

Shakespeare's England, Shakespeare's Rome: National Anxiety and Imperial Nostalgia

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It was in the nineteenth century, which we now call the heyday of European imperialism, when historians shifted their focus from historiography to philosophy of history. Under the legacy of Kantian transcendentalism and Hegelian dialectics, which saw spirituality and teleology as the essential mechanisms of human civilization, nineteenth-century European historians conceived history to be a linear process of progression and evolution. Such proclivity toward totalizing abstraction, in conjunction with the dominant ideology of colonialism and imperialism, inevitably entailed the metamorphosis of European history and culture into History and Culture, producing a plethora of metahistorical narratives with overarching designs and self-sufficient rules. It was during this emergence of a Eurocentric historicism that the Renaissance was brought to the fore of historical hermeneutics viewed as an age of departure from 'the Dark Ages,' and as a center of reference in the progress of European

civilization, wherein the Renaissance signified the liberation of humanity from the tyranny of Christian monotheism and the unprecedented expansion of intellectual and cultural horizons. Just as Greco-Roman antiquity had been for Renaissance Europeans an object of nostalgic reminiscence bearing images of the golden age, so the Renaissance for nineteenth-century Europeans stood for what Jacob Burckhardt has called "the discovery of the world and of man" or "the revival of antiquity" (104, 171).

This idealistic conception of the Renaissance, however, derived purely from aesthetic and apolitical modalities, ignoring that the Renaissance witnessed the genesis of European colonial expansionism. In a sense, the definition of the Renaissance as an age of 'discovery' and 'revival' is also suggestive in light of European imperial history. For the Renaissance signaled at once Europe's 'discovery' (and invention) of the Other World and the 'revival' of European hegemony ruptured since the decline of the Roman Empire. It is indisputable that in European history the Middle Ages were 'dark' not simply in intellectual and cultural but also in socioeconomic and military terms. When compared with developments in other continents, Europe had nothing like the population and wealth of Indian or China whose cities made their European counterparts look like mere villages. Europe's long-distance trade with Asia and Africa was under the control of non-European forces; and the arms of Christendom were rarely a match for such external enemies as Mongolian invaders and the Muslim Turks (Scammell 1-15). It was not until the late fifteenth century that Europe began to emerge from its medieval backwardness and to pave the way for its rise to world hegemony. The beginnings of European overseas expansion were unimpressive. By the end of the sixteenth century, however, Europe was emerging as the center of maritime economy that mediated the intercontinental exchanges of natural resources and labour. The Renaissance, then, was for

Europe an age of reconnaissance that harbingered the Europeanization of the world. As Christopher Hill notes that "one man's patriotism can be another man's imperialist aggression" (163), the history of 'discovery' and 'revival' for Europeans meant that of invasion and dispossession for the non-Europeans. To cite Immanuel Wallerstein's analysis, the Renaissance was the age that laid the foundations of 'the capitalist world economy' or 'the modern world system' wherein the metropole incorporated and exploited the periphery by retaining unequal exchanges and by imposing a particular pattern of specialization with the result of underdevelopment and dependency on the part of the periphery (225-97).

For England, too, the Renaissance was an age of reconnaissance for its overseas expansion. But it is not right to say that during the Renaissance England launched colonial enterprise on a large scale. Compared with other European nations including Portugal, Spain, and the Netherlands, England was quite slow in its development as substantial colonial force. Although Tudor England at home achieved the consolidation of its absolute monarchy even before the end of the sixteenth century, the centralizing energy of the nation was not immediately transmitted to its engagement in foreign affairs. While the Iberian forerunners were forming a network of transatlantic colonialism so as to enjoy exclusive possession of mineral wealth from Africa and America, the English whose minds were busy over domestic politics and 'internal colonialism' in the Celtic fringe could only discover timber and fish around the northeast corner of Europe.¹⁾ Even the voyages and circumnavigations made by the English were not enough to set an optimistic climate for westward enterprises.

1) The term 'internal colonialism' is from Michael Hechter's book, *Internal Colonialism: The Celtic Fringe in British National Development, 1536-1966* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975).

The initial attempt at colonial settlement in Virginia, which was done some sixty-five years after the Spanish had conquered Mexico, ended in a failure. As Jeffrey Knapp points out, England's colonial backwardness is obvious when we note that Columbus's first letter describing his discoveries was circulating throughout the continent by 1494, but never found an English publisher: "the first references to the New World printed in England occur not in economic, political, or even geographical tracts but in imaginative literature"(18-22).

As early as 1534 the parliamentary statute proclaimed England to be an 'empire' and Henry VIII 'the supreme head' of both church and state. The implicit objective in this assertion of national sovereignty was the exclusion from England of papal intervention and influence; the term 'empire' meant a sovereign, independent nation-state, having little to do with the national ambition for colonial expansion (Crowson 102, 108). It was only a century later that the declaration of England as an 'empire' was slowly being materialized in a different sense. In other words, Tudor England was an 'empire' only in name; the legitimate form of English empire beyond European boundaries began to take shape only after the inauguration of the Stuarts, but initially in a tentative and unimposing way. Given such shaky beginnings of English colonialism, Knapp is right to argue that during the Renaissance England was "an empire nowhere," an empire existing only in the imaginary cartography of English literary writers like Thomas More, Philip Sidney, Edmund Spenser, and William Shakespeare. Faced with the gaps between the rising desire for overseas expansion and the poor material conditions of the small island, contemporary English writers had little choice but to confine their expansionism to "an indirection variously conceived as unworldliness, superstition, error, incapacity, introversion, distraction, or disgrace"; in the association of the New World with idleness and folly and in the juxtaposition of "Spain, Empire, and gold on the

one hand and England, island, and poetry on the other," they helped make many of the English "more isolationist, more absorbed in their island as the trifling material index of England's spiritual power" (7-9). As a consequence, England's troubled colonialism only completed a larger picture of national isolation, whereby "the English could see their island as much excluding the world as being excluded by it" (4).

This belatedness of England's overseas expansion is the reason why many historians hesitate to use the terms 'the English empire' and 'English imperialism' in their studies on English colonialism during the sixteenth and even seventeenth centuries. When we take into consideration a wide range of discursive practices in connection with colonial expansion, however, 'the Renaissance' and 'English imperialism' are not incompatible terms. Imperialism, by nature, involves not merely the material practices of expanding and ruling physical space but the discursive practices of rationalizing and empowering those material practices. England was a good example. During the Renaissance, English imperialism was characterized by the awkward meshing between material backwardness and discursive proliferation. Though left behind the Iberian countries and the Dutch in the colonization of the non-European lands, the English were not laggard in making an empire of their own by a variety of cultural representations. Under the aegis of Tudor absolutism, English navigators, cartographers, chroniclers, poets, and dramatists were all involved in the production of nationalist and imperialist discourses. Such projects of empire-building 'within' the realm of discourse against the backdrop of material infeasibility rather intensified English isolationist spiritualism; but paradoxically, they helped to turn the English into imperialists by making them recognize the limitations of a material investment in little England alone (Knapp 7). Not surprisingly, the dominance of English anti-materialism was transitional, not lasting, and its undercurrent was envy and

anxiety rather than indifference. The English highlighted the spiritual greatness of their small island to disguise its material littleness. But the result was the stimulation of a strong desire for imperial ascendancy.

Like other emerging absolute states in early modern Europe, Elizabethan England was in need of constructing a new national and cultural identity. During the nascent phase of national consolidation and imperial formation, writing England was the most ideologically demanding project in every field of cultural representation. According to Richard Helgerson, however, the English rhetoric of nationhood at the outset was colored by the sense of self-alienation and self-abnegation. Despite its overwhelming aspiration for identity-making, England began its national self-fashioning with "a sense of barbarism, with the recognition of the self as the despised other, and then moved to repair that damaged self-image with the aid of forms taken from a past that was now understood as both different from the present and internally divided" (22-23). Helgerson locates the past in either "Greco-Roman antiquity or the middle ages that provided the recognized models of civility and barbarity against which English writings were inevitably measured" (23).

That the self-articulation of Elizabethan England arose from cultural self-alienation holds true as Helgerson contends, but that the models of cultural touchstone were taken simultaneously from the ancient and the medieval on equal terms is an historical oversimplification. For it is obviously Rome that had the most pervasive influence on cultural representation and social ethos during the Renaissance. An extended study by Peter Bondanella on the legacy of Rome demonstrates that the Middle Ages or even ancient Greece presented no serious challenge until the eighteenth century to the cultural hegemony of Rome in Western civilization (21). Until the dawn of the Italian Renaissance in the mid-fourteenth century, Roman culture embodying a secular and pagan

vision of the world were largely disregarded or superseded by the otherworldly and transcendent culture of medieval Christianity (5, 23); but afterwards the city was exalted to the extent that its values, norms, and institutions became the ultimate models of Western civilization. To use Bondanella's words, the history of Rome has been metamorphosed into a myth, a form of secular religion, which has been inextricably connected to "the historical, philosophical, and human problems of change, process, growth, evolution, revolution, decline, decay, corruption, and death"; this protean and inexhaustible myth of Rome is "not so much a relic to be venerated as it is a flexible and limitless source for self-expression, a common heritage which has met the needs of successive generations, influenced the styles of different periods, and inspired widely different forms of artistic expression" (1, 4).

Shakespeare's England, too, came under the sway of Roman myth-making. Located at the periphery of the Mediterranean cultural circle, England engaged much later than the continental countries like Italy in the cultural excavation of the ancient city, just as it was more laggard than the Iberian forerunners in the colonization of the New World. Late medieval English culture was permeated by ecclesiastical scholasticism that viewed Rome merely as a product of worldly vanity or accorded it a place in a Providential scheme as in St. Augustine's *The City of God* (Dean 85, 91). While Francesco Petrarca in Italy was leading the revival of the secular spirit and culture by placing Rome at the center of humanist historiography, Geoffrey Chaucer was the only poet in England who transcended the limitation of the English intellectual climate; but even Chaucer's use of Roman history, overshadowed by a Christian gloss and moralization, remained marginal to other concerns (Dean 86).

The relatively late resurgence of Roman history and legend in England, nevertheless, was quite overwhelming. Across a wide range of discursive

practices including drama, the revival of Roman history created a new social ethos appropriate for an age of upheaval and expansion like sixteenth-century England. In English secular culture the very word 'Rome' was an ubiquitous signifier to stimulate the imaginations of Renaissance Englishmen. No other mode of cultural representation was more preoccupied than drama with Roman history and its mythological implications. Studies on the history of English drama show that the appearance of Roman plays on the English stage was most frequent during the Renaissance.²⁾ Conscious of the tension between Roman myth and English reality, Shakespeare's contemporary playwrights appropriated Roman legacies in aggressive and multifaceted ways. They found materials for plays from every conceivable source, constantly experimenting and crossing generic boundaries. Beneath this enthusiastically acquisitive attitude toward Rome was, as Robert S. Miola indicates, a utilitarian impulse which aimed at "establishing instructive parallels between ancient history and contemporary politics." As a result, Miola says, "English classicism came to be ahistorical and eclectic in character, little concerned with understanding the past on its own terms." The constantly raised question about Shakespeare's anachronisms ever since Ben Jonson's suspicion can be thus explained in this context of the age's indiscriminating immersion in the Roman world at the cost of historical

2) Such leading writers and dramatists as Marlowe, Lodge, Kyd, Middleton, Munday, Heywood, Massinger, Jonson, Webster, Chapman, and Fletcher wrote Roman plays for the public theatre. Clifford Ronan, author of the most recent and comprehensive study of Roman plays in English Renaissance drama, lists forty-three extant vernacular Roman plays 1585-1635, including academic and closet drama (165-69). See also Alfred Harbage, *Annals of English Drama, 975-1700*; Walter Wilson Greg, *A List of English Plays Written Before 1643 and Printed Before 1700*; Terence P Logan and Denzell S. Smith, eds., *The Predecessors of Shakespeare*, and *The Later Jacobean and Caroline Dramatists*. For a list of Roman Plays produced during Shakespeare's times, see Dean (108).

accuracy (8-10).

What did Rome mean for Shakespeare? Why did Shakespeare's interest in Rome encompass the whole of his dramatic career? These questions have appeared almost without exception in any discussion of Shakespeare's Roman plays; but there has been no scholarly consensus on the answers. This may be so because Shakespeare did not picture the Roman world in a single color. As T. J. B. Spencer remarks, what Shakespeare presents in his Roman plays is Roman worlds, not a Roman world (27). Likewise, Vivian Thomas argues that Shakespeare portrays "a changing Rome" wherein Shakespeare from play to play attaches relative importance to different central values (1). Paul A. Cantor bases his study of Shakespeare's Rome upon the assumption that "no single attitude toward Rome prevailed in the English Renaissance, for many of the great intellectual conflicts of the age had a way of focusing precisely on Rome as a point of dispute" (17). Miola also pays attention to the equivocality of the city of Rome Shakespeare depicts: "It is sometimes metaphor, sometimes myth, sometimes both, sometimes neither. Despite its metamorphoses, Rome maintains a distinct identity. Constructed of forums, walls, and Capital, opposed to outlying battlefields, wild, primitive landscapes, and enemy cities, Rome is a palpable though ever-changing presence. The city serves not only as a settling for action, but also as central protagonist" (17).

Such a wide range of Romanness in Shakespeare resulted from the social and cultural matrix of the public theatre in his times. Koppelia Kahn offers a lucid analysis that the public theatre in Renaissance England, "because of its relative novelty as a cultural institutions and its heterogeneous audience," was a battleground in which a variety of conflicting discourses encountered and negotiated with each other; it was a radically discursive field from humanistic scholarship or historiography that had a set of established canon like the one

on which the Latin curriculum was founded. This means that "the public theatre, both as an art and as a social milieu, allowed Shakespeare wide latitude in refashioning Romanness" (8-9). In making plays out of Roman history and legend, in 'translating' Rome from a humanistic discourse to the public theatre, then, Shakespeare was much more on his own than he was with regard to English history.

What all these critics suggest is the difficulty in articulating in a single sentence the political and ideological signification of Shakespeare's Rome. Simultaneously, a common view critics share is that Shakespeare's Rome is more than an ancient city remote in time from Shakespeare's England, a city Shakespeare reconstructs only to probe into the universal and transhistorical aspects of human nature. Thomas, for instance, argues that although the Roman plays may legitimately be regarded as tragedies, they are made distinctive by peculiarities of political identity, institutions and conflicts: "if the identity of England as a place and symbol is clearly articulated in Shakespeare's ten history plays, the sense of Rome as place and symbol is even more powerfully articulated in all four Roman plays" (10). Indeed, Rome is not of peripheral interest in Shakespeare's Roman plays as Samuel Johnson and his followers contended,³⁾ but it is itself the main object of Shakespeare's representation. But this is not to say that Shakespeare's underlying concern in the Roman plays is the ancient city itself. The reason for Shakespeare's foregrounding of Rome lies not only in cultural curiosity but also in ideological needs; Rome is symbolically and ideologically significant because it provided Shakespeare's contemporary Englishmen with an historical mirror for the construction of new political morality. Roman plays, as Paul Dean astutely remarks, are striking examples

3) See Samuel Johnson, *Works*, Vol VII (65-66), and John Palmer, *Political Characters of Shakespeare* (308-9).

of the Renaissance thinking of "Rome and England in tandem"; in his Roman plays Shakespeare uses "Roman history not as a source of scholarly footnotes to English history, not as a quarry for decorative simile or parallel incident, but as a medium through which English history can be interpreted" (102-3). To cite Kahn's phrase, "Englishness appears in Roman settings, and Romanness is Anglicized." Rome was "a model for England's present and future" (4).

This essay on Shakespeare's Rome and Romanness also purports to place "Rome and England in tandem," namely, to situate the plays in the historical circumstances of Shakespeare's England. Under the assumption that the Roman plays, which are said to be the most political of Shakespeare's works, were responses to the political and ideological climate of his age, this essay pays attention to the historicity of the ancient city and its social ethos within the context of Elizabethan and Jacobean contemporaneity. It means that the essay is not concerned with the historical accuracy of the Roman world constructed by a 'lowbrow' playwright who had little access to original Latin and Greek sources. Shakespeare's Rome is removed at least three times from the 'reality' that ancient Romans experienced in heterogeneous and remote circumstances. Shakespeare's main source for the Roman plays is, after all, Thomas North's English translations of Jacques Amyot's French translations of Plutarch's *Lives*. The problem is not only that the Greek biographer relied heavily on the propagandistic devices of stereotyping and mythologizing but also that the translators and the playwright of the sixteenth century modified and distorted Roman history to the needs of their own times. Quite arguably, Rome was a prototype of empire for Shakespeare's England that was an emerging absolute state preoccupied with national and imperial aspirations. If Shakespeare's Rome was a symbol of cultural and political greatness, Shakespeare's England might have been a would-be successor to that Roman greatness. For the Elizabethans,

"Roman history was a discourse that one could not afford to ignore.... one had to make use of it (Burt 112), for "the Roman past was not simply a past but the past" (Hunter 95), legendarily linked to the moment in which Britain itself emerged into history. It is no accident, then, that the myth of Roman-British connection, formulated in Arthurian medieval romance, was deliberately fostered and circulated by the Tudor monarchy, especially after Henry's accession to the throne. In the appropriation of Henry's British ancestry and of the belief that Britain had been founded by Brutus, the English came to define themselves as legitimate descendants of the Roman empire.⁴⁾

In this respect, J. L. Simmons's contention that Shakespeare's Rome is "a world elsewhere" illuminates only half of truth. For Simmons, Shakespeare's Rome is essentially "a pagan world in which the characters must perforce operate with no reference beyond the Earthly City," a world of here and now characterized by moral uncertainty wherein fair can be foul and foul be fair, and consequently, the Roman heroes are not given a moment or the possibility of metaphysical recognition (3-15). Likewise, John Alvis takes a Christian view to suggest that what distinguishes Shakespeare's Roman plays from his major tragedies is a secular, Machiavellian vision according to which protagonists seek virtue in public reputation and self-glorification within political realms rather than in moral sanctions and universal standards of rectitude (124-25). Such an emphasis on the lack of Christian ethics in Shakespeare's Rome leads Alvis to

4) Some Tudor chroniclers like Richard Crafton and William Camden were great pains to deny an alternative myth explaining the name and origin of Britain that traces them not to virile and valorous men but to aggressive and murderous women, the thirty-two daughters of Diocletian, king of Syria, who all slew their husbands on the same night. To punish them, their father turned them out to sea; they arrived in England and called it Albion after the eldest sister, Albina. They then cohabited with devils and gave birth to giants and monsters, the first natives of Britain (Kahn 23).

conclude that "the Roman plays imply a critique of the glory-enamored soul, a skeptical judgment upon Roman claims to the title of history's noblest regime, and a challenge directed toward Renaissance enthusiasts to rethink the grounds of their admiration for things Roman. Neither faith, nor reason, nor taste can find in Shakespeare's Rome a model worthy of veneration" (134).

These exclusively Christian interpretations of Shakespeare's Roman plays, however, ignores what Shakespeare's contemporaries regarded as the most compelling aspect of the ancient city. Given the English preoccupation with national self-identification and imperial ascendancy, Shakespeare's ideological stance toward Rome might be rarely "skeptical," if not naively all-embracing. The Rome with which Shakespeare's England was believed to be racially and ideologically connected was not "a world elsewhere," a morally corrupt pagan empire, but the mother of a heroic people whose imperial aspirations were justified by her precedent (Dean 92). For Shakespeare's Englishmen, in brief, Rome was at once an Other and a displaced self, at once a temporally remote world and a model for England's self-representation. Shakespeare's Roman plays exemplified the displaced projection of Englishness, namely, of what the England ought to be. If Shakespeare's English history plays were committed to nationalist propaganda to display the passing of the nation from the turbulent darkness of the Wars of the Roses into the promising light under the Tudor reign, his Roman plays were responses to the proliferation of nationalist and imperial sentiments arising after the defeat of the Armada and the appearance of Richard Hakluyt's *Principal Navigations of the English Nation*.⁵⁾

5) Hakluyt suggested that colonialism was a cure for various English ills such as growing unemployment, overpopulation, criminality, and hunger; and that by exporting idle men to the colonies England would be able to restore itself to health, reap profits, and contain the growing might of Spain, whose colonial wealth threatened to make it a European superpower. He also feared that, if they were not

In his Roman plays, Shakespeare employs two distinctive narrative devices to imbue his Roman world with a sense of historical palpability. First, he attempts to reconstruct on the sixteenth-century stage the ancient city of Rome as it was presumed to be. Despite his limited knowledge of Roman history, Shakespeare succeeds in elaborating a verisimilar world abounding in graphic corporality and physical idiosyncrasies. By re-presenting Roman manners, customs, and institutions on the stage, and by drawing on numerous references to Roman topography and mythology, Shakespeare makes his audience, whether Elizabethan or modern, have the impression that "Shakespeare's Roman plays may provide an opportunity to learn something about Rome as well as about Shakespeare" (Cantor 7).

Another device of Shakespeare, which is less explicit but more pervasive, is to articulate Roman values by his reliance upon authorial freedom to appropriate historical provenances. Shakespeare's Roman plays, in Thomas's words, "create an intense sense of a social universe--not just a sense of place but an awareness of the values, attitudes, aspirations, and idiosyncrasies of the different Romes" (1). As a result, Thomas says, "the very word Rome rings through Shakespeare's plays with a powerful vibration. It is this profound awareness of the social ethos permeating the thought and actions of these plays which gives a sense of the reality and the solidarity of ancient Rome" (7). Critics do not differ radically in delineating the dominant values throughout the Roman plays. For Thomas, the fundamental Roman values are "service to the state, fortitude, constancy, valour, friendship, love of family and respect for the gods" (13). For Cantor, what constitutes Romanness in Shakespeare's Roman plays is "spiritedness" signifying the complex of "austerity, pride, heroic virtue,

rejuvenated by colonialism, the English would become savage cannibals like those who inhabited in the Americas (Loomba 13).

and public service" (37). Similarly, Miola conceives the three Roman ideals to be "constancy, honor, and *pietas* (the loving respect owed to family, country, and gods)" (17). Thomas is right to indicate that "the relative importance of these values varies depending on the condition of Rome and its stage of development," and that most of these values usually reinforce each other, but occasionally are incompatible in a particular circumstance (13). It is true that the incompatibility of distinctive Roman values in a given moment causes the Roman heroes to face tragic dilemmas as seen in the case of Brutus who oscillates between friendship and patriotism, or of Coriolanus, who is forced to choose between family and country.

Yet if we attempt to identify an underlying and persistent ethos inherent in Roman values, we can presumably name it masculinity. In any patriarchal social structure, masculinity is the core of male chauvinism masquerading as the virtues of nobility, magnanimity, and gallantry. Nationalism or patriotism, in fact, is no more than an enunciation of collective manhood in the communal level. The domestic assertion of masculinity, when directed overseas to find an out-group to practice its combative energy, turns into the massive ideology of colonialism and imperialism in which every in-group white male's struggle of dominance is given a certain kind of moral sanction. With the possible exception of *Cymbeline*, the Roman worlds Shakespeare portrays are invariably male-dominant and the values they embody are essentially masculine. A defining characteristic of Shakespeare's Roman heroes is their preoccupation with a display of manliness either on the battlefield and in the marketplace, or inside their households. In their equation of masculinity with constancy, loftiness, bellicosity, and public devotion on one hand, and of femininity with fickleness, domesticity, effeminacy, and private indulgence on the other hand, the Roman heroes strive for the materialization of Roman nobility in accordance

with such gender-oriented binary principles.

The predominance of masculine values and norms not only distinguishes a body of Shakespeare's Roman canon from his other dramatic works, as the above referred critics demonstrate, but also draws within the Roman plays a cultural and ideological demarcation between Romanness and its alterity. This occurs because Shakespeare forges the idea of Romanness not so much by the sole enunciation of a set of positive norms and self-referential values as by the juxtaposition of them with their negative equivalents. Shakespeare's Romans are led to construct their identity through the encounter with and struggle against "a world elsewhere," a world of non-Roman barbarism. Interesting is that the world of Rome's Other, which is diametrically opposed and fundamentally inferior to Rome, exists at once outside and inside the walls of the supposedly supreme capital of the ancient world. The notion of barbarism as opposed to Roman nobility manifests itself not only in Rome's external opponents including Goths, Moors, Volscians, and Egyptians, but also in the minds and acts of the Romans themselves.

It might be unfair, of course, to define Shakespeare as an unilateral and single-minded champion of male-oriented Roman values, a playwright who portrays in an unequivocal and uncritical manner the alleged hierarchy between Roman masculinity and non-Roman femininity. Shakespeare is quite ambivalent in representing Rome and its inhabitants. While highlighting the patriotic components of Roman political morality, he also questions them by revealing the incongruity of military heroism during peacetime and the lack of balance between the public and the private spheres in the everyday lives of his Roman protagonists. Shakespeare's Rome is not an embodiment of the golden age Virgil eulogized for Augustan imperial propaganda; it is rather a "wilderness of tigers" interspersed with invasion, rebellion, famine, betrayal, and adultery, all

dark realities inherent in the history of human civilization.

The thematic and structural pattern invented to enunciate the idea of Romanness appears repeatedly throughout Shakespeare's dramatic career. The discourse of manhood and military heroism continues to produce the dominant values and rhetoric in *Titus Andronicus*, *Julius Caesar*, *Coriolanus*, and *Antony and Cleopatra*; while scrutinizing the embodiment of masculinity in absolute and exclusive terms, Shakespeare basically describes masculinity as the cardinal virtue for imperial ascendancy and its lack as barbarian regression. The binary demarcation between Rome and its Other in terms of the civilization-barbarism antithesis in *Titus Andronicus* also becomes an epistemological framework of consequence to explore the meanings of Rome and Romanness in *Coriolanus*, and *Antony and Cleopatra*. And the final emergence of Rome as the central protagonist after the vortex of civil disorder or foreign invasion is manifest in all of Shakespeare's Roman canon except *Cymbeline* in which Britain itself replaces the role of Rome. Viewed in isolation, each of Shakespeare's Roman plays seems an independent work with different emphases in which Rome serves as a mere background to explore a variety of universal and transhistorical ideas. Taken as a whole, however, the Roman plays are linked by an intangible but pervasive and compelling set of images, metaphors, and rhetorical devices that demonstrates the underlying consistency of Shakespeare's interest in Rome and Romanness.

The historical analogy between Rome and England is made explicit only in Shakespeare's final Roman play, *Cymbeline*. Generally defined as a romance in genre-oriented studies and approached in terms of Shakespeare's last phase, *Cymbeline* has failed to receive much critical attention as an example of Shakespeare's Roman canon. But the history of the Roman-British engagement and its ideological underpinnings in the play are significant in figuring out

Shakespeare's vision of the ancient empire. If Shakespeare's placing of "Rome and England in tandem" remains suggestive in *Titus Andronicus* and the three Plutarchan tragedies, such appropriation of Rome is quite palpable in *Cymbeline*. The historical backdrop of *Cymbeline* is about the liberation of ancient Britain from Roman colonization. In a larger sense, the play shows an Anglicization of Rome, for it "celebrates an assertion of British independence as well as the creation of a new alliance with Rome" (Miola 207).

At the outset of *Cymbeline*, Britain is invaded and dominated by Rome, an historical fact which Shakespeare takes pains to underplay in consideration of emerging nationalist sentiments among his contemporary Englishmen. The young nation, however, eventually faces the old empire on equal terms by emancipating itself from the sombre past of national subjugation and humiliation. This is not to suggest that the play claims for a British/English predominance over or detachment from Rome. G. Wilson Knight emphasizes that Shakespeare's sympathy and England's self-identification with Rome are unmistakable in the play (137-39). Knight's argument is that, though Britain's national integrity symbolized by Cymbeline's personal destiny is preserved by the unrecognized royal boys and Posthumus, Rome's honor is equally retained by Cymbeline's willing submission to Caesar and promise to pay the wanted tribute. And Jupiter's blessing on Posthumus's marriage and the Soothsayer's vision constitute the climax of Shakespeare's nationalist/imperialist fantasy, for both scenes signify "a certain transference of virtue from Rome to Britain" (166). Yet Knight's idea of Britain's taking over from Rome is difficult to endorse for some critics. Philip Edwards, for instance, sees Shakespeare's subtle scepticism in the juxtaposition of Cloten's patriotic defiance of Rome with Imogen's emphasis on Britain's inescapable insularity: "the British defiance is a blend of truculent jingoism in the Queen and Cloten, and a much more sensitive

but wrong-headed emotional attachment to ideas of freedom and national independence in *Cymbeline*." Accordingly, the play is "not talking about the succession of empires but about the only true form of empire, which is when vassalage is removed, and union is a contract freely entered into" (88-93).

Edwards is right to tackle Knight about Shakespeare's sanguine vision of the emerging empire. When *Cymbeline* is read in conjunction with Shakespeare's previous Roman plays, however, Knight's analysis becomes more convincing. Given the sustained ambivalence of Shakespeare's stance between nostalgic self-identification with and critical reservation toward Rome throughout his previous Roman plays, *Cymbeline* might be a final solution to the imperial ambition and anxiety of his Jacobean audience. The Soothsayer's prophecy that "Britain be fortunate, and flourish in peace and plenty" (V. v. 442-43) and the symbolism of the Roman eagle are very suggestive in this respect. *Cymbeline*'s final statement that "Set we forward: let / A Roman, and a British ensign wave / Friendly together" (V. v. 480-82) sounds like a manifesto of Shakespeare's own, carrying undeniably imperialist overtones beneath the rhetoric of pacifism and international community. The ending of the play reveals a moment of wish-fulfillment in which "the radiant *Cymbeline*" stands on equal partnership with "Th'imperial Caesar" (V. v. 475-77) and ancient Britain (and Renaissance England) is released from the longstanding shadow of Roman tutelage.

In a sense, the romance themes of marriage and reunion are applicable not only to the personal relationship between Posthumous and Imogen or to the historical analogy between Rome and Britain; but they are applicable also to the conflictual dynamics between what Knight calls "two national faiths" of "our supreme national poet," that is, between Shakespeare's "creative faith in ancient Rome, felt in the Roman dramas from *Titus Andronicus* to *Coriolanus*, and his faith in England" (Knight 166). This 'marriage' within Shakespeare's mind

might be too apocalyptic to gain a sense of tangibility in the context of his contemporary England. Nonetheless, it is powerful enough to spur the Zeitgeist shared by the would-be heirs of the Roman empire. In short, *Cymbeline* is an imperial(ist) rhapsody--'rhapsody' with its overtones of enthusiasm, celebration, and wish-fulfillment--that enables Shakespeare to solve the sustained tension throughout his dramatic career between imperial nostalgia and national anxiety, between the rosy vision of Roman inheritance and the stark reality of English insularity and colonial belatedness.

주제어: 셰익스피어, 민족, 제국, 르네상스, 영국다움, 로마다움, 남성성, 여성성, 민족주의, 식민주의, 제국주의

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Shakespeare's England, Shakespeare's Rome: National Anxiety and Imperial Nostalgia

Abstract

Kyung-Won Lee

In European history the Middle Ages were 'dark' not simply in intellectual and cultural but also in socioeconomic and military terms. It was during the Renaissance that Europe began to emerge from its medieval backwardness and to pave the way for its rise to world hegemony. The Renaissance was for Europe an age of 'discovery' and 'revival' that harbingered the Europeanization of the world. For England, too, the Renaissance was an age of reconnaissance for its overseas expansion. Although the beginnings of English colonialism were quite shaky and unimpressive compared with other rival European nations, Shakespeare's England was imbued with nationalist and imperial sentiments. It was Roman history and legend that was placed at the center of England's imaginative geography of national expansion and empire-building.

Shakespeare's Roman plays were responses to such ideological needs and pressures in his society. Shakespeare's Rome is more than an ancient city or "a world elsewhere"; it is a prototype of empire for Shakespeare's England. Rome is both an Other and a displaced self, at once a temporally remote world and a narcissistic model for England's national and imperial self-identification. Shakespeare, of course, is not a unilateral and single-minded champion of masculine Roman values. The Rome Shakespeare depicts is not an embodiment of the golden age Virgil eulogized for Augustan propaganda, but rather a "wilderness of tigers" interspersed with invasion, rebellion, famine, betrayal, and adultery, all kinds of stark realities inherent in the history of human civilization.

Beneath such Shakespearean ambivalence, however, lies the representational matrix of Roman nobility/masculinity versus non-Roman barbarity/femininity. For all its immanent flaws and corruptions, Rome is still an edifying model upon which the Elizabethan England as a nascent empire ought to turn its gaze. If Shakespeare's Rome was a symbol of cultural, political and military greatness, Shakespeare's England was indeed a would-be heir of that greatness.

Key Words

Shakespeare, nation, empire, Renaissance, Englishness, Romanness, masculinity, femininity, nationalism, colonialism, imperialism