**Maternity in Shakespeare’s Empire:**

**Volumnia, Tamora, and the Dangerous Business of Raising Rome**

At this colloquia, I’ll be discussing a current article-in-progress. This essay focuses on how two different but equally troubling mothers manipulate their offsprings’ loyalty, one successfully, and one not. Both Tamora (*Titus Andronicus*)and Volumnia (*Coriolanus*)play significant roles in empire building and breaking and, through performing aggressive, violent maternity, they become mothers to Rome in its infancy and its maturity. For these two characters, maternity is branded as a form of nationalism and mothering becomes central to the health of the empire. Tamora, the unnatural Goth-cum-Roman mother who attempts to kill and proceeds to eat her young, is a racial outsider whose pretensions to mothering Rome through her marriage with Saturninus lead to the collapse of the empire. In contrast, Volumnia is a “successful” Roman mother who reinterprets the concept her offspring’s indebtedness to her as mother, translating it into a debt of loyalty owed to country. She is a figure of incredible patriotism who creates in her son the perfect Roman warrior, and, when necessary, sacrifices him for the good of the fledgling republic. Her deeds are recognized by the citizens, who hail her as “the life of Rome” (5.5.1), while Tamora is memorialized only as “that ravenous tiger” (5.3.194), literally tossed out by both her countrymen and her adopted empire. Reading these two mothers through the lens of ethnically coded maternity (and considering their heritage in Shakespeare’s source material and the ways they’ve been translated to screen in recent film adaptations), this essay examines how maternal roles represent national loyalties and play out through political machinations.

The areas of this argument currently under construction are those that situate these plays’ representation of Roman maternity in the context of classical literature about the connections between maternity and empire. I am still thinking through how Shakespeare’s presentation of Roman maternity in these plays exists in conversation with an understanding of both political patriarchalism and the classical traditions surrounding Roman patriarchy. I look forward to discussing this with you all.