

ROMAN GLASS

Even in the latter, raveling days of the republic, the Romans clung archaically, naively to a belief in equal rule: each year, two consuls were still elected to govern—each equally helpless, inconsequential.

If for nothing else, it's for at least his effectiveness and unwavering sense of priority that Julius Caesar deserves our attention. As example: recognizing the folly of equal rule, he quite efficiently—because literally—saw to the removal of his colleague and enemy

Pompey's head. Never mind that he is said not to have given such an order, that in public he displayed revulsion upon being presented the head by his victorious army; Caesar is sure to have admired in the soldiers, if not their loyalty—which virtue too, like

beauty, he understood as inherently flawed and therefore subject to erosion—then their precision, their thoroughness, their refusal to compromise any more than had the blade in the executioner's hand. Of course,

Caesar eventually was also murdered—but he prefigures and serves as immediate catalyst for empire, a system which, though bloodier, was nevertheless more durable, hypnotic, and worthy of study, hence the abrupt rise in the number of those wanting to chronicle their own times. Granted, the poetry produced in this period remains (with a few assumable exceptions) negligible in quality; but the prose flourishes, especially that which gets written under the most brutal, and often violent laws of censorship. It is as if restraint (often enough, a naggingly realistic fear for one's life) exerted upon prose—and relentlessly—whatever pressure it is that, in effect, can render a poetry *from* prose, in the way, say, sharded glass becomes other and newly valued, given a long enough exposure to the ocean's necessarily indifferent handling. That piece in your hands now—I found it just south of Rome, not far from the waters that, despite pollution, when they receive the light reflected off the salmon-, sky-, oxblood-colored villas that front the boat-littered bay of Naples, suggest something, still, of a grand history that is finally holy, there being always a holiness attached to that which is absolute—even should the subject prove, the entire time, to have been loss.