

S K E N È

Journal of Theatre and Drama Studies

6:1 2020

Awry Crowns: Queenship and Its Discontents

Edited by Rosy Colombo

SKENÈ Journal of Theatre and Drama Studies

Founded by Guido Avezzi, Silvia Bigliuzzi, and Alessandro Serpieri

<i>Executive Editor</i>	Guido Avezzi.
<i>General Editors</i>	Guido Avezzi, Silvia Bigliuzzi.
<i>Editorial Board</i>	Simona Brunetti, Francesco Lupi, Nicola Pasqualicchio, Susan Payne, Gherardo Ugolini.
<i>Managing Editors</i>	Valentina Adami, Emanuel Stelzer.
<i>Assistant Managing Editor</i>	Roberta Zanoni.
<i>Book Review Editors</i>	Chiara Battisti, Sidia Fiorato.
<i>Staff</i>	Giuseppe Capalbo, Francesco Dall'Olio, Bianca Del Villano, Marco Duranti, Carina Louise Fernandes, Francesco Lupi, Antonietta Provenza, Savina Stevanato.
<i>Advisory Board</i>	Anna Maria Belardinelli, Anton Bierl, Enoch Brater, Jean-Christophe Cavallin, Richard Allen Cave, Rosy Colombo, Claudia Corti, Marco De Marinis, Tobias Döring, Pavel Drábek, Paul Edmondson, Keir Douglas Elam, Ewan Fernie, Patrick Finglass, Enrico Giaccherini, Mark Griffith, Daniela Guardamagna, Stephen Halliwell, Robert Henke, Pierre Judet de la Combe, Eric Nicholson, Guido Paduano, Franco Perrelli, Didier Plassard, Donna Shalev, Susanne Wofford.

Copyright © 2020 SKENÈ

Published in June 2020

All rights reserved.

ISSN 2421-4353

No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any means
without permission from the publisher.

SKENÈ Theatre and Drama Studies

<http://skenejournal.skeneproject.it>

info@skeneproject.it

Dir. Resp. (aut. Trib. di Verona): Guido Avezzi

P.O. Box 149 c/o Mail Boxes Etc. (MBE150) – Viale Col. Galliano, 51, 37138, Verona (I)

Contents

Awry Crowns: Queenship and Its Discontents

Edited by Rosy Colombo

ROSY COLOMBO – <i>Introduction</i>	5
MONICA CENTANNI – <i>The Queen on Stage. Female Figures of Regality in Aeschylus</i>	21
NADIA FUSINI – <i>One, Two, Many Medeas</i>	45
ANTON BIERL – <i>Phaedra: a Tragic Queen in Turmoil Between Violent Love and Its Chaste Suppression. An Interpretation of Euripides' Hippolytus in Initiatory Terms</i>	57
GUIDO AVEZZÙ – <i>The (Frustrated?) Regality of Electra</i>	85
ANTONIO ZIOSI – <i>Wounds and Flames: Dido and Her Sisters</i>	113
MICHAEL NEILL – <i>A "Monstruous Empire": Queenly Power in Anthony and Cleopatra</i>	155
MARISA SESTITO – <i>Unveiling Jocasta. The Brave Queen of Dryden and Lee</i>	179

Miscellany

MILAN KROULÍK – <i>"What is expected has not been accomplished". A Historical Materialist Approach to Attic Tragedy</i>	197
MICHAEL CARROLL – <i>Prophetic Deception: The Narrative of the Chariot Race in Sophocles' Electra</i>	219

Special Section

GHERARDO UGOLINI – <i>"Man is a terrifying miracle": Sophocles' Antigone Staged by Massimiliano Civica. An Interview with the Director</i>	243
PAUL A. CANTOR – <i>Patrick Gray, Shakespeare and the Fall of the Roman Republic: Selfhood, Stoicism and Civil War, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019, pp. 308</i>	255
ELENA PELLONE – <i>Jaq Bessell, Shakespeare in Action, London and New York: Bloomsbury (The Arden Shakespeare), 2019, pp. 213</i>	265
ROBERT SAWYER – <i>"Fine Young Cannibals": Review of Eating Shakespeare: Cultural Anthropology as Global Methodology, ed. by Anne Sophie Refskou, Marcel Alvaro de Amorim, and Vinicius Mariano de Carvalho, London and New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019, pp. 301</i>	279
BARRY ALLEN SPENCE – <i>Beckett, Decadence, and the Art of Revisioning. Review of Stanley E. Gontarski, Revisioning Beckett: Samuel Beckett's Decadent Turn, London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018, pp. 320</i>	287

PAUL A. CANTOR*

**Patrick Gray, *Shakespeare and the Fall of the Roman Republic: Selfhood, Stoicism and Civil War*,
Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019,
pp. 308**

Abstract

Patrick Gray's *Shakespeare and the Fall of the Roman Republic* provides an orthodox Christian interpretation of Shakespeare's Roman plays, chiefly *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra*, with some discussion of *Coriolanus*. Gray argues that Shakespeare believed the Republic fell because of the insatiable will to power of its leaders, which led to destructive civil wars. As aggressive males, the Romans needed to embrace their feminine sides and learn compassion in order to live together peacefully. Gray approaches the Roman plays against a background of Augustinian theology and medieval mystery plays. In contrast to many critics, he rejects the possibility that Shakespeare admired his ancient Romans and presented them as tragic heroes. Gray objects to political interpretations of the Roman plays and favours a purely ethical approach. General readers will probably not profit from Gray's book, which sometimes gets bogged down in scholarly disputes. But Shakespeare scholars will learn from his careful analysis of particular scenes in the plays.

KEYWORDS: Patrick Gray; Shakespeare; Roman plays; Roman Republic

Near the end of Patrick Gray's *Shakespeare and the Fall of the Roman Republic*, he writes: "in the final turn to the idea of God as other than I have called 'the last interpellation', as well as my emphasis throughout on one-to-one relationships between individuals, it may seem amiss that I do not invoke the ideas of Emmanuel Lévinas" (271). If it will make Gray feel better, let me reassure him that it never once occurred to me to find anything amiss in his failure to bring up Lévinas in his book. Indeed, this moment felt to me like coming to the end of *Moby-Dick* and finding Ishmael wondering: "And did I forget to mention the minke whale?". Gray's reference to and subsequent brief discussion of Lévinas seem superfluous in a book in which he has already referred to a grand gallery of fashionable theorists: Althusser, Arendt, Bakhtin, Derrida, Foucault, Habermas, Lacan – the list goes on and on. As his book is coming to an end, Gray seems determined to drop one last name, in the hope that maybe then he will have covered all the bases.

Since Gray brings up Lévinas only to dismiss his usefulness to the project of this book, it really does seem as if Gray simply wants to show that he has read yet another modish Frenchman. But there is a method to Gray's madness for theorists. He needs to wrap his book in the mantle of all these contemporary theorists

* University of Virginia – pac2j@virginia.edu

because his underlying argument is so old-fashioned. *Shakespeare and the Fall of the Roman Republic* is an orthodox Christian interpretation of Shakespeare's Roman plays, especially *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra*, with extended comments on *Coriolanus*. For Gray, the fundamental and irredeemable fault of Shakespeare's Romans is that they are pagans and not Christians. As aggressive males, they are doomed to irreconcilable conflicts with each other, which eventually must tear Rome apart in civil wars. The Romans need to embrace their feminine sides and learn to pity each other and thereby to live together in peace and harmony. Gray's Christianity is dogmatic; for him, any argument can be settled by a quotation from St Augustine. There is a kind of time-warp feel to reading this book. I felt as if I were going back half a century to a work like J.L. Simmons's *Shakespeare's Pagan World* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1973), which takes a similarly Augustinian approach to the Roman plays. Gray cites Simmons; he does not cite Roy Battenhouse, an even more prominent example of a critic who read the Roman plays in orthodox Christian terms. But overall *Shakespeare and the Fall of the Roman Republic* does not lack for citations, and the derivative character of Gray's work is evident. Only his use of trendy terms like "interpellation" drags his book into the twenty-first century.

It is difficult to argue with a dogmatic Christian; that is why we call them "dogmatic". Gray believes in the truth of Christianity and hence in the falseness of paganism. To the extent that Shakespeare gives an accurate representation of the ancient Roman world, Gray must view it as benighted, incapable of benefiting from Christian revelation. He does not entertain for a moment the possibility that Shakespeare might have admired something in the ancient Romans. For Gray, Brutus is a Stoic poseur, Antony is a self-deluded sensualist with aspirations to divinity, and Julius Caesar is a pompous tyrant. Gray has no feel for complexity and ambiguity – which is a serious failing in anyone trying to interpret Shakespeare's plays. Gray sees everything in black-or-white terms, with pagan as black and Christian as white. If Shakespeare embodies any failings in his characters, then they are damned and doomed; they cannot possibly possess redeeming virtues that might compensate for their vices. The history of the reception of the Roman plays, among theatrical audiences, readers, and critics, contradicts this view. People generally have had mixed reactions to Shakespeare's characters, finding both positive and negative elements in them. And what looks like a vice to one person, may appear to be a virtue to another. Many theatre-goers do not react to the plays in moral terms at all. Gray is unusually insistent that only moral terms should govern our analysis of the Roman plays. If Christian moral clarity were the chief criterion for evaluating drama, *Everyman* would be the greatest play ever written.

Gray does seem to have a soft spot in his heart for medieval drama. We can see his Christian dogmatism in his attempt to view Shakespeare's Roman plays through the lens of medieval mystery plays. In the process, he reduces the profound complexity and ambiguity of Shakespeare's works to the simplistic moralising of medieval drama. Following his colleague in dogmatism, John Cox, Gray thinks that Shakespeare's portrayal of Julius Caesar can be traced back to the portrayal of Herod in the Coventry Cycle and Caesar in the Chester Cycle:

Like the contrast between Christ and Caesar in the Gospels, or between Christ and a stage tyrant in a Corpus Christi pageant, Shakespeare's characterisation of Julius Caesar is designed to foreground the contrast between divine power and human vulnerability. The gulf between God and man is reconciled and overcome in the person of Christ. (170)

One has to be really steeped in Christian dogmatism to ignore the difference between the one-dimensional, almost cartoonish characters of medieval mystery plays and Shakespeare's multidimensional, fully realized characters in the Roman plays.

For Gray, Shakespeare had nothing but contempt for the ancient Roman world. He represented it in his Roman plays as a purely negative example, as a warning to show how the ancient Romans could only destroy themselves and their community. But I would counter that Shakespeare saw genuine greatness in ancient Rome. He understood that the ancient Romans had many faults, and he does not hesitate to portray those faults. But Shakespeare understood that the ancient Romans also had their virtues, and in many cases, they developed those virtues to heights of excellence that few other peoples have equalled. Moreover, as Friedrich Nietzsche showed, what Christians regard as vices in the ancient Romans, the Romans themselves regarded as virtues. Indeed, many other peoples in history have joined the ancient Romans in celebrating manliness, the martial spirit, and the warrior's discipline and heroism. Even in Christian societies, many people admire the warrior's virtues; the more threatened a society is by enemies, the more likely it is to look up to the kind of martial virtue that is necessary to defend it.

Judging by what Shakespeare chose to write about in his plays, he was fascinated by the martial virtues. In both his tragedies and his histories, his heroes are often soldiers and leaders of armies, and this is true even in the plays he set in the Christian world. Shakespeare may offer Henry V as a model of Christian piety, but he is also the victor on the battlefield of Agincourt and an exemplar of the martial spirit at its fiercest (think of his order to kill his French prisoners). Shakespeare consciously modelled Henry V on Roman examples, as the pedantic soldier Fluellen insists when he offers the "wars of Pompey the Great" as an object of emulation to his fellow warriors. For Shakespeare, ancient Rome represented the pinnacle of martial virtue and he wanted to explore what made that possible. In Shakespeare's portrayal, Rome is the unusual community in which "it is held / That valour is the chiefest virtue", as the consul Cominius says in *Coriolanus*. There is a connection between Rome's paganism – with its this-worldly orientation – and its development of martial heroism to a kind of peak. A community must focus on the martial virtues if they are to flourish in it.

This focus of course creates problems for any such community, and therefore Shakespeare portrays the Romans as profoundly tragic. No community can develop all the potential human virtues equally. To cultivate the aggressive virtues, a community may have to suppress the compassionate virtues, or at least to let them languish. A strictly Christian community would not face this problem because it would not acknowledge that there are aggressive virtues, but instead would damn them as vices. But any community that recognises that it may

at times be necessary to cultivate aggressive virtues may find it difficult to get its citizens to live together peacefully. This may well be the fundamental tragic insight in Shakespeare's works: the incompatibility between opposing forms of human excellence. Not all forms of human excellence are equally available in all communities, and sometimes competing forms of excellence come into conflict. For example, the virtues necessary in war time may clash with the virtues necessary in peace time. The situation of the soldier attempting to make the difficult transition from wartime to peacetime can be tragic, and it frequently recurs in Shakespeare's plays, with varying outcomes, from Richard III to Henry V to Othello to Macbeth to Coriolanus. Human life would be much easier if there were never any war, or, failing that, if men could make the transition smoothly and unproblematically from wartime to peacetime. But that is not the way the world we live in works. Shakespeare's recognition of that fundamental dilemma is at the core of his tragic vision of human life.

Many writers, Gray included, seem to forget that characters like Brutus, Antony, Julius Caesar, and Coriolanus are heroes, albeit tragic heroes. They are not morally perfect, especially not in Christian terms. And yet, for all their moral failings, Shakespeare's Romans embody forms of human excellence that have been much admired throughout history, among them courage, valour, ambition, public spiritedness, indomitable will, iron discipline – all of which can be invaluable to the very survival of a community confronted by enemies. Shakespeare did not write tragedies because he thought that happy outcomes are simply the norm in human life. The man who authored *King Lear* did not go to bed every night thinking "All's well with the world". Shakespeare viewed certain forms of heroism – particularly martial heroism – as deeply problematic and often leading to situations from which no simple happy outcome is possible. But that does not make this kind of heroism any less heroic – it just makes it tragic.

This was Hegel's central insight in formulating his theory of tragedy. Tragedy is not the simple or melodramatic conflict between good and evil; it is rather the conflict between two forms of good, two legitimate principles that tragically clash, such as Antigone's attachment to the family and Creon's to the city in Sophocles' famous play. The conflict between what might be called aggressive virtues and compassionate virtues – roughly between classical and Christian virtues – is often at the centre of Shakespearean tragedy.

Coriolanus is a good example of the complexity of a Shakespearean tragic hero. In a city in which "It is held / That valour is the chiefest virtue", he is virtuous, indeed the epitome of what Rome holds to be virtuous. He develops valour to a peak of perfection and ends up defeating a whole city almost single-handedly, and therefore he seems like a god to the ordinary human beings around him. But the excellence of his valour, which makes him tower over ordinary human beings on the battlefield, turns out to unfit him for domestic political life in Rome. His inability to make the compromises dictated by politics leads to his personal downfall and almost to the destruction of Rome itself. This tragic spectacle puzzles Shakespeare; in fact, it deeply disturbs him. Why should a man as remarkable as Coriolanus, who has done so much for his city, suffer so much for his distinctive kind of excellence? The events of Coriolanus do not unfold according to a simple mor-

al calculus. Shakespeare portrays Coriolanus' tragedy in all its depths, and in an authentic tragedy, a man's defeat and death do not refute what he stood for in his life. Coriolanus develops Romanness almost to perfection, and yet precisely that perfection makes it impossible for him to fit into the city that nurtured him and pointed him in the direction of a warlike life in the first place. As his friend Menenius says, "His nature is too noble for the world".

Gray's response would of course be the standard Christian one: Coriolanus' aggressiveness is just a vice and needs to be drummed out of him. The lion must become a lamb; the great Roman must be Christianised. Coriolanus must cultivate pity and compassion; he must learn how to fit peacefully into the Roman community. In short, Coriolanus must become nice. But a Christianised Coriolanus would no longer be Coriolanus; he would cease to be the gigantic specimen of humanity who can face down the plebeians by simply saying, "On fair ground / I could beat forty of them" (and he is probably correct in his numerical estimate). Shakespearean tragedy is an exploration of a range of extreme human possibilities. If you want to see the full development of what a great warrior can be – and it is a splendid sight as Shakespeare presents it – you had better be prepared for some trouble. But if you want people to herd comfortably together in a community, then you must forego the possibility of seeing the perfection of martial virtue.

That is why Shakespeare was attracted to ancient Rome as a subject. He realised that it was a community very different from what he could observe directly in his own world, and he wanted to explore imaginatively the different forms of human excellence ancient Rome made possible. He recognised how problematic and in fact dangerous those possibilities were, but he still wanted to make them visible on the stage, to broaden our sense of what human beings can become under extreme circumstances. Gray has a simple solution to the problem of heroic types like Coriolanus – just Christianise them. A community in which all human beings are genuinely Christian would be very peaceful (although it might have to worry that aggressive non-Christians might be lurking just beyond its borders).

The peculiar closing lines of Gray's book are revealing:

The possibility of this kind of intersubjective interpellation stands as a salutary check, especially, upon that drive for absolute autocracy or *imperium* that St Augustine describes as *libido dominandi*. Neither nor [sic] the self nor the other can ever entirely overwhelm and obliterate each other's subjectivity. The 'imperial self' cannot expand forever; cannot become self-sufficient and impassible. Instead, the best we can do is to make peace with the human condition as it is, 'grotesque', dependent, and vulnerable. (276)

The way this passage alternates between abstruse Christian theological vocabulary ("impassible") and impenetrable postmodern jargon ("intersubjective interpellation") is typical of Gray's book, as is, of course, his use of St Augustine as the closer in the argument. Gray's ultimate message is "the best we can do is to make peace with the human condition". But is that really the *best* we can do, or is it only a compromise, the acceptance of a second best? What Gray proposes would mean renouncing the possibility of heroism, of fighting against the debilitating limits of the human condition, of trying to transcend its ordinariness even at the

expense of one's life. Gray has in mind a humble Christian response, made all the subtler and more seductive by a Christian redefinition of heroism, one in which heroism would become passive – heroism as martyrdom, as accepting defeat, or rather transforming material defeat into some kind of spiritual victory.

By contrast, Shakespearean tragedy is a protest against the limitations of the human condition; it celebrates the heroic spirit in all its efforts to transcend human limits. Shakespeare's tragic heroes are ultimately defeated, and they typically must be defeated for the ordinary community around them to survive. But that does not change the fact that the community is ordinary or that the tragic hero is extraordinary. Shakespeare's tragic heroes are not models of proper conduct for ordinary people to emulate in their daily lives. They are markers of human greatness, emblems of what the human spirit can accomplish when it refuses to abide by the conventional limits most people tamely accept. Shakespeare's tragic heroes live dangerously.

Shakespeare turned to ancient Rome because it revealed to him with a new clarity the tension between the ordinary community and the extraordinary hero. He genuinely valued ancient Rome, especially the Roman Republic, for all the great heroes it produced. Perhaps from his reading of Plutarch's *Lives*, he came to understand that the Roman Republic was a remarkable mechanism for generating heroes. Its constitution (what the Greeks would call its *politeia*) succeeded in encouraging and developing aggressiveness, and then channelling it to serve the city, by pitting one ambitious man's competitive spirit against another's. To be sure, in the end the Republican regime did in effect subvert itself when one-man rule re-emerged out of the savage contests of the patricians. Yet even – or precisely – in its dying days, the Republic produced one remarkable example of humanity after another, and Shakespeare portrays several of them in *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra*: Brutus, Cassius, Julius Caesar, Antony, and even to some extent Octavius. As was understood already in antiquity and recognised again in the Renaissance, Republican Rome was a school of heroic greatness – not of moral goodness in a Christian sense but of what Aristotle named as the crown of all the virtues in his *Nicomachean Ethics* – *megalopsychia* – magnanimity or greatness of soul. Aristotle provides a better guide to Shakespeare's Roman plays than St Augustine does.

To say the least, Gray does not share Shakespeare's respect for the Roman Republic. His book is about the fall of the Roman Republic and his basic response seems to be something like: "Good riddance; those pagans deserved it". Unlike Shakespeare, Gray seems to have no sense that anything was lost with the fall of the Republic. One reason is that he does not seem to understand what was distinctive about Rome as an aristocratic republic. He repeatedly confuses the Roman Republic with a liberal democracy, and his book keeps offering false parallels between ancient Rome and today's democratic world. Notice that he asks, "Would Shakespeare agree with Cicero that representative democracy, in the absence of a monarch, is the best form of government?" (9). Cicero never speaks of "representative democracy"; representative government was unknown in the ancient world; only direct democracy was practiced in cities like Athens. Cicero champions the classical mixed regime, which combines elements of monarchy, aristocracy, and

democracy (as in Sparta or the Roman Republic). Gray repeatedly rejects political interpretations of Shakespeare's Roman plays and wants to substitute an ethical approach (which for him is identical to a Christian approach). In the process, he demonstrates only his ignorance of ancient politics and political theory.

Although the Republic did not solve the perennial problem of ambition and aggressiveness in politics, it pioneered what has come to be one of the most widely used and successful methods of controlling ambitious people in politics – the system of divided government with checks and balances that ultimately led via thinkers like John Locke to the design of the United States Constitution. The Roman Republic did not invent and it certainly did not perfect the mixed regime, and yet it did make it work. By pitting one political figure against another to check the harmful effects of ambition, and channelling their energy into serving the public good, the Roman Republic flourished. That is the effect that the Republic's complex system of consuls, senators, and tribunes had – to balance and harmonise all the competing interests in the city. The result was that the Roman Republic became one of the longest-lasting and most successful regimes in human history.

Yet Gray finds nothing to speak well of in the Roman Republic:

Shakespeare recognises that political structures can shape historical change. Like St Augustine, however, as well as Cicero, he sees the collapse of Rome's traditional political institutions as more immediately the result of a flawed moral paradigm. The impassibility that the Roman characters tend to idealise is incompatible in the long run with a functioning civil society, because it leaves no room for compromise or concession. (222)

According to Gray, the Roman Republic was incompatible with a functioning civil society. This claim would sound odd to historians and political theorists. Indeed, for them, the Roman Republic has long served as a model of a functioning regime. Gray must have very high standards of "the long run". Depending on when exactly one dates its origin and its fall, the Roman Republic survived and generally prospered for roughly four and a half centuries. By comparison, the United States Constitution has survived just under two and a half centuries, and many today are worrying whether it can endure unchanged much longer. As for other nations in the modern world, some of them, like France, seem to have changed regime almost every generation in the past two centuries. By any normal standards of the "long run", the Roman Republic comes out very well. Despite the many internal and external threats it faced, it managed to survive for centuries and in the process it conquered the Mediterranean world. To read Gray, one would think that the Republic, incapable of functioning as a community, fell apart overnight. And yet the Republic's 'fall' in fact took several centuries, and Gray gives it no credit for its many triumphs along the way. Rome was the envy of the ancient world. To this day many people in the modern world are in awe of its military, political, architectural, artistic, and literary achievements.

Impressed by the Republic's durability, political thinkers like Polybius and Machiavelli posed for themselves the question: why did the Roman Republic last so long, when so many other regimes in the ancient world, including Athenian

democracy, had such short lives? Machiavelli's answer in his *Discourses on Livy* provided the foundation for the theory of checks and balances that informed the thinking of the Founding Fathers in the United States. Contrary to what Gray claims, the Roman Republic allowed for compromise and concession. Indeed, the Roman constitution itself was famously the product of compromise and concession. As Shakespeare shows in *Coriolanus*, the Republican constitution finally took shape only when the Roman patricians, faced with a rebellion of the plebeians, conceded to them the right to tribunes to speak up for their interests in the regime. More generally, the way Rome's constitution facilitated communication and negotiation between the patrician and plebeian parties allowed the Republic to function for centuries – not smoothly, but, as Machiavelli understood, the turbulence between the perpetually warring parties in Rome energised the regime and kept it from being overcome by its many enemies.

Shakespeare went out of his way to portray this process in *Coriolanus* in, for example, the productive interaction between the patrician Menenius and the plebeian tribunes. In fact, *Coriolanus* stands out in the play because he is the only Roman who is unwilling to compromise; his fellow patricians and his mother keep urging him to make concessions to the plebeians. Shakespeare shows that the genius of the Republic was precisely the general willingness of the patricians to make shrewd and prudent concessions to the plebeians. Shakespeare does not portray ancient Rome as some kind of political utopia, but he does show that the Republic managed to function, not despite the disputes between the patricians and the plebeians, but precisely because of them. In this, Shakespeare was true to the actual history of Rome and to the understanding of Rome in political philosophy, a long tradition that stretches at least from Polybius to Montesquieu.

In sum, Gray is left with the odd claim that the Roman Republic was so dysfunctional that it lasted a mere 450 years. By contrast, I would argue that Shakespeare respected Rome's achievement and regarded his exploration of the ancient city as a way of expanding his horizons. As with many figures of the Renaissance, the rediscovery of classical antiquity struck Shakespeare with the force of a revelation. Like a sculptor rediscovering the glory of the human form from viewing a long-buried Roman statue, Shakespeare found his sense of the range of human possibility opened up by his study of Roman history. Here were new specimens of humanity, and glorious ones at that. The ancients did not want simply to stamp out the aggressive and ambitious side of human nature; they looked for ways to make it flourish, to put it in the service of the common good, providing fuel for the highest political achievements.

Shakespeare understood full well that this understanding of human greatness was incompatible with the Christian understanding, and indeed it was the complete antithesis. Shakespeare turned to ancient Rome precisely because it offered an alternative to the Christian world. This does not mean that he embraced the pagan world, but it does mean that he sought to take it seriously, to consider whether it had any merits of its own and to assess its limitations and defects. Shakespeare's genius as a dramatist was a kind of philosophical impartiality, his refusal to take a partisan view of things and his openness to appreciating the merits of either side in any conflict. That is why Shakespeare's tragedies fit the Hege-

lian mold. The Renaissance, as an attempt to revive the ideals of classical antiquity within a largely Christian civilisation, offered Shakespeare a fertile field for tragic drama. Shakespeare's Roman plays, with his effort to recreate classical civilisation on the stage, are the pinnacle of everything the Renaissance stood for. He did not revive ancient Rome simply to vilify it, but to see what he could learn from it. As shown by Gray's attraction to medieval drama, he would like to think of Shakespeare as a man of the Middle Ages, not of the Renaissance. It sometimes seems as if Gray wishes that the Renaissance had never happened and we had all remained loyal to St Augustine and his medieval Christianity.

Understanding both the greatness and the defects of classical antiquity, Shakespeare used his Roman plays to portray the tragedies of people who pursued a conception of the human good antithetical to that of Christianity. Shakespeare's Romans are not Christian saints, but that does not mean, unless one is a dogmatic Christian, that they are not admirable human beings in their own right, pursuing certain distinct forms of human excellence, qualities such as courage and self-reliance that are still widely admired today (even among many Christians) in basic human activities from war to athletic competition. Shakespeare knew exactly what he was doing when he had Mark Antony speak eloquently in his final tribute to Brutus that Nature might say of him: "This was a man!". When Antony calls Brutus "the noblest Roman of them all", he speaks for Shakespeare in suggesting that there was a distinct form of Roman nobility. It is not the only form of human nobility, and it had many problematic aspects and often led to death and destruction. But still, if one is looking to understand the full range of human possibilities, the Roman option must be taken into account. That is the task Shakespeare set himself in his Roman plays. If medieval drama told the entire truth about ancient Rome, we would not need *Julius Caesar*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, and *Coriolanus*.

I reject the one-sidedness of Gray's book, rooted as it is in his Christian dogmatism. Shakespeare's plays are not Christian sermons, even if the sermonizing in Gray's book is reformulated in the liberal democratic terms of postmodern theorists. Nevertheless, I would recommend reading *Shakespeare and the Fall of the Roman Republic*, at least to Shakespeare scholars. Gray does have many interesting observations to make about the individual Roman plays and about the ways they fit together and comment on each other. For example, he does an excellent job of analysing the contrast between the funeral orations of Brutus and Antony in *Julius Caesar*. He uncovers some possible sources in classical literature for the styles of rhetoric Shakespeare's Brutus and Antony employ, pointing to works by authors such as Cicero, Cleanthes, Zeno, and Chrysippus. As Gray observes, "Antony wins the people's hearts because Brutus, hindered by a peculiarly Stoic squeamishness, resolutely fails to pre-empt his rival's more persuasive appeal to pathos. His insistence on his own dry logic baffles his audience . . ." (61).

Gray goes on to develop an equally insightful analysis of the quarrel between Brutus and Cassius in Act 4 of *Julius Caesar*. Here he suggests as possible sources for this scene both Seneca's *De constantia* and Montaigne's "Of Books." Gray concentrates on the famous crux in this scene, the so-called "double revelation of Portia's death". After reviewing this scholarly controversy, Gray correctly (in my opinion) takes the side of those critics who view Brutus as putting on an act at

this moment, pretending to his fellow warriors that, like a good Stoic, he is unaffected by the news of his wife's death (which he actually has already received earlier). In passages such as these Gray recovers a sense of the complexity in Shakespeare's Roman plays that seems to elude him in his analysis of them as a whole.

Although I disagree with the use Gray makes of medieval drama in his interpretation of Shakespeare's Roman plays, scholars will find his discussion of specific mystery plays interesting. It is useful to see how figures like Julius Caesar and Augustus were portrayed on the medieval stage. Gray offers some intriguing parallels to moments in Shakespeare's Roman plays. In the Chester cycle, Octavian says: "All this world, withowten were – / kinge, prynce, batchlere – / I may destroy in great dangere". Gray claims that these lines recall Shakespeare's Julius Caesar when he says, "Danger knows full well / That Caesar is more dangerous than he". I hear a faint echo here, but, unlike Gray, I am struck more by the differences than by the similarities. It is typical of Gray that he works to assimilate Renaissance literature to medieval. I by contrast see Shakespeare as a Renaissance author making a marked advance beyond anything done in the Middle Ages. Indeed, Shakespeare's appreciation of the heroism of his Roman characters reflects precisely the essence of the Renaissance as a rediscovery of classical antiquity.

In any event, one has to respect the seriousness with which Gray approaches Shakespeare. He recognises that the plays have genuine intellectual content and that they are to be read for what Shakespeare has to say on his own, and not, as in much contemporary criticism, for some putative way in which he somehow speaks for material interests of one kind or another. Finally, in evaluating *Shakespeare and the Fall of the Roman Republic*, one must remember that this is Gray's first book and he shows signs of being able to do better in the future. It is in fact too obvious that this book grows out of Gray's doctoral dissertation. It has too much of the kind of signposting one finds in graduate student prose. On page 69 alone, we see "As I explained in the previous section of this chapter", "In this section of the chapter, I outline a second such debate", and "In the next chapter . . . I address a third and final debate". The book cites too many critics, almost as if for Gray that were an end in itself. He engages in petty disputes with other critics; this might have been of interest to his dissertation committee but would not be to the general reader. And the book is repetitious. For example, on page 226, we read of Aristotle's "so-called *Magna moralia*, a treatise once thought to have been written by Aristotle, but whose authorship is now disputed." Then on the very next page, we read of "the *Magna moralia*, once thought to have been written by Aristotle, but now considered of dubious authenticity". Was this book copy edited? A lot could have been done to make Gray's prose flow more smoothly and to make his book a better reading experience. That is why I hesitate to recommend it to general readers. But I do think that Shakespeare scholars, who are more used to this kind of academic prose, could learn a lot from studying it. And I look forward to seeing Gray do better in his next book, even if it has nothing to say about Emmanuel Lévinas.