

interpretation

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interpretation

Volume 14 number 1

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Review Essays

Shakespeare and his Roman Plays

Studies by Cantor, Platt, and Blits

WILL MORRISEY

Shakespeare's Rome: Republic and Empire. By Paul A. Cantor. (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1976. 228 pp.: cloth \$26.95.)

Rome and Romans According to Shakespeare. By Michael Platt. Revised edition. (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1983. 331 pp.: cloth \$25.00, paper \$13.00.)

The End of the Ancient Republic: Essays on Julius Caesar. By Jan H. Blits. (Durham, N.C.: Carolina Academic Press, 1982. 95 pp.: cloth \$12.95.)

Over twenty years ago, Allan Bloom and Harry V. Jaffa wrote *Shakespeare's Politics*, essays "intended as first steps in the enterprise of making Shakespeare again the theme of philosophic reflection and a recognized source for the serious study of moral and political problems."¹ The authors regarded the merely 'literary' or estheticist study of Shakespeare's writings as an example not of refinement but of philistinism. Estheticism, that monument to exquisite perception, actually blocks readers from seeing poetry clearly. Shakespeare intends not only to write beautifully but to depict something: "a whole series of fundamental human problems." Shakespeare depicts these problems by depicting different kinds of men and ways of life.

One sees different kinds of men and ways of life by observing political regimes 'in action.' Drama serves as an especially vivid and accurate way to depict political action. Bloom and Jaffa consider four of Shakespeare's dramas—*The Merchant of Venice*, *Othello*, *Julius Caesar*, and *King Lear*—as depictions of the kinds of men and ways of life political action reveals and cultivates. The first of these two pairs concerns men and their ways of life in Venice, a modern, commercial republic; the second pair concerns men and their ways of life in ancient Rome and ancient Britain, the former as it changed from a republic to an empire, the latter as a monarchy. Bloom and Jaffa move, then, from Shakespearean consideration of the rule of many to his consideration of the rule of one. From the many to the one: the authors move as some philosophers move, not as the Creator-God moves.

1. Allan Bloom and Harry V. Jaffa: *Shakespeare's Politics* (New York: Basic Books, 1964).

That last sentence's comical afflatus calls attention to a serious feature of *Shakespeare's Politics*, and of Shakespeare's politics. Religious matters may not move over the surface of these writings, but they never sink too far beneath it. The modern commercial republic of Venice would "overcome the religious question," the question of how men of opposing faiths could live in harmony, by "attach[ing] men to the here and now rather than to the hereafter." But the toleration commerce requires can survive only as long as men care more for commerce than for the content of their religious faith. Bloom regards Shakespeare as pessimistic about the success of modernity's strategy of distraction:

Othello is about a man who tried to assimilate and failed. In *The Merchant of Venice*, we see the soul of a man who refused to assimilate. He is consequently distrusted and hated. He reciprocates, and his soul is poisoned.

In *The Merchant of Venice*, a comedy that stops just short of tragedy, a Christian is 'saved' from both a Jew and a fellow-Christian by a woman inspired by classical philosophy. Commerce does not suffice for this purpose. Shakespeare makes it plain that classical philosophy can defeat Christianity with more justice than it can defeat Judaism; he also makes it plain that it can only defeat them in a comedy, a drama whose characters have access to utopia. In *Othello*, a tragedy that stops just short of comedy (the jealous husband is a stock figure of fun, justly victimized by a merry wife), Shakespeare has his villain defeated, but only at the cost of death to the villain's good wife. Bloom regards Christian love as the cause of this disaster. Christian love, according to Bloom's Shakespeare, combines the political man's desire for honor—a desire that makes one dependent upon the opinions of others—with an apolitical quest for universality. A 'loving God' is a contradiction in terms, for "a perfect being would not love"; it would desire nothing, depend upon nothing. "Jealousy, the emotion accompanying the suspicion of infidelity, is not an important theme outside the Bible." The Christian "attempt to do away with the superficiality of the old law leads to a mysticism which is even more distant from the truth," to a cult of fidelity that finds words and even deeds insubstantial but which goads itself into believing the frailest of signs—in *Othello's* case, the presence of a handkerchief. In this circumstance, reason can be corrupted. It becomes negativity, and nothing more; the clear-sighted Iago successfully corrodes faith, but "has no idea of what he wants." His clear sight "cannot foresee that Emilia," his wife, "would be willing to die for the truth." All his thinking ends in the silence of nihilism.

Problems caused by religions not adapted to existing civil society, or perhaps to civil society as such, may induce one to examine the ancient polities whose religions were civic. Bloom turns to Shakespeare's depiction of ancient Rome in *Julius Caesar*. He begins with a memorable and perplexing sentence: "*Julius Caesar* is the story of a man who became a god." There is no evidence, to my knowledge, that Julius Caesar ever became a god. He was, of course, worshipped as if he were one. His godliness was entirely a matter of human opinion.

He was, one might say, a political god. "His appearance ended forever the age of human heroes"—that is, human heroes admired as human beings. But in doing this, Caesar "brought to fulfillment the end implied in all heroic ambition," convincing others that he was "the best of all *men*" (emphasis added), and thereby causing his "spirit" to rule Rome by "convey[ing] the sole title to legitimacy." This apparent immortality and the status of being the source of legitimacy—all that came to be implied by the name, "Caesar"—causes Bloom to call Julius Caesar "self-sufficient." This too is perplexing. For Bloom has shown that Othello depends upon reputation, opinion. Did not Caesar, who is an even more political animal than Othello, depend upon others even more? As if to admit this, in his next sentence Bloom calls Caesar's the "greatest of *political* accomplishments" (emphasis added), and then calls the Romans "the greatest political people who ever lived." When one considers Venice, Christianity obscures the political; in Rome we can see the political clearly.

In *Julius Caesar* we see the political at the moment an unusually pure example of it is about to go out of existence. The Roman Republic was "the seed-bed of great Romans." Seeds by nature grow into plants, and plants by nature tend to crowd one another out. "Out of the constant competition for the rewards of citizenship," political life, "finally emerged a victor who could subdue all of his opponents." Just as human heroism naturally aims at the end of heroism, a sort of godhood that makes future heroism impossible, so political life aims at the end of politics, the replacement of the Republic by the Empire. By the time of *Antony and Cleopatra*, "nothing of the old world can work in the new." The peaceful rule of one man ends the external warfare and domestic faction ("undesirable in themselves") that made republican, political, virtue flourish. *Romans* are no longer necessary, or even possible; Antony is "the last hero," a remnant. Further, "within that peace can be sown the seeds of a new faith which exalts peace," leading the world toward the circumstance Bloom's readers have already considered in Shakespeare's Venice.

"The important question is, then, what were Caesar's talents and what was the policy that brought about such results?" To understand Caesar's success, one must first consider the circumstances Caesar's talents and policy exploited. Bloom considers Republic Rome, as seen in Shakespeare's one play about Republican Rome. In *Coriolanus*, Rome stands revealed not as one city, but as two, a city of the rich and a city of the poor. The Senate, representing the rich city, is "the soul of Rome"; if all Romans were equal, aristocratic virtue would lose its "field of action." The poor city is Rome's body. Julius Caesar exposes Rome for what it is: an entity wherein the body actually rules the soul even as its soul believes it rules the body. Caesar does this by "betray[ing] his own class," winning the poor to his side by "appealing to what is basest in them." Although Bloom writes that "the people, when poor and held in check by the aristocrats, are perfectly decent and deserving of pity" but "when in control of the state, they are the enemies of republican institutions," it must be said that the people's decency was

probably less than perfect, else its corruption would be impossible. One might blame the aristocrats for misrule, were it possible for them to truly rule. Coriolanus demonstrates the impossibility of truly aristocratic rule. He “wants his virtue to be independent,” but, like Othello, his political nature requires honor, which comes from men. The more godlike his nature, the fewer men there are who can honor him in a satisfying manner. But as soon as he steps outside the city, rejects politics, he is honored, worshipped, by no one. Further, the existence of his mother proves his humanity, deny it though he will. Bloom writes that “a man cannot become a god, in Rome at least, on the patrician principles” because “the people’s love is necessary; a god unworshipped is no god.” The last phrase is of course either a bad blunder or a good, if naughty, joke, a joke pointing to the human, political character of *Roman* religion at the very least.

Caesar understood that one cannot go broke underestimating the taste of the Roman people. To modern readers, this is an unremarkable insight. “What is remarkable is that this man, who cares so little for the conventional virtues, does not degenerate into mere self-indulgence, that he possesses the charms of nobility.” However, to possess the charms of nobility is not necessarily to possess nobility. Caesar, “capable of the highest ambition and the lowest deeds,” is “saved” — Bloom’s very word, and one with religious resonance — by his own assassins. They “saved him from the errors of humanity and weakness,” preventing him from making the error of allowing himself to be called “king.” Instead, men henceforth shall call kings “Caesar.” “The position he had created was too great to be fulfilled by a man, even Caesar; but Caesar’s spirit, once released from his body, ranged over the whole world.” Bloom titles this chapter “The Morality of the Pagan Hero.” Caesar is the hero to end all heroes; pagan heroism immolates the very morality upon which it depends for its meaning.

“As a man, [Caesar] was a failure”; he did not receive the free, honest admiration of the best human beings of his time. “To be Caesar is no solution to the problem of leading a noble political life that is not tragic, not rooted in fundamental contradictions.” “But,” Bloom immediately adds, “no political man is his equal.” This leads to a consideration of the two political, republican, men who lead the plot to kill Caesar, men whose political character is compromised by antipolitical doctrines. Brutus is a Stoic politician, Cassius an Epicurean politician. That is, they contradict not only each other but also themselves. The moralizing Brutus has “no other source of knowledge about what is decent” than “the popular view,” namely, belief in the gods. In this he is a political man. But he also believes that “morality is absolute” (his “Stoic” side), and tries to present Caesar’s assassination as an act of piety, a “sacrifice to the gods.” But one such sacrifice is not enough. Other sacrifices — notably the sacrificing of Antony — would have been needed to make the conspiracy work. Brutus cannot quite convince himself of his own morality, which he nonetheless would in a sense deify — perhaps in order to convince himself of it. Cassius, by contrast, would kill Caesar, Antony, and many others. But, lacking Brutus’ self-delusion, and

lacking Brutus' hypocrisy, he has neither the reputation nor strength of will to impose his prudence on his fellow plotters. "Could a man be both Stoic and Epicurean," supplementing the defects of each type with the other's virtues? Bloom suggests that the philosopher, Cicero, is "a golden mean" who "perhaps . . . could have mediated between Brutus' moral passion and Cassius' calculation." "With Brutus and Cassius, Shakespeare shows the impossibility of the direct application of philosophy to political affairs," which application results in attempts to transform reality "to fit one's conception of it." Neither Stoicism nor Epicureanism accounts for the political man, who pursues neither wisdom nor pleasure but something in between: "glory through the city." "Caesar seems to have been the most political man who ever lived," but this seeming, as we've seen, pushes beyond the limits of politics.

Caesar does so without ever knowing the significance of what he does. He remains a creature of appearance, dependent upon mere opinion. Jaffa's essay on *King Lear*, titled "The Limits of Politics," shows a better way to go beyond those limits. As the drama begins, Lear has reached a political limit; he foresees the end of his reign and would provide for the succession, monarchy's greatest dilemma. The perpetuation of the political institutions of any regime requires "divine assistance," Jaffa reminds us; monarchy, then, only presents this dilemma in its most obvious aspect. In *Lear* the problem is most striking, as Great Britain is united as in no other Shakespearean drama. Jaffa calls Lear the greatest king, the succession the greatest action, and monarchy the best form of government, of a Great Britain that was never greater.

Jaffa shows that the love test of Act I, scene i, far from being a blunder of Lear's dotage, demonstrates the old king's political greatness. The wisdom of Jaffa's interpretation, however, may be seen in his suggestion that Lear overrides his own political greatness through "a passion far more profound than the passion for political success." On one level, Lear rages because Cordelia's truthful answer to the love test does not permit consummation of his plan for the succession; at worst, her refusal to play the role he assigns might even reveal a Machiavellian selfishness, for all he knows. On the deeper level, Lear *would* "destroy that political edifice which it had been his life's work to construct" because the very character of authority impedes knowledge. As king, Lear can command professions of love but not love itself. As king, he is said to embody justice, but he can never know, as king, who truly loves 'justice.' Without ceasing to rule, he cannot *know*. (One might add that by ceasing to rule he will no longer embody 'justice,' and therefore love for him will no longer be love of 'justice.') Among human beings, Godlike authority blocks Godlike knowledge. The remainder of the play presents a king's divestiture—quite literally, as Lear divests himself of his clothing, symbolic of conventional hierarchy. Only the natural hierarchy is true; the "divine assistance" rulers need to perpetuate political institutions turns out to be the assistance of philosophy, which gives little or no *direct* assistance to those who would perpetuate political institutions. This is not to say that philoso-

phy cannot or will not give useful, indirect assistance; philosophers are self-sufficient in one sense, but not in every sense, and certain political institutions, well perpetuated, may serve them better than others. Lear's "attachment to justice was at the root of his attachment to [the world in which he had been king], and the tragedy of *King Lear* lies in the necessity of Lear to abandon even his attachment to justice [which he himself was said to embody] when the claims of love and truth are brought to bear in all their uncompromising imperiousness." Only a Creator-God, one might say, could both justly command and truly know Cordelia. But would such a God love her? The Bible teaches that He would, leaving the classics to wonder why.

Lear's love for Cordelia shows that he is human, not godlike. He needs truth, for whose discovery one might turn to philosophy or religion, but not to rulership. Bloom and Jaffa consider the philosophic study of politics as understood by Shakespeare to provide for this permanent human need. Politics may shed no light on men, but it does generate a representative variety of men and places them in revealing circumstances. Politics raises questions, sometimes perforce. Politics readies men to be illuminated tellingly.

Since this first step taken by Bloom and Jaffa, many others have joined the exploration. Today, Shakespeare is indeed the theme of philosophic reflection and a recognized source for the serious study of moral and political problems. The dramas most thoroughly studied to date are those on ancient Rome, that exceptionally political city.

Paul A. Cantor examines the Roman Republic and the Roman Empire as understood by Shakespeare, pairing *Coriolanus* with *Antony and Cleopatra*. Cantor dates true republicanism not from the expulsion of the Tarquin kings but from the institution of the tribunate, "which gave the plebeians a share in the power, and by introducing the popular element into Roman sovereignty gave the Republic regime its mixed character." *Coriolanus* presents the tribunate at its beginning. *Julius Caesar*, which presents the Empire at its beginning, does not receive extended consideration because Cantor found he "had little to add to what has already been written on the subject" by Bloom.

Pairing suggests Plutarch. Cantor regards the two dramas as parallel lives: the single-minded and arrogant Coriolanus alienates his allies in victory; the wavering and generous Antony wins the love of his allies in defeat. Cantor writes seven chapters; three on *Coriolanus*, then three on *Antony and Cleopatra*, follow the introduction, "Romanness in Shakespeare."

Shakespeare finds "true Romanness" primarily in the Republic. The Empire caused Romans to succumb to Egyptian customs and Greek doctrines, particularly Epicureanism. The Republic causes a tension between heroic virtue and commerce, a tension the Republic needs in order to survive. Undiluted heroic virtue, associated with austerity, anger, and pride, animates Coriolanus, who would dismantle the Republic. But commerce, with its tendency toward easygo-

ing defenselessness, needs at least some heroic virtue. "Pride turns out to be the only force that can be counted upon to make a man willing to die for his city," even if wounded pride may also make a man willing to kill his city. In the Empire, political advancement comes with flattery of one's superiors, not manly self-assertion identified with the public good. Thus the Empire "redirects the energies of men from public to private life." *Eros* replaces *thymos*.

The two most prominent Roman women in the two dramas reflect this metamorphosis. Volumnia, "torn between love for her country and love for her son," Coriolanus, who threatens her country, represents the Roman matron at her most authoritative. Octavia, "torn between her love for her husband," Antony, "and love for her brother," Octavius, would be a Roman matron but lacks a country to defend; her two conflicting *private* loyalties provide no standard by which to guide choices. The Empire, though universal, lacks a spiritual hierarchy. Cantor suggests that the presence of a standard or hierarchy enables mediators to succeed in the spirited, anger-stirred Republic, whereas the absence of any public standard predestines mediators to fail in the erotic Empire. *Eros* without stable purpose brings only "an endless succession of momentary pleasures," awakening "immortal longings." Longings that are immortal must eventually find objects equally immortal, whether real or imagined. Cantor sees what Jaffa writes, that "there had to be a catholic polity, before there could be a catholic church."²

Shakespeare's Romans do not separate 'church' from 'state,' as moderns do, or as Christians. Romans associate impiety with injustice. Regarding courage as the chief virtue, they "make room at the top for . . . ambitious and spirited men"; the tribunate enables a few among the long-excluded plebeians to satisfy their political ambition. Faced with rebellious, starving plebs, "the patricians are more concerned about the political ambitions of the leaders of the rebellion than about the desires of the plebeian class as a whole." In the Republic, *eros* often amounted only to "a matter of framing warriors." Such patrician austerity "can get out of hand," even as plebeian appetites can. In the most celebrated republic-in-speech, Plato's, reason rules *thymos* and, through it, the appetites. Without reason (Rome's Senate is only a belly, according to the Senator Menenius' fable), the republic-in-deed is ruled by opinion (in particular, by offsetting class prejudices). "This is the paradox of the Roman regime: the plebeians must accept the Senate's right to rule, and yet dispute the way it rules. . . ." Without this acceptance, mere appetite will rule, defenselessly; without this disputing, warrior austerity would exhaust the city.

Coriolanus errs by regarding warriors as the only true Romans. He would re-found Rome, but, "as Shakespeare discreetly hints, no Lyncurguses can be found" in Rome. Rome came, stayed, and went more by chance than by choice. Coriolanus, "worshipped by both sides," might have been a founder were he not too

2. Harry V. Jaffa: "The Unity of Tragedy, Comedy, and History: An Interpretation of the Shakespearean Universe," in John Alvis and Thomas G. West, editors: *Shakespeare as Political Thinker* (Durham, N.C.: Carolina Academic Press, 1981), p. 294.

patrician. He will not use rhetoric to perpetuate the noble lies that bind the city during peacetime. His spiritedness blurs comfortable distinctions between public and private that ordinary men appreciate. His spiritedness is so strong that he demands the highest honor, perpetually. But, of course, honor, compacted almost entirely of opinion, partakes of the mediocrity and changeableness of opinion. Coriolanus hates the fickle plebs for their very fickleness, without ceasing to wish that they would worship him properly. But the more they could admire Coriolanus for ‘Coriolanic’ reasons, the more the plebeians would resemble, and therefore rival, him.

His mother, Volumnia, shows Coriolanus that he cannot destroy the city in order to punish it for dishonoring him, because he has no basis for independence from the city. At times resembling a god, a machine, or a beast, Coriolanus finally cannot deny he is of woman born, hence part of a family, hence part of a city of families—that he is a human being who “needs Rome to perpetuate his noble memory.”³ Shakespeare’s Romans “lack inwardness”; they “avoid thinking for themselves,” at best depending upon proverbs—once defined by an American cynic as boned wisdom for weak teeth. “Republican Romans use rhetoric even when talking to themselves.” Their only counterpoint in the city is Nicanor the spy, the only man in Republican Rome who is truly without a city, free of Roman opinions. Cantor is probably the first commentator to see that with Nicanor Shakespeare suggests the presence of philosophy.

“Rome accomplishes its goal of politicizing its citizens, with such success that it can reveal the limits of the city as such.” Rome demands loyalty, denies “access to wisdom, especially to self-knowledge.” Truth is dangerous to Rome, to the opinions that make Rome Rome. Without entirely seeing this, the patricians act as if they do, sacrificing the outstanding patrician in order to evade plebeian rage at the patrician class (and, one might suggest, to rid themselves of the dominant patrician—‘plebeian resentment’ is not an exclusively plebeian vice). Whereas the individual, Coriolanus, learns that he is not self-sufficient, the city does not learn. “It is as if Lear were to come through the scenes on the heath and still think that storms would peace at his bidding.” Individuals can learn, but cities cannot. They can only change.

The Roman emperor rules subjects, not citizens. A world-encompassing state makes exile impossible; enemies now kill one another, and the men they kill are fellow Romans. An Emperor need not do his own fighting. He can even be a child, prefiguring a religion that worships a Child. Spiritedness is unnecessary and peace obscures the public good, obvious in war. Cantor observes that the word ‘plebeian’ occurs only once in *Antony and Cleopatra*, ‘patrician’ not at all. Shakespeare omits any reference to the Senate and other institutions intermediate between Emperor and subjects. Army officers must guess the intentions of re-

3. Contrast Cantor’s treatment with Jaffa’s (*ibid.*, pp. 292–4). Cantor emphasizes the distinction between public and private, whereas Jaffa emphasizes the connection between patriotism and the Roman matriarchy.

mote generals. The “most remote” rulers of all are the gods. Roman civic religion, with gods ruled secretly by the patricians, gives way to superstition. “For the only time in the Roman plays, personal deities are mentioned.”⁴ Foreign gods, such as Bacchus, and deified lovers, such as Antony (according to Cleopatra), replace the old Roman gods. Personal fidelity to one’s master, or one’s lover, replaces patriotism. One “can gain more glory by losing than by winning.” Not deeds but intentions count most. Tests of love become all-important to men and women. “What is in one way Antony’s weakness as a commander, allowing others to see his limitations as a man, is another way his great strength, for it makes even his enemies pity him . . . and creates in his followers the deepened bond that comes from their feeling he is in need of them.” This is not yet Christianity, but the resemblance may strike us.⁵

With the liberation of *eros*, the problem of fidelity in love no longer inspires comedy. *Eros* takes on the seriousness of the means of salvation, and fidelity to one’s beloved is the new worship. “Paradoxically though, at the moment Antony and Cleopatra are ready to use the whole world as a measure of the value of their love, the world has come to seem worthless to them, and thus their ultimate sacrifice is reduced to a form of self-indulgence.” “[T]he bedrock of nihilism” underlies this “mountainous passion.” Suicide doesn’t solve the problem, for “if life is worthless and death desirable” then suicide is merely “the prelude to new pleasures.” Neither lover can truly relinquish his identity as love “swings back and forth between moments of union and separation.” “Death cannot resolve the paradoxes of their love, but it can fix them in a final form for all time.” Or can it? The “rustic” who brings an asp to Cleopatra doubts her vision. “[T]he ending of *Antony and Cleopatra* underscores the subjectivity of the lovers’ experience.” “[F]or their story to be a comedy, it would have to be a kind of divine comedy,” Cantor notes. Only a god, or a kind of god, could *know* enough to smile at their story with justifiable confidence.

The liberation of *eros* ends politics. It does not end publicity. Antony and Cleopatra “seem to regard politics as a springboard, into some new but undefined celebrity.” (In casting Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor in a movie version, Hollywood was profoundly right.) The new hero and heroine would “excel in love just as the Republican Romans want to excel in war.” Pride unites with *eros*, an impossible coupling in the Republic. The imperial individual’s ambitions are not apolitical but transpolitical. “A boundless desire plays the same role in a man’s soul that a tyrant plays in the city, overpowering other desires and making them follow its lead just the way the tyrant crushes all opposition. . . .” The love and the rule of Antony and Cleopatra both attempt “to do without law,”

4. Most notable among these is a *daimonian*: Act II, sc. iii, ll. 20–31.

5. Cordelia’s response to the love test—that she cannot “love my father all” because half her love must go to her future husband—might thus be seen as a corollary to / anticipation of the Jewish and Christian doctrine of “one flesh.” See Genesis 2:23,24; I Corinthians 6:16; and Ephesians 5:31. I am indebted to the late Professor Gerrit H. Roelofs of Kenyon College for this observation.

and “to bring reality into accord with their own desires . . . without compromise.” In the public world, such illusions injure others; Cantor cites Antony’s militarily bizarre battle strategy. And although Antony and Cleopatra are “the only ones who can be said to respond heroically to the challenge presented by the dissolution of the Republican regime,” Cantor does not find their response anything more than heroic, if that.

“Ultimately the source of tragedy in Rome can be traced to the fact that the Republic seems to offer men nobility only at the price of wisdom and self-knowledge, while the Empire offers freedom in private life only at the price of a lasting and meaningful context for nobility.”⁶ Shakespeare’s Rome. “a city great because of the kinds of human greatness it fosters, and yet tragically at odds with the full and independent development of that greatness,” invites readers to consider the “problem of the relationship of the city and man.”

To what extent do Roman heroes transcend their city? In the revised, expanded version of *Rome and Romans According to Shakespeare*,⁷ Michael Platt contrasts the title he chose with Cantor’s. “I understand Shakespeare to be as interested in the Romans as he is in Rome.” The regime makes men, “but great men also affect the regime and something in them lives outside any regime.” Both Cantor and Platt evidently agree that (in Platt’s words) “in Rome at least the problem of the city and man is insoluble.” They also agree that the occasional Roman transcends the regime, although perhaps “transcend” is the wrong word for Nicanor. They differ in their judgment of the extent to which Roman *heroes* transcend the regime. Perhaps Cantor might say that Platt leans slightly too far toward romanticizing these heroes; perhaps Platt might reply that Cantor tries slightly too hard to bring their pretensions down to earth.⁸

Platt considers all of Shakespeare’s Roman works, which span “the foundation of the Republic in [*The Rape of*] *Lucrece* to its suicidal metamorphosis in *Titus Andronicus*.” He emphasizes the Republic because, “strictly speaking, for Shakespeare ‘Rome’ means the Republic.” Platt eschews what has come to be the conventional scholarly manner—stating a conclusion (called, in half-hearted imitation of science and modesty, a ‘thesis’) and defending it. He proposes *inquiring* into Shakespeare’s meaning, an inquiry that begins not with a ‘thesis’ but with wonder. The inquiry is the scholarly genre nearest to Shakespeare’s preferred genre, drama, which exists neither solely for its beginning nor its ending but for both and for its middle, for the tensions of the middle that we associate with the word ‘drama.’ In choosing to write dramas, Shakespeare most closely

6. Is there a counterpart to Nicanor under the Empire? If not, could Shakespeare be entirely neutral on the question of republicanism versus tyranny?

7. The first edition appeared in 1976, the same year as Cantor’s book.

8. Cantor has made himself an authority on Romantics. See his *Creature and Creator: Myth-Making and English Romanticism* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984). Platt has made himself an authority on Nietzsche, that formidable critic of reductionists.

imitates life: “Those who think life is summed up in its conclusion will, like the Romans, honor and commit suicide. They will also, I think, write dramas much inferior to Shakespeare’s.” After his introduction, Platt divides his book into three parts of one, six, and four chapters, respectively. Eleven, that inauspicious number, quite properly characterizes a history that begins with Lucrece’s rape and ends with Titus’ meatball pie. But Rome’s inauspicious character isn’t the whole story: the Romans count, too, and so does Shakespeare. “The aim of this inquiry is to read Shakespeare’s works so as to learn from his Rome, his Romans, and him.”

Encompassing both the fall of Troy and the founding of Rome, both the *Iliad*’s theme and the *Aeneid*’s, *The Rape of Lucrece* is “an abbreviation of epics.” Within it is “something briefer still”: a description of a painting of the fall of Troy and Lucrece’s interpretation of the painting—“a brief epic within a brief epic.” Within *it* is a stanza describing “the abbreviating skill of the painter who can press a whole epic action onto a surface which is so compact that it requires long study to be understood.” The “eye of the mind” must see the whole Achilles, of whom the painter shows only a part; “visible parts stand for imagined wholes.” Thus Platt restates his understanding of Shakespeare’s artistic technique while restating his own principles of interpretation.

Symbolically, Lucrece “is a city and her rape a tyranny.” Her rapist, Tarquin, exemplifies “the tyrannic soul.” “Shakespeare confirms both the Socratic view that politics is the soul writ large and its Aristotelian elaboration that ethics and politics, though distinct, are inseparable.” Platt does something quite interesting in his own elaboration. He first writes that “it seems tyranny has two opposites, kingship and republic,” just as “rape has two opposites, love and friendship”; love resembles kingship in that “both suppose inequality,” friendship resembles a republic in that “both suppose equality.” But he then writes, “The plot of *Lucrece* seems to be guided by these distinctions: the distinction between a tyrant and a king dominates the first half of the narrative, until the Troy painting; from then on it gives way to the distinction between tyrannies (*or kingships*) and republics” (emphasis added). This shift, conflating tyranny and kingship, might correspond to a movement from classical to modern political philosophy. In the poem’s first half, Lucrece uses rhetoric in an attempt to “persuade a tyrant to become a king” with arguments identical to “those made by the classical political philosophers.” She fails. Tarquin rapes her; “the mark of a tyrant is that he is unteachable.” Only when she *acts* to revenge injustice does Lucrece succeed in overthrowing tyranny, and her action founds not a kingship but a republic. She commits suicide in order to show that “she loves honor more than she fears death,” and in order to inspire her husband and his friends with her own *thymos* for retributive justice. Platt shows how Shakespeare uses both narration and rhetoric to mobilize readers “in a Republican Army.” Lucrece’s interpretation of the painting serves as “a vivid example of art’s capacity to encourage virtuous action.” Unlike the conquering and imperial Caesar, who came, saw, and

conquered, Lucrece looks, speaks, and acts. Shakespeare purposefully alters Vergil's story by replacing Aeneas with Lucrece.

It is not necessary for Rome to have its origin in the prestigious world of epic heroes, either Greek or Trojan. Rome does not need to define itself against Greek models of life, thought, and heroism. . . . Rome is autochthonous, not a scion.

Platt goes so far as to imagine Shakespeare telling Vergil that Roman virtue, "while looking outward," is "always to be self-consulting, with no need of myths." The modern epic poet tells his story on his own authority. Shakespeare is a republican; Vergil is not. Shakespeare prudently avoids using the word "republic" anywhere in the poem.

But Platt next argues that Shakespeare transcends partisan regime-advocacy. "His aim is not to advocate, not to teach, but to understand. . . . No city need fear the gifts he bears." Having given us first a Platonic Shakespeare and then a Machiavellian one, Platt quite deliberately leaves his reader in some confusion. Shakespeare does not want his best readers to be Platonists or Machiavellians; nor does he want them to be Shakespeareans. "Progress toward his deeper thoughts is also a liberation from his authority." His elusiveness "is an image of the elusiveness of the things his thoughts think." Shakespeare does not merely advocate republicanism. "The early Romans are not individuals"; lacking a private side, their thoughts serve their deeds. Shakespeare's deeds—his poems—serve his thoughts. By no means lacking a private side, he is "above or outside Rome." Platt turns next, as Shakespeare does, to Rome at its most republican, that is, to Rome as it most contrasts with what is highest in Shakespeare.

"There is so little love" in *Coriolanus*. "Shakespeare seems to have put aside all that he loved most and imitated with most exuberance in order to treat this Roman and his city." Anger is Rome's ruling passion, which is to say that Rome always verges on the unruly. "The souls of Romans are unmusical" (except for Antony's); only their funeral music partakes of discipline and honor, a fact that pleases but does not encourage us, Platt wryly notes. Unlike Shakespeare's England, Shakespeare's Rome has no greenness; the only natural thing there is fire. Rome scourges the weak. "[W]hile in both *Lear* and *Coriolanus* the powerless receive no quarter, only in the Roman city does no one think of protesting this injustice." No one, that is, except the apparently powerless themselves: *Coriolanus* begins with strife precipitated by famine among the plebs. The "ancient malice" of plebeians for patricians and the complementary contempt of patricians for plebeians concerns the issue of distributive justice. As the Senator Menenius understands (perhaps alone among the Senators), the plebs care for their bodies, not martial virtue. To most of the plebs, politics is economics; to most of the Senators, politics is war. Both classes assume that "life is owed to the city" (not to a Creator-God), and the life-giving city "is higher than man." "Banishment from either the body or the city can lead only to death."

Coriolanus tests this fundamental assumption of Romans. In material things,

Rome honors him with a tenth of the spoils after his conquest of Corioli; this is a tithe, “the distributive justice given a god in recognition that he gave all and thus deserves all.” Coriolanus can take no offense at this. Rather, the enforced humbling of political life itself, made more pointed by scheming tribunes who fear and envy him, goad Coriolanus to make the speeches that provoke his exile. When he marches on Rome with a foreign army, Menenius cannot dissuade him. Although Volumnia can “identify the city and the body at an even deeper level,” that of sexual generation, even “natural affections for his own family” cannot stay Coriolanus. Only his mother’s appeal to honor stays him; because the only honor he cares for is Roman honor, the destruction of Rome would destroy the purpose of his *thymos*.

To honor himself he would have to know himself. It would also mean that he would have to know what is honorable. But in both particulars he finds no guide superior to the opinion of the city.

Coriolanus hates the mortal—the inconstant opinions and appetites of the plebeians, ruled by their bodies—without seeing the immortal. His hatred of the body “masks a fear” of the body. As “the incarnation of the body politic,” Volumnia appeals to honor in her speech while representing in her person the inescapability of *eros*. “The desire of the wholly spirited man like Coriolanus to achieve an absolutely unconditional freedom is not possible.” He too was born of a woman, a condition that makes one’s godliness at least half-suspect.

Having dissected the pretensions of the patrician Coriolanus, Platt turns to the city itself. It too has its limitations. “Who but Rome and Volumnia has raised this destroyer of cities?” Rome is not even one city; as Bloom observes, it is two cities, patrician and plebeian, held together only by threat of war—a threat that reminds one that Rome is not the only city, that enemies would destroy it. “[T]he tension between honor and necessity characterizes the Republic and provides its martial dynamism”; this amounts to “the dismal best the city ascends to.” Unlike Polybius, Shakespeare does not regard Rome as “a temperate regime”; “he knows that it is very hard to have nobility and temperance together, to have the valor of Rome and the temperance of Sparta together, to have the glory of Rome and a temperately mixed regime.” Menenius, whose intelligence and moderation allow him to stand partially outside the city, “has everything but success in his favor.” The friendship he esteems finds little honor in the city animated by appetite, fears, vanity, and envy.

The equation of city and body is not the only Roman assumption Romans habitually fail to examine. Both Coriolanus and Volumnia assume that origins rather than ends “most reveal the nature of a thing.” The city gives life to man and ‘therefore’ “can take life away.” This teaching resembles that of the Bible’s Creator-God, except that Judaism “describes Creation as a *separation* of creature from Creator,” whereas Rome ‘creates’ its citizens but does not separate them from herself. Rome actually creates nothing; that is, “Rome denies the possibili-

ties of any new thing,” regarding each birth as merely “the reappearance of an old thing—namely, an ancestor or parent.” Cyclical nature, the old believed to be good: this is of course the opinion of the ancient peoples. There is at least one problem with it: “ancient malice” exists in Rome, belying the opinion that the origin can be simply good. Malice issues from unmoderated *thymos*, whose “characteristic activity” is killing. “The tyranny of *thymos* would rule a city of the dead.” At the same time, “the rule of *thymos*, being incapable of creation, must recruit from *eros*”; “every warrior must come from a non-warrior mother.” Rome therefore has no firm foundation. Worship of the origin prevents the nurturing of the founders Rome needs, founders cognizant of fully developed human nature. Rome’s equation of body and city contrasts with Plato’s equation of city and soul. Rome lacks soul. At best it has that appearance of nobility that wins honor. Platt now does something exceptionally interesting. Earlier he had discussed the image of the “gilded butterfly,” bitten by Coriolanus’ son; the incident symbolized the Roman’s predatory impulse, the compulsion behind mature Romans’ demand for wilful art, and their intolerance of frailty. Platt recalled the only other occurrence of this image in Shakespeare: *King Lear*, v.iii.8–17, where “gilded butterflies” are courtiers—ephemeral and laughable men. Platt suggests that ephemeral human nature “deserves protection” (according to Shakespeare’s teaching in *Lear*), but it receives not even pity in Rome. This is a somewhat puzzling interpretation, inasmuch as the ephemeral courtiers do not evidently deserve the protection Cordelia deserves. Certain specimens of human nature are more to be scorned (but not seriously) than pitied. But now, near the end of his discussion of *Coriolanus*, Platt reminds us that “to men of some classical knowledge it was common knowledge that the butterfly is an image of the soul’s immortality.” How is the butterfly ephemeral yet immortal? It metamorphoses, changing from egg to larva to pupa to adult, then reproducing the cycle again. How is the soul ephemeral yet immortal? Perhaps it too can metamorphose, grow from the wilful destructiveness of a small boy—little more than a beast—toward the divine. Coriolanus wants to go from manhood to godhood; instead, he metamorphoses into a beast, in what many commentators see as a dramatization of the famous sentence in Aristotle’s *Politics* (I.ii.14).⁹ Romans apparently lack soul. They are spirited lions and clever foxes, but “where reason is a shrewd and deceitful fox, it cannot be said to be in contact with reason in the cosmos above the city, for the reason of the fox is not in love with immortal things.” The fox loves its *self*, not any soul; it would cunningly scheme to make that self immortal, if it could, surviving all the traps in the world. But “the immortal part of the soul, the intellect, is exactly what Coriolanus lacks.” “To be rid of fear and contempt, a Roman would have to be attached to things that exist always.” It is more precise to say, as Platt soon does, that Romans have souls but are ignorant of

9. Platt does not discuss Menenius’ assertion that Coriolanus, after metamorphosing into a dragon, is “*more than a creeping thing*,” more than a mere grub. Perhaps Menenius speaks ironically, or perhaps Shakespeare does. Or perhaps the details need still more work.

them. Platt suggests that the Shakespearean philosopher, exemplified by Prospero, would not strive to become divine but would “be guided by immortal things.” Christianity “would appear to have cooled the ancient desire to be divine—when, as in the Christian teaching, souls are immortal, divinization is unnecessary—“and pacified the tumults of the Roman city.” Platt omits the Christian teaching that the will to divinity manifests a mortally sinful pride.

This explicit reintroduction of the Christian theme leads to the consideration of *Julius Caesar*, although the reason for this is not immediately obvious. Like Coriolanus, Caesar tests the limits of politics. But Caesar does so with intelligence. His intelligence serves his will to be honored.

The core of that Roman pursuit of honor is the wish to become a larger-than-life statue whose hundred bleeding spouts found a political dynasty and secure the divine immortality [in Bloom’s political sense] of its founder. Julius Caesar is himself the most perfect expression of the regime he destroys.

Should he be killed? Caesar’s rise “jeopardizes all things which claim some autonomy from politics,” particularly friendship and poetry, but one must observe that the Rome he epitomizes scarcely cultivated these things. “The only thing which can justify the assassination of Caesar is the restoration of liberty and honor to Rome.” The conspirators fail to do this because Caesar’s killing is all they do; there is no coherent republican plot that follows from that killing, no re-founding of Rome. Both Brutus and Cassius “are unpolitical” in believing “assassination enough to make a new political order.” Shakespeare demonstrates that he knows how the republican plot might have succeeded. He does so without quite endorsing this better plot, precisely because he knows the limitations of both republicanism and Caesar. “On the question of whether Caesar should be killed, Shakespeare preserves an openness which pleases neither partisans of the Republic nor those who reluctantly hail Caesar as a post-constitutional ruler.” Shakespeare “belongs to the very few” human beings “who live with questions,” not answers.

Platt presents a Caesar whose life formidably rivals the life of questioning. Shakespeare’s “*Et tu, Bruté?*”—itself a question, but a brilliantly rhetorical one—bespeaks the “political genius” of a man who “must seem unpolitical to be political, seem without ambition to be ambitious, appear at rest to strive, and . . . must die to live.” Like Bloom, Platt sees that the republican plotters only assist Caesar. But Platt goes further. Unlike Bloom, he argues explicitly that Caesar knew of the plot and incorporated it into his own plot, made it an instrument of his quest for divinity.¹⁰ Caesar is “the most ambitious (or second most ambitious) man who ever lived”—rivaled only by Jesus, Whose methods, Platt suggests, bear more marks of resemblance to Caesar’s than the New Testament would have one think. Platt wittily (some might say wickedly) observes that

10. See David Lowenthal: “Shakespeare’s Caesar’s Plan,” *Interpretation*, Vol. 10, Nos. 2 & 3, pp. 223–50.

Caesar makes such a poor impression as a human being, but this is only proof that he is nearly a god. A god, after all, might make a very poor sort of human being, numb to the fears of mortal flesh, the pleasures of warm motion and the happiness of friendship. The being Caesar becomes is fearless, senseless, motionless, a statue of himself. He is a great disappointment to any spectator who expected to find that one can be 'immortal,' 'great,' or 'Roman' and also remain human.

Platt agrees with Bloom in writing that "highest in the ranks of honor is not 'king' but to compel men to take one's particular name as title of rulership and a source of legitimacy." In the end, only the philosopher Cicero, with his "moderate and skeptical eye," successfully resists submitting to Caesar. (Is he, too, the culmination of the Republic?) Brutus, who has answers (Stoic doctrine), allies, and even a good wife, fails to philosophize, conspire, or love adequately. If "a friend is he or she in the presence of whom I know myself best, in whose presence I become what I am," Brutus and his fellow Romans have little or no capacity for friendship. Both philosophy and friendship require the desire for knowledge, but the Roman "does not want to be known or to know himself, he wants to be admired."

Shakespeare himself contrasts most dramatically with the Romans. Although he plots better than the plotters, he is "no threat to a monarch" (but, perhaps, to many tyrants?).

Though he is superior to political men, he is not their rival. His knowledge of politics is not such that he is a rival of those who burn for its distinctions. The reasons why Shakespeare knows how to kill Caesar better than Brutus are connected with the reasons why he would not desire to do so.

Shakespeare knows more than Romans do because his will serves his intelligence, not vice-versa. He imitates. Only "sympathetic intelligence," akin to friendship, enables one mind to understand another. "Without this sympathetic intelligence neither friendship, dramatic poetry, nor interpretation could flourish." No sentimentalist, Shakespeare *rules* his characters, at times subjecting them to "cruelty and terror," and even marrying them. But he rules them in order to know them; Platt knows Jaffa's (and Shakespeare's) teaching about the incompatibility of political rule and knowledge, but poetic rule is not political rule. Whereas "Caesar's combination of ruling and interpreting is skillful," Shakespeare's "is more than skillful, it is wise." "Shakespeare understood himself and his art as an image of the mysterious combination of wisdom (sympathetic insight) and power exhibited by the God of *Genesis*." Shakespeare's imitation of God does not issue from a desire to become a god.

In *Antony and Cleopatra* "a courtly interior" has replaced "the civil streets of Rome." Love prospers after equality disappears; "each will be each other's slave, each, each other's master." Courage, truth, and activity have no place in the Empire; the Pax Augusta, "a peace of exhaustion," redirects human energy into protoromantic love. "[I]n the play of passions in [Cleopatra's] breast Antony

will discover whole early Republics of tumult.” But the passions in and for Cleopatra never satisfy, and they beget nothing. She awakens “immortal longings” without fulfilling them, on earth or in Heaven. “Both Rome and Egypt are without children,” a fact the drama counterpoints by its references to Herod, the man most obsessed by news of a childbirth. Platt suggests that adoration of the Christ *as child* distinguishes modern from early Christianity, and “one might even suggest that the origins of modernity itself lie in such innovations.” “[B]y struggling to judge Rome and Egypt, we come to long for something beyond ancient politics and ancient pleasures.” Perhaps Platt means that impatience with antique sterility prepares souls for moderns who offer a science more fruitful in works than in disputation. Be that as it may, “between Shakespeare’s ancient and his modern world lie a number of his plays, including all his ‘romances’”; of these plays neither ancient nor modern, two are set in the Roman Empire. Both allude to the rape of Lucrece. *Titus Andronicus* “shows that Rome succumbed to what we now know as terrorism and nihilism by choice.” Lavinia, raped, is revenged spectacularly but not politically. Rome’s best general, Titus, prefers to lose in order to display his virtue. He “so divorces virtue from the good, one does not know whether to compare him to a terrorist or a saint.” In *Cymbeline*, Imogen, the Lucrece-figure, triumphs over Iachimo, whose name may be an anagram for Machiavelli. “English virtue” triumphs over “modern Italian vice,” but England and Rome are reconciled because “Imogen is not as entirely virtuous as Lucrece and Iachimo is not as vicious as Tarquin.” The god who rules over this “most happy and prosperous” condition in world history is Jupiter. “Natural religion . . . supports human virtue by making good men confident.” Against the critic who asserts that Shakespeare wrote not one good prayer, Platt calls attention to the prayer of Posthumus: “His guilt is just and serious, rather than gloomy or base, for the gods he appeals to are masters of life and death and nothing more.” This “happiest historical time in all of Shakespeare did not have to pass,” but the Romans chose to die, a choice related to but not determined by Christianity, and by Stoicism before that. One might say that Posthumus’ name is an obvious pun, and that Shakespeare intended it to be obvious.

Divergent answers to the question of chosen death distinguish pagan antiquity from Christianity. So do divergent answers to the question of generation, specifically, sexual abstinence before marriage. Shakespeare’s Rome, republican and pagan, “is the exact opposite” of monarchic, Christian England. In Shakespeare “all roads lead to *The Tempest*,” not to Rome or to England. By the end of *The Tempest*, Prospero, the poetic philosopher and king, “is well on his way to founding a new Rome” by uniting northern and southern Italy. Machiavelli, too, would reunite Italy. But, as Platt reminds us, Shakespeare would do this only in speech, not in practice. Today we live in Machiavelli’s empire, but some might wonder who was the real realist. Unless I am mistaken, Platt writes for those who recognize this question, and others like it, as open. On the questions of death and generation, his Shakespeare would not cling to life but would die

blessing life for the warmth of our bodies and for our speech. In regard to the latter Platt quite properly ends his book with a reconsideration of the genre he calls an “inquiry,” and with praise of several contemporary inquirers who helped him along the path of inquiry.

Jan H. Blits returns us to the central, pivotal, Roman play. He agrees with his predecessors in calling Caesarism both the destruction and the fulfillment of the republican regime. Emphasizing the theme of manliness, he adds many observations to those of Bloom and Platt, challenging them on several points while confirming their basic reading and endorsing their way of reading.

“Loving victory, dominance and honor, [the Romans] characteristically equate manliness and human excellence.” Even Portia, Blits notes, is a misogynist. They regard women as weak, not so much because women lack physical strength, or because women fear too much, but because a woman tends to love another instead of herself. Romans want to be loved without loving. “The republican contest for love . . . is a contest in manliness for the love of other manly men.” “[S]pirited, not affectionate,” manly love impels a Roman “to crush a friend by unmanning his proud heart.” “Rome’s civil strife seems to be Roman friendship writ large.” Blits then breaks with Platt’s interpretation in denying that Portia could be Brutus’ true friend. Portia sees that insofar as she is womanly, Brutus distrusts her weakness. She fails to see that if she could be manly, Brutus would have to crush her, not confide in her. “She has too exalted a view of manliness to see its limitations.” Blits observes that manly strife inheres in Rome’s very foundation by Romulus and Remus—fratricide, not fraternity. Thus both republic and empire may be seen in the origin of the city.

Blits asks the same question Platt asks: Should Caesar be killed? Unlike Bloom, he emphasizes “the corruption, as distinguished from the personal shortcomings, of the Republic’s principal defenders.” This corruption is personalism, the belief that one owes loyalty to an individual and not to one’s country. Roman manliness does not issue in patriotism, or in “republican equality.” It destroys them. Not only Caesar and the plebeians, but Marullus, Brutus, and Cassius too succumb to personalism. They are defeated before they begin. Love, including manly love, allows no equality and must undermine republicanism.

Blits concurs with Bloom and Platt in their criticism of Brutus’ “ethics of intention,” but he judges Brutus more severely on moral rather than on intellectual grounds, arguing that Brutus’s “Stoic ethics” contains “an antirepublican disdain for the success of his own political cause and even for the welfare of his country”—a corruption that reflects and reacts to “the rise of imperial Rome.” (With Cantor and in partial opposition to Platt, he emphasizes the importance of regime in determining individuals’ thoughts and actions, although this emphasis conflicts somewhat with his assessment of manly love).

It is especially fitting that Antony eulogizes Brutus for his disinterestedness, for even though Brutus considers him his moral opposite, Antony proves to epitomize the

postrepublican notion that one can gain more by losing politically than by winning. Brutus' virtuous self-denial is of a piece with Antony's sensual self-indulgence. They are the twin representatives of the new Rome.

One might add that as with the twins present at Rome's founding, twinship does not preclude violence. Nothing "can mediate between desire and duty" in imperial Rome. Brutus is indeed brutish; his 'idealism' "requires the sacrifice of human blood."¹¹ Inasmuch as the Republic was hardly pacifistic, one must take Blits to be criticizing, first, Roman manliness and, second, this late, hypocritical version of it. Should Caesar be killed? Not by one such as Brutus, or by Brutus' co-plotters.

This does not mean that Caesar should not have been killed. Blits confirms Platt's thesis, that Caesar makes the republican plotters part of Caesar's more intricate plot. "[W]hat at first glance appear to be dull failures in Caesar's attempt to become a king are in fact disguised successes in his attempt to become a god." As in several other places, Blits revealingly contrasts Shakespeare's account with Plutarch's; Caesar's apparent epileptic seizure after refusing the crown does not occur in Plutarch. The fall simulates and prefigures the assassination, transforming the crowd's fear of ambition into "piteous forgiveness" and "provid[ing] them with an interpretation for his death which later inspires them to worship him as a martyred god." The people exchange republican fear of greatness, the "ancient malice," for martyr-worship. "With the establishment of imperial Rome, nobility comes to be associated with human love and piteous suffering rather than with manly pride." As his predecessors saw, Blits sees that the new nobility issues from the triumph of the old. "To conquer everyone, Rome had to embrace everyone, so that her very conquests eventually transformed her basic principle of universal force into universal love." He credits Machiavelli with this insight. Force could become love because the Roman motive for applying force was the desire to be loved or honored. Honor, 'a good name,' was worth the world to the Romans. Some Romans conquered the world for honor, others sacrificed the world for it. "It would be difficult to exaggerate the importance of names in *Caesar*," the play in which the names of the leading characters "are mentioned much more often . . . than in any other Shakespearean play." To the manly—that is, honor-loving—Romans, "names are most real. The name is the thing itself." Unfortunately, the exaltation of one's name, rather than due observance of nature, puts the great name at risk. "Caesar claims to be in the world what the northern star is in the sky. But the northern star, as Caesar seems to forget, is visible only at night." The image suggests at least two thoughts. Caesarism depends on darkness. And Caesarism can be blotted out by the coming of a nearer star, the sun.

11. Does Blits glance at Christianity here? Incidentally, if Caesar is the culmination of the Republic, and Cicero is somehow associated with the culmination of the Republic, and if Jesus is the culmination of the Empire, then Shakespeare's refusal of simple partisanship becomes more understandable.