Generally considered monoglot, Shakespeare’s dramatic works are nonetheless inscribed with traces of polyglot practice due to the openness of his English to other languages and histories. Discussions of his education almost always begin with Ben Jonson’s comment about Shakespeare having “small Latin and less Greek.” The remark seems disparaging, especially since it comes in the middle of what should be an encomium about his dead friend in the front matter of the First Folio of Shakespeare’s works, published in 1623 by members of his theatre company, the King’s Servants. As Colin Burrow notes, however, this judgement of Shakespeare’s classical learning should not be taken out of context, especially since it is an implicit comparison with Jonson’s own considerable mastery of classical precedents. Shakespeare’s grammar school and subsequent reading, especially in translation, would have given him a thorough grounding in Latin texts, stories that would remain available to him as source texts and more generalized influences throughout his career even if he did not reach the same standards as Jonson. This article seeks to tease out the implications of polyglot association for a playwright who has been made into the pinnacle of literary accomplishment, with its concomitant privileging of the text as the principal repository of meaning. Following the work of Robert Weimann and Andrew Gurr on Renaissance staging and audience composition, the article discusses alternative ways of looking at Shakespeare in performance that restore some of the importance of the theatrical moment to the production of meaning. The discussion focuses on the representation of the Tribunes in Shakespeare’s Roman plays, as a test case for the procedure, starting with *Titus Andronicus* before moving on to Coriolanus via Brecht, followed by some observations about emblematic staging in *Julius Caesar*.

Shakespeare has been removed from the popular roots of his own theatrical culture in a process that culminates in what Lukas Erne has called “Shakespeare as Literary...
Dramatist” in the title of his well-known book. Erne’s interest is in the publication history of Shakespeare’s plays and the ensuing construction of the edifice notoriously familiar as the national Bard of England and, indeed, Britain. He is therefore more interested in what has been done to Shakespeare, or made of him, than in what the man himself produced. By concentrating on the centuries-long valoration of the man from Stratford, Erne reminds us of the construction of Shakespeare as, precisely, a literary figure, and in his reconstruction of Shakespeare’s relationship with antiquity, Colin Burrow similarly reads Shakespeare in terms of literary allusion. The classical contents of, for example, Venus and Adonis and The Rape of Lucrece lend themselves well to a narrative of Shakespeare’s more literary as opposed to dramatic output. Even so, it should not be forgotten that Shakespeare was first and foremost a man of the stage. In a sense it does not matter whether his non-dramatic poetry was written when the theatres were closed due to plague, or between bouts of theatrical writing; what does require renewed enquiry is how his play texts may have incorporated his old Latin lessons and ongoing engagement with the classics for the purposes of staged performance.2

Such a comment seems rather obvious, even superfluous: of course his plays were designed for performance. However, the centuries-long tradition of reading Shakespearean allusion as a literary phenomenon still needs to be revised, and preferably reversed. And an obvious place to begin is not just with his debt to Roman writers, but indeed with the main source of authority in Renaissance performance: the audience.

**Renaissance Variegated Audiences**

The work of Robert Weimann on Shakespeare’s stage suggests that language is only part of a staged character’s repertoire, which seems obvious but in fact is extremely useful when envisioning ways to move beyond the text. Weimann traces the strand of drama that emerges from late medieval popular performance culture, as opposed to the influence of university-educated writers such as Marlowe. This is not to suggest that Weimann downplays the importance of humanist influence on the theatre; rather, he recovers the cultural context of Renaissance drama as a vibrant form of popular entertainment. This procedure provides the overarching framework for his theorizing of the opportunities offered by the large apron stage thrust into the middle of the audience so common in London’s public playhouses.3 The flexible dramaturgy he excavates goes a long way to countering the historically specific removal of Shakespeare’s plays in particular from their performance roots as he is remade into a national poet.4 Weimann’s term for the specific requirements of staged figuration, what later cultures term characterization, is *figurenposition*, a composite term for the combination of stage placement, choreography, and language that constitutes stage personae (Weimann, Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition 224-36).5 This is a far
cry from the assumed internalization of psychologically realistic characters as people that has been so depressingly common in Shakespearean reception, based as it is on an entirely spurious reading of Aristotle's *Poetics*.\(^6\)

Following Weimann, it should be noted that the shape of the auditorium plays a crucial role in the actors’ relationship with the audience. The public playhouses are reminiscent of the amphitheatres of classical Greece, although the scale is completely different due to the crowded London location. This is not necessarily to say that the theatrical entrepreneurs of the English Renaissance set out deliberately to copy models from antiquity, but rather to point to their similarities in function, particularly in terms of ritual. To put it another way, the relationship between both types of theatre and the cultures that produced them warrants some comment. It is especially suggestive that both periods produced the amphitheatre design; it permits specific kinds of relationships between the place of the performance and its audiences, and also has other useful visual and acoustic properties.\(^7\)

Any full analysis of Shakespeare’s plays must accordingly go well beyond language only, and that includes the use of allusion. A more subtle implication is that Shakespearean verse and prose are inadequate in and of themselves as the end of criticism. This in turn leads to a logical recognition that far more is happening on the stage than merely the words that emerge from the dramatist’s pen. Meaning, therefore, does not reside in the figure of Shakespeare, but in the reception accorded his figuration on their own stage by contemporary audiences. Again, this seems like a rather obvious point to make, but its central importance must be constantly recognized and reinforced if we are to move away from an overabundant reliance on the words alone, since the primacy of the verbal forms basis for the removal of Shakespeare’s plays from their own performance culture and the subsequent construction of the Bard.

There is in fact a rather more startling corollary to a position informed by the requirements of the Renaissance theatre: that ultimate authority for meaning, understood as the success or otherwise of a particular production, lies with the audience rather than the playwright. Not only does this restore some of the importance of the ephemeral stage moment to a fuller understanding of the production of meaning in the theatre, it also relieves at least some of the weight from the supposedly broad shoulders of the great Bard. Rather than reading Shakespeare as the source of meaning, it should therefore be possible to produce a more nuanced awareness of the relationship between playwright, production and audience reception.

This is exactly what Weimann does in his later books as he elaborates on the project he began with the period’s popular performance culture:

> […] language and institution, textual authority and performative agency, engaged in a new, more deeply divided and dynamic interaction, one that greatly stimulated the unique cultural productivity of the time. Not fortuitously, early modern England produced a vital and articulate setting within which traditional versions of authority could
be intercepted by or subjected to the “imaginary puissance” (and empowerment) of the writer’s, reader’s and interpreter’s conscience. (Authority and Representation 29)

Here Weimann is describing the extraordinary ferment produced in Shakespeare’s time by a combination of social, religious, and political change, especially in prose writing, at least at this point in his discussion. The use of the term interpreter, however, gives licence to think of the same ferment operating in the theatre, particularly if one were to replace the word writer with audience. Meaning is therefore socially produced, rather than somehow inhering in an extraordinary individual.

Indeed, Weimann goes so far as to give the final say to the paying audience. They, rather than the writer, decide whether any individual play is going to succeed, not the writer, and this applies even to a play like Hamlet that supposedly sets the seal on Shakespeare’s literary achievement:

Finally, in the entire cast of the “To be, or not to be” speech, we can observe how a peculiar type of audience response is invited by a specific and yet far from univocal mode of theatrical transaction. (Weimann, Author’s Pen 21)

The invitation to multiple possible resonances requires what Weimann calls a theatrical transaction; in other words, a fully productive relationship with the audience is a fundamental requirement of Shakespearean drama, and not in the relatively enervated form common to modern performances on a proscenium stage for which his plays were never designed. And this is despite the occasional flash of directorial or actorly brilliance; the very structure of Shakespearean drama depends upon a completely different stage space from that familiar to much later audiences.

Meaning is plural in Shakespeare’s plays because in a sense there is no such thing as a single audience in that setting. As the painstaking work of Andrew Gurr on the social composition of Renaissance audiences reminds us, multiple simultaneous—even conflicting—meanings can be produced at the same time in these circumstances. Perhaps the single most important point to be made is that Shakespeare’s socially layered audiences were physically located in a building that required multiple simultaneous perspectives on the action:

But three-dimensional acting makes it wrong to think of any ‘normal’ direction to look in. Acting in the round requires a non-linear positioning, facing in whatever direction the action requires.

This question impacts strongly on the business of where actors chose to stand on the stage, and where or who they faced. The ‘front’ edge of the Globe’s stage was positioned at the centre of the circle of the audience, and it might be expected that choruses, soliloquies and other speeches directly addressed to the audience would be spoken from there. But from that centre the speaker might face in any one or more directions round the circle of the audience. (Gurr and Ichikawa 10)

The conception parallels that of Weimann, and a combination of these critical works enables us to produce an exceptionally powerful riposte to the literary definition of Shakespeare’s rise to prominence. A crucial implication is that his theatre requires a
far more dynamic relationship between actors and audience than is usually possible on the proscenium, because multiple audience perspectives need to be addressed if the playgoing experience is to be successful.

**Polyglot Allusion and Performance Necessity**

It should accordingly be possible to consider or theorize Shakespearean allusion as more than simply an intertextual moment: as multidimensional, just like the stage on which it is performed. This procedure could be followed with several languages that impinge upon Shakespeare’s seemingly monoglot English, but that would require a full monograph, and there is not the space here to do more than gesture towards the possibility. The focus will be upon Latin, especially the appearance of Tribunes of the People in several of Shakespeare’s Roman plays—a case study, if you will. The Tribunes lend themselves well to such a project because they activate important elements of the plot and, therefore, the spectacle. Their presence can in addition be further decoded by audience members who are well aware of the political, social, and historical ramifications of their position and role in Roman society in the form of ‘literary’ allusion. However, this added layer of meaning is not available to all members of Shakespeare’s audiences because many, indeed most, will not have the classical learning that gives them access to such resonances. In other words, the performance appeals to a variegated audience watching the Tribunes in this play by simultaneously enacting spectatorship and multivalent reference. It is a way of engaging everyone in the audience at the same time.

An excellent example of this process at work can be found in the scene directions for the beginning of *Titus Andronicus*:

*Flourish. Enter the Tribunes [including MARCUS ANDRONICUS] and Senators aloft. And then enter [below] SATURNINUS and his followers at one door, and BASSIANUS and his followers at the other, with drums and colours. (TA I.i.)*

Apart from the reasonably standard editorial interpolations in square brackets, this is exactly the same wording as in the First Folio (Hinman 647). The additional editorial material is presumably intended to make the staging more explicit for a readership that would not necessarily be as well versed in the visual resources so easily available to a Renaissance audience. Most modern readers and audiences may assume a proscenium organization of spectatorship because that is the inevitable visualisation for such later cultures. For the purposes of spectacle, it does not matter if Shakespeare wrote these initial staging directions, or even the first Act of the play. The history of the addition of stage directions to Shakespeare’s plays is fraught with difficulty, and it is always possible that this particular example was included in the First Folio by the collaborators from Shakespeare’s company who produced it. What does matter, however, is the confluence of allusion with stage placement and choreography. For
the purposes of the present article, there are some specific ways in which the figures of the Tribunes enact and encode multiple possibilities in a complex series of resonances, some of which may even conflict with one another.

Fig. 1. The Swan Theatre.

De Witt’s drawing of the Swan Theatre, dated to the winter of 1596-97, enables us more easily to imagine the multiplicity denied by the relatively static, singular proscenium perspective. Rather than simply refer to the drawing and then move on, the details bear much fuller discussion. The area covered by this stage as it is thrust into the midst of the auditorium is appropriately vast, and the performance space is layered in all three directions. Although the trapdoor in the centre is obscured by the three actors and their minimal stage properties, its presence is nevertheless implied by the hollow nature of the platform—the area underneath is clearly delineated. The actors are shown to be working near the front edge of the space, and one of them is especially active. He needs to be to keep the Renaissance audience engaged, as indeed Gurr and Ichikawa have noted. This actor has to move constantly across the horizontal plane. The zonal organization of stage depth is evidenced by the large empty area behind the actors as the gaze travels towards the rear at the tiring house, demonstrating exactly what Weimann means by the platea at stage front and locus nearer the back. The use of costume is amply demonstrated, and of course the two more sedate figures are men wearing dresses. Two doors leading into the building at
the rear can easily be seen.

The placement of the columns is a little more ambiguous; perhaps they are supporting a canopy that covers about half of the stage area, or possibly they are set right against the back wall at the tiring house. The upper gallery or balcony, however, is much more distinct, and quite a few people can be seen there. These may be other members of the cast, perhaps actors or musicians, or possibly even audience members who have paid handsomely for the privilege. The rest of the audience will surround the stage on all sides, as noted by Weimann, Ichikawa, and Gurr, both standing on the ground right next to the stage and sitting in the rising galleries around the periphery—and the higher these go, the more expensive the seats will be. Finally, it is worth noting the flag and the trumpeter announcing that a performance is taking place.

To translate these abundant details to the situation right at the outset of *Titus Andronicus* should be a simple enough task. The “flourish” denotes both the start of the play and the entrance of the various characters. The specific reference to the Tribunes and Senators arriving “aloft” indicates their presence on the upper gallery on the tiring house itself. They may enter from different recesses, which would make things easier if there are quite a few of them. They are, however, arranged in a single group, and the stage directions are unequivocal in suggesting that this includes both Tribunes and Senators together. It must be noted that whether or not these ideas were Shakespeare’s own intention is irrelevant; what matters is the movement between page and stage, and in this instance it is possible that the First Folio text bears witness to an actorly intervention in the supposedly pure “Shakespearean” text long after the initial version of the play was produced. In other words, it is distinctly possible that these stage directions were not written by the playwright, but instead added later as part of the memorial processing of the text in performance by the actors.

Speculation of this kind is fascinating and tempting, but of course we will never know the full truth behind directions such as these. The point is that the situation right at the outset of *Titus Andronicus* suggests initial harmony on the upper level of the performance, something that was severely lacking in the historical enmity between these two important social and political factions. Although they have both lost much of the power traditionally associated with them in earlier Roman history, the audience is about to find out that at this juncture they hold the balance of possibilities due to an *interregnum*. The Tribunes of the People were a critical element of the mixed constitution of the Roman Republic:

Properly speaking, this office was outside the usual *cursus* as it was not an office of the senate at all, but of the Roman plebs. Patricians, who originally dominated the senate, could not hold this office, though plebeians who were aristocrats could, and often did. Tribunes were not elected by the whole Roman people, but by the plebeians alone in a special council called the *concilium plebis*. A tribune could veto and propose legislation, and even, if he felt the situation demanded it, arrest other officers of state, including the consuls. He had no power outside the city of Rome, but within the city, a citizen to whom
he extended his protection was untouchable. In reality, tribunes knew well that the senate could take vindictive revenge at leisure after their year in office, and most tended to be circumspect. But a tribune from an aristocratic family with popular support could be a truly formidable force. (Matyszak 13)

Here Philip Matyszak notes, in his usual accessible style, the most important aspects of this ancient constitutional role, at least as it was originally envisioned during the Republic. Tribunes could not be from one of the noble or patrician families, and the office was separate from those associated with the senate. The mention of “untouchable” protection and its constitutional ramifications is important because the Tribune was in effect a sacrosanct individual during his time in power. This could often lead to conflict with the senate. Titus Andronicus belongs to the later Principate period, when Rome was simultaneously threatened by and reliant upon powerful tribal groups at her borders.  

However, at the beginning of this play, Rome has no emperor, which is why, as the action opens, there is conflict about precisely who will become the next one: Titus Andronicus, Rome’s greatest general against the encroaching Goths, or one of the previous emperor’s two sons, Saturninus and Bassanius. The stage is set with all three possibilities directly under the watchful eyes of the Senators and the Tribunes together. Even though the powers of both became enervated during the Principate, on this occasion they re-emerge due to a vacuum at the apex, and it is crucial to realize that Shakespeare and/or his collaborator deliberately place the Senators and Tribunes in a position of complete agreement, emphasised by their staged location.

Now, of course, not many audience members will be so aware of the constitutional niceties associated with the Senators and Tribunes, but some of the more elite will notice the unusual agreement between them. This is why the text of the stage direction is so careful to mention both at the same time, instead of just putting them together with a generic term such as “upper ranks of Rome.” The physical separation between the two brothers is therefore counterpointed by the unity of Senators and Tribunes, as the putative heirs by lineage almost start a civil war over their respective rights. This is why they both enter separately via the doors at the rear of the stage. And the situation becomes even more complex with Titus taking up position near the front of the stage, which gives him access to the trapdoor that serves at this point in the play as the location of his ancestral mausoleum.

In fact, it is possible to carry these insights further into the play. The word “Tribune” appears twenty-five times in Titus Andronicus, and one can discern in such complex usage a further layer to the term’s utility in relation to the specific office of the Military Tribune:

This office was a forerunner to the cursus honorum itself. Members of the Roman aristocracy had to serve eight years in the army before holding any other office, and the first time we hear of many of the men described in these pages is when they took service with one of the great commanders of the day. (Matyszak 13)
Now, given the period of his book’s focus, Matyszak’s primary concern is, of course, with the offices of the Republic, but even so it is worth remembering that the practice would continue well into Rome’s later history. This should be unsurprising given the innate conservatism of the military establishment, and in effect these figures fulfill a role similar to those of young aristocratic aides de camp in European absolutist forces, as opposed to the professional military centurions. But even if this is not seen as an important consideration, we should remember that English Renaissance drama could be very free with anachronisms, which opens up a useful distinction between the Tribunes of the people on the one hand and more military figures associated with the Andronici on the other. The war service rendered by this family is therefore reinforced further. The potential meanings unleashed by polyglot performance possibilities are therefore much more than some allusive intertext; they constitute a critical element of staging in and of itself.  

**Coriolanus and the Centrality of the Social**

It is deceptively easy for modern Shakespearean productions to pander to our predilection for the personal response, ahistorically reworking these plays for an individualistic sensibility. This is good contemporary theatre business, of course, but such a procedure—a translation into modern terms—not only removes Renaissance drama from its historical context, but insinuates that it has always been like this. A much more nuanced awareness of the polyglot web of associations that is rooted in that period’s dramatic practice would, however, seem more alive because it opens up the potentialities occluded by a rigorous insistence on the primacy of the self.

A case in point, indeed a limit test case, is *Coriolanus*, which seems to be so obviously suited to a psychologised insistence on the importance of inward selfhood. However, as Brecht astutely realizes, the play imbricates the figure of Caius Martius Coriolanus within a complex weaving of social obligations that he cannot escape. The partial transcript of a brainstorming session between Brecht and members of his company demonstrates an acute concentration on the Roman social world with which the play begins. The riot of the plebeians in the midst of famine sets up a field of social forces, in effect defining for the play as a whole the centrality of the social world of the city. Rome becomes a site of contestation over which great constitutional struggles will be fought throughout the play:

> And great and small conflicts are all thrown on the scene at once: the unrest of the starving plebeians plus the war against their neighbours the Volscians; the plebeian’s hatred for Marcius, the people’s enemy—plus his patriotism; the creation of the post of People’s Tribune—plus Marcius’ appointment to a leading role in the war. Well—how much of that do we see in the bourgeois theatre? (Willett 255)

Even at this remove, it is still refreshing to come across a discussion that puts the social world at the centre of the play, as opposed to privileging the protagonist as
somehow being the only source of the play’s meaning. The particular comment noted above is made by Brecht himself, and it demonstrates a consciousness of the ways that the conventional theatrical tradition can often exclude meanings that would otherwise incorporate an awareness of social struggle. Brecht picks up here on the critical political innovation of the office of Tribune as a necessary means of constitutional defence for the plebeians in such a fraught and threatening environment.

It is so easy—and lazy—to play the Tribunes Sicinius and Brutus as vicious little functionaries bent on destroying the valorous and noble Coriolanus by manipulating the citizenry into their ultimate betrayal of the great man, as if the crisis with which the play begins can just be ignored. As Brecht, suggests, though, it is possible to acknowledge the powerful fact that the play opens with a fractured social world into which Coriolanus is then placed. The polyglot connotations of the birth of the Tribunate as a form of defence against rapacious patricians will not be lost, since even if many in Shakespeare’s audience would not be fully aware of the Roman history here, they will nevertheless pick up on the central social struggle.

Indeed, it would not be too fanciful to suggest that in the case of this play, the polyglot dramatic function of the Tribunes is so crucial that it becomes not just an element of the performance, but a structuring principle. This is a completely different viewpoint from that afforded by Paul Cantor:

The unwavering determination that produces an irresistible foe on the battlefield unfits him for participating in the give-and-take of Roman domestic politics. Rome shapes Coriolanus into a fighting machine and then is appalled when he turns his fury against his central citizens. Precisely because Coriolanus takes the demands of the city seriously and struggles to live up to its ideals as fully as possible, he finds himself ultimately in conflict with Rome. As the most Roman of Rome’s citizens, Coriolanus must paradoxically be banished from the city. (164)

Beautifully written as this is, it makes Coriolanus into a sympathetic victim. Even so, the first sentence quoted above acknowledges that Coriolanus is not at all suited to the political arena precisely because of his unwavering devotion to the necessities of warfare. Accordingly, it is possible to read back into the privileging of the protagonist a much more socially aware analysis. Coriolanus is not the most Roman of Rome’s citizens; he is a great soldier, but that is not enough. Rome is not defined purely by external warfare but also by the requirements of domestic politics. Therefore, Coriolanus takes one element of the city’s life seriously, while at the same time deriding the other half of the political and social equation. As Tribunes, Sicinius and Brutus have the political instincts to recognize the threat posed to the city by such a figure if he were to become consul:

SICINIUS. On the sudden I warrant him consul.
BRUTUS. Then our office may, during his power, go sleep. (Cor. II.i. 216-217)

These lines could denote an inordinate fascination with personal power, and that would be a simplistically easy modern response because of our fascination with the
individual. However, an awareness of the polyglot associations would focus attention on the central issue of what Brutus calls “our office.” The struggle between Coriolanus and the Tribunes that cuts across the play is therefore more than just some form of jealousy on their part. The power dynamic is what matters:

Coriolanus thus stands at one end of a spectrum of manifestations of the will to power, the *ne plus ultra* of the objective expression of *libido dominandi*. Shakespeare, however, is also fascinated, however, by the subjective expression of this impulse: the desire to be master of one’s own experience, independent of the world at large. (Gray 181)

Patrick Gray here notes that Coriolanus is located at one extreme of the political continuum, although he still feels the need to make his position feel subjective, personal. Nevertheless, the observation of unbalanced extremism is a valuable one, and reminds us by association of the structural importance of the emergence of the Tribunate at this moment in the development of the early Republic as discussed earlier in relation to Matyszak’s definition of the office. An awareness of the polyglot associations that lie behind Shakespeare’s dramatization of the conflict between the eponymous Coriolanus and the Tribunes extends and refines the meanings produced by the play.

**Emblematic Staging**

A stage so involved with the potential released by polyglot associations in this period is by definition not realistic, at least in the later modern sense. *Julius Caesar* is another play that opens with immediate conflict, and again the Tribunes of the people are in the thick of it. This time, though, they are openly opposing the people themselves. The situation is often played to some extent for laughs, with modern Shakespearean performance often belittling the people by use of that old staple, the mumbled ‘mummerset’ accent so beloved of elitist theatre companies. Such an obvious, knee-jerk representation inevitably detracts from the action at the outset of the play, so undermining the importance of the conflict being represented. Even so, this scene famously gives rise to some of the most memorable lines in Shakespeare’s plays:

> Wherefore rejoice? What conquest brings he home?  
> What tributaries follow him to Rome  
> To grace in captive bonds his chariot wheels?  
> You blocks, you stones, you worse than senseless things! (*JC* I.i. 33-36)

The resonant lines of the Tribune Murellus can so easily be used to contrast in the most patrician manner with the behaviour of the workers, especially since they speak in prose. What this does, though, is mask the fact that here we have the elected representatives of the people challenging that very electorate, and they do so to remind the people that there is an alternative way of looking at Caesar’s grand return. Picking up on associations of Caesar’s populism from Plutarch, Shakespeare here delin-
eates in exceptionally precise form the implications of the series of civil wars that the people’s hero has just completed. Caesar is returned in triumph on this occasion after having conquered absolutely nobody, no enemies of Rome—just other Romans. Therefore, there are no prisoners to be paraded in the time-honoured ritual of the formal Triumph of a great Roman general, no ‘tributaries’ that will include a grand parade of captured wealth.

Reducing these important meanings to a cipher based on assumptions about the primacy of the individual inevitably erases the polyglot resonances. A ploy so beloved of reactionary state school examination systems can easily seek to reinscribe some form of national culture onto a fractious late modern plural society by simply removing the speech from its context entirely. And the associations are again much more than simply a series of ‘literary’ allusions. This scene is the only time in the entire play that the Tribunes appear, which at first sight seems rather startling given their initial prominence and the effect of this speech, especially in live performance. It might seem odd to a modern audience for such an important scene to be treated in this way, but of course the implications can be lost quite easily in the stage business. As Casca goes on to say in prose: “Murellus and Flavius, for pulling scarves off Caesar’s images, are put to silence” (JC I.ii. 284-85). Renaissance plays are full of suddenly prominent characters emerging or returning to relative obscurity in performance terms; one only has to think of the sheer number of aristocratic victims paraded across the stage of Richard III and Shakespeare’s other English history plays in ways that mostly bewilder subsequent audiences, and certainly readers. Perhaps our much later culture’s emphasis on the individual renders us relatively incapable of following the swift vagaries of such a performance tradition, and it is notable how often many of these kinds of instances are cut to make the plays’ meanings seem more easily accessible.

**Conclusion**

Scenes like those at the outset of Titus Andronicus, Coriolanus, and Julius Caesar are not realistic; they are emblematic. They are not the only scenes that can be discussed in relation to their emblematic function, but they do serve in conjunction with the figures of the Tribunes as useful set pieces for the present analysis. As a theatrical mode, the emblematic comments upon the action in the oblique, especially since it does not advance the plot itself in any meaningful way. A relatively flat form of representation, it serves a peculiar purpose, meaning both specific and (to modern eyes at least), one that can be decidedly odd. Perhaps this explains the difficulty modern interpretations have with many scenes from Shakespeare. Additionally, however, it is worth pointing out that emblematic scenes are often the ones that pose the most difficulty for a modern audience that expects coherent psychological characterization. The emblematic can cause serious problems for such an assumption, and not only
with the example of the Tribunes in these plays. At the very least, it should remind us of the crucial function of the polyglot recollection of classical history and culture on the stage as well as on the page.\(^{19}\)

### Notes

1. See Burrow 1-3 for a full argument about the relative status of the two men’s knowledge of the classics.

2. This article is the culmination of a long process of working with Shakespeare’s Roman plays as multivalent, while at the same time trying to imagine the performance possibilities available on the English public stage.

3. See especially the section where he defines zones of this very large stage area as “platea” and “locus” in Weimann, *Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition* (73-84).

4. There is of course a large and continually growing body of work that engages with this centuries-long process. Several examples should suffice here. In *Shakespeare Verbatim*, De Grazia analyzes the business of bardification as effectively anachronistic because of the way the exigencies of a later reading public are imposed retrospectively on Shakespeare-as-Literature. She continues this work specifically on the figure of Hamlet in *Hamlet without Hamlet*. One of the most well-known and entertaining theorized attacks on the appropriation of Shakespeare by and for a radically different and much later culture is the chapter “Bardbiz” (Hawkes 141-53). For a more recent essay that relates the procedure with Shakespeare to notions of national culture and prestige derived from the epic, see Innes, “National Poets.”

5. Weimann’s suggestive subtitle for this part of the book is “The Correlation of Position and Expression.”

6. The ways in which the familiar meanings that have become associated with Aristotle’s conception of *hamartia* are in fact overdetermined by much later cultural requirements and misreadings are discussed in Liebler (36-49). For a detailed analysis of the issues surrounding *hamartia* and the construction of the protagonist in *Othello* and *The Winter’s Tale*, see Innes, “National Poets” (2).

7. This would seem to me to be a potentially fruitful avenue for enquiry. It would build upon the methodology of comparative literature, but from a more theatrically oriented viewpoint. Recent advances in computer modelling for the purposes of architectural enquiry in fields related to archaeology would be especially useful; see Adembri et al.

8. *The Shakespearean Stage* and *Playgoing in Shakespeare’s London* remain essential required reading for what could be called a sociology of the Renaissance stage.

9. For a full consideration of the field of French allusion in Shakespearean drama, see Hillman. A collection of essays on English Renaissance multilingualism is Delabastita and Hoenselaars. The emphasis of the various essays is understandably concerned with the verbal, although performance obviously plays its part.

10. This is how Jonathan Bate renders the situation in his edition of the play for the Third Arden Series.

11. Bate discusses the question of collaborative authorship in this play in the introduction to his Third Arden edition (79-83).

12. Naomi Liebler was effectively the first person to pinpoint for certain the source material for the play in the work of the later Roman historian Herodian (134-37).

13. I should like to take the opportunity at this point to thank my anonymous reviewers. It is difficult to satisfy everyone who might be interested in an essay that crosses boundaries between literary history, theatrical history, performance theory, and cultural history, all within the purview of polyglot uses
of language. Their comments helped me to solidify the way I have been trying to do this, while also permitting me to avoid using terms that have separate meanings associated with different discursive and academic domains.

14. The text used is Holland.
15. Brecht’s ideas as discussed here obviously informed his own project on the play, Coriolan. There is not the space here to go into the project in detail, since it needs treatment in its own right. For more detail, see da Rocha.
16. This is understandable within the context of Gray’s book, which is a philosophical investigation, and so is intimately concerned with categories of selfhood.
17. See the 1979 BBC television production for a great example, which is rather unfortunate because otherwise it does have a great cast, with Charles Gray as Caesar and Keith Michell as Mark Antony.
18. The edition used is the Third Arden (Daniell).
19. By way of comparison, a thorough analysis of the emblematic function of the later killing of the poet Cinna in Julius Caesar can be found in Innes, “Pluck But His Name out of His Heart.”

Works Cited


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