"SOME KIND OF PEACE WILL FOLLOW": ARCHIVISM AND ANARCHIVISM IN SHAKESPEAREAN APPROPRIATIONS IN *ROME* (HELLER, MACDONALD AND MILIUS 2005-2007)

"ALGÚN TIPO DE PAZ VENDRÁ DESPUÉS": ARCHIVISMO Y ANARCHIVISMO EN LAS APROPIACIONES SHAKESPEARIANAS EN *ROME* (HELLER, MACDONALD AND MILIUS 2005-2007)

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Abstract

This article explores the appropriation of Shakespeare's works in *Rome* (Heller, MacDonald and Milius 2005-2007). Drawing on archive theory, it looks into the use of Shakespeare's archive in this TV series by examining gender variables. The results of this research show that the traces of Shakespeare's archive in *Rome* form different assemblages for female and male characters. This fact reflects the cultural hierarchies of the TV seriality of the period in which *Rome* was aired. Nonetheless, the appropriations of different Shakespearean dramatic genres —mainly tragedy and romance— raise transformative possibilities for those gender politics in *Rome*'s narrative world.

Keywords: archive, anarchivism, trace, tragedy, romance.

Resumen

En este artículo se explora la apropiación de las obras de Shakespeare en *Rome* (Heller, MacDonald and Milius 2005-2007). Sirviéndonos de la teoría del archivo, abordamos la utilización del archivo de Shakespeare en esta serie televisiva prestando atención a variables de género. Los resultados de esta investigación muestran que las huellas del archivo de Shakespeare en *Rome* forman diferentes

ensamblajes para personajes femeninos y masculinos. Estos reflejan las jerarquías culturales de la serialidad televisiva del periodo en que *Rome* se emitió. No obstante, las apropiaciones de diferentes géneros dramáticos shakespearianos —principalmente, la tragedia y el romance— plantean posibilidades transformadoras en lo tocante a estas políticas de género en el mundo narrativo de *Rome*.

Palabras clave: archivo, anarchivismo, huella, tragedia, romance.

1. Introduction

This article explores the role of Shakespeare's archive in strengthening the egalitarianism attributed to the TV series *Rome* (Heller, MacDonald and Milius 2005-2007).[1] *Rome*'s first season concluded with the assassination of Julius Caesar (Ciarán Hinds), a pivotal point in Shakespeare's eponymous tragedy. The tyrannicide in *Rome* was tied to the death of a plebeian: Niobe (Indira Varma), wife of the veteran Lucius Vorenus (Kevin McKidd). In this last episode (Heller, Macdonald and Milius 2005: episode 12), Calpurnia (Haydn Gwyne) predicted Caesar's death, in a reformulation of her dream.[2] Also, Niobe foresaw disaster for her family. The fulfilments of both prophecies were, therefore, intertwined. En route to the Senate, Vorenus was told Niobe had been unfaithful while he was at war. Without Vorenus' protection, Caesar was unprotected and murdered. In exchange for her out-of-wedlock son's life, Niobe killed herself in front of her husband. This intertwining was proof that "the Plebeians [were] given at least as much attention as the Patricians" (Bataille 2009: 230). This set the premise for series two: Vorenus was haunted by Caesar and, intensely, by Niobe's memory. He sought redemption and struggled to reunite and be reconciled with his children. *Rome*'s was, at first sight, predominantly inter-connected to the Roman tragedies. Yet, after the end of season one, a complex interplay of Shakespearean genres —tragedy and romance— was revealed.

The Shakespeare archive in *Rome* is formed by Shakespearean traces. A 'trace' is "some sort of linguistic, cultural, or thematic residue, an absence or exile" (Iyengar 2023: 184).[3] The Shakespeare archive can be considered as "the imagined totality of playbooks, documents, versions, individual variants, comments, adaptations, and other preservable records that underwrite the transmission of Shakespeare's texts" (Galey 2014: 3). This archive also includes traces of Shakespeare's screen adaptations (Guneratne 2016) and performance props (Hodgdon 2016). It inspires performance practice (Buchanan 2020) and interpretation of the plays (Burt 2017). In the particular case of *Rome*, Shakespeare's assembled traces mobilize unexpected meanings.

However, the part played by the Shakespeare archive in *Rome* is ambivalent. As the story goes, *Rome*'s vision of society was "moulded by democratic thought, something that [could] hardly be expected of Shakespeare" (Bataille 2008: 223). The series took issue with the legacy of *Julius Caesar* by individuating the Roman mob and devaluing the power of rhetoric, a distinctive weapon used by the elites in Shakespeare's tragedy (Lockett 2010: 107-111). But, while *Rome*'s egalitarianism and the restorative power attributed to Shakespeare seem natural allies, it is misguided "to assume that the adaptational process is necessarily progressive or that it can easily contemporize Shakespeare" (Henderson and O'Neill 2022: 6). In fact, "adaptational processes can seek to close off as well as open up new ways of thinking (and it can do both —and often does— in different ways in the same work)" (Lanier 2014: 33). Shakespearean traces provided *Rome*'s plot and characters with narrative depth and psychological complexity, but the reparative appropriations of Shakespeare in this TV series predominantly favored male characters. This article shows that the Shakespeare archive in *Rome* serves characters differently on the basis of gender. As the series progresses, there is a shift in this politics —also reflected in the Shakespeare archive— which sets the basis for social change in the story.

2. *Rome* and Shakespeare

Scholars and practitioners have identified and exploited the intertextual connections between Shakespeare and *Rome*. Executive Producer Jonathan Stamp said that the series creatives wanted to avoid the classical legacy that haunted popular memories of Rome.[4] Stamp was referring both to Shakespeare and to the epic film and TV traditions that preceded *Rome*. Yet, Sylvaine Bataille claimed that "the ghost of Shakespeare" was not always relegated to the wings, since "he more often than not show[ed] up on the stage" (2008: 229). Bataille identified Shakespearean scenes —e.g. the forum scene, in which Shakespearean dialogues or situations were paraphrased, parodied, rethought or versioned (2008: 231-238). She also listed *Rome*'s non-verbal allusions to Shakespeare's works. Such non-verbal Shakespearean allusions —to plot, characterization, metaphors, tone, theatricality, etc.— are recurrent in contemporary popular productions of Shakespeare (Lanier 2022: 50). Traces of the Shakespeare performance archive were discerned in *Rome*. For instance, Lindsay Marshall's boyish and soldierly characterization recalled stage characterizations of Cleopatra (Bataille 2008: 241). Visual citations from Joseph Mankiewicz's and Stuart Burge's films were identified.[5] *Rome* inspired Lucy Bailey's RSC Courtyard Theatre production of *Julius Caesar* (2009), which enriched the ongoing dialogue between Shakespearean series and stage performances.[6]

The Roman Plays are not the only Shakespearean sources of *Rome*. As observed in other series —e.g. *Westworld* or *Succession*— *Rome*'s Shakespearean themes and dramaturgic strategies extend to more than one play (Bronfen 2020: 12; Wald 2020: 2). The Newsreader (Ian McNeice) was compared to Shakespeare's choruses in the histories and comedies (Bataille 2008: 236). Lockett saw, in *Rome*'s "Falstaffian history", a "fictional supplement […] to echo and parody the events of the actual history —such as the interaction between Hal and Falstaff [parodying] the relationship between Hal and his father" (2010: 105). According to Monique L. Pittman, *Rome* appropriated Shakespeare's acting metaphor, perennial in the author's oeuvre, "as a vehicle for understanding power and history, and the limits of any attempt to adapt a text and tell the fiction of the history itself" (2010: 209-210).

However, *Rome*'s cultural substrata failed to impress all critics. Alessandra Stanley argued that, despite its "arresting scenes", *Rome* did "not open a new frontier in HBO's empire" (2005). Robert Lloyd thought that, "like its HBO slate-mate *Deadwood*", *Rome* attempted "to re-create the social order and prejudices of a gone time in a way that resonate[d] with and play[ed] against our own without exactly judging it" (2007). *Rome*'s gender imbalances and indulgence of male violence were attributed to the scriptwriters' male-chauvinism (Press 2005: 50). The series was described as an upholder of patriarchal ideals and an enemy of feminist ideals (Peers 2009: iii). Although the success of several series —*Mad Men*, *The Wire*, *Breaking Bad*, etc.— had been due to their male-centric approach (Cascajosa-Virino 2016: 173), the masculine ethos of complex TV series was discredited by the time *Rome* ended. HBO's male-chauvinistic clichés were scorned by academics (Laverette, Ott and Buckley 2008: 6-7); it was argued that showrunners' behaviors had "mirrored [those] of the macho antiheroes in their dramas" (Press 2019: 10); whereas gender-stereotyping is shown as recurrent in contemporary seriality (Fedele, Planells-de-la-Maza and Rey 2021: 4).

Shakespearean appropriations have been overtly complicit with gender imbalances in TV series such as *Sons of Anarchy* and *Deadwood* (Burzynska 2017: 272; Ronnenberg 2018: 103). According to Pittman, *Rome* also indulged in the misrepresentations of race often seen in Shakespearean performance (2010: 230). Additionally, Pittman perceives a middle-class bias in the representation of plebeians in *Rome* (2010: 212). Lockett (2010: 104) and Huertas-Martín (2019: 44) have suggested that the treatment of women in *Rome* altered Shakespeare's masculine focus in the Roman Plays. However, it is *Rome*'s selective use of the Shakespeare archive that is detrimental to female characters. *Rome*'s politics can be inscribed in post-feminist ideas which became hegemonic in the early 2000s (Raucci 2015: 114). According to Angela McRobbie, post-feminism suggests that

equality has already been achieved and, therefore, feminism is "a spent force" (2004: 255). This post-feminist turn inspired some exciting Shakespearean adaptations such as *Mean Girls* (Waters 2004), in which *Julius Caesar* was recast as a high school film.[7] In the words of Ramona Wray, films such as *Much Ado About Nothing* (Percival 2005) and *Taming of the Shrew* (Richards 2005) raised awareness "of the ways in which post-feminist understanding of gender and genre push[ed] into productive proximity early modern constructions of 'woman' and twenty-first-century reflections upon love, marriage and heterosexual relations" (2006: 186). In *Rome*, Shakespearean traces shift from post-feminism towards a more nuanced understanding of gender relations.

3. From Archivism to Anarchivism

The currency of Shakespeare's works in popular culture facilitates their identification without specific textual references. Post-textual Shakespearean adaptations are, in fact, "capable of much wider use in the marketplace" than canonical Shakespearean adaptations (Lanier 2011: 150). Part of the excitement of serial Shakespeares —i.e. series in some way based on Shakespeare— has to do with the viewers' discoveries of the Shakespearean wealth that, following Stephen O'Neill, is in TV more present than could be seen at first glance (2021: 3). Of the terms that explain Shakespeare in series —"cross-mapping" (Bronfen 2020), "returns" (Wald 2020), "slingshot" (Wilson 2020)— Jason Mittell's "drilling" seems the fittest, as serial viewers mine "to discover something that is already there, buried beneath the surface" (2015: 289). In continuity with Mittell's metaphor, archive theory supplies the theoretical framework to discuss this Shakespearean wealth in series.

Michel Foucault used "archaeology" and "archive" as metaphors to explain dispersions of textual units (2002: 64-65) with which archives are constructed. These units are, for Foucault, reactivated, rewritten or transferred across fields of application. This results, he continues, in new discursive formations (66-85). I employed Foucault's lens in my analysis of *Sons of Anarchy*, in which activations of the *Hamlet* archive —beyond Shakespeare's source text— were identified (Huertas-Martín 2022). As the conclusion, *Sons of Anarchy* challenged patriarchy with a "self-derogatory, yet somewhat self-affirming epitaph" (2022: 54). For an analysis of *Rome*, this framework has been enriched with an anarchivist lens that has taken into account the gender-based hierarchies within subaltern groups which, in the series, are associated to specific uses of Shakespearean traces.

Andrés Maximiliano Tello defines anarchivism as "assemblages of bodies, affects and technologies that *alter* the registers of identities, positions and functions labelled in the social machine that distributes the general production of the body

[…] on the surface of inscription that we call reality" (2018: 8, my translation, emphasis added).[8] Challenging the hegemony of institutional recording technologies, routines and affects, Tello proposes the use of *hypomenmata* (notebooks) to appropriate archival technologies. Note-taking cultivates and trains the self, who registers what she/he hears, reads or thinks, not for reproductive but for self-developing purposes (275-276). Such writing involves selecting, cutting and assembling inscriptions from textual input. Registered notes form assemblages; assemblages allow the modification of memory registers. This practice leads to ethical transformations of the self, and may produce new archival regimes. Socio-political transformations are plausible if, Tello argues, producers collaborate to create a better version of the established social archive (284). Considering the Shakespeare archive "a public object" offering "a progressive politics in allowing anyone who deems himself or herself addressed by the texts" (Albanese 2010: 9), I will explore the anarchivist reconfigurations found in the Shakespearian archive of *Rome*.

4. Masculine Anarchivism

Unlike Shakespeare's Roman plays, *Rome* elevates the plebeians, but predominantly grants dignity to male citizens. The Pilot begins showing Caesar laurelled in close-up as a voice-over summarizes anxieties over his leadership: "Caesar stands with the common people. A man like that —an aristocrat with soldiers, money and the love of the people— might make himself king" (Heller, Macdonald and Milius 2007: episode 18). The clamor that follows echoes that offstage popular uproar heard by Brutus and Cassius in the first act of *Julius Caesar* (1.2.79-80, 1.2.131). This close-up of Caesar is followed by another one showing Vorenus. The suggested equation between the two characters symbolizes the equal claims to sovereignty of Caesar and Vorenus, an anecdotal character —with Titus Pullo (Ray Stevens)— in *Gallic Wars* (Caesar V.XLIV: 129-130). Later on, the road accident that almost costs Young Lucius his life means Cicero's warning to Brutus and Cassius on the Caesarian alliance never reaches its destination (Heller, Macdonald and Milius 2005: episode 12). Young Lucius alters the course of history and Vorena the Younger makes a parchment crown for him, a gesture that confirms the series' elevation of the male commoners to suzerainty (Figure 1).

Figure 1. "Philippi" (Heller, Macdonald and Milius 2007: episode 18)

The Plebeian advancement in *Rome* goes hand in hand with advancement in plebeian instruction. Contrary to Lockett's suggestion (2010: 108), such an advancement does not take place in *Rome* at the expense of literacy. This aspect re-strengthens parallels between the series and Shakespeare's works. The Globe was inaugurated with *Julius Caesar* in 1599, and Shakespeare's company refused "a certain kind of comedy" by marketing the brand-new theatre as a "playwright's and not an actor's theatre" (Shapiro 2005: 43). Though *Julius Caesar* was a reaffirmation of theatre "as a mass medium", in the Roman Plays it was the writerly character, Octavius, who eventually prevailed (Pennacchia 2019: 338-339). *Rome*'s writerly dimension is, I suggest, deeply Shakespearean. HBO's success was, truly, based on the exhibition of a "tele-literary product that place[d] emphasis on smart writing" (McCabe and Akass 2008: 89). Pullo's command to Young Lucius to "go learn to read of something" (Heller, Macdonald and Milius 2007: episode 21) is shown as relevant at a time in which the plebeians at the Aventine are gaining political power. Caesar's slave, Posca (Nicholas Woodeson), is the custodian of Caesar's will and, later, Antony's. It is he —not Antony, as in Shakespeare— who weeps over Caesar's corpse at the capitol and, as suggested, saves Caesar's will (Heller, Macdonald and Milius 2007: episode 13). The political strategy to outmaneuver Brutus is designed by Octavian (Max Pirkis), who orchestrates the coup that leads Antony to the forum scene. This mirrors the dynamics of TV scriptwriting, with the executive producer gathering writers in the room to map season-long arcs, establish benchmarks, goals, narrative structures, outlines of

episodes, screenplays and dialogues. This logic emerges during *Rome*'s proscription scene (Heller, Macdonald and Milius 2007: episode 18), modeled on the same scene in *Julius Caesar*. Although Octavian appears as "showrunner", the interventions of Gaius Maecenas (Alex Wyndham) and Posca prove decisive to Octavian as they help justify some of the seemingly necessary killings for the triumvirate to prosper.

In *Rome*, plebeians carry out actions that, in Shakespeare's works, are in the hands of aristocrats. This occurs, for instance, during Pullo and Vorenus's fight across season two, a rambunctious version of Brutus and Cassius's "quarrel scene" in *Julius Caesar* (Heller, Macdonald and Milius 2007: episode 15). Likewise, *Rome*'s Shakespearean appropriations often show a positive regard for aristocrats. Brutus (Tobias Menzies) asks for forgiveness from Janus by becoming baptized (Heller, Macdonald and Milius 2007: episode 15). This citation of the Biblical legacy sustaining Roman history in the epic tradition is redolent of King Harry's atonement on the eve of Agincourt (H5, 4.1.203-257). When informed in "Philippi" that the Caesarians hold nineteen legions against his fourteen, Brutus's speech on the "tide in the affairs of men" (JC, 4.3.216) is replaced with a more decisive one: "If we win, all the more glory for us. And if we are to die, this is as good a place as any. It's in the hands of the gods now" (Heller, Macdonald and Milius 2007: episode 18). *Rome*'s creatives reformulated Harry's Agincourt speech: "If we are marked to die, we are enough/ To do our country loss. And if to live,/ The fewer men, the greater share of honour" (H5, 4.3.20-22). When *Rome* was aired, Kenneth Branagh's interpretation in *Henry V* (1989) had already laid out the pattern for a type of war hero which would reappear in *Saving Private Ryan* (Spielberg 1998) and *Band of Brothers* (Spielberg and Hanks 2001), whose influence was noted in *Rome*'s affiliation with the bromance, i.e. "an emotionally intense bond between presumably straight males who demonstrate an openness to intimacy that they neither regard, acknowledge, avow, nor express sexually" (DeAngelis 2014: 1). This hero was "untested, imperfect, and stained but not cynical" (Crowl 2011: 196). In this way, *Rome*'s anarchivist practice replaced Shakespeare's Brutus's political idealism for *Rome*'s Brutus's Harry-like zest.

5. Feminine Archive

Rome's uses of Shakespearean traces favor male aristocrats and plebeians, but women do not obtain an equal share in this benefit. Timon (Lee Boardman), Atia's Jewish bodyguard, dreams of the bliss of sharing his aristocratic mistress' bed. When she (Polly Walker) tells him that "horseshit suits [him] better" than the perfume he uses to seduce her (Heller, Macdonald and Milius 2005: episode 3),

like Nick Bottom's, Timon's fantasy vanishes. Scriptwriters, nonetheless, turned Timon's disappointment into an opportunity to glorify masculinity. Ordered by Atia, he tortures Servilia (Lindsay Duncan). The camera focuses on his struggle between allegiance to Atia and pity for Servilia as shots presenting the tortured Servilia are alternated with shots presenting the punisher, Timon, who resents the fulfillment of his duty. *Rome*'s creatives decided that Timon was too decent to continue his murderous treatment of Servilia. His decision to confront Atia is precedented in Shakespeare's *King Lear*, in which a servant challenges Cornwall to protect the blinded Gloucester (3.7.71-77). Unlike Shakespeare's servant, Timon overcomes his domina, whose neck he grabs declaring: "I am not an animal! I am not a fucking animal!" (Heller, Macdonald and Milius 2007: episode 16; see Figure 2). Marketed as faithful to historical reality, *Rome*'s vindication of male dignity became complicit with what has been identified as the male-chauvinism of contemporary screen fiction, plagued with pleasure at beaten feminine bodies, sex as aggression, high praise for male suffering, humorous portrayals of rape, and justifications of violence (see Aguilar-Carrasco 2010).

Figure 2. "Testudo et Lepus" (Heller, Macdonald and Milius 2007: episode 16)

It may be argued that Shakespeare's archive is, in *Rome*, made part of this premise, particularly with regards to plebeian and racialized women. The license to rape a shepherdess granted to Antony (Heller, Macdonald and Milius 2005: episode 2) reflects the culture in *Henry V* (3.4.5-43) and *The Rape of Lucrece* (1-7), which depicts rape as inevitable in war. Gaia (Zuleikha Robinson) and Eirene's (Chiara Mastalli) quarrel for Titus Pullo is not based on Shakespearean precedents, but it is founded on divides of race, class, gender and status, which were intensified in Medieval and Modern European culture.[9] Lavinia's dismissal of Tamora is,

similarly, based on the latter's preference for Aaron the Moor, pejoratively described as "experiments" (Tit, 2.2.69). This is, in *Rome*, paralleled by fair Eirene's despotism over her darker servant Gaia, who responds, like Tamora, by killing her female rival. In *Titus Andronicus*, Lavinia is buried in her family's mausoleum (5.3.190-193) and the "ravenous tiger, Tamora" is allowed no "funeral rite, nor man in mourning weed,/ No mournful bell", but is thrown "forth to beasts and birds of prey" (5.3.192-197). Eirene is buried in an open field to honor her ancestors (Heller, Macdonald and Milius 2007: episode 20); the marked Gaia is, unburied, thrown into a ditch (Heller, Macdonald and Milius 2007: episode 21; see Figure 3). Octavian's encounter with a foreign prostitute, Egeria (Francesca Fowler), echoes and distorts Lysimachus's encounter with Marina in *Pericles*. In Shakespeare's play, the mythical and hagiographical echoes of the name Egeria match the aura attached to Marina's devotion, wisdom and noble ascendancy (4.5.115-116). However, Egeria's inarticulateness does not move Octavian the way Marina's speech moves Lysimachus; the sadistic Octavian commands Egeria to prostrate herself. Women-wise, *Rome* embraces what is marketed by HBO/BBC as the real Roman past, not the utopia prevailing in Shakespeare's romance.

Figure 3. "Deus Impeditio Esuritori Nullus" (Heller, Macdonald and Milius 2007: episode 21)

Rome's uses of Shakespearean traces are equally unfair with aristocratic women. According to Coppélia Kahn, Lucrece's suicide in Shakespeare's *The Rape of Lucrece* marks the rise of the Republic (1997: 27). The anesthetization of Lucrece's death follows, according to Kahn, the coded logics of patriarchy (1997: 28). In

Rome, Servilia's suicide marks the end of the Republic, but it also follows coded logics of patriarchy. For Peers, Servilia's death as an isolated and pitied figure contrasts with the dignity of Pullo and Vorenus's brotherly fight in the arena (2009: 38-44). It is tempting, though, to think of Lindsay Duncan's Servilia as an expansion from her previous participation as Portia in Peter Gill's *Julius Caesar* (Riverside Studios, London, 1980).[10] *Rome* erases Portia, but Servilia —not Cassius— writes the pamphlets supporting Brutus; she leads with Brutus and advises against the death of Antony (Heller, Macdonald and Milius 2005: episode 12). Brutus's echo of Caesar's words ("Et tu, Brute?") —paraphrased as "You too, mother?" (Heller, Macdonald and Milius 2005: episode 12)— addressed to Servilia, stresses, as Bataille says, the creatives' playfulness with Shakespeare (2008: 235). Also, it emphasizes Portia's emulation of Brutus insofar as she undertakes actions that, in Shakespeare's play, correspond to him. Convincingly, Bataille compared Servilia and Lady Macbeth: like Macbeth, Brutus in *Rome* is hesitant and unready; like Lady Macbeth, Servilia pushes her male ally into action, points at his cowardice and stops him from shuddering as he washes his hands after the killing (2008: 242-243; see Figure 4). Yet, Shakespeare's female characters are of little use in empowering the women of *Rome*.

Figure 4. "Passover" (Heller, Macdonald and Milius 2007: episode 13)

The equating of Lady Macbeth, one of Shakespeare's loneliest characters, with Servilia, a politically active historical character, ends up hurting the latter's status as a character in *Rome*. Like Lady Macbeth, *Rome*'s Servilia dies by her own hand. Yet, Servilia, at this stage of Roman history, is known for having worked to restore

the dignity of her family (Syme 1939: 69). As Susan Treggiari points out, Servilia had powerful allies; she may have been a mediator between the Caesarians and the liberators; her initial siding with Caesar may have been strategic, not sentimental (2019: 160). It has not been proven that she knew about the conspiracy, let alone taken any part in it out of resentment (182). She commanded authority even amongst the likes of Cicero (192), and she survived Brutus. Octavius and his allies perhaps saw advantages in cultivating her friendship because of her personality, her contacts and her experience (216). The astute historical Servilia has little to do with *Rome*'s appealing but self-destructive character.

Rome's selective uses of Shakespeare's archive also undermine Atia's potential as a character. Due to their parallels —mainly her political aspirations and liaisons with Antony— critics suggest Fulvia was a model for Atia.[11] But, unlike Atia Balba, Fulvia was sufficiently audacious to successfully lead an army against Octavian at Praeneste (41-40 BC). In *Rome*, Atia makes Antony pay for his refusal to meet her in Egypt; yet, her revenge on Antony is countered by her final submission to Octavian. Fulvia is, in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, depicted as a domineering wife and a remarkable leader, more than a match for Octavius, mourned and betrayed by Antony, who acknowledges having desired her death —"There's a great spirit gone! Thus did I desire it" (1.2.129). Unlike Fulvia, Atia survives but her body, like Servilia's, is "shown to be used and abused, as the viewer witnesses the desexualization of these main female protagonists" (Augoustakys 2015: 117). At *Rome*'s conclusion, "the women debate varied meanings of the battle" of Actium, challenging Octavian and Livia's official interpretation (Pittman 2010: 223). But this seems too scholastic for Fulvia —a significant erasure— who, in Shakespeare, rises —although dead, a soul-stirring specter— above her political rivals and inconstant allies. Other Shakespearean traces were detrimental to Atia. The triangle formed by Octavian, Atia and Antony mirrors that of Hamlet, Gertrude and Claudius. Octavian's refusal to acknowledge Antony as family (Heller, Macdonald and Milius 2007: episode 14) echoes Hamlet's reluctance to acknowledge Claudius. His disgust for Atia's attraction to his rival parallels the Danish Prince's scorn at Gertrude's love for her brother-in-law. By turning a Fulvia-like character into Octavian's mother, her political ambitions were subordinated to the young Caesar's, her role reduced to that of pawn amidst male rivalry.

All these aspects lead me to conclude that some opportunities to use Shakespeare to strengthen feminine agency were dismissed in *Rome*. Atia's first farewell —"May fortune smile on you" (Heller, Macdonald and Milius 2005: episode 1)— can be considered as a reformulation of the King's blessing of Bertram and Helena in *All's Well That Ends Well*: "Good fortune and the favour of the King/ Smile upon this contract" (2.3.169-170). For Bataille, the value of this allusion is merely that of an archaic turn of phrase (2008: 235). Nonetheless, in *Rome* Octavia (Kerry Condon)

and Marcus Agrippa (Allen Leech) become lovers. This suggests an inter-class alliance similar to the one established in *All's Well That Ends Well* resulting from feminine volition. However, Octavia and Agrippa are tragically separated by Antony and Octavian's agreement to become in-laws (Heller, Macdonald and Milius 2007: episode 19). This inter-class alliance is short-lived due to Agrippa's incapacity to challenge Octavian. Uses of Shakespeare's archive for feminine utopianism are defined by hints of what may have happened if only masculinity had not imposed itself.

6. Anarchivism and Genre Interplay

These imbalances in the uses of Shakespearean traces in *Rome* were at some point, intentionally or not, modified by the creatives. Addressing the *collegia* leaders, during season two, Vorenus predicts that "Whoever wins in Greece wins in Rome. Some kind of peace will follow […] Peace is no friend to men like us […] The *collegia* must change or they'll die" (Heller, Macdonald and Milius 2007: episode 18). This shift is reflected in the series posters: season one's features an armed soldier walking the blood-soaked streets; season two's poster presents a ghostly woman, dagger in hand —ready to fight for her freedom— the city gilded by a splendor announcing a new era. Embodying this utopianism, "the final shot [in season one] of Pullo walking hand-in-hand with his beloved Eirene, whose name means 'Peace', offer[ed] a visual promise of the ultimate survival of the Roman people" (Cyrino 2008: 6; see Figure 5). Arguably, season two resorts to Shakespeare's romance, which suggests an interplay of genres within *Rome*'s archive itself.

Figure 5. "Kalends of February" (Heller, Macdonald and Milius 2005: episode 12)

Such generic interplay runs alongside *Rome*'s transition from male-chauvinistic to feminine-orientated politics. Vorenus kills the local leader Erastes Fulmen to avenge his children (Heller, Macdonald and Milius 2007: episode 13). The scene exhumes *Macbeth*'s tragic conclusion, in which Macduff holds up the tyrant's head, announcing a new age in Scotland (5.9.20-25). It does not seem accidental that Fulmen is played by Lorcan Cranitch, who played Macduff in Michael Bogdanov's *Macbeth* (1998), an adaptation that set the Scottish Play in a deprived 20th-century suburban environment whose inhabitants experienced living conditions similar to those found on *Rome*'s Aventine Hill. McKidd seems to take the baton from Cranitch, a more veteran Shakespearean actor in a popular appropriation of the Scottish tragedy. Vorenus and Pullo climb up the tenements' ladder holding Fulmen's head (Figure 6); meanwhile, the camera tilts to reveal the mount and the sky whose glimpses of hope reify the survival spirit of the neighborhood (Figure 7).

In keeping with this, Shakespearean allusions are identified in the Aventine scenes across season two. Pullo describes the collegium as a "merry band" (Heller, Macdonald and Milius 2007: episode 14), suggesting a similarity with the "merry men" gathered around Duke Frederick to "fleet the time […] as they did in the golden age" in Shakespeare's *As You Like It* (112-113). Vorenus's decision to deliver fish and bread to the neighbors, like in "the old days", assumes the political undertaking Gonzalo proposes in *The Tempest* —"nature should bring forth/ Of it own kind, all foison, all abundance/ To feed [his] innocent people" (2.1.159-161). Pullo's advice to the Aventine neighbors to endure famine in the absence of grain from Egypt (Heller, Macdonald and Milius 2007: episode 21) approximates Menenius's warning to the Roman plebs to be moderate in times of famine, too (Cor, 1.1.84-158). The proliferation of these allusions suggests a Shakespearean substratum that reinforces the sovereignty —sometimes, under duress— that the plebeians are progressively acquiring in the Aventine.

As the series continues, the suggested social transformation in *Rome* is concentrated in the Aventine. After Caesar's victories in Pharsalus and Utica, a well-paid actor who enacts Caesar's victory over the Pompeians insistently repeats the slogan "Happy day!" (Heller, Macdonald and Milius 2005: episode 9), which echoes Octavius Caesar's proclamation in *Julius Caesar*: "So call the field to rest, and let's away/ To part the glories of this *happy day*" (5.5.79-80; emphasis added). According to John Drakakis, the theatre's liminality in *Julius Caesar* does not merely ventriloquize political domination but engages forms of representation that encourage subversion (2002: 79). *Rome*'s appropriation of Shakespeare's theatricality seems, to my mind, in line with Richard Wilson's interpretation of *Julius Caesar* as theatre-state apparatus, whose echoes make actors complicit with

state power (2013: 158). Despite the Roman plays' tendency to hypothesize on political change, and despite cultural materialist efforts to read populism in *Julius Caesar* as emancipatory, *Rome*'s egalitarianism required a different covenant with Shakespeare —outside the Roman plays— to prosper.

Figure 6. "Passover" (Heller, Macdonald and Milius 2007: episode 13)

Figure 7. "Passover" (Heller, Macdonald and Milius 2007: episode 13)

Shakespeare's romances, I argue, fuel *Rome*'s politically transformative drives. The romances harbor horizons of possibility, the triumph of benevolent humanity over the tyranny of actuality; they tackle the loss and recovery of royal children, and examine the journeys of flawed rulers who, after years of hardship, find redemption. Miraculous twists of fate alter characters' curses. Reunions and resurrections of characters presumed dead are engineered by divine agencies (Thorne 2003: 1). In *Rome*'s season two, these conventions are deployed in the separation, reunion, recognition and later reconciliation of Vorenus's family. The scriptwriters did not grant Niobe the resurrections that Shakespeare gave to Thaïsa and Hermione. But, in the words of Bataille, the eliminations of the supernatural was "in keeping with the naturalistic stance of the series" (2008: 223). Such naturalism is, in contemporary TV seriality, disinterested, following Wald, "in non-realistic early modern theatre practices" (2020: 11). Following these principles, Niobe's haunting memory approximates features of romance, without actualizing it. Vorenus's reunion with his children takes place through miraculous turns of events which are typical in Shakespearean romance. After accusing Pullo of infidelity with Niobe, the two friends separate (Heller, Macdonald and Milius 2007: episode 15). In the same episode, narrative time, like Time in *The Winter's Tale* (4.1.1-32), is unusually accelerated for TV's naturalistic standards: the Newsreels reader announces the battle that will take place in Mutina (43 BC). A second narrative jump brings Pullo and Eirene back from Massilia. A divinity has compelled Pullo to return to make peace with Vorenus. An additional stroke of the pen by a *Deus ex Machina*: Lyde (Esther Hall) appears with news that the children are alive in a slave camp. The gods again favored Pullo; providence reunites Vorenus with his children. This accumulation of accidents and narrative accelerations mark the series' generic shift from tragedy to romance.

A reunion scene in which Vorenus embraces Young Lucius as his own, seems moving in the way in which reunions in romances are touching, particularly with the accompaniment of "Niobe's Theme" (Heller, Macdonald and Milius 2007: episode 16). But that the most reparative aspects of romance are blocked raises questions about the solubility of this Shakespearean genre in TV series. Vorena the Elder's (Coral Amiga) plotting against and eventual challenge to Vorenus resituates the family reunion within the realm of tragedy's family split: "Oh yes! I betrayed you! And I was glad to do it. […] You killed my mother. You cursed us to Hades. You made me a fucking whore. […] I hate you! We all hate you. I wish you were dead" (Heller, Macdonald and Milius 2007: episode 20). Like his Shakespearean counterpart, Lear, Vorenus feels driven out. *King Lear*'s conclusion is identified with "a movement towards redemption that is incremental, unsteady, and indeterminate" (Lynch 2011: 131). Similarly, in *The Winter's Tale*'s end, the weight of tragedy is "subsumed into a larger, redemptive, comic vision of the triumph of times over time" (Lynch 2011: 135). I argue that *Rome*'s ending seems

to be situated in this same indeterminate territory discerned in *King Lear* and *The Winter's Tale*. As I have claimed, *Rome*'s conclusion is as problematic as the one found in *The Winter's Tale* since both Hermione's silence —after resurrection— and the closure during the reconciliation of the dying Vorenus and Vorena do not allow precise conclusions to be drawn about the stability of such reconciliation (2019: 43). Additionally, unlike *The Winter's Tale*, *Rome* does not allow resurrection for the dead wife. *Rome*'s traces of *King Lear* —the brutal separation of the father from his offspring— and the implausible reconciliations of Shakespearean romance lead, nonetheless, to transformative results. Although the reconciliation between Vorenus and the children takes place in the last episode, Vorena's acquired vestal dignity grants her the freedom to choose to forgive her father (Figure 8). Vorenus's attempted political renewal is signified by the other two children's acquired positions in the Aventine: Vorena the Younger (Ana Fausta Primiano) starts to run the tavern; Young Lucius (Marco Pollack) takes up the non-violent trade of mason. If *Rome*'s Palatine remains under Octavian too faithfully tied to the imperial resolution in the Roman plays —in which "Mechanic slaves/ With greasy aprons, rules and hammers […] In their thick breaths,/ Rank of gross diet" (At, 5.2.208-210) flock around "an Egyptian puppet" (Heller, Macdonald and Milius 2007: episode 10)— the Aventine shapes a new society, starting with Vorenus's family. The miraculous twists of fate and turns of romance are replaced by a more familiar generational relay; the excess of tragedy is diluted in the less impressive daily struggle for family survival in a social environment bent on getting by. The women of the family are protagonists of this relay and this commitment.

Figure 8. "De Patre Vostro" (Heller, Macdonald and Milius 2007: episode 10)

Conclusion

Recent performance practice, screen and multimedia adaptation, and other forms of appropriation of Shakespeare's works reveal that Shakespeare's archive is a heuristic source of outstanding productive potential. Serial Shakespeares liberally employ this archive to appropriate the legacy of Shakespeare's works. *Rome's* Shakespeare archive followed trends in popular adaptations which took the plays —and what, at the time, they stood for— as "the momentary glimpse of a utopian horizon that [could] propel longing for a more just future that ha[d] yet to arrive" (Albanese 2010: 5-6). Recalling the dramaturgic techniques of adapters such as Charles Marowitz, John Osborne and Edward Bond, *Rome*'s script might have been an equivalent to Alan Sinfield's proposal for *Julius Caesar*, that would have made "prominent the incidents where the people feature and supply business" (1992: 20). *Rome*'s dramaturgy was interconnected with the adaptive millennium turn which replaced reverent reconstructions of Shakespeare with scripts —such as Christine Edzard's *As You Like It* (1992), Penny Woolcock's *Macbeth on the Estate* (1997), Michael Bogdanov's *Macbeth* (1998), Tim Blake Nelson's *O* (2001), Sangeeta Datta's *Life Goes On* (2009), Ralph Fiennes' *Coriolanus* (2011), etc.— that laid the foundations of Shakespearean screen adaptation in the 21st century (Greenhalgh 2022: 253), and explored the actuality of contemporary history with Shakespeare on screen. Therefore, *Rome* did not merely pick up traces of Shakespeare. It echoed concerns present in gritty, revisionist, vernacular and socially orientated (though not unproblematic) adaptations of Shakespeare.

Satisfactorily or not, Shakespeare's archive strengthens the feminine turn near the end of series two. Undoubtedly, the series' post-feminism and male-chauvinism were made part of its appeal; therefore, *Rome*'s Shakespeare is double-edged gender-wise to say the least. This fact illuminates the series' transitionary status. During the 2010s, serial Shakespeares started to pursue drastically different gender politics. *House of Cards* (2013-2018), *Westworld* (2016-), *Succession* (2018-), *Black Earth Rising* (2018), *The White Lotus* (2021-) represented a departure from male-centered Shakespeare-inflected shows such as *The Wire* (2002-2008), *Deadwood* (2004-2006), *Rome* (2005-2007), *Breaking Bad* (2008-2013), *Sons of Anarchy* (2008-2014), etc. This divide shows that, as suggested above, there is much to gain from historicized research on serial Shakespeares by probing into the contexts in which archival selections of Shakespeare are made. All things considered, *Rome*'s investment in Shakespeare's romance is not unprecedented in serial Shakespeares. Analyzing characters, themes and motifs of Shakespeare's romance in *Lost* (2004-2010), Sarah Hatchuel and Randy Laist identified a shift from

bloody tragedy to redemptive romance (2016). Such a shift is, as this article has shown, equally found in *Rome*. Both series are, therefore, representative of an incipient recurrence of allusions to other genres beyond tragedies and histories —initially dominant— in serial Shakespeares. *Rome* in Shakespeare's adaptive archive stands out as an anarchivist inscription. Shakespeare's archive reveals the lights and the shadows in the narrative arcs of *Rome* from the perspective of gender bias that has been explored in this study.

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Notes

1. Created by Bruno Heller, John Millius, William J. Macdonald, David Frankel, Adrian Hodges and Alexandra Cunningham, *Rome* first aired 28 August 2005 and last aired 25 March 2007.

2. See Calpurnia's dream in North's translation of Plutarch, *Life of Julius Caesar* (83-84); see also Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* (2.2.13-26).

3. Traces may also be referred to as "remains", which, in the absence of explicit reference to writers' authorities, get "under the skin", permeate "an affective register", and incite "repeated inquiries into and identification with a body of work" (Lehmann 2002: 2).

4. See "Ghosts at Cockrow, Inside the Episode 02/10, With Jonathan Stamp", https://www.hbo.com/rome/watch/season2/episode22.html (unavailable now), cited in Bataille (2008: 221).

5. See Bataille (2008); Hatchuel (2011).

6. For Bailey, *Rome* "was astonishingly fresh and tapped into the addictive violence and brutality that [she] found in the play" (2009).

7. Listen to Barbara Bogaev's interview with Ian Doescher, "If Shakespeare Wrote 'Mean Girls'…", in *Folger Shakespeare Unlimited Podcast*, posted 22 July 2019, <https://www.folger.edu/podcasts/shakespeare-unlimited/doescher-mean-girls/>.

8. *"ensamblajes de cuerpos, afectos y tecnologías que alteran los registros de identidades, posiciones y funciones rotuladas en la máquina social que distribuye la producción general del cuerpo […] sobre la*

superficie de inscripción que llamamos realidad."

9. See Gruber (2003), Kaplan (2013), Gajowsky (2017), etc.

10. See *Richard III* (1.3.296-302).

11. According to a reviewer, "Even in silence she rivet[ed] respect" (Cushman 1980).

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