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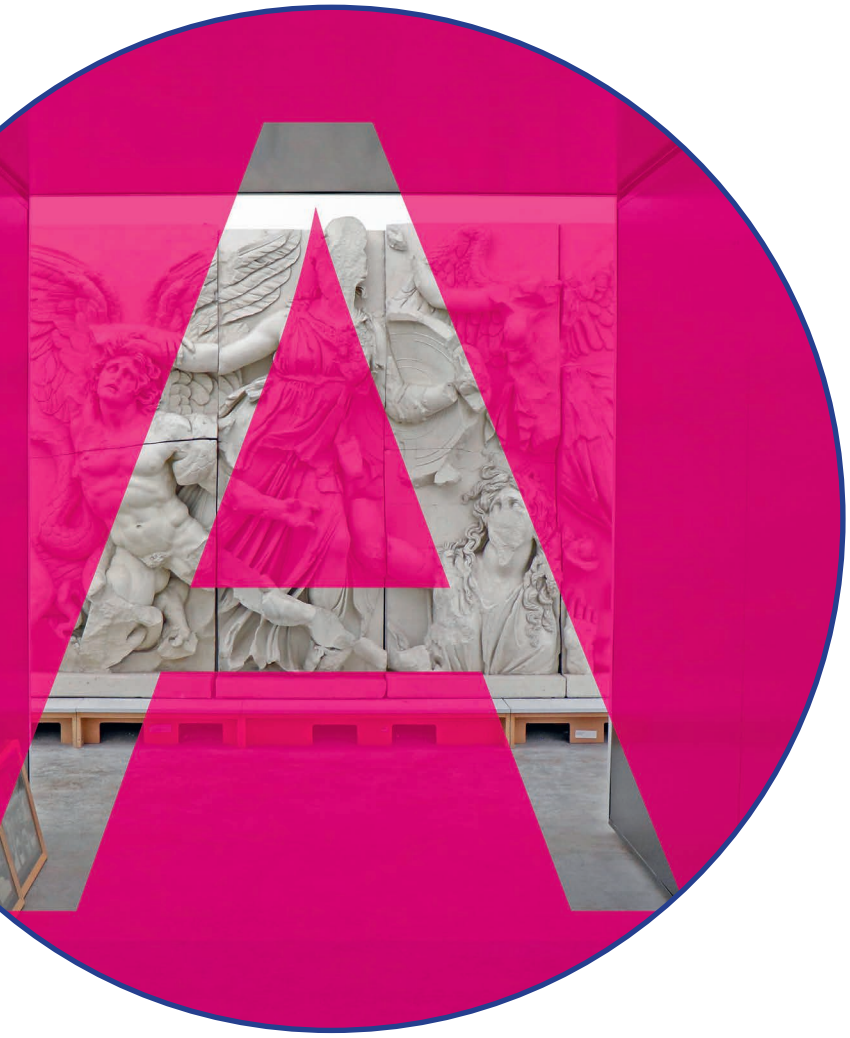

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(The Ivan Mestrovic Museums)

Review of Patrick Gray: *Shakespeare and the Fall of the Roman Republic: Selfhood, Stoicism and Civil War*

Edinburgh University Press (Edinburgh 2019) (Edinburgh Critical Studies in Shakespeare and Philosophy), pp. xii + 308. ISBN: 978 I 4744 2745 6 (hardback), £80

Since its publication, Gray's latest monograph has experienced a lively reception in academia and a number of engaging reviews. In fact, the book induced a rich and uncommonly fierce discussion between the author and Paul Cantor, generating inter alia new knowledge on Shakespeare's understanding of the Romans' perception of themselves.[1] The book is well structured. After a sizeable Introduction there are two main parts that analyze two plays, Julius Caesar and Antony and Cleopatra, with Coriolanus often used for comparative purposes. Each part of the book is well introduced, and respective conclusions help the reader contextualize Gray's theses. On the other hand, I agree with Lovascio who states that the (final) Conclusion "feels more like a coda than

1 see: 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, *Skenè: Journal of Theatre and Drama Studies* Vol 6, No 1 (2020) 255–64, Patrick Gray, Shakespeare and the Fall of the Roman Republic: A Reply to Paul A. Cantor. *Skenè. Journal of Theatre and Drama Studies* Vol 6, No 2 (2020) 189–203.

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an actual conclusion and may perhaps have been left out with no considerable harm".[2]

In the Introduction the author writes how the excessive urge of Roman patricians for autonomy, invulnerability, political domination and control of others and of their own status, their lives and their bodies is the reason that causes civil war (8). In an insightful way the author connects the Roman trait of 'constancy' with St. Augustine's concept of libido dominandi, Kant's idea of 'unsocial sociability' and Nietzsche's 'will to power' (3). Even if in general I find Gray's literature review, comparisons and theoretical references illuminating, I admit that for a reader of the book his short theoretical and conceptual comparisons may be challenging at times. For instance, the Introduction refers often to Kant and his idea of vain egotism as a driver of progress. While borrowing from Ewan Fernie's Shakespeare for Freedom he contrasts Kant's view with Hegel's idea that the only possible way to realize personal freedom is in a system that favors collective freedom. This is something that he will argue in different ways in later chapters and in the Conclusion to the book. He refers also to Charles Taylor's idea of mutual, social recognition, again related to Hegel's Anerkennung. Gray brings into play the debate between individual and collective rights and identity politics (4). On the other hand, he shows how Shakespeare in JC and Antony and Cleopatra turns Romans' urge to dominate into passivity (5), and then connects Stoic ideas with Neostoicism (6). The author brings up the theological concept of 'passibility' to contrast Roman 'constancy'. He suggests that Shakespeare's view on the fall of the Roman Republic aligns with St. Augustine's, and he writes that the reason for the decline of Rome was "the absence of Christianity" (15). After he elaborates the idea of 'constancy', Gray argues that the best way to achieve individual realization is by accepting one's own vulnerability. This should take place within a social framework that recognizes needs of different people. He briefly grounds this in a Christian framework (29). Such understanding of Shakespeare's views of the self in Roman Republic, of Christianity and of the end of the Roman Republic led to a harsh debate between the author and Paul Cantor mentioned in the beginning of this review. On the other hand, Sean Keileen suggests that "perhaps the most valuable thing about Shakespeare and The Fall of the Roman Republic is the view it gives of the tension between classical and Christian texts in these plays: two domains of Shakespeare's

2 Domenico Lovascio, "Patrick Gray, Shakespeare and the Fall of the Roman Republic: Selfhood, Stoicism and Civil War (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019)", Early Modern Literary Studies Vol 21, No 2 (2020), https://extra.shu.ac.uk/emls/journal/index.php/emls/article/view/545 (last accessed 06/10/21).

wide reading that modern scholarship rarely considers in the same frame".[3]

In Chapter one, Christian and Stoic values come into conflict. They are analyzed by contrasting Shakespeare's (M. Iunius) Brutus with his homonymous ancestor L. Iunius Brutus. In the second section of the chapter the author elaborates the concept of 'ego ideal' and its manifestation in the concepts of divinity. In his analysis he introduces Adler's term 'striving for perfection' and connects it with Nietzsche's 'will to power' (52–54), and Freud's "longing for phallic potency" (54). Gray analyses Brutus's speech to the Romans after Caesar's death and he insightfully shows how different it is, both rhetorically and philosophically, from Antony's speech (61). In a similar way he analyses Brutus' meeting with Cassius on the battle field (62). Beside the emotional exchange between the two men, he focuses on Portia's death and Brutus's reaction to it (64), showing how some aspects of it are more Stoic than others (65). In the following part of the chapter Gray turns from Stoicism to the Neostoicism of Shakespeare's time. He discusses the reception of Stoic 'constancy' in the Renaissance. Here he concentrates on contrasts between Neostoicism and Christianity. He connects Calvin's interpretation of Joseph from the Old Testament with Brutus in JC (75). In the chapter Gray differentiates between nuances in Christian and Roman definitions of pity, mercy, clemency and compassion, and presents meanings and values attached to them (73, 75).

Chapter two deals with concepts of 'constancy' and 'passibility' in Julius Caesar. His explanation of 'passibility' is philosophical and theological. The author illustrates well the differences between Jesus Christ triumphant-in-suffering with Aristotle's idea of an impassible Unmoved Mover. The author presents psychoanalytic and feminist views on Shakespeare's Romans, their bodies and their gender identity, their views and manifestations of masculinity and femininity. He focuses on the work of Coppélia Kahn and her idea that Shakespeare's Romans embody masculinity as an ideology (99). However, he describes Shakespeare's Romans' misogyny not as a result of their patriarchy, but of their "larger anxiety about all forms of 'vulnerability'" and their imperative to be impassible (103).

In the Conclusion to Part I, Gray presents the issue of two Caesars portrayed by Shakespare, the decaying old man and the strong overarching symbol that Caesar was (146). Here he establishes connections between Caesar and different representations of Hercules

3 Sean Keileen, Book review: Shakespeare and the Fall of the Roman Republic: Selfhood, Stoicism, and Civil War, *Cahiers Élisabéthains* Vol 101, No 1 (2020) 136–39, https://doi.org/10.1177/0184767820902744d (last accessed 06/10/21).

(153, 154). He analyses similarities between Caesar and Jesus Christ, and Shakespeare's play as a Passion play, especially in the eyes of Shakespeare's Elizabethan readers (154, 155). This is done by comparison of JC and medieval biblical plays (163), Towneley (164) and Chester plays (165).

The second part of the book deals with Antony and Cleopatra. Gray introduces Antony's two different approaches to 'passibility': "Roman politics and Senecan retreat into 'philosophy'", and defines Antony as being divided between the two (178). In a similar way he briefly characterizes Coriolanus (178–179). Gray introduces Christopher Gill's study of "'objective-participant' and 'subjective-individualist' concepts of selfhood," both in ancient Greece and in modern Europe (181, 182). He moves on to Brutus and argues that Brutus performs suicide not on account of his Stoicism, but because he is unwilling to compromise his public image and let himself be led as a war prisoner in the victors' triumph through the streets of Rome (192). Cleopatra's suicide is explained in a similar way. However, even if it may seem that Cleopatra's way of life is opposite to a Stoic life (194), Gray interestingly argues that her suicide is the culmination of a series of acts by which she tries to dominate her body and her life. At the same time her suicide is the result of her escapism (197). Antony's behavior also demonstrates a similar escapism. The behavior of Antony and Cleopatra is analyzed through their relationship with the concepts of 'time', 'fortune' and 'destiny' (203–212). Gray shows how the two characters support each other's grandiose delusions (215).

Chapter four starts with the introduction of the importance of the concept of moral judgement or 'interpellation', and the role of the audience and the readers in this process (220). As it was hinted in the paragraph above, both Antony's and Cleopatra's imperative is to avoid being judged by others, either their peers or the plebs. They cannot stand the idea that other people mock them, especially those that they find inferior. This not only motivates their behavior, but it suggests that in the end they too are passible.

In the Conclusion to Part II, Gray argues that throughout the play there is an audience that cannot be escaped from, especially in relation to the suicide. The 'privileged observer' is, in Gray's view, the Christian God (260). He provides several examples of Christian references throughout the play (264). Therefore, the one interpellation that Antony and Cleopatra will not be able to escape from is the Last Judgement (268).

In the Conclusion to the whole book Gray evokes Lévinas's concept of 'the face-to-face', and again contrasts it with other authors' ideas, mainly those of Lacan and Ricoeur. In this way he suggests that the people and their

identities exist only in relation to other "selves" (275).

Even if it may seem at times that Gray repeats his theses in different chapters, the examples he uses to explain them are not repetitive. His later arguments build on the previous ones, and they provide a very illustrative, close reading of the plays. On the other hand, he frequently refers to philosophers and complicated concepts. How much sense they will make to the reader depends on his or her interdisciplinary knowledge. At the same time, this points to the fact that scholars in a large number of academic fields will benefit from reading the book, not least those from Shakespeare Studies and Classical Reception Studies.

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https://edinburghuniversitypress.com/book-shakespeare-and-the-fall-of-the-roman-republic.html (last accessed 06/10/21).

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