

PAST THE SIZE OF DREAMING? SHAKESPEARE'S ROME

ROBERT S. MIOLA

Ethereal Rumours

Revive for a moment a broken Coriolanus

(T. S. Eliot)

Confronting modernity, the speaker in 'The Wasteland' recalled the ancient hero and Shakespeare's play (his 'most assured artistic success', Eliot wrote elsewhere) as fragments of past grandeur momentarily shored against his present ruins. Contrarily, Ralph Fiennes revived *Coriolanus* in his 2011 film because he thought it a modern political thriller:

For me it has an immediacy: I know that politician getting out of that car. I know that combat guy. I've seen him every day on the news and in the newspaper – that man in that camouflage uniform running down the street, through the smoke and the dust. I've seen the people protesting on the streets, in their hoodies and jeans. You know, that's our world.¹

Critics of Shakespeare's Rome have always occupied a place along the spectrum marked by these extremes, some thinking it depicts a world elsewhere and long ago, others that it reflects contemporary times, either those of the playwright or of his audiences.

Shakespeare first encountered Rome as ancient world through his grammar-school education, specifically his study of Latin authors such as Ovid, Vergil, Horace, Cicero, Caesar, Seneca, Plautus, Terence, Livy, Suetonius, Tacitus and others; this education made Rome more significant and accessible than Athens, Jerusalem, or cities in Asia and the East. Allusions and representations throughout the canon evoke the ancient city and its famous

citizens, its customs, laws and code of honour, its enemies, wars, histories and myths. But Shakespeare knew Rome as a modern city of Italy as well, land of love, lust, revenge, intrigue and art, setting or partial setting for eight plays. Portia disguises herself as Balthazar, a 'young doctor of Rome' (*Merchant*, 4.1.152); Hermione's statue is said to be the creation of 'that rare Italian master, Giulio Romano' (*The Winter's Tale*, 5.2.96). And Shakespeare knew both ancient and modern Rome as the centre of Roman Catholicism, home of the papacy, locus of forbidden devotion and prohibited practice, city of saints, heretics, martyrs and miracles. The name 'Romeo', appropriately, identifies a pilgrim to Rome. Margaret wishes the college of Cardinals would choose her bead-praying husband Pope 'and carry him to Rome' (*2 Henry VI*, 1.3.65), whence Cardinal Pandolf in *King John* and Cardinal Campeius in *Henry VIII*. Despite such presence, criticism has been slow to recognize the connections between Shakespeare's ancient and modern cities. For most commentators today, Shakespeare's Rome is the classical *urbs* he depicted in one narrative poem, *The Rape of Lucrece*, and five plays, *Titus Andronicus*, *Julius Caesar*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Coriolanus* and, to a lesser extent, *Cymbeline*, which has only four

¹ Ralph Fiennes in Christopher Wallenberg, 'Stage to Screens: Ralph Fiennes Talks to Playbill.com About Wrestling *Coriolanus* Onto the Big Screen', *Playbill*, 20 November 2011, p. 2, www.playbill.com/news/article/stage-to-screens-ralph-fiennes-talks-to-playbill.com-about-wrestling-coriol-184750

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scenes in Rome, the rest in Britain and Wales. (Some have argued also for *Hamlet*, wherein Horatio claims to be ‘more an antique Roman than a Dane’, 5.2.293.)

It was not ever thus. The most influential book yet written on the subject, M. W. MacCallum’s *Shakespeare’s Roman Plays and their Background*,² considered only *Julius Caesar*, *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Coriolanus* as the Roman plays and, though noting French Senecan drama, only North’s Plutarch as the background. MacCallum exhaustively analyzed character, all the while methodically comparing passages from Plutarch’s *Lives* to Shakespeare’s text. So doing, he advanced well beyond the insight of the first editor, Nicholas Rowe (1709), who praised the ‘virtue and philosophical temper’ of Shakespeare’s Brutus, his Antony’s ‘irregular greatness of mind’, these figures portrayed ‘exactly as they are described by Plutarch, from whom certainly Shakespeare copied ‘em’.³ Charting additions, omissions and contradictions, MacCallum defined the subject and the principal approach for most of the following century, culminating in the word-by-word semiotic analyses of Alessandro Serpieri;⁴ but he excluded *Titus Andronicus* as Shakespeare’s juvenilia, relegating it to the ‘vestibule and forecourt of his art’.⁵ Introducing the 1967 reprint of MacCallum’s book, T. J. B. Spencer justly noted its importance and some deficiencies – this exclusion, the relentless emphasis on character, and the lack of any stage sense. A decade earlier Spencer’s own article ‘Shakespeare and the Elizabethan Romans’ had begun correction by considering *Titus Andronicus* as authentically Roman, Shakespeare’s attempt ‘not to get it all right, but to get it all in’,⁶ and by stating (overstating, actually) that Elizabethan Romans, despite literary admiration for Cicero, were ‘Suetonian and Tacitan rather than Plutarchan’,⁷ that is, imperial rather than republican. Spencer’s fellow contributor to the same *Shakespeare Survey* volume, J. C. Maxwell, included *Titus* in his review of Shakespeare’s Roman plays, though he thought, prophetically, some of it by George Peele.⁸ After exhaustive review of the scholarship and the application of some

twenty-one tests, Vickers, of course, has now conclusively demonstrated Peele’s hand in the play, even if some contest the details.⁹

John W. Velz’s magisterial 1978 review in *Shakespeare Survey* expanded Shakespeare’s Rome to include *Lucrece*, *Titus Andronicus* and *Cymbeline*.¹⁰ (After its appearance, Michael Platt felt obliged to revise his *Rome and Romans according to Shakespeare* to take into account the missing plays.)¹¹ Velz’s subtitle, moreover, ‘authenticity or anachronism?’, pithily identified a central question for commentators on Shakespeare’s ancient world. Nahum Tate, along with such luminaries as Dryden, Pope and Johnson, saw historical verisimilitude in Shakespeare’s representations. In 1662 Margaret Cavendish actually went further, declaring them improvements on the originals: ‘certainly Julius Caesar, Augustus Caesar and Antonius did never really act their parts better, if so well, as he hath described them’.¹² On the other side, Ben Jonson thought ‘ridiculous’ Shakespeare’s description of Caesar as never doing wrong but with ‘just cause’,¹³ a phrase that

² M. W. MacCallum, *Shakespeare’s Roman Plays and their Background* (London, 1910; rpt. with an introduction by T. J. B. Spencer, New York, 1967).

³ Brian Vickers, ed., *William Shakespeare: The Critical Heritage*, 6 vols. (London, 1974–81), vol. 2, p. 200.

⁴ Alessandro Serpieri, et al., eds., *Nel laboratorio di Shakespeare: Dalle fonti ai drammi*, vol. 4, *I Drammi Romani* (Parma, 1988); Alessandro Serpieri, ‘Shakespeare and Plutarch: intertextuality in action’, in *Shakespeare, Italy, and Intertextuality*, ed. Michele Marrapodi (Manchester, 2004), pp. 45–58.

⁵ MacCallum, *Roman Plays*, p. 177.

⁶ T. J. B. Spencer, ‘Shakespeare and the Elizabethan Romans’, in *Shakespeare Survey 10* (Cambridge, 1957), pp. 27–38; p. 32.

⁷ Spencer, ‘Elizabethan Romans’, p. 31.

⁸ J. C. Maxwell, ‘Shakespeare’s Roman Plays: 1900–1956’, in *Shakespeare Survey 10* (Cambridge, 1957), pp. 1–11.

⁹ Brian Vickers, *Shakespeare, Co-Author: A Historical Study of Five Collaborative Plays* (Oxford, 2002).

¹⁰ John W. Velz, ‘The Ancient World in Shakespeare: Authenticity Or Anachronism? A Retrospect’, in *Shakespeare Survey 31* (Cambridge, 1978), pp. 1–12.

¹¹ Michael Platt, *Rome and Romans according to Shakespeare* (Salzburg, 1976; rev. 2nd edn, Lanham, MD, 1983).

¹² Vickers, ed., *Critical Heritage*, vol. 1, p. 43.

¹³ Vickers, ed., *Critical Heritage*, vol. 1, p. 26.

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does not appear in the Folio as we have it. Thomas Rymer (1693) mocked Shakespeare for putting Caesar and Brutus in 'fools' coats' and making them 'Jack Puddings in the Shakespeare dress'.¹⁴ And, Velz observed, 'from the time of John Dennis's *Essay on the Genius and Writings of Shakespeare* (1712) it has been a scholarly parlour game to enumerate Shakespeare's blunders in the Roman plays'¹⁵ – the clock striking in Rome, the night clothes of Brutus and Portia, other anachronisms and anapisms. Velz argued that critics in the mid to late twentieth century reformulated the perennial question by asking not whether Shakespeare's Rome and Romans were authentic, but whether the playwright and his audience thought them so; most, he thought, now answered in the affirmative. He also declared that Shakespeare presented Rome as a 'world apart', a place with its own politics, national character and institutions and called attention to its symbolic topography (walls, gates, Capitol, forum, battlefields), rhetoric and sources, especially Vergil.

Not only has Shakespeare's Rome grown larger for readers today, so has its 'background'. Again, Spencer began the process by reviewing Elizabethan historians of Rome, for example William Fulbecke and Richard Reynoldes, who, like Shakespeare in *Titus Andronicus*, portrayed the city as a place of 'garboyles' or tumults.¹⁶ Glossing *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra*, Leeds Barroll comprehensively reviewed classical, medieval and renaissance accounts of Roman history since the time of Augustus.¹⁷ From this plenitude Anne Barton argued that Livy's *Ab urbe condita* (along with Machiavelli's *Discorsi*) contributed to *Coriolanus* its unusual regard for the citizens (hers a distinctly minority view of the plebeians, by the way) and its critical view of Coriolanus, who makes the patrician error of identifying himself as the Republic.¹⁸ *L'etat ce n'est pas moi*, he learns too late. Vergil has now become a well-recognized source of image and action, even as Shakespeare writes against him, transforming Aeneas and Dido, for example, into Antony and Cleopatra.¹⁹ Ovid, Jonathan Bates demonstrated,²⁰ inspires in the Roman plays a luminous and significant network

of mythic allusion to Tereus, Procne, Philomel, Astraea, Mars, Venus and Hercules. Others have suggested Lucan's *Pharsalia* as a deep source for the imagery of parricidal *saevitia*,²¹ Machiavelli for the disillusioned politics of *Julius Caesar*,²² and Cicero and anti-Ciceronian oratory for the rhetoric of *Coriolanus*.²³

By the late twentieth century the model implicit in traditional *Quellenforschung*, wherein an author reads a book and tags borrowings by verbal iteration, has yielded to more spacious, accommodating models of intertextuality. 'Background' can now include subtexts beneath texts, contexts alongside, which may or may not have been read by the author, intertexts betwixt and between the author, original audience and modern reader. The master of sources traditionally defined, Geoffrey Bullough, actually served as unacknowledged harbinger of these changes with his endlessly capacious category of 'analogue'; Bullough contributed

¹⁴ Vickers, ed., *Critical Heritage*, vol. 2, p. 55.

¹⁵ Velz, 'Authenticity or Anachronism?', p. 1.

¹⁶ Spencer, 'Elizabethan Romans', pp. 29–32.

¹⁷ J. Leeds Barroll, 'Shakespeare and Roman History', *Modern Language Review*, 53 (1958), 327–43.

¹⁸ Anne Barton, 'Livy, Machiavelli, and Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*', in *Shakespeare Survey* 38 (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 115–29.

¹⁹ See John W. Velz, "'Cracking strong curbs asunder": Roman Destiny and the Roman Hero in *Coriolanus*', *English Literary Renaissance*, 13 (1983), 58–69; Robert S. Miola, *Shakespeare's Rome* (Cambridge, 1983); Barbara J. Bono, *Literary Transvaluation: From Vergilian Epic to Shakespearean Tragicomedy* (Berkeley, CA, 1984); Heather James, *Shakespeare's Troy: Drama, Politics, and the Translation of Empire* (Cambridge, 1997).

²⁰ Jonathan Bates, *Shakespeare and Ovid* (Oxford, 1993).

²¹ Clifford Ronan, 'Antike Roman': *Power Symbolism and the Roman Play in Early Modern England, 1585–1635* (Athens, GA, 1995).

²² Robin Headlam Wells, 'Julius Caesar, Machiavelli, and the uses of History', in *Shakespeare Survey* 55 (Cambridge, 2002), pp. 209–18.

²³ Michael West and Myron Siberstein, 'The Controversial Eloquence of Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* – an Anti-Ciceronian Orator?', *Modern Philology*, 102 (2005), 307–31; John Kerrigan, 'Coriolanus Fidiussed', *Essays in Criticism*, 62 (2012), 319–53.

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wide-ranging and searching essays on classical and early modern representations of Brutus, Caesar, Antony, Cleopatra and Coriolanus.²⁴ Another forerunner, Emrys Jones, introduced Euripides's *Hecuba*, intermediated somehow, as a model for the structural movement from suffering to revenge in *Titus Andronicus*; he also presented the dispute between Agamemnon and Menelaus in *Iphigeneia in Aulis* as prototype for the quarrel scene (4.2) in *Julius Caesar*.²⁵ Jones did not need to claim that Shakespeare read Euripides in Greek, or to compile verbal echoes, or to trace precise filiations in order to note structural and tonal similarities. Anne Barton similarly compared the 'divided catastrophe' in three plays of Sophocles, imitated by later playwrights, to that in *Antony and Cleopatra*; in all cases the second event forces a reappraisal and radical change of view.²⁶ Naomi Conn Liebler has argued for Herodian's *History* as 'con-text' for *Titus Andronicus*, insisting on the hyphen to indicate a text that is not mere background but that must be read with.²⁷ Jane Grogan has made a persuasive case for Herodotus's depiction of the dying Persian empire as 'intertext' for *Titus Andronicus*.²⁸ Now, more than ever, 'Tutte le strade portano a Roma', 'all roads lead to Rome'.

The movement to intertextuality, along with various other critical changes that decentred the author, placed Shakespeare and his Roman plays among various competing cultural and literary discourses. Consequently, critics began to attend to other dramatic representations of Rome. In an Italian monograph, Vanna Gentili surveyed the field, focusing on Lodge's *The Wounds of Civil War* and Edmund Spenser.²⁹ Warren Chernaik called attention to other playwrights and to variant traditions in the reception of Tacitus, though he disappointingly provided a series of discrete discussions rather than integrated analysis.³⁰ Most perceptively, Clifford Ronan analyzed the forty-three extant English Roman plays between 1585 and 1635, demonstrating that early modern stage Romans are distinctive and extraordinary in seven areas: 'military and governmental achievements, humanistic patronage of the arts, an ostensibly king- or godlike clemency, and the powers of

self-control and self-denying *constantia*'. These four virtues come with three vices: a pride that could become 'factiousness and a sensitivity to insult', a 'fondness for rituals of superiority' and 'downright savage cruelty'.³¹ Taking Shakespeare as her central point, Julia Griffin has usefully surveyed Caesar plays from 1545 to 1762 under three headings, those dramatizing Catiline's conspiracy, the civil war with Pompey, or the assassination.³²

Among other playwrights, Ben Jonson has begun to command deserved attention, his *Sejanus* and *Catiline* now not simply dismissed as pedantic foils to Shakespeare's more successful representations. This demeaning trend started with Leonard Digges (1640), who contrasted the 'ravished' spectators of Brutus and Cassius at 'half-sword parley' with those who could not 'brook a line / Of tedious though well-laboured *Catiline*; / *Sejanus* too was irksome'.³³ (The trend continues in Martindale and Martindale.)³⁴ But Ian Donaldson has described *Sejanus* (in which Shakespeare acted) as a deliberate and critical response to the

²⁴ Geoffrey Bullough, ed., *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, vol. 5, *The Roman Plays* (London, 1964).

²⁵ Emrys Jones, *The Origins of Shakespeare* (Oxford, 1977).

²⁶ Anne Barton, "'Nature's piece 'gainst fancy': The Divided Catastrophe in *Antony and Cleopatra*' (1974), *Essays, Mainly Shakespearean* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 113–35.

²⁷ Naomi Conn Liebler, 'Getting it all right: *Titus Andronicus* and Roman History', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 45 (1994), 263–78.

²⁸ Jane Grogan, "'Headless Rome" and Hungry Goths: Herodotus and *Titus Andronicus*', *English Literary Renaissance*, 43 (2013), 30–61.

²⁹ Vanna Gentili, *La Roma Antica degli Elisabettiani* (Bologna, 1991).

³⁰ Warren Chernaik, *The Myth of Rome in Shakespeare and his Contemporaries* (Cambridge, 2011).

³¹ Ronan, 'Antike Roman', p. 65.

³² Julia Griffin, 'Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* and the Dramatic Tradition', in *A Companion to Julius Caesar*, ed. Miriam Griffin (Malden, MA, 2009), pp. 371–98. See also her witty study of the two poets in *Julius Caesar* and elsewhere: 'Cinnas of Memory', in *Shakespeare Survey* 67 (Cambridge, 2014), pp. 299–309.

³³ Vickers, *Critical Heritage*, vol. 1, p. 28.

³⁴ Charles Martindale and Michelle Martindale, *Shakespeare and the Uses of Antiquity: An Introductory Essay* (London, 1990).

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ambivalences of *Julius Caesar*.³⁵ Chernaik included the Horatian *Poetaster* as well in the mix, explained the republicanism of *Sejanus* as a warning against tyranny, and explored Jonson's changes from Sallust in *Catiline*.³⁶ Tom Cain reviewed the circumstances and probable causes of the Privy Council's concern about 'popery and treason' in *Sejanus*, Jonson's ancient world providing a disturbing mirror to his own.³⁷ Inga-Stina Ewbank examined *Catiline* in the contexts of both Roman plays and Stuart politics.³⁸ Not coincidentally Donaldson, Cain and Ewbank all served as editors in the grand publication of the Cambridge Ben Jonson (print and electronic editions), a vast repository of scholarship – replete with texts, records and search capacities – that enables and invites further study of Jonson's Rome. We await also the Oxford Thomas Heywood and other editions that will inspire more informed accounts of Rome in contemporary representations.

Seen together, Shakespeare's Roman works depict momentous political changes over almost a millennium of Roman history. *Lucrece* dramatizes the expulsion of the Tarquin tyrants in 509 BC and the start of the Republic, the problems of which are on full display in *Coriolanus* – the battles, uprisings, elections and betrayals that occurred between 491 and 488 BC. *Julius Caesar* portrays the events immediately before and after Caesar's assassination, 15 March 44 BC. The march of history toward Empire continues in *Antony and Cleopatra* with Antony's defeat in the battle of Actium in 31 BC and the prophecy of the Pax Augusta beginning in 27 BC, 'the time of universal peace' (4.6.4). *Cymbeline* provides perspective on that Roman Empire from the outside, from the court of the British king who died in AD 41. *Titus Andronicus* depicts the decay of empire and the invasions of the Goths, c. AD 300–400.

Consequently, notice of political themes has been a constant preoccupation in the critical history. Paul A. Cantor (1976) believed that *Coriolanus*, *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra* 'form a kind of historical trilogy, dramatizing the rise and fall of the Roman Republic, in a sense the tragedy of Rome itself, in which the Republic is

corrupted and eventually destroyed by its very success in conquering the world'.³⁹ He identified *thumos* (defined as 'public spiritedness') as characteristic of the republic and *eros* as characteristic of the empire. But this study, Gary Miles pointed out, makes some unhistorical assumptions; the essential virtue in a Roman aristocrat's life in both republic and empire was *dignitas*, or public standing, as evident in *elogia*, portraiture and official deifications.⁴⁰ Shakespeare adds a post-classical emphasis on integrity, on interior life.⁴¹ Andrew Hadfield takes up other political themes, viewing *Lucrece* and *Titus* as warnings against tyranny and *Julius Caesar* as exhibiting the decay of republican institutions, though he strains to accommodate this play to his reading of Shakespeare as republican sympathizer.⁴² Virtually no one has assented to Barbara L. Parker's claim that Plato's *Republic* constitutes a direct source for the politics of Shakespeare's Rome; her monograph cites commonplace ideas a few verbal echoes, and then succumbs to the fallacy of misplaced specification.⁴³ And few have found many engaging ideas in the largely derivative monographs of Vivian

³⁵ Ian Donaldson, "Misconstruing everything": *Julius Caesar* and *Sejanus*', in *Shakespeare Performed: Essays in Honor of R. A. Foakes*, ed. Grace Ioppolo (Newark, DE, 2000), pp. 88–107.

³⁶ Chernaik, *Myth of Rome*.

³⁷ Tom Cain, ed., *Sejanus*, volume 2 of *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Ben Jonson*, ed. David Bevington, Martin Butler and Ian Donaldson, 6 vols. (Cambridge, 2012), quoted from p. 201.

³⁸ Inga-Stina Ewbank, ed., *Catiline*, in *Cambridge Edition of the Works of Ben Jonson*, ed. Bevington, Butler and Donaldson, vol. 4, pp. 6–18.

³⁹ Paul A. Cantor, *Shakespeare's Rome: Republic and Empire* (Ithaca, NY, 1976), quoted at p. 16.

⁴⁰ Gary B. Miles, 'How Roman are Shakespeare's "Romans"?', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 40 (1989), 257–83.

⁴¹ As also noted by Cynthia Marshall in 'Shakespeare, Crossing the Rubicon', in *Shakespeare Survey* 53 (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 73–88.

⁴² Andrew Hadfield, *Shakespeare and Renaissance Politics* (London, 2004) and *Shakespeare and Republicanism* (Cambridge, 2005).

⁴³ Barbara L. Parker, *Plato's Republic and Shakespeare's Rome: A Political Study of the Roman Works* (Newark, DE, 2004).

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Thomas and Charles Wells.⁴⁴ More specifically and helpfully, Peltonen examines the connections between the arts of rhetoric and citizenship in *Coriolanus*, topics of perennial interest.⁴⁵

It has become standard practice to discern in the Roman works topical political parallels: many compare Lucrece's concern for her chastity and Elizabeth's cult of virginity, for example, the Imperial Rome of *Antony and Cleopatra* and the court of James I, the civic unrest in *Coriolanus* and the Midlands revolts, the dreams of monarchy and nationhood in *Cymbeline* and those of Stuart ideology. In a sensitive and detailed reading of *Julius Caesar* in 1599, James Shapiro discusses many Elizabethan concerns in Shakespeare's ancient Rome: worry over assassination and succession, controversy over the calendar and the suppression of ceremonies and debate about 'the uses of the classical past, republicanism, tyranny, holiday, popularity, censorship, political spin and the silencing of opposing voices'.⁴⁶ Two challenging essays have sought wider political application. John Drakakis examines *Julius Caesar* as a case history in the mechanisms of power, as relevant today as it was in the Globe: the theatrical imagery exposes 'the discursive mechanisms, at the moment that it seeks to reinforce, the historical and material determinants, of political power'. The play is 'not so much as a celebration of theatre as an unmasking of the politics of representation per se'.⁴⁷ Martha Nussbaum reads *Julius Caesar* as profoundly anti-republican in that its Roman citizens, contrary to those in the sources, are too fickle and self-centred to govern themselves, incapable of rising to the necessary love of principles and institutions that guarantee freedom and equality for all. Shakespeare's play and his *Brutus*, she argues, get rewritten in the passionate republicanism of the American (1776) and Indian (1947) revolutions.⁴⁸

Along with politics, religion has always fascinated visitors to Shakespeare's Rome, particularly its pagan ethos of honour, shame and fame. In a seminal essay, D. J. Gordon observed in *Coriolanus* Shakespeare's critical treatment of this ethos as self-destructive.⁴⁹ Glory, the principal form of immortality open to these Romans,

appears here as the stinking breath of the multitude or, as Falstaff put it, 'What is that "honour"? Air' (*1 Henry IV*, 5.1.135). The role of Stoicism has also been much in conversation. Shakespeare's reading of Cicero, Seneca and Plutarch, Geoffrey Miles argued, furnished the vision of *constantia* as steadfastness and invariability that underlies three Roman plays.⁵⁰ According to Aristotelian ethical theory, Shakespeare explores the defect of constancy in Antony, its balanced presence in Brutus, and its excess in Coriolanus – a consistent reading if a bit too schematic. Gordon Braden has sharply focused attention on the most immutably alien and pagan element in Shakespeare's Roman world, namely suicide. Lucrece, Portia, Brutus, Cassius, Antony and Cleopatra all kill themselves as climactic gestures of self-control and self-assertion (though Cleopatra, of course, is a special case). Despite Augustine's and Dante's admonitions, as well as Chapman's and Fletcher's examples in their plays, Shakespeare's self-slaughtering Romans do not consider life after death. In the case of Brutus, 'Shakespeare has cleanly excised the look to the afterlife that would have seemed authoritative in North and been nearly instinctive

⁴⁴ Vivian Thomas, *Shakespeare's Roman Worlds* (London, 1989); Charles Wells, *The Wide Arch: Roman Values in Shakespeare* (New York, 1993).

⁴⁵ Markku Peltonen, 'Political rhetoric and citizenship in *Coriolanus*', in *Shakespeare and Early Modern Political Thought*, ed. David Armitage, Conal Condren and Andrew Fitzmaurice (Cambridge, 2009), pp. 234–52.

⁴⁶ James Shapiro, *1599: A Year in the Life of William Shakespeare* (London, 2005), p. 189.

⁴⁷ John Drakakis, "'Fashion it thus": *Julius Caesar* and the Politics of Theatrical Representation', in *Shakespeare Survey 44* (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 65–73; pp. 71 and 72.

⁴⁸ Martha C. Nussbaum, "'Romans, countrymen, and lovers": Political Love and the Rule of Law in *Julius Caesar*', in *Shakespeare and the Law: A Conversation among Disciplines and Professions*, ed. Bradin Cormack, Martha C. Nussbaum, and Richard Strier (Chicago, 2013), pp. 256–81.

⁴⁹ D. J. Gordon, 'Name and Fame: Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*', in *Papers, Mainly Shakespearean*, ed. G. I. Duthie (Edinburgh, 1964), pp. 40–57.

⁵⁰ Geoffrey Miles, *Shakespeare and the Constant Romans* (Oxford, 1996).

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in a Christian writer, and replaced it with a foursquare bleakness: the only thing lasting forever is farewell'.⁵¹

Shakespeare's Romans, then, differ distinctly from Puccini's Roman Tosca, who cries 'O Scarpia, avanti a Dio' ('O Scarpia, onward to God') as she jumps to her death from Castel Sant'Angelo, the pagan gesture of suicide thus located in explicitly Christian contexts, physical and metaphysical. Yet critics have detected elsewhere and in other ways significant Christian presences and absences in Shakespeare's Rome. J. L. Simmons thought 'the antedating of Christian Revelation' 'the most significant historical factor' in *Julius Caesar*, *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Coriolanus*.⁵² Trapped in Augustine's Earthly City, Shakespeare's Romans are doomed to tragic failure. This study explains credibly the bleak sense of constriction in Shakespeare's Roman world but is itself too narrow and single-minded. Noting in *Julius Caesar* plentiful reference to contemporary religious issues, David Kaula well discussed Caesar's holy blood in Calphurnia's dream, source of 'tinctures, stains, relics, and cognizance' (2.2.89); the 'sacrifice' of Caesar and subsequent bathing in this blood strongly evoke Christian rituals.⁵³ In a much admired essay, Stanley Cavell went further, seeing Coriolanus as competing with Christ, the 'lamb' the wolf loves or, in his view, who loves the wolf.⁵⁴ Among other parallels, he compared Coriolanus's refusal to show his wounds with Christ's showing of his wounds to Thomas, and the appearance of three women to Coriolanus to the appearance of three women at the Crucifixion 'whose names begin with the same letter of the alphabet (I mean begin with M's not with V's)'.⁵⁵ We have all learned to appreciate the mysterious operations of Shakespeare's religious memory but this seems like free association in service of over-determined Christological resonance.

In his edition of *Titus Andronicus*, Jonathan Bate suggestively interpreted the Goths who join Lucius's army against the corrupt city as harbingers of constitutional reform and as pre-figurations of the Protestants who effected another *translatio*

imperii in the sixteenth century.⁵⁶ Attempting an overview, Robert S. Miola explored the clash between classical *anima* and Christian soul in *Lucrece*, the sacrament of violence in *Titus Andronicus*, and pagan oracle as Holy Scripture in *Cymbeline*. 'The drifted humanist imagination apprehends the other as other and as itself.'⁵⁷ Also discussing *Cymbeline*, Sarah Beckwith argued that the final reconciliation scene 'links the languages of confession, acknowledgment, and recognition to create the unprecedented peace that is the "mark of wonder" in this play, the play that harmonizes Britain with ancient and contemporary Rome'.⁵⁸ Her persuasive analysis of religious language and imagery in the last scene shows the creation of a restored community and nation.

Whether classical or Christian, Shakespeare's Rome presents to most readers and audiences a world of values coded as masculine – honour, constancy, self-control, courage, *virtus* – a world, in other words, especially suited to the interrogation of feminist and gender criticism. Janet Adelman powerfully argued that Coriolanus's masculinity 'is constructed in response to maternal power, and in the absence of a father; . . . the hero attempts

⁵¹ Gordon Braden, 'Fame, eternity, and Shakespeare's Romans', in *Shakespeare and Renaissance Ethics*, ed. Patrick Gray and John D. Cox (Cambridge, 2014), pp. 37–55; p. 46.

⁵² J. L. Simmons, *Shakespeare's Pagan World: The Roman Tragedies* (Charlottesville, VA, 1973), quoted at p. 7.

⁵³ David Kaula, "'Let us be sacrificers'": Religious Motifs in *Julius Caesar*', *Shakespeare Studies*, 14 (1981), 197–214; see also Jack Heller, "'Your statue spouting blood'": *Julius Caesar*, the Sacraments, and the Fountain of Life', in *Word and Rite: The Bible and Ceremony in Selected Shakespearean Works*, ed. Beatrice Batson (Newcastle upon Tyne, 2010), pp. 77–93.

⁵⁴ Stanley Cavell, "'Who does the wolf love?' Reading *Coriolanus*", *Representations*, 3 (1983), 1–20; quoted at p. 8.

⁵⁵ Cavell, "'Who does the wolf love?'" p. 12.

⁵⁶ Jonathan Bate, ed., *Titus Andronicus* (London, 1995).

⁵⁷ Robert S. Miola, "'An alien people clutching their gods?'" Shakespeare's Ancient Religions', in *Shakespeare Survey 54* (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 31–45; p. 32.

⁵⁸ Sarah Beckwith, *Shakespeare and the Grammar of Forgiveness* (Ithaca, NY, 2011), p. 105.

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to recreate himself through his bloody heroics, in fantasy severing the connection with his mother even as he enacts the ruthless masculinity that is her bidding'.⁵⁹ Coriolanus ultimately fails to construct an identity apart from his mother and dies 'helpless and unarmed, his multiply-penetrated body the sign of his mother's presence in him'.⁶⁰ Adelman writes mesmerising prose, extremely sensitive to the language of the play, but this anti-heroic reading ultimately construes Volumnia as both male and female when it suits (is she ever portrayed as multiply penetrated?); it reduces Roman *virtus* to compensatory phallic aggression (displaced from oral fixation), and turns Coriolanus into a helpless 'child', pathetic rather than tragic.⁶¹ Pondering the Egyptian Queen's revulsion at 'some squeaking Cleopatra' boying her 'greatness' (5.2.216), as well as the theatrical history of the play, Juliet Dusinberre argued that productions should assert 'women's control', not weakness; the play exposes 'the performative nature of gender categories, offering us a world we can recognize'.⁶² Gail Kern Paster boldly described blood as a trope of gender in *Julius Caesar* and argued that the assassination 'discloses the shameful secret of Caesar's bodiliness: by stabbing and displaying his body, the conspirators cause the fallen patriarch to reveal a womanly inability to stop bleeding'.⁶³ From a different angle, Coppélia Kahn continued this investigation, discovering a larger pattern of wounding that includes Lavinia's mutilation, Portia's stab of her thigh, Antony's attempted suicide, and Coriolanus's gashes and scars; in this copiously bleeding world she discussed the place of the women – the oppositional Cleopatra, the chaste, sacralized Lucrece and Lavinia, and the frighteningly Roman Volumnia.⁶⁴ Despite their differences these studies have all reckoned the costs and contradictions of Roman *machismo* and forcefully located women centrally within and without Roman walls.

Such developments in feminist and gender studies have led to new studies of early modern sexuality, the body and homosexuality that further illuminate Shakespeare's Rome. Cynthia Marshall analyzed *Titus Andronicus* as pornography,

particularly its display of a raped, mutilated woman that pushes 'the erotics of pain, suffering, and dominance to new limits'.⁶⁵ Gail Kern Paster revised her essay on Caesar for *The Body Embarrassed* (1993), which explores early modern constructions of the humoral body and the disciplines of shame, and has sparked new interest in early modern blood, physiology and corporeality. Discovering a discourse of phlebotomy in Shakespeare's Rome, Belling discusses contaminated blood and bloodletting as both purge and revenge in *Lucrece*, *Titus Andronicus*, and *Coriolanus*.⁶⁶ Balizet examines the bleeding child, son and daughter, in *Titus Andronicus* and the relation of blood to domestic identity and to 'home'.⁶⁷ Hoffman argues that Coriolanus's blush acts against Galenic humoral determinism and 'motivates a process of moral consciousness and complexional reform through which his soul is purified'.⁶⁸ (This is a bit much since Coriolanus never actually

⁵⁹ Janet Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origin in Shakespeare's Plays, 'Hamlet' to 'The Tempest'* (London and New York, 1992), p. 146. (This work contains a revised version of 'Anger's My Meat: Feeding, Dependency, and Aggression in *Coriolanus*', 1980).

⁶⁰ Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers*, p. 162.

⁶¹ Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers*, p. 161.

⁶² Juliet Dusinberre, 'Squeaking Cleopatras: Gender and Performance in *Antony and Cleopatra*', in *Shakespeare, Theory, and Performance*, ed. James C. Bulman (London, 1996), pp. 46–67; p. 64.

⁶³ Gail Kern Paster, "'In the spirit of men there is no blood': Blood as Trope of Gender in *Julius Caesar*", *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 40 (1989), 284–98; p. 285.

⁶⁴ Coppélia Kahn, *Roman Shakespeare: Warriors, Wounds, and Women* (London, 1997).

⁶⁵ Cynthia Marshall, 'The Pornographic Economy of *Titus Andronicus*', in *The Shattering of the Self: Violence, Subjectivity, and Early Modern Texts* (Baltimore, 2002), pp. 106–37; p. 11.

⁶⁶ Catherine Belling, 'Infectious Rape, Therapeutic Revenge: Bloodletting and the Health of Rome's Body', in *Disease, Diagnosis and Cure on the Early Modern Stage*, ed. Stephanie Moss and Kaara L. Peterson (Aldershot, 2004), pp. 113–32.

⁶⁷ Ariane M. Balizet, *Blood and Home in Early Modern Drama: Domestic Identity on the Renaissance Stage* (New York, 2014), pp. 89–120.

⁶⁸ Tiffany Hoffman, 'Coriolanus' Blush', in *Embodied Cognition and Shakespeare's Theatre: The Early Modern Body-Mind*, ed.

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blushes but only mentions the possibility twice, 1.10.69, 2.2.146). In 2010 Maria del Sapia Garbero and others published twenty-one essays in *Questioning Bodies in Shakespeare's Rome*, a wide-ranging study of what John Dee called 'anthropographie' or 'the description of man', 'both a transdiscipline and a field of enquiry imagined on the model of the new cartography'.⁶⁹ The collection moves beyond the reinterrogated human body to wider scientific and philosophical applications.

Queer theory has much to address in Shakespeare's Roman works, the most baroque examples of male military eroticism, of course, appearing in *Coriolanus*, where Martius wants to embrace Cominius, 'In arms as sound as when I wooed, in heart / As merry as when our nuptial day was done, / And tapers burnt to bedward!' (1.7.30–2). Aufidius greets his former enemy as a newlywed anticipating the wedding night: 'more dances my rapt heart / Than when I first my wedded mistress saw / Bestride my threshold' (4.5.117–19). He embraces Coriolanus on stage and remembers dreaming often of him, 'Unbuckling helms, fisting each other's throat' (126). In a comprehensive study of homosexual desire in the Renaissance, Bruce Smith explained that these Roman warriors assert their masculinity by bonding and competing, yet by keeping at a distance in a kind of 'communal narcissism'.⁷⁰ Jonathan Goldberg wrote that Aufidius and Volumnia are 'versions of each other, lovers and enemies', that *Coriolanus* equates 'hetero and homo desire and its betrayal'. 'Coriolanus's career of attempted self-authorship', however, finally 'represents a desire to become a machine, to "live" in some realm that is not biological'.⁷¹ The sensationally titled essay, 'The Anus in *Coriolanus*', thus dwindles to a tamely conventional conclusion. The contributors to *Shakespeareer* (2011) might have provided further insight into the strange concentricity of military and amorous impulses and into the undercurrents of homoerotic desire in Shakespeare's Rome had they spent more energy on the textual, critical and performance histories of the works and less on confession and

self-congratulation.⁷² Much more remains to be said.

Recent race and ethnic studies have also opened our eyes to the many non-Romans in and outside of Shakespeare's city and, more importantly, to the extent that city constructs its identity by demonizing and expelling outsiders. Ania Loomba noted that the dominant patriarchy of Rome casts Tamora and Aaron as 'embodiments of pure evil; the supposedly uncontrollable sexuality of women and blacks motivates their liaison'.⁷³ Exploring stage stereotypes of blackness, Arthur Little called Aaron additionally 'the sexually potent mastermind behind Lavinia's rape'.⁷⁴ But these and many other critics note that Rome proves to be child-devouring whereas Aaron barter his own life for his infant's. Elsewhere Loomba cites Antony Sher and Gregory Doran recalling black South African audiences identifying with Aaron, who delights in his 'coal-black' hue (4.2.98), and their boisterous approval of his defiance.⁷⁵ A Moor and a villain, Aaron complicates race distinction in Shakespeare's Rome and helps to dismantle the oppositions between civilized Roman and barbarous Goth.

Laurie Johnson, John Sutton and Evelyn Tribble (New York, 2014), pp. 173–89; pp. 173–4.

⁶⁹ Maria Del Sapio Garbero, Nancy Isenberg and Maddalena Pennacchia, eds., *Questioning Bodies in Shakespeare's Rome* (Göttingen, 2010), p. 14.

⁷⁰ Bruce R. Smith, *Homosexual Desire in Shakespeare's England: A Cultural Poetics* (Chicago, 1991), p. 59.

⁷¹ Jonathan Goldberg, 'The Anus in *Coriolanus*', in *Shakespeare's Hand* (Minneapolis, 2003), pp. 176–86; pp. 183 and 185 respectively.

⁷² Madhavi Menon, ed., *Shakespeareer: A Queer Companion to the Complete Works of Shakespeare* (Durham, 2011).

⁷³ Ania Loomba, *Gender, Race, Renaissance Drama* (Oxford, 1989), p. 47.

⁷⁴ Arthur L. Little, Jr, *Shakespeare Jungle Fever: National-Imperial Re-Visions of Race, Rape, and Sacrifice* (Stanford, CA, 2000), p. 63.

⁷⁵ Ania Loomba, *Shakespeare, Race, and Colonialism* (Oxford, 2002), p. 75. On their 1995 production, see Natasha Distiller, *Shakespeare and the Coconuts: On Post-Apartheid South African Culture* (Johannesburg, 2012), pp. 71–96.

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The category of 'race' itself has been shown to be problematically indeterminate. To early moderns, race did not simply mean 'skin color', Margo Hendricks has demonstrated, but referred also to 'difference born of a class-based concept of genealogy, a psychologized (and essentialized) nature, or group typology'.⁷⁶ Thus Little can treat Antony as white male who transgresses the boundaries that demarcate race: 'in going primitive, Antony goes Egyptian, in effect African'; he ends up as a 'kind of white African'.⁷⁷ The archetypal anti-Roman outsider, Cleopatra, 'with Phoebus' amorous pinches black' (1.5.28), deeply interrogates the play's constructions of racial difference, colonial conflict, gender and national oppositions, as Kim Hall has noted.⁷⁸ The colour of the historical Cleopatra's skin has occasioned much recent dispute since Martin Bernal's *Black Athena*⁷⁹ and Mary Lefkowitz's bristling response, *Not out of Africa*.⁸⁰ Joyce Green MacDonald devotes a chapter to this controversy before dismissing it for Shakespeare, concluding that *Antony and Cleopatra* 'is finally so convinced of the cosmic import of Cleopatra's racial difference from the Romans that it cannot be bothered to be consistent about her skin color'.⁸¹ Perhaps, but directors and actors have usually chosen to cast an actress of one colour or another in the role and this decision has consequences. Celia R. Daileader surveys the various impersonations of blackness in the history of modern stage Cleopatras.⁸² Of course, whiteness studies now hold that whiteness is a raced position and not simply the invisible and normative default. From this point of view, Francesca T. Royster explores the constructions of racial identity for Tamora, also depicted as anti-Roman other, and for Cleopatra.⁸³ Aebischer examines the relation of 'whiteness' to beauty in Renaissance Cleopatras from Jodelle to Shakespeare.⁸⁴ Whatever the merits of her 1963 performance, Elizabeth Taylor's pale, voluptuous Cleopatra, masked in blue eye-shadow and mascara, adorned in sixty-five costumes, including one of 24-carat gold cloth, had a long dramatic history.

As racially other, however defined, Shakespeare's Cleopatra has struck many as paradoxically Roman, particularly in her refusal to be led in triumph and in

her suicide. As such she recalls Horace's famous Cleopatra (*Carmina*, 1.37), the hated foreign queen ('fatale monstrum', 'doom-bringing portent'), who nevertheless faces death with serene countenance ('vultu sereno') and manly ('nec muliebriter') Roman fortitude. Shakespeare again addresses the paradoxes of racial alterity in his last portrayal of an anti-type to Rome, the Britons. Critics have variously discussed the shifting perplexities of *Cymbeline*, which mixes conflicting historical and mythical accounts to feature the English and Welsh, ancient Romans and modern Italians, a chauvinistic defiance of Rome, and finally an agreement to pay it tribute. Jodi Mikalachki notes that dramas set in Roman Britain tend to conclude with a masculine embrace that exorcizes resistant female savagery and promises peaceful union with the Empire.⁸⁵ Griffiths disagrees, arguing that inclusion of Renaissance Italians in the play, idlers, philanderers and worse, undermines the final fraternal

⁷⁶ Margo Hendricks, 'Surveying "Race" in Shakespeare', in *Shakespeare and Race*, ed. Catherine M. S. Alexander and Stanley Wells (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 1–22; p. 20.

⁷⁷ Little, *Jungle Fever*, p. 104.

⁷⁸ Kim F. Hall, *Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England* (Ithaca, NY, 1995).

⁷⁹ 2 vols. (New Brunswick, NJ, 1987 and 1991).

⁸⁰ New York, 1996.

⁸¹ Joyce Green MacDonald, *Women and Race in Early Modern Texts* (Cambridge, 2002), p. 60.

⁸² Celia R. Daileader, 'The Cleopatra Complex: White Actresses on the Interracial "Classic" Stage', in *Colorblind Shakespeare: New Perspectives on Race and Performance*, ed. Ayanna Thompson (New York, 2006), pp. 205–20.

⁸³ Francesca T. Royster, 'Cleopatra as Diva: African-American Women and Shakespearean Tactics', in *Transforming Shakespeare: Contemporary Women's Re-visions in Literature and Performance*, ed. Marianne Novy (New York, 1999), pp. 103–25; 'White-limed Walls: Whiteness and Gothic Extremism in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 51 (2000), 432–55; *Becoming Cleopatra: The Shifting Image of an Icon* (New York, 2003).

⁸⁴ Pascale Aebischer, 'The Properties of Whiteness: Renaissance Cleopatras from Jodelle to Shakespeare', in *Shakespeare Survey 65* (Cambridge, 2013), pp. 221–38.

⁸⁵ Jodi Mikalachki, 'The Masculine Romance of Roman Britain: *Cymbeline* and Early Modern English Nationalism', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 46 (1995), 301–22.