

BOOK REVIEW

Rome, Season Two: Trial and Triumph. Edited by MONICAS. CYRINO. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015. Pp. xviii + 256. Hardcover, \$120.00. ISBN 978-1-4744-0027-5.

Rome, Season Two: Trial and Triumph makes a welcome successor to Cyrino's previous edition on the HBO BBC series *Rome, Season One: History Makes Television*. This new volume demonstrates the same topical engagement with issues of gender, class, spectacle, and the modern reception of the ancient world. Some of the contributors to the previous volume are back but there are also many new voices, and a more international selection of contributors.

The volume is divided into two sections: "Part I: Power and Politics," comprising seven chapters, and "Part II: Sex and Status," with ten chapters. First, Angeline Chiu looks at the traditions surrounding the speeches of Brutus and Mark Antony at Julius Caesar's funeral. *Rome* bypasses the actual speeches themselves—instead, they are recounted after the event by the barfly Troilus, illustrating vividly how the low-brow audience found Brutus' 'cerebral' speech boring, but Antony's brandishing of Caesar's bloody garment irresistible. Lee Brice, who wrote about *Rome's* depiction of warfare for Cyrino's first volume, returns in chapter two with an examination of the challenges faced by army veterans, partly reflecting contemporary concerns. In chapter three Arthur Pomeroy foregrounds the issue of gangsterism in *Rome*, as he investigates how much the Aventine *collegia* owe to the Hollywood gangster movie (42–45).

Since *Rome* typically parallels characters of high and low social status, Margaret Toscano next seeks to explain why Pullo and Octavian ultimately prove to be survivors, while "it is the commonalities between Vorenus and Antony that doom them to their tragic deaths" (49).

Toscano suggests that compromise, across social class divisions, explains the survival of Pullo and Octavian at the expense of the other two. But is Vorenus really dead? In the penultimate scene of *Rome* Pullo tells Octavian that his old friend "didn't make it" (episode 22), but are we to believe him? After all, in the same scene we witness him deliberately lying about Caesarion's death. Caesar-

on, Toscano argues, is the ultimate “symbol of the merging of classes and the illusive nature of the class structure itself” (60), but he will only survive if he can put aside his past and desire for revenge.

In chapter five, Eran Almagor, treating the confused rhetorical tradition surrounding Cicero’s death, argues that the series’ version, with Pullo acting as executioner, is as valid as any other. Barbara Weiden Boyd’s chapter six, spoofing Tolkien’s *The Fellowship of the Ring* in its title, contrasts the rise of Octavian’s sphinx ring with the demise of Brutus’ ancestral gold ring (sporting a mysterious image) which is eventually stolen off his corpse. In chapter seven Lisa Maurice analyses the presentation of Jews and Judaism in *Rome*, which takes off in Season Two with the appearance of the assimilated Jew Timon’s religious, politically active brother Levi. Maurice shows that the Jews of *Rome* owe much to *Fiddler on the Roof*, signalled by Timon’s anachronistic birth name Tevye (93). After killing his brother in a scuffle, Timon/Tevye and his family leave Rome abruptly, their possessions in a cart, like the other Tevye and his family departing Anatevka (99). Nevertheless, Maurice suggests that Jews in *Rome* generally escape stereotyping, and Judaism itself, while linked to fundamentalism, is shown as ‘a moral force for ethical behavior’ (100).

Women and gender issues consume the lion’s (or lioness’) share of the volume. In chapter eleven Kirsten Day investigates how *Rome* simultaneously entertains and undermines the goddess/whore dichotomy. Day parallels women of high and low status, showing that not only do Atia and Servilia ‘mirror’ each other, but their rivalry is reflected in the clash between Eirene and Gaia (148). However, I disagree with Stacie Raucci that the revenge plots of the women of *Rome* season two reflect “prime-time drama” (106): Servilia’s *flagitatio* outside her rival’s house after her son Brutus’ death, and chilling curse of Atia prior to her own suicide by stabbing, are in the best tradition of the noble Stoic *Romana mors* (followed appropriately, by that of her body slave Eleni), is breathtakingly impressive (episode 19). Even Mark Antony comments, with thespian *double entendre*: “Now *that* is an exit!”

Antony Augoustakis observes in chapter nine how both Atia and Servilia ‘lose’ their sons and much of their power in the course of season two, with Servilia’s demise foreshadowing Atia’s downfall (123). Juliette Harrison shows how Atia’s increasingly sympathetic character attracts audience identification by the end of season two (165). In my view, a touching aspect of Atia’s ‘downfall’ not remarked on in this volume is that she still inspires loyalty in her estranged lovers: both Timon and Mark Antony act to protect her when her life is in danger, to

their own detriment or that of those close to them. Timon kills his own brother when he catches sight of Atia in the same procession as their target Herod (episode 20), and Mark Antony distracts Cleopatra from her plan to kill Atia when the latter arrives in Alexandria (episode 21). I agree with Augoustakis (126) and Harrison (165) that when Atia warns Livia, just before the start of Octavian's triumph, that "better women than yourself" have tried to destroy her, she is thinking primarily of her great, worthy rival Servilia, rather than, as Raucci would have it (113), Cleopatra, whose effigy will shortly rattle past.

Contemporary gender roles are harnessed by at least two of the authors to explain alterations in the historical tradition. Tackling Livia's historically untested domination of Octavian during sado-masochistic sex (128), Anna McCullough notes that while women's prominence in politics is no longer shocking, as in the ancient world, "total male submissiveness is still not acceptable" sexually (138). Therefore showing Livia dominating her husband in bed is nowadays the most efficient way to signal her ascendancy to power and to indict the *princeps* of wifely domination (138). In chapter thirteen, Rachael Kelly argues that James Purefoy's Mark Antony, while still failing in the performance of "hegemonic masculinity," now fails not due to effeminacy, but because of a boorish type of hyper-masculinity (180).

In chapter fourteen Gregory Daugherty continues his exploration of the intertextual influences on Cleopatra's presentation, and an Egyptologist, John J. Johnston, examines the visual depiction of the Ptolemaic court. The penultimate chapter is Alex McAuley's much-needed analysis of the anachronistic appearance of recreational drugs in the series: 'hemp' is a normal rite of passage in *Rome*, in keeping with modern mores, but 'harder' drugs like opium are shown to be far more addictive and corrupting (215). In the final chapter, Amanda Potter investigates the contemporary trend of online fanfiction inspired by the *Rome* series. In all, this is a stimulating volume which makes a worthwhile contribution to scholarship on the interface between gender issues, media and history.

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