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Shakespeare and the Mediterranean • 3

Antony and Cleopatra

Edited by Cristiano Ragni



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Shakespeare and the Mediterranean

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“The sea is mine”: Pompey the Pirate

LISA HOPKINS

Abstract

Although Pompey the Great makes only a peripheral or incidental appearance in most surviving early modern plays, there were others which are now lost in which he clearly figured more prominently, and his memory haunts both *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra*, in which his son Sextus is master of the sea. Young Pompey is clearly intended to evoke his father, but he is also strongly connected to his ship. There is an onstage boat in two scenes of the 1607 *The Tragedie of Caesar and Pompey*, and when Young Pompey tells the triumvirate “Aboard my galley I invite you all” (2.6.80) we are clearly invited to imagine the subsequent scene as taking place onboard. Ships were resonant objects in the early modern imaginary which could be used to figure a variety of ideas such as statecraft and survival in difficult circumstances. This essay argues that *Antony and Cleopatra* makes symbolic use of Pompey’s galley, which can be seen as both a ship of faith and also a ship of state, with Young Pompey himself illustrating how to lose both power and glamour.

KEYWORDS: Galleys; government; faith; ships; spectacle

I am not given to talking in the theatre, but whenever I go to see *Julius Caesar* and hear the question “Knew you not Pompey?” (1.1.38),¹ I always have an absurd urge to shout out “No, I’ve never met him. Do please tell me something interesting about him”. There are in fact quite a lot of interesting things to say about Pompey. He had five wives, only one short of Henry VIII. He conquered Jerusalem, purged the Mediterranean sea of pirates, and was awarded three triumphs for victories in three different continents before he was forty. According to Plutarch, he was nicknamed Alexander because of his resemblance to Alexander the Great (2017, 120), and he also achieved the soubriquet ‘the Great’ on his own account, which was more than either Julius Caesar or Augustus ever did. Above all he

¹ All references to *Julius Caesar* are from Shakespeare 2017 and will appear between brackets in the text.

came to stand for the high ideals of the Roman republic which Julius Caesar threatened and which Augustus destroyed.

Pompey the Great was a significant and resonant figure in Elizabethan and Jacobean England. Freyja Cox Jensen observes that

The clash between Caesar and Pompey afforded lessons both for individuals and the nation as a whole, and was presented as an admonitory tale by several writers seeking to draw attention to the political parallels between ancient history and the contemporary situation. The wars between the *populares*, led by Caesar, and Pompey's *optimates* were the most significant and protracted of the civic upheavals which afflicted Rome, and represented a state of affairs abhorrent to many English writers; Rome, with its martial traditions and bloody history, provided a warning for an England lately delivered from the threat of Spanish invasion and facing an uncertain future under an aged, heirless queen. (2012, 126)

Information about Pompey was available from a number of different sources, including Plutarch's *Lives*, but in contrast to Switzerland, where the French-language *Tragédie Nouvelle appelée Pompée* was published in Lausanne in 1579,² in most surviving English early modern plays he makes only a peripheral or incidental appearance, which is the reason I feel I've never met him. In *Henry V*, Fluellen says "If you would take the pains but to examine the wars of Pompey the Great you shall find, I warrant you, that there is no tiddle-taddle nor pibble-pabble in Pompey's camp" (4.1.69-72).³ In *Measure for Measure* the name of Pompey Bum is a deliberate incongruity; in *Love's Labour's Lost* Pompey features (unusually) as one of the Nine Worthies; and in both Fletcher's *The False One* and Elizabeth Cary's *The Tragedy of Mariam* we either hear of or see the fate of Pompey's severed head. Even in the anonymous 1607 *Caesar and Pompey* (admittedly also known as *Caesar's Revenge*) Pompey dies in Act 2, and although the full title of Kyd's *Cornelia* is *Pompey the Great his Fair Cornelia's Tragedy* Pompey himself is dead before the play begins.

² I'm very grateful to Anne-Marie Miller-Blaise for alerting me to this.

³ All references to *Henry V* are from Shakespeare 1995 and will appear between brackets in the text.

It is a different matter when it comes to plays we no longer have; Domenico Lovascio notes on *The Lost Plays Database* that “A storie of Pompey” was performed at Whitehall by the Children of Paul’s on Friday 6 January 1581, but the only hint of what it contained is that it required “one great citty, A senate howse and eight ells of dobbble sarcenet for curtens and .xviij. paire of gloves”. There are also lost plays about *Caesar and Pompey* and Lovascio suggests that Pompey may have figured too in the lost *Ptolemy* (2017); of those which survive, however, only Thomas Lodge’s *The Wounds of Civil War* and Chapman’s *Caesar and Pompey* really show us the man, and the latter of these was not published until 1631 and seems never to have been acted. Moreover, Lovascio notes that “in all the extant early modern English plays featuring him as a character, Pompey mainly serves as a foil for Caesar, and whenever his name appears in the title of a play, Caesar’s also does” (ibid.).

In *Antony and Cleopatra*, however, we hear quite a lot of Pompey considering that he is dead, because his son Young Pompey (in fact the younger of his two sons, but the play does not remind us of that) is a significant character. Young Pompey’s role is a relatively simple one for this complex play: he is master of the sea. The first we hear of him is when Antony tells Enobarbus that “. . . Sextus Pompeius / Hath given the dare to Caesar and commands / The empire of the sea” (1.2.190-2).⁴ Soon after this we hear that Young Pompey is on the move when Antony says,

Sextus Pompeius

Makes his approaches to the port of Rome;

Equality of two domestic powers

Breed scrupulous faction.

(1.3.46-9)

Thereafter Young Pompey is consistently associated with the sea and is also particularly connected with pirates, as when a Messenger announces,

⁴ All references to *Antony and Cleopatra* are from Shakespeare 1995 and will appear between brackets in the text.

Caesar, I bring thee word
 Menecrates and Menas, famous pirates,
 Makes the sea serve them, which they ear and wound
 With keels of every kind. Many hot inroads
 They make in Italy – the borders maritime
 Lack blood to think on't – and flush youth revolt.
 No vessel can peep forth but 'tis as soon
 Taken as seen; for Pompey's name strikes more
 Than could his war resisted.
 (1.1.47-56)

The link between the two “famous pirates” Menecrates and Menas and Young Pompey is only implicit and circumstantial at this stage, but we will soon find Menas and Young Pompey in company together and the Messenger's insinuation will be amply confirmed. Young Pompey's power seems to be more than can be accounted for by the use of brute force, however; not only does his name – or/and that of his father – “strike” apparently autonomously (to a greater extent indeed than if battle were given) but he seems to be almost symbiotically connected with “the borders maritime”, which are personified as “lack[ing] blood” as a result of Pompey's pet pirates “ear[ing]” and “wound[ing]” the sea. The Mediterranean seems suddenly to have turned into a quasi-human body, animated on its own account and animating too the lands which surround it, with Pompey presiding over what happens there as if he were a demigod or a *genius loci*.

Pompey himself contributes to the sense that he is a more-than-human figure when he declares,

I shall do well.
 The people love me, and the sea is mine;
 My powers are crescent, and my auguring hope
 Says it will come to th' full.
 (2.1.8-11)

Not only can he grandly announce that “the sea is mine”, he implicitly figures himself as the moon, the governor of tides, when he says that his “powers are crescent”, an image developed in the unspecified and otherwise grammatically incongruous “it” which “will come to

th' full". There is also a distinct sense of him as larger than life in a three-way exchange amongst Lepidus, Antony and Caesar:

LEPIDUS Time calls upon's.
 Of us must Pompey presently be sought
 Or else he seeks out us.
 ANTONY Where lies he?
 CAESAR About the Mount Misena.
 ANTONY What is his strength by land?
 CAESAR Great and increasing, but by sea
 He is an absolute master.
 (2.2.166-73)

Pompey is not only in a position to hunt down the three supposed masters of the civilised world; the description of him "l[ying]" "About the Mount Misena" suggests that he occupies a vast amount of space, enough in fact to encompass a mountain. Moreover, he is metaphorically growing, since his strength by land is increasing, while the sea is already completely under his control. At this stage of the play he does indeed cut a formidable figure.

On one level, Young Pompey is clearly there to evoke his father. When Antony first mentions him he explains specifically that

 Our slippery people,
 Whose love is never linked to the deserfer
 Till his deserts are past, begin to throw
 Pompey the Great and all his dignities
 Upon his son, who, high in name and power,
 Higher than both in blood and life, stands up
 For the main soldier; whose quality going on,
 The sides o' th' world may danger.
 (1.2.192-9)

Domenico Lovascio observes that "the very presence on stage of his younger son Sextus further strengthens the onstage ghostly presence of Pompey" (2020, 12), and there is also a potential, if puzzling, extradiegetic connection, since Young Pompey's first words are "If the great gods be just, they shall assist / The deeds of justest men" (2.1.1-2) and the title page of Chapman's *The Wars of Pompey and Caesar* bears the epigram, "Out of whose euentis is eucted this Proposition. /

Only a iust man is a freeman" (my emphasis).⁵ Chapman's play would not see print until long after Shakespeare's death, but Shakespeare seems to show knowledge of Chapman's translation of Homer in *Troilus and Cressida* (Wolfe 2015, 299), and he could conceivably have been aware of his Pompey and Caesar play, for whose composition J. E. Ingledew has proposed "a certain date between 1599 and 1607, and a probable date of 1605" (1961, 144). Young Pompey's use of "justest" might simply be intended as ironic preparation for his deeply cynical response to Menas' later suggestion of committing political assassination, but it is not quite beyond the bounds of possibility that it nods extradiegetically at a play about his father. What it certainly does do, however, is to establish him as a character who claims a moral as well as a political perspective, and this instantiates him as part of the thematic structure as well as the plot, as a contributor to the play's sustained enquiry into what it means to live well.

It is apparent from the outset that Young Pompey is a charismatic character. A messenger rather daringly warns Caesar that not only is Pompey "strong at sea", but it also appears that he is "beloved of those / That only have feared Caesar" (1.4.36-7). Young Pompey also seems to be a potentially crucial catalyst in the turbulent political situation, as we see when he says, "But how the fear of us / May cement their divisions, and bind up / The petty difference, we yet not know" (2.1.48-50).

He understands himself as someone who creates fear, and he also seems to be using the royal 'we', as if he were not only kingmaker but king. But as well as this public, political persona he also has a private one, and the two are headily imbricated when he addresses the triumvirate:

To you all three,
The senators alone of this great world,
Chief factors for the gods: I do not know
Wherefore my father should revengers want,
Having a son and friends, since Julius Caesar,
Who at Philippi the good Brutus ghosted,
There saw you labouring for him. What was't

5 All references to *The Wars of Pompey and Caesar* are from Chapman 1631 and will appear between brackets in the text.

That moved pale Cassius to conspire? And what
 Made the all-honoured, honest Roman, Brutus,
 With the armed rest, courtiers of beauteous freedom,
 To drench the Capitol, but that they would
 Have one man but a man?
 (2.6.8-19)

This speech starts out by being about private revenge, but it turns into an embryonic political manifesto as Young Pompey praises Brutus and calls his co-conspirators “courtiers of beauteous freedom” (provocatively enough given that he is talking to both the nephew and the best friend of the man they murdered). He sounds like a classic supporter of the Roman republic and would therefore have appeared to many in the original audience as honourable, disinterested and virtuous, but his reference to “one man [being] but a man” has the ironic potential to undercut his own status just as much as Caesar’s and does indeed herald a new phase of events in which he will no longer be like the waxing moon but rather like the waning one. Young Pompey could sustain the role of master of the sea while he did not attempt to be anything else, but he will prove no politician.

At the same time as Young Pompey’s personal and political power begins to decline, however, his allegorical and symbolic force increases. His father’s defining attribute in early modern drama was a ship. As we shall see, scenes on a (perhaps physically staged) ship play an important part in the anonymous 1607 *Caesar and Pompey*, which Leeds Barroll suggests is alluded to in *Antony and Cleopatra* (2005, 280), and John Taylor the Water Poet would later figure Pompey as metaphorically afloat when he wrote that

Fellow-SHIP: this ship was once of that estimation, that *Iulius Caesar* would have been content to have sayled in her, but that the great *Pompey* scorn’d any equality, and would be no meanes boord the Fellow-SHIP with any man (1630, li v).

In *Une Tragédie nouvelle appelée Pompée*, Cornelia plans a sacrifice in a boat and Pompey dies in one (2000, 1-60). Partly this reflects the strong association of the historical Pompey the Great with naval warfare and with the general control of the sea. In Chapman’s *The Wars of Pompey and Caesar* Crassus warns Caesar that

Pompeys navie,
 You know, lies houering all amongst those seas,
 In too much danger, for what ayde soeuer
 You can procure to passe your person safe.
 (D4r)

Caesar himself, by contrast, has only “poore vessels” (D4r) to which his aides advise him not to trust, and though a terrible storm is merely described we do see the master of a ship entering with sailors (E3r). At the beginning of Act 5 it is the sight of a lone ship that first warns Cornelia of Pompey’s failure (H3r). In *Antony and Cleopatra*, this imagery is echoed when Cleopatra recalls how “great Pompey / Would stand and make his eyes grow in my brow; / There would he anchor his aspect” (1.5.32-4). Here Pompey is figured as an actual ship for whom emotional attachment can be troped as an anchor.

But ships meant much more than simply sea power. Bronwen Wilson observes that ships were

potent images . . . for medieval and early modern Europeans. With diverse biblical, functional, philosophical, economic, mythological, and poetic associations, they appealed to the imaginations of pilgrims and travelers, artists and writers, merchants and rulers . . . Because ships stimulated thinking about the accumulation of wealth as well as risks of loss, ships were symbols for the vicissitudes of fortune. (2022, 2)

They could have other metaphorical uses too: they might for instance represent statecraft and survival in difficult seas, while Nicola Tallis notes that “As symbols of happiness, ships were a popular theme for jewels in this period” (2023, 92). Julia Fox and John Guy observe that in 1518 the inhabitants of Nantes gave Francis I

a silver-gilt ship weighing 16 lbs 8 oz. Judging by its weight, this was a table jewel meaning that his subjects were safe in storms so long as he was at the tiller. It was a motif as ancient as Plato’s use of the term ‘pilot of the ship of state’ to describe the leadership of the Athenian Republic (2023, Kindle loc. 1626)

Fox and Guy suggest that Anne Boleyn was remembering that ship when she gave Henry “a fair diamond’ set in a ‘ship in which a

solitary damsel is tossed about”, and perhaps such imagery is also echoed in the Hunsdon Jewel, a ship pendant said to have been given by Elizabeth I to her cousin Lord Hunsdon, whose mother was Anne Boleyn’s sister (2644; 2676). Elizabeth relied on Hunsdon to keep the Scottish Border safe (and also to control the activities of Shakespeare’s theatre company); a ship would have been an appropriate sign of the extent of her trust in him.

In literature in particular a ship is rarely just a ship; Lindsay Ann Reid, discussing the title page of John Awdelay’s *Fraternitye of Vacabondes* (1565), argues that it implicitly “aligns the Gravesend barge with the metaphorical ship of fools popularised in Sebastian Brant’s late fifteenth-century *Das Narrenschiff*” which she calls a “seminal work of humanist *narrenliteratur*” which had familiarised readers with the expectation that ships should be read allegorically (2024, 113). Finally John Guy notes that at the banquet following the wedding of Mary Queen of Scots to the Dauphin François

six mechanical ships had been constructed . . . The ships rocked from side to side and moved backwards and forwards. Painted canvas had been laid on the floor of the great hall to imitate the waves [and] As the clockwork ships navigated their way round the hall, a narrator explained how the scene depicted Jason . . . Henry II, he announced, was Jason. By capturing the Golden Fleece, he would conquer an empire and create a universal monarchy’ (2018, 88-9)

Clare Hunter suggests that ships figured in Mary’s marriage masque because the ship was “the Catholic symbol of safety in time of persecution” (2022, 42), and Alison Weir notes that in England too 1573 Henry Killigrew wrote to Lord Burghley about plans “to save the kingdom from shipwreck” (2016, 357). If shipwreck is something to be profoundly feared and ships are totems of security, to murder *in* a ship, as Menas suggests that Pompey should do, is terrible not only morally but allegorically.

On stage and in other kinds of dramatic entertainment, ships also allowed for spectacular visual effects. Joseph Ward notes that during the annual Lord Mayor shows the Thames served as “a ceremonial thoroughfare in . . . London, as its streets were far too narrow for the purpose” (2008, 58), and Maria Shmygol too observes its historically crucial role in elaborate civic festivities

(2022). The river offered ‘both a means of passage and a watery stage during occasional royal processions and annual Lord Mayor’s Day celebrations’ which might include “a vibrant flotilla of vessels accompanied by trumpets, drums, and the thundering gunfire of the galley-foist, as well as symbolic and allegorical devices” (13-14). Such scenes and entertainments were drawing on a long tradition. Meg Twycross notes the dramatic power of scenes in mediaeval plays involving a ship caught in a storm, whether Noah’s Ark or “Mary Magdalene’s Mediterranean galley” (2008, 53), and Daisy Black observes that

Records from plays staged in civic centres such as York and Chester suggest pageants of Noah’s ark were highly popular with audiences and among the most spectacular and expensive pageants to produce, calling for the expert knowledge of the cities’ craft guilds . . . That the device of the ship appears in other medieval performance genres attests to its success as a narrative and spectacular device. (2024, 73)

In particular, Black observes that “The late fifteenth-century Digby *Mary Magdalene* play has long been noted for its complex use of space and spectacle. Its use of a stage ship as a location for a tempest, as well as a space of birth, death, and rebirth, holds compelling similarities to that of *Pericles*” (ibid.) And there was a particular appropriateness in repurposing such stage effects for a play about Antony and Cleopatra: Joan Evans notes that Elizabeth I had a jewel showing Cleopatra standing in a ship (2003, 115). Elizabeth had been described by a Jesuit writer as “the English Cleopatra” (with Raleigh, on this occasion, envisioned as her Antony) (Lacey 1973, 54), and it has often been observed that there are some suggestive parallels between the two queens: Elizabeth cross-questioned the Scottish ambassador Melville over the appearance of Mary, Queen of Scots much as Cleopatra interrogates the messenger about Octavia (2.5.111-18) (Little 2000, 160-1), and both Cleopatra and Elizabeth express a self-identification with a milkmaid: “No more but e’en a woman, and commanded / By such poor passion as the maid that milks” (4.15.72-3) (Yachnin 1991, 7). The jewel’s coupling of Cleopatra with a ship is however particularly suggestive: here one queen uses another to suggest balance, statecraft, and the wherewithal to survive in rough seas.

At least one play about Pompey may have drawn on the resonances of an on-stage ship. In the introduction to her edition of the 1607 *The Tragedie of Caesar and Pompey*, Julia Daly argues that there are ‘a number of scenes that seem totally unnecessary but which may point to items of spectacle’, and suggests that there is a specific clue to one such moment at 1.5.59 when Pompey says “But in this ship remain”:

Suddenly, it becomes possible to view the scene with Cato not as a pointless exercise, but as a stalling mechanism. Cato is perhaps standing in front of a curtain whilst behind it frantic efforts are made to wrestle appropriate props and scenery into place to denote the location as being on a ship, or possibly there is an actually ship prop being put together or manhandled into position (2009)⁶

Daly notes that “There are a number of uses of ship imagery in the play, always connected with loss or confusion” (ibid.), including Titinius terming Rome a “gallant ship” (1.1.7) about to be wrecked, Antony’s reference to himself as a “crazèd bark . . . tossed in troubled seas, / Uncertain to arrive in wishèd port” (1.6.125-126) after his first meeting with Cleopatra, and Cassius figuring himself as one of those who “without stars do sail ’gainst stars and wind” (5.1.261), as well as Discord’s reference to Charon’s “old rotten boat” (5.1.379). Daly helps us see that a play which may look rather flat on the page could have come alive when staged.

Antony and Cleopatra is strongly interested in ships, as we see from the detailed description of Cleopatra’s barge (2.2.201 ff), and memories and resonances of scenes and spectacles involving ships haunt the moment when Young Pompey grandly announces to the triumvirate “Aboard my galley I invite you all” (2.6.80), setting up a scene which will be pivotal to both his own personal fortunes and the thematic structure of the play. E. R. Adair declares that “To the English mind the term ‘galley’ has always had an unpleaant savour. It is redolent of criminals and forced labour, of the corsairs of the

6 See Julia Daly, “What’s in a name?”, introduction to her online edition of *The Tragedie of Caesar and Pompey*, available at: https://extra.shu.ac.uk/emls/iemls/renplays/Caesars_Revenge_Introduction.htm (Last Access, 13 May 2024).

Mediterranean” (1920, 497). Galleys were also associated with the Ottoman Empire: George Gascoigne’s 1573 *A Devise of a Maske for the Right Honourable Viscount Montacute* speaks of

The thundering fame which blew about the world so wide,
 How that the christian enmie, the Turke that prince of pride,
 Addressed had his power, to swarme vppon the seas,
 With gallies, foists, and such like ships, wel armde at all assays.
 (383)

However Adair goes on to note that “for a considerable time the English fleet had one or more galleys attached to it, and these were true galleys in the Mediterranean sense of the term”, including Henry VIII’s *Galley Subtile*; Henry also tried to borrow or buy ten more galleys from the Emperor Charles V, but the Emperor was unable to spare them because he needed them to fight the Ottoman Turks (1920, 497). Elizabeth I built or planned five further galleys in the last years of her reign, at least one of which was constructed at Deptford, a village within easy reach of London, and two of which were specifically intended for the defence of the Thames and would have been still new when *Antony and Cleopatra* was written (505). However galleys were high maintenance and demanded a lot of manpower, as we see when Caesar observes of Antony that “his best force / Is forth to man his galleys” (4.11.2-3), and by the reign of James I “The four galleys were a source of constant expense, one or the other being in continual need of repair, rebuilding, or shed protection from the weather. They were never used” (Oppenheim 1892, 489). The audience, then, could be expected to be familiar with galleys but also to be aware that they were not really suited to English waters; Pompey’s possession of one marks him as a man who sails in other seas as well as being a vessel in which we might historically expect to find a Roman naval commander.

But galleys, like other ships, were not only literal vessels but also metaphorical ones. Andrew Hadfield observes that

Shakespeare was undoubtedly alluding to the political issues raised by the story of the last days of the Roman republic in *Antony and Cleopatra*: but how, exactly? A clue is provided in 2.7, the galley scene, which may have been inspired by James’s

meeting with his brother-in-law, Christian of Denmark, aboard a ship in 1606. (2005, 224)

James Shapiro calls the Danish king's visit to London "as rich a source in its own way as Plutarch's *Life of Antony*", and it included a banquet described hilariously by John Harington as a scene of unmitigated debauchery (2015, 293). James was fond of ship images: a ship featured on the back of the gold ryal coins which he issued when he became king of England, and material celebrations of his wedding to Anna of Denmark appear to have included a church-ship model which may have originally hung in South Leith.⁷ Both of these images were clearly intended to trope the king as safely steering the ship of state, but the onboard festivity of 1606 was unfortunately marred by a diplomatic contretemps in which the Danish king apparently (though perhaps inadvertently) implied that the Earl of Nottingham, Lord High Admiral and commander of the English fleet against the Armada, was a cuckold (Coates 2014), making the staging of an important meeting on board a ship look like a rather risky tactic in a play written shortly afterwards, and one which may well have prepared the audience for an edgy atmosphere.

The scene is indeed edgy, but it nearly becomes even more than that when Menas suggests to Young Pompey,

These three world-sharers, these competitors,
 Are in thy vessel. Let me cut the cable,
 And when we are put off, fall to their throats.
 All then is thine.
 (2.7.71-4)

Pompey's reaction to this proposal is the play's pithiest and most cynical exploration of what is really involved in statecraft:

Ah, this thou shouldst have done
 And not have spoke on't. In me 'tis villainy;

⁷ See the entry "James VI and I" on the website of the National Museums Scotland, available at: <https://www.nms.ac.uk/explore-our-collections/stories/scottish-history-and-archaeology/james-vi-and-i/> (Last Access, 13 May 2024)

In thee't had been good service. Thou must know
 'Tis not my profit that does lead mine honour;
 Mine honour, it. Repent that e'er thy tongue
 Hath so betrayed thine act. Being done unknown,
 I should have found it afterwards well done,
 But must condemn it now. Desist and drink.
 (2.7.74-81)

Hadfield notes that Menas' proposal to Pompey "has no obvious source", so appears to be solely Shakespeare's invention, and he also argues that Pompey's

code of "honour", one that is rooted in a comprehension of public appearance not ethical behaviour . . . would have reminded the audience of the dying cult of honour of their own aristocracy rather than the culture of the republic, making Pompey more akin to Achilles and his macho posturing in *Troilus and Cressida* than Cicero or the first Brutus. (Hadfield 2005, 226)

This is, then, less a scene telling us a truth about the past than one which is dropping a distinctly dark hint about the present and about what is happening on the Jacobean ship of state rather than on the long-gone Roman one; as so often on the early modern stage, a history play proves to be a thrillingly effective vehicle for comment on contemporary politics. But it is also important to note that although Young Pompey is not very good, he is equally not very bad: he does not tell Menas to go ahead and does display residual, if not entirely convincing, regard for *some* form of honour, even if we might not find it the most desirable kind. The man who rules the middle sea is also in the middle between Antony (all ideals and rhetoric) and Octavius Caesar (all pragmatism and power).

Hadfield's observation that Pompey's version of honour might have reminded the audience of "the dying cult of honour of their own aristocracy" is particularly suggestive because any such reminder might also have brought with it recollection of a particular figure who had been strongly associated with the late Elizabethan version of the honour cult: Robert Devereux, earl of Essex, who along with his friend Philip Sidney subscribed to a "chivalric romanticism . . . that was intended to fortify Elizabethan men . . . against the

vicissitudes of fickle fortune” and was founded on a “synthesis of wisdom, honour and religion” (Wood 2013, 30-1). Freyja Cox Jensen notes that

Perhaps the most famous instance of Pompey’s history being recycled and harnessed to a new objective is Nicholas Hilliard’s Elizabethan miniature, *Young Man Among Roses*, painted sometime between 1585 and 1595. Here, the idea of Pompey is utilised as a symbol of greatness and constancy. The motto at the top of the painting, “*Dat poenas laudata fides*”, taken from Lucan’s *Pharsalia*, refers to Pompey’s fidelity, not only to his wives, but to the republic. Robert Devereux, the subject of the portrait, is thus identified with Pompey, assimilating to himself the Roman’s military heroism and trueness of heart, as well as his professed love for his queen. (2012, 131)

Although Catharine Macleod notes that the identification as Essex is uncertain, she concurs with Cox Jensen’s overall decoding of the image, translating the motto as “Praised loyalty is punished” (2019, 169), a sentiment to which the self-pitying Essex would indeed have been likely to subscribe. Shakespeare was clearly interested in Essex, to whom he seems to refer in *Henry V* and whom he may also have been remembering in *Coriolanus*, since Essex was directly compared to Coriolanus in a sermon preached by Bishop William Barlow in the aftermath of the Rebellion (Headlam Wells 2000, 403). If the Young Man Among Roses was indeed the earl Young Pompey looks even more like a contemporary political figure rather than a classical one, but whoever is represented in the painting it confirms the continuing currency of the story of Pompey the Great and by implication that of his son.

Young Pompey is not his father, however, and although he has previously traded on his father’s name, he now begins to lose its power and protection as Menas says “Thy father, Pompey, would ne’er have made this treaty” (2.6.82-3). Menas has earlier warned that “Pompey doth this day laugh away his fortune” (2.2.106-7), casting Young Pompey as not only a political failure but as someone who does not even achieve tragic status: his father, Pompey the Great, may have had a great fall, but Young Pompey merely laughs his way into obscurity. Although we briefly hear that Caesar has made “New wars” against him (3.4.4) and that Lepidus has joined

in (3.5.4), he is simply no longer worth our attention, for he does not appear again and his offstage death, noted only in passing, both counterpoints and is diminished by the extraordinarily detailed attention given to the deaths of Antony and Cleopatra. The way in which the death of Young Pompey is reported also exculpates Antony, without any historical warrant for doing so: as Yasmin Arshad comments, Shakespeare “suppressed Antony’s part in Pompey’s assassination” (2019, 189), and indeed presents him as grieved by it when Eros declares that Antony is

walking in the garden, thus, and spurns
 The rush that lies before him; cries, ‘Fool Lepidus!’,
 And threats the throat of that his officer
 That murdered Pompey.
 (3.5.16-19)

That is all we hear of the matter; not only do we learn merely in passing that Young Pompey has been murdered, the man who did it does not even warrant a name. From being master of the Mediterranean Young Pompey has been relegated to merely a footnote.

Although Young Pompey and his actions have ultimately proved to make no difference to the course of events, however, they may still affect how the audience feels about them. Survival is not the only thing that counts; the fact that Antony and Cleopatra also die does nothing to diminish their glamour (indeed it arguably enhances it) and Menas’ question to Pompey “Wilt thou be lord of all the world?” (2.7.62) evokes not only the question of political power but also the temptation of Jesus, confirming the presence of an understated but suggestive eschatological element in the play. As I have argued at greater length elsewhere, Cleopatra is associated strongly with the Biblical, and so too is Antony when at his noblest and when closest to her values (Hopkins 2008, ch. 5). In particular, there is a host of suggestive allusions to the nativity story. Early in the play, Charmian beseeches the soothsayer, “Good now, some excellent fortune! Let me be married to three kings in a forenoon and widow them all. Let me have a child at fifty, to whom Herod of Jewry may do homage” (1.2.27-30). Antony recurs to motifs associated with the nativity when he excuses himself to Octavius Caesar by saying,

“Three kings I had newly feasted” (2.2.80); Cleopatra pretends the fish she catches are Antony as if she were one of the fishers of men (2.5.10-15); and it is suggested that Cleopatra, like the Pharaoh of the Bible, might be stricken by leprosy (3.10.9-11). Other things also point firmly in the same direction, such as the constant references to trinities and triples and Antony’s caution that Cleopatra will have to “find out new heaven, new earth” (1.1.17). There is an obvious parallel between Enobarbus and Judas – both master-leavers who subsequently regret it and commit suicide – and a less strongly marked but equally suggestive one between the last feast on the night of Cleopatra’s birthday and the Last Supper. Antony apparently recollects the Psalms when he speaks of the hill of Basan (3.13.126-8), and Caesar’s assurance that “The time of universal peace is near” (4.6.5-7) also gestures in the same direction.⁸ Moreover, Arthur Little considers Caesar to be represented as Christ-like and Cleopatra to be both like and unlike Mary – “nurturing her asp, she scripts herself as the *Madonna lactans*” (2000, 157-8). Moreover, Barbara C. Vincent points out that

[i]n 4.4, Antony crosses the threshold into the serious comic realm of Christianity. This scene is repeatedly concerned with meaning . . . [Antony’s] meaning is lost on his immediate, pre-Christian audience; only his off-stage audience can find meaning in these biblical *topoi*. (1994, 234)

Shakespeare’s emphasis on the synchronicity of classical and Christian stories in this play is not found in the other contemporary or near-contemporary treatments of the Cleopatra story by Samuel Daniel, Samuel Brandon or Mary Sidney. It does, however, tap into a difference pointed out by Paul Yachnin between James and Elizabeth:

The propagandistic contexts of the two monarchs were opposed: James’s was largely classical, Elizabeth’s mostly biblical. In its own struggle between classical and biblical modes of expression, *Antony and Cleopatra* registers and critiques this competition between the politicized allusive fields associated with Elizabeth and James. (1991, 14)

⁸ For comment on the Messianic resonances of this, see for instance Sohmer 1999, 122.

Moreover, the play itself suggests that the Biblical is its preferred explanatory mode, definitively superseding the classical. John F. Danby suggests that its Egypt is “the Egypt of the biblical glosses: exile from the spirit, thralldom to the flesh-pots, diminution of human kindness” (1994, 52). The suggestion, therefore, is that the Biblical – the mode associated with Elizabeth and by extension England – is superior to the classical, the mode associated with James and his preferred avatar Augustus, the Octavius Caesar of this play. If we thus view the events of the play *sub specie aeternatis* they take on a very different complexion. Although Enobarbus may resolve to leave Antony because “thou art so leaky / That we must leave thee to thy sinking” (3.13.67-8) he comes to repent it just as Judas repented forsaking Jesus; by contrast, “’tis paltry to be Caesar” (5.2.2).

Antony and Cleopatra, then, draws on a tradition of allegorical uses of ships both on and offstage to make Young Pompey a character with greater thematic heft than his ultimately unsuccessful political career might seem to warrant. When he invites the rulers of the empire on board his galley, he paves the way for a stage picture which might seem like an innocent reminder of the historical period in which the play is set, but which smuggles in not only a general discourse about ships of state but also hints at biblical as well as classical overtones and potentially reminds the audience about some uncomfortable recent episodes in the homelife of their own dear king. Ultimately the way Pompey sails his ship through the Mediterranean becomes a metaphor for the way we – and our rulers – all sail our own ships and try to keep them afloat in hazardous waters.

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