

SAA 2012, Boston

Radical Romans and Shakespeare's Politics
Seminar 28

- 1) Catherine Winiarski
Radical Romans

"Incorporate in Rome": The Pauline Remnant in *Titus Andronicus*

Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* presents an obtrusive paradox: imperial Rome is nearly *destroyed* by a small band of Gothic captives only to be *redeemed* by a large, invading Gothic army. This paper attempts to reckon with this paradox by examining it through the lens of the messianic remnant in Paul's epistles, as analyzed by Giorgio Agamben in *The Time that Remains*. The ethnic and legal categories of Roman, barbarian, free, bonded—the famous terms of Paul's universal call to the nations—undergo radical transformation in the play as volatile forces of eros and vengeance win the Gothic slaves adoption and incorporation into Rome and turn the Romans barbarous. With Titus as its embodiment, his severed hand representing the state's rejection of its public servant, the Roman body politic suffers progressive dismemberment and even a kind of liquefaction in the extremes of grief; Titus' Roman "pietas" is converted into Christian "pity." Those characters, both Roman and barbarian, who enact excesses of grief and revenge are eventually purged from the body politic. In this way, the opposed categories of barbarian and Roman are each "re-divided," to use Agamben's term. What remains is a prospective vision of a "Holy Roman Empire," with a remnant of the pious Andronici at its head and "just" Goths as its in-grafted members.

- 2) Andrew Moore
Radical Romans

"Then I, and you, and all of us fell down": Dead Body Politics in Shakespeare's Rome

The sight of Lucrece's dead body being paraded through the streets of Rome causes a republican revolution. The sight of Caesar's corpse generates a response that is eerily similar and exactly opposite. Again the Roman people chase their leaders from the city, but this time they stand up for the autocratic side, not the republican. The sight of Lucrece's corpse causes the people to rally behind a revolutionary named Brutus; the sight of Caesar's causes them to banish another Brutus from the city. This paper employs the work of Elaine Scarry to explain the signifying power of dead bodies and the effect they seem to have on Shakespeare's Roman publics. Ultimately I will contend that through these representations of populations transfixed and politically motivated by wounded corpses, Shakespeare suggests the degree to which early modern politics is concerned with the preservation of the body. What is revealed in Shakespeare's Roman works is the emergence of a politics that finds its justification in the

essential vulnerability of the body to violence, and not, for example, in the immutability and permanence of the cosmic order. The metaphor of the body politic was often deployed in the early modern period as an analogical tool to affirm the naturalness of particular forms of government; however as modernity emerges, the relationship between the body and the state is fractured and reorganized. The processes of the body once gave justification to the processes of government; the modern state finds its sole justification in the preservation of the body. The state that was once as natural as weather, and sex, and death, exists now as a constructed and artificial thing designed only to preserve material forms and promote material ends.

- 3) Nichole E. Miller
Radical Romans

Paul's Call; Cymbeline's Calling

Simon Forman, whose ca. 1611 account is the earliest written record of Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* in performance, begins with the exhortation to himself to "remember." His recollection proceeds curiously backward, in terms of the play's chronology, focusing first on the historical argument (Britain's clash with Rome). Recent criticism of the play tends, to a certain extent, to favor this same focus, reading the play in terms of its treatment of emergent nationalism. I would like to suggest, however, that while always bearing both political and historical questions in mind, we also return to an earlier critical consideration, exploring the various ways the play treats both retrospective and perspective acts of viewing, knowing, and reporting. Such a consideration, in turn, lends itself to a focus not just on how the play treats nationalism, but also how it treats (or refuses) to treat religion.

This paper draws on the double sense of "calling" deployed in Max Weber's 1919 essay, "*Politik als Beruf*," in order to read between Shakespeare's late play and the letters of St. Paul. Generally translated as "vocation," the German term *Beruf* implies a supernatural as well as a worldly "calling," a voice that is more than voice. It also carries the decidedly worldly sense of "business" or "profession. Early in the play, Innogen chides Pisanio for not keeping Posthumous in view long enough: "Thou shouldst have made him / As little as a crow, or less, ere left / To after-eye him" (1.3.14-16). Innogen and Forman (and the play in its entirety) make us think about what makes "after-eyeing" impossible: absence; death; doubt; shifts in perception; chronological gaps. In a way, Innogen's agonized desire to "after-eye" is, like Forman's, a call to "remember"--and not just to remember, but to reconstruct, to call back time. The term Paul uses that perhaps comes closest to the vocational sense of Weber's *Beruf* is the Greek *klētos*. As readers of Paul (perhaps especially readers of Giorgio Agamben's book on the letter to the Romans, which cites Weber) will recall, Paul defines himself as *klētos* ("selected" or "chosen," often translated "called" or "having been called," since it derives from the verb *kaleo*) to be an apostle. Ultimately, I will argue, the play's "calling" is simultaneously erotic, political, and poetic, in a way that recollects yet reconfigures the Pauline notion of a *corpus mysticum*.

- 4) Lisa Gim
Radical Romans

Conspiratorial Collaboration and Treacherous Triumvirates: Imagining the Divisive “Monarchical Republic” in *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra*

My paper explores Shakespearean attitudes toward autocratic leadership and political coalitions in two Roman plays, *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra*, as manifested in the uneasy alliances forged between the conspirators and the triumvirates found in each play. By investigating attitudes toward and outcomes of their portrayal, I also hope to be able to comment on these as a reflection of Early Modern attitudes toward classical republicanism and democracy, and by extension how these might relate to concepts concerning tyranny and freedom in the republic and monarchy contemporary with Elizabethan and Stuart political understanding. Shakespeare’s reliance on Sir Thomas North’s translation of *Plutarch’s Lives* and his changes to the portrayal of the “great Romans” as well as to the representation of political coalition and the commonwealth are also important to consider. They throw light on the ways on which Shakespeare depicts “Rome,” “Roman ideals” and the concept of the Empire, and upon the qualities that receive praise and criticism in Roman leadership.

- 5) Emily Griffith Jones
Radical Romans

"Beloved / Of all the trades in Rome": (O)economics, Occupation, and the Gendered Body in *Coriolanus*

This paper examines Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* via Gentian Herret's 1573 translation of Xenophon's *Oeconomicus*, which confronted Renaissance England's growing opportunities for social mobility with a conservative framework in which class, occupation, and bodily condition are all inherently interwoven. Many readings of *Coriolanus* have emphasized the hero's fear of psychosexual passivity; others have taken a sociopolitical approach to his marketplace anxieties. Herret's text reveals that these foci are not mutually exclusive. *Coriolanus* is less afraid of passivity than of the gendered and classed performance of certain active labors that his ideology forbids, and rather than rejecting economics altogether, he clings to Xenophonic economics. *Coriolanus* embodies classical aristocratic values in a Rome that reflects the changing society of Shakespeare's England: a world losing the clarity of Oeconomic boundaries between patrician and plebeian classes, noble and ignoble occupations, honorable and base bodies, and masculine and feminine genders that *Coriolanus* requires in order to function.³

- 6) Jonathan Coller
Radical Romans

All the Points o'th' Compass: The Political Dilemma of the People's Voice in *Coriolanus*

Andrew Hadfield has recently argued that Shakespeare chose *Coriolanus* as his last Roman “celebrity” because of an increased “interest” in Republicanism in the 16th century (466-67). This interest was inspired by the anti-tyrannical works of John Knox, John Ponet, and Christopher Goodman, among others. These early modern political theorists saw political representation as a solution to the social inequalities facing England at the time. Subsequently, Hadfield bases his interpretation on the way *Coriolanus* focuses on “the importance of offices and positions of responsibility held by ordinary citizens/subjects” and the manner in which they are provided political representation through the People’s Tribunes, Brutus and Sicinius (466).

Oliver Arnold concludes the opposite: “In Shakespeare’s [Roman] plays, the tragedy of political representation turns not on the exclusion from power of the unenfranchised but on the powerlessness enfranchisement produces (and mystifies)” (12). The citizens may theoretically gain power through political representation, but not in actuality as demonstrated by the tribunes’ manipulation of the crowd at *Coriolanus*’s trial. Such an interpretation suggests that Shakespeare was attempting to discourage the republican inclinations of his audience.

However, is it not possible that Shakespeare was encouraging his audience to consider the larger questions affecting society (such as the role of the people in determining political leaders) rather than attempting to advocate any particular political system or philosophy? Or, as Rita Banerjee states, the play invites “a debate on the limited participation of the people in the government [...] in the context of the reigning controversy about Common Law and the concept of unlimited royal power that James openly advocated” (43). My paper discusses this debate and views *Coriolanus* as one of Shakespeare’s last attempts to educate his audience on the problems inherent in both a traditional monarchy and a republic. Shakespeare invites his audience to participate in a debate that addresses a social dilemma that (to this day) has no current solution.