Clarion Review

Historical

Republica
Richard Braccia
978-1-4490-4340-7
Four Stars (out of Five)

Respublica falls into the tradition of other novels of Rome such as Collen McCullough's Masters of Rome Series and Taylor Caldwell's fictionalized biography of Cicero, *Pillars of Iron* . Unlike McCullough, who portrays Cicero in a negative light, or Caldwell, who aggrandizes him, Richard Braccia shows Marcus Tullius Cicero as a brilliant philosopher, orator, politician, and lawyer, but also as a man torn between his duty to his country and his conscience.

The narrative of *Respublica* primarily consists of a fictionalized version of letters written by Cicero to his young son Marcus in which he describes personal matters and his thoughts on what is happening behind the scenes to influence Rome. These letters allow readers to eavesdrop on a great mind and strategist, and they reveal unflattering but human traits, like insecurity, arrogance, and pettiness. "Our plans have been well laid," he writes. "I paced the library like a caged animal, now and then looking over volumes of Plato and Aristotle. But the comfort I sought alluded me. I had a sense of foreboding, of some imminent disaster that was to befall me." To balance the novel and provide exposition material that Cicero could never have known, Braccia also includes chapter threads he calls "Omniscient Narratives." These don't always work and sometimes sound like a dry lecture rather than chapters in a novel.

Assiduous research and the author's love for the subject matter is more than evident. Besides telling Cicero's story, *Respublica* also covers the ascension of Julius Caesar and the beginnings of a dynasty. The world of Rome's allies and enemies during the Late Republic era (after 132 BC) serves as a backdrop for the novel. The political and social machinations by the powers that be—and the powers that want to be—reveal insidious detail. Rome, with its poor and indecisive leadership motivated by greed and selfishness, is a frightening reflection of today's world. Braccia provides uncanny parallels between the Roman government dealing with a natural disaster and the American government's ineptness during and after Hurricane Katrina. He writes, "Father Tiber flooded his banks, bringing extensive destruction and death to

multitudesÂ…Relief efforts were hampered by acrimonious debates in the Senate."

Respublica is not an easy read, and readers will need background knowledge of the era to really enjoy the book. It's not a page turner, but those who persevere will find themselves immersed in vivid descriptions of the convoluted lives of giants who influenced the destiny of the world.