*, and indeed what it means to be a woman. These characteristics are consequential of the widening of the conceptual space for considering female exemplary behaviour. In other words, the outcome is the diametric opposite of the broadening of the ways in which men could be considered *exempla* (as discussed above), which much less problematically, and much more simply, expands the possibilities for how males are fixed and rendered imitable.

4.3.3 Sisters doing it for themselves: the *Consolatio ad Helviam Matrem*

In the second of Seneca's consolations to a named female addressee, the *Consolatio ad Helviam*, similar patterns of shifting exemplary status to those we saw above in the *Consolatio ad Marciam* are evident at the conceptual level, and become magnified. Several can be detected in Seneca's representation of the two exemplary women of this text, Helvia and her sister. This means that the text's significance goes well beyond the typical scholarly understanding of it as a work of consolation and/or exile, also inviting us to read it as a rhetorical exercise about *exempla* themselves – thinking about the relevance of gender in relation to *exempla* especially. It is the continual layering of various paradoxes within the text (more so than in the *ad Marciam*) that combine to highlight the *ad Helviam's* intrinsically rhetorical nature, and underscores the gendered repeatability of *exempla* more widely.²⁹³ As Williams (2006) 159 notes, paradox is one of the major themes of the text in the context of how one ought to live when in exile. The use of *paradoxa* ("surprising arguments") was an important aspect of Stoic doctrine; therefore, their usage is not surprising in and of itself. However, as this section shows, it is the extent to which they have been employed in the context of female *exempla* that is worthy of note, and leads us to re-examine the purpose(s) of the text.

One of the primary illustrative purposes of Helvia and her sister for the external reader is to highlight the ideal of Stoic motherhood. This extends beyond the purely biological relationship of mother and son to place a value on the roles that can be performed by forms of 'cultural motherhood', such as the relationship between Seneca and his aunt, demonstrating the important role that women played within their family unit.²⁹⁴ Therefore, Helvia and her sister enable the reader to reflect upon the meaning of motherhood in its broadest sense, and retains using these exemplary women along gendered lines.

²⁹³ Williams (2006) 159.

²⁹⁴ See Gloyn (2017) 35-8 for how the *Consolatio ad Helviam* is a reflection on the ideal of Stoic motherhood. Miron (2008) 241-2 notes that one of the text's key features is how it utilises the maternal figure to show the value of familial values and networks that extend across spatial boundaries.

In contrast, the main male *exemplum* in this text, that of Marcellus in exile, represents the ideal of the wise man living happily as a result of his study of philosophy, an avenue only freely open to elite Roman men. As we saw earlier, his *virtus* rests upon his image as the physical embodiment of the Republic, epitomising masculine *virtus* in its most politically charged forms. Marcellus represents an example of someone who sought solace in philosophical studies during tough times due to its power to heal wounds and eradicate sadness, and therefore his relevance to Helvia specifically becomes apparent at 17.3, where Seneca urges her to resume her earlier studies that had been cut off during her marriage:²⁹⁵

Itaque illo te duco, quo omnibus, qui fortunam fugiunt, confugiendum est, ad liberalia studia. Illa sanabunt vulnus tuum, illa omnem tristitiam tibi evellent. His etiam si numquam adsuesses, nunc utendum erat; sed quantum tibi patris mei antiquus rigor permisit, omnes bonas artes non quidem comprehendisti, attigisti tamen.

And so I guide you to that in which all who fly from Fortune must take refuge – to philosophic studies. They will heal your wound, they will uproot all your sadness. Even if you had not been acquainted with them before, you would need them now; but so far as the old-fashioned strictness of my father permitted you, though you have not indeed grasped all of the liberal arts, still you had some dealings with them. (*Helv.* 17.3)

However, at the conceptual level this places Helvia as an outcast: it is only those women who are regarded as morally superior in the first place (lacking standard feminine weaknesses), like Helvia (and indeed Marcia), that can be trusted to engage with philosophy correctly.²⁹⁶ Nonetheless, there is still the implication that men are

²⁹⁵ See also Fantham (2007) 183.

²⁹⁶ In *Tristia* 3.7.25-34, Ovid urges his step-daughter to return to the *bonae artes* as a means of distracting her from thinking about his own situation. Therefore, the idea that women could engage with some form of liberal studies as a means of distracting them from the loss of important male family figures – in this case, both Ovid and Seneca as political exiles – could have been an accepted one in literary circles.

required to guide them along the way, and Seneca may be suggesting that Helvia begins her own studies with Brutus' *De Virtute*.²⁹⁷

Returning to the practical function of women as role models, the *Consolatio ad Helviam* elaborates significantly on the value of living role models for learning about exemplary behaviour – more so than in the *ad Marciam*, where, with the one exception of her father, the main exemplary models posited for Marcia are already dead. Seneca is asking Marcia to draw upon her memory store of female agency in order to imagine Livia and Octavia as if they were living and breathing. However, the *Ad Helviam* expands considerably the argument for turning to living role models as the best source for emulating exemplary behaviour, by focusing on the one environment that has the potential to be of equal importance to both sexes – the family. Seneca presents this argument as a two-way relationship: firstly, presenting Helvia as the exemplary maternal figure for the rest of her family, and, secondly, by suggesting that Helvia too has the potential to find role models for herself from the same environment. Paradoxically, this undermines Helvia's own position as an *exemplum*, as noted below.

Until Helvia becomes self-sufficient in her knowledge of *liberalia studia* and is able to use philosophy to master control over her suffering, she is urged to turn towards her family as a source of *solacia*.²⁹⁸ This includes her other sons, as well as grandchildren, who (Seneca assures her) will treat her with the respect due a *matrona*, and whose personalities will provide her with comfort and pleasure (18.1-5). Helvia's respected maternal role within the family is seen as the model for its younger generation: she is urged to order (*componere*) and shape (*formare*) the character of her

²⁹⁷ For men being required to act as guides for women's learning, see Vidén (1993) 108-138, Hemelrijk (2015) 293-298 and Caldwell (2015) 26-27.

²⁹⁸ In *Ep.* 99 Seneca outlines that experiencing the emotion of grief is not consistent with living virtuously. Therefore someone who exhibits *virtus* in all domains of their life – such as Marullus, the 'recipient' of this consolation – should be able to use their philosophical training in order to control their grief (Graver (2009) 236-238). Marullus is known to have spent time studying philosophy (*Ep.* 99.14), and so Seneca is justified in reminding Marullus not to forget himself (*Ep.* 99.32). Helvia's earlier studies of philosophy were cut off by her husband before she could understand how to master her emotions, meaning that she has to be guided back to her earlier studies as part of a longer study programme to overcome her grief.

granddaughter Novatilla, and act as an instructor in teaching her how to speak and act: *multum illi dabis, etiam si nihil dederis praeter exemplum* ('you will give her much even if you give her nothing but your example', 18.8). Seneca is conferring a *praeceptor* role onto Helvia herself, yet it is one that is very gender-focused: she is being urged to act as a role-model for the younger generation of women in the family, thus protecting the future reputation of the family.²⁹⁹ The same advice is not suggested for Marcus, her grandson, who is identified as a source of comfort for Helvia, but not as an intended recipient of her own instruction (18.4-5), suggesting that Helvia's instruction is of a feminine nature only.

Seneca has told the reader prior to this point of the other virtues that Helvia possesses that can justify her position as a potential *exemplum* for women outside of the family. These include her refusal to take advantage of her sons' power for her own self-gain, either political or financial (14.2-3), and – most importantly for Seneca – her *pudicitia*. Her chaste behaviour – her simple tastes, fecundity and unadorned appearance – creates an image of a stern, conservative woman, who is set up in deliberate opposition to contemporary women who are ambitious and sexually licentious. Thus, on the surface it is entirely appropriate that Seneca refers to the traditional Republican *matronae* of Cornelia, mother of the Gracchi, and Rutilia, sister of Rutilius Rufus (another *exemplum* for exile) and mother of the Republican statesman Cotta, in the context of *pudicitia*, asking Helvia if she is willing to consider as models (for dealing with loss) these brave women who suffered as mothers, too (*Helv.* 16.5).³⁰⁰ The fashioning of Helvia as traditional is illustrated further when the conservatism of her husband (Seneca the Elder) is drawn upon to accentuate the highly traditional environment of the Senecan household. Here, her study of philosophy was cut off after marriage in fear that she used it inappropriately in public

²⁹⁹ Wilson (2013) 102 notes that one of Seneca's main tropes across his consolatory works is that the bereaved ought to look to the future, and not the past, and thus should cultivate those relationships that remain. This is partly why Marcia is criticised by Seneca (*Marc.* 2.4), as her grief was such that it is risked being an affront to the living.

³⁰⁰ *Helv.* 16.5: *si modo illas intueri voles feminas, quas conspecta virtus inter magnos viros posuit* ('if only you are willing to turn your gaze upon the women whose conspicuous bravery has placed them in the rank of mighty heroes'). These women are also problematic, however, in that their sons were viewed as political opponents of the state in championing the power of the tribunes.

(17.4). It soon becomes clear that Helvia may have already used these *exempla* as models for her own life: *quarum vitam semper imitata es, earum in coercenda comprimendaque aegritudine optime sequeris exemplum* ('In your effort to restrain and suppress your sorrow your best course will be to follow the example of those women whose life you have always copied', 16.7). Seneca therefore hints at a possible model of a woman – Helvia – who can become exemplary for other women by virtue of having emulated other exemplary women, Cornelia and Rutilia. However, the wording is ambiguous here – it is not clear whether Helvia *has* consciously modelled herself on Cornelia and Rutilia, or whether Seneca is implying that the parallels between Helvia, Cornelia and Rutilia are so strong as to infer a retrospective causal link.³⁰¹

Helvia is held up as an example of virtuous motherhood for those internal to the Annaei family, and her status as a role model for those outside of it has been indicated explicitly by Seneca. However, having established her position as a role model, Seneca delivers a setback to Helvia's own exemplarity at the end of the consolation, one which serves to threaten her imitability as well as her position on the exemplary spectrum of operation which has, until this point, seemed secure. It turns out that Helvia still has more to learn, not only in terms of philosophical knowledge, but also in the context of feminine virtue. Unlike in the *ad Marciam*, where Marcia draws inspiration for her courageous behaviour from her father and acts accordingly, Seneca makes it clear that Helvia needs to seek out her own female-to-female relationships, both to provide her with comfort, and as example of feminine courage (19.3).³⁰² Once more emphasising the value of family, it is Helvia's own sister who Seneca believes is the best *exemplum* for Helvia, urging Helvia to

³⁰¹ This is another way in which Helvia's exemplarity rests upon rhetorical foundations.

³⁰² *Helv.* 19.3 illustrates as source of comfort: *Hoc est, mater carissima, solacium quo reficiaris. Illi te, quantum potes, iunge, illius artissimis amplexibus alliga. Solent maerentes ea, quae maxime diligunt, fugere et libertatem dolori suo quaerere. Tu ad illam te, quidquid cogita veris, confer; sive servare istum habitum voles sive deponere, apud illam invenies vel finem doloris tui vel comitem.* ('She, my dearest mother, is the source of comfort from which you will gain new strength. To her attach yourself as closely as you can, in her embraces enfold yourself most closely. Those who are in grief are prone to avoid the ones they love most dearly, and to seek liberty for the indulgence of their sorrow. Do you, however, share with her your every thought; whether you wish to retain or to lay aside your mood, you will find in her either the end of your sorrow or a comrade in it.')

'show a courage to match hers' (*Huic parem virtutem exhibeas oportet*, 19.7). Her sister's exemplarity rests on traditional aspects of Roman womanhood: a devoted mother (albeit in a surrogate form) and wife. Several features echo Helvia's own exemplarity: her sister nursed Seneca himself as if her own son and provided support when Seneca was first running for office (19.2), and lived a chaste and modest life away from the public eye (19.6).

These similarities mean that both Helvia and her sister have the potential to be equals as *exempla*: however, it is Helvia's sister who Seneca explicitly represents as the ideal model of female *virtus* which Helvia must try to match in enduring her grief. It is the masculine conception of *virtus* that places Helvia's sister firmly into the exemplary sphere: her bravery in the face of life-threatening circumstances (a shipwreck) in order to save her husband's body for burial is a deed that, in previous times, would have been admired as heroic (19.5). The familiar trope of laying aside her sex is being used here by Seneca, describing her as *uxor oblita imbecillitatis* ('a wife... forgetful of her own weakness', 19.5). Thus, the sister is constructed as a traditional female *exemplum* who, nonetheless, can be of relevance to the contemporary woman as a role model.

On the surface, therefore, both Helvia and her sister illustrate how women can perform a function as role models for other women, especially within the confines of the family. However, closer inspection of the text reveals a number of significant rhetorical paradoxes that individually can all impact upon the position of Helvia and her sister on the spectrum of operation for female *exempla*. As a result of the opening up of the conceptual space used to consider gendered exemplary behaviours, their status as an *exemplum* becomes more secure as a rhetorical device, rather than as truly imitable *exempla*.

In rendering Helvia's sister nameless and basing her courage and virtuous behaviour on that of traditional Republican women, Seneca frames her as a literary blueprint for future female *exempla* as constructed by male authors – for the male voice is still

required to transmit exemplary deeds at this point in time.³⁰³ Yet paradoxically, in rendering her nameless, her own longevity within the exemplary tradition is undermined – as Langlands notes, the individual identification of an *exemplum* via their name is an essential part of fulfilling the criteria of belonging to the wider exemplary discourse.³⁰⁴ Although there is a case for suggesting that Helvia's sister does not need to be named in a letter between familiars – the recipient would not need to be told who their sister was – it is the contrast between several other members of Annaei being named in the text and the sister's namelessness that is significant here, especially in relation to the idea of rhetorical paradoxes. Helvia herself is also not directly named in the text itself, but the title of the *consolatio* in the literary tradition, as well as Helvia's known status as Seneca the Elder's wife (as a prominent elite family member), means that her identity would have been known. The same is true of her other sons, Novatus and Mela (named at *Sen. Contr.* 1. *praef.*), who were similarly well-known. Her sister, despite being married to a prominent statesman, deliberately chose a life of seclusion (19.6), easing the path to anonymity. However, she cannot have been totally anonymous in elite society, given her attempts several years earlier to acquire a political foothold for Seneca (19.2) – a fact that must have involved interactions with other prominent men and/or women. Her anonymity here is utilised as a paradox, one that crosses the boundary between practical usage and ethical reflection, and underlines her function as a rhetorical device.

In the case of Helvia, Seneca opens his consolation to his mother by setting her apart from the rest of her sex – employing the same technique as in the *ad Marciam* – once more opening up a conceptual space for the consideration of gendered exemplary behaviour.³⁰⁵ Helvia is *mater optima*, hinting at a subtle comparison being made by

³⁰³ At 20.1, Seneca tells Helvia that she should imagine his spirit in her mind (similar to the advice given to Marcia in imagining her father is speaking to her), crystallising his male praeceptor role for her. As we will see in the next chapter, Pliny reveals that he is told about female bravery from a woman (*Pl. Ep.* 7.19). However, the male voice is still required to transmit it to a wider audience.

³⁰⁴ Langlands (2006) 186, where it is noted that unnamed *exempla* are normally associated with a lower social status in Valerius Maximus.

³⁰⁵ This style of opening is not evident in the *Consolatio ad Polybium*.

Seneca with other mothers through the adjective *optima* (1.1).³⁰⁶ To be ‘excellent’ or ‘best’ implies that Seneca has already embarked on a process of evaluation and judgement prior to committing himself to the text; at the same time, it suggests that Helvia stands apart from other mothers by virtue of being judged as better than them. This sense of standing alone, of occupying a lonely position on the spectrum of operation as *optima*, is echoed in the reference to her being *exposita* (‘exposed’) at birth by the hands of Fortune at 2.4 (as opposed to the antiquated custom of literal exposure at the hands of the baby’s father, should he wish it) following the death of her mother in childbirth, thus metaphorically rendering her as an outcast.

Her individual uniqueness *as a woman* (rather than as a mother) is underscored further through the catalogue of losses that she has endured: having lost her mother at birth, she also suffered the loss of her brother, husband, and three grandchildren – and even Seneca himself through his exile (2.4-5). Seneca has cast Helvia as a lonely mother figure adrift in a sea of sorrow caused by this plethora of familial losses, being battered by *tot pericula, tot metus* (‘countless dangers, countless fears’, 2.5). In case Helvia has failed to understand her singularity as a result of her misfortunes, Seneca then demands that she does not give in to the temptations of unchecked wailing and lamentation typical of grieving women (3.1): she must retain her ‘other’ status, and remain set apart from them even as Seneca places all of her misfortunes in front of her in a heap (*Nihil tibi subduxi ex malis tuis, sed omnia coacervata ante te posui*; 3.2).

Having created an image of Helvia as unique woman at the beginning of the text, situating her at one end of the spectrum of operation, Seneca returns to Helvia’s own exemplary status at section 14.1-3, concentrating on her status as a virtuous mother. As noted in the previous section, this rests upon her being ‘other’ to contemporary women in her social circle, in that she has protected their financial assets (and even grown them), staved off any temptation to use her sons for her own ambition or self-

³⁰⁶ One could argue that this opening may be ‘typical’ of how a son could address his mother; however, the later comparisons made with other women at sections 14 and 16 – and again at section 19, when Helvia is compared implicitly with her sister – suggests that *optima* is being used as a deliberate indicator of comparison.

interest, and kept her own counsel. Her refusal to give into her *muliebris impotentia*, where male relatives are used by women for their own *utilitas* (advantage), is the source of her *virtus*, but, paradoxically, at the same time this makes her unwomanly, or not-woman (yet not quite a man either) – she becomes her own sub-category of (wo)manhood.³⁰⁷ This is highlighted further in section 16:

A te plus exigit vita ab initio fortior; non potest muliebris excusatio contingere ei, a qua omnia muliebria vitia afuerunt. Non te maximum saeculi malum, impudicitia, in numerum plurium adduxit; non gemmae te, non margaritae flexerunt; non tibi divitiae velut maximum generis humani bonum refulserunt; non te, bene in antiqua et severa institutam domo, periculosa etiam probis peiorum detorsit imitatio; numquam te fecunditatis tuae, quasi exprobraret aetatem, puduit, numquam more aliarum, quibus omnis commendatio ex forma petitur, tumescentem uterum abscondisti quasi indecens onus, nec intra viscera tua conceptas spes liberorum elisisti; non faciem coloribus ac lenociniis polluisti; numquam tibi placuit vestis, quae nihil amplius nudaret, cum poneretur. Unicum tibi ornamentum, pulcherrima et nulli obnoxia aetati forma, maximum decus visa est pudicitia. Non potes itaque ad obtinendum dolorem muliebre nomen praetendere, ex quo te virtutes tuae seduxerunt; tantum debes a feminarum lacrimis abesse, quantum vitiis.

From you life, that was sterner from the start, requires more; the excuse of being a woman can be of no avail to one who has always lacked all the weaknesses of a woman. Unchastity, the greatest evil of our time, has never classed you with the great majority of women; jewels have not moved you, nor pearls; to your eyes the glitter of riches has not seemed the greatest boon of the human race; you, who were soundly trained in an old-fashioned and strict household, have not been perverted by the imitation of worse women that leads even the virtuous into pitfalls; you have never blushed for the number of your children, as if it taunted you with your years, never have you, in the manner of other women whose only recommendation lies in their beauty, tried to conceal your pregnancy as if an unseemly burden, nor have you ever crushed the hope of children that were being nurtured in your body; you have not defiled your face with paints and cosmetics; never have you fancied the kind of dress that exposed no

³⁰⁷ Fabre-Serris (2015) 101-3 notes that not only is Seneca creating women as a separate *genus* of humanity, he is also developing a further sub-category of womanhood who represent *vitia* (vices) – those who give into the weaknesses of the bodies, using their *pudicitia* as a sexual commodity (cf. Langlands (2006) 108). Hence this metaphor of sub-categorisation can be extended to gender as well, as part of the wider rhetorical exercise embodied within Helvia as an ethical and moral *exemplum* – those who are not quite man, like Helvia herself.

greater nakedness by being removed. In you has been seen that peerless ornament, that fairest beauty on which time lays no hand, that chiefest glory which is modesty. You cannot, therefore, allege your womanhood as an excuse for persistent grief, for your very virtues set you apart; you must be as far removed from woman's tears as from her vices. (*Helv.*16.2-5)

As Gunderson notes, it is her lack of womanly weakness and steadfast adherence to *pudicitia* in contrast with the *impudicitia* of other women that ironically means she cannot use the excuse of being a woman to justify her grief.³⁰⁸ Helvia once more stands apart (*seducere*), occupying a unique position on the exemplary spectrum of operation, one that she is urged to maintain (*'tantum debes abesse'*). Nonetheless, her standing apart rests on the foundation of being transgressive: by *not* seeking power and by *not* being *impudicitia*, she becomes an outlier in her own society.

Helvia's transition along the exemplary spectrum of operation from *exemplum* to exemplary learner in section 19 – clearly demarcated by the presentation of her sister as an *exemplum* in the mould of heroic Republican women – threatens to destabilise Helvia's own position as an *exemplum*, not only in how she still has much to learn from other role models, but as the *optima mater*, the ideal Stoic mother. Seneca reveals his aunt (Helvia's sister) to have been *maternus* (motherly) and *pious* (devoted) towards him when he was a young child, having been taken by her to Rome and nursed by her during a period of illness. She also provided him with financial support when he stood for his first significant political position, overcoming her introvert nature (19.2).³⁰⁹ The relationship between Seneca and his aunt is represented as equivalent to that of Helvia and her son, not only creating a model of familial harmony, but also demonstrating that motherhood is not solely dependent on direct blood ties between mother and son.³¹⁰ Such bonds of kinship and representations of

³⁰⁸ Gunderson (2015) 99.

³⁰⁹ *Helv.* 19.2: *Illius manibus in urbem perlatus sum, illius pio maternoque nutricio per longum tempus aeger convalui; illa pro quaestura mea gratiam suam extendit et, quae ne sermonis quidem aut clarae salutationis sustinuit audaciam, pro me vicit indulgentia verecundiam.* ('It was in her arms that I was carried to Rome, it was by her devoted and motherly nursing that I recovered from a lengthened illness; she it was who, when I was standing for the quaestorship, gave me generous support – she, who lacked the courage even for conversation or a loud greeting, in order to help me, conquered her shyness by her love.')

³¹⁰ Gloyn (2017) 39-40.

motherhood were not unusual in view of life expectancy rates, adoption, and so on; what is of note here is how Helvia's previously defined exemplary motherhood can be undermined through the role that her sister played in Seneca's upbringing.³¹¹ It is his aunt who appears to have provided the emotional and financial support required by Seneca as a young boy: yet this latter aspect is another paradox of the female *exemplum* in this text. Although the specifics remain ambiguous, in giving him generous support during his bid for the quaestorship, there is a potential implication that his aunt has acted in a way suggestive of that with which he criticises women at 14.2 – liaising with other elite families in securing votes for her nephew. Whilst the act of doing this is not of itself worthy of specific criticism (being a common feature of Roman politics), it is the way in which it is set up that is framed as exemplary, in contrast to unchaste women who engage in such behaviour as part of their wider immoral make-up. In addition, Helvia's sister is noted as being almost invisible for 16 years whilst residing in Egypt (19.6). Her distance from society marks her as *unicum exemplum*: a singular example of reserve in a society full of gossips.³¹²

For Helvia and her sister, it is possible for their position on the exemplary spectrum to vary according to context. Both women can be regarded simultaneously as an 'outlier' within their society, a feature normally regarded as transgressive, simply by *not* acting as other women do. Yet at the same time, both can be viewed as exemplary within the family unit – still potentially an outlier, but by virtue of being exemplary rather than a 'true' transgressor, and representing a different position on the spectrum of operation for female *exempla*. The very nature of these various paradoxes and tensions within the text combine to produce a plethora of questions about the nature of female exemplarity, and what it means to be a woman within Claudian society. These paradoxes are permitted as a result of the widening of the conceptual space within which female exemplary behaviour can be considered,

³¹¹ See Dixon (1988), (1992) and Rawson (1986) for more on the fluid definition of motherhood in the Roman world.

³¹² It seems remarkable that the wife of a prominent statesman was rarely seen in society, even among elite circles, and that she never played any part in patronage requests that were a common feature of political and social life among the elite.

which in both of Seneca's consolations to women results in a further expansion of this space.

4.4 Conclusion

By pushing the boundaries of what female exemplary behaviour could encompass, and in hinting at how it could be of relevance to everyday life within the home, Seneca allows for the *possibility* of more women to be characterised as meaningful *exempla* that could, potentially, be truly imitable.

My analysis of *exempla* in both consolations addressed to female recipients has demonstrated that a rhetoric of transgressiveness, associated with the descriptions of traditional female *exempla* such as Cloelia, persisted within Seneca's consolations at the same time as he includes them as part of his revised exemplary system that emphasises living role models over characters from the past. The view of men's position in the Roman world persisted over time and throughout various literary genres, while the skills learned in declamatory exercises to debate exemplary behaviour remained focused on gender, and the right of women to be situated within the exemplary sphere. This is why, even within Seneca's revised exemplary programme that dedicates more space to the inclusion of women, their exemplary status retains the possibility of being threatened, undermining the potential for female *exempla* to be truly imitable.

In the case of Helvia and her sister, the number of paradoxes that result from Seneca's description of their exemplarity pushes them towards being categorised as rhetorical devices, used predominantly for ethical and moral thinking rather than as models for emulation. By framing Helvia and her sister (and Marcia) in this way, Seneca has opened out the possibilities for later authors to include greater numbers of women alongside men as *exempla* used for ethical and moral thinking, rather than exclusively as models for emulation or avoidance. In this regard, Seneca has (ironically) levelled out the usage of male and female *exempla*, theoretically

equalising them in relation to their gender. Whilst the ability to be an *exemplum* for rhetorical purposes does not necessarily differ according to gender, gender remains important in the context of imitability. Exemplary women may be admired by men, but were not intended specifically for emulation by them; furthermore, this imitability is often rendered problematic (even along gendered lines) due the impact of a rhetoric of transgression that categorises women's deeds as 'singular' or 'unique'. In order for a woman to belong to the exemplary sphere she had to be defined as *unicum*, and (as we saw in earlier chapters) this 'rhetoric of transgressiveness' relies on implicit reference to the masculine definition of *virtus*. So, for a woman to demonstrate *virtus*, she must be rendered automatically as an outlier, or 'other', from the very outset.

Due to this rhetorical paradox, authors such as Seneca have to work hard to make their 'truly' exemplary women *not* appear as transgressive outliers on this spectrum. Hence, we can observe that there is a 'gendered usability' evident in Seneca's literary representation of Roman *exempla*, where his female *exempla* (ironically) have greater possibilities for being an *exemplum* – fitting into a conservative system – when they exhibit transgressive tendencies at the conceptual (or rhetorical) level. Consequently, the potential for female *exempla* to be imitable remains constantly under threat even within the wider revised exemplary system of the first-century CE, and destabilises the looping nature of Roller's discourse of exemplarity. Nevertheless, the turn towards evaluating exemplary women on their own terms continued throughout the rest of the first-century CE, such as in tales of female bravery in the context of the Stoic opposition. It is partly these women to which we turn in the next chapter, where we will observe that Pliny continues to grapple with the issues outlined here.

CHAPTER FIVE

Attempting to Level the Playing Field: Female *Exempla* in Pliny's *Epistulae*

5.1 Introduction

5.1.1 Chapter aims

This chapter forms the final textual analysis of the thesis. Using Pliny's *Epistulae*, I will show how the ideas around the construction of *exempla* as a rhetorical device (with the specific parameters associated with gender) persisted at the turn of the second century CE. Like Seneca, Pliny demonstrates how women can act as living role models for other women (based upon a broader meaning of virtue), and takes an additional step forward in the exemplary domain by offering the possibility of men learning virtue from women as well as from other men. This confers a sense of gender 'neutrality' to the living role models that he includes within his letter collection.

On the surface, therefore, Pliny suggests that gender boundaries can be removed in how his living *exempla* can be adopted by his readers. He identifies instances of wifely virtue and chastity as living role models, citing particular examples as instructive for both men and women equally.³¹³ However, a close analysis of several of these female models reveals that, on the occasions when Pliny engages with the exemplary discourse, they too are constructed in accordance with the literary techniques shown in the other chapters of this thesis. These techniques concentrate on the implicit adoption of an imagined conceptual space within which female exemplary behaviour is considered, and the prevalence of the rhetoric of

³¹³ Noted by Langlands (2014).

transgression that marks an individual as ‘beyond her sex’ – techniques that are still largely missing in the context of male *exempla*.

In the example of Arria the Elder (*Ep.* 3.16), I show how Pliny adopts the story-telling tradition of this common *exemplum* of the era, utilising the general flexibility of the *exemplum* to create his own version of her tale – but one that retains elements of the rhetoric of transgression that underpins all female *exempla* in general. This has the effect of complicating her ability to be imitable for other women, even as it is Fannia – her granddaughter – that narrates this tale. I then turn to Fannia herself (*Ep.* 7.19) as an example of how Pliny seeks to transform a living contemporary into an exemplary role model for others, but ultimately adopts aspects of the Roman exemplary discourse that complicates Fannia’s imitable qualities as a female *exemplum*. Finally, I show how in the case of Ummidia Quadratilla (*Ep.* 7.24), Pliny appears to indulge in a form of rhetorical game, where he retains the gendered exemplary conceptual space to consider the exemplary (or otherwise) natures of Ummidia and her grandson. As this analysis shows, it is only the female character in this letter who is subject to negative rhetorical manipulation, undergoing several shifts on the exemplary spectrum of operation. This is in direct contrast to the male character, whose position remains static throughout, despite the challenges of his grandmother’s way of life. Overall, therefore, the chapter shows that, even as Pliny seemingly moves away from the approach taken by Valerius Maximus in particular, the mechanism used to discuss these female *exempla* reveal close similarities to Valerius – and the rhetorical methods adopted in declamation. In other words, Pliny represents the most significant test of the arguments made in this thesis, but nevertheless I show that he still adheres to the gendered conceptual space that I have discussed in previous chapters.

5.1.2 Letters as a medium for *exempla*

The corpus of letters that comprises Pliny's collection were composed and arranged between 96 CE, just after the assassination of Domitian, and 112 CE.³¹⁴ His collection spans a period of imperial succession that was marked by a general cultural shift towards conservatism in personal and public values – a shift that is evident throughout his *Letters*.³¹⁵ As Shelton notes, Pliny represents himself as an advocate for this change (especially from the accession of Trajan onwards), and uses his *Letters* as the means by which he can offer paradigms of how men and women would act under this new ideology of traditional social roles and conventions.³¹⁶

With its relatively simple and accessible communication style, the letter writer is able to create an 'intimate space' that permits the reader a privileged insight into the thoughts and life of the letter's producer.³¹⁷ As a result, the form lends itself to what Hoffer defines as a 'mutually beneficial exchange [*sic*] of cultural value, of symbolic capital', where the author is able to impart knowledge at the same time as the reader receives it. Such an exchange also works to reinforce cultural hierarchies (for example, mentor-protégé, man-woman, father-son), where the letter writer simultaneously communicates aspects of the underpinning social and cultural hegemony.³¹⁸

³¹⁴ Bradley (2010) 390. It is widely assumed that Pliny died whilst on active service as governor of Pontus-Bithynia; see Gibson (2020) 239 on the abruptness of the collection's ending.

³¹⁵ The letters cover the rules of Domitian, Nerva and Trajan. A general 'macro-chronology' is evident across the collection in addition to broader themes that underpin each book (Gibson (2012) 62; see also Edwards (2005) 280). As Gibson notes, the reader is encouraged to discover the overall artistry and design of the collection, and posits that greater cultural prestige could have been conferred onto authors of texts that were not arranged according to a strict chronology (*op cit.* 71-72).

³¹⁶ Shelton (2013) 12. Pliny uses the *Panegyricus* as a vehicle for extolling the virtues of the emperor himself, and gives space to the imperial women within this speech, too (*Paneg.* 83-84). The *Letters* focus only on his immediate social circle (with the exception of book 10 – likely to have been a later addition – that is comprised of his correspondence with Trajan as governor of Pontus-Bithynia). I am focusing solely on books 1 to 9 of the *Letters* in this chapter.

³¹⁷ See Morello and Morrison (2007) vi-xii on the letter and the expectations associated with its literary form.

³¹⁸ Hoffer (1999) 133-34.

As noted in this thesis, one of these cultural hierarchies in the Roman world concerns the construction of *exempla* within literary texts, and the differences that are evident according to the gender of the *exemplum* in question. Thus the flexibility of the letter form, combined with the broader, more implicit cultural ideas around social status, gender and age, makes the letter a suitable vehicle for continuing the construction and deployment of *exempla*. Furthermore, the letter's capacity to transmit advice and knowledge enables it to pursue a wider programme, using *exempla* to reflect upon wider moral and ethical concerns that fit within this.³¹⁹ Therefore, as Morrison and Morello note, 'in pursuing a didactic agenda, the letter genre becomes remarkably elastic, adapting and adopting features from almost any other genre for best effect', with this didactic agenda being enhanced when the collection of letters is viewed as a whole.³²⁰

As a vehicle for constructing and communicating the social value of *exempla*, the letter form lends itself well to Pliny's broader moralising agenda.³²¹ In turn, as I have shown in Valerius Maximus' collection of *exempla* and the consolations of Seneca, the *exemplum* itself is an essential tool in communicating moral and ethical concerns. Pliny utilises it to excellent effect, creating new *exempla* of both sexes relevant for his contemporary audience, and transforming himself into an *exemplum* for the senator of the Trajanic era. As I demonstrate in this chapter, in the process of creating some of his exemplary women, declamatory echoes of how the female *exemplum* is rhetoricised within the defined exemplary conceptual space can be identified within several of these vignettes. This is once again dependent upon the gender of the *exemplum*, with Pliny's *Letters* containing women that are subject to the same

³¹⁹ Bradley (*op. cit.*) 396.

³²⁰ Morello and Morrison (*op cit.*) x. See also Edwards (2005) for a general overview on epistolography in the ancient world.

³²¹ As Langlands (2014) 226-27 notes, any genre that deals with contemporary society and living individuals (such as letters, consolations and eulogies) tends to include a larger volume of women who are spoken of in praiseworthy terms – for example, Cicero's letters. The influence of Cicero as a letter writer on Pliny is well-attested; see Gibson and Morello (2012) 75-103 for an in-depth of analysis of the influence of Cicero (and Seneca) on Pliny's own epistolary programme.

conceptual processes and rhetorical manipulation as in other genres, as demonstrated in previous chapters.³²²

5.2 *Exempla at the End of the First Century CE*

5.2.1 'Done to death' *exempla* – traditional values over traditional *exempla*

As noted in the Introduction chapter of this thesis, over the course of the first century CE a number of political, cultural and social changes catalysed shifts in the types of *exempla* that authors used within their texts. As the emperor claimed exemplary pre-eminence as *princeps* – narrowing the focus of who performed exemplary deeds, and where – the traditional emphasis on patriotism and self-sacrifice on behalf of the state, as associated with Republican *exempla*, was gradually superseded by exemplary role models that came from an individual's own social circles.³²³ As senatorial opposition to imperial power grew, the wider exemplary discourse began to place emphasis on particular themes, such as resistance to autocracy and a revised form of civic and personal virtue.³²⁴ This is not to deny that Republican *exempla* still retained a place within Roman moral discourse: Quintilian (Pliny's own teacher of rhetoric) referred to the importance of using them as illustrative examples within his treatise on rhetoric and oratory, arguing that the good orator should be able to draw upon such examples when needed.³²⁵ However, their relevance politically by this time had decreased, as Seneca alluded to when he refers to Cato as a 'done to death'

³²² Pliny does not discuss every single woman in his *Letters* in terms of their potential to be an *exemplum*. Nevertheless, common across the different women are the underlying tendencies in how they are framed as a rhetorical device.

³²³ See Kraus (2005) 186-89 for the concentration of the public performative aspects of *exempla* towards the emperor.

³²⁴ Langlands (2018a) 206.

³²⁵ Quint. *Inst.* 2.4.20-21, 5.11.1-10; 12.2.29-31.

exemplum (Ep. 24.6).³²⁶ Consequently, Republican *exempla* had lost their symbolic force by the end of the first century, acquiring a stock laudatory function in general.³²⁷

Pliny himself makes scant references to traditional *exempla* in his *Letters*, creating instead what Gazich defines as a novel rhetoric of exemplarity that transforms the everyday life and the people within it into meaningful words and deeds for the community as a whole.³²⁸ Through emphasising ‘biographical portraits and character sketches’ over heroic deeds, he creates a ‘living exemplary tradition’ that concentrates on personal connections, individual experience and memory.³²⁹ For Pliny, these become the foundations upon which *exempla* can be created, and given meaningful resonance within the immediate community.³³⁰ As a result, Pliny’s *Letters* are the vehicle through which his new, modern *exempla* can take their place alongside the traditional stock of *exempla*, restoring the exemplary discourse that had been temporarily damaged under Domitian.³³¹

At the same time, as Riggsby notes, the relationship between the individual and community in Pliny is still rooted in conservative ideas and traditions. In placing his *exempla* into the public domain (via the medium of his *Letters*), Pliny is conforming to the community-based system of exemplary ethics where virtue is constructed under (or through the gaze of) the community. Ascribing ethical value to his *exempla* necessitated bringing them forward for judgement by his readership, enabling the everyday and the domestic to attain moral virtue.³³² As such, Roller’s exemplary

³²⁶ A discussion on Cato as the ‘done to death’ *exemplum* can be found in Morello (2018), whose primary concern is how authors such as Pliny and Martial rework Republican *exempla* in counter-factual terms to explore conceptions of power. The counter-factual mode itself becomes an important marker of modernity at the turn of the century.

³²⁷ Gowing (2005) 106.

³²⁸ Gazich (2003) 123. Gibson and Morello (2012) 127 note that Pliny’s use of traditional *exempla* is concentrated on the *Panegyricus*, which, as a laudatory text, lends itself as a more appropriate medium for such references.

³²⁹ Langlands (2014) 224-25.

³³⁰ Langlands (2018a) 248-49.

³³¹ Langlands (*op. cit.*); cf. Gazich (2003) 140 on the ruptured chain of exemplarity under Domitian.

³³² Riggsby (1998) 77-80 and 92-93. As Gibson (2003) 252-254 identifies, Pliny is eschewing the Senecan emphasis on the inner self and improvement of one’s character. This is in favour of a programme of self-fashioning that demonstrates how different social and political roles can be fulfilled; Edwards (2005) 280-281. As Edwards remarks, ‘the self presented by Pliny in his letters is

discourse remains pertinent to this study of Pliny's *Letters*: it is Pliny who acts as the primary audience by attaching moral value to his individual *exempla*, with his readers performing the role of the secondary audience. Therefore, there is an assumption (by Pliny) that his *exempla* can be applied systematically to the real world as role models for the living, thus perpetuating the exemplary discourse among his community and rendering them as imitable.³³³

5.2.2 Living role models – adding the human touch

The *exempla* that Pliny constructs are intended to act as practical guides to life, based upon their personal qualities. The lessons that the reader is expected to take away focus on morality, which, in turn, will bring stability back into the community after the dark days of Domitian.³³⁴ The reader is therefore expected to be active in analysing their role models, adapting the lessons they have learned from the examples they are shown, and taking this forward into their own lives.³³⁵

It is this 'humanising' element – the emphasis on personal character – in Pliny's *Letters* that is integral to his construction of *exempla*.³³⁶ To ensure that the reader is fully conversant with Pliny's exemplary programme, he positions himself in the role of guide and mentor. He does this in two ways: firstly, in positioning himself as an exemplary patron and mentor in action, showing his young protégés (including Ummidius Quadratus, who we will meet in section 5.4.4 below) how the young orator – Quintilian's *vir bonus dicendi peritus* – should navigate his way through the courts, as well as the *cursus honorum*.³³⁷ This didactic persona, of the older man instructing

clearly constructed for public consumption'. Also see Leach (1990) for further discussion of Pliny's self-fashioning.

³³³ Pliny mentions the term *exemplum* over 60 times across the *Letters* – an indicator of its importance as a rhetorical device to the collection as whole. Jones (2001) 34.

³³⁴ Bradley (2010) 397-98.

³³⁵ Langlands (2018a) 249 notes that it lends an element of 'immediacy' to his *exempla* as a mechanism through which society can seek to be transformed swiftly without recourse to lengthy periods of social change. This aspect is a feature of post-Domitianic literature more widely.

³³⁶ For more on the humanist element in Pliny (as a literary construct), see Méthy (2007).

³³⁷ 'A good man skilled in speaking', Quint. *Inst.* 12.1.1.

and guiding his *iuvenes*, confers a degree of paternal authority onto his text, in the tradition of his literary role models such as Cicero.³³⁸

The second method used is to talk about his own exemplary influences, indicating their merits as living role models, as well as hinting at where identified shortcomings may have prompted Pliny to turn to alternative individuals to accommodate any deficiencies.³³⁹ There are four prominent male role models who had an impact on Pliny's own life that can be identified within the collection. These are Vestricius Spurinna (*Ep.* 2.7, 3.1), Corellius Rufus (4.17), Verginius Rufus (2.1, 9.19) and his uncle, Pliny the Elder (3.5, 6.16, 6.20).³⁴⁰ Each can be aligned to a particular principle (and in most cases, map onto the career of a senator): therefore, his uncle is a model for learning (when Pliny was an adolescent) and *studia* more generally, Verginius Rufus as a mentor and patron for Pliny's early career, Corellius for his political principles, and Spurinna for the elderly statesman figure and for retirement from a public career.³⁴¹

However, for each man, implicit limitations can be identified underneath the surface, reflecting how selecting *exempla* for use as living role models is not without difficulty.³⁴² For example, in the context of finding a balance between *otium* and *studia*, the life of Spurinna (as a 'model of cultured existence') in retirement is offset

³³⁸ See Bernstein (2008) for a detailed discussion of Pliny's presentation of himself as a father figure based upon 'multiple forms of relatedness'. This enables Pliny to create a rhetoric (what Bernstein calls 'a discourse of paternity') where he adopts a fatherly role (as a childless man) without any form of biological relationship to his letter recipient. The literary father – the nurturer, instructor, and exemplary role model – becomes more important than the biological father within this model.

³³⁹ See Gibson and Morello (2012) 129-134.

³⁴⁰ I have identified only the letters where it is clear that these men had an influence on the young Pliny. There are other references to these individuals elsewhere in the *Letters*, occasionally indirectly (such as through reference to their family members: Spurinna: *Ep.* 1.5, 3.10, 4.27; Corellius: 5.1, 7.11, 7.31, 9.13; Verginius: 3.10, 5.3, 6.10; Pliny the Elder: 5.8).

³⁴¹ It is likely that his uncle had connections to Spurinna, Verginius and Corellius through their hometown of Comum. Verginius acted as a guardian/tutor after the death of Pliny's own father (*Ep.* 2.1.8) prior to formal adoption by his uncle when Pliny reached 18 years of age (6.20.5); see Gibson and Morello (2012) 105-135 for more on these men as influential upon Pliny's life. All four had prestigious public careers, although his uncle did not reach the position of consul – he was, however, important within the military and had direct connections with the emperor; Gibson (2020) 73-75.

³⁴² Gibson and Morello (2012) 129-134.

against his uncle's unceasing devotion to work.³⁴³ As Henderson notes, the two men are presented in dialectical parallel, suggesting that a middle ground can be reached – one that, by implication, Pliny has reached himself.³⁴⁴ Similarly, Pliny's uncle, depicted as both a *domesticum exemplum* through his literary pursuits (5.8.4-5) and an *exemplum* in the traditional mould through his immense courage in the face of fear at the time of the Vesuvius eruption (6.16), is used as the means by which Pliny can reveal how the ethical learner can make mistakes, such as through unthinking imitation of their elders.³⁴⁵ In identifying Pliny's own adolescent 'unheroic' tendencies and 'excessive devotion to study' in his obsession with continuing his studies at 6.16.7 (in preference to investigating what was happening outside), Pliny depicts himself as attempting to follow the model of the Elder's obsession with *studia*.³⁴⁶

Underlying this, however, is a subtle message that the individual needs to find where the boundaries are for certain moral virtues.³⁴⁷ In using his role models in this considered way, Pliny demonstrates that he is able to recognise the limitations of his own models, and prompts the learner to do the same through their own moral reasoning. Nevertheless, despite the acknowledgement that these role models have limitations, this does not categorise them as unrepeatable overall. It is through the enhanced practical function – how *exempla* can be applied as an illustration of a

³⁴³ Quote from Johnson (2010) 37-38, whose focus is on Spurrina as a model for moderation and self-control in retirement.

³⁴⁴ Henderson (2002) 58-66, 260-268.

³⁴⁵ *Ep.* 5.8.4-5: *Me vero ad hoc studium impellit domesticum quoque exemplum. Avunculus meus idemque per adoptionem pater historias et quidem religiosissime scripsit. Invenio autem apud sapientes honestissimum esse maiorum vestigia sequi, si modo recto itinere praecesserint* ('In my case family precedent is an additional incentive to work of this kind [writing history]. My uncle, who was also my father by adoption, was a historian of scrupulous accuracy, and I find in the philosophers that it is an excellent thing to follow in the footsteps of one's forbears, provided that they trod an honest path'). See Jones (2001) for a detailed analysis of the two Vesuvius letters (6.16 and 6.20), including a focus on Pliny the Elder's status as both a heroic *exemplum* and a *domesticum exemplum*. Gibson (2020) 56-75 offers a more critical viewpoint on the Elder's exemplary actions during the time of the eruption, as well as his shortcomings in assisting the Younger's early career.

³⁴⁶ Gibson and Morello (2012) 57 and 60.

³⁴⁷ Cf. Langlands' concept of 'contested sites of exemplarity'.

broader way of living – that the potential difficulties around imitability, often associated with traditional *exempla*, are minimised.³⁴⁸

In general, therefore, Pliny moves away from the tropes associated with the traditional exemplary discourse. Only traces of the common rhetoric associated with the male heroic *exemplum* are evident: when describing his uncle's courage at 6.16 (as noted above), and in talking about the honours that are conferred onto Spurinna and his son. This is outlined in *Ep.* 2.7:

Here a senatu Vestricio Spurinnae principe auctore triumphalis statua decreta est, non ita ut multis, qui numquam in acie steterunt, numquam castra viderunt, numquam denique tubarum sonum nisi in spectaculis audierunt, verum ut illis, qui decus istud sudore et sanguine et factis adsequebantur. Nam Spurinna Bructerum regem vi et armis induxit in regnum, ostentatoque bello ferocissimam gentem, quod est pulcherrimum victoriae genus, terrore perdomuit. Et hoc quidem virtutis praemium, illud solacium doloris accepit, quod filio eius Cottio, quem amisit absens, habitus est honor statuae. Rarum id in iuvene; sed pater hoc quoque merebatur, cuius gravissimo vulnere magno aliquo fomento medendum fuit. Praeterea Cottius ipse tam clarum specimen indolis dederat, ut vita eius brevis et angusta debuerit hac velut immortalitate proferri. Nam tanta ei sanctitas gravitas auctoritas etiam, ut posset senes illos provocare virtute, quibus nunc honore adaequatus est.

Yesterday on the Emperor's proposal the Senate decreed a triumphal statue to Vestricius Spurinna, an honour granted to many who have never faced a battle, never seen a camp, nor even heard the sound of a trumpet except at the theatre; but Spurinna was one of those heroes whose honours were won by the blood and sweat of action. It was Spurinna who established the chief of the Bructeri in his kingdom by force of arms, and by mere threat of war against a savage people he terrorised it into submission, so winning the finest type of victory. Now he has his reward of merit; and to bring him consolation in grief, the honour of a statue was also granted to Cottius, the son who had died during his absence abroad. This is rarely granted to a young man, but in this case it was also due to the father whose grievous sorrow needed some special remedy to assuage it. Cottius himself had also given such marked indication of

³⁴⁸ This is not to say that Pliny *never* explicitly identifies an *exemplum* that is inimitable and at odds with his wider focus on moral virtue. For example, his abundant dislike of Regulus is obvious across the collection (*Ep.* 1.5, 1.20, 2.11, 2.20, 4.2, 4.7, 6.2).

his promise that some sort of immortality was required to extend a life thus cut short. His high principles, his sense of duty and influence were such as to make him rival our elders in merit, and he is now raised to be their equal in honour. (*Ep.* 2.7.1-4)

Here, Pliny blends personal virtue with military heroism, adapting the motif of intergenerational repeatability. The father's honours are granted on the basis of his glorious victory (*pulcherrimum victoriae genus*, 2.7.1-2), which, in turn, justifies the erection of a statue of his son as a consolation for his personal loss.³⁴⁹ The twist comes from the type of *virtus* associated with the son: his is comprised of principle and duty (*sanctitas, gravitas, auctoritas*) associated with his own innate qualities (*indolis*), rather than heroism (2.7.4). Pliny's definition of *virtus* associated with *exempla* has therefore widened (which we will see in the next section when considering the role granted to women), with a wider range of virtues now worthy of exemplary praise. Nonetheless, the trope of intergenerational repeatability is adhered to here in judging that the son is worthy of the same honours as the father, despite the differences in how these honours were earned (victory at war versus personal qualities). Pliny's focus here, therefore, is less the heroism of the father and more the totality of possibilities that can now be associated with the concept of *virtus*. Hence, in widening the field of virtue, space can be granted to various kinds of *exempla* – not just men.³⁵⁰

³⁴⁹ Pliny is also criticising the grounds on which honours had been granted by the Senate under previous emperors; see also *Ep.* 7.29. Here, honours are being conferred for the right reasons – heroism and personal virtue.

³⁵⁰ Langlands (2018a) 206 notes that towards the end of the first century, there was an increasing social inclusivity to exemplary ethics that granted increasing space for new kinds of exemplary heroes, such as women and slaves.

5.3 Dissolving Gender Boundaries?

5.3.1 De-gendering virtue

Rebecca Langlands' intervention on the use of women in Pliny's *Letters* clearly shows the innovative aspects of his exemplary programme, and his attempts to be 'self-consciously inclusive of both sexes' as moral *exempla*.³⁵¹ As this thesis has demonstrated, the idea of virtue in Roman society was highly gendered, identifying the female *exemplum* as unique, and was coupled with using a conceptual space to consider female exemplarity. This is frequently associated with a rhetoric of transgression that depicts women as 'going beyond their sex' and standing apart from other women. In contrast, Pliny uses the term *virtus* as associated with a wider understanding of moral virtue (rather than masculine courage), which permits women to be situated alongside men within the same moral sphere for the first time – dissolving the boundaries in place between men and women in terms of their rhetorical force. As a consequence, both sexes are given a 'moral equivalence', with the *facta dictaque virorum feminarumque* ('deeds and words of men and women', 3.16.1) presented as mutually compatible across the sexes – in other words, that exemplary women can inspire men.³⁵² In *Ep.* 5.14.4, Pliny is clear in stating that both sexes can stand as objects of admiration and/example to all, regardless of gender:

Una diligimus, una dileximus omnes fere quos aetas nostra in utroque sexu aemulandos tulit...

Together we have admired and still admire almost every man or woman who is an example to our generation...

³⁵¹ Langlands (2014) 217. Langlands offers a more nuanced analysis of the inclusion of women in comparison with, for example, Carlon (2009) and Shelton (2013). These works offer a narrow assessment of the women in Pliny's *Letters*, adopting either a prosopographical viewpoint (Shelton) – despite the scant evidence of these women's lives in the majority of instances – or in the context of Pliny's own self-representation (Carlon), not seeing them on their own merits. Although Shelton does consider the women as *exempla*, it is more in terms of how they fit broader social roles (as the ideal wife, mother etc.) rather than how the female *exemplum* as a rhetorical device is applied in this context (the focus of this chapter). The body of work of Centlivres Challet (2008, 2012, 2013) similarly focuses on the dissolving of gender boundaries in the context of moral virtue.

³⁵² Langlands (2014) 214-20.

Thus, any reference to Pliny's women as being 'outstanding' among their sex is applied in the same way to the men whose virtues he extols.³⁵³ To give an example of this levelling in action, in *Ep.* 4.19 Calpurnia Hispulla (his wife's aunt) is depicted as exemplary for her whole family due to her affectionate nature and her familial devotion (*pietatis exemplum*, 4.19.1), and even offered something that could replace a *father's* love to his orphaned daughter. Moreover, not only had she 'trained' her niece to become a worthy and loving wife for Pliny, but she is also included among the list of *male* relatives to whom the younger Calpurnia is a credit (*dignam patre, dignam te, dignam avo*, 4.19.1). Most notably, as a close friend of Pliny's mother, she in some sense formed Pliny as a worthy and loving mate for her niece (4.19.7).³⁵⁴ Calpurnia Hispulla is therefore presented as a woman influencing both women and men equally: living by example, substituting (in a positive way) for both men and women, and shaping a man's character as a future husband.

5.3.2 Echoes of the exemplary conceptual space

This balanced approach to his presentation of Calpurnia Hispulla reflects Pliny's ethical programme that privileges the quality of *humanitas*, finding *exempla* from the ordinary and sometimes anonymous whose loyalty and moral integrity are never in doubt (for example, the unnamed wife of Comum, who forced her husband to commit suicide in her wake; *Ep.* 6.24).³⁵⁵ In focusing on these virtues, Pliny is able to include traditional female *exempla* as moral equivalents to his living role models within his *Letters*, offering his own reinterpretation of these *exempla* as paragons of

³⁵³ From this, we can assume that women formed part of the readership of his *Letters*, for they are being shown how to perform as exemplary wives and mothers – their expected social roles; Langlands (2014) 234. The position adopted by Pliny in relation to moral virtue and sex is that advocated by the Stoic philosopher Musonius Rufus, who argued that women were capable of the same virtues as men – but performed within their designated gendered spaces; see Dobson (81-82) and Hemelrijk (1999) 61-62.

³⁵⁴ *Ep.* 4.17.7: *Nam cum matrem meam parentis loco vererere, me a pueritia statim formare laudare, talemque qualis nunc uxori meae videor, ominari solebas* ('For you respected my mother like a daughter, and have given me guidance and encouragement since my boyhood; you always foretold that I should become the man I am now in the eyes of my wife').

³⁵⁵ This does not, however, mean an equivalence in social roles: the sphere of activity for women was still largely restricted to the home, in line with the persistent motif of the loyal wife and doting mother.

humanist values.³⁵⁶ Pliny is largely successful in this programme. However, there are instances in the collection where there are echoes of the rhetoricisation techniques utilised by the other authors studied in this thesis when constructing their female *exempla*. Once more, this is dependent upon the use of the imagined conceptual space used to consider female exemplary behaviour, and subsequent shifts along the exemplary spectrum of operation that threaten to destabilise their position as a female *exemplum*. This is more apparent when Pliny adapts the traditional female *exemplum* of Arria. Nonetheless, even for those female *exempla* that embody more ‘human’ traits (such as Fannia’s charm and Ummidia Quadratilla’s decadent tastes), these echoes can still be found, as I show in the next section. Once again, issues arise in the context of imitability in particular, that, given Pliny’s emphasis on using role models, run the risk of destabilising the value of these individuals overall.

5.4 Transgressions and Contradictions: Adhering to the Rhetoric

Arria the Elder is a figure that, by Pliny’s time, has emerged as having a story-tradition associated with her, based upon her loyalty to her husband Caecina Paetus, executed in 42 CE, and the utterance of her famous words “*Paete, non dolet*” (“It does not hurt, Paetus”) before her suicide.³⁵⁷ Pliny bases his version of the Arria tale (*Ep.* 3.16) on the extra details about her life that are given to him by Arria’s own granddaughter Fannia, who tells him about Arria’s deeds personally and exclusively.³⁵⁸ It is this form

³⁵⁶ Langlands (2018a) 250-51 (cf. Méthy (2007)).

³⁵⁷ Further details about the rebellion led by Scribonianus can be found at Tac. *Ann.* 12.52 and *Hist.* 1.89, 2.75. Arria is also referred to in Martial (*Ep.* 1.13). The story-tradition around Arria continued into the next century; Cassius Dio includes her in his history of the Julio-Claudian period (*Rom. Ant.* 60.16.4). For more on story-traditions and female *exempla*, see section 3.3 on Cloelia (Valerius Maximus chapter).

³⁵⁸ The women associated with the Stoic opposition feature prominently within Pliny’s letter collection, indicating their overall importance to Pliny both as political figures, and as models of courage. These women of the Stoic opposition included Arrionilla (*Ep.* 1.5), Serrana Procula (1.14), Arria the Elder (3.16), Arria the Younger (3.11, 7.19, 9.13), Fannia (7.19, 9.13), Gratilla (3.11, 5.1), Anteia (9.13) and the Vestal Virgin Iunia (7.19). Only books 2 and 8 make no reference to the women of the Stoic opposition; Carlon (2009) 36-37. Out of the 13 letters that refer to the Stoic opposition more widely, 9 include reference to their female kin; Carlon (2009) 20. It is probable that Pliny’s inclusion of the women associated with the Stoic opposition was on the basis of a need to bolster his own reputation following the tyranny of Domitian’s rule; Carlon (2009) 18-20 and Dunn (2019) 147-48.

of verbal transmission that simultaneously demonstrates how exemplary tales about women are passed down by women themselves, and confers authority onto his own version. This means that Pliny ‘has a better Arria story to tell, something that the other Arria tellers of his day have missed’, emphasised by the *obscuritas* of the deeds that he reveals as previously missing from other versions of her exemplary tale.³⁵⁹

Fannia herself is then transformed into a new *exemplum* through the medium of Pliny’s letter about her (7.19). Letters 3.16 and 7.19 should be viewed as a linked pair, similar to the Vesuvius letters (6.16 and 6.20) about Pliny and his uncle as a personal *exemplum*: the first letter of the pairing establishes the grounds by which an individual is regarded as exemplary, and the second demonstrates how this exemplarity can be emulated across the generations (regardless of whether the interpreter fails or succeeds in living up to the exemplary standards established in the first letter).³⁶⁰ In using Fannia in this way, Pliny deploys a living person who has the potential to act as a role model for others. In doing so, Pliny appears to be widening the scope for women to be situated firmly as an *exemplum* for others to follow, and enhances this by implying that Fannia was influenced by the *exemplum* of her grandmother. As we saw in Seneca’s consolations, authors were no longer shying away from the suggestion that women could be inspired by other women from their family, and had begun to demonstrate how intergenerational repeatability, an important feature of the exemplary tradition, could apply to women.³⁶¹ However, Pliny ends up revealing a number of transgressive qualities associated with Arria that implies a residual yet important degree of inimitability, and he unwittingly undermines the potential for Fannia to be repeatable as well. As a result, Pliny adheres to the gendering of the exemplary discourse by rendering them both as inimitable.

³⁵⁹ Freudenburg (2001) 219. *Ep.* 3.16.2: *multa referebat aviae suae non minora hoc sed obscuriora* (‘she told me several things about her grandmother which were quite as heroic though less well known’).

³⁶⁰ I have taken Jones (2001) as inspiration here for demonstrating how the pairing of letters can rest upon the inimitability of an *exemplum*.

³⁶¹ Unlike in Seneca’s consolations, however, Fannia has not required the male voice to act as an intermediary: her own actions reveal a clear influence of her courageous grandmother, albeit through the male narrator.

5.4.1 Arria the Elder

Turning first to Arria at *Ep.* 3.16, Pliny's construction of her as an *exemplum* has its foundations rooted in a desire to show that the lesser-known deeds of an individual can be regarded as inherent to their (exemplary) nature, regardless of sex. In stating that 'the more famous words and deeds of men *and* women are not necessarily their greatest' (*facta dictaque virorum feminarumque alia clariora esse alia maiora*, 3.16.1), Pliny seems to remove (or at least downplay) the idea of difference between *exempla* of both genders, indicating that *exempla* of both genders have the potential to act and be judged equally. The repetition of this maxim at the end of the letter (3.16.13) suggests that Pliny believes that he has succeeded in this aim.

The deeds that Pliny will reveal to Nepos (the letter's recipient) are described as admirable (*mirabilia*), and, taken in combination, should be included within the exemplary tradition surrounding her.³⁶² By implication, therefore, Pliny is injecting his own authorial authority in order to develop the existing story-tradition surrounding Arria, thus expanding it beyond her famous death where she acted as an example to her husband (*quae marito et solacium mortis et exemplum fuit*, 3.16.2). Taken as a whole, the three stories that Pliny narrates appear initially to place her in a fixed position on the exemplary spectrum of operation. However, as we progress through the letter and move between each story, a growing destabilisation of her position on the spectrum becomes apparent, similar to the cumulative effect witnessed in the declamation exercise *DMin.* 272.³⁶³ These shifts work to undermine any practical, imitable potential she has as an *exemplum* for women in the real world, and align her more closely with the more time-honoured female *exempla* of the Republican tradition (like Cloelia) than with a contemporary role model.

³⁶² Sherwin-White (1966) 230 notes that in telling these stories about Arria he is following rhetorical principle of the *lex scholastica*, that requires the rule of three to be followed. The adherence to this principle supplements the usage of the conceptual space as a rhetorical device.

³⁶³ See section 2.3.2.

The first story he relays demonstrates her strength in concealing her grief from her ill husband following the death of their son, and in continuing to perform the role of mother to a living child (*Ep.* 3.16.3-6). In so doing, she had to lie to her husband about the health of their son in order to avoid hindering Paetus' own recovery (*quotiens cubiculum eius intraret, vivere filium atque etiam commodiorem esse simulabat, 'whenever she entered his room, she pretended that the son was still alive and even rather better', 3.16.4*). Her ability to temporarily lay aside her grief when visiting her sick husband is almost masculine in how she continues to perform her own specifically feminine form of *negotium* as a loyal wife. As noted by Pliny, her loyalty was demonstrated through her ability to suppress her feelings, the opposite of the usual wailing, breast-beating response to the death of a son:

Deinde, cum diu cohibitae lacrimae vincerent prorumperentque, egrediebatur; tunc se dolori dabat; satiata siccis oculis composito vultu redibat, tamquam orbitatem foris reliquisset.

Then when the tears she had held back for so long could no longer be kept from breaking out, she left the room; not till then did she give way to her grief. (*Ep.* 3.16.5)

Arria's capacity to master her emotions is established here as more heroic than the deed for which she is famous, plunging a dagger into her breast and speaking the words "*Paete, non dolet*" ("It does not hurt, Paetus"):

Sed tamen ista facienti, ista dicenti, gloria et aeternitas ante oculos erant; quo maius est sine praemio aeternitatis, sine praemio gloriae, abdere lacrimas operire luctum, amissoque filio matrem adhuc agere.

But on that well-known occasion she had fame and immortality before her eyes. It was surely even more heroic when she had no hope of any such reward, to stifle her tears, hide her grief, and continue to act the mother after she had lost her son. (*Ep.* 3.16.6)

Here, it is when Arria is at her most helpless that she becomes her most heroic: a heroism based on a paradox of *constantia* in grief, an excess of which is normally associated with highly emotional, and often irrational, women. At the same time, her

heroism is also linked to the loss of her status as a mother – this indicates that she could become heroic *only* through losing part of her womanly status. Therefore, her exemplary transgressiveness is predicated upon, and indeed requires, her to shed an essential part of what it means to be female.

In the second story (3.16.7-9), Arria's determination to accompany her husband back to Rome for trial is narrated. Her position as a loyal wife is emphasised: Arria begs the soldiers to allow her to travel alongside her husband. In adopting direct speech and speaking in Arria's voice, Pliny gives her words force – words that emphasise her devotion to her husband is so great that she is willing to place herself in a servile position:

“Nempe enim” inquit “daturi estis consulari viro servolos aliquos, quorum e manu cibum capiat a quibus vestiatur, a quibus calciatur; omnia sola praestabo.”

“This is a senator of consular rank”, she insisted, “and of course you will allow him a few slaves to serve his meals, dress him and put on his shoes; all of which I can do for him myself.” (Ep. 3.16.8)

As Shelton notes, Arria's willingness to take on the role of Paetus' slave fit with the cultural expectation that wives would always serve their husbands, regardless of the circumstances. In doing so, she seeks to ensure that the guards escorting Paetus are reminded of his own elite social status. Ultimately her pleadings fail, and she is forced to follow behind in a small boat: this failure to persuade her husband's captors suggests a chink in her exemplary armour, one which is further enhanced by the pathetic lonely image of her trailing in a much smaller boat behind her husband's temporary prison. Furthermore, there is a subtle transgressive rhetoric present in this episode, based upon her readiness to place herself in a different social class by adopting the position of a slave, and then by exposing herself to public view in an even more hopeless and diminished situation.³⁶⁴ As we saw in the case of Marius' soldier (*DMai* 3), the *vir* protects his own social status at all costs – therefore, Arria's

³⁶⁴ Shelton (2013) 26-27.

willingness to give up hers renders her exemplary, even as she does it to protect her husband.³⁶⁵

The final story (3.16.9-12) acts a precursor to her famous death, giving us an indication of her resolve to die alongside her husband. This begins with her chastising Vibia the wife of Scribonianus, leader of the conspiracy of which Paetus is charged with being involved in:

Eadem apud Claudium uxori Scriboniani, cum illa profiteretur indicium, "Ego", inquit "te audiam, cuius in gremio Scribonianus occisus est, et vivis?" Ex quo manifestum est ei consilium pulcherrimae mortis non subitum fuisse.

Again, when she came before Claudius and found the wife of Scribonianus volunteering to give evidence of the revolt, "Am I to listen to *you*," she cried, "who could go on living after Scribonianus died in your arms?" This proves that her determination to die a glorious death was not a sudden impulse. (*Ep.* 3.16.9)³⁶⁶

In publicly berating Vibia, Arria situates herself as separate to her in her devotion to her husband. Thus, whilst the standard rhetoric of transgression of a woman 'going beyond her sex' is absent here, Arria has metaphorically set herself apart from Vibia, establishing the foundations upon which she will eventually become a female *exemplum* through her suicide.³⁶⁷

This setting apart also marks the point at which Arria is once more destabilised on the spectrum of operation. Arria's determination to die is questioned by her son-in-law Thrasea, where he asks her if she would wish for her daughter to carry out a similar act if Thrasea himself was condemned to death (3.16.10).³⁶⁸ Her response – that she would, provided her daughter had been in as devoted a relationship as hers – demonstrates a self-conscious attempt on Arria's part to be seen as an *exemplum*

³⁶⁵ Section 2.2.2.

³⁶⁶ Cf. Tacitus, *Ann.* 12.52.

³⁶⁷ Shelton (2013) 30 notes that it was not unusual for the wives of condemned traitors to appeal to the empress to obtain a pardon for themselves.

³⁶⁸ Cf. Tacitus, *Ann.* 16.34.

for another woman, despite the doubt cast upon her imitable status by the other members of her family. This doubt is justified in the steps taken by her family to guard her more closely in an attempt to stop her from acting out her intentions, at which they fail:

“Nihil agitis” inquit; “potestis enim efficere ut male moriar, ut non moriar non potestis.” Dum haec dicit, exsiluit cathedra adversoque parieti caput ingenti impetu impegit et corruit. Focilata “Dixeram” inquit “vobis inventuram me quamlibet duram ad mortem viam, si vos facilem negassetis.”

“It is no good,” she said. “You can make me choose an ignoble death, but you cannot make it impossible.” With these words she leaped out of her chair and dashed her head against the wall opposite, so that she fell senseless from the violent blow. When she was brought round, “I told you,” she said, “that I should find a hard way to die if you denied me an easy one.” (*Ep.* 3.16.11-12)

Pliny remains ambiguous as to whether he believes that this act is exemplary, reflecting the misgivings of her male kin: instead, he focuses on praising her words (*Videntur haec tibi maiora illo “Paete, non dolet,” ad quod per haec perventum est?*, ‘Surely you think these words greater than the well-known “It does not hurt, Paetus” which was their culmination?’, 3.16.13). It is clear here that the motivation behind her self-maiming was transgressive in nature, as she has ignored the entreaties of her family. The inclusion of the doubt and fear expressed by Thrasea suggests that what she perceives as a glorious suicide could become viewed as a shameful (or unnecessary) death by others. Arria’s determination to die – and misrecognition of her own exemplary potential – has blinkered her recognition of this.

Arria’s acquisition of the status of an *exemplum* in Roman popular culture is on the basis of her virtues as a wife and mother, and for her remarkable courage shown in the face of death (‘safe’ exemplary territory for women). In attempting to create his own version of Arria’s tale, Pliny opens up the conceptual space used to construct the female *exemplum*. In consequence, we can see a progressive move towards destabilising Arria’s position on the exemplary spectrum of operation. Whilst the

explicit language of transgression is missing, it persists at the rhetorical level in how she situates herself as different to other mothers, wives, and social statuses, and it is made clear that her resolve to die is viewed as transgressive by her family. In this way, the notion of inimitability associated with the female *exemplum* is preserved, and Pliny's exemplary system remains gendered. Thus, to render female *exempla* as protagonists ought not to be mistaken for a stabilising of their role within the narration and, in consequence, for a fixing of their position on the spectrum of operation. As such, imitability remains out of reach.

5.4.2 Fannia

In *Ep.* 7.19, Pliny turns his attention to the sick figure of Clodia Fannia, the granddaughter of Arria the Elder who had been Pliny's source in 3.16. Despite the generational linkage between these two women (highlighted in 3.16), Pliny makes no mention of her grandmother in this letter, which enables him to put her forth as a living *exemplum* on her own merits. Her virtues are deliberately held aloft for admiration by the reader. His concern over the possibility of her death prompts him to reflect on her exemplary qualities, qualities that he will reveal as consistent over several different arenas (domestic as well as public, within the family as well as for the state). Hence, he applies the Stoic principle that the moral virtue of an individual is evident across all aspects of their life. Nonetheless, as I show in this section, her status as a female *exemplum* is once again subject to destabilisation as a consequence of the rhetorical techniques used to construct her as an exemplary figure. This complicates her potential to be imitable, and works against Pliny's own programme of bringing forward living role models – a programme that is more straightforward when applied to men.

Pliny begins by expressing concern over Fannia's recent illness, contracted while nursing a sick relative of hers, the Vestal Virgin Junia. This was a duty that she did willingly for her relative, even before she was ordered to do so by the state (7.19.1): her sense of familial duty is highlighted as worthy of note by Pliny (and has echoes of

her determination to share unknown stories about her grandmother, *Ep.* 3.16). In consequence, her body weakened significantly due to the ravages of sickness:

Animus tantum et spiritus viget Helvidio marito, Thrasea patre dignissimus; reliqua labuntur, meque non metu tantum, verum etiam dolore conficiunt. Doleo enim feminam maximam eripi oculis civitatis, nescio an aliquid simile visuris. Quae castitas illi, quae sanctitas, quanta gravitas quanta constantia!

Her fever never leaves her, her cough grows worse, and she is painfully thin and weak. There remain only the courage and the spirit worthy of her husband Helvidius and her father Thrasea: in every other way she is failing, and my anxiety on her behalf is coupled with grief, grief that so great a woman will be lost to the sight of her country when her like may not be seen again; such are her purity and integrity, her nobility and loyal heart. (*Ep.* 7.19.3-4)

Here, the motif of the feminine weak body is contrasted with the masculine male *animus*. As noted in section 3.4.1 on Porcia, this paradox (and separation) of the two gendered aspects of the female *exemplum*, the weak female body and the strong manly *animus*, signifies a stepping of the female character into the exemplary sphere.³⁶⁹ It is notable that it is through channelling the spirit of her *male* relatives that Fannia is identified as an *exemplum* in this case (a *femina maxima*), a status that is then enhanced by reference to her (feminised) virtues of *castitas*, *sanctitas*, *gravitas* and *constantia*. Despite the space given to her famous grandmother in *Ep.* 3.16, Arria's feminine form of courage is eschewed in favour of that of her male ancestors.

In this letter, therefore, Pliny adopts the standard conception of the female *exemplum* as dependent upon being a transgressive figure. This is further underscored by her words and actions that are performed within a public arena (7.19.4-6). Having followed her husband into exile twice (acting as the loyal wife), she is then banished for a third time on her own terms. The exceptionality of Fannia's attendance in the courtroom during the trial of Senecio (whom she had

³⁶⁹ Also outlined in detail by Langlands (2006) 138-147.

commissioned to write a biography of her husband) is emphasised by her defiance and self-assurance in the face of Mettius Carus' threatening questions. Answering in terse, clipped responses, she refuses to say more than was absolutely necessary: 'Not a word in fact did she utter through fear of danger' (*postremo nullam vocem cedentem periculo emisit*, 7.19.5). Having been found guilty and sentenced to exile, Fannia manages to save the condemned works in question, taking them into exile with her (7.19.6).³⁷⁰ The memory of great men is inextricably linked to the Roman system of exemplarity, for to exemplify an individual was to preserve the memory of his deed (glorious or otherwise); however, such commemoration was normally the preserve of Roman elite men.³⁷¹ Whilst Pliny is not explicitly commenting on the role of a woman in claiming this responsibility, the inclusion of this event in his collection of *Letters* – where other acts of male memory-preservation are included – highlights the exceptionality of a woman performing the same kind of act, and represents a transgression of a female into the masculine field of memory preservation.

Having placed Fannia firmly within the exemplary sphere as a transgressive figure, Pliny's construction of his new female *exemplum* reaches its pinnacle in the next section of the letter:

Eadem quam iucunda quam comis, quam denique (quod paucis datum est) non minus amabilis quam veneranda! Eritne quam postea uxoribus nostris ostentare possimus? Erit a qua viri quoque fortitudinis exempla sumamus, quam sic cernentes audientesque miremur, ut illas quae leguntur?

At the same time, she has such friendliness and charm, the rare gift, in fact, of being able to inspire affection as well as respect. Will there be anyone now whom we can hold up as a model to our wives, from whose courage even our own sex can take example, and whom we can admire as much as the heroines of history while she is still in our midst? (*Ep.* 7.19.7)

³⁷⁰ See Carlon (2009) 53-55 and Dunn (2019) 148-154 for more on Fannia's exile.

³⁷¹ The exemplary act of saving contemporary historical works was also performed by Marcia, who saved the works of her father Cremutius Cordus (*Sen. Marc.* 1.3). Gowing (1995) emphasises the importance of preserving memory, particularly of the Republican past, and whilst he is not explicit in stating that it is only men who are preservers of memory, it is implicit that it was seen as a masculine activity.

Fannia's virtues are such that she combines a delightful disposition (*iucunda*), complete with charm (*comis*), with her masculine *animus*. Therefore, she is not only able to inspire affection and respect (*amabilis* and *veneranda*) in other women, but courage (*fortitudo*) in men, too. It is this transition towards being a model for men (*erit a qua viri quoque fortitudinis exempla sumamus*) that is a novel way of applying the rhetoric of transgression associated with women – in place of a literal 'going beyond her sex', there is a metaphorical crossing of gender lines in her capacity to act as a model of *fortitudo* for men. This is reminiscent of Valerius Maximus' positioning of Cloelia as *viris [...] lumen virtutis* (section 3.3.3 in this thesis), underscored by aligning Fannia with 'the women we read about' (*illas quae leguntur*).

In this way, Pliny constructs Fannia as being from the same mould as traditional Republican exemplary women, but with even greater contemporary relevance than an *exemplum* like Porcia in that he identifies the personal characteristics and virtues that may be admired from a living role model. However, in adopting the rhetorical framing of the female *exemplum* (as commonly understood in Roman culture), he inevitably introduces another level of inimitability that enhances her transgressive qualities as an *exemplum* in contemporary society. This is applied firstly through a literal truncating of the exemplary discourse associated with her, and secondly by destabilising her uniqueness in defining her as inseparable from her mother, Arria the Younger. The first situates her as so thoroughly exemplary that her own descendants could not ever seek to emulate her:

Ac mihi domus ipsa nutare, convulsaque sedibus suis ruitura supra videtur, licet adhuc posteros habeat. Quantis enim virtutibus quantisque factis adsequentur, ut haec non novissima occiderit?

To me it seems as though her whole house is shaken to its very foundations and is tottering to its fall, even though she may leave descendants; for how can their deeds and merits be sufficient to assure that the last of her line has not perished in her? (*Ep.* 7.19.8)

In this way, any notion of intergenerational repeatability is impermissible: Pliny suggests that she literally cannot be copied. As a result, her whole house (a metaphor for her lineage) is about to come crashing down, conferring a sense of finality to the exemplary cycle associated with her – this cycle cannot be self-replicating. In the same way that her grandmother has been categorised as unique and separate from her own descendants, here Pliny is doing the same with Fannia, categorising her as inimitable. His final move confirms this in virtually erasing her own character and merging it with that of her mother:

Me quidem illud etiam adfligit et torquet, quod matrem eius, illam (nihil possum inlustrius dicere) tantae feminae matrem, rursus videor amittere, quam haec, ut reddit ac refert nobis, sic auferet secum, meque et novo pariter et rescisso vulnere adficit. Utramque colui utramque dilexi: utram magis nescio, nec discerni volebant. Habuerunt officia mea in secundis, habuerunt in adversis. Ego solacium relegatarum, ego ultor reversarum; non feci tamen paria atque eo magis hanc cupio servari, ut mihi solvendi tempora supersint.

A further and more personal pain and grief for me is my feeling that I am losing her mother again – to whom I can pay no higher tribute than by calling her the famous mother of a great woman. The mother was restored to us in her daughter, but soon will be taken away with her, leaving me the pain of a re-opened wound to bear as well as this fresh blow. I honoured and loved them both – I cannot say which the more, nor did they wish a distinction to be drawn. My services were at their command alike in prosperity and adversity; I was their comfort in exile and their champion after their return. I could never make them an adequate return, and so I am all the more anxious for Fannia's life to be spared to give me time to pay my debt. (*Ep.* 7.19.9-10)

In placing Fannia and her mother side by side within the same conceptual space, Pliny is unable to draw a distinction between the two – in terms of both his own affection for them and also their own greatness as (in each case) a *femina maxima*. This means, ultimately, that Pliny yet again does not follow through the logic of his positioning of living women as potential role models: he refrains from crossing over into a terrain of imitability.

Throughout this letter, Pliny has adopted the conceptual space used to consider female exemplary behaviours. He utilises a number of standard rhetorical techniques applicable to women when they are placed into this space, engaging in a novel form of transgressive rhetoric (but one that still maintains gender separation) and several shifts along the spectrum of operation that destabilise their status as *exempla*. These shifts are enhanced by the placing of a second woman within the same conceptual space, which, when seen in combination, render Fannia as inimitable. In this way, Pliny has adhered to the culturally accepted manner in which women are rhetoricised in order to be constructed as *exempla*.

5.4.3 Ummidia Quadratilla: an exemplary game?

In my final example, I will consider how Pliny transforms the affable figure of Ummidia Quadratilla (*Ep.*7.24) into a rhetorical device, which is used to reflect upon the qualities that categorise gendered exemplary behaviour.³⁷² Composed around 107 CE, the letter does not read like a typical obituary letter³⁷³; this enables Pliny to utilise the epistle form to create a ‘moral tale’ that provides a commentary on the nature and effects of women’s *otium*, as well as a reflection on the reverence of familial relationships and the nurturing of the new generation.³⁷⁴ As a moral tale, therefore, the letter becomes a suitable vehicle through which exemplarity can be considered.

On the surface, her status as an exemplary figure is ambiguous: on the one hand, she has several qualities (to be considered below) that single her out for praise; yet, on

³⁷² Here, I build on Shelton (2013) 245, who notes how the rhetorical design of the letter brings Ummidia’s flaws to the foreground in order to offset her grandson’s own morally upstanding character. I extend Shelton’s argument in demonstrating *how* Ummidia is transformed into a rhetorical tool (through the opening of the conceptual space used to consider female exemplary behaviour).

³⁷³ Vidén (1993) 102-3. The date of 107 CE is suggested by Shelton (2013) 240.

³⁷⁴ Gibson and Morello (2012) 195-197. *Otium* was regarded as a reward earned for public service and is therefore fitting for older men, such as Spurinna (whose retirement Pliny details at length at *Ep.* 3.1). However, there was a fine balance to be struck between using leisure time productively and indulging in *luxuria*; see Leach (2003). This letter therefore offers a small insight into (and critique of) how elite elderly women were expected to spend their own golden years by virtue of what were deemed inappropriate pursuits.

the other hand, her penchant for morally dubious activities (pantomimes and board games) opens the door for criticism and transgressive rhetoric, implicit as well as explicit.³⁷⁵ Pliny retains the conceptual space that is used for thinking about female exemplary behaviours, situating it in parallel with the *exemplum* of her grandson, Ummidius Quadratus, within the letter. In contrast with the other episodes considered within this chapter (and indeed, in this thesis), Pliny situates his female character *alongside* his primary male *exemplum* within the same episode, continually comparing and contrasting their characters, habits, and moral rectitude to achieve the overall effect of fixing the *exemplum* status of the male character. As I will show, it is only the female character who is subject to rhetorical manipulation, undergoing several shifts on the exemplary spectrum of operation. This is in direct contrast to the male character, whose position remains static throughout, despite the potential obstacles placed in his way by his grandmother's way of life. As with declaimers who utilised female stock characters as part of a public performance for entertainment, Pliny indulges in a form of rhetorical 'game' that brings him pleasure (*quia incundum est mihi quod ceperam gaudium scribendo retractare*, 'because I like to dwell on my pleasure by writing about it', 7.24.8). In this way, Pliny demonstrates how the rhetorical manipulation of female characters continues into the late first century/early second century CE, at the same time as he identifies other female *exempla* who have the potential to be truly imitable for his readers.

Ummidia's initial entry into the conceptual space rests upon her robust physical stature and sharp intelligence:

*Ummidia Quadratilla paulo minus octogesimo aetatis anno
decessit usque ad novissimam valetudinem viridis, atque etiam ultra
matronalem modum compacto corpore et robusto.*

³⁷⁵ Consequently, scholarship on Ummidia has tended to fall into two categories. First, that which seeks to define her as a historical woman, situating her, her manner of earning a living, or her munificence more generally within the first century AD Roman world (for example, Syme (1979), Sick (1999) and Hemelrijk (2013)). Second, that which focuses on her role in relation to how she supports the exemplary characterisation of her grandson – Tracy (1990) 402, Vidén (1993) 102-3, Fitzgerald (2007) 209-10, Carlon (2009), Gibson and Morello (2012) 195-97, Shelton (2013) 240-255 and Ash (2015) 446-48.

Ummidia Quadratilla is dead, having almost attained the age of seventy-nine and kept her powers unimpaired up to her last illness, along with a sound constitution and sturdy physique which are rare in a woman. (*Ep.* 7.24.1)

As we have seen elsewhere in this thesis, one of the common features of the rhetoric of transgression associated with female *exempla* is the notion of going beyond her sex: here, Pliny uses that rhetoric (*etiam ultra matronalem*) and applies it to Ummidia's physical characteristics. Her strong and sturdy physique (*compacto corpore et robusto*) are more mannish than feminine. Elsewhere in his letters, Pliny remarks on reaching old age still sound in body and mind as a quality of eminent statesmen such as Spurrinna (*Ep.* 3.1), which means that his explicit comments on her physical characteristics can be seen to reflect this viewpoint about older men.³⁷⁶ Ummidia's 'going beyond her sex' is further underscored by her excellent will (*honestissimo testamento*, 7.24.2), where she leaves her grandson two-thirds of her estate and her granddaughter the remaining third.³⁷⁷ As Pliny remarks in *Ep.* 8.18 about Domitius Tullus, a man who also left an excellent will contrary to his 'encouragement of legacy hunters' prior to his death, there was a popular belief that 'a man's will was a mirror of his character' (*testamenta hominem speculum esse morum*, 8.18.1).³⁷⁸ Ummidia's sense of 'doing the right thing' is echoed at the end of the letter, where her will is representative of 'the honour done to an excellent man' (*honore optimi iuvenis*, 7.24.8). Therefore, by applying the manly characteristics of a robust physical stature in old age that places her *ultra matronalem* alongside her 'an excellent will' that affirms the honourable status of its primary benefactor, Ummidia is subject to the familiar rhetoric of transgression associated with female exemplarity.

³⁷⁶ *Ep.* 3.1.10: *Inde ille post septimum et septuagesimum annum aurium oculorum vigor integer, inde agile et vividum corpus solaque ex senectute prudentia* ('The result is that Spurrinna has passed his seventy-seventh year, but his sight and hearing are unimpaired, and he is physically agile and energetic; old age has brought him nothing but wisdom').

³⁷⁷ Shelton (2013) 245 notes that it was not unusual for smaller portions to be allocated to female heirs, as she was likely to have received a portion of the family estate as part of her dowry. As Pliny does not comment further on the granddaughter (*Neptem parum novi*, 'I scarcely know the latter', 7.24.2), we do not know if this was the case here, although given Ummidius' likely age at the time of this letter (at least 24 and married), it is likely that the granddaughter was also married by this point.

³⁷⁸ See Hoffer (1999) 146 for more on wills as evidence of a person's character.

From the very start of this letter, therefore, Pliny has situated her within the conceptual space used to manipulate the meaning of the female *exemplum*.

Pliny then immediately turns his attention towards her grandson, Ummidius Quadratus, to establish the foundations for the comparisons that he will make between the two characters. Pliny starts by commenting on the grandson's nature, framing him as an *adulescentem singularem* (7.24.2) who inspires affection from others. It is this framing of Ummidius Quadratus as a singular individual who inspires those around him that marks him as the true *exemplum* of the letter: a man unlike others (singular), but who nonetheless can inspire others to adopt a similar character to his (repeatable). Thus Pliny, like the Senecan *praeceptor* figure, guides the reader towards who should be regarded as the *exemplum* in this letter, grounding this status within the moral purity of the grandson who has overcome the various and constant threats to his virtue within his own home, as Pliny then goes on to show.

Having identified clearly the *exemplum* within this letter, Pliny begins a series of comparisons that have the combined effect of destabilising Ummidia's position on the spectrum of operation while ensuring that the grandson's status is fixed at all times. These comparisons are rooted in the characterisation of the grandson as 'austere' (*severissime*, 7.24.3) and an 'excellent young man' (*optimus iuvenis*, 7.24.8), in contrast with Ummidia, a lady of 'sybaritic tastes' (*delicata*, 7.24.3) whose household was a place of decadence and who indulged in activities that were questionable for a woman of her status (*principi feminae*):

Ac primum conspicuus forma omnes sermones malignorum et puer et iuvenis evasit, intra quartum et vicensimum annum maritus, et si deus adnuisset pater. Vixit in contubernio aviae delicatae severissime, et tamen obsequentissime. Habebat illa pantomimos fovebatque, effusius quam principi feminae convenit. Hos Quadratus non in theatro, non domi spectabat, nec illa exigebat. Audivi ipsam cum mihi commendaret nepotis sui studia, solera se, ut feminam in illo otio sexus, laxare animum lusu calculorum, solera spectare pantomimos suos, sed cum factura esset alterutrum, semper se nepoti suo praecepisse abiret studeretque; quod mihi non amore cius magis facere quam reverentia videbatur.

In the first place, though conspicuous for his good looks, he spent his youth and early manhood untouched by scandal; then he married before he was twenty-four and would have been a father had his prayers been granted. He lived in his grandmother's house, but managed to combine personal austerity with deference to her sybaritic tastes. She kept a troupe of pantomime actors whom she treated with an indulgence unsuitable in a lady of her high position, but Quadratus never watched their performance either in the theatre or at home, nor did she insist on it. Once when she was asking me to supervise her grandson's education she told me that as a woman, with all a woman's idle hours to fill, she was in the habit of amusing herself playing draughts or watching her mimes, but before she did either she always told Quadratus to go away and work: which, I thought, showed her respect for his youth as much as her affection. (*Ep.* 7.24.3-5)

Ummidius' upbringing in his grandmother's house constantly placed him at risk of sexual corruption and moral depravity at the hands of her pantomime actors, a profession viewed amongst the elite classes as sexually licentious (especially for women and youths) and at odds with the moral discourse of Roman society.³⁷⁹ Pliny tells us that Ummidius successfully negotiated his adolescence and early manhood with his moral and sexual status intact, despite living in his grandmother's house – where her troupe of actors also lived. Furthermore, he claims never to have seen the actors performing or practising, instead focusing on his studies.³⁸⁰ The veracity of these claims is proved when Pliny narrates an incident that took place at the Sacerdotal Games, where after a public mime performance Ummidius claims that 'today was the first time I have seen any of my grandmother's freedmen dancing' (*"scis me hodie primum vidisse saltantem aviae meae libertum?"*, 7.27.6). This incident is *mirabilis* to Pliny: even he seems taken aback that Ummidius had never seen these actors before this point. Pliny's sense of surprise reinforces the qualities and moral excellence of this singular young man.

³⁷⁹ Edwards (1993) 99-129. Despite the moralist views against pantomimes and actors, Sick (1999) 342-46 suggests that owning troupes of actors had the potential to be a profitable business for women, as it may have been an area that male members of the conservative elite class (like Pliny) avoided being associated with.

³⁸⁰ Reminiscent, of course, of the young Pliny himself, who preferred to pursue his studies than investigate the rare and catastrophic phenomenon of the Vesuvius explosion alongside his uncle (*Ep.* 6.16.7).

Therefore, Ummidius' moral virtue is shown to be a constant feature of his personality, evident since his youth. However, Pliny does not deny a role for Ummidia in Ummidius' upbringing, for she has actively cultivated the austerity within her grandson in spite of her own decadent tastes. Her awareness of the value of a high-quality education that would lead to a prestigious public career, that must remain untouched by scandal within what was now a highly conservative society (compared with her own upbringing during the Julio-Claudian era), is made clear in the passage above.³⁸¹ Her appointment of Pliny as a tutor for her grandson is further to her credit (in Pliny's eyes), as was her forthright acknowledgement of how her own less-than-salubrious pastimes had the potential to impact on Ummidius' future career prospects – rather than allowing gossip to spread about her activities, she takes them in hand and does not shy away from them.

On the one hand, therefore, Ummidia is following the expectations of Roman motherhood (albeit a generation once removed) in ensuring that the male members of her family are ready to embark on an excellent public career. However, it is not only *how* she chooses to spend her *otium* (playing boardgames and being entertained by pantomime actors in her own home), but also the fact that she recognises her own failings and *continues with them anyway*, that pull her away from any possibility of standing as an *exemplum* in the text. There is a sense of irony that Pliny is *almost* praising her for having this sense of awareness – at the very least, he acknowledges that she shows respect for Ummidius' youth, as well as affection for him (7.24.5).

The final part of the letter confirms her move back along the spectrum, threatening to overshadow her good qualities. Despite once again referring to Ummidia's inheritance, Pliny uses it here to confirm Ummidius' status as an excellent young man – a man who deserves honour to be shown to him (7.24.8):

*...laetor etiam quod domus aliquando C. Cassi, huius qui Cassianae
scholae princeps et parens fuit, serviet domino non minori. Implebit*

³⁸¹ Sherwin-White (1966) 431 suggests that her tastes reflected those of the Neronian era in particular.

enim illam Quadratus meus et decebit, rursusque ei pristinam dignitatem celebritatem gloriam reddet, cum tantus orator inde procedet, quantus iuris ille consultus.

...I am happy to think that the house which once belonged to Gaius Cassius, the founder of the Cassian School of jurisprudence, will have a master no less distinguished. For my friend Quadratus will adorn it by his presence and restore its former grandeur, fame, and glory by issuing from it to be as great an orator as Cassius was a jurist. (*Ep.* 7.24.8-9)

Hinting once again at the unsuitable pastimes preferred by the owner of the house, Pliny remarks that the house itself will be transformed back into a place of grandeur and glory. Ummidius' moral excellence is such that he will overturn the present immorality and decadence associated with the house, restoring (*reddet*) the glory previously associated with it before Ummidia and her pantomime actors resided there. Therefore, the house itself has become tainted by Ummidia's decadent lifestyle, a lifestyle which must be eradicated in order to permit a different type of fame to be associated with it.

Whilst not an *exemplum* in the traditional meaning of the term, Ummidia nevertheless represents how the conceptual space for thinking about female exemplary behaviours can be deployed in an unexpected way – in this case, to bolster the exemplary status of her grandson. The conceptual space itself remains the vehicle by which gendered exemplary behaviour is explored in this episode: in the case of Ummidia, it is linked to the concept of grandmotherly responsibilities, whereas for Ummidius, it is related to his moral integrity. Nonetheless, Ummidius himself does not enter the conceptual space alongside Ummidia – his position remains stable throughout, demonstrating his moral excellence since a young age. He only occupies the exemplary sphere (on his own terms) once she has been removed from it, as is the case when Pliny focuses on the restoration of the house. In contrast, Ummidia's position on the exemplary spectrum is flexible, and undergoes a two-stage shift that ultimately pulls her away from almost achieving the status of an *exemplum* herself – a shift which occurs by her own making (in that she refuses to change how she spends her own leisure time).

Pliny's use of the rhetoric of transgression is slightly different in this episode compared to what I have shown elsewhere – the standard trope of 'going beyond her sex' is evident, but is based upon her manly physical characteristics rather than any definition of *virtus*. This serves to make Ummidia a complex and paradoxical figure, and one not consciously designed to be imitable; moreover, it is Ummidius who is firmly positioned as a model of the virtuous youth who is destined to come to be a leading figure in public life.³⁸² Thus, imitability is still retained along gendered lines, not least because Pliny implies that Ummidia's achievements with her grandson are unexpected given her own innate immorality. The message is clear: similarly immoral women should not anticipate scaling the same heights.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter has argued that, in the main, Pliny is even-handed in his framing of women as moral *exempla*. As part of his wider exemplary programme that relies on the value of living role models as illustrations of moral virtue that negotiate the everyday concerns of the real world, women can take their place alongside men. This represents a development in the use of *exempla* more generally. Pliny's primary aim in using *exempla* of both sexes is not to outline heroic acts of courage (associated with traditional Republican *exempla*), but to reveal *virtus* in all of its guises, and to assist the reader in finding their own role models from within their own social circles.

Nevertheless, when Pliny's women are considered more conceptually, small cracks in his system appear. This chapter has outlined problematic examples of female *exempla*, where different interpretations are permissible depending on the individual's reading of the female *exemplum* in question. In the three core examples

³⁸² We know that Ummidius Quadratus reached the highest positions possible to a man of the elite (bar the emperor himself): he was appointed consul suffect alongside Hadrian in 118 CE and held at least governorship positions in Lower Moesia and Africa – see Birley (2000) 96 and Shelton (2013) 243-44. Ummidius' own son married the sister of Marcus Aurelius; Syme (1997) 306ff.

in this chapter, Pliny reverts to adopting the conceptual space, manipulating the status of these women as *exempla* due to their parallel status as a rhetorical device. In this way, the techniques first practised in declamation still persist when women are transformed into a literary construct by male authors. This reveals the chinks in Pliny's armour as a literary *praeceptor*.

Conclusion

Throughout this thesis, I have shown how, within the Roman exemplary discourse of the first century CE, an implicit conceptual distinction is evident in the use of *exempla*, based upon the gender of the *exemplum* in question. Despite chronological changes in who was constructed as an *exemplum* over this period, the method in which this was done remained stable over time. In the previous chapters, I have demonstrated how the literary construct of the female *exemplum* in particular was reliant upon the use of an imagined conceptual space by the author in question, within which they considered and reflected upon what could be categorised as exemplary behaviour in Roman society.

Within this space, the majority of female *exempla* tend to occupy varying positions along an 'exemplary spectrum of operation', often within the same episode. In repositioning the female *exemplum* in this way, sometimes on multiple occasions within the same instance, the space became a means through which men could explore the meaning of female virtue and exemplarity. In contrast, men are much less likely to undergo such shifts, if at all. As a consequence, the Roman exemplary discourse was a gendered system with clear gendered effects.

The means by which these shifts occurred relied upon emphasising the uniqueness of the female via a rhetoric of transgression. This means that women's exemplary deeds are framed via transgressive language, adopting terms that accentuate her exceptionality. This is often synonymous with a parallel transition that moves her away from her feminine self and into that of the male. In doing so, female *exempla* are constructed as not only different from their male counterparts, but are also framed as different to other women, thus occupying a fundamentally ambiguous space that is defined by their exceptionality. The overall effect is to complicate her possibility to be emulated in some form, which is a key stage in Roller's discourse of exemplarity. Overall, therefore, a gendered usability is evident in the depiction of Roman *exempla*, where the rules of engagement vary according to the gender of the

exemplum in question. The end of this chapter will discuss some of the implications of the findings of the thesis, alongside avenues for further research.

6.1 Summary of the Key Findings

Chapter Two showed how declamation exercises, the final stage in the rhetorical education of the elite Roman male, were a vehicle through which socialised norms about society were embedded, and manipulated in order to take them to their limits within a safe, enclosed space. In using 'stock characters', unnamed social stereotypes, extremes of character and situation could be explored within the 'declamatory arena' to think about and define gendered exemplary behaviours. This arena doubled up as a defined conceptual space within which *exempla* were constructed and manipulated, to not only test the limits of acceptable social behaviour, but to also practice utilising the rhetorical techniques required to frame an individual in exemplary terms. The two female case studies selected showed how the manipulation of female exemplary behaviour worked in practice, with the case of Marius' soldier demonstrating how the declaimer works hard to prevent the soldier from fully crossing over into the transgressive, ensuring that his repeatable status is maintained.

In Chapter Three, I focused on the exemplary collection of Valerius Maximus' *Facta et Dicta Memorabilia*. As a work that categorised *exempla* under various moral and ethical headings, Valerius presents all of his *exempla* as equal: a consistency is evident in their applicability for ethical and moral thinking in how they assist the reader to understand Roman social and cultural practices and institutions. Nonetheless, his text still reveals much about the gendered characterisation of exemplary figures. I argued that Valerius deployed a conceptual space akin to that used in declamation when constructing his *exempla*, using it as a vehicle for demonstrating the gendered distinctions between male and female *exempla*. Through a detailed analysis of Cloelia and Porcia, I showed how the foundations of how these two *exempla* are constructed is dependent upon a transgressive rhetoric that works to render their

position on the exemplary spectrum of operation as unstable. This is the case despite Cloelia being of the traditional Republican mould, and the Porcia a contemporary (if not, new) example.

Chapter Four analysed Seneca's two consolations to women, the *Consolatio ad Marciam* and the *Consolatio ad Helviam Matrem*. These are two of the first extended length texts to survive that are addressed to women, both of whom were in his social circle, and represented a major turning point where female *exempla* could be sourced from for the ethical learner. This marked a widening of the exemplary field in terms of the space given to women. However, the models that are presented to both Marcia and Helvia are still placed on clearly demarcated gender lines, with the expectation that they will look to other *women* as their exemplary influences, not men. In addition, I argued that in his attempts to frame the addressees of the texts as *exempla* in their own right, Seneca ends up introducing a level of contradiction that reframes both Helvia and Marcia as rhetorical devices themselves. As a consequence, he inadvertently introduces complications around their own imitability, once again via the application of a female-specific rhetoric of transgression.

The final chapter on the women in Pliny's letters showed how his *Letters* attempted to confer a degree of gender 'neutrality' onto the *exempla* within his collection. In promoting his female exemplary characters as usable to both sexes, particular examples are cited by Pliny as instructive for both men and women equally. In the main, Pliny is successful in his aim; however, in the process of creating some of his exemplary women, declamatory echoes of how the female *exemplum* is rhetoricised within the defined conceptual space can be identified. In the case of Arria the Elder, his version of her exemplary tale – established within the literary tradition – retains elements of the rhetoric of transgression, despite his attempts to add a more human quality to her. In Arria's granddaughter, Fannia, we see Pliny attempt to create a new female *exemplum* in the Republican mould, but with contemporary relevance in identifying her personal characteristics and virtues that can be admired. He is only partially successful in this aim, as this chapter demonstrated. The final example,

Ummidia Quadratilla, showed how Pliny unavoidably transformed her into a rhetorical device when situating her alongside the male *exemplum* of her grandson. In framing him as the *exemplum* in this piece, Pliny reverts to adopting the exemplary conceptual space when considering Ummidia's own exemplary qualities, as well as her shortcomings.

6.2 Implications of this Thesis for the Study of Roman Exemplarity – Avenues for Further Research

As I argued in the Introduction, the question of gender within the existing theoretical approaches about Roman *exempla* has not been fully explored. This thesis represents some possible ways of doing this. For example, it shows that by juxtaposing the work of Roller and Langlands it is possible to draw on the insights of both: in the former's case, his emphasis on consistency over time in the exemplary cycle; on the latter, her focus on situational variability and flexibility in the exemplary process. This led to the articulation of my concept of gendered usability, which stresses the existence of consistencies across time *a la* Roller, but also that some consistencies – such as gendered differentiations – are more likely than others, thus extending Langlands' argument.

The conceptual framework used within this thesis is significant in demonstrating how female *exempla* were conceived of as rhetorically different to their male counterparts by Roman authors. The emphasis on a defined conceptual space as part of the relationship between author and reader allows the latter to explore the mechanisms used by the former in constructing their *exempla*, and in the value that is being ascribed to them. The reader is prompted by the author to recognise when and how this space is being used whenever meet an *exemplum* is introduced in a text. These prompts centre around the use of a spectrum of operation in association with a rhetoric of transgression, that work in tandem to position the female *exemplum* as rhetorically different to male *exempla*.

Thus, it is contingent on the reader to play an active role in understanding how the *exemplum* is manipulated rhetorically, and to consider the real-world relevance that the individual *exemplum* may have as a learning tool. In framing female *exempla* as rhetorically different to their male counterparts, their capacity to fulfil all four stages of Roller's exemplary discourse is truncated before imitation can take place. In complicating women's capacity to be truly regarded as exemplary, it leads us to question how Roman readers may have responded to such characters. If women are continually portrayed in a manner that emphasises their uniqueness – often through a literal transgression of their sex, or by being categorised as 'different' to their fellow women, setting them apart – their ability to act as role models for readers of both sexes is undermined. This is why Pliny's attempt to equalise the sexes in terms of their exemplarity in his *Letters* is significant to this work: it acts as an attempt to 'correct' the issues in how female *exempla* have been portrayed in earlier texts. Although Chapter Five demonstrates the underlying flaws in his attempt to do this, nonetheless it is clear that he does at least try to overcome the problems around the usability of female *exempla*.

This means that the thesis – and, more importantly, the conceptual framework used – opens up avenues for further research on the interplay of continuity and change in the exemplary cycle, understanding it to be a flexible yet patterned process of socialisation. As such, it opens up space for future research to consider other interplays at work across the exemplary cycle, be this on gender or other themes. Moreover, the thesis' foregrounding of gender demands that scholarship on exemplarity and *exempla* takes gender more seriously as a crucial feature of Roman society – particularly with regard to differentiated expectations for men and women, dissimilar understandings of how 'public' and 'private' spaces should be used (and by whom), and so on. Again, space has been opened up to bring gender into the centre of discussions rather than leaving it confined to the margins, or even absent altogether.

Due to the parameters of this thesis, I have been able to focus on only a select number of case studies within each text as a means of demonstrating the applicability of

gendered usability across the exemplary mode. An omission has been the imperial women; as I noted in the thesis Introduction (footnote 10), this is because the patterns I have traced in the utilisation of female *exempla* occur largely *in spite of* the imperial regime's conscious programme of commemoration. Nonetheless, the possible impact of this programme on the wider construction of female *exempla* could be explored: for example, in the work of Tacitus.³⁸³ This would also enable research on the themes covered in this thesis to consider other authors from the first century CE to those that I have studied. To bookend this period, the women of the late Republic – political players, such as Fulvia – could also be considered in terms of their possible influence on how female *exempla* are constructed by the authors chosen here, before reflecting upon the impact Roman authors and *exempla* of the imperial period had on later Christian writers and female martyrs, such as in the letters of Jerome.

As a final separate but related area of study, the links between how declamations trained students in using the gendered transgressive rhetoric and its emergence in other genres could be explored, including 'real world' scenarios such as the courtroom. For example, the abnormality of women as exemplary is taken to its extremes in invective, as employed by Cicero against women such as Clodia, Sasia, and Fulvia, who (in Cicero's eyes) dared to step over the line demarcating 'expected' feminine behaviour into that considered as transgressive.³⁸⁴ The notion of the transgressive in these instances normally incorporated involvement of strong women within the male public sphere of politics, moving beyond the domestic private

³⁸³ For example, Caitlin Gillespie's study of Agrippina the Younger notes how she is the only woman in Tacitus' *Annals* to be identified as *unicum exemplum* (*Ann.* 12.42.2). In doing so, she notes the issues surrounding Agrippina's imitability, whilst noting that her singularity rests upon her position within the imperial dynasty; Gillespie (2014) 279. She goes on to suggest that Tacitus is asking the reader to decide upon Agrippina's exemplary status – therefore the conceptual framework adopted in this thesis can be applied to Tacitus' characterisation of her as an *exemplum*, and would be a helpful tool in assisting the reader to make this judgement. Similarly, Mary McHugh's study of Agrippina the Elder as *ferox femina* (McHugh (2012)) considers how Tacitus combines heroic masculine virtues within traditional feminine ones in his characterisation of her (*Ann.* 1.69). McHugh explicitly refers to 'grey areas' (p.74) and the ambiguity in how Agrippina the Elder is portrayed by Tacitus – areas that correlate to shifting positions on my exemplary spectrum of operation.

³⁸⁴ See *Pro Caelio* 30-36 (Clodia), *Pro Cluentio* 12-18, 175-199 (Sasia) and *Phil.* 2.11, 2.77, 2.95, 2.113, 3.4, 5.11, 5.22 (Fulvia).

environment that was by rights the sphere of women's action. Despite the growing trend for women to be considered as exemplary through new media such as proscription tales, the notion of the female *exemplum* as transgressive was never fully shaken off. As Cicero demonstrates, the stereotypes employed within his arguments to denigrate these women reflects the rhetorical tropes used and explored within declamatory exercises, demonstrating the success of how gendered behaviours were understood were deeply entrenched in Roman elite society.

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