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[REVIEW]

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Review of Monica S. Cyrino (ed.), Rome Season Two. Trial and Triumph (Edinburgh 2015) (= Screening Antiquity), xviii & 253 pp., ISBN: 978-01-4744-0027-5, £ 75.00 (hb), in: thersites 7 (2018), 164-168.

THIS tidy volume is, in the parlance of Hollywood, a sequel to Cyrino's similarly titled publication on the first season of "Rome" (2005-2007), a well-known and popular miniseries depicting the rise of Julius Caesar and the later Augustus in a visually gorgeous and, as it turned out, financially ruinous co-production of the BBC and HBO. Released almost a decade after the TV miniseries in question stopped airing, this collection of seventeen individual papers takes up the thread of its predecessor and explores the ways in which Roman antiquity has been shaped in the second and final season. It appears in a new monograph series focused on reception studies in the area of cinema and television, published by Edinburgh University Press and entitled "Screening Antiquity" and it is worth pointing out that the editor in particular has previously published extensively on this subject. This volume in particular, according to Cyrino, "opens up new avenues of scholarly discussion" by "exploring, for the first time, the visual, narrative, and thematic aesthetics of the show's second season" (6). It would be redundant to individually review all seventeen papers. Hence, I will limit myself to brief discussion of a small selection that reflects my personal interests and the general direction of the volume.

The papers are organised in two parts, entitled "Power and Politics" and "Sex and Status", respectively. The first section intends to analyse the depiction of the political power struggles in the time between the death of Julius Caesar and those of Mark Antony and Cleopatra. In accordance with the dramaturgy of the show, which occasionally adopts the perspectives of two ex-centurions mentioned briefly in Caesar's "Gallic Wars", the papers focus partly on the level of high politics, with Octavian and Antony as protagonists, and partly on the 'lower-class' Romans Vorenus and Pullo. For the most part, this two-level perspective is gainfully used to show how the showrunners attempted to portray the Roman world as a 'lived-in', in-depth experience.

In an excellent paper, Angeline C. Chiu demonstrates this interplay of different social perspectives in the context of Antony's funeral speech for Caesar. After elucidating the famous antecedents of this scene, from Plutarch to Shakespeare, Chiu rightly points out the mastery of "Rome" handling of this well-known trope: in completely eliding the famous speech and focusing on the aftermath, "Rome" presents us with two divergent interpretations of the event. On the one hand, a scene including Brutus, Cassius, Servilia and Antony both hints at the importance of Antony's rhetoric with

a brilliant throw-away line by the latter ("I'm sorry about all this. I got a bit carried away.") and provides us with a cathartic dénouement not present in either Plutarch or Shakespeare: the confrontation between Brutus and Antony (20). On the other hand, a barroom discussion of the same speech from a socially inferior perspective is both "interpretation and analysis" (21) and perfectly encapsulates the show's view of Brutus' sometimes pompous personality: "And he goes blah blah blah, the law this, and the Republic that, and Twelve bloody Tables."

Other papers in this section deal with the fate of military veterans in Rome (and "Rome"), with the role of the infamous *collegia* (which Arthur Pomeroy intriguingly sees as lower-class, low-intensity mirror of elite, political criminality), or with the personal relationship between the show's main characters (Octavian, Antony, Pullo, Vorenus). In all of these contributions, the interplay between high and low evident in the narrative of "Rome" is explicitly addressed.

The second section is devoted to question of gender and sexuality, which, when dealing with a series that was both widely known and widely criticised for its abundant nudity, seems apposite. The papers of this section include discussions of gendered depictions of revenge (Stacie Raucci) and hegemonial masculinity (Rachael Kelly), and are generally strong and well-theorised, profiting from individual author's famili-arity with, e.g., feminist film studies. I found Anna McCullough's paper on the series' decision to portray Octavian and Livia as willing participants in a sadomasochistic relationship particularly illuminating. This decision, which could – and, indeed, did – strike the viewer as a gratuitous inclusion of sexual themes for the titillation of the target audience, is here presented as a variation on the ancient anti-Augustan tradition. While, initially, the viewer is led to believe that Octavian is the dominant partner (see p. 133: "While discussing with Livia their upcoming marriage, Octavian informs her that he may on occasion beat her with his hands or a whip; but that she should not take this as any kind of rebuke or punishment, as he will do it for sexual pleasure, and not to discipline her for any wrongdoing. She acquiesces with a simple, 'Yes, sir.'"), the power dynamics are in later episodes subtly switched to a "domme-male sub relationship" (139), with Livia as the dominating part. Briefly touching on the depiction of Livia's prominent political role, her influence over Augustus, and her notoriety for intrigue and alleged murder both in Roman historiography and in later receptions, McCullough argues

that the dominant Livia in "Rome" is a variation of ancient tropes calibrated for modern TV audiences, as such a relationship "most clearly illustrates to modern audiences the control a woman has over a man. […] So, the writers are sending the same message as was communicated by the ancient anti-Augustan tradition – that Livia is in charge, and that this is a bad thing" (139).

There is much more of value and interest to discover in this fascinating, multi-perspective book than can be discussed here. The two papers highlighted were chosen to showcase the various approaches that were used in talking about "Rome" and the possible pay-off that is their result. While not every contribution rises to that level and, indeed, some may feel slightly redundant, depending on the reader's individual back-ground and interests, this is nevertheless a very worthwhile collection and an exemplary instance of 'doing' classical receptions in what has now become known as the "Golden Age of Television".

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