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"... TO DO ROME SERVICE IS BUT VAIN"; ROMANNESS IN
SHAKESPEARE

by

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A THESIS SUBMITTED
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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Houston, Texas
April, 1999
ABSTRACT

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by

Yvonne Bruce

Shakespeare creates a Rome in which he brings together and reinvents Rome's political and military brilliance and the work of its greatest poets and historians. As Shakespeare's Romans have become to a great extent "our" Romans, the critical tendency has been to ignore his manipulations and read these plays as promulgating and continuing a unified tradition of "classical" values.

But the line of descent is not so clear, and Shakespeare's Roman individuals are, in fact, diminished by this tradition. His Rome often seems to function less as a place name than as an incantation of history and ideology, while his individual Romans struggle to escape this cultural determination. They speak and act as though defining individual identity were simply a matter of defining this cultural entity, this "Rome," but reveal (in soliloquy, by juxtaposition with alternate social constructions, and through class conflict) their inability to construct cohesive private states of being. Shakespeare's Roman plays thus become tacit investigations into the core ethical foundations upon which Rome built its classical legacy.

Romanness in Shakespeare connotes a divided quality of being; the cultural legacy shared by all Romans makes every Roman an avatar of the state, but individual Romans cannot fully translate their shared history into present action. The conflict is one between the passive acceptance of a generic and glorious past, and the implementation of this past at the expedient level demanded by the action of the plays: determining reasons to kill Caesar in Julius
Caesar, transferring martial prowess into bureaucratic efficiency in Coriolanus, and interpreting masculine glamor through the critical perceptions of a feminine culture in Antony and Cleopatra. The plays are linked by the gap between Rome as a cultural entity and its citizens, who are searching for a practical and individual ethic.

The chapters are organized as they illuminate this division. I introduce the major Roman plays with a general discussion of Rome's paradoxical status: as a system or culture it continually disappoints the citizens who turn to it for ethical instruction, while at the same time it produces individuals who identify completely with it. Next I discuss the stoicism of Julius Caesar as it is an emblematic philosophy of Rome's ethical failure. In Coriolanus, the nascent republic of Rome tries and fails to carve out a sphere of self-containment and self-renewal, a failure paralleled by Coriolanus' failure to adequately represent it. Antony and Cleopatra dramatizes Rome at its most powerful and most fragile. It is at the peak of its imperial efficiency, yet vulnerable to Cleopatra, and Shakespeare draws an imaginative and potential correlation between the apparently dissimilar states of Rome and Egypt. The final chapter looks briefly at Titus Andronicus and Cymbeline, as plays bracketing the major works (and Shakespeare's career) but sharing an ethical viewpoint that looks ahead to later seventeenth-century depictions of Rome.
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CHAPTER I
Self and State in Shakespeare's Roman Plays

The Rome of Shakespeare's Roman plays always exists in comparison with its illustrious past--even the early republican Rome of Coriolanus is considered by its characters to be fallen away from its aristocratic origins. As a result, the word "Rome" often functions in the plays less as a place-name than as an incantation, uttered to summon ancestral spirits into a present they will rouse from moral inertia: Octavius Caesar wants Antony to leave his "lascivious Vassails" and be the hero-warrior of old; the practical and gentlemanly Roman Lucius exists in anachronistic contrast to the decadent medieval Italians of Cymbeline. Perhaps this incantatory quality is especially apparent in Julius Caesar, in which "Rome" and variations of the word are uttered constantly to remind the Romans that they are or are not acting like Romans: "Age, thou art shamed. / Rome, thou hast lost the breed of noble bloods" (1.2.152); "for Romans now / Have thews and limbs like to their ancestors" (1.3.79-80); "My ancestors did from the streets of Rome / The Tarquin drive" (2.1.53); "and show yourselves true Romans . . . bear it as our Roman actors do, / With untired spirits and formal constancy" (222-6).

These phrases suggest Romans who are grappling with their "true" selves--how that truth ought to be defined and enacted--and they also suggest there is a crucial break between ancestral, noble, "true" Romanness, and Romanness as it is performed presently, burdened by history's ever-changing script. In Julius Caesar, Rome's
superior past is clearly summoned, but throughout the play present action is determined by the faith that the past is homogenously interpreted and shared. The results are tragic, however, when past ideologies do not meet the needs of present realities. Romanness connotes a divided quality of being; the cultural legacy shared by all Romans makes every Roman an avatar of the state, but Shakespeare’s individual Romans cannot fully translate past deeds into present action. The conflict is one between the passive acceptance of a generic and glorious past, and the implementation of this past at the expedient level of, for example, determining reasons to kill Caesar, or transferring martial prowess into bureaucratic efficiency, or interpreting masculine glamor through the critical perceptions of a feminine culture. As I will argue through a discussion of Julius Caesar’s theatrical Rome, the starving Rome of Coriolanus, and the erotically incomplete Rome of Antony and Cleopatra, the gap between Rome as a cultural entity and its citizens--who are searching for a practical and individual ethic--is the linking theme of all the Roman plays.

Consider Titus Andronicus, for example, whose framework of revenge supports an exaggeration of Rome’s incomplete enculturation of the individual. Here Titus, seeing for the first time his mute and mutilated daughter Lavinia, expresses a relationship with Rome that is defined by a conflict other than Rome’s habitual martial discord. His behavior has been guided to this point by Rome’s obsessive mythohistoricizing; now his excesses seem “bootless” and “vain”:
Speak, Lavinia, what accursed hand
Hath made thee handless in thy father's sight?
What fool hath added water to the sea?
Or brought a faggot to bright-burning Troy?
My grief was at the height before thou cam'st,
And now like Nilus it disdaineth bounds.
Give me a sword, I'll chop off my hands too,
For they have fought for Rome, and all in vain;
And they have nursed this woe in feeding life;
In bootless prayer have they been held up,
And they have served me to effectless use.
Now all the service I require of them
Is that the one will help to cut the other.
'Tis well, Lavinia, that thou hast no hands,
For hands to do Rome service is but vain (3.1.67-81). ¹

Titus wishes to equate the size of Rome's ingratitude with the size of his grief, the latter of which seems directed more toward the "effectless use" he has had in the service of his homeland than toward Lavinia's suffering. At this moment he openly disdains the civilization of which he is a devoted citizen, and in whose defense he has contributed the lives of twenty-one sons--it will be twenty two, shortly after the play begins, when the enraged Titus slays one of his four surviving sons in an attempt to honor the Roman emperor's claim to Lavinia.

Titus Andronicus is not so strongly driven by the complexities of the subject "Rome" as the major plays, but the truncation Titus
feels at recognizing that his lifetime of devoted service is precisely what alienates him from his homeland also orients *Julius Caesar*, *Coriolanus*, and *Antony and Cleopatra* (the clearest example of this is Titus’ insistence that Lavinia marry the eldest son of the imperial family, the decision that results in the slaying of his son). Political and private never work in concert: in *Julius Caesar*, Brutus cannot find nor invent personal reasons for going forward with assassination. Forced to rely instead on the conspirators’ consensus, he refuses to believe that Antony will not be won to their side, and is later shocked to learn that Cassius may have had entirely different motives for wanting Caesar dead. And of course Brutus never recognizes in himself the political haughtiness and hunger so well manipulated by Cassius.

*Coriolanus*, conversely, cannot imagine Rome as anything other than an extension of the individual. What he deems beneficial to himself ought to be beneficial to the state, but the Rome of *Coriolanus* is no longer a congregation of warrior-nobles; it is a nascent republic. In this play Shakespeare dramatizes the ravenous quality of political growth that will produce the hollowed out characters of *Julius Caesar*. Dearth does not merely describe the lack of food in the Rome of *Coriolanus*, but Rome's lack of viability. If Coriolanus remains its chief warrior, Rome can only function in a state of perpetual warfare; if peace is obtained, Coriolanus will incite the citizens to civil war. There is a curtailment of meaningful progression in this Rome, even a circularity of behavior that produces its ever-hungry and ever-frustrated Romans.
Antony and Cleopatra's love affair demonstrates just how successful yet simultaneously barren Rome can be. Octavius Caesar makes the demarcation between personal and political clear: those who attempt to honor loyalties formed by a republican past (Pompey, Lepidus, and Antony) will be destroyed by the new Roman order, in which power is vested in "one Man but a Man" (2.6.19). Caesar's imperial Rome, which produces individuals subject to and completely dependent on the state, produces an Antony who becomes subject to and completely dependent on Cleopatra. Antony's struggle to resolve his conflicted loyalties, and his eventual embrace of and by Cleopatra and Cleopatrjan values, include a detailed examination and reassessment of such key Roman concepts as honor and constancy. Cleopatra, who seems to provide opposition and contrast, instead completes and "o'erflows the measure" (1.1.2) of Rome's incomplete authority.

This incomplete authority is, in turn, an indication of the incomplete identification of the Roman self with the *polis*. The only individual Shakespeare's Rome has room for is the "one Man but a Man" in whom all political power and hopes are embodied or projected--this even applies to Coriolanus, who sometimes seems to function less as a character than a reaction. I appear to be describing the limitations attending imperial or perhaps monarchical rule generally, but Rome's problem is subtler: it successfully disseminates political power and indoctrinates its citizens with political ideology, but it lacks a comprehensive, practical, and most important, a humane ethical framework upon which its politics and citizens can rest. Rome's ethical meanness
has its closest analogy in the Christianity of *The Merchant of Venice*. In *Merchant*, Christian values "win," and yet the generosity of spirit upon which those values should be founded is so lacking—and the merchant Antonio so bereft of the vitality animating Shylock—that the ethical foundations underpinning Antonio's lending practices makes a far different and continually provocative point than the play's Christian judicial successes. Shakespeare is always skeptical of philosophies or ideologies that are ungenerous, but unlike the Christians of *Merchant*, the idiosyncratic individuals of his Roman plays struggle to practice a fully virtuous ethic when they do not have a cultural legacy of ethical generosity from which to draw.

Thus, when Shakespeare's Roman plays are considered together, what emerges is not the dramatization of conventional Roman traits--constancy, honor, virtue--but rather the dramatization of characters attempting and failing to enact or adhere to these conventions: Titus' vain identification of himself with his homeland and his desire for retribution that leads to filicide, or the wasteful bloodshed of Caesar's assassination and at the battle of Philippi, or Coriolanus' final pointless attempt to satisfy his mother and make peace for Rome, or Lepidus' and Pompey's martial defeat and death.

The excess in *Titus Andronicus*--an essential feature of the revenge play, to be sure--emerges in Titus' speech as a desire for self-mutilation, a bizarre urge to somehow cut himself down to fit Rome. His later killing of Lavinia, so that she will not "survive her shame" (and thus increase her father's sorrows), has been
anticipated in scores of ways, including the example of Virginius, who, according to Livy, also slew his deflowered daughter. One thinks too of Lucrece and of the examples of Roman behavior to which the handless, tongueless Lavinia points in the pages of Ovid. No matter how outrageous Titus' murder of his daughter seems, he has the authority of Roman precedent, and perhaps one is lulled by the onslaught of cultural shorthand that covers over his excessive behavior: Romans behave according to a certain code of honor, one thinks, and they identify passionately with their homeland. But even Saturninus is amazed by Titus' slaying of Lavinia (until he learns of her shame, that is), and his description of Titus as "unnatural" lingers. The unnatural quality of the Rome of Titus Andronicus--Ralph Berry describes its world as "primitive" and its Rome does feel wrenched from an aggressive nature that wants it back--returns in Coriolanus, in the unnatural mother who eats her own: a good description of the Roman Titus and his dwindling family.²

The failure--or sometimes refusal--of these Romans to practice the standards with which they should have been culturally inculcated demonstrates not only their failure, but the failure of the ethical, moral, or cultural conventions and standards to be realized by and transmitted to them. This is Titus' realization in act 3, and to return to his lines: Titus' grief is great because he feels he has spent himself in vain service to Rome, and this "effectless use" has diminished him; to evidence this diminishment he will cut off his own hands. But what he claims diminishes him also props up his sense of self. Thoughts of Titus lead to Rome and back to Titus, and his initial reaction to Lavinia's violated self is a very Roman
outrage at his own violated self, which turns her violation into a reflection of his, a reflection neatly captured by the connotation of vanity in the final line, and poetically expressed by the bracketing use of “hands” in the first and last two lines.

This reflection forms the ethical underpinning of Antony and Cleopatra. Remember Caesar’s nostalgic grieving for the warrior Antony of old, when he and his men were driven from Modena and, plagued by famine, Antony, “though daintily brought up, with Patience more / Than savages could suffer,” thrived on hardship:

Thou didst drink
The Stale of Horses, and the gilded Puddle
Which Beasts would cough at.

Yea, like the Stag, when Snow the Pasture sheets,
The Barks of Trees thou brows’d (1.4.60-6).

Caesar seems to be calling back a part of the Republican past so mourned by Pompey and helped brought to a close by Caesar himself. But in Caesar’s later actions one sees a dawning comprehension that past and present lie close and continuous; the aggressively ascetic Antony is not so far removed from the voluptuary who currently tumbles “on the Bed of Ptolomy” (16). This revelation will not occur to Pompey, and he will pay for the ignorance with his life; Antony, conversely, will with great difficulty learn to reconcile and then welcome the contradiction of his character once Cleopatra points out to him that the elements of it are corroborative rather than
contradictory; his “well-divided Disposition” will become a “Heavenly Mingle” (1.5.49, 55).

*Julius Caesar* provides one with nearly the opposite example, in Portia’s famous emblem of stoic constancy, the wounding of herself in the thigh. Portia, daughter of Cato the Younger, demonstrates to her husband Brutus her fitness for sharing his thoughts and occupations:

Think you I am no stronger than my sex,
Being so fathered and so husbanded?
Tell me your counsels; I will not disclose ’em.
I have made strong proof of my constancy,
Giving myself a voluntary wound
Here in the thigh. Can I bear that with patience,
And not my husband’s secrets? (2.1.295-301).

As I will discuss at length in chapter two, Portia’s stabbing of herself communicates constancy only as it is a variation of her three (at least) previous requests for Brutus to acquaint her with his “cause of grief” (236-77. 255). Portia is justifiably curious; she defends her desire as “the right and virtue of” her place to know, reminding Brutus of her elevated patronymy. Brutus too acknowledges her superior lineage in his reply, “O ye gods, / Render me worthy of this noble wife!” (268, 301-2). Portia’s father, of course, endured one of the most celebrated honorable deaths known to the Renaissance; he fell on his sword and, when the blow proved insufficient, tore out his entrails in defiance of Julius Caesar’s
increasing political power. By wounding herself, Portia attempts not only to align herself with the masculine virtue of stoic indifference, but to tacitly demonstrate her sympathy with Brutus’ undertaking, the nature of which she may suspect.

But Cato’s self-dispatch conforms more nearly to the cultish conventions of Roman suicide than to stoic precepts, and it is suspect behavior in more than one way.3 Ever candid, Montaigne comments:

Witness the younger Cato. When I see him dying and tearing out his entrails, I cannot be content to believe simply that he then had his soul totally free from disturbance and fright; I cannot believe that he merely maintained himself in the attitude that the rules of the Stoic sect ordained for him, sedate, without emotion, and impassible; there was, it seems to me, in that man’s virtue too much lustiness and verdancy to stop there. I believe that he felt pleasure and bliss in so noble an action, and that he enjoyed himself more in it than in any other action of his life. \textit{He so departed from life, as if he rejoiced in having found a reason for dying}.4

Montaigne’s essays had their first English translation in 1603, but this skeptical view of disinterested stoic behavior was and had been widespread in sixteenth-century England; and from about 1590 onward—as the neostoic revival was ebbing—the perspective on classical virtue steadily darkened: “To seek to extinguish anger utterly, is but a bravery of the Stoics,” sniffs Francis Bacon. “We have better oracles.”5 And Fulke Greville expresses doubt about the
existence of a straight conduit between nature and reason, the
channel through which stoic apprehension—and thus constancy—
flowed:

Besides, these faculties of apprehension;
Admit they were, as in the soules creation,
All perfect here, (which blessed large dimension
As none denies, so but by imagination
Onely, none knows) yet in that comprehenson,
Euen through those instruments whereby she works,
Debility, misprision, imperfection lurkes.6

At this point in a discussion of Romanness, one runs into
difficulties that may be evaded so long as one concentrates on five
plays by one playwright. For example, “stoicism” now appears to be
synonymous with Romanness—an equation accepted by John Anson in
his deeply moral study of Julius Caesar—but of the Roman plays,
only Julius Caesar makes overt references to a stoic belief system,
particularly in the person of Brutus. Because Anson believes that the
Elizabethans did not, by and large, distinguish between the Roman
and the stoic, his study of stoicism becomes a brief overview of
“Shakespeare’s underlying vision of Roman character and culture.”7
Anson’s perspective is a difficult one to challenge, primarily
because his work raises the question of the extent to which
Romanness always connoted stoic philosophy for the Elizabethans, or
to which neostoicism emphasized particular characteristics of stoic
thought in order to better align it with Christianity.8
England absorbed most of its stoicism through Seneca and Cicero, but threads of stoic thought wound their way through most of the Latin writers read by both Elizabethan scholars and its middle class—it was a predominantly practical ethical philosophy, no matter how ultimately unattainable its ideal remained. The grammar-school Rome that Shakespeare knew would have been a pastiche constructed by Seneca, Cicero, Terence, Livy, Plutarch, and Juvenal, abstracted and organized in textbooks of *sententiae pueriles*. Here Anson’s theory becomes increasingly attractive, because in Elizabethan England “learning was fashionable . . . Hence makers of books arose to supply quantities of easy erudition.”

*Sententiae* and “similitudes” were in the air, and popular taste mirrored pedagogical in its liking for miscellany and redaction. The remarkable success of *Mirror for Magistrates*, for example, over three-quarters of a century spurred interest in the moral lessons of biographical history, hence the popularity of Plutarch’s *Lives*, Suetonius’ *Twelve Caesars*, histories by Tacitus and Livy, and native works such as William Fulbecke’s *Historicall Collection Of The Continual Factions, Tumults, and Massacres of the Romans and Italians . . .* (1601), or Richard Harvey’s study of England’s founding debt to Rome, *Philadelphus, or a Defence of Brutes and the Brutian History* (1593).

Further complicating the relationship between stoic and Roman thought is the ease with which stoicism lent itself to aphorism. Justus Lipsius, the greatest fashioner and promoter of Renaissance neostoicism, was one of the few scholars to promulgate stoic metaphysics; its philosophy was mostly looked to instead as a guide
for virtuous living. With its vaguely Oriental reliance on paradox and lofty ascetic ideals, stoicism exactly suited the Elizabethan temper and, fortunately, provided Shakespeare with ready-made moral dilemmas exactly suited to the stage. The “constancy” explored by *Julius Caesar* is, in fact, a Christianized version of what Anson calls “The doctrine of self-sufficient impassivity”¹¹; it became the goal of the neostoics to rework what was perceived as stoic apathy in the service of Christian hope for salvation, but stoic indifference was derided by Renaissance thinkers from Erasmus to Jonson.¹²

Critics have often commented on the irony of Caesar’s proclamation of constancy: seconds before being stabbed to death he refuses an appeal to enfranchise Publius Cimber:

But I am constant as the Northern Star,
Of whose fixed and resting quality
There is no fellow in the firmament.

That I was constant Cimber should be banished,
And constant do remain to keep him so (3.1.60-73).

In truth, the irony is illusory, because Caesar’s belief in his own constancy is questionable, and because Shakespeare presents us with so little of Caesar himself, and with conflicting reports of him from others colored by their own motives. Thus, Cassius sneers that Caesar’s physical infirmity makes him unfit for rule, but aggrandizes his political strength to incite Brutus against him: “Why, man, he doth bestride the narrow world / Like a Colossus, and
we petty men / Walk under his huge legs” (1.2.136-8). Later, Brutus in soliloquy will attempt to reconcile Caesar’s previous intransigence (“to speak truth of Caesar, / I have not known when his affections swayed / More than his reason”) with the “common proof” that power corrupts (2.1.19-21). Constancy in Julius Caesar is the characters’ idee fixe, as Shakespeare examines it, so to speak, constantly, less to determine who is or is not constant than to explore the difficulties of dramatizing it.

Shakespeare is not the only playwright to be fascinated with Roman constancy. Of particular interest is Samuel Brandon’s academic Senecan drama The Tragicomoedi of the vertuous Octavia (1598), an extended study of Octavia’s response to Antony’s affair with Cleopatra and her own role as mediator between her husband and her brother Caesar. The play is a fascinating discourse on constancy, as Octavia resolves to rise superior to Antony’s “sinne”: “Yet vertue will not have me to do ill”:

Ile be as true in vertuous constancie,  
As thou art false and infamous therein.  
Ile be as famous for a vertuous wife,  
As thou notorious for so leawd a life (1084-93).13

But poor Octavia is assailed by conflicting opinions, from Caesar’s objection that honor requires them to take up arms against Antony, to the soothing confirmation of her virtue offered by the messenger Byllius. The most startling perspective, however, comes from the lips of Sylvia, “a licentious woman,” for whom constancy “is that
which marreth all." Sylvia holds the play's "Romaine Ladies" in thrall with her praise of inconstancy: "Were I Octavia I would entertain / His double dealing, with as fine a sleight" (755-6).

Constancy is only one ideal of stoic conduct, of course, but it is the quality most identifiable and most easily ridiculed, as Brandon's Sylvia demonstrates. Her "licentiousness" provides the Roman ladies with the ideal excuse to at last dismiss her clearly fascinating discourse: "Peace wicked woman, nay foule monster peace" (933), but Sylvia raises logical issues with which the ladies have actively engaged. Constancy is Stoicism distilled, and it becomes easily flavored by the context in which it occurs: it may connote strength of purpose, irrational adherence, even dull-eyed apathy. Lipsius' early and most famous neostoic work, De Constantia, clearly realizes this plasticity, and attempts to supplant negative (pagan) connotations with positive Christian ones while remaining within a stoic ethical frame.\textsuperscript{14}

But as numerous critics have shown, a Christianized stoicism pervades a great deal of Elizabethan and Jacobean drama,\textsuperscript{15} including Shakespeare's non-Roman plays; of the latter, perhaps Hamlet's examination of the workings of reason in the onslaught of adversity is the best known example. Claudius rebukes Hamlet for his excessive mourning:

\begin{quote}

to persever
\end{quote}

In obstinate condolence is a course
Of impious stubbornness, 'tis unmanly grief,
It shows a will most incorrect to heaven,
A heart unfortified, a mind impatient,
An understanding simple and unschooled (1.2.92-7).\textsuperscript{16}

This injunction seems meant primarily to eschew excess itself and thus to extol moderation, but its specifics assume a stoic brand of moderation natural only to the fortified and learned heart, and it very pointedly contrasts an unmanly stubbornness and obstinacy with, elsewhere in Claudius' exhortation, attention to duty in mourning, in contemplation of mortality, and in political administration, all, one infers, very manly pursuits.

"So it comes about," as Cicero has it, "that in this sense moderation, which we explain as I have indicated, is the science of doing the right thing at the right time . . . everything in the conduct of our life shall balance and harmonize . . . we must keep ourselves free from every disturbing emotion."\textsuperscript{17} In a slightly different key, Seneca has this to say in response to the stoic equation of joy and pain: "if I am asked to choose, I shall seek the former [joy] and avoid the latter. The former is according to nature, the latter contrary to it . . . but . . . the virtue in each case is the same, whether it comes through joy or through sorrow. Vexation and pain and other inconveniences are of no consequence, for they are overcome by virtue."\textsuperscript{18}

Seneca is leading to one of stoicism's chief tenets, virtue's unchanging nature, its constancy. Constancy, as the goal of stoicism's "wise man," the sapiens, means to act in accordance with this virtue in whatever guise; right reason is what the wise man applies to circumstance and learning in order to recognize virtue in
all of its guises. But what does virtue look like? Like itself, according to Seneca:

Why is no good greater than any other good? It is because nothing can be more fitting than that which is fitting, and nothing more level than that which is level . . . nothing is more honorable than that which is honorable . . . all the virtues are by nature equal . . . This is what I mean: there is an equality between feeling joy with self-control and suffering pain with self-control . . . Any man who believes them to be unequal is turning his gaze away from the virtues themselves and is surveying mere externals . . . Reason is equal to reason, as one straight line to another; therefore virtue also is equal to virtue. Virtue is nothing else than right reason. All virtues are reasons. Reasons are reasons, if they are right reasons. If they are right, they are also equal. As reason is, so also are actions; therefore all actions are equal. For since they resemble reason, they also resemble each other.19

How deeply this must have appealed to the Renaissance love of paradox: Seneca’s formulation, slightly altered, will guide Volumnia’s behavior in Coriolanus, and the tautology (and possible inanity) of the thought is expressed, seemingly in jest, in Antony and Cleopatra, as Antony explains Egyptian exotica to the drunken Lepidus:

[The crocodile] is shap’d, Sir, like it self, and it is as broad as it hath Breadth. It is just so
High as it is, and moves with its own Organs. It lives by that which nourisheth it (2.7.45-8).

The ability to discern virtue, to recognize it for what it is and to live according to it, depends upon the continued accumulation of and striving toward wisdom. The wise man recognizes that virtue and nature are one, that harmony (ennoia) means living in absolute accordance with nature. This is the highest stoic good--perfect attunement not only with nature, but with universal law and universal reason. The wise man, however, according to Aristotle, is a fanciful fiction--one of Bacon's stoic braveries--an assessment apparently refuted by Seneca. Lipsius circumvents the likelihood that the sapiens can and does exist by addressing neostoic ideals in terms of Christian behavior; the wise man is the man who acts like a good Christian.

Stoicism's ideal is fundamentally neither more nor less extreme than the ideal of any philosophy or religion, but because it was meant to be first and foremost a guide to the conduct of living, its large gap between practicality and idealism presents a dilemma that Christianity--with its concept of grace--does not. The unattainability of the highest stoic good was not the only quality of the philosophy ridiculed; the limitless obstructions that may insert themselves between nature and reason--the frail physical instruments of comprehension articulated by Greville, for example--were also criticized. Montaigne, most famously in "An Apology for Raymond Sebond," scoffs at the notion that stoicism can teach one what nature is; reason is self-delusion.
Stoicism assumes that the individual is an aspect or element of nature, and thus ideally performs its function as naturally as a limb performs in accord with the rest of the body; simultaneously it has as its ideal for the *sapiens* a self-containedness that makes acting in accordance with nature an extremely subjective experience. This kind of paradox, however, is scarcely stoicism's alone, as Jonathan Goldberg, most notably, has argued. Contradiction characterizes all ideologies, but only religion has the means to make these contradictions viable tenets of faith. In an increasingly secularized society, the shift from faith to empiricism as a final authority means these contradictions will be laid bare.\(^{24}\) In *Coriolanus*, for example, Menenius attempts to defuse the citizens' threatened violence with his version of the body politic analogy, likening the hungry citizens to "mutinous members" and the nobles to the "good belly," the body's "store-house." But his fable (itself a significant description) only ironically describes the situation in Rome. The citizens are not getting fed at all and, as they infer from Menenius' analogy, this body politic lacks a governing organ.

*Coriolanus* does not address stoicism in any conventional sense; this may be due partly to its chronological place in Roman history, during which, as Plutarch notes, the dominant connotation of *virtus*--martial valor--was very different from that assumed by Seneca. Coriolanus himself, like Titus Andronicus, cannot work out a satisfactory relationship with the Roman *polis*, a difficulty increased by the unsatisfactory relationship he has with Volumnia, Rome's embodiment. Although virtue in this Rome is not the self-evident tautology of stoicism--recall Seneca's formulation--
Volumnia expresses another of Seneca's truisms: "As reason is, so also are actions." That is, right action is a manifestation of right reason, and both right action and right reason are ethically indistinguishable from the virtue they manifest. This becomes, as recast by Volumnia, "Action is eloquence" (3.2.76), a powerful statement of the play's own tautological tensions, in which martial valor as the ground of virtue predicates effective battlefield rhetoric.25 Demonstrating the substance of her tautology, Volumnia asks Coriolanus:

If it be honour in your wars to seem  
The same you are not, which, for your best ends  
You adopt your policy, how is it less or worse  
That it shall hold companionship in peace  
With honour, as in war, since that to both  
It stands in like request? (46-51).

Shortly before this Coriolanus, musing that his mother "does not approve me further" after his latest disastrous run-in with the tribunes over his consulship, asks her if she would have him "False to my nature? Rather say I play / The man I am" (15-6). The notion of role-playing gains a special resonance from its juxtaposition with Coriolanus' implication that there is normally a distinction between playing the man he is and playing one false to his nature. He thus neatly expresses another paradoxical stoic precept, that one plays true to oneself. Epictetus warns: "Remember that you are an actor in a drama, of such a kind as the author pleases to make it . . ."
If it be his pleasure you should act a poor man, a cripple, a governor, or a private person, see that you act it naturally. For this is your business, to act well the character assigned you; to choose it is another’s.26

Yet the notion that he may be playing any role at all vexes Coriolanus throughout the play, his indecisiveness making him an easy target for Volumnia’s own shifting ethical perspective. Volumnia identifies herself with Rome (and is identified with it) to a greater degree than even Titus Andronicus, but the association does not cause her the agitation of the men.27 Volumnia finds no dilemma in expediency, and in her formulation “action is eloquence” she seems, in fact, to be counting on the multiple interpretations such a equation generates. One must, after all, decide on the definition of the terms so equated, but Volumnia refuses to do this, nor to give her son time to think it through himself:

I would have had you put your power well on
Before you had worn it out.

You might have been enough the man you are,
With striving less to be so.

Pray be counsell’d;

I have a heart as little apt as yours,
But yet a brain that leads my use of anger
To better vantage (17-31).
Volumnia's hectoring spins an intricate web of acceptable Roman behavior that has a nonetheless simple principle at its hub: the virtuous man knows how to act. This is, while not the stoicism of Empire, theoretically indistinguishable from it; in fact, "power," "honor," "action," and "eloquence" in Coriolanus are all synonymous, just as "reason," "action," and "virtue" are synonymous to Seneca.

But Coriolanus examines the difference between putting on virtue and being virtuous. That there is a difference seems apparent, as the difference between Coriolanus and Volumnia is apparent. Yet while Volumnia believes putting on virtue is virtuous, and Coriolanus does not, his very difficulty in "putting on" means his virtuous ideal remains incompletely or ineffectively dramatized ("Come, come, we'll prompt you," Cominius offers at line 106). If action is eloquence, then one might expect his actions to speak for him, but the equation is Volumnia's and, in the main, Coriolanus' actions speak only uncertainty.

Coriolanus throws the notion of "constancy" into complete disarray; Coriolanus himself is one of Shakespeare's most constant heroes, in the sense that he resists expediency for what seems to be adherence to a particular principle of valor—one, it is important to note, promulgated by Volumnia and the other nobles—but simultaneously, he is the most tempestuous of Shakespeare's Romans, oscillating between extremes of emotion, duty, and social behavior. He contrasts rather neatly with Brutus, whose agitations seem to result from the opposite difficulty: lack of personal conviction. Brutus is trusted and admired by every Roman in Julius Caesar, yet when he ostensibly turns inward, via soliloquy, the
reasons he generates for moving forward with assassination ring false because they rest on common, external proofs rather than on his personal experience or beliefs.

At this point another complicating paradox of stoic belief becomes relevant: the relation of the particular to the general, or the relation of the individual's behavior to universal nature (which becomes God for the Neostoics). One's individual nature partakes of the universal, and the relationship of one's nature to the universal can only be understood by the application of reason: "Reason, therefore, which is itself a part of the common Nature, will lead man to the life of virtue."^28

While neostoic thought emphasizes the word of God (the Ratio of the Romans becomes the Logos appropriated by St. Jerome and St. Augustine), the stoic formulation of individual life lived secundum naturam seems to leave the burden of the discovery of nature solely to the individual,^29 which explains the divergent behaviors of, for example, a Coriolanus and a Brutus and, more generally, the divergent expressions of stoic constancy. It also provides the justification for Epictetus' dramatic analogy in which one may leave the question of, as it were, "motivation" unasked, since presumably effective roleplaying will communicate the intention of the author as well as the skill of the actor.

Clearly, stoic morality is malleable, penetrable, utilitarian, complex, and appealing. Anson's equation of stoicism and Romanness remains too neat, I believe (primarily because the stoicism upon which he builds his argument is not a neat system of thought) but the impulse that leads to his claim is irrefutable. Stoicism and
Romanness appear to run a nearly parallel course, particularly stoicism in its early imperial Roman manifestation, at which point the literature extolling it (chiefly the writings of Seneca, Cicero, and Epictetus) emphasizes its practicality and downplays the metaphysical basis upon which earlier stoics like Chrysippus had justified its ideal. Thus begins the conventional association of stoicism with fatalism, since without a metaphysical justification, one has no reason for aspiring to be the sapiens. Indeed, according to Jason Saunders, stoicism at this point begins to look increasingly like the Christianity which would soon appropriate it: a mode of behavior that, however impeccable in its own right, remains meaningless without the requisite spirituality. 30

Stoicism thus seems to have served two major and unsurprisingly opposite functions in the English Renaissance. On one hand, classical authors were all fair game for educational purposes, as St. Jerome and, before him, St. Augustine had decided, and their works and philosophies all useful insofar as they served the ends of Christianity. On the other hand, there was the simultaneous fear that the study of classical literature might easily undermine the goals of Christian humanism:

The danger of [Stoicism] to Christianity lay paradoxically not in the antagonism or unlikeness of the two creeds but . . . in the very ease with which the two appeared to be reconciled . . . This discovery could have but one effect. It could only suggest that Christianity had no monopoly on morality . . . it made for the secularization of
morality by declaring it to be the province of reason rather than that of the church.31

Whether stoicism appears in Shakespeare in comparison or contrast to Christianity, an appreciation of the stoic-Christian dialectic promotes an appreciation of the appeal of "Rome" as a dramatic subject. As far as Romanness was associated with stoicism, the characterization of the Roman would thus have been founded on the convention of the stoic as fatalistically indifferent. And, as far as this same association touched on the Elizabethan individual's own worldview or conception of morality--whether at the point of an increasingly secularized Christianity or at the point of Rome's political and historical relevance--the Elizabethan Roman is at least in part a response to or projection of the Elizabethan.

But what of the Romanness that diverges from stoicism? Two seminal essays on the Roman plays, one by Gary B. Miles and one by T.J.B. Spencer, in which the authors attempt to determine the authenticity of Shakespeare's Rome and Romans, never posit a link between Romanness and stoicism. This is an especially surprising omission in the Miles essay, since it deals almost exclusively with Julius Caesar and the connotations of words like honestus and nobilis, which gain gravity and richness from an attunement to their stoic reverberations.32

The attempt to determine the authenticity of Shakespeare's Rome and Romans strikes me as an ultimately futile exercise (as witnessed by the divergent conclusions reached by Anson and Miles, for example); Spencer, in fact, while cautioning against the
attractive urge to credit Shakespeare with "practically creat[ing] the ancient Romans," admits "it can hardly be doubted that Shakespeare's Julius Caesar has had more effect than Caesar's own Commentaries in creating our impressions of his personality." More generally, Shakespeare's Rome "often belonged to the time of Queen Elizabeth and King James."33 This is an important distinction; while the verisimilitude of Shakespeare's Rome and Romans must remain moot, the authenticity of his Rome and Romans as products of an Elizabethan-Jacobean cultural matrix need not. As Thomas Greene suggests, the very urge to reconstruct Rome is part of "the double gesture of the Humanist imagination"; that is, the humanist project of excavating the past necessitated re-creating or re-building it into an historical-literary edifice for the present.34

Earlier I wrote that the Roman plays document the failure of Rome to adequately inculcate or transmit its ethos and of its Romans to adhere to and incorporate the standards of the polis. Thus when the Roman plays are considered together, what emerges is a wholesale frustration of Roman values, and antipathy toward stoicism alone surely cannot account for this. The problem is more nebulous and pervasive; there is something deeply wrong with a system which so continually disappoints its citizens and at the same time produces individuals who so completely identify with it. Romanness itself is never directly attacked, but when considered in the context of drama, always falls short. Alone, it lacks vitality: the Rome of Antony and Cleopatra, for example, gains urgency and garners tension from its relationship with Egypt. In contrast, the Romanness of Coriolanus seethes with vampiric vitality, feeding on
its own urge toward self-destruction; Janet Adelman calls the “exciting cause” of the drama “the specter of a multitude of hungry mouths.” And Menenius, rebuffed by the citizens for his defense of Coriolanus, addresses their tribunes:

Now the good gods forbid
That our renowned Rome, whose gratitude
Towards her deserved children is enrolled
In Joves’ own book, like an unnatural dam
Should now eat up her own (3.1. 287-91).

The rapacity Menenius describes is endemic; while he fears that Rome will eat up Coriolanus, the citizens fear they will be eaten, and Coriolanus anticipates battle with the Volscæs, which will produce a machinery of war into which the citizens may be fed. Coriolanus, taking place early in Rome’s history, is more conscious of the city’s nascent political construction: what does bind the city to the people? What does make its citizens specifically Roman citizens? How can Rome breed ravenous warriors without being eaten itself? “I sup upon myself / And so shall starve with feeding,” snaps Volumnia (4.2.50-1)

Julius Caesar, arguably the most purely Roman of the Roman plays, in that all its action takes place within Rome and is concerned solely with its political succession, is also the least vital. The lack of any significant sexual relationships, the determination of the conspirators (particularly Brutus) to purge the assassination of any taint of bloodlust or irrationality, the defusing
shift of the climax from the murder itself to the funeral orations afterward all drain the play of any urgent drive. In a well-known argument for its studiedness, Kenneth Burke wryly notes the "hilarious" violence done to the poet Cinna: "You somehow know that the poetic Cinna will suffer no fundamental harm. He will merely be slain-not slain, like a clown hit by cannon balls."36

It is no wonder that the completely Roman world of *Julius Caesar* should also manifest the only direct references to stoicism (and to the related philosophy of Epicure). Stoicism is the lens through which this Rome is magnified; more important, stoic rigidity and paradox are simply expressions of Roman traits that recur in all the Roman plays. But unlike the alternative systems or communities of Egyptians, Britons, Volscians, and Goths, or the motif of infant dependency that characterizes *Coriolanus* (and, in a very different way, *Titus Andronicus* and *Cymbeline*) against or through which Rome and Romanness are dramatized, the stoicism of *Julius Caesar* is a manifestation of purely Roman qualities.

Nowhere is the sterility of the Roman system more apparent than in *Antony and Cleopatra*, in which the value system of Rome is transformed by Egypt's Cleopatra. More clearly than any other play, *Antony and Cleopatra* demonstrates Rome's failed potential by showing it off at its most powerful and influential. There is a divide between what Rome is and what it might be, a gap bridged by Cleopatra's bountiful ethos. My discussion of *Antony and Cleopatra* applies a deeply feminist reading to explain that the kinship and mutuality of the lovers express a potential kinship and mutuality between the cultures of which each is representative (although
strictly speaking Cleopatra does not represent, but embody). Thus the "feminine," as it exists in the play, is not something recuperative or alternative; it does not exist in opposition to the masculine but, in an Irigarayan fashion, inextricably with it. The dearth that typifies the Rome of Coriolanus is, in Antony and Cleopatra, washed away by the overflowing Nile. The "higher Nilus swells," says Antony,

The more it promises; as it ebbs, the Seedsman
Upon the Slime and Ooze scatters his Grain,
And shortly comes to Harvest (2.7.22-5).

But Egypt does more than end Antony's Roman drought, and Antony is more than another of Egypt's many "seedsmen," as the multiple and complex images of abundance and immeasurability in the drama suggest. Luce Irigaray wonders "what men will do and say if their sexuality gets loose from the empire of phallocratism"37 and this is precisely what happens in Antony and Cleopatra, as Antony leaves behind a Roman economy for an Egyptian one which in its excess may duplicate and exceed the "phallocratism" of Rome.

This duplication with a difference is a tenet of Irigarayan feminist thought, and of most poststructuralist French feminism. That is, Irigarayan wants to show that no matter how constrained and defined by a phallocentric language woman is, she can and does escape because she retains an essential difference beyond and outside of language (just what this "essentialism" is has provoked much discussion, which I address in chapter 4). Here it is important
to note the crucial role of mimicry to Irigarayan feminine
difference. Woman's mockery designates both the sameness and
difference to "man" of which "woman" is made, and above all it
connotes the ludic spirit animating her relation to the masculine.

But mimicry begins to be an inadequate measure of Cleopatra,
too, insufficient to describe all the ways in which she exceeds the
limits of language by which the Romans attempt to capture her
"infinite variety" (2.2.241). Cleopatra eventually effects or offers a
transmutation of Romanness that is more nearly Nietzschean than
Irigarayan in its emptying out of the significance of Roman virtue;
the change is "not a change of values, but a change in the element
from which the value of values derives."38 When Cleopatra
anticipates her death, her "Resolution's plac'd": "I have nothing / Of
Woman in me" (5.2.240-1). Irigaray's woman is clearly here, as
Cleopatra's "nothing" recalls the "Absence" and "nothing" left
behind by Antony's death, while its sexual punning celebrates
exactly what it is of woman she leaves. But her Irigarayan "absent
presence" has its genesis in Nietzsche's "active destruction," an
affirmation not of being, but of living: "There is no other power but
affirmation . . . the whole of negation is converted in its substance . .
nothing remains of its own power or autonomy. This is the
conversion of heavy into light, of low into high, of pain into joy. This
trinity of dance, play, and laughter creates the transubstantiation of
nothingness."39

The radical joy with which Cleopatra absorbs and transforms
Roman virtue is more easily seen when she is compared with Samuel
Daniel's Cleopatra, the most complexly wrought Cleopatra until
Shakespeare's. Here Daniel's queen meditates on her life of sensuality and then, as she awaits delivery of the asps, anticipates her death:

I then thought all men must loue me of duety,  
And I love none: for my lasciuous Court,  
Fertile in ever fresh and new-choyse pleasure,  
Affoorded me so bountiful disport,  
That I to stay on Love had never leisure:  
My vagabond desires no limites found,  
For lust is endesse, pleasure hath no bound.

So shall I shun disgrace, leaue to be sorry,  
Flie to my love, scape my foe, free my soule;  
So shall I act the last of life with glory,  
Die like a Queene, and rest without controule (158-64; 1196-9).

Daniel's drama, like Brandon's, is an academic Senecan study and while his Cleopatra, like Brandon's Octavia, explores a gamut of emotions and ethical concepts, she cannot escape the confines of Roman ideology. The moral lessons of her native lasciviousness and decadent detachment ("And I love none") are driven home by the Chorus, who hope "Romans learne our way of weakenes, / be instructed in our vices, so that Egyptian "spoyles may spoyle your greatnesse" (1265-7). Egypt is viewed even by its Chorus as weak, wanton, and supine, and its faults, embodied by Cleopatra, seem somehow pestilential or even venereal, despite the hint that Egypt
has been initially infected by its subordination to Rome. And of course, the excesses of Rome and Egypt (including the suicides of Antony and Cleopatra) are colored by Daniel's own Christian ethic. Boundless pleasure in his play is inimical to love.

But Shakespeare's Cleopatra celebrates their inextricability:

Give me my Robe, put on my Crown: I have
Immortal Longings in me.
................................................................................................................
Yare, yare, good Iras, quick: me thinks I hear
Antony call: I see him rouse himself
To praise my Noble Act. I hear him mock
The Luck of Caesar, which the Gods give Men
To excuse their after Wrath. -- Husband, I come.
................................................................................................................
I am Fire, and Air; my other Elements
I give to Baser Life. -- So, have you done?
Come then, and take the last warmth of my Lips.
[She kisses them.]
Farewell, kind Charmian.--Iras, long farewell.
[Iras falls dead].
Have I the Aspic in my Lips? Dost fall?
If thou and Nature can so gently part,
The Stroke of Death is as a Lover's Pinch,
Which hurts and is desir'd (5.2.280-96).
Daniel's Cleopatra is restricted by her poetry; the poetry of Shakespeare's Cleopatra seems to waft upward like fire and air of which she is made. Shakespeare's Cleopatra functions according to an entirely different economy, or system of values, and anticipates an entirely different teleology (she will eventually escape from all such systems of measurement or determination). Despite the complexities displayed by Daniel's Cleopatra (and her intimations of the Cleopatra to come in Shakespeare) she retains a Roman rigidity and manifests and ethos that expects death to be a corrective. This perspective makes Daniel's Cleopatra ultimately indistinguishable from Brandon's Octavia. Shakespeare's Cleopatra, as is clear from these lines, does not refer to the past, idealize it or regret it.

Robert S. Miola and Coppelia Kahn cite a study that lists forty-three extant Roman plays dating from the period 1585-1635, although the majority of these are dated after 1600. As Kahn interprets it, while English history plays might be considered Shakespeare's invention, Roman history plays are not.

Unless, of course, one considers the uses to which those plays are put. While one must be aware of the evolution or trajectory of Tudor-Stuart drama in general--the manner in which, for example, it reflects the increasingly stratified audience who patronized the theaters after the turn of the century--it is evident that Shakespeare's depictions of Rome and Romans distinguish themselves from previous depictions. His plays build on issues
raised in the earlier drama, as is clear from the comparison with Daniel's Cleopatra, but whereas dramatizations of Romanness from the 1580s and 90s are a working-out of honor, constancy, and virtue against a Christianized ground of morality, Shakespeare's scrutiny assumes these qualities are are already inadequate or unattainable behavioral ideals.

Here again, the specter of authenticity arises. For example, Shakespeare's Julius Caesar displays qualities almost identical to the Julius Caesar in the anonymous Caesar's Revenge (ca. 1595): an egomania that Gordon Braden terms "imperial pathology" and traces back through Senecan drama. It is "in great part the derangement of the classical competitive ethos with nowhere to go . . . A ruler whose power goes beyond all opposition and faction has to create opponents and factions in order to experience that power." Shakespeare's Julius Caesar experiences this invented opposition and, in a different way, so does Octavius Caesar. But these characters embody a pathology of imperialism generally, not of Rome particularly, and so this "derangement" also appears in Tamberlaine, to a lesser extent in The Spanish Tragedy, and in the Tudor University dramas; after 1600, it appears in Lear (among other of Shakespeare's later plays) and in the tragedies of Chapman, Webster and Tourneur. Thus, while Shakespeare's Roman plays certainly investigate a range of traditional behaviors in common to plays such as Thomas Lodge's Wounds of Civil War (ca. 1585) or to Caesar's Revenge or to Ben Jonson's Roman plays, the investigation is part of a larger cultural interest in exploring the problems,
opportunities, and dangers of rule, or the complexities of a stoic, Christian, or machiavellian virtue.

But Shakespeare is the first to dramatize a Rome whose legacy is a pattern or even a pathology of ethical frustration and failure. Ultimately, the pessimism with which these plays are infused may be the most authentic quality of his Romans. These characters are all linked by the obscurity of their motives, an obscurity that sometimes deepens to an effective absence of motive. Relatedly, they make minimal use of soliloquy. The suggestive lack of a substantive private consciousness produces what is perhaps the oddest quality of the Roman plays, the final emotional reversal expressed by the ideological or martial victor. Thus in Julius Caesar Antony stands over the dead Brutus and mourns, “This was the noblest Roman of them all,” the same epithet he had uttered over the slain Caesar, and Octavius ends the play proclaiming Brutus’ virtue and honor. Even Brutus, immediately before he slays himself, admits, “I killed not [Caesar] with half so good a will,” an admission that could overturn one’s entire interpretation of the conspirators’ relationship to Caesar, to one another, and to history (5.5.51).

At the end of Antony and Cleopatra, Octavius orders the “Pair so Famous” to be buried together, as “their Story is / No less in Pity” than Antony’s glory, a proclamation not only premature but bewilderingly hypocritical (5.2.359, 361). Most inexplicable, however, is the response of Aufidius to the death of Coriolanus. “My rage is gone, / And I am struck with sorrow,” he says, bare lines after he claims his rage prevents him from explaining the danger Coriolanus represented to the Volsces (5.6.146-7).
This reversal is, I believe, unique to the Roman plays, although it echoes very faintly the pronouncements that often end the history plays and the later tragedies. And even if, as is often the case, one would like to assign to this reversal a traditional reading such that it indicates the restoration of order and a kind of dramatic closure, the assurance of reestablishment cannot begin to explain the emotional peripeteia that accompanies the actual one these characters undergo. These are complete reversals, that is, not merely explanations for succession or vaunting generosity: at the end of Coriolanus the hero's body is nearly trampled; at the end of Antony and Cleopatra Caesar insists upon their public burial together when the public imitation of marriage they had enacted during life enraged him.

The lack of motive and a discernible, consistent private consciousness, the reversals of public consciousness, the motif of dependency--all these are symptoms of the futile relationship between the self and Rome that marks these plays, or, as I defined it early in this chapter, of the frustration of conventional behaviors. The following chapters are organized as they illuminate this relationship, beginning with Julius Caesar's examination of stoicism as a kind of emblematic philosophy of Roman ethical failure. Next I discuss the nascent republic of Coriolanus, and the attempt (and failure) of its Rome to be both self-contained and self-renewing. I close my discussion of the major plays with Antony and Cleopatra and the imaginative and potential parallel it draws between Rome and Egypt. The final chapter looks briefly at Titus Andronicus and Cymbeline, as plays each Roman and not-Roman that bracket the
major works, and whose very different strains of disillusionment similarly distinguish Shakespearean treatments of Rome from other and later treatments.

It is my hope that a composite of Romanness develops from the following chapters and suggests something greater than each chapter may when considered alone. In tracing the manifold ways in which Shakespeare empties concepts such as honor and constancy of the rigid and perhaps thoughtless meanings one conventionally associates with them, I found that his Roman plays had deeply affecting and often nihilistic things to say about the power and potential of history, politics, language, and performance. There is something about Rome and discovering what Romanness is or might be that had an intense appeal for Shakespeare, but the Romanness he discovers is largely inhuman and, for lack of a better word, broken; as one moves on to the later plays, it also becomes increasingly insufficient: the two-dimensional Rome of Julius Caesar becomes the infinite world of Antony and Cleopatra, for example. But this formulation is far too neat and reductive; it does not explain how I can find Coriolanus to be as moving as Hamlet or Lear or Othello, and more pitiful than any of these. Nor does it explain the startling similarities between two plays as different and creatively distant from one another as Titus Andronicus and Cymbeline. It may be the Roman plays appeal to me for the reasons I find Titus’ speech so compelling: they hold up a mirror of language and reflect not only the our humanity, as all the tragedies do, but the cultural conventions we have been inculcated with and have learned to take for granted. Perhaps like Titus, we have paid unquestioned service to the values
of our Roman birthright; when we read the Roman plays, I believe we come to understand that Shakespeare questions those values for us.

Notes


2. Berry views "the canonical order [of the Roman plays] as the imprint of thought, and thus of the historical imagination in Shakespeare. In other words, I view the society of *Titus Andronicus* not as decadent, but as primitive; the true decadence emerges in *Julius Caesar*. In "Communal Identity and the Rituals of Julius Caesar." *Shakespeare and the Awareness of the Audience* (London: MacMillan, 1985), p. 77.


Playwrights and the Conditions under which it was Produced (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1943); Felix E. Schelling, Elizabethan Playwrights: A Short History of the English Drama from Medieval Times to the Closing of the Theaters in 1642 (1925; rpt. New York: Benjamin Blom, 1965).


7. Anson, pp. 13, 12.

8. At any rate, neostoicismo was primarily a continental phenomenon, and its chief proponents, Justus Lipsius and Guillaume Du Vair, while aiming for a Christian-stoic reconciliation, drew from a wide variety of classical Greek and Roman philosophies in constructing its doctrines; Lipsius' voluminous writings on stoicismo influenced both Montaigne and Bacon, and his De Constantia was written principally "to destroy the notion that philosophical studies were incompatible with literary elegance" (Qtd. in Jason Lewis Saunders, Justus Lipsius: The Philosophy of Renaissance Stoicism [New York: The Liberal Arts Press, 1955], p. 22); see Aggeler, chaps. 1 and 2; Braden, chaps. 1 and 3; Wilson, chap. 2; see also The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy. Ed. Charles B. Schmitt and Quentin Skinner (Cambridge University Press, 1988), chap. 7.; and Justus Lipsius, Two Bookes of Constancie . . . Englished by Sir John Stradling. Ed. and intro. Rudolf Kirk (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1939), Kirk's intro. and the First Booke, chap. 20, in which Lipsius distinguishes Christian "Destinie" from "Stoicall";
and the Second Booke, chaps. 20-7, in which the present “miserie of
the Low-countries” is evaluated and compared with the “euils of
olde time,” primarily of ancient Greece and Rome.

See note 21 for the relation of epicureanism and
peripateticism to stoicism and hence to Romanness. Cassius refers
to the former in *Julius Caesar*: “You know [Messala] that I held
Epicurus strong, / And his opinion. Now I change my mind” (5.1. 76-7
[see note 15]); and see note 22 for its reference in *Antony and
Cleopatra*.

9. Louis B. Wright, *Middle-Class Culture in Elizabethan England*
10. Wright, pp. 319, 323; Kahn, pp. 7-8.
12. See Anson, pp. 13-4; also Saunders, pp. 106-10; for a very
judicious and thorough discussion of both the ethics and the
metaphysics of stoicism, see F.H. Sandbach, *The Stoics*. 2d. ed (1989;
13. Rprt. by The Malone Society as *The Virtuous Octavia 1598*
(Oxford University Press, 1909).
14. Lipsius, the First Booke, chaps. 18 and 19; Saunders, pp. 71-80.
15. See note 7 above, particularly Aggeler, Braden, Shifflett, and
Wilson.
16. *The Complete Works*. A fairly recent and interesting study of
*Hamlet* that discusses the significance of Hamlet's relationships in
a way revelative of stoicism, without ever using the word or
addressing its philosophy, is *Hamlet and the Concept of Character,*
by Bert O. States (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), esp. chap. 6).

Frederick Boas traces a barely possible (but serendipitous if true) relationship between *Hamlet* and *Julius Caesar*. He remarks on the striking similarities between Brutus' speech in the forum and the prose of *Caesar Interfectus*, a University drama probably written by Richard Eedes around 1581. "Nothing is more improbable than that Shakespeare should have known *Caesar Interfectus*," Boas writes rather wistfully" (p. 165), but the latter may have influenced a slightly later University drama, the anonymous *Caesar's Revenge*, which in turn may be referenced in *Hamlet*, in act 3, scene 2, when Polonius tells Hamlet of a university play in which he acted Julius Caesar (but Boas cautions again that "it would be unsafe to assume that the reference is to *Caesar's Revenge*," p. 277). If the links are there (and Boas makes a strong case for the links existing between other plays and dramatists, where the evidence is sufficient to allow such a conclusion), they would increase the possibility that early Tudor drama about Rome directly influenced Shakespeare's understanding and rejection of its values (*University Drama in the Tudor Age* [1914; rprt. New York: Benjamin Blom, 1966).

20. Shortly after this exchange, Caesar asks Antony if his description of the crocodile will satisfy Lepidus. "With the Health
that Pompey gives him; else he is a very Epicure” (55-6). John Williams notes that “Then as now, an Epicure . . . was an insatiable glutton” (p.122), but as one learns from the adherence of the “lean and hungry” Cassius to its doctrine (see note 10), that association should not be taken for granted. The chapter on moral philosophy (chap. 7) in The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy allows one to make a clear comparison of the systems; Arnold, in Roman Stoicism, also discusses the relationships among the various classical philosophies, chaps. 2, 3, 12, and passim. See also Hellenistic Philosophy: Introductory Readings. 2d. ed. Trans. Brad Inwood and L.P. Gerson (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997).


23. See esp. Montaigne’s citation of Cicero in “An Apology,” p. 358; Aggeler, before himself quoting Montaigne, writes, “What the activist virtus of Brutus and the passive virtus of Agamemnon have in common is a reliance upon reason that proves to be not merely unreliable but totally deceptive” (p. 147).

24. Goldberg, p. 20. This interpretation of ideology’s structural relation to society is a linchpin of new historicist or cultural materialist thought. See also, for example, Political Shakespeare: New Essays in Cultural Materialism. Ed. Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985); and Stephen Greenblatt, Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare (University of Chicago Press), 1980; Karen Newman, Fashioning

25. Philip Brockbank, in a note to this line, cites studies referencing it to Bacon's "Of Boldness": "Question was asked of Demosthenes, what was the chief part of an orator? he answered, action; what next? action; what next again? action" (in The Essays, pp. 48-9; see Brockbank's note, p. 223 in the Arden Coriolanus). Will Durant describes the relationship between the two in a description of Caius Gracchus: "His passionate temperament . . . made him the greatest of Roman orators before Cicero, and opened almost any office to him in a society where eloquence served only next to bravery in the advancement of men" (The Story of Civilization. Part 3, Caesar and Christ: A History of Roman Civilization and of Christianity from Their Beginnings to A.D. 325 (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1944), p. 115.


27. Presumably because she is restricted from acting out her eloquence in the political sphere. Shakespeare often seems, in the Roman plays, to work out the men's problems in the women: Coriolanus' ambivalence in Volumnia's single-minded adaptability; Antony's erratic magnanimity in Cleopatra's voluptuousness. This observation forms, in essence, Coppelia Kahn's thesis in Roman Shakespeare. Although it may seem throughout this dissertation that I cite Kahn repeatedly only in order to refute her, I am deeply indebted to both her work (including the organization of her material) and to our disagreements.

29. Saunders, pp. 99, 98; Aggeler notes that "Not coincidentally, [this Stoic revival] coincides with the rise of English Protestantism" (p. 13).

30. Saunders, pp. 96, 98.


33. Spencer, pp. 37, 28.


39. Deleuze, pp. 174, 176. Relative to Greene’s argument that Rome is both an excavation and a creation (a sort of Frankenstein’s monster, or a Lazarus), Nietzsche has this to say regarding Goethe’s appraisal of Shakespeare’s Romans as neither Roman nor English but human:

only strong personalities can endure history; the weak are completely extinguished by it. The reason is that history confuses feeling and sentiment where these are not strong enough to make themselves the measure of the past. The man who no longer dares to trust himself, but, seeking counsel from history about his feeling, asks “how am I to feel here”, will, from timidity, gradually become an actor and play a role . . . Gradually all congruence between the man and his historical scope is lost; we see cheeky little fellows treating the Romans as though they were their equals: and they dig and burrow in the remains of Greek poets as though even these corpora lay prepared for their dissection and were villia, which their own literary corpora may be.

(Friedrich Nietzsche, On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life. Trans. Peter Preuss [Indianapolis: Hackett, 1980], pp. 30-1). The first half of this argument is a surprisingly apt description of Brutus in Julius Caesar, but of his relationship to the future’s interpretation of his actions, rather than his own relationship to the past.

40. Joan Rees succinctly outlines the project of the academic and the sensationalist Senecans in Selected Writings of Fulke Greville


43. Braden, pp. 8, 14-5.

44. Its most direct relationship, however, is with earlier Roman drama, particularly Lodge's Wounds of Civil War (one of the only extant Roman plays from the period written for public performance), a dramatization of Lucius Cornelius Scilla's bloody dictatorship. As Lodge's drama ends, Scilla, victorious after the exile and death of Marius, the suicide of the younger Marius, and his self-appointed seventh consulship, has a sudden change of heart:

Believe me countrymen, a sudden thought,
A sudden change in Scilla now hath wrought.
Old Marius and his son were men of name,
Nor Fortune's laughs nor lowers their minds could tame (5.5. 171-4)

Scilla goes on to pine, also uncharacteristically, for the peace and quiet of a pastoral retirement, proclaiming "My powers do cease, my titles are resigned." Scilla's reversal does have a surprising historical foundation, in Appian's account of the civil wars, but Shakespeare's use of this technique has a less exact relationship to
his sources (Ed. Joseph W. Houppert. Regents Renaissance Drama Series. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1969); see also note 19.
CHAPTER II
Julius Caesar's Theater of Stoicism

"... and show yourselves true Romans."

There is no more convincing demonstration of politics as theater than Julius Caesar, but the dramatic purpose of the demonstration remains far less persuasive than the demonstration itself. Surely there is a finer point to be made by the "portentous things" of its "strange-disposed time" (1.3.28, 31), by the secrecy surrounding every motive for assassination and retribution, and by the sophistical brilliance of the drama's every orator than the relativity of historical interpretation. But Julius Caesar does not pursue its observations; the action simply pauses so Brutus can adjure his fellow conspirators to bear their secret "as our Roman actors do, / With untired spirits and formal constancy" (2.1.225-6), or so Casca or Antony can convincingly cast—to the aristocracy or the plebs—a political reading of Caesar's dramatic refusal of the crown.

The "motivelessness," the secrecy and silence surrounding the assassination and radiating outward from it, make largely moot the question of the play's analogical relationship to Elizabethan politics and of its historical authenticity. The play's politics are of a broader sort, encompassing not just the government of the polis but the conduct of all its relationships, because all of them are in some way related to the assassination conspiracy: there are no subplots,
parallel plots, or competing locations to divert energy or interest away from Rome and the murder of Caesar.  

Instead, there is the diversion of conspiracy itself, which spawns the little secrets and subterfuges so characteristic of the action. Much like Iago, though lacking his malignancy, the Romans of *Julius Caesar* appear to enjoy the plottings and double-dealings for their own sakes, and the assassination of Caesar seems almost to be an unusually ambitious extension of this tendency. Brutus alone speaks significantly of “Rome” as the reason behind his leadership of the conspiracy, and yet even his speech is at most inconclusive, referring only to the general good or to the general reasons why Caesar should die.  

This accounts for the suspicion of the tribunes toward what they regard as the cryptic behavior of the commoners, who as the play begins are out “Upon a laboring day without the sign” of their profession (1.1.4-5). The tribunes' behavior toward the plebs is typical of the play’s half-hearted regard for the “general,” and of its overall dynamic of distrust. There is a native secretiveness to Brutus and Cassius, too, that colors the intimacy with which each addresses the other. Cassius, for example, easily manipulates the conception Brutus has of himself as contained and solitary, warring only with Brutus; in 1.2 he suggests that Brutus is so good at concealment he isn’t even aware he harbors a murderous impulse. And although Brutus and Cassius at this point are speaking together with no possibility of being overheard, Brutus requests Cassius to drop the subject, acknowledging he has an inkling of what Cassius
wants of him, and promising to "recount hereafter" his thoughts on the matter (1.2.166).

The conspiracy is really only an example of this individual secrecy grown large and organized. Characters repeatedly promise others they will divulge a critical piece of information, or that the primary cause for some action will be revealed: Casca only partially relates events surrounding Caesar's refusal of the crown; Cassius later asks him to "consider the true cause" of all the omens and portents auguring in Rome, a cause he leaves to Casca's imagination (1.3.62). "What other bond / Than secret Romans" do the conspirators need, Brutus asks as he refuses to swear an oath of allegiance to their cause (2.1123-4). Brutus soothes Antony after the assassination with a promise to "deliver you the cause / Why I, that did love Caesar when I struck him, / Have thus proceeded" (3.1.182-4). Brutus later thinks Cassius may "Hath given me some worthy cause to wish / Things done undone" (4.2.8-9). Prior to the battle at Philippi, Octavius interrupts the confrontational boasting of the two sides to remind them of the business at hand: "Come, come, the cause" (5.1.49)

The conspirators are clearly not acting out of character. The dramatization of Caesar's assassination as an outgrowth or exaggeration of typical Roman behavior permits Shakespeare to link inextricably individual choice to "the tide of times" (3.1.260). This continuum of behavior explains why Julius Caesar might be "described as a play about the difficulty of producing historical drama" and why the characters veer so perversely between feeling
they are slaves to larger forces and a sense of themselves as
directors of those forces.6

Just as—or perhaps because—the characters of Julius Caesar
never forget their relationship to history, so do they always keep
tightly wrapped within their public personae; public and private man
are in essence indistinguishable. Only the scenery changes: Caesar at
home with Calpurnia is very much like the processional Caesar of
the first scene; Brutus musing in his orchard sounds the same note
of pomposity and sincerity as the Brutus urging his fellow assassins
to "stoop, / And let us bathe our hands in Caesar's blood" (3.1.106-7).
Even though the public arena of this Rome of course connotes a
masculine arena, it is notable that these homosocial relationships
do not differ significantly from the heterosocial ties of the private
sphere. Not only does the domestic Brutus sound conspicuously like
the Brutus of the forum, but the prickly intimacy he shares with
Portia is very much like the prickly intimacy he shares with Cassius.
And Caesar, by turns imperious and impotent with the members of
the Lupercalian procession, displays a similar combination of
ineffective arrogance in Calpurnia's presence.

The play's complex implication of the audience also begins to
untangle itself when read through the conspiracy. The metadramatic
conceit that has garnered the most critical attention—that history
is written by the best orator and that we, like the plebs, can be
persuaded to any interpretation of events—is not the only, nor even
the principal implication; rather, it is part of the play's blanket
seduction of the audience, to lure the audience to read itself there,
much as Cassius claims to function as Brutus' mirror. We are not
simply the plebs at Caesar's funeral, weighing or being swayed by the best evidence. We are invited to be conspirators, too, since if we feel, perhaps, talked down to in our role as spectators of Brutus and Antony's rhetorical sophistication, and perhaps cheated by these Romans who refuse to share their innermost selves with us, surely we recover our equilibrium, and invent some superiority for ourselves by knowing how the tide of time will treat them. We feel, as do the conspirators, superior to their history.

The assassination conspiracy may serve as the ultimate metadramatic reference, signifying the mysterious processes of historical interpretation and the shrouded motives of the individual, but it does not move one much closer to understanding these and other equally daunting dramatic strategies. Just because motive remains inscrutable, for example, does not mean it presses any less forcibly on the scholar. But by obscuring the motives of his characters, by blurring their individuality with the oppressive overlay of history, Shakespeare has created in *Julius Caesar* a rarity in the canon: a viable drama lacking in characterological interest.7

Paradoxically, the cause of this distance between character and spectator or reader is the history Shakespeare leaves out, rather than that he leaves in. In the drama's most notorious deviation from Plutarch, Shakespeare conflates Caesar's assassination and funeral, and has Antony speak the funeral oration immediately after Brutus, at the latter's urging. This is Brutus' gravest error, displaying not the Plutarchan hope that Antony will come around to the conspirators' side, but a misunderstanding of Antony's motives so fundamental it is almost beyond belief. Shakespeare's condensation
heightens the historical paradox of the funeral scene—the conspirators will lose their ideological battle against Caesar whether Brutus personally is blamed for overlooking the threat of Antony and Octavius or whether the cause is more diffuse and the responsibility shared—but lessens the intellectual empathy Brutus can exact from us: how is it that he can convince himself to murder Caesar based purely on the invented reasons he puts forward in the orchard soliloquy, and yet dismiss the far more plausible reasons for murdering Antony provided by Cassius?

Brutus' miscalculation of Antony is the most egregious example, but there are other motives obscured or abbreviated by Shakespeare which further lessen our sympathy. Brutus muses that

Since Cassius first did whet me against Caesar
I have not slept.
Between the acting of a dreadful thing
And the first motion, all the interim is
Like a phantasma or a hideous dream (2.1.61-5).

This speech occurs shortly after the orchard soliloquy, which is itself the only example provided of the “hideous dream” suffered by Brutus; his invention in that soliloquy is phantasmagorical enough, but is directed less at Caesar than at himself, less indicative of the probability that Caesar will abuse his greatness than of Brutus’ own capacity for self-delusion.

Antony loses the sympathy he might have gained with his clear-eyed desire to avenge Caesar's death by his merciless
proscriptions; again, Shakespeare pares away crucial detail and subtly alters history by placing the proscription scene immediately after the funeral, and by putting Antony in sole charge of post-Caesar policy. The effect is to undermine completely Antony's previous concern and to dilute his ostensibly principled reasons for vengeance: “Thou art the ruins of the noblest man / That ever lived in the tide of times,” he speaks alone, addressing the dead body of Caesar prior to the decree of proscription: “Woe to the hand that shed this costly blood!” (3.1.259-61).

Perhaps the most curious manipulation of history with the purpose of obscuring individual motive appears in the character of Julius Caesar. Why is the play named for someone who appears briefly toward the beginning and end of 1.2, disappears until 2.2, and is dead early in the third act? When Caesar does appear, Shakespeare takes pains to establish his physical and emotional weaknesses, weaknesses that may or may not reflect the historical Caesar but which certainly detract from the forcefulness of character possessed by the Plutarchan Caesar. And when this nominal hero speaks—in a play of conspicuous rhetorical suavity—his historically famous eloquence is all but absent. Why is Caesar’s dramatic presence so inferior to his nominal presence, when his nomen is not only integral to the history of Rome’s transition from republic to empire, but to the play’s emphasis on patronymy?

It is perhaps restating the obvious to note that the name “Julius Caesar” connotes sufficient individual identity and history for the actual character to remain sketchy. Ralph Berry goes further: “The name is the role. The patronymic encodes the data of ancestry
and behavior which a Roman should embody," and not just for Caesar, of course. It is also important to note that Caesar is "kept alive" after his death by the avidity with which the meaning of his assassination and its aftermath are discussed and acted upon. And even after Caesar dies, he is "a most convincing stage prop," as his body remains the focus of discussion and attention for the rest of act 3.9

The idea that history and the individual are bound theatrically-Jonathan Goldberg suggests "history itself may be a series of representations"--finds its best expression in the stoicism of *Julius Caesar*, and its representation of stoicism in turn explains much of the play's obsession with secrets and silence.

The play makes several direct references to stoicism--Portia invokes her father Cato, perhaps Rome's most famous stoic; Cassius urges Brutus to make use of his "philosophy" after he erupts in anger during the tent scene of 4.2; and Brutus, strangely enough, scorches the stoic suicide of Cato, as he prepares to face a loss to Antony and Octavius in act 5.

But less directly, *Julius Caesar* is concerned overall with a "doctrine of self-sufficient impassivity" that is the hallmark of Renaissance neostoicism. From Cassius' attempt to discover what problem shadows Brutus to the rote *elogia* uttered by Antony and Octavius over his slain body, the play replaces the examination of motive with an analysis of how motive is veiled. Unsurprising for a play this stylized, public-oriented, and indifferent to the individual, the analysis suggests that there may not be any motives of worth beneath the veiling.
Renaissance neostoicism was a complex gloss on the Roman version, itself a gloss on the Greek original, and Christianity could not completely redeem its messy pagan history; the conflict arising from the attempt to Christianize it was fairly straightforward, divided between those who found stoicism's ideology amenable to Christianity, and those who found it antithetical. Of course, the debate was muddied by the varieties of stoicism available for adaptation, but the interpretive latitude it allowed also contributed to its usefulness and popularity. And, as with any popular philosophical movement, it evolved its own lexicon which moved away from strictly philosophical or ethical applications.

Constancy, for example, so often invoked in *Julius Caesar*, is the subject of Justus Lipsius' *Two Bookes of Constancie*, translated into English in 1594. The Flemish Lipsius was the chief proponent of neostoicism, and his influential work advised one, rather than exhibiting the apathy, or emotionlessness of classical stoicism, to turn this characteristic active by demonstrating *constantia*, or a positive steadfastness of soul in the face of good fortune or adversity:

This is onely that faire beautifull *Helena* which will present unto thee a wholesome cup of counterpoysion, wherewith thou shalt expell the memorie of all cares and sorrowes, and whereof when thou hast once taken a taste, being firmelie settled against all casualties, bearing thy selfe upright in all misfortunes, neither puffed vp nor pressed downe with either fortune, thou maist challenge to thy selfe
that great title, the nearest that man can have to God, To be immooueable. 

What inspired neostoicism was, in part, the need to make a valuable ideology palatable, and the Christian revision of its doctrine was not wholly successful. One can see in the work of Lipsius and others (principally the influential and popular French stoic Guillaume Du Vair) an attempt to fill the void left by stoic emotional evacuation with a sentiment manufactured to stoic specificity. Make an emotion of emotionlessness, in other words, and name it constancy. There remained something "unnatural" about its doctrinal goal of emotional stasis, however, and a fear, expressed by many writers of the period, "that constancy will turn to hardness and self-reliance to pride." 

Stoicism is not only morally inert in Julius Caesar, but as a behavioral model it confronts Shakespeare with a peculiar dramatic challenge: animating a moribund ethos. "I am as constant as the Northern Star," proclaims Caesar seconds before his murder (3.1.60). As evidence of her "constancy," Brutus' wife Portia gives herself "a voluntary wound / Here in the thigh." She later calls for constancy to "be strong... set a huge mountain 'tween my heart and tongue" (2.1.298-300; 2.4.6-7). Brutus calms Cassius with "be constant," and later, "be content." Preparing to inform Brutus of Portia's death, Messala admonishes him to "like a Roman bear the truth I tell" (3.1.22; 4.2.41; 242)

As an indictment of the stoic morality and mentality of the play, the scene of confrontation between Brutus and Portia is
paradigmatic. Not only does it contain a direct reference to stoicism (in the person of Portia's father, Cato) it exposes the central dilemma of the doctrine: how does one perform independence of one's environment?

The marriage of Brutus and Portia is usually considered a bright spot among the play's insufferably secretive--though public--male bonds. But the accord the couple share, in their only scene together, is undermined by the savage spectacle of the self-inflicted wound Portia reveals. Look, she tells Brutus: "Can I bear that with patience, / And not my husband's secrets?" (2.1.300-1). He responds:

O ye gods,
Render me worthy of this noble wife!
Knocking within
Hark, Hark, one knocks. Portia, go in a while,
And by and by thy bosom shall partake
The secrets of my heart.
All my engagements I will construe to thee,
All the charactery of my sad brows.
Leave me with haste (301-8).16

The most jarring element of this scene is the equanimity with which Portia has not only borne her wound, but now displays it to her husband. This is the point and proof of her constancy, of course, as is her reminder to Brutus that she is the daughter of Rome's quintessential stoic, Cato, but the more one lingers over the supposed relationship of her wound to her behavior, the more elusive
the evidence of "constancy" becomes. Equanimity is not constancy, and the fact that Portia hopes to sway Brutus to reveal his secret to her by revealing hers to him makes an odd argument for one's ability to bear more secrets. We leave the scene more convinced of her curiosity than of her constancy: the infliction of her wound comes after she has tried and failed three times to find out from Brutus what keeps him up nights "Musing and sighing" (239).

The issue is not Portia's devotion to Brutus; the scene economically limns their intimacy. What lingers problematically is the spectacle of her wound's presentation and its antistoiical connotations. There is a disturbingly theatrical quality to Portia's revelation, despite the calm with which she reveals it, suggesting that her constancy is worthless unless ostensive, and underscored by the reference to her father. Cato's infamous suicide--he was forced to tear out his own bowels to kill himself when the initial sword thrust proved insufficient--is one of the most commonly referenced acts of political resistance in Renaissance literature. Just as striking as Cato's subsumption by his political philosophy, however, is his theatricality: Coppelia Kahn observes that the gathering of Cato's friends and sons with whom he spends his last evening "constitute[s] . . . his audience," and that Plato's *Phaedo*, which he reads prior to the suicide, is his script.\textsuperscript{17}

Portia manages a similar manipulation of her surroundings, creating, in effect, a drama within a drama. She invites her husband to witness and authenticate her constancy, just as she invokes her patronymy to do the same. But why would Portia show Brutus her wound if the point of wounding herself is to demonstrate how well
she bears the pain? The best way for her to convince us of her constancy, and to convince us she has convinced Brutus (and not simply made him uncomfortable enough to tell her what she wants to hear) is for all concerned to learn of her action after the fact, which is exactly what happens in act 4, at the end of the tent scene between Brutus and Cassius, when Brutus tells of Portia’s suicide. The impact of her death might appear to be blunted by the odd double revelation of it--Brutus tells Cassius, entreating him not to speak of it, and Messala enters their camp shortly after to tell Brutus, who admits no foreknowledge of it--but, in fact, whether the second revelation is Shakespeare’s intention or his oversight, both demonstrate the stoicism lacking in act 2.

Shakespeare has put his finger on the very impossibility of dramatizing stoicism as a “self-sufficient impassivity” by reporting Portia’s offstage death. This is a stoic death: no lingering, no forecasting, no display. In the character of Portia Shakespeare demonstrates the paradox of stoicism: in 2.1 Portia creates a dramatically riveting moment around her revelation that fails to convincingly prove constancy; in 4.2 her death is convincingly self-sufficient and impassive--she dies swallowing fire with her “attendants absent,” according to Brutus--but made dramatically inviable.

Another recurring element that comes to the fore in the Brutus-Portia scene is sickness. Portia taxes Brutus with it as a possible explanation for his unusual behavior, finally deciding he is not afflicted with a physical ailment, but with a mental disorder:
Brutus is wise, and were he not in health
He would embrace the means to come by it.

You have some sick offence within your mind (2.1.257-8, 267).

Brutus chides Portia for committing her “weak condition to the raw cold morning” (235), and he finally dismisses her with a hasty promise to share all the “secrets of [his] heart” (a promise he does not appear to keep),18 in order to admit Caius Ligarius. Ligarius arrives with his head bound in a kerchief, and this sign of both secrecy and sickness provokes the coded wordplay of their exchange:

LIGARIUS
I am not sick if Brutus have in hand
Any exploit worth the name of honour.

BRUTUS
Such an exploit have I in hand, Ligarius,
Had you a healthful ear to hear it.

LIGARIUS
By all the gods that Romans bow before,
I here discard my sickness.

What’s to do?

BRUTUS
A piece of work that will make sick men whole.

LIGARIUS
But are not some whole that we must make sick?
BRUTUS

That must we also (315-28).

This "sickness" is what Brutus had blamed in his attempt to explain to Portia his distraction of mind, and it occurs again in the scene between Caesar and Calpurnia, when Calpurnia, having at last convinced her husband to stay home on the ides, suggests Decius Brutus send word to the Senate that Caesar is ill.

Elsewhere in the play, Caesar's physical infirmity is a constant presence, and according to Cassius, it is what seems to determine his unfitness for rule, while Caesar in turn describes Cassius as "lean and hungry" and "never at heart's ease," smiling "As if he mocked himself" 1.2.195, 209, 206-7). Caesar and Calpurnia are cursed with sterility, and Brutus, Cassius, and Casca all, again according to Cassius, "have the falling sickness" (1.2.256). "What private griefs" the conspirators are suffering, "alas, I know not," mocks Antony. "They are wise and honourable" (3.2.208-9). Brutus laments to Lucullus that Cassius has betrayed the cause of the assassination: "When love begins to sicken and decay / It useth an enforced ceremony" (4.1.20-1).

Martin Vawter treats the sickness of Brutus at length, and Brutus' "infection" of Portia. He claims Brutus' mental agitation is causing physical distress; that is, his "sick mind is brutalizing his body." For Vawter, the evidence provided by Cassius and Portia that Brutus manifests physically an inconstant mental state is proof that the constancy he does display is unreliable.19 And yet, the play does not bother overmuch to distinguish between physical sickness--
Caesar's brand, for example—and the mental sickness plaguing Brutus: that much is made clear in the Brutus-Ligarius scene, where conspiracy comes disguised as an ague, and the psychological health of the conspirators' mission is admittedly subjective. Health and sickness are here practically interchangeable—the sick will be made whole, the whole sick—and the play ends without the health or sickness of either side determined.

For what can we know of the mental ill health of the conspirators, and particularly of Brutus? Vawter cites the reports of Cassius and Portia, but not only are both already "unhealthy" themselves, both express their concern of Brutus as part of their not very well concealed agendas: Cassius wants Brutus to lead the conspirators, and Portia wants Brutus to tell her what is disturbing him.

Earlier I suggested that Brutus' unsympathetic soliloquy in act 2 is a poor demonstration of the "phantasma" or "hideous dream" supposedly afflicting him. His soliloquy is, in fact, a marvel of stoic thought. He does not let his personal feelings for Caesar affect his decision, and he constructs a solidly plausible argument for the assassination, except, of course, it has absolutely no foundation in truth. Here is an opportunity for Brutus to betray the inadequacy of his stoic resolve to us and it is perfectly possible that a director would choose to have Brutus speak this soliloquy while manifesting some of the outward signs of agitation mentioned by Portia, such as distractedly pacing and sighing, crossing and uncrossing his arms, etc. Yet the very composedness of the soliloquy provides a kind of internal direction for the composedness of the acting:
But 'tis a common proof
That lowliness is young ambition's ladder,
Where to the climber-upward turns his face;
But when he once attains the upmost round,
He then unto the ladder turns his back,
Looks in the clouds, scorning the base degrees
By which he did ascend. So Caesar may.
Then lest he may, prevent. And since the quarrel
Will bear no colour for the thing he is,
Fashion is thus: that what he is augmented,
Would run to these and these extremities (2.1.21-31).

The language is perfectly matched to the thought that expresses it: to "So Caesar may," the clauses build upward, each one augmenting the sense of the clause before. Even if this soliloquy is proof of the "phantasma" haunting Brutus, imaginatively projecting Brutus rather than Caesar upward above "the base degrees," the language and imagery retain an evenness and focus so unlike "a hideous dream" that it almost seems that Brutus--in spite of the analogy he draws between Rome and the "little kingdom of man"--must import Rome's civil unrest into himself (2.1.68). Vawter's supposition, then, is exactly the opposite of the point I wish to make about Brutus' stoicism: his constancy is so reliable that his mental state becomes either dramatically inaccessible or indifferent; even worse, it becomes dramatically uninteresting.
But Brutus seems completely unaware that the philosophy he holds so dear is dangerously self-deceptive. In a brief soliloquy following his major speech in the orchard, Brutus, waiting for the disguised conspirators to enter his home, thinks to himself that they should eschew conventional disguise, rather hide their “monstrous visage . . . in smiles and affability.” Shortly after he will bid them look fresh and merrily.
Let not our looks put on our purposes;
But bear it as our Roman actors do,
With untired spirits and formal constancy (2.1.81-2, 223-6).

This is a contradictory request, since the conspirators are asked to put on a look at the same time they are asked to disguise their looks, but they have so far become their roles—or their roles become the conspirators—that any ironic awareness they might possess evaporates.20 Brutus is unintentionally making Shakespeare’s point about stoic constancy—that it is an act—but will not realize it even as he and Cassius stand over Caesar’s dead body in Pompey’s theater, imagining the eyes of history upon them:

CASSIUS

........................................

How many ages hence
Shall this our lofty scene be acted over,
In states unborn and accents yet unknown!
BRUTUS
How many time shall Caesar bleed in sport,
That now on Pompey's basis lies along,
No worthier than the dust! (3.1.112-7).

Nowhere is the sense of playing to the audience, as it were, stronger than here, but coupled with Brutus' and Cassius' realization that they are making history is a frankly incredible naivete about how that history may be interpreted. Brutus seems particularly exultant in this scene; his concentration on Caesar's bloody and sporting mortality plays oddly against his earlier insistence that the assassination be treated as a holy sacrifice, but in fact the only difference between those two points of view is one of degree. Brutus remains constant in his ignorance.

Brutus is not the only immovable and self-deluded practitioner of the stoic arts in Julius Caesar; in fact, there is a dulling sameness to the conspirators (and to Caesar) that further distances us from their dilemma (everyone knows what happens to the unfortunately named Cinna). This uniformity is, unsurprisingly, expressed most forcefully when the Romans are disguised in their conspirators' robes. Servant Lucius cannot tell Brutus who has arrived to see him, because

their hats are plucked about their ears,
And half their faces buried in their cloaks,
That by no means I may discover them
By any mark of favour (2.1.73-6).
Later, Artemidorus reads aloud the warning letter he has prepared for Caesar: "There is but one mind in all these men, and it is bent against Caesar." Most crucial of all, Brutus cannot tell the difference between the motives inspiring the conspirators and those moving Antony; nor do the plebs distinguish between Caesar and Brutus: let Brutus be Caesar, they announce after the assassination. The battle at Philippi contains equally odd slips of identity: Cassius commits suicide after mistaking the forces of Octavius for those of Brutus, and Lucillius is captured by Octavius' men, who mistake him for Brutus.

Rene Girard calls this sameness a "plague of undifferentiation," a collectivity that takes the place of conflict. The leaders of Rome "all want the same thing; they all copy each other; they all behave in the same way." Girard defines conspiracy as a "mimetic association of murderers," but a dramatic exegesis of the word suggests a quite different--though complementary--definition.21

It makes sense that stoic personalities would be drawn to a collective endeavor; as I noted at the beginning of this chapter, the assassination of Caesar appears to be a reasonable undertaking for these Romans. Obsessed with constancy, the murder plot presents them with the perfect opportunity to test their resolve and to enjoy the performance aspect of performing sameness. Portia attempts to "out-constant" Brutus, but Brutus wins, evading her manipulations by swearing he will "construe" to her all his "engagements"--and he has just delivered his opinion of the value of an oath a few lines before--a promise neatly interrupted by the arrival of a fellow
conspirator. The conspirators, led by Brutus, are drawn to sameness, or undifferentiation, because it is a stoic trait.

This explains why there are no erotic attachments in the play; a female difference would be out of place, shockingly so. Calpurnia's warning in 2.2. feels vaguely maternal, but to the point of emphasizing Caesar's indecisiveness rather than suggesting any remotely oedipal complication. Not one relationship in *Julius Caesar* feels at all sexually charged; this is not only an anomaly among the plays, but it foregrounds the stasis and marble-hard inaccessibility of the characters. Cleopatra will claim she is "marble constant, with nothing of woman in her," but we know the constancy is only one facet of her infinite variety, and she lets us know it herself by keeping the sexuality of woman's "nothing" in her pun. Shakespeare's most vital characters always have a significant relationship to sexuality. Always, except in *Julius Caesar*.

Of the characters in *Julius Caesar*, only Antony feels profoundly vital, and only during Caesar's funeral oration, when he speaks to the plebs on behalf of the conspirators. And as Kenneth Burke has pointed out so wittily, Antony's oration is equally a critical commentary of the play. In Burke's essay, Antony turns from the plebs in act 3 to address the audience, and steps out of his character to analyze it. He ends dryly previewing act 4: "You will be still more wisely handled by what follows, as our Great Demagogue continues to manipulate your minds . . . You will witness a startling quarrel between Brutus and Cassius. After this violence and the sad reconciliation (these men are disintegrating), there will be a contrasted descent to soft tearfulness."
Burke's vaguely carnival-barker Antony has just exposed the relentless manipulation of the audience worked by his "Friends, Romans, countrymen" speech, and he anticipates our manipulation by--and critical distance from--the play's only other possible instance of dynamism: the argument between Brutus and Cassius.

This "startling quarrel" has prompted Louis Swilley to observe how unstartling it is in production. Swilley claims that while he has seen many deft interpretations of *Julius Caesar*, he has never seen one he considers affecting, because no director has ever attacked the play's odd stoicism. Using the quarrel scene as his model, Swilley suggests that directors have been too aware of Brutus and Cassius as great cultural icons or political doctrinaires to question their lack of motivation. Change the names of Brutus and Cassius to Bob and Mike, suggests Swilley, and their inexplicable motives leap out.22

In the quarrel scene, for example, the moment at which Cassius invites Brutus to stab him should be stunning in production: "When Brutus does NOT kill Cassius . . . the sky should fall. This is the moment when the world has turned upside down for Brutus"; he learns that a fellow conspirator and one of his closest friends may have killed Caesar having completely different motives than the idealistic ones Brutus has espoused. Brutus must either kill Cassius or "betray the principle that made him kill Caesar." And yet, were Brutus really to consider stabbing Cassius, the sky *would* fall; that Brutus would be far more shocking than the man who simply tells Cassius to sheathe the dagger and "Be angry when you will."23
More ostentatious than the Brutus-Portia scene of 2.1, the tent scene is a *tableau vivant*, affecting because it is sad, not—as Swilley believes it is or as one perhaps would like it to be—shocking or incendiary. The quarrel between Brutus and Cassius and its aftermath is touching because in it one can read the regard these two men have for one another diluted by the stoicism that has sustained them to this point.

The scene begins with Brutus’ hinting that Cassius has disappointed him in some way;\textsuperscript{24} almost immediately Cassius and his army arrive at Brutus’ encampment and, without greeting, Cassius confronts Brutus with his own disappointment at the latter’s behavior:

**CASSIUS**

Brutus, this sober form of yours hides wrongs,
And when you do them—

**BRUTUS** Cassius, be content.

Speak your griefs softly. I do know you well.
Before the eyes of both our armies here,
Which should perceive nothing but love from us,
Let us not wrangle. Bid them move away,
Then in my tent, Cassius, enlarge your griefs,
And I will give you audience (4.2.40-8).

It is as though one is being invited not only inside the tent, but inside the “sober form” of Brutus. The armies will stand aside, but
we will be privy, along with Brutus, to the griefs of Cassius, which will enlarge to become the whole substance of the action.

And yet the sober barrier separating Brutus’ outside from his inside proves to be as illusive as the tentskin; Brutus and Cassius both sit inside and wait to hear the other say, in so many words, that appearances are deceptive. “That you have wronged me doth appear in this,” begins Cassius as a prelude to the reasons for Brutus’ behavior he hopes to hear. Instead, Brutus answers with his own charges, and they play a spirited game of “did too, did not” beyond which they cannot go because of the debilitating and suppressive philosophy they embody. In one of the scene’s more touching lines, Brutus responds to Cassius’ insistence that he said something other than Brutus thought he said: “If you did, I care not” (113). Ultimately, I think, Brutus really does not care, but this line still suggests a man who is offended and wishes for Cassius to clarify his position. But Brutus almost immediately undermines any vulnerability his utterance may have implied by positing his ethical superiority (123-8).²⁵

Nothing is resolved in their dispute, and Brutus at last admits that he “carries anger as the flint bears fire” which “much enforced, shows a hasty spark / And straight is cold again” (167-9). But this is no more emotion than Brutus had shown in act 1, and that had caused Cassius to exclaim, “I am glad / That my weak words have struck but thus much show / Of fire from Brutus” (2.176-8).²⁵

Cassius ends his life having “misconstrued everything” (5.3. 83). Brutus ends his with an address to the ghost of Caesar: “Caesar, now be still. / I killed not thee with half so good a will, and Antony
ends the play praising Brutus for having been the "noblest Roman," because "All the conspirators save only he / Did that they did in envy of great Caesar" (5.5.50-1; 69-70). This is an assessment only slightly less startling than Brutus’ mistaken appraisal of Antony in act 3: everything about Brutus--his long soliloquy in act 2, his leadership of the conspiracy, the cry of the plebs to “let him be Caesar,” even the mood of ritual reverence surrounding his last moments and his death--subtly suggests Brutus is the natural successor to Caesar, a succession not entirely unwelcome to him. The play’s ubiquitous misconstruals are the legacy of its conspiracy, and mistaken identity is the norm when no one may be discerned “By any mark of favour.”

Caesar really is the play’s “star,” his role the most easily misconstrued because the least eloquent. His part is available for multiple adaptations: an impotent opportunist for Cassius, a bloody stage prop for Antony, a philanthropist for the plebs. Finally, however, his body, with its “poor dumb mouths,” remains a sly reference to the powerful but ultimately lifeless appeal of Rome’s stoicism.

Notes
1. All citations of Julius Caesar are taken from The Complete Works, ed. Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), and will be referenced parenthetically in the text.
2. Ralph Berry, in Shakespeare and the Awareness of the Audience, having discarded the claims of character, politics, and anthropology,

Berry and others have also noted that "Rome" and its variations occur more often in this play than in any other. Surprisingly, the word "Roman" occurs next most often in *Cymbeline*.

3. In act 1, Brutus reminds Cassius that he is willing to look "indifferently" on both honor and death if his actions will tend "toward the general good" (2.89, 87). In act 2, he soliloquizes:

> And for my part
> I know no personal cause to spurn at him,
> But for the general.

........................................

> 'tis a common proof
That lowliness is young ambition's ladder (2.1.10-21).

Later, Brutus tells Antony that "pity to the general wrong of Rome" has killed Caesar (3.1.171).

4. John Anson describes *Julius Caesar* as "a Roman drama whose vision appears less personal than social and historical." In an
unusual but apt reading of the play, Anson sees the “repressive ethic” of its body politic result in a “gradual loss of sensibility expressed in the play as the separation of hand from heart.” Of course, as the hand is a member of the body, Anson’s configuration shares with mine the idea of the assassination plot as an extension of Roman ethics (p.11).

Anson’s thesis in many ways subsumes my own. He casts a skeptical eye on the play’s version of stoicism, as I do, claiming that “it is possible to approach Julius Caesar as a drama exploring just the moral petrification Erasmus diagnosed [in The Praise of Folly] as the illness of the Senecal man” (p.14). I believe it is more than possible; I diverge from Anson, however, in that I am interested in the peculiar challenges that must have confronted Shakespeare’s dramatization of this “moral petrification.” "Julius Caesar: The Politics of the Hardened Heart," Shakespeare Studies 2 (1966): 11-33.

I am also indebted to Martin L. Vawter’s “‘Division ’tween Our Souls’: Shakespeare’s Stoic Brutus,” Shakespeare Studies 7 (1974): 173-95. Vawter builds on Anson’s work but turns the latter’s “hardened heart” into a Roman sickness that afflicts, primarily, Brutus (q.v.).


6. In the play’s opening scene the tribunes blast the fickle plebs:

Run to your houses, fall upon your knees,
Pray to the gods to intermit the plague
That needs must light on this ingratitude (53-5).

Cassius tries to outrage Brutus' sense of noblesse oblige:

Men at sometime were masters of their fates.
The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars,
But in ourselves, that we are underlings (1.2.140-2).

Casca suggests that the Romans might have been “too saucy with the gods,” who now are raining destruction (1.3.12-3). Brutus and Cassius boast that their murder of Caesar is an immortal act that will be played over and over again “in states unborn and accents yet unknown,” and

So oft as that shall be,
So often shall the knot of us be called
The men that gave their country liberty (3.1.114, 117-9).

7. While Van Laan never explicitly agrees with my formulation, he implies that a barrier of history exists between the characters of *Julius Caesar* and their audience:

Unlike most history plays, by Shakespeare or others, *Julius Caesar* is actually a play about history. The only other play by Shakespeare that could be called a history play in this sense is *Troilus and Cressida*, which also compels its audience to respond to the characters and events on the stage through the perspective of
history, even though, of course, these characters and events actually derive from legend (pp.161-2).

Rene Girard also makes the *Julius Caesar-Troilus and Cressida* connection, although he does so at the level of character rather than theme. “Collective Violence and Sacrifice in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*,” *Salmagundi* (Fall 1990): 399-419.

8. Berry, p. 80.


12. Ralph Berry calls Julius Caesar “decadent,” an epithet I found shocking at first, but which now feels more apt every time I read the play (pp. 77-8).

13. The *Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy* discusses the varieties of stoicism and traces the ongoing debate over them from antiquity to the neostoicicism of the sixteenth century. Even the Roman stoics thought it impossible for the average individual to live up to exacting stoic standards; some medieval and Renaissance thinkers found stoicism admirable but unrealistic, others dismissed it as impracticable and thus not admirable; still others tempered it
with Christianity or “Aristotelian moderation,” and some with epicurean or peripatetic ethics (Ed. Charles B. Schmitt and Quentin Skinner [1988; rpt. Cambridge University Press, 1990], pp. 360-86 and passim, 362). Sixteenth-century stoicism would have based its philosophy on, primarily, the works of Seneca and Cicero’s *De Finibus* and *De Officiis*.


15. Anson cites the sixteenth-century zoologist Aldrovandi and Robert Burton, for example, passim, and see also p. 14; also Vawter, pp. 177, 182-3.

16. And “construal” is an eye-catching word that recurs in *Julius Caesar*, most famously in Titinius’ mournful reproval of the dead Cassius: “Alas, thou has misconstrued everything” (5.3.83). It also appears early in the play, when Brutus asks Cassius not to “construe any further my neglect” (1.2.47). Its Latin root, *struere*, most commonly means to arrange or build, but it may also mean “to plot.”

17. *Roman Shakespeare: Warriors, Wounds, and Women* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 124. Portia’s wound forms the centerpiece of Coppelia Kahn’s reading of the play, “Mettle and Melting Spirits in *Julius Caesar*.” Portia’s wound “hints ambiguously” at a genital wound, but because the wound is a demonstration of stoic indifference, it also has a masculine valence, “Or, to put it another way, the constitution of manly virtue requires the repression of the feminine, and the repressed returns” (p. 101). Kahn’s reading is quite
convincing in itself, but I have deep reservations about the extent to which *Julius Caesar* may be amenable to a conventional psychoanalytic interpretation.

18. Both Coppelia Kahn and Martin Vawter seem to feel that Brutus does keep his promise and “construe . . . all the charactery of [his] sad brows” to Portia at some point before her distracted appeal to Lucius in 2.4. Of course, even if he does “construe” to her, he has not necessarily told her the truth, but I find no conclusive evidence that Brutus and Portia have discussed his “sickness” between 2.1 and the assassination of Caesar. It’s clear in 2.4 that Portia knows something is afoot, but she is purposefully vague, and surely she would have suspected her husband’s involvements without his admission. At one point, apparently as she and Lucius stand outside, she tells him, “I heard a bustling rumour, like a fray, / And the wind brings it from the Capitol” (19-20). This is either a veiled reference to news she has gotten from Brutus (obviously she would not be familiar in conversation with Lucius) or a more direct reference to the Roman grapevine, which at this time must be fairly choked with rumor (Kahn, p. 101; Vawter, p. 186).


20. The observation that Brutus’ words are contradictory is Jonathan Goldberg’s (Bloom, p. 91).


22. All references to Louis Swilley’s interpretation refer to an email conversation posted on Sept. 22, 1998 to The Shakespeare Conference <SHAKESPER@ws.bowiestate.edu>.
Of course, Cassius refers to himself as an epicurean (5.1.76-7), but there were as many varieties of epicureanism as of stoicism, including one, advocated by Seneca, as austere and rigorous as the harshest stoic doctrine; this seems to be the kind referred to by Cassius, but at any rate, it's clear that his reference is not to a system that espouses a voluptuous ethic. See The Cambridge History, pp. 374-86.


24. This scene also begins eerily like 1.2, in which Caesar enters at the head of the procession and calls to Calpurnia. Casca, overhearing, bids everyone "Peace, ho! Caesar speaks" (2). 4.2 begins with Brutus entering at the head of his army, and calling "Stand, ho!" (1).

25. Ralph Berry writes that, by acts 4 and 5 Brutus and Cassius "become weary automata, playing out their parts with a diminishing expectation of success" (p. 85). But it is clear to me, and the two references to Brutus' brief emotional sparks are hardly necessary reminders of it, that the two do not become weary automata at some point after Caesar's assassination; rather, they begin the play so.
CHAPTER III

Dearth and Coriolanus

Coriolanus seems to be a play of action, a dramatized world of mutinous citizens, plotting tribunes, famine, war, and banishment. Yet, what really happens in this world? The citizens never realize their mutiny, Brutus and Sicinius never realize their ill-defined plot, Coriolanus' consulship is rescinded, the mutual banishment of Coriolanus and the citizens is undone by his resolve not to make "true wars" against Rome, and the defeat of Aufidius in act one becomes a meaningless victory when Coriolanus is in turn defeated in the final scene of the play. Perhaps it is more accurate to call Coriolanus a play of action, a drama in which action is enstated rather than enacted, in which action is described, deferred, erased, and repeated, but in which activity itself is never "finalized" as a discrete event. Coriolanus contains plenty of movement but no progression, debate without resolution, plots and promises that are never fulfilled, and constant effort for no realized gain.

The shortage of corn focuses all this anxious activity, signalling not only material shortage, but the play's scarcity of viable politics, peace, and interiority. Coriolanus is the fulcrum about which is balanced Rome's ideology (as expressed by Volumnia) and its reality (the hungry and underrepresented citizens). This Rome is the play's "world elsewhere," held in perfect stasis by the competing tensions of its component parts. The play is at heart a tautology of rhetoric, whereby corn and representation become
interchangeable demands made by the plebeians, bodies and voices become substitutable states, and every action is "talked" into the performance of a competing or cancelling reaction.

For the dearth exists less as material scarcity than as a fortuitous opportunity for the nobles to manipulate the plebeians; if there were no dearth, so to speak, the nobles would have had to make it up. The play forcefully suggests that corn is scarce, but never establishes it definitely, nor does it ascertain the nobles' complicity in the shortage. In fact, after scarcity is established in act one, the fact of dearth is largely dropped, while the language of dearth and hunger is assimilated into and shapes the dynamics of the play. By taking into account the related ambiguities presented in the figure of Coriolanus and in the issues raised by the corn shortage, one can negotiate the gap between voice and body so problematic in the play, and assimilate the importance of the dearth to the drama in a fuller way than merely aligning it with actual shortages in early seventeenth-century England.

The peculiarly systemic relationship between Coriolanus and its rhetoric is suggested by T.S. Eliot in The Sacred Wood: "we cannot grasp [the Elizabethans], understand them, without some understanding of the pathology of rhetoric. Rhetoric, a particular form of rhetoric, was endemic, it pervaded the whole organism; the healthy as well as the morbid tissues were built up on it. We cannot grapple with even the simplest and most conversational lines in Tudor and early Stuart drama without having diagnosed the rhetoric in the sixteenth and seventeenth-century mind."
*Coriolanus* displays Eliot's pathology in a notably organic way, while defining this organicism has been the goal of much *Coriolanus* criticism, from Nahum Tate's dedication of his 1682 adaptation of the play, to Zvi Jagendorf's 1990 essay on the failure of Rome's political ideology. Even criticism less overtly political recognizes the link between political unity and individual wholeness (or perhaps wholesomeness). Janet Adelman, for example, explores the play's shift from its "exciting cause," the hungry multitude, to its central focus on the individual, wounding maternal body.2

These and other essays, whether arguing from a dialectical understanding of the play's political processes, or from a psychoanalytic point of view or a structuralist, ultimately read the play as an essentialist conflict: between plebeians and nobles, between Coriolanus and the cultural forces against which he is set, between the body and speech, between the maternal and the martial.

I think this reading by disjunction comes about, surprisingly, because of the play's resistant, even seamless language. Stanley Cavell believes "The play presents us with our need for one another's words by presenting withholding words, words that do not meet us halfway. In Carole Sicherman's "*Coriolanus: The Failure of Words,*" the author's thesis mandates a disjunctive analysis: "In Coriolanus, dissociation between words and meanings . . . has become a hopeless disjunction."3

But I believe words succeed in *Coriolanus*; far from disjoining words and meanings, the play's peculiarly endemic pathology of rhetoric suggests its own reconciliation of voice and body, members to corporation, fragments to the whole. What fails in *Coriolanus* is
not words, but the uses to which its rhetoric is put, and a clear, cooperative definition of the Roman state from which its rhetoric springs. That is, Coriolanus is "about" the manipulative function of rhetoric—to persuade the plebeians to vote for and, immediately after, to banish Coriolanus, to shift Coriolanus' allegiance first to Rome then to the Volscian territories, to enable Volumnia to pit the agents of Rome (her son, the nobles, the tribunes) against one another all in the name of Rome. But since the citizens remain physically and politically starved, Coriolanus is reduced to martial impotency, and the nobles dependent upon his voice lose the physical presence need to instantiate their power, the play exposes the inefficacy of its rhetoric. The language of dearth and hunger is endemic because every character in Coriolanus is hungry for something the play does not provide.

The first scene establishes the relationship between hunger, citizens, tribunes and nobles, bodies and speech. Jarrett Walker, in his essay on Coriolanus as a conflict between voice and body, begins his analysis of this scene by noting that Shakespeare launches "a frontal assault of bodies. Enter a company of mutinous Citizens, with staves, clubs, and other weapons. (1.1.1. S.D)." He cites Philip Brockbank's assertion that "Coriolanus is the only play of the period to open with public violence . . . [it] is . . . the very first thing we are meant to perceive. The stage direction insists that the armed citizens that have stormed the stage are 'mutinous,' not, as we later learn, that they are, specifically, hungry."4

But contrary to Brockbank, and Walker after him, Coriolanus does not open with "public violence," but rather the potential for
violence, a threat or description of violence. Thus our first impression is not of violence being done but of its imminence. The citizens may enter "mutinous," but once they begin speaking, they more properly become potentially mutinous. Their very first words immediately begin the process of defusing action; even this scene's inflammatory language defers and usurps the impetus toward revolt:

First Cit. Before we proceed any further, hear me speak.

All. Speak, speak.

First Cit. You are all resolved rather to die than to famish?

All. Resolved, resolved.

First Cit. First, you know Caius Martius is chief enemy to the people.

All. We know't, we know't.

First Cit. Let us kill him, and we'll have corn at our own price. Is't a verdict?

All. No more talking on't; let it be done. Away, away!

Second Cit. One word, good citizens.⁵

The citizens are here stayed by the second citizen to discuss in more detail the nobles' role in the grain shortage, and in particular, the role of Coriolanus to the commonalty. Upon hearing shouts from the other side of the city, the citizens ask, "why stay we prating here? To th' Capitol!" (47), but once again are halted, this time by the entrance of Menenius; the citizens remain discussing their grievances with him until the entrance of Coriolanus and his news that "the other troop" of citizens have been granted "Five tribunes to defend their vulgar wisdoms," and "are dissolv'd" (203, 214),
prompting a further discussion that continues until nearly the end of the scene.

The language of the citizens, whose intent initially seems to be to further action, repeatedly halts or postpones it. The second citizen’s interjection appears to interrupt the mutiny, but of course it is already a repetition of the first citizen’s introductory deferral. The citizens claim that by ridding themselves of Coriolanus they will have corn at their own prices: that is, by killing him they will force the nobles to recognize their economic power, but, as Walker notes, the cause and effect between the two is never made explicit. What is clear is the citizens’ hunger per se, an easily shifted or deferred but unsatisfied desire.

But how do the citizens come to decide on the link between food and Coriolanus (especially, as Walker writes, “collectively”)? Until the point in the first scene at which Menenius enters (at line 50), the likeliest link between corn and Coriolanus comes from the citizens’ attribution of abundance to both: “the leanness that afflicts us, the object of our misery, is as an inventory to particularise [the nobles’] abundance.” When the conversation shifts to Coriolanus his faults are enumerated by the first citizen as “what he hath done [for his country] famously, he did it to that end . . . he did it to please his mother, and to be partly proud, which he is, even to the altitude of his virtue.” The second citizen responds, “What he cannot help in his nature, you account a vice in him. You must in no way say he is covetous.” Before their conversation is interrupted, the first citizen replies in turn: “If I must not, I need not be barren of accusations. He hath faults, with surplus, to tire in repetition”
(18-45). This remark echoes the first citizen’s earlier suggestion that the nobles’ very behavior makes them suspect hoarders of grain: “What authority surfeits on would relieve us. If they would yield us but the superfluity while it were wholesome, we might guess they relieved us humanely” (16-8).⁶ As Coriolanus is also the plebeians’ “object of misery,” then he too serves to “particularise” the abundance of the nobles.

Walker goes on to describe hunger as the motive behind the revolt, while Coriolanus is the “symbol of [the citizens’] suffering and the object of their violence. . . . this consensus can be built only through speech, [but] it is driven by an impulse that speech cannot describe.” For Walker, the citizens’ motive is hunger while their act is revenge because voice and the body are ontologically different. He bridges the gap between voice and body by suggesting that what really unites the people is “the specific image of Martius,” and following Rene Girard, he describes Coriolanus as a “sacrificial victim,” and his relationship to the citizens as a “silent, bodily one.”

Walker’s observation astutely realizes Coriolanus’ sometimes nebulous position, and yet his status as bodily object need not be seen as a different phenomenon than the citizens’ hungry speech. Walker notes that “neither hunger nor revenge really describes the proposed act,”⁷ but his very mention of a proposed act points to an alignment of both hunger and revenge in the register of speech, and of the displacement of action into proposition. What the citizens in 1.1 propose to do is mutiny, and they propose to mutiny because of claims of hunger, yet at the beginning of 1.1 their hunger is for corn;
by the end of the scene it is a hunger for tribunes, and their proposed
mutiny culminates in an utterance of banishment in 3.3.

We never learn if the patricians are hoarding grain, nor if any
of the other accusations made by the citizens are true (1.1.80). The
tribunes granted them, of whom we know only Brutus and
Sicinius, hardly defend their "vulgar wisoms," and never address
the problem of their physical hunger. Menenius tells Martius that the
citizens seek "corn at their own rates, whereof they say / The city
is well stor'd. Martius replies "Hang 'em! They say! . . . They say
there's grain enough?" (1.1.188-95). The issue of corn begins as a
debate between the patricians and plebeians, but without clear
evidence on either side, the argument transforms itself into a
taxtology. More than this: in 1.1, corn and representation themselves
become interchangeable demands. After Menenius finishes his fable,
he asks "What say you to't?" The first citizen replies "It was an
answer. How apply you this?" Menenius explains his notion of the
body politic, and ends by calling this citizen "the great toe" of the
assembly. He means it as an insult, of course, but his descent into
name-calling and the first citizens' request for Menenius to apply
his tale to the present situation expose the irrelevance of the fable-
the citizens are hungry, so the nobles feed them words. We learn
that the second group of mutinous citizens have "vented their
complainings" of hunger, and as a result, have been granted tribunes
rather than food. The language of their complainings plays on both
wind and belly, voice and body, but the connection between food and
representation remains obscure. Menenius and Martius both call the
petition granted the plebeians "strange," and it is a measure of the
play's strange "rhetorical pathology" that the citizens can feed on words and so transform their hungry mouths into voting "voices."

It is not only the citizens who are suspicious of abundance. When a messenger interrupts this scene with news that the Volsces have taken up arms, Martius replies, "I am glad on't; then we shall ha' means to vent / Our musty superfluity" (224-5), language that calls to mind the "superfluity" of grain growing unwholesome in its storehouse. And in this image, by a rhetorical transformation similar to the one by which the citizens feed themselves with news of the tribunes, Martius, hungry for battle, transforms news of Volscian attack into citizens-as-food, feeding them and their insurrection into the wars.8

But hunger and scarcity remain the only commodities in abundance in Rome; the tribunes do not satisfy the citizens; victory in Corioles does not satisfy Coriolanus; Coriolanus' banishment does not satisfy the tribunes. As Volumnia so eloquently states the dilemma: "Anger's my meat: I sup upon myself / And so shall starve with feeding" (4.2.50-1). Coriolanus, less enigmatically, attempts to soften the impact of his banishment by prophesying, "I shall be lov'd when I am lack'd" (4.1.15). What are the inhabitants of this Rome really hungry for? And why do the manifestations of their hunger continually shift? Why can't Rome satisfy its citizens?

It may be helpful to address these questions by posing their opposites: what does Rome provide in abundance? What is the relationship between abundance and scarcity? If Rome provides an excess for which its citizens are not hungry, then what is the function of its dearth?
One thing Rome appears to have in abundance is wounds: wounded and wounding citizens, the infectious conversation of the tribunes, a “diseased” Coriolanus who “must be cut away” (3.1.292). Coriolanus in particular is abundantly wounded, a cause for celebration in 2.1, as Volumnia, Virgilia, Valeria, and Menenius anticipate his arrival home from the wars in Corioles. And yet, the rhetoric of the waiting nobles values these wounds in terms of their number, rather than their physical effect. Menenius, surprisingly, offers initial resistance to this “fabulation,” (or “tabulation,” more accurately), but he is no match for Volumnia’s exuberance. Together they count twenty-seven wounds, including those acquired in previous wars. Brockbank notes the “discrepant arithmetic” of their calculations, but the more wounds the better, as Volumnia and Menenius imaginatively finger his “cicatrices” like coins.9

These wounds, and their meaning in this scene and throughout the play, further vex readings which would divide the play thematically into factions, whether those factions are voice and body or citizens and nobles. What value do these wounds have? Menenius uses them to justify Coriolanus’ pride to the tribunes; Volumnia values them (in this scene, at least) for the impact they will have on the people when Coriolanus “shall stand for his place” in the market. But Coriolanus does not show his wounds, either to the nobles or to the citizens; the wounds’ value remains explicitly dependent upon their ability to be detached from the referent of Coriolanus’ body and circulated rhetorically. The citizens take up the worth of his wounds in the market scene, much as Volumnia and Menenius in 2.1: “For, if he show us his wounds and tell us his deeds,
we are to put our tongues in those wounds and speak for them. So if he tell us his noble deeds, we must also tell him our noble acceptance of them.” (2.3.5-9).

In this strange combination of conditionality and protocol, the body/voice distinction is again effaced. Although Sicinius warns Coriolanus the citizens will not “bate / One jot of ceremony” (2.2.140-1), they award him the consulship without being shown his wounds and without being told of his deeds (Coriolanus tells them he has “Of wounds two dozen odd; battles thrice six / I have seen and heard of” [126-7]). In fact, in a moment made significant by its absence of artifice, the first citizen tells Coriolanus the price of the consulship is simply “to ask it kindly” (75); Coriolanus, who had earlier claimed “I cannot bring / my tongue to such a place,” appears so taken aback he does ask it kindly, and says “I have wounds to show you, which shall be yours in private” (76-7).

Apart from this exchange (“but this is something odd,” the third citizen will say a few lines later), the wounds lose their ceremonial potency.\(^{10}\) The remark that the citizens will put their tongues in Coriolanus’ wound is jarring because it momentarily subverts the ritual mechanism by which speech and ceremony keep separate tongues and wounds. What the citizen implies (“So if . . .”) is if Coriolanus acts according to custom, the citizens will respond in kind. But his reiterations only highlight the instability of the tongue-wound image. It echoes a moment in *Julius Caesar* when Antony addresses the plebeians in front of Caesar’s body:

[I] Show you sweet Caesar’s wounds, poor poor dumb mouths,
And bid them speak for me. But were I Brutus
And Brutus Antony, there were an Antony
Would . . . put a tongue
In every wound of Caesar (3.2.220-4).

But Coriolanus cultivates an underlying perversity such that the third citizen’s rhetoric does not put its tongue into Coriolanus’ wounds only to speak in their place; the language of barter also drives the exchange, and slants the whole scene in the marketplace (e.g., “You must think, if we give you anything, we hope to gain by you” [72-3]). The alternative force of “speaking for wounds” must be figured in: the citizens are speaking to gain the wounds, to appropriate them and the abundance they signify.

In receiving Coriolanus' wounds, the citizens must be wounded. The divergence from the ceremonial script, by which wounds shown in private will lose their performative force, hurts the citizens' cause. The confusion following Coriolanus’ exit from the marketplace (confusion artfully manipulated by the tribunes) springs from just this divergence. The citizens would resolve Coriolanus' enigmatic temper—was he mocking them, wounding them with his words?—in his favor had he only shown them his wounds in public, only saved them from the play’s pathological speech with a literal instance of pathology:

Second Cit. Amen, sir. To my poor unworthy notice,
He mock’d us when he begg’d our voices.

Third Cit. Certainly,
He flouted us downright.

*First Cit.* No, 'tis his kind of speech; he did not mock us.

*Second Cit.* Not one among us, save yourself, but says

He us’d us scornfully: he should have show’d us

His marks of merit, wounds receiv’d for his country.

*Sic.* Why, so he did, I am sure.

*All.* No, no; no man saw 'em.

*Third Cit.* He said he had wounds which he could show in private;

And with his hat, thus waving it in scorn,

'I would be consul,' says he; 'aged custom,

But by your voices, will not so permit me:

Your voices therefore.' When we granted that,

Here was, 'I thank you for your voices, thank you;

Your most sweet voices: now you have left your voices,

I have no further with you.' Was not this mockery? (2.3.156-71).

What impresses me mostly strongly in this scene is the way it positions the reader as a citizen (or vice versa) struggling to interpret Coriolanus, whose wounds lose their "merit" when withheld from public view, and whose refusal to perform according to custom forces the citizens to render his tone. Both the first and second citizens voice a plausible response (and the same reasoned speculation will occur in Antium, as Aufidius' servingmen attempt to piece together Coriolanus from clues of face, clothes, and strength); and this market scene seems to confound readings that pit the plebeians against the nobles, even readings sympathetic to the former (those of Jagendorf, Brecht, and Grass, for example). These
interpretations, however carefully they individuate the citizens or explore their political legitimacy, neglect the indeterminacy animating the relationship between Coriolanus and the citizens, the emotional dependence each one has on the other, and the extent to which this relationship, so often dismissed by both parties as futile, still has the power to surprise.11

The wounding capability of words is explored at length by Geoffrey Hartman, in a “different turn” on Derridean theories of rhetoric; Hartman attempts a “restored theory of representation” that takes into account the “empirical nearness . . . the moral and mimetic impact” of signified and signifying practices: “Literature, I surmise, moves us beyond the fallacious hope that words can heal without also wounding. Words are homeopathic, curing like by like.”12

Hartman’s conjecture recalls Eliot’s “pathological rhetoric,” upon which the “healthy as well as morbid tissues are built.” But in Coriolanus rhetoric’s health and morbidity are continually supplanted by its usefulness or lack. “Plenty is then a function of dearth,” writes Jagendorf,13 and I am suggesting that what is plentiful in Coriolanus is the rhetoric of hunger; dearth works, in other words. But the rhetoric of Coriolanus plays a powerfully reflexive game, one from which Stanley Cavell can extrapolate the “paradox and reciprocity of hungering” exemplified by Coriolanus and Volumnia.

Cavell cites the ambiguities of grammar attending Menenius’ question in 2.1: “Who does the wolf love?” Cavell wants to know if Menenius means “whom does the wolf love,” or “who does love the
wolf”; the answer in either case, the lamb, forces one to decide “what or who you take the lamb to be, hence what the wolf.” He intimates that Menenius, “ever the interpretive fabulist,” generates a kind of interpretive shock by his image-reversal, suddenly posing the patricians, especially Coriolanus, as the lamb. But the image is not really shocking, since these citizens have already been described in the first act as scavenging dogs and rats, eaters of excess, and have, in their attribution of abundance, perhaps already figured Coriolanus as prey.

“The circle of cannibalism, of the eater being eaten by what he or she eats,” is a phenomenon not limited to Coriolanus and Volumnia, and Cavell implies as much by pointing to “the active and passive constructions” of the play’s “focal verbs” (feeding and suckling) informing “the inevitable reflexiveness of action” in Rome.14 But this “reflexiveness” is the play’s central activity, of which “cannibalism” is only one instance. The subsumption of eating and being eaten in a single verb recalls the subsumption of act and motive by violent action posited by Walker. To return briefly to 1.1, this is Coriolanus’ response to the question posed by Menenius regarding the second group of citizens, “what says the other troop?”:

They said they were an-hungry, sigh’d forth proverbs--
That hunger broke stone walls; that dogs must eat;
That meat was made for mouths; that the gods sent not
Corn for the rich men only. With these shreds
They vented their complainings, which being answer'd
And a petition granted them, a strange one,
To break the heart of generosity
And make bold power look pale, they threw their caps
As they would hang them on the horns o’th’moon,
Shouting their emulation (203-13).

We have only Coriolanus’ word for what happened on this side of the city, but knowing the rhetoric of the citizens with whom we are familiar, his dismissal of their claims of hunger may not be without warrant. In Coriolanus’ version these citizens languorously sigh their hunger in proverbs, but whether they sighed them or shouted them, Coriolanus unwittingly links their propensity for aphorism with that of Menenius. They are further linked by their shouted emulation, a phrase glossed by Brockbank as the citizen’s shouts emulating their caps, but they could be just as easily emulating the nobles, whose bold power they have made look pale. Coriolanus appears a bit vexed by the “strange” petition granted them because, apart from the seeming irrelevance of the tribunes granted them to the food they said they were hungry for, he claims they were answered not solely by these tribunes, but they were answered and a petition granted them, a sort of double divergence from the hunger for corn that has ostensibly begun the unrest. The citizens are doing no more than reflecting the language of the nobles. Much has been written, for example, of Menenius’ belly fable, but not of the pas de deux between Menenius and the first citizen that extenuates the fable and exposes not only its erroneous content—the fable is a fable—but, in his rhetorical interruption and imitation, the citizen’s
foreknowledge and dismissal of it (113-21), ending with a diagnosis of the nobles as the body's "cormorant belly." "It was an answer," this citizen at last responds, "How apply you this?" Given the behavior of the other troop, this same question might be asked of them.

The mutual banishment of Coriolanus and the citizens epitomizes this reflexiveness. Their competing declaratives neatly express the play's strange narrative drive that insists positive action requires negative presence; in them one can hear Volumnia's desire to efface Coriolanus' nature in pursuit of her political goal, the conferral of tribunes in lieu of corn, the tactical persuasions and cajolery directed toward Coriolanus once he is in Antium.

The banishment, however, is rarely seen as mutual; Coriolanus is, of course, the one who leaves Rome, and criticism typically views the utterances of banishment as emanating from the different positions of political or linguistic strength occupied by Coriolanus and the citizens; for example, Coriolanus' declaration is an attempt to stake out a new, alternate sociopolitical world, or it functions as critical commentary rather than constitutive authorization. I do not deny the dramatic tension of this scene created by these differences, but I want to point out that it is at this moment, in a drama whose forensic style is for the most part an extremely sophisticated version of "did too, did not," and in mutual statements buried within the play's knottiest language, that the gloves are taken off, so to speak, and Coriolanus and the citizens address one another "truly," in words that, in speaking of banishment, actually
result in (at least a temporary) banishment. Plotz notes that Coriolanus can't create a "world elsewhere" by simply saying so and taking leave of the world he's lived in thus far, but at this point in the play Coriolanus doesn't know that, and his ignorance gives his declaration of banishment its persuasive power.

In fact, Plotz's reading of the play rests upon the characters' knowledge of the emptiness of their expressions: "All the characters in Coriolanus [except Coriolanus] are aware, underneath, that the linguistic games they are playing are fraudulent . . . [his] criticism uncovers a hamartia that society would just as soon ignore--but his criticism cannot work as a cure." Of course his criticism cannot work as a cure, because there is no world elsewhere to which Coriolanus can go to learn the relative worth of fraudulence. 17 Coriolanus looks inward, and since the play provides no overt opportunity for inwardness--no revealing soliloquy, no alternatives except another Latin community--its inwardness must be expressed in the same language as its outwardness. Plotz refuses Coriolanus the ability to conjure (linguistically or physically, by moving into a non-Roman space) an alternative world, yet he attributes to him the ability to imagine a world of which he can have no knowledge.

Coriolanus reacts to Rome, just as everyone in the play reacts rather than sets in motion. What makes the banishment scene so singular is the possibility it seems to present for action rather than reaction, although this possibility remains potential, circumscribed by its political solipsism, and by the citizens' future language. The play's tragedy resides partly in its indeterminacy; we sense Coriolanus struggling toward something he knows nothing about, but
all we know is what Coriolanus knows—that sense of struggle, the grappling to define an alternative—because all we have is its Rome, too.

I think one then cannot contrast the “fraudulent” language of the citizens with the “solipsistic universe” posited by Coriolanus, in which “other human beings are . . . useful only as motives to our actions”; in fact, Plotz’s own distinctions between Coriolanus and the citizens fall apart when he insists upon separating the truth value of words from their persuasive power. To distinguish the “manipulative” talk of the citizens designed to keep them “comfortably numb to their own motives,” from Coriolanus’ stoic philosophy of “any deed bravely done is its own reward and its own proof of rightness,” does not shed any light on Coriolanus’ motives, or explain to what purposes he uses others as motives for his actions.18

Plotz is exactly right to see that Coriolanus and the citizens are mirrors of the other’s discontent; I only want to argue that the play does not divide language into “persuasive” and “true,” but erases this division. Coriolanus, whose language of banishment differs so markedly from the citizens, is straitened by the same lexical conflation of signified and signifier. His “I banish you” has the same rhetorical force as the citizens’ and tribunes’ more baroque utterances; his decision to appeal to them, made earlier in counsel with the nobles, partakes of the same grammatical futurity as the citizens in the banishment scene, and of the same indecision that has also been typical of the citizens throughout. Coriolanus is
far more aware than the citizens of the fraudulence of his language, and equally guilty of the citizens’ "uncertainty."

"Action is eloquence," says the maddening Volumnia (3.2.76), and her equation and its Plutarchan antecedent might serve as the play’s most eloquent synopsis. She has already rhapsodized to Virgilia that the purpose of Coriolanus’ battlefield garlands is their power to "become" him through reknown and good report. When Coriolanus soothes his mother with "I shall be lov'd when I am lack'd," he is recasting her earlier pronouncement to Virgilia, "If my son were my husband I should freelier rejoice in that absence wherein he won honour." Coriolanus is not Rome’s only practitioner of Plotz’s brand of solipsism.

But what does Volumnia’s "Action is eloquence" mean, or perhaps I should ask how does she mean it? The possibilities are clearly limited if one must decide between this statement’s truth value and its persuasive power. Volumnia’s rhetorical self-referencing confuses her statement’s grammatical, logical construction with its figurative, aphoristic force; her statement has both illocutionary and perlocutionary status. Paul de Man asserts the problem with what seems "a perfectly clear syntactical paradigm" is not whether "we have, one the one hand, a literal meaning and on the other hand a figural meaning, but when it is impossible to decide by grammatical or other linguistic devices which of the two meanings . . . prevails. Rhetoric radically suspends logic and opens up vertiginous possibilities of referential aberration." In Volumnia’s statement one must weigh, for example, the manifestations and manipulation of the Plutarchan ethos infiltrating the play: action
privileged over speech; the necessity for speech and action to exist in symbiosis (action expressed in apt speech); and the possibilities suggested by a reversal of the variables, to “eloquence is action.”

The syntactical paradigm de Man uses for his assertion is the rhetorical question, and not a species of statement; Coriolanus provides such a paradigmatic example, one that, as happens so often in the play when he and Volumnia seem to be speaking unaptly to each other, recontextualizes her own gnomic speech. The rhetorical questions I’m interested in occur early in the scene that also produces Volumnia’s “Action is eloquence,” and after he has been proclaimed consul. I quote the whole of his address after Volumnia’s entrance:

I muse my mother
Does not approve me further, who was wont
To call them woollen vassals, things created
To buy and sell with groats, to show bare heads
In congregations, to yawn, be still, and wonder,
When one but of my ordinance stood up
To speak of peace or war. I talk of you.
Why did you wish me milder? Would you have me
False to my nature? Rather say I play
The man I am (3.2.7-16).

Coriolanus appears to be answering his own questions, yet that answer is an extenuation of his indeterminate rhetorical questions and their referents. As de Man asks of the confusion engendered by
this paradigm, "what is the use of asking . . . when we cannot even authoritatively decide whether a question asks or doesn't ask?"\textsuperscript{23}

The inflectional possibilities awaiting the interpreter of Coriolanus at this moment are daunting, and one might make a decision in favor of Plotz's belief that (especially in the banishment scene), "only Coriolanus says out loud what others keep under their hats."\textsuperscript{24} But Coriolanus seems caught in the same linguistic labyrinth integral—not to his sense of true worth nor the citizens' knowing fraudulence—but to meaning in the play. Coriolanus may be frustrated by not being able to say just what he means, but I think to assert more than this possibility places a burden on him unsubstantiated by the text. True, he will at one point admit, "I flee from words," but when words suit his purpose, he uses them as profitably as the tribunes, the citizens, Menenius, or Volumnia: "so shall my lungs / Coin words till their decay" (3.1.76-7).

When Coriolanus asks his rhetorical questions, he is talking of Volumnia, musing that his mother does not approve him, although what it is she does not approve remains unclear. The content of his speech seems calculated to win sympathy for his explosion against the tribunes in the previous scene, when he learned the citizens, after granting him the consulship, "are incens'd against him." Yet, so far as Volumnia knows, he is still consul, and his invective might well express shame at her disapproval of one of his "ordinance" standing for the office, despite her desire for it (and her own remarks through line 31 hardly resolve their respective positions). He is feeling her out, testing her "true" feelings toward himself by testing those toward the "woollen vassals," and using (possibly) her
own words (the antecedent of “wont” could be either Coriolanus or Volumnia) to establish a strange intimacy between them. Coriolanus’ questions not only foreclose an answer from Volumnia, but have accumulated the force of all the preceding lexical twists. His own answer (which uses decidedly Volumnian syntax), if a continuation of his talk “of” Volumnia, might be a rebuke to her, as “you would rather say I play the man I am.” If rebutting his own questions, however, he is as much as admitting that the man he is requires performance. That he can perform convincingly while never seeming the same he is not speaks volumes: action is eloquence.

What one must weigh in the banishment scene is not only Coriolanus’ present language versus the future language of the citizens, not only whatever solipsistic philosophy escapes his lips versus the need for external proof voiced by the citizens, but the proportions established by the play leading up to the scene. Everything between 2.2 and 3.3 concerns Coriolanus’ consulship and its rescission. The pronouncements of banishment sound striking in isolation, especially Coriolanus’ alliterative rant, but if one pulls back enough to view them within this larger context, they lose a great deal of their cogency and climactic impact. The mix of tenses by which the citizens banish him (“He’s banished, and it shall be so!”), the tribunes’ odd, truncated language (“we, / Ev’n from this instant, banish him our city”), and of course the citizens’ reversal, at the urging of the tribunes, of voting Coriolanus into office and then casting him out of the city, provokes his cry, “And here remain with your uncertainty!” But here is Coriolanus responding in the previous scene to the urgings of the nobles that he return to the
. Mother, I am going to the marketplace . . . I'll mountebank their loves . . . I / Will answer in mine honour" (3.2.35-144).

Plotz seeks to understand "who's banished," and argues for the impossibility of Coriolanus' authorizing himself sufficiently to "turn the paradigmatic tide." But Plotz also establishes a strong case for the "nonsense" of both declarations of banishment, "though the staging of the dual banishment does create sense within the frame of the play." As I've pointed out, however, the banishment scene does make sense as the culminating of an impetus that began in the second act, and while I don't wish to overextend the significance I've established of dearth and abundance to this scene, it does work aptly as a mutual venting, by which Coriolanus and the citizens not only voice their discontents but expel linguistically the irksome abundance signified by the other. Both Plotz and Cavell realize that Coriolanus cannot really leave Rome for a world elsewhere; he is too inextricably of Rome to create or function in a place not-Rome (banished, he becomes, in the parlance of the play, a limb that's cut away.) But what happens as a result of this "banishment"?

I wrote at the beginning of this chapter that Rome is held in perfect, precarious balance by the tension of its parts. It is a fully functioning homeostatic organism, viable so long as all its rhetoric of fragmentation and dismemberment remains just talk. When Coriolanus leaves, the citizens and nobles "regraft" him with their rhetoric, and "the commonwealth doth stand, / And so would do, were he more angry at it" (4.6.14-5).
But the drama with Coriolanus out of Rome is different than the drama with him in it, although the difference is expressed, of course, morphologically:

*Sic.* Is’t possible that so short a time can alter the condition of a man?

*Men.* There is a differency between a grub and a butterfly; yet your butterfly was a grub. This Martius is grown from a man to a dragon: he has wings: he’s more than a creeping thing (5.4.9-14).

This is surely an unnatural metamorphosis, a pathology, but it exactly suits the character of acts 4 and 5. Here is Menenius continuing, for example, in response to Sicinius’ remark that Coriolanus “loved his mother dearly”:

So did he me; and he no more remembers his mother now than an eight-year-old horse. The tartness of his face sours ripe grapes . . . He sits in his state as a thing made for Alexander (15-22).

Coriolanus may be more than a creeping thing, but he is still a thing; more to the point, a similar change seems to have crept into Menenius’ style of speaking. Still the fabulist, his rhetoric has moved from the comprehensive belly fable to these curt and ugly analogies. His role in the first three acts, as a kind of self-appointed paternal arbiter, has been pared to that of an ineffective rager against the machine, bitterly repeating to the tribunes, “you have done good work.” Menenius was equally ineffective in the
former role, and in the first three acts he certainly never hesitated
to chastise the tribunes, but now his rhetoric smells of crisis and
his impotence in its face.

The relationship of the post-banishment Coriolanus to its pre-
banishment one has vexed readers who understandably are looking
for coherent and particularly tragic meaning. Linda Bamber likens
Coriolanus to Macbeth, claiming "the dialectic in both plays . . . is
inconclusive . . . Macbeth and Coriolanus simply exhaust the
possibilities of their mode; they repeat themselves until, like
Marlowe's Tamburlaine, they are dramatically played out. Then they
die." Zvi Jagendorf, eschewing the play's tragedy for its politics,
and weaving in the imagery of food, comes to nearly the same
nihilistic conclusion: "the body cut to pieces remains an obstinately
secular final image. No nourishment can issue from these fragments,
and no promise of any coherence that outlives the body is inscribed
in them."27

This seems to me almost the best that can be done in terms of
finding meaning in the play's final two acts without forcing
signification on them, especially the kind of "transcendent loss"
Bamber ascribes to the other tragedies.28 I would like, however, to
examine the post-banishment play as an annotation, or critical
commentary of what has gone before.29 Aufidius, for example, who
in the first three acts remains a very peripheral figure, should
provide a clue to the pathology of Rome/Coriolanus; he is usually
seen as a projection of Coriolanus, either father figure or sexualized
counterpart, or, for Janet Adelman, an invention: "Shakespeare takes
pains to emphasize the distance between the Aufidius we see and
the Aufidius of Coriolanus' imagination." But while one can see imagination working in Coriolanus' attributing martial worthiness to an opponent he has beaten at every conflict, neither invention nor distance can account for their shared sexualized language and hatred, nor Aufidius' meditation on the nature of his foe, expressed in language that is a refracted version of the Roman citizens' in 1.1 (4.7.37-47).

Aufidius is not Coriolanus, but he is like Coriolanus, in the same way Antium is not Rome but like Rome. Antium has conspirators rather than tribunes, cryptic servingmen rather than citizens, lords and lieutenants rather than nobles. The play ends in Antium's marketplace. One need only track the permutations of rhetoric to see how the critical difference between the two places is wrought. Looking at Menenius' "differency" between a grub and butterfly, it's clear the analogy to Coriolanus will not bear scrutiny; butterfly is not to grub as dragon is to man. The reader has become inured to the rhetorical excesses of Rome, and to the mythologizing of Coriolanus by the nobles, because Rome has so successfully contained its hero and been "the world elsewhere." If one takes him out of this world and compares him to Antony, for instance, "whose legs bestrid the world," it becomes clear that Coriolanus is very much a local hero. 31

Because he is a local hero, his carefully constructed Roman presence is out of place in Antium, hence Aufidius' refusal (or inability) to recognize and call him by name in 4.5., and the effectiveness of his taunt "boy" in 5.6. A more comprehensive depiction of difference occurs in the scene-ending Volscian
conversaon of 4.5 and Sicinius’ observation opening 4.6. The Volscian servingmen are here anticipating the invasion of Rome:

Second Serv. Why, then we shall have a stirring world again.

First Serv. Let me have war, say I. It exceeds peace as far as day does night: it’s sprightly walking, audible, and full of vent.

Second Serv. ’Tis so, and as wars, in some sort, may be said to be a ravisher, so it cannot be denied but peace is a great maker of cuckold.

First Serv. Ay, and it makes men hate one another.

Third Serv. Reason: because they then less need one another. The wars for my money. I hope to see Romans as cheap as Volscians. They are rising, they are rising.

First and Second Serv. In, in, in, in!

Sic. We hear not of him, neither need we fear him;
His remedies are tame i’th’present peace
And quietness of the people, which before
Were in wild hurry. Here do we make his friends
Blush that the world goes well; who rather had,
Though they themselves did suffer by’t, behold
Dissentious numbers pest’ring streets, than see
Our tradesmen singing in their shops and going
About their functions friendly (4.5.225-40; 4.6.1-10).
This is an extraordinary juxtaposition, articulating what seems to be a profound difference between the Volscian and Roman ideologies of warfare. War is very much an external threat to Antium, a menace from outside that must be met by unified forces from within. Rome, on the other hand, is already a “stirring world” whose inhabitants “hate one another,” although this does not, in Rome’s case, preclude their need for those they hate. Even if one could ignore the ironic unlikeness of Sicinius' friendly, singing Romans, his speech is still bracketed by the servingmen’s anticipation of war and the announcement in Rome that Aufidius is preparing to attack. The construction of these scenes--Rome surrounded by Volscies--makes the “quietness” of the Roman people and the calm of the state claimed by Sicinius feel more like ominous lacunae.

For the Volscies, war's ravishing destruction is preferable to cuckolding peace, but these associations are subtly opposed in Rome, as Cominius accuses the tribunes of helping to ravish their own daughters, and Menenius concludes the imminent invasion is the work of Aufidius, who “Thrusts forth his horns again into the world, / Which were inshell’d when Martius stood for Rome” (4.6.44-5). Antium has inverted the circumstantial markers of war and peace associated with Rome. War is for the former “full of vent,” but not a venting of citizens; instead war purges undesirable Volscian traits and makes men “need one another.” This practical and, as far as possible, healthy attitude toward warfare is in contrast to the Roman, whose inhabitants have all they can do to mediate the city's continual state of internal siege.
Rome might be the Orwellian exemplar of a state operating under the banner “war is peace.” Not only does Antium provide a different perspective on the value of war, it discriminates between the conditions prescribed by peace and war. These terms seem useless in Rome, whose stability depends upon the proper balance of fomentation. In act one Coriolanus (as yet named Martius), attempting to rouse his troops against Corioles, insults them with the same zest and language with which he insulted the hungry citizens, going so far as to threaten that unless the soldiers “Mend and charge home,” he will “leave the foe / And make my wars on you.” Their response: “Foolhardiness! Not I. / Nor I” (1.4.38-46). After singlehandedly turning the tide of battle against the Volsces, Martius then whips up the same troops with a remarkable piece of incendiary rhetoric.

Not much critical attention is paid to this lengthy battle scene, probably because it is sandwiched between more rhetorically interesting and revealing exchanges between the nobles and citizens; the battle is business as usual, more about intra-Roman politics than battlefield fraternity. But the scene enriches the complex characterization of Coriolanus; here is yet another instance of the man both fleeing from words and coining them till his lungs’ decay. Whether or not Coriolanus is fully in control of his rhetoric at this point is unknowable; the tension generated by the play is such that, although his death in Corioles will come after Aufidius’ refusal to let Coriolanus “purge himself with words,” one still is unsure if he provokes the response he expects or exposes other motives beneath the Roman lexicon. Aufidius will echo him in this, ending the play a
typically Roman amnesiac, whose rage evaporates immediately upon
the death of his foe, thus obscuring the purgative relationship
between motive and act.

In 4.7 Aufidius, in a speech Coleridge thought "the least
explicable from the mood and full intention of the speaker of any in
the whole works of Shakespeare,"33 understands the Roman people
"Will be as rash in the repeal as hasty / To expel him thence." This
is a key insight into the fragility of the Roman state, enabling
Aufidius to prophesy that "When, Caius, Rome is thine, / Thou art
poor'st of all: then shortly art thou thine" (32-3, 56-7). It matters
not to Aufidius if Coriolanus makes Rome his through warring or
peaceful means; he knows that Coriolanus and Rome are inextricably
bound.

The emphasis Rome had placed on the value of Coriolanus'
position in the city, as a register of the citizens' and noble'
discontents, and on his wounds and reputation as martial and
political currency begins to accumulate considerable relevance when
issued from the mouths of the Volsces. Coriolanus is out of place
and valueless in Antium, and it is by manipulating his worth to Rome
that Aufidius "devalues" him, turning him into the "kind of nothing,
titleless" he becomes.

Philip Brockbank makes the provocative observation that in
4.6, as the Romans anticipate Volscian invasion, Shakespeare
"exaggerates the extremity of Roman fear and panic at the return of
Martius."34 Why should Brockbank be struck by an exaggeration of
extremity here, as the play to this point is a protracted, precarious
balance of extremes? Does he perhaps notice an imbalance in Rome
caused by Coriolanus' absence, or symptoms of rhetorical excess unmediated by his presence? His assertion opens up a pleasing field of speculation for a scene which does not appear to have much more happening in it than the usual blaming, bickering nobles, tribunes, and citizens--except for Coriolanus' absence.

There is no similar notation for Volumnia's lengthy speech in 5.3, though it is a rhetorical coup de maître, a not-quite-double talk intricately wedding the expectation of filial duty to the assertion of maternal authority, blurring all bounds between the political and social familial, and attacking Coriolanus' most Volumnia-entrenched beliefs for the purpose of satisfying Volumnia. She says her request is not "To save the Romans, thereby to destroy / The Volscies . . . No, our suit / is that you reconcile them." Volumnia sweetens her request with the projection that should Coriolanus do so both sides will "Give the all-hail to thee"--the laurel wreath of "good report" Volumnia (and thus Coriolanus) prizes more than his life (5.3.233-9). The drama's first three acts, in preparing for the banishment, have demonstrated just what success Coriolanus has made of reconciliation, and Volumnia, as his chief manipulator, knows how critical is his role as Rome's tabula rasa; her plea here is an attempt to restore the city's previous (dis)order, to close the gap his absence has opened.

Volumnia's suit is born of desperation, now "all the policy, strength, and defence" Rome has left to it (4.6.128) In 1.3 she had derided Virgilia, "If my son were my husband I should freelier rejoice in that absence wherein he won honour, than in the embraces of his bed." That absence is now a certainty, and
Volumnia is pressed to admit to her son her dependence on Rome’s insular homogeneity:

Thou barr’st us
Our prayers to the gods, which is a comfort
That all but we enjoy; for how can we,
Alas! how can we for our country pray,
Whereunto we are bound, together with thy victory,
Whereunto we are bound? (5.3.104-9)

Volumnia’s anguished emphasis on her bonds to Coriolanus evokes the pain of Rome’s protracted tumescence, its inability to discharge its deferrals and postponements. Volumnia also projects the obverse of reconcilement’s gain to Coriolanus, and binds him rhetorically to the citizens, whose “voices might be curses” to themselves (2.3.182-3), much as Coriolanus had unknowingly linked the citizens to Menenius in act one. It is certain, she says, “That if thou conquer Rome, the benefit / Which thou shalt thereby reap is such a name / Whose repetition will be dogg’d with curses.” In these few lines Volumnia references the major rhetorical images in the play, or—since each of these images in some measure conjures up Rome in its pathological entirety—what Lawrence Danson calls Coriolanus’ “numerous and striking metonymies.”

Danson claims these metonymies are “in effect called into being . . . by Menenius’ fable of the body and the belly.” Although I don’t agree with the primary importance Danson attaches to this
fable, I do agree that "the play's mode of expression . . . is intimately related to the nature of the thing to be expressed . . . [Menenius defines] for us the macrocosm of Rome both in its present dissentious reality and its unrealized ideal of order."36 Volumnia's lines are not metaphorical, not expansive; she proves the lie of Menenius' attempted metaphor by cobbbling together the metonymic "fragments" of Rome: Coriolanus will be "dogg'd," presumably by the scavenging citizens who are, after all, "the city"; his name, "forg'd" in the fires "Of burning Rome," will be repeatedly cursed; and he will reap these unfortunate benefits after having been denied the benefits of conquering Rome politically (and after denying the citizens the literal benefits of reaping).

Volumnia's rhetoric of metonymies, repeating many of the bodily images of the belly fable and representing the destruction of Coriolanus' family as the destruction of Roman society, succeeds with Coriolanus, but it seems to shock him into the awareness, away from Rome, that he cannot do for Rome what it cannot do for itself: "O mother, mother! . . . Behold, the heavens do ope, / The gods look down, and this unnatural scene / They laugh at" (5.3.182-5). The "unnatural scene" refers not simply to the specter of the women and son kneeling to Coriolanus, but to the more figurative role reversal: this is a man who has wanted "nothing of a god but eternity" (5.4.24), would stand "as if a man were author of himself," and who has accepted the regard of Menenius, who "godded me indeed" (5.3.36, 11). But Coriolanus nevertheless has not grown into the expansive comprehension or autonomy necessary for the "deserving" of these epithets--just as he has refused to brook the reduction of
his person into subhuman wounds. Volumnia's speech reminds him of his "place," her metonymies indicative of Rome's parochialism and Coriolanus' "unnatural presence" outside its walls. "The heavens do ope"—a subtle enjambment that fleetingly suggests a metaphorical opening up of Coriolanus' understanding—gives way to his final fragmentation, the realization that he is "most mortal" and ineluctably indebted to Rome for the creation and continuation of his identities. "I am glad thou hast set thy mercy and thy honour / At difference in thee," gloats Aufidius. "Out of that I'll work / Myself a former fortune" (5.3.199-202).

The distance Coriolanus achieves from Rome, and the seeming objectivity he achieves as a result, only hasten the process by which he is destroyed. When he had met Aufidius in battle he always emerged victorious, but when he partakes of and succumbs to the rhetoric of Rome, away from Rome, Aufidius is there to record his (and its) vulnerability. Coriolanus makes a valiant effort to fit into the "world elsewhere," reminding himself, I think, that the linguistic strategies integral to his domestic incorporation are not useful except in the domestic sphere. But Aufidius' Antium, like Rome in so many ways, provides an alternative model of social coherence, far less reliant on the lexical forcing of signification. When Aufidius calls Martius "traitor," he reads the latter's actions, not his words, lest "he purge himself with words," and Aufidius' conspirators similarly concern themselves with this difference:

Ere he express himself or move the people
With what he would say, let him feel your sword,
Which we will second. When he lies along,
After your way pronounc'd shall bury
His reasons with his body (5.6.55-9).

This richly involved statement expresses not only a fear of Roman linguistic infection, but potentially a fear of what Coriolanus' fragmentation represents—the very power to be representative. Rome has, however, instantiated its representative power in "a kind of nothing," subject to the rhetorical whims and projections of which the city is made. The Volsces are eager to eradicate this threat in much the same way Rome was eager to eradicate its internal threats. The play's final scene, while putting a stop to Rome's tiring redundancy, generates the possibility that Antium may not be significantly different; it is, after all, in many ways a repetition of the first scene of the play—with the difference that the people actually rather than potentially kill, in a conflict proscribing words and thus producing the meaningless spectacle of Coriolanus' body.

Notes
2. For example, Tate writes: "Faction is a Monster that often makes the slaughter 'twas designed for; and as often turns its fury on those that hatcht it." From The Ingratitude of A Common-Wealth, quoted in "Coriolanus": Critical Essays, ed. David Wheeler. Shakespeare Criticism (New York: Garland Publishing, 1995), p. 4. See also


6. In the folio this line reads, "what Authority surfets one, would relieve us" (my italics). Brockbank notes the folio's "one" as a common variant spelling, but it seems unusually apt in this scene given the distinctions drawn by the citizens.


8. Cf. Falstaff in I Henry IV, whose "toasts-and-butter" soldiers are "good enough to toss, food for powder, food for powder; they'll fill a pit as well as better" (4.2.17, 50-1).

9. The nobles' miserly hoarding of wounds echoes their alleged hoarding of grain, particularly as the wounds will not be shared with the citizens in the marketplace.

10. Shakespeare considerably abbreviates the history behind the standing-for-consul provided by North. According to North, at the
time Coriolanus stood for the office, the ceremony had not yet been corrupted, but "given then by desert" (quoted in Brockbank, p. 331).


15. Obviously, I use "reflexiveness" in a broader sense than does Cavell, to connote the play's fundamental mirroring of speech between the citizens and nobles. Although Cavell restricts his use of the word to mean an action directed back onto the agent or subject--the controlling grammar of Rome's "cannibalism"--his essay gestures toward my own argument that Rome feeds on words (pp. 14-5).


17. Plotz, p. 810.

19. Plutarch several times refers to the traditionally Spartan attachment to action over speech, but he also praises the act of speech when it aptly serves a purpose, particularly the purpose of war. Thus, in North’s Life of Paulus Aemilius, Paulus was “a severe captaine, and strict observer of all marshall discipline, not seeking to winne the souldiers love by flatterie, when he was generall in the field, as many dyd in that time.” Of Julius Caesar, “It is reported that Caesar had an excellent naturall gift to speake well before the people, and besides that rare gift, he was excellently well studied, so that doubtless he was counted the second man for eloquence in his time, and gave place to the first . . . bicause he was geven rather to follow warres and to manage great matters . . . And therefore in a booke he wrote against that which Cicero made in the praise of Cato, he prayeth the readers not to compare the stile of a souldier, with the eloquence of an excellent Orator.” Plutarch’s Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans, Englished by Sir Thomas North. The Tudor Translations, ed. W.E. Henley (London: David Nutt, 1896), 2:199, 5:3.

The protocol of speech, silence, and kinds of action also produces some notable moments in Plutarch. Shakespeare follows him closely in the scene from Antony and Cleopatra in which Menas requests permission from Pompey to kill “These three world-sharers, these competitors.” Pompey replies:

Ah, this thou shouldst have done
And not have spoke on’t. In me ’tis villainy,
In thee ’t been good service.

"
Repent that e'er thy tongue
Hath so betrayed thine act. Being done unknown,
I should have found it afterwards well done,
But must condemn it now. (2.7.69-79)

In the Life of Antony, Plutarch relates, “the Alexandrians . . .
joined good-humoredly and kindly in his frolic and play, saying they
were much obliged to Antony for acting his tragic parts at Rome, and
keeping his comedy for them.” Parallel Lives. The Complete Works of
20. Linda Bamber says of both Coriolanus and Macbeth, “These
heroes, unopposed by the [feminine] Other, solipsistically repeat
themselves; in both cases the price of solipsism is tedium.” Bamber
also observes that these two plays “share this sense of recurrence
rather than forward motion,” but in Bamber’s Jungian reading, this
“compulsion to repeat is a function of the absence of the Other.”
Comic Women, Tragic Men: A Study of Gender and Genre in
Shakespeare (Stanford University Press, 1982), pp. 96-7.
22. Brockbank cites Bacon’s essay “Of Boldness”: “Question was
asked of Demosthenes, what was the chief part of an orator? He
Bacon is in turn citing Plutarch’s Life of Demosthenes. Brockbank,
3.2.76-7n., and Bacon’s Essays, introd. A. Spiers (New York: Carlton
House, 1930), p. 103.
23. De Man, p. 29.
25. Janet Adelman writes that this line reveals Coriolanus' "bafflement"; he "would like to suggest that there is no distance between role and self, but he in fact suggests that he plays at being himself, that his manhood is merely a role," p. 135.


29. I have taken this idea of "critical commentary" from Plotz, but while he attributes this critical capacity to Coriolanus, I believe it is a function of being away from Rome and, as I have already pointed out, I also do not believe Coriolanus does or can function in any truly critical capacity; i.e., he knows something in Rome is rotten, but not what it is.


31. But note the remark of Sicinius that Caius Martius affects "one sole throne, / Without assistance," and Brockbank's observation that "the form of words here shadows the emergence of Caesar," 4.6.32-33n. See also the remarks of the Volscian lord in the final scene: "The man is noble, and his fame folds in / This orb o'th'earth"--still a somewhat contrary aggrandizement (lines 124-5).

32. The speech with which Martius stirs his soldiers to a final attack on Corioles runs from lines 66 to 85. Brockbank, following the Tucker-Brooke Yale Shakespeare, attributes the line "O me alone! Make you a sword of me!" (76) to the soldiers. The folio, however, attributes the entire speech to Martius, only dividing it at line 76 with the stage direction, "They all shout and wave their swords, take him up in their Armes, and cast up their Caps." Editions which
retain the folio assignment and attribute the line to Martius (F’s “Oh me alone, make you a sword of me”) seem marginally superior (despite the textual cues supporting Brockbank’s assignment) since the sentiment, in the context of his eagerness to meet Aufidius, is pure Martius. It is also tempting to imagine that his soldiers, perhaps still believing in his “foolhardiness,” remain life-preservingly silent.

33. Qtd in Brockbank, 4.7.28-57n.
34. 4.6.120n.
35. The Freudian model of plot explored by Peter Brooks provides in many ways a wonderful paradigm for the narrative drive of Coriolanus, particularly his discussion of the state of repetition in which narrative exists and the problematics of psychic mastery as transferred to textual energy: “Repetition in all its literary manifestations may in fact work as a . . . binding of textual energies that allows them to be mastered by putting them into serviceable form, usable “bundles,” within the energetic economy of the narrative . . . To speak of “binding” in a literary text is thus to speak of any of the formalizations, blatant or subtle, that force us to recognize sameness within difference . . . these formalizations and the recognitions they provoke may in some sense be painful: they create a delay, a postponement in the discharge of energy, a turning back from immediate pleasure, to ensure that the ultimate pleasurable discharge will be more complete.” In Coriolanus, however, the final “discharge” of energies feels alien, almost spurious because, while the text has seemed to prepare for Coriolanus’ death since its first scene, its narrative impetus has
been toward an endless continuation of this state of repetition and
deferral. *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (New
36. “Metonymy and Coriolanus,” *Philological Quarterly* 52, 1 (January
37. As Coriolanus hears the disturbance offstage heralding
Volumnia’s arrival, he asks himself, “Shall I be tempted to infringe
my vow / In the same time ’tis made? I will not” (5.3.20-1). His
“resolution” conveys a bittersweetness different from the
oscillating answers he had given his mother in preparation for the
consul ceremony. Here he seems to be abrogating the rhetorical
fickleness that would be unacceptable to Aufidius. Even more
poignant is his earlier dismissal of Menenius; Coriolanus has been
wounded by the banishment, but is again constrained from “showing”
these figurative wounds by the play’s limited forensic style: “I say
to you, as I was said to, Away!” (5.2.105-6).
38. Danson refers to Kenneth Burke’s analysis of representative
government as synecdochic, although Danson himself appears uneasy
about the extent to which Rome exemplifies a representational
ideology: “What Coriolanus denies in himself, he despises in the
state and would extirpate--its fragmentary, representative nature,
its at least partial democracy of functions” (p. 34). Insofar as
Coriolanus is representative of Rome, however, I think his presence
is potentially threatening to the Volscies.
CHAPTER IV

Antony and Cleopatra: Reading the “and”

Of all the characters in the Roman plays, Cleopatra is the creature of greatest complexity, so much that interpreters of Antony and Cleopatra generally facilitate their understanding by dividing her into halves: the material Cleopatra--erotic and fecund, and the symbolic Cleopatra--alien andemasculating projection of Roman anxieties. This division is in turn an attempt to grapple with the play’s conflicting economies, ideologies, or ethical principles—a conflict between, for example, Egyptian excess and Roman restriction, or Roman imperialism and Egyptian monarchy, or any of a number of ostensibly matched contrasts used to demonstrate Rome’s inevitable victory over Cleopatra and the Egyptianized Antony.¹

Reading Antony and Cleopatra primarily as a drama of conflict ignores its visceral/erotic attack, which depends just as obviously on the sexual and thanatotic union of the lovers as on their cultural separation and difference; ignores also its subsuming of binary contrasts in the cyclical imagery of Fortune’s wheel and the systolic-diastolic rhythms of the Nile. Antony and Cleopatra reminds one again and again that the individual is subject to the whims of forces larger than oneself: Caesar may invoke Fortune’s turning to explain or justify his ascendancy, but he is largely silent regarding what will happen when the wheel turns against him at some future time. Cleopatra, seeming embodiment of all things un-Roman, keeps time to an earthier cadence while manipulating her own ascendent
status as cunningly as Caesar. But Cleopatra also seems to have found the secret, which she shares with Antony, of escaping fortune, and late in the play she will express her superiority over Caesar, who is "paltry . . . not being Fortune . . . but Fortune's Knave" (5.2.2-3).2

Thus there is, in a sense, a central opposition: Caesar's worldview versus Cleopatra's; and, if these two opponents, so evenly matched, were the play's central focus, it would end in a draw, with Cleopatra opting for an afterlife beyond Caesar's reach (which she does), or with Caesar's profoundly practical universal landlordism hounding her out of existence (which it does). But the love story of Antony and Cleopatra is the play's central focus, and Antony's character skews things wonderfully in Cleopatra's favor. If the play's victory is Cleopatra's it is by way of Antony's intervention, the emotional expedience of their affair demonstrating not only the ease with which the qualities of Romanness and Egyptianness segue, but prompting Caesar to admit that Rome is peculiarly susceptible to Cleopatra's influence.

Cleopatra's "victory" is thus itself of a peculiar kind. She does not defeat Rome in some kind of gender or cultural battle; rather, her character illuminates Rome's own self-defeating ideology. A deep "interior" division exists between the imperialism of Caesar, for example, and the more romantic republicanism exemplified by Antony and, to a lesser extent, Pompey. Cleopatra also confronts Rome with its conflicted conception of women, a conflict between the masculine expectations it has for Octavia and the uneasiness generated by the failure of these expectations. But Cleopatra does
not simply hold up a mirror to Rome; in concert with Antony she actively appropriates it, turning Rome's inadequacy into an Egyptian abundance.

In this chapter I will assume the preeminence of the love story while taking advantage of recent critical tendencies that have explored the play's complex psychology and treatment of gender, and keeping in mind the play's interweaving of its politics with its erotics, I will offer a more faceted Cleopatra, one whose femininity, chiefly manifested by the materialism of Egypt, eludes its identification as a symptom of the play's patriarchy. Cleopatra is associated with an Egyptian fecundity and caprice, but she is also, with Antony, a new interpreter of Rome. She and Antony continually recycle and reread the play's many Graeco-Roman motifs and its emblematic Roman behavior so that, for example, the couple become a united Dido and Aeneas, and play at revising Echo and Narcissus, while Antony literally sheds his armor and figuratively his warrior persona for love of Cleopatra.

In this introductory section I make some general remarks about the play's mythopoeia in order to establish the significance of Caesar's speech in 1.4:

It hath been taught us from the Primal State
That he which is was wish'd until he were,
And the Ebb'd Man, ne'er lov'd till ne'er worth Love,
Comes fear'd by being lack'd. This Common Body,
Like to a Vagabond Flag upon the Stream,
Goes to and back, lacking the varying Tide,
To rot it self with Motion (41-7).

I will refer to this speech throughout the chapter, since it summarizes the difficulties of culling from the play a coherent sense of what Romanness means, and particularly, in its imagery of fluidity and languor that is most closely associated with Cleopatra, what the Roman conception of masculine and feminine means. The speech also brings together Roman beliefs expressed in part elsewhere: an individual virtue that is dependent upon absence, and the attraction-repulsion that seems to be a typical Roman response to all activities and events; and that produces Caesar's reference to a motion that rots with stillness.

In the next section I explore Cleopatra's relationship to the elements of this speech, especially to the "Primal State," a tantalizing place or situation which Caesar evokes ambiguously as an authority for the behavior he describes. In this section I posit Cleopatra as the primal state, as that state is outlined by Caesar; she thus becomes the linchpin of Antony's Romanness and his Egyptianization. Cleopatra (or, as Caesar and Enobarbus will call her, "Cleopater") exemplifies everything that Caesar evokes with this primal state but cannot define about it; that is, he describes the symptomatic behavior sprung from this state, but not the cause or origin of the behavior. This assertion leads me to the next section, a feminist reading of Cleopatra generated by my observations in the previous section. Using a few of the more controversial tenets of, chiefly, Luce Irigaray and Helene Cixous, I demonstrate Cleopatra's
practical femininity. She never attempts to define herself apart from Antony, yet exerts a unique and unsettling influence on Rome's masculine system, pointing out its permeability. She brings this discomfiting realization home to Caesar (and of course to Antony); Caesar's catachrestic speech of 1.4 demonstrates that, once Rome has been infiltrated by Cleopatra's influence (which he admits in the scene leading up to this speech), he cannot then preclude her from his conception of Romanness.

Finally, I examine the relationship of Antony and Cleopatra as the erotic prerequisite and parallel to the Rome-Egypt relationship. Focussing primarily on the scene of Antony's death at Cleopatra's monument, I discuss Antony's relinquishing of Rome and Romanness to and for Cleopatra, and Cleopatra's integration of the Romanness Antony relinquishes, as they achieve a "Heavenly Mingle," joyful antithesis to Caesar's anxiety of influence.

Reading the play as an oppositional contest has its uses, but only insofar as these conflicts illuminate the drama's central union and the causal connection between Cleopatra's disruptive presence in Roman affairs and Rome's own penetrable autonomy. There is, for example, much that seems decidedly Roman about the Cleopatra who begins the play in Alexandria begging Antony to hear news from Rome, whose very identity depends at least partially on Antony's success or failure as a Roman, and who ends her life articulating herself as "marble constant," with "nothing of woman" in her. Simultaneously, the Romans exhibit a constant (and relentlessly
checked) urge toward a Cleopatran state that deconstructs the very Romanness Cleopatra appears to exemplify, whether that urge is expressed by Antony’s continual submission to his pleasure, or by Caesar’s startling and involved analysis of the difficulties attending Roman identity in 1.4, or by the burdens of loyalty scrutinized via the characters of Enobarbus and Octavia.

The play is more than an erotically spiced episode in the serial construction of the era’s Augustan heritage, and to appreciate this one need only note the changes Shakespeare makes in adapting Plutarch, particularly the expansion of Cleopatra’s role in the events the play dramatizes, and the minimizing of both her political aspirations and her culpability in Antony’s defeat at Actium. ³ Shakespeare creates a Cleopatra who lacks the political subtext of the Plutarchan creation (Shakespeare is so comparatively reticent about Cleopatra’s previous history and political affiliations--and when these are mentioned, they are typically as accusations from Roman mouths--that she appears in the play like one of the Nile’s phantasmic creatures, sprung whole from its mud) and also the immorality crucial to Plutarch’s didacticism, dramatically altering the tone of his source so as to construct, in effect, a different story.⁴

This change in tone produces the most celebratory dramatization of love in the corpus, and to think instead of the lovers’ bonds and the play as ultimately “about” Rome’s sociopolitical victory (or primacy) is to defuse the pleasures built into the text. Antony and Cleopatra’s relationship, though certainly not without risk, lacks the youthful vulnerability of Romeo and
Juliet's to the crushing kinship networks surrounding them, and their affair avoids the social sanctions brought to bear on the marriage of Othello and Desdemona. And Antony, whose masculinity suffers some shocks (particularly as a result of Cleopatra's easy way of inverting gender roles), does not suffer from the sexual nausea infecting Othello or Leontes. Antony and Cleopatra are both powerful adults who "stand up peerless," and this power creates the freer social space in which their alchemy works.

When the play does broach the political tension existing between Rome and Egypt (and thus between Antony and Cleopatra), it treats this tension as an aspect of the personal. For example, after his defeat at Actium Antony, initially tender toward Cleopatra, swings into outrage as he suspects her of currying favor with Caesar's servant Thidias. Cleopatra replies, "Not know me yet?", defusing Antony's certainty ("Cold-hearted toward me?", he ventures, after his accusations elicit no explanation). Her question, a poignant (and possibly exasperated) lover's plea, shames us, too: do we have doubts about her faithfulness? Should we know her? In the flush of remorse provoked by her question it is easy to overlook the obstacles to interpretation Cleopatra has presented in the preceding lines. Does she submit to Caesar through Thidias because she assumes Antony's defeat is final? When she muses on her relationship to "Caesar's father," what does one learn about her understanding of the power relations between Egypt and Rome? In his rage Antony recalls her past liaisons with Julius Caesar and Gnaeus Pompey, "besides what Hotter hours / Unregist'red in Vulgar Fame" she has enjoyed (3.13.116-7). Shakespeare otherwise
minimizes the politically expedient relationships which Plutarch mentions as a matter of course; but here Antony confronts us with the possibility that Cleopatra's relationship with him is another in this series.

A possibility is all it remains, however. At this moment, as well as during many of the play's events--Antony's reactions to Fulvia and Octavia, Cleopatra's preparations for her death, the reasons for Antony's defeat in his final confrontation with Caesar--crucial information seems to be withheld, and one is left without a stable point of reference from which to address the issues raised. Janet Adelman, for example, remarks that she is "as unwilling to imagine a fundamentally disloyal Cleopatra as the most romantic critic and will argue for the best possible interpretation of her actions; but the fact is that the play will support the arguments of my opponents almost as readily as mine. We simply are not told the motives of the protagonists at the most critical points in the action." While any critical stance might display this vulnerability, adopting a policy of uncertainty seems particularly apt for Antony and Cleopatra, as those elements which appear so inimical to explication suggest what may be, in fact, the play's raison d'être. In other words, perhaps the play requires a reading in which motive is subsumed by effect.

Antony and Cleopatra has a nearly cubist preoccupation with showing all its hard edges at once; it gives out information, and produces much of its mood, in large readily identifiable blocks of mythohistory: Cleopatra's Eastern mysticism, Antony's Herculean stature and Bacchic appetites, Caesar's anticipation of Rome's
manifest destiny. Counteracting this assemblage are the words of the characters themselves, which systematically undermine the surety of these associations. Antony, for example, calling himself “no more a soldier” after his final loss to Caesar, directs Eros to “pluck off” his armor in a speech recalling the first words of the play: Philo’s comparison of Antony’s overflowing “dotage” on Cleopatra to “his Captain’s Heart, / Which in the scuffles of great Fights hath burst / The Buckles on his Breast.” At the end of act 4, however, defeated and preparing to join Cleopatra in death, he says:

The seven-fold shield of Ajax cannot keep
The Battery from my Heart.--Oh cleave my Sides.
Heart, once be stronger than thy Continent:

A few lines later he anticipates his and Cleopatra’s “sprightly” presence in the underworld, where they shall displace Dido and “her Aeneas” so that “all the Haunt” be theirs. Antony constructs a complex chain of associations, substituting a stronger, battered heart for that of the battering captain’s in Philo’s memory, its cleft sides recalling in turn Cleopatra’s “sides of nature” which will not sustain her (1.3.16). Although Philo and Antony do not, in these references to the warrior Antony, directly conjure up the spectacle of Mars or Hercules that occurs abundantly elsewhere, and thus do not invoke the complementary feminine spectacles of Venus and Omphale, Antony appropriates what had been a feminine incontinence in Philo’s assessment, and in Cleopatra’s “sickness” of 1.3. And yet,
Antony brings up the parallel couple of Dido and Aeneas as soon as he (quite contradictorily) resolves to "o'ertake thee, Cleopatra, / And Weep for my Pardon" (4.14.44-5). The image of the lovers united in a sprightly netherworld is Antony's rewriting of the myth into Dido's victory of love over Aeneas, one that excises the negative connotations of submission and passivity ascribed by Philo, and later Caesar; more to the point, Antony feels he has earned the right to this revision and excision; he has won it as a kind of spoils of war in the battle just waged with himself.

The play's network of mythographic associations has been made at length by other critics; but I wish to point out that the characters are acutely aware of their historic and mythic burden, and so, in many cases, express it with the goal of adapting this burden to suit the drama of their situation, to clarify their relationship to it or, conversely, to question the archetypal affiliations to which they are heir. The premier example of this acuity, in all its manifestations, is Caesar's utterance on the burden of the past, which I will use as a kind of template for much of the following discussion. It also introduces, quite indirectly, the degree to which Cleopatra-Egypt has entangled itself with Rome. His remark occurs in 1.4 and is initiated by conversation with Lepidus about Antony's activities in Alexandria and news from his messengers that Pompey is consolidating power at sea:

I should have known no less.

It hath been taught us from the Primal State
That he which is was wish'd until he were,
And the Ebb'd Man, ne'er lov'd till ne'er worth Love,
Comes fear'd by being lack'd. This Common Body,
Like to a Vagabond Flag upon the Stream,
Goes to and back, lacking the varying Tide,
To rot it self with Motion (40-7).

This statement is both a utilization and conglomeration of imagery just used by Lepidus and the messengers, and at the same time strikingly unique: it has a self-communing, ruminative quality-despite the onstage presence of inferiors (Lepidus included)—in which Caesar will never so deeply indulge himself again. It is also paradoxical in seeming, at first glance, a simple recitation of those characteristics of Romanness upon which depends so much of the play's plotting,\(^8\) and then, upon consideration, in establishing the most intricate and elusive of the drama's reflections on identity.

I should point out first that the references to the "Ebb'd man" and the "Vagabond Flag" in Caesar's remarks are recurrent, evoking a stream of imagery that runs through the play, so much so that for all but the opening and closing lines of his speech even Caesar seems incompletely aware of what he is trying to articulate, carried along by his words in exactly the directionless direction his decisive last line condemns. Second, I believe it is only in this utterance that brief voice is given to the full effect this particular course of thought has on the play's conceptions of Egyptian and Roman.

But what are these conceptions? Caesar's assessment that only the "Ebb'd" man (who is, I will assume, identical or at least akin to the man who is "lack'd") inspires fear and love is put
forward more strategically in Antony's evaluation of Roman reaction
to Sextus Pompey's strength at sea:

Our Slippery People,
Whose love is never link'd to the Deserver
Till his Deserts are past, begin to throw
Pompey the Great and all his Dignities
Upon his Son (1.2.187-91).

Both Antony's and Caesar's statements address the complexities of individual agency. Caesar indirectly sanctions Antony's lack of agency in Alexandria, having earlier cited his wasting of time in Egyptian revels, his idleness, his abstraction: Antony is not really doing anything in Egypt; he is done to. This is contrary to a Roman fundamental: one must do in order to provide a patronym of note for one's progeny. In theory this should work as an endless chain of endowment, each progeny shouldering the burden (or more) of his progenitor. But as Antony recognizes and Sextus Pompey's recklessness demonstrates, Roman patronymy takes on a quite separate and tenebrous agency of its own (Antony, in fact, more aggressively demonstrates the nonpaternal foundation of this endowment by "coasting" on the memory of his own earlier history).

Further, this lack of agency is associated with the feminine, particularly in their shared imagery of water: the figure of Egypt/Cleopatra of course being most closely associated with all things fluid (I would even suggest that the constant identification of Pompey with the sea insinuates a failure to live up to his
patronym). It is notable that Antony echoes almost exactly Caesar's reference to the "Vagabond Flag" in an aside about Octavia:

Her tongue will not obey her Heart, nor can
Her Heart inform her Tongue--the Swan's Down Feather,
That stands upon the Swell at full of Tide,
And neither way inclines (3.2.47-50).

Antony, recently married to Octavia, is here depending on her sense of Roman virtue to keep her a dutifully nondivisive mediator between himself and Caesar. And yet it is this very sense of a dutiful and feminine passivity that complicates the corresponding masculine expectations of activity. Rome's "slippery People," (just as Caesar's "Common Body") are caught passively in the cycle of Roman mythohistory and patriarchal expectation, and their conflicts with this paradoxical Roman ideal (including the efforts of so many to escape it) generate the uneasiness and ambiguity of Caesar's speech in 1.4. The components of his utterance are partly determined by the context of the scene in which it occurs, but only he will link together so succinctly past deeds and physical absence with a fluid immobility--states respectively significant of masculinity and femininity--in a way that demonstrates their underlying kinship.

The difficulties of this passage obscure exactly how these states are linked, and the verse does express two independent thoughts, divided neatly and equally at the sentence beginning "This Common Body." Yet they gesture poetically toward a connecting
whole, as Caesar’s “Ebb’d Man” of the first half initiates the language of fluidity in the second half. “Common Body” is cued visually to “Primal State,” and vocally in the pauses required at the end of the lines in which they occur. “Common Body,” beginning the second half of the speech, is also the only multisyllabic phrase other than “Primal State,” in the first four lines.

Caesar’s ruminations occur as a response to Antony’s idle self-indulgence in Egypt and to Pompey’s naval ascendency in Italy. It makes sense that, if their actions are related by Caesar in speech, he must consider them related in deed. I believe that the first half of Caesar’s speech leans slightly toward an indictment of Pompey (Caesar’s “fear’d” echoes the messenger’s news that Pompey is “belov’d of those / That only have fear’d Caesar), while the language of the second half, particularly “To rot itself with Motion,” recalls Caesar’s own analysis of the rotting he suspects Antony is suffering as a result of his motion in Egypt: the “Full Surfeits” and dry bones of excessive eating, drinking, and sex. It is equally possible that the references are reversed, so that the “Ebb’d Man” is Antony, whose faults seem to Lepidus as the “Spots of Heaven, / More Fiery by [the] Night’s Blackness” (12-3) of his past glory. Pompey may be the “Vagabond Flag,” consigned to his galley while his pirates run abroad, and a poor match for the ambitious patronymy Caesar plans for himself.

If Antony and Pompey are linked in deed then these deeds must somehow share a motive or reflect the historical impetus that is so obviously a function of Roman behavior according to Caesar. How Caesar imagines this linkage, and that he imagines it this early in
the play, are important indications of the trajectory his two subjects will take: Pompey, like Lepidus, will simply drop out of the play’s sight at about its midpoint, while Antony and his concerns will accrue dramatic force superior to that Pompey’s presence leaves behind. But in 1.4 Caesar equates them, or at least assesses them equally, and finds both lacking: Pompey because his patronymy is superior to his talents, Antony because his devotion to Cleopatra has left him indifferent to his duties as a commander and soldier.

Caesar reproves not only the weaknesses to which Romans are heir, but acknowledges that Rome’s patriarchal system breeds these faults. And at the same time he is inculpating the capricious loyalties that have been taught “since the Primal State,” he is inculpating Cleopatra for the identical qualities of fickleness and indolence with which she will be associated throughout the play. It may be less than ingenuous for Caesar to mourn Antony’s excessive self-indulgence in Alexandria by lauding the equally excessive self-mortification that characterized his soldiering days, and it is probable that in 1.4 Caesar becomes enough impressed by the similarities to begin mentally turning them to his advantage; his later silence on the subject of influence suggests this strongly.

No matter how rich Caesar’s speech, it must be examined in relation to the play to show how deep its anxieties of influence run and how expressly Cleopatra speaks to these anxieties: mitigating them in Antony, reinterpreting them in Caesar, exacerbating them in Enobarbus. Cleopatra’s influence extends far beyond Antony, and exerts on the play qualities which grow in fascination as interest in Caesar’s military and political machinations wanes (“’Tis paltry to
be Caesar," as she remarks at the beginning of 5.2). Put in the least erotic manner possible, Cleopatra is the most comprehensive critical apparatus imaginable of a play that is also largely her creative medium. She reads the myths of Rome anew, creating a heaven and earth with Antony in which her Egypt and his Rome converge.

"Cleopater" and the "Primal State"

I have suggested that the syntax of Caesar's speech generally impresses me as aqueous, the multidirectional state of his mind expressing itself in his somewhat muddy verse, and I have also suggested that this opaque articulation corresponds to Caesar's realization that "Romanness" involves irresolvable paradox, not the least of which is its apparent legacy of femininity.

Caesar patently conflates this dual genderedness in the pun "Cleopater" in act 2 (a crucial bit of wordplay emended to "Cleopatra" in most modern editions) that brings together the two states of his speech with a concision lacking in 1.4. That speech takes its color from the context of its scene, and so "Primal State" might there be considered a putative reference to the beginnings of Roman history; but now the influence on Antony's behavior is nominally fixed by Caesar as both male and female, paternal and, as shall become apparent, maternal.

Caesar's suggestion that Cleopatra is in some way paternal makes an associative leap the play has not directly prepared one to accept. Thus far her link to the "Primal State" has been
prehistorical and, so to speak, prehallic: material, muddy, her
"Winds and Waters . . . greater Storms and Tempests than Almanacs
can report" (1.2.145-7). I have mentioned her association with the
fluid, but that hardly suggests the degree to which she is equated
with fecund Egypt and its "o'erflowing Nilus" (1.2.44). When with
her in Egypt, Antony appears to exchange the Roman world-view for
one more materially inclined: "Here is my space," he says,
"Kingdoms are Clay. Our dungy Earth alike/ Feeds Beast as Man"
(1.1.34-6). Shortly after, Cleopatra learns of the death of Antony's
first wife and tells him to "weep for [Fulvia] . . . and say the Tears /
Belong to Egypt" (1.3.76-7). Pompey assumes Antony is charmed to
"a Lethied Dullness" in the "Lap of Egypt's Widow" (2.1.27, 37), who
earlier had been "ploughed" by "great Caesar . . . and she cropp'd"
(2.2.233-4). Enobarbus holds Caesar's friend Agrippa in thrall with
the description of Cleopatra's first meeting with Antony, when she
"purs'd up his Heart upon the River of Sidnus." The exchange between
Antony and Lepidus on board Pompey's galley, however, is the most
comprehensive identification of Cleopatra-Egypt with the material:

ANTONY ............................................................

        The higher Nilus swells,
The more it promises; as it ebbs, the Seedsman
Upon the Slime and Ooze scatters his Grain,
And shortly comes to Harvest.
LEPIDUS Y' have strange Serpents there?
ANTONY I, Lepidus.
LEPIDUS  Your Serpent of Egypt is bred now of your Mud by the operation of your Sun; so is Your Crocodile.
ANTONY  They are so (2.7.22-30).

The drunken Lepidus goes on to ask, “What manner o’thing is your Crocodile?”, and Antony responds with a series of tautologies: “It is shaped, Sir, like it self, and it is as broad as it hath Breadth . . . Of it[s] own Color too . . . and the Tears of it are wet” (44-53). Antony is undoubtedly thinking of his own “Serpent of old Nile,” black “with Phoebus’ amorous pinches” and “wrinkled deep in Time” (1.5.22-6).

To my knowledge all interpreters of Cleopatra ground their arguments in the same two absolutes: she embodies woman and she embodies Egypt. These two absolutes are really one, because Cleopatra cannot be extricated from the play’s conception of woman nor of Egypt. Cleopatra as woman is place, as Luce Irigaray would say, a “transportable mold,” a quality neither solely matter nor form, but defining both in relation to the thing constituted. This amorphous mold is the matrix, both material and container, adapting itself to the shape of its own vessel. This is Antony’s strange creature, shaped like itself, “Whom every thing becomes” (1.1.49).11

“Matrix,” as used by Irigaray, comprises an elaborate system of associations. One way to understand how Caesar can conflate the differing conceptions of influence in “Cleopater” is to consider Cleopatra as a kind of matrical network, functioning both metaphorically and metonymically--as both the apotheosis of everything not-Rome in the play, and as a signifying link in the play’s chain of continuous associations of elemental and fostering
material—and thus her vertices, the nodes of intersection, are the
points of fusion that cause Caesar so much vexation in 1.4, and
which he then articulates as simply “Cleopater.” Antony, too,
expresses the difficulty of defining Cleopatra in the dual meanings
of “becoming,” and, it seems to me, in his acquiescence to the
complex imagery proffered by Lepidus. “Matrix” suits both
Cleopatra’s essential self and her shape-shifting capabilities, her
being and her “becoming,” and, in terms of her relationship to the
primal state, it also serves to suggest how her presence can
incorporate the disparate roles of masculine and feminine.

For example, after Cleopatra has beaten and chased away the
messenger who delivered news of Antony’s marriage to Octavia,
Charmian upbraids her: “Good Madam, keep yourself within yourself:
/ The man is innocent.” But, says Cleopatra:

Some Innocents 'scape not the Thunderbolt.
Melt Egypt into Nile, and kindly Creatures
Turn all to Serpents.

--These Hands do lack Nobility, that they strike
A Meaner than my self: since I my self
Have given my self the Cause.

The messenger is called (and probably dragged) back, and when he
repeats his news, asking “Should I lie, Madam?”, Cleopatra responds:

Oh, I would thou didst:
So half my Egypt were submerg'd and made
A Cestern for scal'd Snakes. Go get thee hence:
Hadst thou Narcissus in thy Face to me,
Thou wouldst appear most ugly (2.5.74-96).

There are two discourses running through these lines--one of
Graeco-Roman myth (Zeus-Jupiter and Narcissus) and one of Egyptian
fluidity--that Cleopatra joins via her intervention. She first aligns
herself with the god of thunder, an association strengthened by her
hands that "strike," then strips this authority of its nobility. It
seems Cleopatra then considers what nobility may exist in humility-
modern editions either direct Charmian offstage before "These
Hands" or, as this edition does, indicate by punctuation a self-
address--and one can imagine her looking at her ignoble hands while
she contemplates why she cannot keep herself contained. But
Charmian's appeal to her "self" seems also to touch off the thoughts
that emerge in the Narcissus allusion: Cleopatra repeats her "self"
three times in as many lines, and the folio edition does not preclude
an audience for her remarks. Not that Charmian's presence matters;
Cleopatra may as easily be aggrandizing her authority in these lines
with a kind of false modesty.

The notions of containment and escape come together in the
messenger's Narcissus; Cleopatra cannot keep herself within
herself, so gives herself cause for the excess, projecting an ugliness
onto the messenger in which his face becomes a reflection of the
snake-filled cistern of Egypt. Graeco-Roman mythos is "becoming"
her here by its transformation into a discourse of fluidity and flux;
she appropriates it only to leach the authority from the mythic and transform it into something self-communing and particular.

Of course, Cleopatra needs the authority she invokes and transforms to leave its traces in her utterances; without them, her own associations cannot gain in discursive power. At the same time, her discursive inundation of the play’s mythohistory blurs the distinctions between herself and Antony. Her use of this authority is an example of what I have been describing as the inextricability of the play’s Rome and Egypt. And as this inextricability insinuates itself as the defining characteristic of the play’s construction, it becomes clear that Caesar’s inability to articulate the authority by which in 1.4 he condemns Antony and others is not due to any comprehensive lack on his part, but to the inexpressible origin of this authority. The primal state that provokes Rome’s characteristic behaviors is neither wholly masculine nor feminine, neither a stable reference to an originary authority nor an arbitrary designation.

Caesar’s speech admirably yokes together what he sees as Romans’ paradoxical behavior: loving man only when he is lacked, then fearing that lack, and of a stillness that rots with motion. Yet it is Cleopatra who is the primal state as Caesar describes it. She is the origin of Caesar’s anxieties as well as the origin of Antony’s desire. In her production of both fear and longing, only she can reconcile the twin possibilities of this state that Caesar conflates in the ambiguous preposition in the first line of his speech, “It hath been taught us from the Primal State”: in her role as the personification of Egypt she is the generative matrix, reminding the men of Rome of their maternal origins (“from” meaning “since”); and
in her appropriation and transformation of paternal authority she confronts Rome with the tenuous masculinity that depends for its success upon separation from the maternal ("from" meaning "by," and connoting a state to which Rome should not return).

These are obviously inseparable states of Cleopatra's being, as evidenced by Antony's oscillating behavior toward her. Criticism that interprets Cleopatra's gendered influence, however, typically views the fear and desire she provokes as two opposing forces, with the former dominant, so that Antony can never experience his desire as fully pleasurable: his sexual relationship with Cleopatra is necessarily precarious since it has already resulted in the loss of his political and military prowess. Such a reading is in turn an aspect of the larger perspective taken by cultural-materialist criticism, which sees Cleopatra's desirability as a threat to the desire informing the homosocial relations between the men of Rome; in order for this desire to be contained she must be seen as a projection of the latter relations and therefore, like Octavia, must become another object of exchange among Rome's competing factions.12

How can all these facets of Cleopatra be understood as coherently constructed? How can Cleopatra move Antony to fear for his masculinity and at the same time move Caesar to admit that her influence is in some way responsible for that masculinity? In the next section I will examine Cleopatra in the light of some aspects of French feminism, certain theories of which--particularly as articulated by Irigaray and Helene Cixous--share an understanding of the feminine as celebratory and sexual difference as a mark of
power, along with a belief that this difference is in some way natural rather than purely symbolic. These are all crucial components of the Cleopatra figure, and gesture toward the ways in which her materiality informs her use of language.

**Cleopatra and the Feminine**

Cixous, in *The Newly Born Woman*, "resound[s] the echo" of Antony and Cleopatra’s story, and celebrates “a victory of love in history . . . the Gaiety of the royal couple and its inspired creativity.” Few American feminists have embraced “a vision of Cleopatra” equal to her presence in Shakespeare,\(^{13}\) and if I could contain this study of *Antony and Cleopatra* in a sentence, it would be Cixous’: “The one equal to the other, the one without equal for the other, they have found the secret of embodying Still More.”\(^{14}\)

“Embodying” is a crucial term in Cixous’ celebratory rewriting of *Antony and Cleopatra*. It suggests a somewhat paradoxical interpretation of the Antony and Cleopatra who opt for death rather than the worldly concerns of Rome, but this kind of paradox is fundamental to the play. If, for example, one were to concentrate on Antony and Cleopatra’s final eschewal of the material for the spiritual, it would still be possible to demonstrate, using the same foundation of their ideological sympathy, that the play has prepared for their “afterlife” by the adaptation of its classical motifs to the particular needs of the lovers. In this interpretation the play would signal, in the Antony who echoes Aeneas (among other progenitors), a conception of an afterlife that forecloses the possibility of his
meeting a silent Dido who turns away from his entreaties, and embraces one in which the couple, having eschewed Rome, fulfill their earthly promise in death.

But as I noted at the beginning of this chapter, my project entails rescuing Cleopatra from the impoverishment of critical bisection. Any interpretation that derides the "sexist" implications of Cleopatra as "ur-woman" because "Her allegedly 'female' attributes demand in many instances to be understood as displaced or misrecognized Roman characteristics," can only be half-right; such a reading denies Cleopatra an "authentic" presence in the text, and then a priori accepts from the Romans the identical behavior used to demonstrate her presence as a symptom.\textsuperscript{15} The readings that dismiss the notion of an "essential" Cleopatra ignore the unspoken essentialism underpinning Caesar's understanding of the "Primal State": as an originary and incompletely understood place of Roman instruction that, to be sure, makes Caesar uneasy, but the authority of which generates a code of Roman behavior unconditionally accepted by him, Antony, and Pompey.

Irigaray and Cixous both address the possibility of an "ur-man" whose sexuality is embodied rather than sublimated: "What I desire and what I am waiting for," writes Irigaray, "is what men will do and say if their sexuality gets loose from the empire of phallocratism."\textsuperscript{16} According to Cixous, this sexuality bursts its constraints in \textit{Antony and Cleopatra}: "We are far from object 'a,' from the fatality of its absence, from its evasions that only sustain desire by default"—far, that is, from a drama of boundaries, from
the interchangeability of Octavia and Cleopatra, from the separation from the maternal.\textsuperscript{17}

Cixous describes her reworking of Antony and Cleopatra's story as "resound[ing] the echo," as echoing the Narcissus myth. She is adapting the very strategy of the play's own rewriting of its classical motifs--a very French feminist strategy--as mimicry. By touching on Echo's role in the Narcissus myth, Cixous subtly enriches its resonances in the play. Rather than limiting Echo's dramatic use to Antony's projection of desire onto his Cleopatran reflection or to Cleopatra's own narcissistic vanity, Cixous reinserts the woman into the myth. In doing so she draws a parallel between her own "echoing" and Cleopatra's; that is, Cixous' conscious mimicry parallels Cleopatra's strategy for disrupting Roman subjugation. In Cixous' interpretation, the Cleopatra who seems to end the play absorbed and contained by Rome--"Marble Constant," with "nothing / Of Woman" in her--is living in her pyramid/tomb, "perched on top . . . at the point of the phallus in which she resides, which she will make her home forever."\textsuperscript{18}

The mimicry that Cixous adopts is a difficult discursive game to play. But as Irigaray believes, mimicry is the only method by which women can disrupt phallocentrism. Her concept of mimicry also points to women's materialism, particularly her empathetic relationship to the fluid, so that, by a simplified analogy, the fluid is to containment as mimicry is to the phallus, each only "real" with reference to the other. Thus Irigaray's "woman" is dependent for meaning as much on her materiality as her articulation, and this in
turn is why her particular feminism is so amenable to an understanding of Cleopatra.

At the same time, both Irigaray and Cixous make claims difficult to sustain. For Irigaray in particular, the feminine cannot be located or documented because the attempt to fix it as such is a masculine strategy; that is, I cannot, strictly speaking, point to Cleopatra’s materialism as feminine, because by doing so I have already presupposed a gender binary in which the masculine is nonmaterial, and Irigaray’s point is the feminine is that which escapes this kind of figuration.¹⁹

But if one turns to Irigaray’s theorization of woman in the maddeningly elusive spirit by which she theorizes, Cleopatra emerges as a most practical exemplar of Antony and Cleopatra’s gender paradoxes. Irigaray chooses, for example, to revolve her theories around the key terms Derrida calls paleonymic, where “the occasional maintenance of an old name [is used] in order to launch a new concept.”²⁰ The terms Irigaray chooses to reconceptualize are without fail of Greek derivation, as mimesis, catachresis, morphology, and matrix. But Irigaray does not launch new concepts, she returns to the etymology of these words to exploit their lexical openness, which has been elided by time and customary usage. And she chooses the words she does because of their origin in Western culture and the associate authority they convey by virtue of this origin. Irigaray’s “woman,” in fact, emerges out of this exhaustive return to origin, by
showing that origin to be an “effect” of a certain ruse of phallogocentric power [so that] the feminine as maternal does not offer itself as an alternative origin . . . Indeed, one might reconsider the conventional characterization of Irigaray as an uncritical maternalist, for here it appears that the reinscription of the maternal takes place by writing with and through the language of phallic philosophemes. This textual practice is not grounded in a rival ontology, but inhabits--indeed penetrates, occupies, and redeploy the paternal language itself.21

This is precisely how Cleopatra emerges out of Caesar’s language in 1.4, and in the play’s puns on her name. I wrote earlier that Cleopatra is a creation who is also critical of the drama that produces her; no other character functions creatively and critically to the extent she does, and it is because she embodies “woman” that she functions thus. In other words, she can exist as a projection of Roman (and undoubtedly Shakespeare’s) desire, as the ur-woman constructed in opposition to Rome’s masculinity because, while this construction produces her, it also presupposes a woman who necessitates the production of “woman.”

Yet this does not mean there must be somewhere a material woman from which the citational or performative “woman” arises.22 Cleopatra does not need a material presence to embody the woman; as a dramatic creation, she elegantly exemplifies the woman who cannot exist except as a masculine construction of the feminine, yet whose invasion of “the paternal language itself” results in an excess that language cannot contain. As a result, she is
continually associated with the fluid, unpredictable Nile and its tautologous, spontaneously generated creatures (both she and the Romans make this association), while the play still distinguishes Cleopatra’s own speaking presence from the attempts by the Romans to capture her in the hyperbole of fecundity or otherworldliness.

If the woman is the same as the “woman,” only existing when called forth and only emerging out of this citation, but also resisting and producing in the invocation a “linguistic impropriety” or catachresis, then what is essential about her is her mimicry: she is no different than the language of patriarchy, except she is not the language of patriarchy. Such a configuration would seem hopelessly coy (though no one minds when Lacan does it) were it not for the occasional Cleopatra who clearly articulates the language of patriarchy and its difference.

One can begin now to understand Cixous’ “misuse” of Cleopatra’s relation to the phallus as an attempt to render this complex state of woman’s being, via the mimicry through which she makes her presence known. Cixous appears to disregard the binary designations of gender while referring to the authority (in this case Freud and Lacan) that makes these designations meaningful: “We are far from object ‘a’,” while Cleopatra ends “at the point of the phallus in which she resides, which she will make her home forever”; but Cleopatra, after death, lives still with Antony, far “from the cravings of penis and sword.” Cixous is only, in her words, resounding the echo, restating what Cleopatra has already expressed: there is no division in her; she exists “at the point of the phallus” because she gives the phallus its point.
In order to more fully understand how Cleopatra is “woman” it is useful to compare her with Octavia, Antony’s wife and Caesar’s sister. Octavia occupies the liminal role that should by rights be assigned to Cleopatra, but Octavia is truly the “other woman” of the play, and her position as wife and oxymoronic “Roman woman” does exemplify the feminine as a projection of Roman homosocial desire. She, as much as Cleopatra, is implicated in Caesar’s speech of 1.4, with the difference that Cleopatra is the origin of Caesar’s anxieties about Rome, while Octavia is only a symptom of them.

Octavia is described as a “piece of virtue” by Caesar (3.2.28), as he once again demonstrates his talent for offensive pithiness. “Piece of virtue” links Octavia’s dutiful Romanness to her sexual commodification just as clearly as “Cleopater” yokes together the woman and the father. But Cleopatra will also treat Octavia in this way, weighing her value to Antony based upon the messenger’s news of Octavia’s shape, height, voice, and age. Octavia’s saleable virtue exists in direct contrast to Cleopatra’s sexual authority, such that even “the holy Priests / Bless her when she is Riggish” (2.2.244-5).

Octavia is a fascinating character in her own right, but she remains anomalous in many ways, and strangely denatured, more shadow than substance. The size of her role in Shakespeare is proportionate to her role in Plutarch, yet Shakespeare compresses events involving her active participation (her temporarily successful suit of Octavius for peace at Tarentum, for example) and produces the inescapable impression that Octavius and Antony have no intention of honoring the bonds of peace this marriage is meant to
solidify. Unlike Plutarch's tale, the play offers no compelling reason why Antony should marry Octavia.

But her presence heightens the chiaroscuro of the drama's central relationship, since she casts both Cleopatra and Rome in greater relief. I have been attempting, with Cleopatra, to show how an appreciation of what she is requires an understanding of what she is more than, and of how she escapes masculine attempts to fix her. Cleopatra's relationship to Octavia is similar to the relationship Cleopatra has with Rome's men, since Octavia is created, for all practical purposes, in Rome's image. Octavia's character, understood in conjunction with Cleopatra's, makes the play's concept of Romaness seem even stranger and more fragile.

To demonstrate just how strange, I want to return again to Caesar's speech of 1.4. The behavior he describes there is figured feminine, as I've noted, both as it applies to the Egyptianized Antony and, in a more revealing way perhaps, as his tidal metaphor is in turn used by Antony to describe Octavia. Yet the differences between the two women make a single behavioral model of the feminine inadequate. Further, both Antony and Octavia, according to Caesar, exhibit Roman traits of indecision and rotting languor: strange descriptions of Romaness, and very unlike the Romaness Caesar himself exhibits. It would be fair to deduce, I think, that Caesar wants to scapegoat the feminine in general for actions he considers inimical to his ideal Roman, but this cannot work in general, since to do so he must scapegoat Octavia, whose behavior is ideal. Put more broadly, Caesar must invoke the vague authority of the primal state
both to excuse Roman inadequacy and to justify the actions it engenders as Roman.

Octavia’s significance emerges out of these musings because Cleopatra has already provoked Caesar into the admission that Romanness is not the autonomous masculine paradise he would like. Octavia may be ideal, but she is a woman, albeit a Roman woman whose behavior, unlike Cleopatra’s, is easily manipulated and contained. Octavia, caught literally between her brother and husband, is most often relegated to the sidelines, where her presence annotates the whole paradoxical Roman system. Octavia exemplifies the feminine side of Caesar’s virtus: as obedient as he is driven, as domestic as he is warring, as patriotic—at least, these are the qualities both he and Antony are counting on. But the fact that Octavia is virtuous, does feel torn between fealty to her brother and her husband, and does act with the intention of preventing open warfare between the two, only exaggerates Caesar’s duplicity and Antony’s indifference. Octavia’s character demonstrates retrospectively how Cleopatra can so easily infiltrate the Roman system; Octavia is more evidence that Rome does not have a substantially coherent ethic or ideology underpinning its actions, and that it thrives on exactly the kinds of excess and inconsistency so condemned in Cleopatra and in the Egyptianized Antony.

Consider Octavia’s last appearance in the play, an exchange between her and Caesar. Octavia has been in Athens with Antony, where she had attempted to reconcile him to a peaceful resolution with her brother (Antony agrees to let her mediate, but says, “the mean time, Lady, / I’ll raise the preparation of a War / Shall stain
your Brother" [3.4.25-7]). She is now returned to Rome to attempt
the same reconciliation with Caesar (with whom she will have as
much success). This scene begins with Caesar vilifying Antony to
Maecenas and Agrippa for Antony's ostentatious display of power and
flagrant disregard of his legitimate heirs--vilifying him, in short,
for establishing an illegitimate royal family in Egypt "I'th'common
Shew-place." But when Octavia enters, Caesar castigates her for the
plainness of her train's arrival:

Why have you stol'n upon us thus? You come not
Like Caesar's Sister. The Wife of Antony
Should have an Army for an Usher, and
The neighs of Horse to tell of her Approach
Long ere she did appear. The Trees by th' Way
Should have borne Men, and Expectation fainted,
Longing for what it had not. Nay, the Dust
Should have ascended to the Roof of Heaven,
Rais'd by your populous Troops. But you are come
A Market-maid to Rome, and have prevented
The Ostentation of our Love, which, left unshewn,
Is often left unlov'd (3.6.42-53).

Earlier I suggested, after Janet Adelman, that the often inexplicable
motives of the play's characters do not provide the interpretive
material necessary for understanding Antony and Cleopatra's
glittery melodrama. I quote Caesar's hyperbole here at length
because it is so typical of the Roman straining-for-effect that
efficiently masks the inconsistency beneath; both Caesar’s conception of Rome, and the Rome one pieces together from its other, less singleminded characters are certainly complex, but that is because they make a sophisticated cover for the Rome that rarely defines itself other than through this ostentation. In this scene Caesar tries to make the showiness sufficient; the pageantry he imagines for his sister, Antony’s wife, complete with gawping spectators, ought to work as a metaphor for Rome’s relationship to its subjects (particularly Egypt, of course). But the metaphor has a sting in its tail, as Cleopatra has already shown by going Rome’s pageantry one better, turning the Romans into spectators who retell the spectacle of her fantastic barge, her Lucullan banquets, her spontaneously generated creatures and music; all the while, this excess and ostentation are part of the identity she shares with Antony (her question of him, “Not know me yet?”, gains an appreciable narcissistic irony in this light).

Part of Caesar’s obsession with Octavia’s humble entrance stems from his wanting to outdo Cleopatra, although at the beginning of the scene he spoke with disdain of the spectacle that accompanied Antony’s enthronement of Cleopatra as “Absolute Queen” (and this spectacle—as well as the one Caesar imagines of Octavia’s entrance—is no more an ostentation than that Antony describes in 3.4 of Caesar’s public reading of his will).24

But it is not merely a desire to better Cleopatra that prompts Caesar’s remarks: Octavia, by arriving so plainly, has “prevented / The Ostentation of our Love, which, left unshewn, / Is often left unlov’d.” The “logic” seems to be that only Octavia’s ostentation can
provoke Roman love, itself an ostentation. "We should have met you / By Sea and Land," Caesar tells her, "supplying every Stage / With an augmented Greeting" (53-5).

Caesar knows that it was (and is) partly Cleopatra's extravagant display of love that so completely captivated Antony, and again one sees how Cleopatra has not merely exhibited "Egyptian" behavior but tapped into a Roman trait. One also hears in Caesar's words a reverse echo of the strange ethic informing the "Ebb'd Man, ne'er lov'd till ne'er worth Love," and the slipperiness of the Roman people, "Whose Love is never link'd to the Deserver / Till his Deserts are past." In contrast to relationships involving Cleopatra, what emerges to define Roman bonds between man and woman and man and man is a show of love that exhausts itself in display, that mistrusts loving or respecting or owing those worthy of it because "worth" is never addressed. At one point Antony tells Cleopatra that those previously hated in Rome are now loved because the new emotion offers a change from "Quietness, grown sick of Rest" (1.3.53). In another example, after the revelry aboard Pompey's galley Agrippa and Enobarbus amuse themselves with imitations of Lepidus' extravagant epithets for Antony and Caesar--and one wonders if this is done solely in disdain of Lepidus' obsequiousness or if their derision has a more cynical subtext, its object the overvalued greatness of Antony and Caesar and, more generally, of the ostentation associated with monarchical rule. Later Enobarbus, torn between his devotion to Antony and his "reasonable" fear of the course Antony chooses in his decision to engage Caesar at sea, explains to the bewildered Cleopatra that Antony is manipulating his
soldier's loyalty by making them cry. Even aware of this Enobarbus is manipulated, too: he is an "Ass... Onion-ey'd" (4.2.35)

Octavia tries to act counter to this empire of ostentation by performing its reverse and fulfilling the virtuous role Caesar has created for her, one designed to unite him and Antony. But even this is show, and Octavia's plain appeals to them both are simply an impediment to their unstated goals. Caesar rages against her humble entrance, a display really directed at Antony, but Octavia foils that, telling her brother that she refused the lavish train Antony would have provided for her. She goes on to describe the pain of her "Heart parted / Betwixt two Friends," but Caesar is not listening. He wants to construct sufficient cause for warring with Antony, and though he calls Octavia an "Abstract" between Antony and his lust for Cleopatra, her mediation is equally an abstract between Caesar and his goals.

Octavia cannot or will not manipulate the intricacies of Rome's talent for display. Caesar's own words relating ostentation to love should tell her that her virtuous behavior is doomed to fail. Cleopatra, once she learns the particulars of Octavia's personality, ceases to worry about her influence on Antony, unlike the concern she displayed toward Antony's first wife, the powerful and canny Fulvia, who before her death waged war against Antony's brother and Caesar in turn, activities that early in the play provoke Antony to leave Cleopatra and return to Rome. Even Antony echoes Caesar's paradoxical formula of love (as well as his primal state speech) when he learns, in Alexandria, of Fulvia's death, and muses on the impact she has made:
--There's a great Spirit gone; thus did I desire it.
What our Contempts doth hurl from us,
We wish it ours again. The present Pleasure,
By Revolution low'ring, does Become
The Opposite of it self. She's Good being gone;
The Hand could pluck her back that shov'd her on (1.2.118-23).

Only Cleopatra senses fully that this Roman version of love is itself an imitation of profounder feelings; only she displays the acuity and retains an essential difference from Rome necessary to access these profounder feelings by imitating the imitation, reflecting Rome's coarse veneer in her depthless show of love. Enobarbus seems to partly understand this, aware that because she makes "Defect Perfection" her lavish seduction of Antony will never end:

Age cannot wither her, nor Custom stale
Her infinite Variety. Other Women cloy
The Appetites they feed, but she makes hungry
Where most she satisfies (2.2.237, 240-3).26

The excess and ostentation, used to very different effect by Cleopatra and the Romans, introduces, in a sense, this chapter's discussion of Antony and Cleopatra. Until this point Caesar has been the primary masculine referent partly because he provides in many ways such a rich and useful foil to Cleopatra that Antony's more
nebulous relation to both Egypt and Rome becomes clearer by him. Antony, in this section, at least, has emerged chiefly to demonstrate how when in Rome he acts like a Roman, quick to marry Octavia but then quicker to find an excuse to return to Cleopatra. Of course, early in the play when he is already in Alexandria, he uses Fulvia's death (and the havoc she has wrought on his relationship to Caesar) as an excuse to leave her: “These strong Egyptian Fetters I must break, / Or loose my self in Dotage” (1.2.11-2). Although Antony appears to oscillate between his sense of Roman duty and his indulgence of Egyptian pleasure (and thus between his presence in Rome or Egypt), his relationship with Cleopatra is a fait accompli from the play’s beginning; he must reconcile himself, not with Egypt’s fetters, but with himself—the Antony who clings to Rome and the Antony who clings to Cleopatra—a process that has little to do with opposition or geography, but much to do with escaping Roman standards of behavior. Antony seems to believe that Romanness is somehow talismanic, that his physical presence in Rome and his marriages of political or economic convenience—these displays of fealty—demonstrate true fealty. But by play’s end his reconciliation is complete, and Antony learns fealty to himself and thus to Cleopatra.

Cleopatra and Antony

Antony and Cleopatra opens with Philo’s comparison of the present Antony, whose chief behavior is excessive doting, to the Antony of old, whose “Captain's Heart . . . burst / The Buckles on his
Breast.” This is an image Antony will later use when he feels “No more a Soldier” and wishes to overtake Cleopatra in death, who he believes has beaten him even in the quintessentially Roman act of suicide (though she has as yet only mimicked suicide). It is a long four acts between Philo’s pronouncement and Antony’s reappraisal of it, but the first act, in the initial presentation of Antony and Cleopatra, provides the same complication of roles; more specifically, it gives one a Cleopatra who teasingly sides with Rome in order to extract an Egyptian excess from Antony.

After Philo points out to Demetrius, in the play’s first thirteen lines, the spectacle of the lovers, but before the messenger arrives with news from Rome, there is this initial and isolated exchange between Antony and Cleopatra:

CLEOPATRA If it be Love indeed, tell me how much.
ANTONY There’s Beggary in the Love that can be reckon’d.
CLEOPATRA I’ll set a Bourn how far to be belov’d.
ANTONY Then must thou needs find out new Heaven, new Earth (1.1.14-7).

This is a quick and sprightly introduction to their more consequential roleplays. I think one can assume that Cleopatra is, from her first line, seeking the boundless response Antony gives her in line 17, but first each must guarantee that the other is self-consciously donning a role before the role-switching can begin in earnest. Cleopatra only cultivates Antony’s “Beggary” to project a limit and thus goad him into the admission that he is not superior to
“reckoning.” Antony, of course, responds by making the notion of boundaries of love meaningless.

This exchange demonstrates the ease with which Antony and Cleopatra perform the behavior of the other from the beginning. It is Antony, after all, whose sense of Romanness one would expect to dictate a concern with measurement and limitation, as Philo points out, and Cleopatra whose Egyptian voluptuousness would overflow a “Bourn” of love. But “perform the behavior of the other” is in a sense misleading, since this first exchange pointedly refuses to associate the lovers with the concomitant behavior expected of an Egyptian or a Roman; the play also carefully and completely contrasts, as I have mentioned earlier, the present Antony and Cleopatra with the past ones related by other characters. These are older, wiser lovers who realize that the roles they are expected to play (Antony’s mythical warrior status, Cleopatra’s sly inconstancy) can be as erotically discharged as the sexual roles, as when Cleopatra fondly remembers the time (“Oh times”) . . . “I drank him to his Bed, / Then put my Tires and Mantles on him, whilst / I wore his Sword Philippan” (2.5.21-3).

This roleplaying is not without its dangers. Antony and Cleopatra have incorporated, as much as we, cultural expectations, and as this first scene progresses, they more subtly and intricately test their limits for transgression.

When the messenger enters, at line 17, to give Antony news from Rome, Antony’s order that the man summarize the message for him sets off another exchange between the lovers, this one characterized by Cleopatra’s repeated request to hear the
messenger, and Antony's repeated refusals and attempts to engage her in more pleasurable discursive pursuits. After Antony's lengthy swearing that he cares not for news of Fulvia nor Caesar (beginning "Let Rome in Tiber melt, and the wide Arch / Of the rang'd Empire fall"), Cleopatra responds:

--Excellent Falsehood:

Why did he marry Fulvia and not love her?  
I'll seem the Fool I am not; Antony  
Will be himself (40-3).

Whether or not this remark is intended to be an aside--and it is clear Antony overhears her--it seems to indicate that Cleopatra believes beneath Antony's romantic, fluid, and Egyptian posturings, he will be "himself," that is, Roman enough to marry for expedience. It also demonstrates her awareness of the Roman weakness for hyperbole and ostentation. H.W. Fawkner, in his extended study of the play, treats this scene and this remark at length. His ideas express the richness of the Antony and Cleopatra relationship immediately established in act 1, so that in the dialogue leading up to Cleopatra's lines above:

We observe a pattern of refrigeration that is paradigmatic: Rome, in affirming Egypt, affirms an Egypt that Egypt itself does not quite recognize . . . The Rome [Antony] abandons, Cleopatra knows, is a world of virtuous constancy . . . But in his abstract conception of his wife Fulvia, Cleopatra senses that Antony's new life-style is simply
a mechanical inversion of constancy . . . Cleopatra senses that Antony, if he is not manipulated with the utmost cunning, will repeat the Roman marriage tragedy in Egypt, that he will repeat himself, return, quite constantly, to the formula of his own spirit, absolute inconstancy . . . Cleopatra, who like Shakespeare has a shrewder appraisal [than Philo] of Antony’s nature, feels that Antony’s divergence from Antony is a paradigmatic and original trait rather than an occasional misfiring. 27

Fawkner indirectly touches on many of the points I find most crucial: that Cleopatra cannot fully be explained as a projection of Roman desire, since she so often escapes the configurations of that desire; that a part of Antony clings (however tenuously) to a conception of Roman virtue inadequate or unequal to his relationship to Cleopatra; and that this split in his character is an “original trait,” one Caesar will diagnose in scene 4.

Thus, from their first dramatic exchange Cleopatra recognizes in Antony the qualities he attempts to project onto her and reveals her strategy for reconciling his “well-divided Disposition” into a “Heavenly Mingle” (1.5.49, 55). In order to expose the “real” Antony and Cleopatra relationship, Cleopatra seems the fool she is not; that is, she mimics the Roman Antony to undermine his Egyptian pretense. Antony would like her to believe that his marriage to Fulvia, as a purely political union, will not infringe upon his affair with Cleopatra, but Cleopatra knows this is a dangerous misconception, and so reminds him, just as he is proclaiming his Egyptianness, that his “Egyptianness” is wrong.
Cleopatra's aim is not to diminish the pleasures of her relationship to Antony, but to define herself with a presence greater and more specific than Antony's ideal. According to Philo, Antony is already overflowing the "Measure" in his love for Cleopatra, but it would be a more accurate appraisal to say that love involving Cleopatra is immeasurable. In her exchanges with Antony she continually attacks his "well-divided Disposition" with the same duplicity he uses to convince her that he can capably sustain this division, until the "Heavenly Mingle" is achieved. The scenes of Antony and Cleopatra together are surprisingly few—they impress one as making up a great deal of the play—but ever-deeper explorations of the issues raised in their first brief exchange, and culminate in Antony's death at Cleopatra's monument.

It is here, in Antony's dying ascent to Cleopatra, in a place she will never leave, that Antony and Cleopatra most clearly define the mutuality that exemplifies their relationship. Cleopatra plans her escape of the masculine confines in which she seems literally imprisoned, and she plans this after watching the dying Antony make his own escape from these confines: it is not Caesar's valor that overthrows Antony, but "Antony's hath triumphed on it self."

"Triumph" is an interesting choice, bringing to mind the inimitably Roman genius for pageant, here to be transformed into Egyptian display. Cleopatra begins this scene by claiming that "Our size of sorrow, / Proportion'd to our Cause, must be as great / As that which makes it," a mournful but intensely theatrical—and, taken out of this context, very Caesarian--expression. Not only will Cleopatra's sorrow be "monumental" in order to match the greatness
of Antony, but it will be so to match his spectacular, protracted death. She has Antony brought to her, rather than leaving the monument to come to him, because she will not risk capture and brook "th' imperious Shew of the / Full-Fortun'd Caesar." The danger of capture seems minimal at this point, but Cleopatra's subtext is clear: the show belongs to her.

Beyond simply matching herself to Antony, Cleopatra demonstrates how she in fact creates death "after the high Roman fashion" (86). Antony's attempted suicide, and the death of Eros that results indirectly from his attempt; Antony's discovery, immediately after he inflicts the wound, that Cleopatra still lives; the complicated business of hoisting the dying Antony up to Cleopatra; Cleopatra's repeated interruption of his efforts to impart some dying instruction--always involves elements of comedy. The comedy, however, is subsumed in the pageantry by which Cleopatra will again best Caesar's Rome; her display and protraction of Antony's death mocks the fiction of a "high Roman" death while simultaneously preparing the way for her own suicide.

Walter Coppedge echoes a common critical theme when he says that Antony's death is "sacrificial to the extent that it serves to bring about a profound change and recognition in the . . . queen . . . [who] now discards the forms of royalty to insist on her humanity." While it is true Cleopatra decries the weakness of her passionate sorrow as fit for the "Maid that milks / And does the meanest Chares" (73-4), she also imperiously dismisses the "false Huswife Fortune," and cannot resist threatening the "injurious Gods" with characteristic hyperbole. It is tempting, then, to
consider Antony a means not to Cleopatra's "humanizing" but to her final triumphant end, which would then be a final triumphant mockery of Caesar's manipulation of him.

But Antony does bring about profound changes in Cleopatra, chief of which is her own realization that Antony's troubled Romanness is, as Fawker described it, "a paradigmatic and original trait." His Romanness, which has provided Cleopatra with such "sport" throughout the play (just as his Egyptianness has provided the Romans with similar sport) is not the Romanness of Caesar, but hearkens to a more romantic, republican past. The constant mythologizing of him, by Philo, Caesar, and even Cleopatra has a quality of eulogy about it, and this too is the "high Roman" death Cleopatra celebrates, and plans to emulate at the monument.

Thus Antony and Cleopatra's deaths are in a profound sense collaborative, even though they do not occur together. Cleopatra's belief that with Antony's death there is nothing remarkable left "Beneath the visiting Moon," and "All's but Naught" (77) leads her to proclaim that she shall die "Marble Constant" (5.2.237). She and Antony will find a marble constancy in death that has eluded them in life, but not the marble constancy of Rome, not Caesar's brand of constancy; rather, it will be an erotic constancy. The lovers will be free to engage endlessly in the loveplay that typified them in life: Cleopatra even worries that, since her woman Iras precedes her in death, Antony will demand of her "that Kiss" which is Cleopatra's "Heaven to have" (5.2.302-3).

Anticipating death, Cleopatra cannot resist a pun that will demonstrate Caesar to be an "Ass / Unpolicied" at the same time it
shows her to be a "lass unparallel'd." She will die with "nothing / Of Woman" in her: with Antony dead, Cleopatra too will cease to exist, a seeming victory for Caesar. But it is the sexual "nothing" of woman that makes her woman, that has already ensured her union with Antony.

The deaths of Antony and Cleopatra are "Sport indeed" (4.15.32), which is why Cixous echoes the lovers' story so lightheartedly, as Cleopatra lives not only at the point of the monument but, with Antony, brings to the same point all the play's paradoxes and residual oppositions. Even the mournfulness she displays for Antony is tempered by a kind of anticipatory joy:

Noblest of Men, woo't die?
Hast thou no care of me? Shall I abide
In this dull World, which in thy Absence is
No better than a Sty? --Oh see, my Women:
The Crown o’th’ Earth doth melt. --My Lord?

[He dies.]

--Oh wither’d is the Garland of the War;
The Soldiers Pole is fall’n. Young Boys and Girls
Are level now with Men. The Odds is gone,
And there is nothing left Remarkable
Beneath the visiting Moon (59-68).

Antony's dying provides the emotional and poietic nexus for Cleopatra's imminent suicide. His death is the crux: with it, Cleopatra changes her rhetoric from interrogative to declarative and
imaginatively reconciles herself to her end. Immediately after these
remarks she faints, causing Iras and Charmian to believe her dead.
The mournful ejaculations of the women appear to rouse her, and her
waking utterance, “No more but in a Woman,” may be a punning reply
to Charmian’s “Peace, peace, Iras.” Cleopatra’s utterance, however,
does anticipate her later remark that she will “have nothing / Of
Woman” in her.

While Cleopatra and her women haul Antony to the monument’s
top, she cannot resist exuberant puns on “coming” and “dying,” but
during and after his death the erotic-thanatotic wordplay informs
and spills over her every expression. Consider the lines above,
addressed to Antony, in conjunction with her speech containing the
reference to woman’s “nothing,” the latter uttered in response to
news that the clown has brought her a gift of figs:

What poor an Instrument
May do a Noble Deed: he brings me Liberty.
My Resolution's plac'd, and I have nothing
Of Woman in me. Now from Head to Foot
I am Marble Constant; now the fleeting Moon
No Planet is of mine (5.2.233-8).

It becomes impossible—or perhaps irrelevant—to distinguish
between the imagery used to signify Antony and that used by
Cleopatra in self-reference. The shared connotation of the fallen
“Soldiers Pole” and the poor instrument of the bawdily suggestive
figs is certainly clear, and yet the referent of this “Instrument” is
ambiguous. The linkage of "rural Fellow," figs, a poor instrument, and the jettisoned womanhood of Cleopatra is direct, and may be a suggestively masculine one (as a chain of associations which seems to help Cleopatra place her "Roman" resolutions) but it remains indeterminately articulated. Might the poor instrument be Cleopatra? As she prepares to take the asp to herself, she imagines Antony rousing himself to praise her "Noble Act" (285), while she, her vision of Antony, and the asp all come together in a coil of sexual and mortal desire and gratification, so that if one "and Nature can so gently part, / The Stroke of Death is as a Lover's Pinch, / Which hurts and is desir'd" (294-6).

Compare also the significance of the "nothing / Of Woman" Cleopatra claims she has in her, to the "Absence" left by behind with Antony's death. There is "nothing left Remarkable," says Cleopatra, "Beneath the visiting Moon," a moon typically associated with Cleopatra until her eschewal of it at line 238. But the association is so complex, several times linking the moon to Antony's fear of cuckoldry (4.12.45) and to Cleopatra's role as Isis—that is, Antony imagines having the horns associated with Cleopatra as the Egyptian goddess—that the "nothing" might then apply equally and quite erotically to either ("All's but / Naught," Cleopatra claims after Antony's death).30

Cleopatra's final line, cut off by her death, is "What should I stay--" (313), a line often glossed as "Why should I stay," and, in fact, completed in the play by Charmian so as to render the "what" as "why." But "stay" conflates the senses of "remain," "keep," and/or "check," and by allowing the nominal force of "what" to
"remain" (rather than insisting on the rhetorical force of "why"), the phrase grounds Cleopatra's remain(der)s in her ability to name without forcing her to complete the act of naming. Her interrupted "question" points one to her presence in the text without limiting that existence: what should I stay? That is, what of myself should remain? What trace should I leave? As the embodiment of woman, she may remain indistinguishable from Antony, or even "nothing / of Woman" at all.

Notes
1. There are notable exceptions to this kind of interpretation, particularly among previous generations of critics. See Harley Granville-Barker's Prefaces to Shakespeare, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Princeton University Press, 1946); Robert Ornstein, "The Ethic of the Imagination: Love and Art in Antony and Cleopatra" (1966; reprinted in Shakespeare: Modern Essays in Criticism. ed. Leonard F. Dean [Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. 389-404; Mark Van Doren, Shakespeare (New York: Doubleday, 1939), pp. 231-43. Among more recent critical inquiries into the play, perhaps the most careful and comprehensive is H.W. F awkner's Shakespeare's Hyperontology: "Antony and Cleopatra" (London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1990); and Walter Coppedge, in "The Joy of the Worm: Dying in Antony Cleopatra," writes: "It is not necessary to assert on the one hand that Antony and Cleopatra are the fool and strumpet blinded by illusion, or on the other hand that they are the world's greatest lovers who find the palace of wisdom at the end of the road of excess. The richest reading of the play, not insisting on either/or,
may entertain both/and” (Renaissance Papers 1988: 41-50, 41). I will return to Coppedge briefly later in my essay, and to Fawkner at more length.


3. Coppelia Kahn, in her recent study of the Roman plays, admits that Plutarch qualifies “to some extent” the Augustan bias against Cleopatra, but “still encodes it.” According to Kahn, Plutarch's account is another episode of Augustan aggrandizement, so much so that Cleopatra is never constituted as a legitimate enemy vying for Antony's principles in an ideological struggle: she is simply magnified to monstrous sexual and alien proportions in order to provide a contrast with the rational genius of Caesar. Putting aside the validity or invalidity of this particular interpretation (and thus of Antony and Cleopatra as a subsequent encoding of Plutarch; see note 4 below, for example), Kahn rather breezily assumes a coherent “classical ethos,” the Renaissance legacy of which forms the foundation of her discussion of Antony and Cleopatra. She states that “Virgil, Ovid, and Horace served the ideological purposes [for Kahn, primarily homosociality] of Caesar’s party,” a generalization that obscures the conflicted ideologies present in both Plutarch and in Renaissance dramatists other than Shakespeare, particularly Daniel, Marlowe, and Greville. Most damaging to a reading of Shakespeare's play, however, is her gloss of Plutarch. No matter how closely or not Shakespeare follows his source, Plutarch's “encoding” is surely countered by an ideological dissonance, most notable in his delineation of Cleopatra, in the subtextual relationship he draws

4. Mark Van Doren describes Shakespeare’s debt to Plutarch, but says the writing of the play “involved the removal of his imagination to a distance that almost staggers measurement” (p. 230).


7. Kahn writes, “The embracing irony of the play is that Antony never returns to the heroic Roman image of fixed and stable identity from which--according to the testimony of nearly every character in the play--he has only temporarily departed” (p. 116). Coppedge calls attention to the moment when “Cleopatra reflects that Antony “painted one way [is] like a Gorgon, / The other way’s a Mars,” claiming this as an example of “the constantly shifting perspectives demanded of the spectator” (p. 44).
8. In other words, the outwardly languorous, coy, or diffident posture articulated by Caesar (and also used by Antony to describe the Romans generally and Octavia specifically), no matter how disingenuous, is dependably Roman. Both the defeat of Pompey and the complicity of Octavia hinge on this quality of "not making waves."

9. There is that peculiar moment aboard Pompey's galley, when Menas offers to unmoor the ship and, once adrift, to kill the triumvirs so that Pompey may succeed as emperor. Pompey replies:

   Ah, this thou should'st have done,
And not have spoke on't. In me 'tis Villainy,
In thee't had been good Service. Thou must know
'Tis not my Profit that does lead mine Honour:
Mine Honour it. Repent that e'er thy Tongue
Hath so betray'd thine Act. Being done unknown,
I should have found it afterwards well done,
But must condemn it now. Desist, and drink (2.7.77-84).

It remains unclear what does lead Pompey's honor, if not his profit, since Menas claims earlier that Pompey's father would never have agreed to the treaty offered by the triumvirs, which is probably true, although the Sextus Pompey of Antony and Cleopatra seems very much his father's son: a popular favorite, battle-worthy, and not too bright. Pompey is not only incapable of understanding Caesar's treacherous cleverness, but he does not question the consequences of the honor he invokes; this complacence is as
responsible for his feminine associations as his inferior military strategies.

10. See Andrews, p. 44n.

11. Irigaray’s formulation results chiefly from her analysis of the Platonic form/matter distinction, as described in the Timaeus and by the allegory of the cave in the Republic, the latter of which she introduces as "a metaphor of the inner space, of the den, the womb or hystera . . . though we shall see that the text inscribes the metaphor as, strictly speaking, impossible." On the Timaeus, one reads: “[Plato] is determined to disown that view [that the participation of Matter in an Ideal-Form would produce a thing modified by the effect each modality has on the other]; he labors to indicate in what mode Matter can receive the Ideal-Forms without, itself, being modified . . . he therefore devises a metaphor for participation without modification,” a catachresis (to use Irigaray’s word) that forms the basis of her investigations into the form/matter relationship. Thus, her inquiry is into generation: if Form and Matter each retain an essence, then how does Matter instantiate Form? The generative “nature” is not accessible through figures of speech, although Plato likens the hystera to a mother. According to Judith Butler, “the receiving principle potentially includes all bodies, and so applies universally, but its universal applicability must not resemble . . . those eternal realities . . . which pass into the receptacle. There is here a prohibition on resemblance (mimeta), which is to say that this nature cannot be said to be like either the eternal forms or their material, sensible, or imaginary copies.” The problem of the relation of the receptacle to the

The “Cleopater” variation that communicates Irigaray’s catachresis also occurs in the catalogue page of the First Folio, and in two of the play’s stage directions, but is not used by any of the other characters except Caesar and Enobarbus, as noted.

12. See, for example, Harris, who suggests “there is something in the very structure of Roman desire itself which produces Cleopatra as desirable . . . Her allegedly “female” attributes demand in many instances to be understood as displaced or misrecognized Roman characteristics” (pp. 415, 422); and Roberta M. Hooks, “Shakespeare’s *Antony and Cleopatra*: Power and Submission,” who describes the play’s attitude toward transvestism and blurred gender identities as representing “a Roman perception of the dangers of Cleopatra’s otherness and Antony’s desertion of male solidarity that is the basis for patriarchal [sic] order” (*American Imago* 44, 1 [Spring 1987]: 37-49, 41). Most reductive is Jonathan Dollimore’s summary of the play: “if *Antony and Cleopatra* celebrates anything it is not the love which transcends power but the sexual infatuation which foregrounds it.” *Radical Tragedy:*
13. But there is Adelman, and the much maligned Camille Paglia. In Sexual Personae, Paglia rivals Mark Van Doren in her sheer gratefulness for and imaginative submission to the Cleopatra figure, which she swooningly claims “contains all emotional modes and all powers of male and female . . . Into Cleopatra as Isis flows the untransformed energy of nature, sheer sex and violence.” Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), pp. 222, 217. Also noteworthy is another woman, Anna Brownell Jameson, whose 1832 volume, Characteristics of Women, expresses an appreciation of the play’s inclusive pleasures that anticipates the work of Walter Coppedge and H.W. Fawkner (see notes 1 and 27): “What is most astonishing in the character of Cleopatra is its antithetical construction--its consistent inconsistency, if I may use such an expression--which renders it quite impossible to reduce it to any elementary principles” (qtd. in Andrews, p. 330).
15. Harris, pp. 409, 410, 422.
18. Cixous and Clement, p. 130.
19. Lacan's *objet a* is that which the sexual drives seek to satisfy themselves, although the drives are designated by their lack of a fixed object (when the subject is oedipalized or, for Lacan, enters a symbolic--language-based--sexuality, his previously polymorphous sexuality, which had been defined by complete satisfaction and identification with the mother, is now channeled into genital sexuality and hierarchized according to acceptable social standards). Thus all objects of desire are forms of the *objet a*, all forms of the *objet a* are links on an unsatisfactory chain of metonymies, and all forms are culturally distinct. The phallus, as the linguistic signifier, takes the place of the mother once the subject enters the symbolic order, and it is this shift, from identification with the mother to desire for the (m)other, with its presuppositions of language as a superior masculine construct, generically inclusive of all sexual difference and all cultural exchange, that Irigaray and Cixous take issue with.

In “The ‘Mechanics’ of Fluids,” Irigaray addresses empirical science (including psychoanalysis) as a repudiation of the fluid; that is, a phallocentric culture must insist upon measurement, lineation, solidity, etc., but “Woman never speaks the same way. What she emits is flowing, fluctuating. Blurring.” She contrasts woman's speech, her lactation, and the sexless “urine, saliva, blood” as contrary to *objet a*, an object she considers falsely defined by phallocentrism's a priori determination that definition, *language*, although a masculine construct, speaks for all (*This Sex*, pp. 112-3).

But, as Jane Gallop interprets this essay, the fluid has “a mechanics of its own” and while Lacan's description of the *objet a*
is mobile and fluid itself, he invests the mechanics of it "with a protective rigidity" that Irigaray dissolves (The Daughter's Seduction: Feminism and Psychoanalysis [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982], p. 40). One must take on faith much of Irigaray's speculation; it is, as countless feminist readings of her work attest, hindered by one's inability to read counter to phallocentrism without using phallic language.

20. Quoted in Naomi Schor, "This Essentialism Which Is Not One: Coming to Grips With Irigaray," differences 1.2 (1989): 38-57, 48. Schor's essay is an interpretation of Irigaray's essentialism, as it differs from the essentialism of other feminist writers and as it links her discourses of fluidity and materialism in a mimetic relationship to phallogocentrism.


22. In the lengthy quote concerning Irigaray's redeployment of "phallogocentric power" (q.v., and note 21 above), Judith Butler wants to rescue her from "uncritical maternalism" (p.38), but admits in an earlier passage that this maternal stance, so often understood as an aspect of Irigaray's biological essentialism, has already been figured by her as a rhetorical strategy.

23. Ibid.


25. She is not the only one who tries; Pompey rather adheres to a vaguely honorable ideal, but is literally "at sea" when it comes to decoding the pageantry of Caesar's treaty (see note 9 above). Enobarbus, too, is left "lacking the varying tide," caught between the ostentation of Antony and Caesar:
Unstate [Antony's] Happiness and be Stag'd to th' Shew
Against a Sworder. I see men's Judgements are
A parcel of their Fortunes, and things outward
Do draw the inward quality after them
To suffer all alike (3.13.27-32).

The phrase ending "Against a Sworder" (which sounds very much like
"Against disorder"), provides a clue to Enobarbus' agonized decision
to leave Antony. He has just witnessed the spectacular rout at
Antium and, I believe, he assumes that Caesar's army will at least
be orderly and his battle plan rational. It seems likely, however, that
he overhears Caesar's plan to have deserters from Antony's troops
put in the front line. But when Antony sends Enobarbus' treasure to
him, with a "Bounty over-plus" (4.6.21), Enobarbus discovers the
different relation between "things outward" and their "inward
quality" as demonstrated by Caesar and Antony.

26. This description is almost immediately followed by Antony's
remark to Octavia: "The World, and my great Office, will sometimes
/ Devide me from your Bosom," a rather unsettling proof that
Enobarbus is correct, and Antony will never leave Cleopatra (3.1.1-
2).

27. Fawkner, pp 30-1. Fawkner calls his reading of *Antony and
Cleopatra* "hyperontological" as way to open up "ontology," which
has "fallen into disrepute . . . it suggests a humanist centeredness
and a logical self-presence that poststructuralists view as a
totalist threat.” Fawkner’s thesis revolves around the play’s
“question of leaving” and, while “It is true . . . that the idea of
emphasizing any conceptual nucleus as a central clue . . .
immediately triggers the suspicion that one is really discussing a
phenomenological deep structure . . . the crucial construct here (the
leaving/following nexus) is perfectly identical . . . with the forces
that, in the text, undermine and dismantle it” (15-6).
29. And Cleopatra may be remembering her first “sport” with Julius
Caesar: “Cleopatra, taking only one of her friends with her
(Apollodorus the Sicilian), embarked in a small boat and landed at
the palace when it was already getting dark. Since there seemed to
be no other way of getting in unobserved, she stretched herself out
at full length inside a sleeping bag, and Apollodorus, after tying up
the bag, carried it indoors to Caesar.” Plutarch, Fall of the Roman
Enobarbus alludes to the event at 2.6.70.
30. The associations, in fact, seem to increase exponentially and
limitlessly. See the significance of horns at 1.2.4-5, 3.13.125-6, and
their use as marks of identity (perhaps mistaken) at 1.2.57-76; see
also the note in Andrews to 3.6.17. In 5.2 Cleopatra tells Dolabella
of her dream of Antony:

His Face was as the Heav’ns, and therein stuck
A Sun and Moon, which kept their Course and lighted
The Little o’th’ Earth (78-80).
Here Antony the sun and moon; Cleopatra as Isis would have been associated not only with the moon but, as Andrews points out in the Everyman edition, if she puts on her “best Attires” to “meet Mark Antony” in death (226, 227)—habiliments she sends Charmian and Iras to fetch—these might include the goddess’ headdress, which features the sun bracketed by a pair of cow’s horns (see note p. 314).

Line 80 above is emended in most editions to “The little O, the earth,” a choice difficult to defend but one that continues beautifully the punning eroticism Cleopatra maintains with the deific Antony.
CHAPTER V

The “poor remainder” of Rome in Titus Andronicus and Cymbeline

For two plays separated by more than fifteen years and a world of tone Cymbeline and Titus Andronicus are often remarkably alike. Their shared Ovidian foundations have been noted by many scholars,¹ but a comparison of them as manifestations of Shakespeare’s ethically limited Rome reveals richer similarities. At the same time, neither play is fully Roman in the way Julius Caesar, Coriolanus, and Antony and Cleopatra are. The major plays, steeped in Roman history and culture, create a Rome out of which qualities of Romanness emerge. The Rome of Titus Andronicus and Cymbeline serves the conventions of genre rather than being served by them and, in the case of Cymbeline, the quality of Romanness is limited by the secondary role Rome itself plays.

In the first chapter I remarked that Titus Andronicus comes to view Rome as an incomplete and unsatisfying entity and sees the “trimmed” Lavinia as somehow emblematic of this unwholesome state; in fact, the “great man” views Lavinia as in a mirror, and plans his own physical truncation to fit this recognition: “Give me a sword, I’ll chop off my hands too, / For they have fought for Rome, and all in vain” (3.1.73-4).² Knowing, I believe, that Rome has no place for one whose grief cannot be contained (as the Rome of Antony and Cleopatra has no place for one whose eroticism cannot be contained)—“like Nilus it disdaineth bounds”—Titus moves toward the furious revenges of the final act, a revenge that begins with the slaying of Tamora’s sons and continues through the murder of the
reflected reminder of his shame, Lavinia (who, unlike his sons, cannot be sacrificed to Rome in any other way).

*Cymbeline*, in its own odd late-play fashion, faces the same problem with containment and thus, with what disdains the bounds of its Rome to flow into Britain. Much has been made of *Cymbeline*'s "lane" scene in act 5 as a site of psychosexual anxiety similar to the sexual "pit" of *Titus Andronicus* but it also functions superbly as an image of the Rome-Britain cultural relationship: a narrow field of battle, congested with men, the advantage belonging first to the Romans and then to the Britons.4 A British lord expresses surprise that the Britons have turned the tide, to which Posthumus bitterly replies:

Will you rhyme upon't,
And vent it for a mock'ry? Here is one:
"Two boys, and old man twice a boy, a lane,
Preserved the Britons, was the Romans' bane" (5.5.55-8).

Shortly after, in soliloquy, he adds, "Great the slaughter is / Here made by th' Roman; great the answer be / Britons must take" (78-80).

But what is the answer made to Rome? In previous chapters I have noted the motif of infant dependency associated with the inhabitants of Shakespeare's Rome; it is a motif particularly apt for *Titus Andronicus* and *Cymbeline*, both of which dramatize independence from Rome, in the *translatio imperii* that moves the seat of power westward through Europe to Britain.5 While *Titus*
Andronicus depicts a Rome provoking its own destruction, and Cymbeline depicts a Rome overshadowed by Britain, both plays represent independence in familial terms: in Titus Andronicus, the "poor remainder of Andronici" struggle to explain and leave behind the bloody actions set in motion by their father Titus; in Cymbeline, Britain struggles to separate itself from its cultural parent. Thus, despite the often divergent routes by which the two plays work out their anxieties of influence, both end with an attempt by the survivors-victors to distance themselves from the Rome that urged them to that point.6

Both plays also share a motif of excessive violence (particularly against women) that drives the characters to assert their independence, but this violence is of different kinds: literal, in the case of Titus Andronicus, and largely potential in the case of Cymbeline. Titus Andronicus' brand of violence is clear--rape, murder, dismemberment, filicide, cannibalism--but the implicit violence of Cymbeline is less so. By potential violence, I mean threatening: its characters speak a language harboring a far greater disgust for and distrust of Innogen (the future mother of Britain) than provokes the mutilation against Lavinia; and Cymbeline's anachronistic Italians express a coarseness and decadence barely kept in check by the conventions of the romance.

And yet, at first glance, Titus Andronicus would seem to be the coarser and more decadent product; it has evoked varied reactions since the success of its first staging, but until recently modern criticism has almost uniformly dismissed it as egregious and tasteless, an evaluation that springs from its violent logic: the
bloodletting and rapine seem to be dictated less by plot than to occur in a register of communication apart from language or exposition. This separation or distancing means the violence may be more extreme but—despite the distasteful reaction—less affecting; in other words, the conventions of the revenge drama permit, even encourage cartoonishness. After ravishing and mutilating Lavinia, for example, Tamora’s sons appear with her onstage, jeering at her muteness and the bloody stumps of her arms:

DEMETRIUS
See how with signs and tokens she can scrawl.

CHIRON
Go home, call for sweet water, wash thy hands.

DEMETRIUS
She hath not tongue to call, nor hands to wash,
And so let’s leave her to her silent walks (2.3.5-8).

This is hypnotically repulsive enough, especially as Titus will soon be making the same puns in seriousness, but even Tamora manages a play on Lavinia’s handlessness before the mutilation, when she plans to kill Lavinia herself: “Give me the poniard. You shall know, my boys, / Your mother’s hand shall right your mother’s wrong” (2.2.120-1). The most extreme wordplay occurs when Lavinia’s uncle Marcus discovers her, bleeding and disfigured, and expresses his outrage in an Ovidian monologue of parodic inversion:

Fair Philomela, why she but lost her tongue,
And in a tedious sampler sewed her mind;
But, lovely niece, that mean is cut from thee.

Come, let us go and make thy father blind,
For such a sight will blind a father's eye (2.3.38-53).

This might be a speech from Chiron or Demetrius; the point in these lines is the play on a visual reference, not subtle characterization or the development of Marcus' outrage. Compare, for example, this father's blindness to the thematic blindness in *King Lear*. In *Titus Andronicus* "blindness" does not signify a moral and metaphysical condition; at least, the play is not interested in showing us the scales falling from the eyes of Titus. Rather, the pun on sight is an extension of the play on Lavinia's truncated body, and Titus' reaction to the sight of Lavinia will provoke another stream of punning on handlessness.

Yet the real subject of Titus' speech is not Lavinia but Titus, and in this sense the drama's horror does remain unseen and unarticulated: "Titus' passion is a continued struggle ... to express the inexpressible ... The impulse to play, in other words, arises in Titus not as a retreat from the hideous world that confronts him, but as a means of registering its full significance."7

But how can we know that Titus registers the full significance of the "hideous world" that confronts him unless he articulates it? At the height of his horror, Titus laughs: he seems to be both sharing our laughter at the ludicrous excesses parading by, and (perhaps) registering a sorrow and sense of injustice so great neither words
nor institutional justice will meet it. The horror he will not register, however, is his own contribution--having led his "country's strength"--to the unmerciful mechanism that is Rome (1.1.197).

As another example, before Lavinia can accuse her assailants, she must get the record of their misdeeds--the story of Tereus and Philomela in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*--from young Lucius. The boy runs from her, afraid despite Titus' assurances that she loves him, but Lucius seems to express the truer response; he notes that her feelings were loving before his father left; now, it may be inferred, they may be something else. Lavinia's silent behavior in this scene might well verge on madness. She has had the power of language and teaching taken from her by men--and Titus, quite unknowingly, reenacts this violation when he contrasts her previous education of young Lucius with the new course of vengeance Titus himself will teach the boy. As with Titus' laughter, the tragedy of this scene registers metadramatically; Titus institutes the actions he believes will avenge Lavinia, but he does not see that the revenger is inadequate to right the wrongs done to her.

Instead of the tasteless but playful language and grotesque violence of *Titus Andronicus, Cymbeline's* language largely subsumes its violence; its characters do not remark on what has been done, but rather insinuate what their ethic would allow them to do if they so desired. Giacomo, during his first meeting with Innogen, expresses his admiration for her this way:

It cannot be i'th'eye--for apes and monkeys.
'Twixt two such shes, would chatter this way and
Contemn with mows the other the other; nor i’th’judgement,
For idiots in this case of favour would
Be wisely definite; nor i’th’ appetite--
Sluttery, to such neat excellence opposed,
Should make desire vomit emptiness,
Not so allured to feed.

The cloyed will,
That satiate yet unsatisfied desire, that tub
Both filled and running, ravening first the lamb,
Longs after for the garbage (1.6.40-52).

In this scene Giacomo’s remarks are a test of Lavinia’s honor, and as such stem from an acknowledgement of her purity and his native disgust of women. “Garbage,” which provides such an emphatic and revolting period to his statement, occurs only one other time in the canon, and in much the same context.8

Its violence largely defused, Cymbeline demonstrates that words are more wounding than swords. Giacomo’s speech to Innogen, for example, expresses a deep-seated distrust and fear of women wholly lacking in Titus Andronicus. When Innogen dismisses him for a beast, in order to remain in her presence and graces he claims that his own vulgarities (and his report of the vulgar behavior of Posthumus) are a test of her honor. In fact, they are a test, and they reveal, along with Innogen’s virtue, that Giacomo’s base utterances are as true of him as Posthumus’ trust of Innogen is false. Cymbeline’s puns differ from those in Titus Andronicus in being
unconscious; during the argument that results in Giacomo’s test of Innogen’s virtue, Posthumus wagers the diamond ring she has given him and claims, “I fear not my ring” (1.3.96). Later, in a letter sent to his servant Pisanio, Posthumus grieves, “Thy mistress, Pisanio, hath played the strumpet in my bed, the testimonies whereof lies bleeding in me” (3.4.21-3). Even the gentlemen who witness the exchange between Posthumus and Giacomo express their displeasure in a language where sexual innuendo and homosocial preference nearly break the surface: “Gentlemen, enough of this. It came in too suddenly. Let it die as it was born; and, I pray you, be better acquainted” (1.4.118-20).

Unlike the violence done to Lavinia’s person, the violence against Innogen is done to the signs of her worth to Britain: the ring and her reputation. Innogen remains chaste, but her suitors are all equally vile, including, for a time, Posthumus, whose suspicion provokes the play’s most misogynist speech, in which he swears vengeance on the woman who has denied him his “lawful pleasure” while playing him false (he thinks) with any number of men. Innogen’s value corresponds to the market, as it were: her ring becomes variously priceless and worthless as he wavers between belief in Giacomo’s success and Innogen’s honor. It is significant that she is ill-treated by every man in the play (except the servant Pisanio), Romans and Britons alike, and this includes Lucius, the character most often named to invoke the “honorable” Rome.

There are other rhetorical flourishes in Cymbeline that seem to align it with Titus Andronicus: verbal and visual plays on the headless trunk of Cloten and the trunk in which Giacomo is conveyed
into Innogen’s chamber; these “trunks” in turn become the “stately cedar” of Britain whose “lopped branches” shall be rejoined. Coppelia Kahn calls these “outrageous dramatized puns” Shakespeare’s reversion “to something like the hybrid mode of Titus ... After the dire, tragic Romes of the intervening three dramas, again he plays with Rome or rather with Roman Britain, a hybrid dramatized in a likewise hybrid form, tragicomedy.”

The image of the lopped or “trimmed” female body lingers after Lavinia's death, and the all-male ending of Titus Andronicus reminds one that this Rome is effectively barren, despite the final remarks made by the “poor remainder of Andronici” to the “gentle Romans”: “May I govern so,” says Lucius, “To heal Rome’s harms and wipe away her woe” (5.3.146). Given the furious assaults just dramatized, the possibility of peace seems rather doubtful. The lopped branches of the effeminate Cymbeline, on the other hand, will be regrafted onto him in a final dramatic image that seems to promise a productive Roman-British union. In Cymbeline, however, it is not violent action that casts a shadow over the healthy union of Rome and Britain, but the very unreliability of language as it has been used to this point, and thus the subjectivity of interpretation (as demonstrated, for example, by the ending relations between the disguised Innogen and the Roman Lucius). It is as though Shakespeare demonstrates, through the images of translatio imperii, that a literal translation of empire is far more difficult to achieve than cultural movement westward.

The soothsayer’s prediction of victory exemplifies the difficulty of translation. In act 4 he is shown a vision by the gods:
I saw Jove's bird, the Roman eagle, winged
From the spongy south to this part of the west,
There vanished in the sunbeams; which portends,
Unless my sins abuse my divination,
Success to th' Roman host (4.2.350-4)

In the last scene of the play, the same image of the eagle flying westward into the sun becomes "Th' imperial Caesar" uniting "His favour with the radiant Cymbeline / Which shines in the west" (5.6.476-8). The odd "spongy south" of the earlier vision is read by G. Wilson Knight as an anachronistic reference to the "soft, effete, decaying land" of Giacomo's Italy;12 to paraphrase the British gentleman on Posthumus' virtues, Augustan Rome and its Italian progeny are crushed together in time as well as in temperament, and the eagle must fly further westward--while the sun burns off its old feathers, according to myth--to find a culture worthy of "success." What is disturbing here is the proximity of classical Rome to Renaissance Italy; one may be impressed by the contrast between Lucius and Giacomo, but as Posthumus demonstrates, in the context of this drama neither goodness nor corruption may be delved completely to the root.

The soothsayer's prediction is also disturbing for its latent implication of contagion or blight. There is the barest suggest that, as the Roman "host" moves successfully westward, it carries with it this potential for "sponginess," and that the easily defeated
Caesar's desire to share Cymbeline's radiance is also a desire to stave off the effects of encroaching corruption.

The anachronistic insertion of Italy to make a point about Rome jars less than if it were it the only inconsistency, but Cymbeline uses the conventions of the romance "to resolve its awkward mixtures of sources, genres, and chronology." The play seems to work itself out as it goes along, and never more so than in the final scene, in which the soothsayer carries not only the burden of demonstrating Britain's ascendency, but also of determining the Roman-British Posthumus' role in that future. Saved from death by the disguised Innogen, Posthumus asks the soothsayer to "show / His skill in the construction" of the tablet given by "Great Jupiter, upon his eagle backed" (5.6.429, 434-5): "'Whenas a lion's whelp shall, to himself unknown, without seeking find, and be embraced by a piece of tender air; and when from a stately cedar shall be lopped branches which, being dead many years, shall after revive, be jointed to the old stock, and freshly grow: then shall Posthumus end his miseries, Britain be fortunate and flourish in peace and plenty'" (437-44).

The soothsayer reads "lion's whelp" to mean Posthumus, who is surnamed Leonatus, "lion born" (the effect of his given name on this formulation is suggestive, as Posthumus eschews the Latin origins implied by his name for a British future), and rather tortuously reads "tender air" for Innogen, by translating the phrase into Latin as "mollis aer," contracting this to "mulier" and translating that back into English as "wife." But the soothsayer has just been tasked to interpret these signs after Giacomo's confession, Innogen's unmasking, and Belario's revelation: all bodes
well for Britain, it seems, and thus the language of the tablet must follow the action.

However, the interpretation of the tablet to favor the future of Cymbeline's kingdom and the revision of the eagle's portent--both within forty lines and immediately before the end of the play--wrests a more positive reading of Britain's victory and its relationship to Rome than can be justified by the action. Cymbeline, for example, a relatively minor and certainly unforceful presence from the beginning, utters the final pronouncements of the play, promising to pay Britain's monetary tribute to Rome (the Queen's previous refusal of which had precipitated war), and congratulating his kingdom for the resounding peace it has won. This payment has been read a variety of ways, including as I've noted, Shakespeare's own payment of his cultural debt to Rome, but as a signifier of future leadership it is ambivalent. Cymbeline's kingdom seems both stronger than the Rome over which it has won victory, and enervated by its association with Posthumus and Giacomo.

This troubled ending links Cymbeline most strongly to Titus Andronicus: both dramas record a lingering note of deep ambivalence toward Roman values that informs and brackets the major plays. At the end of Titus Andronicus, for example, the "poor remainder of Andronici" stand aloft, and offer to throw themselves to their deaths, if the Romans wish it, "and on the ragged stones beat forth our souls / And make a mutual closure of our house" (5.3.130-2). Marcus here alludes to the Tarpeian rock, the peak from which Roman traitors were thrown. This image of treason, and the visual separation achieved by the Andronici's appearing aloft recur in
Coriolanus, when Coriolanus, after appearing in the marketplace as candidate for consul, is accused of traitorous deeds by the "common voice" and escorted from Rome: "He's banish'd, and it shall be so!" (3.3.234). In Titus Andronicus, Roman Emilius responds to Marcus' offer very differently:

Come, come, thou reverend man of Rome,
And bring our emperor gently in thy hand,
Lucius, our emperor, for well I know
The common voice do cry it shall be so (5.3.136-9).

Compared to the frightening potential displayed by the crowd in Coriolanus, here Emilius, speaking for citizens we never see, is unctuously soothing. Compared to the passion that prompts Marcus to offer up the Andronici, Emilius sounds indifferent, even dismissive, and in fact the future of Rome remains in doubt: with no other Romans left alive to rule, how will Lucius execute his responsibilities? Will he end or escalate the cycle of violence that leaves him in command? Will the now leaderless Goths remain content with rule by Rome? The remaining Andronici appear, by standing aloft, to raise themselves above the pile of bodies and fragmented politics to which they have contributed, but it may not be possible to simply leave behind the self-destructive quality so native to Rome, as one Roman notes, echoing the same quality dramatized in Coriolanus: "Let Rome herself be bane unto herself" (75).14
Cymbeline, which ends on a far more civilized note (Cymbeline himself seems eager for peace rather than just temporarily tired of violence), still reverberates with uncertainty. Succession is troubled by the play's tainted sexual and family relationships. Britain is saved from rule by the problematic Posthumus; the throne will succeed instead to Cymbeline's recovered sons, whose foster father Belarius articulates a philosophy of forgiveness and sexual faithfulness that responds antithetically to Posthumus' misogyny and suspicion. Posthumus, first reared and then banished by Cymbeline, becomes a kind of cultural mercenary for love of Innogen:

    Fight I will no more,
    But yield me to the veriest hind that shall
    Once touch my shoulder.

        For me, my ransom's death,
    On either side I come to spend my breath,
    Which neither here I'll keep nor bear again,
    But end it by some means for Innogen (5.5.76-83).

    Yet the virtuous Belarius was also banished by Cymbeline, and he reveals his foster sons' true parentage only to save them from death. Cymbeline still considers him a traitor and Belarius admits he stole the boys in retaliation for his banishment. At the end of the play the sole Briton whose faithfulness cannot be doubted is Innogen, and she, by the recovery of her brothers, loses the throne. In the busy, hasty settlements of the play's last scene, Innogen, with
whose plight the drama had been vitally concerned, is largely forgotten, and Cymbeline, somewhat perversely, takes over the role of mother (5.6.370-4). In this ending confusion of roles and identities, culture is implicated, as well: Cymbeline’s decisive victory over Rome may have come too late, so that the corruption registered by Posthumus, Giacomo, and Cloten may be an inescapable aspect of the legacy produced by the Roman-British union.

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The troubled legacy of Rome recorded by Cymbeline sets the tone for the dramatic Rome to come. Shakespeare’s transmutation of his classical heritage into a deep and living study of the West’s shared philosophy and mores effectively ends with him. There will not be another definitive interpretation of Rome until Dryden’s *All for Love*, seventy years later, a play that has much to do with classicism and very little to do with Rome itself as a character.

This claim for Shakespeare’s primacy is perhaps an audacious one, largely because it relegates to secondary importance Ben Jonson’s significant contribution to the Roman drama and his even more significant influence on dramatists of Rome until Dryden. And yet, Jonson is not concerned with the kind of sustained ethical investigation that marks Shakespeare’s Rome. In *Sejanus, Catiline*, and even *Poetaster*, Jonson’s Rome is incontrovertibly corrupt; but unlike Shakespeare’s Romans, Jonson’s are bitterly aware of their state’s complete ethical failure, and they realize that any individual
struggle to act counter to this truncated ethos and attendant moral inertia is pointless:

'Tis we are base,
Poor, and degenerate from th' exalted strain
Of our great fathers.

not a spark of their eternal fire
Glows in a present bosom. All's but blaze,
Flashes, and smoke, wherewith we labor so.
There's nothing Roman in us, nothing good,
Gallant, or great.15

Jonson's Roman dramas are also more overtly attentive to political conditions in England than Shakespeare's; Jonson seems less concerned with constructing Roman drama than Roman settings, and in all of Shakespeare's plays there is nothing so pointedly critical of contemporary politics than the struggle for power--in which a whole nation becomes complicit--between Tiberius, Drusus, and Sejanus.

And yet, Sejanus and Catiline remain ultimately unaffected as men, not only because of their amorality, but because, as criticism has often noted, Jonson's dramas are not driven by character. There can be nothing zestful nor zealous about the machinations of Sejanus or in the slow fall of the stolid Catiline. More recent critical trends, which deemphasize characterization and stress cultural context, have reevaluated Jonson's Rome, and seen in it a construction of
statehood as textured as Shakespeare's, and certainly a more detailed political record of Jacobean England. One of the best of these reevaluations is Edward Pechter's, who finds evidence in Sejanus of the kind of troubled, "anti-Roman" private consciousness that I believe so distinguishes Shakespeare's Romans. Even so, Pechter realizes that Jonson's Romans are types, and that what is significant about them is our intellectual relation to and appreciation of them. This is not a new critical insight, especially as Pechter takes into account Jonson's well-known appreciation of his own erudition, but Pechter goes on to imagine how these abstractions of Romans need not be judged wholly by modern expectations of what constitutes theatrical success and thus, that these same abstractions might be very effectively staged: "theatrical effectiveness is not a transcendental signified; it does not encompass the whole field of value. We are poorer if we cannot admire the austerity and intelligence of Sejanus" at the same time we are busy admiring Shakespeare's Roman plays.16

But Jonson is the playwright later seventeenth-century dramatists of Rome choose to emulate (or actively reject). It is noteworthy that Shakespeare's detachment from Rome in Cymbeline is an ethical detachment "authorized" by subjection to genre conventions, and future dramatists will follow a kind of Jonson-Shakespeare split: either the drama of Rome will become detached from Roman history (Marston's Sophonisba, for example), or increasingly studied and stylized, and lacking theatrical interest (Massinger's Roman Actor).
And yet, *Cymbeline* is perhaps more prophetic than it seems as Shakespeare's final version of Rome. Dramas of ethical investigation will not be linked to a shared Roman culture after Shakespeare, but the legacy of Italian decadence *Cymbeline* so significantly juxtaposes to Rome will figure in the darkest of the seventeenth-century tragedies. And although these dramas will explore themes already broached by Shakespeare in his non-Roman tragedies, the focus will become less culturally specific. Tourneur's *Revenger's Tragedy*, for example, while it explores the actions of a Renaissance Italian family, involves ahistoric characters representative of types: Ambitioso, Supervacuo, Spurio. Conversely, Webster's *White Devil* takes as its subject historical figures from late sixteenth-century Italian nobility. This play combines Jonson's bitter belief in the irredeemable corruption of its society with Shakespeare's intense concern with individuality; the result is described by Jonathan Dollimore as "transgression without virtue." The few virtuous characters end the play murdered or mad, while the complexly unvirtuous Flamineo, amid his rants against politics, religion, and women, expresses more simply the drama's fatalistic morality, one that echoes Shakespeare's critique of stoic indifference: "We endure the strokes like anvils or hard steel, / Till pain itself make us not pain to feel." 17

Shakespeare's treatment of Rome in *Titus Andronicus* and *Cymbeline* demonstrates how his individual creative arc comprises the whole of interpretation from the early Tudor to the Restoration periods. He enlivens the complex but static moral studies of Brandon, Daniel, Lodge, Mary Sidney, and the author of *Caesar's*
*Revenge* by dramatizing skepticism toward Rome as England's humanist template, and he does this via close studies of individual Romans attempting and failing to overcome the deeply flawed ethical system they inherit. With *Cymbeline*, he looks ahead to the more rigidly conventionalized and often Italianate morality expressed in the drama of the first half of the seventeenth century. Flamineo's couplet in *The White Devil* can thus communicate in brief the difficult territory that has already been mined by Shakespeare's individual Romans, whose attempts to act virtuously had confronted the hard steel of Rome's real "virtue"--Rome as an ideological edifice that forfeits individual identity for cultural homogeneity--and were dashed by it.

Notes


4. Relatedly, Coppelia Kahn suggests, “in these tight spaces jammed with men, each one struggling to get ahead of the others and come out on top, Shakespeare expresses the intense anxiety of institutionalized competition in the Roman ethos” (p. 163).


8. The word occurs in *Hamlet*, during the ghost’s revelation to Hamlet late in act 1 (in *The Complete Works*):
But virtue, as it never will be moved,
Though lewdness court it in a shape of heaven,
So lust, though to a radiant angel linked,
Will sate itself in a celestial bed,
And prey on garbage (1.5.53-7).

10. In a note to the last scene of the play, Jonathan Bate remarks on
the text's reticence toward the relationship between the Goths and
the Romans: if the Goths join in the general cheer for Lucius as
"Rome's gracious governor" (5.3.145), it might signify that they
have united with the Romans, "if not, they remain as a silent—and
potentially sinister—guard for Lucius... Lucius is a bringer of
order to the fragmented state, but it is left open whether he will
usher in an age of peace or resort to strong-arm tactics himself" (p.
274).

11. Cymbeline is an extraordinarily passive ruler, dominated by the
Queen throughout, and in fact, until the last scene of the play, he
speaks only a few more lines than the Romans. And, in the last
scene, as he registers wonder at the discovery of his long-lost sons,
he likens himself to a mother, and includes an odd pun on
displacement:

O, what am I?
A mother to the birth of three? Ne'er mother
Rejoiced deliverance more. Blest pray you be,
That, after this strange starting from your orbs,
You may reign in them now! (5.6.370-4).

12. Qtd. in James, p. 153.

13. James, p. 151 (who is echoing what has been a critical commonplace since the time of Johnson).

14. Jonathan Bate comments extensively on the textual variations occurring all through the end of the play; see his notes on 5.3 after the death of Saturninus, pp. 268-77, and my note 11 above. An provocative question asked by the text is whether or not Aaron and Tamora’s child survives. Bate remarks that he assumes “Lucius has kept his word to Aaron and the baby is still alive, but in the BBC production Marcus at this point held up a box containing its dead body” (p. 272 note to line 118). The BBC production is interesting in several respects, particularly in its depiction of young Lucius, who is a sensitive looking, bespectacled youth, mesmerized by the only other youngster in the play, the dead infant of Aaron and Tamora. This version ends, in fact, with the tiny coffin being borne away while young Lucius watches, his face registering grief, fear, and hopelessness.

The "poor remainder" of Rome, as Marcus calls the surviving Andronici, is an unpleasant epithet for Rome’s future, too, particularly as it echoes Titus in act 1, standing near the family tomb as he prepares to bury yet another son: "Behold the poor remains" (1.1.84).


16. Edward Pechter, “*Julius Caesar* and *Sejanus*: Roman Politics, Inner Selves, and the Powers of the Theatre,” in *Shakespeare and His*

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