Shakespeare and Bagehot: a Study in Drama and Politics

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Triumph, my Britain, thou hast one to show
To whom all scenes of Europe homage owe.
He was not of an age, but for all time!
And all the muses still were in their prime[1]

He set the minds of a few fortunate friends aglow with the delights of the very wonderful tongue which nature had given him through his mother. And then he died, while his power was yet young.[2]

[1] Ben Jonson, Dedication to the *First Folio of Shakespeare's Comedies Histories and Tragedies* (London: William Jaggard, Edward Blount, L. Smithweeke and W. Aspley, 1623).
[2] Woodrow Wilson, 'A Literary Politician', *The Atlantic Monthly*, 76.457. (November 1895), 668-680 (p. 671).

Contents

In addition a copy of my unpublished edition of Walter Bagehot's 'Shakespeare – The Individual', is submitted as a separate document with and in support of this thesis.

Frequently Referenced Texts

Quotations from Shakespeare's plays are taken from *RSC Complete Works* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2007) ('*Complete Works')*. References from the plays are given in parenthesis rather than in footnotes.

References to '*Collected Works*' are to *The Collected Works of Walter Bagehot*, ed. Norman St John-Stevas, in fifteen volumes (London: The Economist, 1965 – 1986).

References to *Encyclopaedia Britannica* ('*Britannica*') are to the 1959 edition.

References to the *Oxford English Dictionary* ('*OED*') are to *OED Online*.

Shakespeare and Bagehot – a Study in Drama and Politics
Abstract

Walter Bagehot (1826 – 1877) demonstrated his interest in Shakespeare in his essay, *Shakespeare – The Individual* (1853). That essay betrays Bagehot's emerging political theories, casting him as a constitutional dichotomist. The proposition is that Shakespeare shows the same political sensibility and can therefore be placed usefully with Bagehot in Harootunian's 'thickened present'.

Shakespeare's Roman Plays are chosen as the testing ground for the proposition. Critical methods employed fuse together historicism, presentism, and impure aesthetics in an attempt at Grady's desired 'myriad-minded Shakespeare studies'. *Titus Andronicus*, *Julius Caesar*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, and *Coriolanus* are, in turn, set alongside Bagehot texts, principally his *Letters from the 1851 Paris Coup*, *The English Constitution*, and *Physics and Politics*. Shakespeare and Bagehot's own immediate contexts are considered but the emphasis is on their respective texts operating within 'non-contemporaneous contemporaneities' per Harootunian's characterisation of history.

Titus gives us a gory demonstration that political ethics are not immutable. *Julius Caesar* is designedly enigmatic – a fractured aristodemocracy turning inward and devouring itself. *Antony and Cleopatra* is described as a play of multiple dramatic oppositions that mirror the dignified/efficient dichotomy underpinning *The English Constitution*. *Coriolanus*, a far starker play, reinforces the conclusion that a man cannot be author of himself at that point where a conception of due process of law asserts itself in society. *Cymbeline* may be markedly the least Roman of the Roman Plays but its climactic accommodation between Rome and Britain comes as close to philosophical clarity as can be expected with Shakespeare's deliberate political anamorphism.

The shared dualism of Shakespeare and Bagehot grants us a tool for understanding political systems and sits well with modern theorists such as Snyder. The proposition of the thesis stands – Bagehot and Shakespeare are at home in our own 'thickened present' and each aids comprehension of the other.

Chapter One
Introduction

Canonical Shakespeare – the literary architecture is forbidding. How might we add a new response to this provocative structure?
I suggest that narrow pursuit of some grail of critical methodological purity should not impede our attending to what Grady terms 'a myriad-minded Shakespeare Studies'.[1] The challenge is to embark on a structured critical exercise without becoming mired in the exigencies of theory. I therefore offer a distillation of techniques as a suggested means of shedding a new light on a discrete issue, specifically political power as manifested in Shakespeare's Roman Plays. My overarching proposal is that critical method should be concerned with these plays as living cultural artefacts - Shakespeare now.

Jonathan Gil Harris's admirably dense *Shakespeare and Literary Theory* maps the maze of critical terms that potentially disorient us.[2] Twelve schools of criticism are delineated with sub-sets of each given proper place. Harris starts from the 'problem' of theory:

> To its nay-sayers, literary theory can seem not just difficult but even wilfully obscure and jargon-ridden, inimical to the practical tasks of reading, understanding, and enjoying literature.[3]

Harris quickly establishes why we should nevertheless get to grips with critical method:

> If theory is a virus that has invaded Shakespeare, its genetic material already contains traces of its host. Theory, then, is not straightforwardly foreign to Shakespeare: it is already Shakespearian.[4]

I select a Victorian political commentator of modest literary reputation, to act as my principal lens onto Shakespeare. This may seem anachronistic, but I think we

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[1] Hugh Grady, *Shakespeare and Impure Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 239.
[2] Jonathan Gil Harris, *Shakespeare and Literary Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).
[3] Ibid., p.2.
[4] Ibid., p.3.

can establish cultural modernity for both Walter Bagehot and Shakespeare. Just as Harris posits the commonplace that literary theory is Shakespearean, so, courtesy of his many-sidedness, is Bagehot .

I will in particular utilise Bagehot's two most enduring tools of political analysis. First is his assertion that a successful politics is founded upon a co-existence of 'dignified' and 'efficient' elements, in English terms between the monarchy and a discursive parliament.[5] Second is Bagehot's identification of a 'cake of custom' as the germ from which (acted upon crucially by an 'animated moderation') a durable political system grows, ultimately to Bagehot's mooted successful society rooted in an 'Age of Discussion'.[6] My own method delves deeper than merely into Bagehot's two most enduring works, *The English Constitution*, and *Physics and Politics*. It is however my contention that the dignified/efficient dichotomy, and the cake of custom (introduced respectively in those two works) are the twin pillars on which rest all of his political writing. I expand these terms and apply them to the Roman Plays and suggest that Bagehot and Shakespeare share a disbelief in perfect kings, manifesting instead a pragmatic preference for a divided sovereignty. As for that cake of custom, I borrow Bagehot's contention that the most elusive element of political growth is not the early making of that cake but its very gradual reconfiguration to produce an Age of Discussion. In the particular context of *Coriolanus* I suggest that it is at the moment of schism that greatest dramatic potential exists.

In my final chapter I introduce my own shading of Bagehot as I suggest that the action of his dichotomy upon the cake of custom is properly understood as an advocacy for deference on the part of rulers and ruled. I impose this opinion onto a reading of the enigmatic character of King Cymbeline. In the final analysis Shakespeare emerges as the more companionable political philosopher – sanguine but gently optimistic where Bagehot inclines too much to cynicism.

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[5] This analysis underscores *The English Constitution*, in *Collected Works,* vol. v, pp. 161-409. This style of analysis is echoed throughout Bagehot's output.
[6] *Physics and Politics*, in *Collected Works*, vol. vii, pp. 13-144.

In this opening chapter I consider the yoking together of the Roman Plays, and place Bagehot in context. My second chapter contemplates some critical methods influential upon me and then merges Renaissance, Victorian, and modern timeframes into a thickened cultural present (a phrase I examine in that chapter). Succeeding chapters consider each of the five plays in chronology of authorship, culminating with the designedly enigmatic *Cymbeline*. I arrive at my conclusion that a deferential cultural dichotomy emerges as the cornerstone of political sovereignty. In my approach to *Cymbeline* I am indebted to Brian Gibbons and the chapter in his book, *Shakespeare and Multiplicity*, 'Fabled *Cymbeline*', charting how Shakespeare's final dramatic dalliance with Rome melds itself into an historical arc closer to home: 'itself a phase of history which forms only a part of a still unfinished matter of Britain'. In my scheme Britain remains unfinished.[7] I do not offer Bagehot up as an exemplary critic/theorist of Shakespeare, although his one major essay (see note 8 below) on Shakespeare is intriguing, telling us more about Bagehot than about Shakespeare. Rather it is Bagehot the analyst of sovereignty I deploy and place alongside other critical voices to refract a novel reading of Shakespeare's Roman politics.

I: An Experiencing Nature

Bagehot is quite adamant about the root of Shakespeare's utility as a dramatist: 'To a great experience one thing is essential, an experiencing nature. It is not enough to have opportunity; it is essential to feel it'.[8]

In the Introduction to his 1825 novel, *The Betrothed*, Walter Scott ventures a ponderous joke about the steam-powered production of works of fiction. He sets out the imagined minutes of a meeting of investors who will garner the

[7] Brian Gibbons, *Shakespeare and Multiplicity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993). The chapter in question is at pp. 18-47 (p. 47).
[8] Walter Bagehot, 'Shakespeare – The Individual', in *Collected Works*, vol. i. pp. 173-214. The essay was first published in the *Prospective Review* for July 1853. As to 'Shakespeare – The Individual', more detail may be gleaned from my own unpublished critical edition of the essay appended to this thesis. References to Bagehot's essay in this thesis are to the text in *Collected Works*.

commercial benefits of his Waverley novels.[9] In 1853 Bagehot, a devotee of Scott, was a tyro journalist in his twenty-eighth year and had already found time to train for and summarily abandon a career in the law. Scott merits an aside from Bagehot in 'Shakespeare – The Individual', Bagehot deeming him a rougher genius than Shakespeare because, being Scottish he is exposed to the 'rough simplicity' of his homeland rather than the 'minute and finished delicacy' of England.[10] Even for a man who revelled in journalistic generalisations this is markedly outrageous on Bagehot's part. Scott, we will be reassured (in an essay written five years later – though we hardly need to be told Bagehot's conclusion) is also the owner of an experiencing nature.[11] Bagehot chooses to borrow (without acknowledgement) the gist of Scott's joke as he launches himself on an eighteen thousand word assessment of Shakespeare:

> Yet surely people do not keep a tame steam-engine to write their books; and if those books were really written by a man, he must have been a man who could write them.[12]

The essay shows a nimble mind at work but its readability can mask the fact that it reveals rather more about its author than it does Shakespeare. Perhaps we should not be surprised by this – Stanley Schoenbaum anatomises the inherent danger of all biography: 'I quickly recognized the truth of the observation that biography tends towards oblique self-portraiture.'[13] The tenor of 'Shakespeare - The Individual' is consistently biographical (and thereby intriguingly autobiographical) and it deploys an enviable knowledge of Shakespeare's output to divine 'facts' about the poet, most specifically that he had an experiencing nature. What precisely is this invaluable experiencing nature? Bagehot describes its operation as a 'plastic power' fuelled by 'not only a great imagination but a full conversancy with the world'.[14]Bagehot's critical method confronts head-on any notion that it is not possible to deduce anything of the character of an author

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[9] Walter Scott, *The Betrothed* (Philadelphia, PA., The Gebbie Publishing Company, 1896) pp. xvii-xxv.
[10] 'Shakespeare – The Individual', p. 178.
[11] Bagehot, 'The Waverley Novels', in *Collected Works,* vol. ii, pp. 44-75 (p. 54).
[12] Bagehot, 'Shakespeare – The Individual', p. 173.
[13] Samuel Schoenbaum, *Shakespeare's Lives (New Edition)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. viii.
[14] Bagehot, 'Shakespeare – The Individual', p. 174.

from his works. Bagehot repeats this methodology elsewhere. Take for example his essay on Adam Smith, the very title of which ('Adam Smith as a Person') has loud stylistic echoes of 'Shakespeare – The Individual'.[15] Those echoes continue to reverberate in the body of the Smith piece, Bagehot venturing that Smith's 'books can hardly be understood without having some notion what manner of man he was'.[16]

Deploying his biographical method Bagehot finds space to know Shakespeare unfashionably well: 'The greatest of English poets, it is often said, is but a name […] Yet of no person is there a clearer picture in the public fancy.'[17] This Shakespeare who Bagehot purports to know has been described by David E. Latane Jr. as: 'above all a national Poet, essential to Englishness' – in short, 'an honorary Victorian.'[18] There is substance in this critique of Bagehot's conclusions. Even his stoutest defender is hard pressed not to detect that Bagehot sees in his own writing traces of the experiencing nature by which he sets such store. Thus Bagehot, a keen huntsman, fancies that Shakespeare, betrayed by a passage in *Venus and Adonis*, knows what it is to ride to hounds.[19]

Self-effacement is never a trait of Bagehot's writing. 'Shakespeare - The Individual' is ostensibly a review of two pieces of then current Shakespeare scholarship.[20] It is, in the habit of the Victorian periodical, hardly any such thing. It is in Hart's assessment: 'Bagehot at his best, in the genre at which he excelled, the long periodical review as biographical essay'.[21] The two texts reviewed by Bagehot combine as a neat promontory from which to contemplate the texture of Shakespearean criticism cum scholarship in the mid-nineteenth century. The first, Guizot's *Shakespeare et son Temps*, runs (in its 1855 English language

[15]Bagehot, 'Adam Smith as a Person', in *Collected Works*, vol. iii, pp. 85-112. The essay first appeared in the *Fortnightly Review* for July 1 1876.
[16] Ibid., p. 85.
[17] 'Shakespeare – The Individual', p. 173.
[18] David E. Latane Jr., 'Literary Criticism', in *A Companion to Victorian Literature and Culture*, ed. Herbert F. Tucker (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 388-406 (p. 393).
[19] 'Shakespeare – The Individual', p. 177.
[20] The two 'reviewed' pieces are Guizot's *Shakespeare et son Temps*, and R. Payne Collier's *Notes and Emendations to the Text of Shakespeare's Plays*.
[21] Francis Russell Hart, 'Walter Bagehot: the Sage as Human Being', *The Virginia Quarterly Review*, 42:4 (Autumn 1966), 639-643 (p. 640).

edition, translated by the author) to three hundred and sixty pages, roughly one half of which comprises the titular essay, itself freely acknowledged by the author as a reprint (no mention is made of any authorial revision in Guizot's Preface to the translated edition) of that first published in 1821 as the introduction to a French edition of Shakespeare's plays, nineteen of them translated by Guizot himself. [22] The remainder of the 1852/1855 (French/English) tome is taken up with nineteen later and shorter essays on individual plays. Guizot's multiple accomplishments as both scholar and politician are given short shrift by Bagehot as he warms to his theme of the experiencing nature. Guizot inspires a mean-spirited streak in Bagehot. Guizot had been Prime Minister of France at the fall of the constitutional monarchy in 1848 – the fall which first brought Louis Napoleon to an insufficient (as things would transpire) constitutional prominence. That deemed insufficiency would be remedied by Napoleon's self-coup of 1851 and Bagehot's illiberal journalistic response to that coup (which we encounter in further detail in Chapter Three) establishes the foundations of his enduring fascination with Louis Napoleon. So distracted is Bagehot (his dubious empathy with Louis Napoleon perhaps playing in tandem with his liking for the sound of his own voice) that he quite forgets any substantive literary analysis of *Shakespeare et son Temps*. In the few hundred words that Bagehot spares for his consideration of Guizot's offering, he damns the French intellectual precisely for his lack of an experiencing nature: 'His mind is no doubt at work, but it is not stirred by what is external.'[23] This is harsh on Guizot. We can by way of balance credit the polyglot Bagehot for responding to the original French edition. We can also concede that a deeper reading of Guizot's essay does unearth some examples of the anti-biographical reading of Shakespeare that Bagehot's essay so deprecates: 'Scarcely, throughout the long series of the poet's successes, can we discern any traces of the man'.[24]

It has to be said that Bagehot's animus seems hardly at all to be against Guizot's critical method but rather against the critic himself. The defect (if such it be) in

[22] Francois Guizot, *Shakespeare and His Times* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1855).
[23] Bagehot, 'Shakespeare – The Individual', p. 175.
[24] Guizot, p. 59.

Guizot's scholarship cuts against the grain of Bagehot's own animated speculations but this fact does not rescue the method of Bagehot's review. In this regard Bagehot stands in the line of the Romantic critics identified by Schoenbaum and for whom:

> 'The dry raw materials of scholarship – parish registers, mortgages, wills – failed to excite their interest. Instead they concentrated their attention on the *oeuvre*'.[25]

Of course the Romantics had their antitheses in the shape of the Shakespearean scholars who pored over, analysed and, as we will see, even invented dry historical documents in the quest for biographical clarity and scholarly preeminence.

Bagehot seems, at all stages of his life, to have read anything and everything that comes to hand but sadly we cannot accurately pinpoint how he first ran across Shakespeare. Even Frank Prochaska's magnificent piece of literary ventriloquism (a 'faux autobiography' as its cover note announces itself), *The Memoirs of Walter Bagehot*, does not speculate on this – instead it satisfies itself by this neat encapsulation of Bagehot's opinion:

> Men of genius – Shakespeare above all among the English – are in general finer and softer than other men, distinguished by their extreme susceptibility to external experience.[26]

It is safe to venture that Bagehot was no avid theatregoer: nowhere does his journalism or his correspondence betray such a predilection and we can settle, in this regard, for Prochaska's reliance on Bagehot the writer to betray himself, rather as Bagehot believed that Shakespeare betrayed himself. In his foreword Prochaska explains his own route to inhabiting Bagehot: 'Bagehot, to use his phrase, was a 'self-delineating' writer, someone who left a vibrant image of himself in his essays, books and letters.'[27] At no stage does Bagehot leave an image of himself as a familiar of the stage.

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[25] Schoenbaum, p. 183.
[26] Frank Prochaska, *The Memoirs of Walter Bagehot* (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 2013), p. 81.
[27] Ibid., p. viii.

It is then Shakespeare the poet with whom Bagehot engages, not Shakespeare the dramatist. Nor does he appear to have had any formal educational encounter with Shakespeare. His education from the age of five was under the instruction of a home governess and he started with the ancient languages and history in those languages; thereafter between the ages of eight and thirteen he was a day-boy at the Langport Grammar School; from thirteen to sixteen he was a boarder at Bristol College, and from there he went on to take his Bachelor's degree at University College London.[28] At Bristol College he studied (with precocious brilliance) Classics, Mathematics, German, and Hebrew. His letters to his father confirm that his final undergraduate examinations at University College were in Pure Mathematics, Applied Mathematics, Classics, Natural Philosophy, Physiology, and Logic.[29] Between the hours expended in the rigours of these disciplines, what editions of Shakespeare might this avid young student have experienced? In the appended Edition I explain my conclusion that Bagehot had Maunder's single volume *Plays of William Shakespeare* at hand when composing 'Shakespeare - The Individual'. However he would not, in his exposure to London's libraries, want for broader alternatives to provoke his prejudices: perhaps one of the variorum editions that dominated Shakespearean scholarship in the eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, reaching a pinnacle with what has come to be known as the Third Variorum, edited by Malone and Boswell.[30] Certainly the twenty-one volumes of that edition would help to satisfy the appetite of the most voracious consumer. From an edition such as this, Bagehot might well acquire a distaste for those dry raw materials of scholarship.

Bagehot seems quite happy to conclude that his own journalistic time is better spent in locating biography in the poetry rather than the dry task of devilling for

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[28] For an account (largely epistolary and quite revealing) of Bagehot's education see Mrs Russell Barrington (Bagehot's sister-in-law), *Life of Walter Bagehot* (London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1914), pp. 77-164.
[29] Ibid., p. 159.
[30] Edmond Malone and James Boswell the Younger (eds), *The Plays and Poems of William Shakespeare with the Corrections and Illustrations of Various Commentators*, 21 vols (London: C. Baldwin, 1821): full facsimile available at https://shakedsetc.org/19th-century-editions [accessed 9 August 2022].

detail. Certainly the two contrasting schools of biographical method seem able to run their distinctive courses at the same time – the Romantic elevation of the text continuing to suit a particular obsession with biography ('It was the heyday of biographical criticism, when, by a curious inversion of priorities, men read the letters for the sake of the lives'); the devillers after detail meanwhile branching off 'into the various footpaths of articles, monographs, editions, compilations, and full – and small-scale Lives.'[31]

A brief contemplation of the second item ostensibly under review in 'Shakespeare – The Individual' brings another intriguing character into view. For J. Payne Collier is the villain in the pantomime of competitive Victorian Shakespeare scholarship. As Schoenbaum has it in his two chapters on Collier (his influence is pervasive enough to merit such attention in an encyclopaedic study) titled 'A Forger's Progress' and 'Exposure': 'No extenuation can be offered for Collier. He forged in deadly earnest, for glory, and staked his reputation on his "discoveries"'.[32]

There had been some muted concern amongst scholars about Collier's reliability before his *Notes and Emendations* was published but Bagehot (and this is no real criticism) seems oblivious to them. In fact, it is with the reviewed piece that Collier's credibility starts to come unglued. At the heart of the scandal is the *Perkins Folio* – it is the notes and emendations endorsed on that folio on which Collier expounds. Those notes and emendations were forged by Collier. Thus, Collier's prestige collapsed into notoriety with the 'final blow' falling in 1861.[33] The whole mendacious endeavour is dispassionately catalogued by Clement Mansfield Ingleby in *A Complete View of the Shakespere Controversy*.'[34]

If the reception of Collier's 'discovery' by a gullible public had matched that of Bagehot, then Collier might indeed not have wasted his forger's ink. As with his

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[31] Schoenbaum, p. 181; and p. 273.
[32] Ibid., p. 245. The two chapters lie at pp. 245-266.
[33] Ibid., p. 263.
[34] Clement Mansfield Ingleby, *A Complete View of the Shakespere Controversy* (London: Nattali and Bond, 1861).

treatment of Guizot, Bagehot limits himself to a cursory consideration of the text he is reviewing – a lonely couple of paragraphs in the last five pages of his article. Again, as with his detachment from Guizot, Bagehot lets the subject text fire him into a stylish denunciation of its method. It is difficult not to conclude that Bagehot is speaking of all such scholarship (faked or not) when he curtly dismisses an emendation to *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*: 'It is difficult to fancy Shakespeare perusing a volume of such annotations'.[35]

'Shakespeare – The Individual' is, then, a stylish essay that is a review in small part only. It is of its time. The adamant views expressed are rendered charming by their stylish delivery. Bagehot does much the same with his political, historical, and economic output. By its subtext Bagehot immodestly identifies himself with Shakespeare's 'experiencing nature'. Bagehot should be received with caution but, as with the best journalism, his work can aid our insights into the Roman Plays. In the grand scheme of Shakespearean criticism and biography, Bagehot is a mere bit-player but one important enough to earn a tiny chapter in *Shakespeare's Lives*.[36] Schoenbaum is not immune to Bagehot's charms, even if, 'The dominant tones of Bagehot's palette are too roseate for the modern taste', it nonetheless, 'retains an unfashionable attractiveness'.[37]

Bagehot is too quick to dismiss Guizot, a man of vast accomplishment – lawyer, historian and statesman. Nor does the passage of time (with its attendant experiences presumably acting on Bagehot) improve his assessment of Guizot. Writing in 1874 on receiving the news of Guizot's death he is still carping:

> [Guizot] was stiff in manner and sedate in politics to a fault. A puritan born in France by mistake is the description which will most nearly describe him to an ordinary Englishman.[38]

The Frenchman commands a laudatory ('no murmur of disappointed ambition, no language of asperity ever passed his lips') one-and-a-half pages of dense text

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[35] 'Shakespeare – The Individual', p. 210.
[36] Schoenbaum, pp. 342-343.
[37] Ibid., p. 343.
[38] Walter Bagehot, 'M. Guizot', in *Collected Works,* vol. iv, pp. 441-444 (p. 441).

in *Britannica*, Bagehot half that space.[39] To complete this shorthand survey of the cultural weight of the men under our surveillance, Collier's entry (at least he gets one) is less than half a column but decorated with cheery condemnation: 'No statement of his can be accepted without verification'.[40]

I look beyond Bagehot's lack of humility and hope to demonstrate that he can do rather more than merely appropriate Shakespeare to a narrow and personal nineteenth-century agenda. To achieve this, I look not so much at 'Shakespeare – The Individual' but rather more at Bagehot's substantial political output. That output contains some of the most entertaining speculation as to how sovereignty accrues to viable governments. Bagehot's thinking (as regards both politics and literature) is impure, scattergun even.[41] However, this type of multi-faceted criticism aids the desired 'myriad-minded Shakespeare Studies'.

Ben Jonson's summation ('not of an age, but for all time') repeated at the front of this thesis is a most convenient, albeit hackneyed, estimation of Shakespeare's enduring value. That Shakespeare survives as a cultural touchstone needs no further commentary. Woodrow Wilson's praise of Walter Bagehot's prose ('the delights of the very wonderful tongue that nature had given him') is, by comparison, hardly repeated and the value that this American President and others have placed on Bagehot's writing is no longer prominent, albeit a new biography (its sleeve notes trumpeting it as 'definitive') was published in 2019.[42] Bagehot merits revisiting, most particularly in understanding the accrual, maintenance and administration of sovereign power over a state. His work on the English constitution (and he always described it as English rather than British) was, in its minute details, out of date almost as he wrote it, but its wider

[39] *Britannica*, vol. 10, p. 979.
[40] *Britannica*, vols. 10, 2, and 6.
[41] Silvana Collela, '"The mind washes its hands in a basin": Walter Bagehot's Literary Essays and Impure Criticism', *English Literature*, 2.2 (December 2015) 219-235.
[42] James Grant, *Bagehot: The Life and Times of the Greatest Victorian* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton and Company, 2019).

points on the mechanics of sovereignty (in particular the dignified/efficient dichotomy) cast light on Shakespeare's sophisticated constitutional politics.

My particular concern is with the political implications of the five Roman Plays. It might be asserted that the English History Plays form an equally enticing field for this type of enquiry – I would not disagree, but I think there is a distinctiveness to the Roman Plays that justifies their standing separately. Moreover, there is pragmatism in not embarking on a too broad project which attempts to yoke the History and Roman Plays (or at the very least the Plutarchan histories therein) together. This latter ambitious combination is undertaken (with aplomb) by Paul N. Siegel in *The Gathering Storm* but even he acknowledges an underlying distinction between Roman and English history as it might have presented itself to Shakespeare.[43] In Siegel's analysis, Roman history is the completed tale of a failed project, a slave economy which bears the seeds of its own destruction.[44] Shakespeare's English history, on the other hand, is a work still in progress, the decline of feudalism still playing itself out.[45]

For a Marxist scholar such as Siegel (writing at the end of the Reaganite economic surge) the proper line of enquiry is not so much, 'Where are we now?' as, 'Where are we going?' From my own perspective the former question is of greater importance, particularly as regards issues of sovereignty. Bagehot, as most journalists, lived in his moment as an explicator of the English political system, interested in the past only as a route to his present and he plotted no ideological path to the future. Shakespeare is, of course, considerably more than that – a surpassing observer of human nature whose acuity opens numberless lines of philosophical enquiry. However, for my discrete purpose these two writers stand together. I contend that Shakespeare and Bagehot stand as contemporaries with us in a 'thickened present'.[46] My aim then is a conversation between two prolific writers, their births separated by two-and-a-half centuries

[43] Paul N. Siegel, *The gathering storm: Shakespeare's English and Roman history plays: a Marxist analysis* (London: Redwords, 1992).
[44] Ibid., p. 159.
[45] Ibid., p. 163.
[46] Harry Harootunian, 'Remembering the Historical Present', *Critical Inquiry*, 33:3 (Spring 2007) 471–493 (p. 476).

but whose ascents are marked by some curious, even pleasing, parallels. Neither (a relevant factor) is a product of the ancient English universities; both elevate the existence of the jobbing writer; both splutter into professional flow before a torrent commences in their mid-twenties, both make a professional life in London before returning to their birthplaces where they die, one (according to convenient legend) on his fifty-second birthday, the other in his fifty-second year. Most pertinently for my purposes each offers copious insight into the art of governance.

In the remainder of this chapter I will attend to two tasks: firstly, I will sketch the existing sweep of the critical landscape for the Roman Plays as a group; secondly, I will outline the less prolific Bagehot scholarship and respond to criticism of Bagehot's alleged racism.

II: The Roman Plays: the Critical Context

In referring to the sub-genre 'the Roman Plays' I follow recent scholarship (unfashionably anticipated by Roy Walker in 1951) by including not only the three broadly historical/Plutarchan plays, *Julius Caesar*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, and *Coriolanus*, but also the early and ahistorical *Titus Andronicus*, and the late and enigmatic *Cymbeline*.[47] Not all critics have so readily included these two last-mentioned and difficult texts. One play, the early (1591-2) *Titus Andronicus*, has been to many minds a tasteless aberration.[48] One such stern arbiter of taste is Guizot who is not alone in averring that the text is so indecorous that it cannot be Shakespeare's:

> [H]e had not reproach himself with the production of that execrable accumulation of horrors which, under the name of "Titus Andronicus" has been foisted upon the English people as a dramatic work.[49]

Cymbeline, on the other hand, is a late play which defies easy categorization and whose bewildering finale unravels some thirty denouements for the benefit of

[47] Roy Walker, 'The Northern Star: An Essay on the Roman Plays', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 2:4 (October 1951), 287-293 (p. 287).
[48] Throughout this thesis I follow the Conjectural Chronology in the *RSC Complete Works*, pp. 2471-2475.
[49] Guizot, p. 66.

the assembled dramatis personae – we the audience are thankfully already privy to all but one of these, though perhaps grateful for the reminders.[50] The case for the inclusion of these two awkward plays seems not to have occurred to Mungo William MacCullum in his seminal 1910 text, *Shakespeare's Roman Plays and Their Background* – his concentration is on the Plutarchan texts individually and without concern for 'ties that bind the plays together.'[51] As we move forward the inclination against either or both *Titus Andronicus* and *Cymbeline* remains evident. In 1961 Maurice Charney carries out an intensive analysis of the 'Roman Plays' but confines himself to the three Plutarchan plays.[52] He excludes (by a note in an appendix) the other two plays as respectively: '[Rome being] only the setting for a revenge play'; and 'basically a romantic British play'.[53] The same author repeats this approach when editing a collection of essays in 1964 for the *Discussions* series.[54] T.J.B. Spencer in 1963 finds room for a brief consideration of *Titus Andronicus* (which he judges is estimable, 'When one ceases to be preoccupied with the savagery') but omits *Cymbeline*.[55] Also in 1963, Derek Traversi's *Shakespeare: The Roman Plays* confines itself assiduously to the three Plutarchan/history plays which sit in the centre of the sequence of composition.[56] Traversi sets out to achieve a close reading of those three texts that he hopes might augment MacCullum's earlier efforts.[57]

In his 1972 essay 'Shakespeare's Roman Trilogy: The Climax in Cymbeline', Hugh M. Richmond concentrates a challenging critical gaze upon a grouping of *Julius*

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[50] Ros King, *Cymbeline: Constructions of Britain* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), p. 1.
[51] Mungo William MacCullum, *Shakespeare's Roman Plays and Their Background* (London: Macmillan, 1910). The quoted analysis of that text is taken from: Robert S. Miola, *Shakespeare's Rome* (paperback edition, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, first published 1983), p. 12.
[52] Maurice Charney, *Shakespeare's Roman Plays: the Function of Imagery in the Drama* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1961).
[53] Ibid., p. 207.
[54] Maurice Charney (ed.), *Discussions of Shakespeare's Roman Plays* (Boston MA: D.C. Heath and Company, 1964).
[55] T.J.B. Spencer, *Writers & Their Work: Shakespeare: the Roman Plays* (Harlow: Longman, 1963), pp. 7-12.
[56] Derek Traversi, *Shakespeare: The Roman Plays* (London: Hollis and Carter, 1963).
[57] Ibid., p. 5.

Caesar, *Antony and Cleopatra*, and *Cymbeline*, treating them as broad companion pieces, united (however obliquely) in their setting around the time of the birth of Christ.[58] In a concluding provocation Richmond posits *Henry VIII* as another unlikely companion piece by virtue of its, 'serene formulation of Christian policies'.[59]

In 1976 in *Shakespeare's Rome: Republic and Empire*, we find Paul A. Cantor influentially favouring the old adherence to those three Plutarchan plays, but his critical method is marked in its departure from previous analyses.[60] In Cantor's scheme *Julius Caesar* is no more than an adjunct to the two later plays. His central contention is that Shakespeare conceived *Coriolanus* and *Antony and Cleopatra* as a complementary pair by which Roman republic and empire are contrasted. In this deliberate pairing Cantor even suggests a Plutarchan stylistic influence upon Shakespeare.[61]

Four decades after *Shakespeare's Rome: Republic and Empire*, Cantor returns in substantial form to the three Plutarchan Plays with his *Shakespeare's Roman Trilogy: The Twilight of the Ancient World*.[62] He does not repudiate his earlier volume but takes much further his reading of the three plays in the context of Nietzsche's conception of the will to power and the conditions necessary for the success of the slave revolt.[63] Charney's mild critique of Cantor's earlier book (and I suggest we can carry this forward to its recent companion) is justified – that is to say that Cantor's identification of *Coriolanus* with republican themes is more successful than is the attempt to tie *Antony and Cleopatra* exclusively (or nearly so) to the imperial.[64]

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[58] Hugh M. Richmond, 'Shakespeare's Roman trilogy: The Climax in Cymbeline', *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, 5:1 (April 1972), 129-139.
[59] Ibid., p 139.
[60] Paul A. Cantor, *Shakespeare's Rome: Republic and Empire* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1976).
[61] Ibid., p. 14.
[62] Paul A. Cantor, *Shakespeare's Roman Trilogy: The Twilight of the Ancient World* (Chicago IL: University of Chicago Press, 2017).
[63] Ibid., pp. 100-159.
[64] Maurice Charney, 'Review of *Shakespeare's Rome*', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 30:1 (Spring 1977), 113-115 (p. 115).

Despite Charney's proper reservations, we can, I think, agree that the political strains of these two plays work tellingly alongside each other. In 1978 John W. Velz, like Charney, takes issue with Cantor.[65] Velz encapsulates what he believes is the problem that plagues all putative grouping of the Roman Plays, namely a lack of any strong generic link so that 'they belong together less inherently than some other groups of plays in Shakespeare'.[66] Nonetheless Velz ultimately favours the grouping of five plays and is sceptical of any received wisdom that Shakespeare's Romans are no more than, 'Elizabethans in togas'.[67] For Velz there are some timeless truths embedded in the five plays and he perceives that just as Rome came to believe itself driven by Fate towards the Pax Augusta, so the analogous myth of a Tudor destiny captivated Elizabethans.[68] I will suggest that the five plays incorporate a sceptical interrogation of these twin myths and illuminate a godless (Bagehotian) conception of sovereignty.

Writing in 1980, Robert M. Bergeron tackles the *Cymbeline* issue head-on and labels it the 'Last Roman Play': 'Though its Roman background has not been particularly emphasized by interpreters, that attribute of the play accounts for much that happens.'[69] The five play argument goes on to achieve (in my view convincingly) its zenith in Miola's *Shakespeare's Rome* in 1983. However, before we consider that book and Miola's more recent return to the topic, it is instructive to see how an intervening and more assiduously methodological approach intrudes onto the sub-genre of the Roman Plays. In the *Longman Critical Readers* series, the editors of *Shakespeare: The Roman Plays* (1996) are brazen about their cultural materialist/new historicist bent.[70] *Titus Andronicus* gets only a solitary mention in this collection of politically-infected essays and

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[65] John W. Velz, 'The Ancient World in Shakespeare: Authenticity or Anachronism? A Retrospect', *Shakespeare Survey*, 31 (1978), 1-12.
[66] Ibid., p. 7.
[67] Ibid., p. 1.
[68] Ibid., p. 12. References throughout this thesis to the 'Roman Plays' are to the five plays.
[69] David M. Bergeron, '*Cymbeline*: Shakespeare's Last Roman Play', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 31:1 (Spring, 1980), 31-41 (p. 31).
[70] Graham Holderness, Bryan Loughrey, and Andrew Murphy (eds), *Shakespeare: The Roman Plays* (London: Longman, 1996), p. 13.

that only in the chapter which (apologetically so far as the editors are concerned) deals with *Cymbeline*. The essay in question is disparagingly glossed as, 'a very traditional piece of criticism which leaves unexamined its own political foundations and assumptions.'[71] The excerpt in question is described as, 'a chapter from Cantor's book *Shakespeare's Rome: Republic and Empire.*'[72] It is not. It is in fact the penultimate chapter from Miola's *Shakespeare's Rome*. Cantor refers to the misattribution in his more recent book, politely confining himself to a footnoted reference but justifiably taking offence at the description of him as 'a naïve Christian.'[73] It is disappointing to note that the misattribution is still being repeated – for example in 2015 by Paul Innes in *Shakespeare's Roman Plays*.[74] Perplexingly Innes cites the chapter as being Cantor's and on the very next page recommends readers to the Miola text from which it is actually taken.[75] Innes follows Miola in including both *Titus Andronicus* and *Cymbeline* in his classification of the plays. Where Miola's attention is mostly on characterization, Innes foregrounds the importance of performance.[76]

Miola's *Shakespeare's Rome* remains then the persuasive standard-bearer for the five plays taken as a set. It should be noted that Miola also ranges over the epic poem *The Rape of Lucrece*, notwithstanding that it may be judged 'an interesting but ungainly child.'[77] I confine myself to the five stage dramas – it is in the potential of drama to illuminate the question of sovereignty that we will find the greatest interest and, even by Miola's admission, *Lucrece* is a rhetorical exercise which 'impedes movement and stifles dramatic potential.'[78]

Miola acknowledges his debt to Walker's 1951 scholarship. Walker's article concisely and persuasively makes the case for an organic and necessarily uneven

[71] Ibid., p. 13.
[72] Ibid., p. 13.
[73] Cantor, *Shakespeare's Roman Trilogy*, p. 230.
[74] Paul Innes, *Shakespeare's Roman Plays* (London: Palgrave, 2015).
[75] Ibid., pp. 2-3.
[76] Ibid., p. 5.
[77] Miola, p. 18.
[78] Ibid., p. 18.

use of Roman themes by Shakespeare.[79] Walker's tone is even more admirable when one considers that it precedes the substantial rehabilitation of *Titus Andronicus* effected by the 1955 Royal Shakespeare Company production. Walker describes the place of *Cymbeline* in the Roman substructure:

> So Rome's defeat is also Rome's victory. The Rome of Titus defeated the Goths, the Rome of Julius Caesar and Antony defeated itself, the Rome of Coriolanus would have fallen to the Volsces but for Roman sacrifice. Now Rome is defeated by Britain[80]

This assertion of a concluding importance for *Cymbeline* is a tenet taken yet further by Miola, particularly in that chapter, '*Cymbeline:* Beyond Rome', which comes to be misattributed by Holderness et al. Indeed it is Miola who is not only an accommodating guide to Shakespeare's Rome but also the most enlightening summariser of the critical history of this sub-genre, firstly throughout *Shakespeare's Rome*, and more recently in the opening article to the 2016 *Shakespeare Survey*.[81] In 2016, Miola commented favourably on the newer avenues opened-up to modern scholars by the intertextual possibilities inherent in the use of databases such as Early English Books Online. He quotes from 'The Waste Land' at the opening of his 2016 review: 'Only at nightfall, ethereal rumours / Revive for a moment a broken Coriolanus'.[82] By the conclusion of his survey Miola can find countless possibilities for Shakespeare's Rome: 'no limit to the ethereal rumours that can revive for a moment a broken Coriolanus'.[83]

Miola's own conception of Shakespeare's Rome has not materially altered from that drawn in 1983 – specifically that Shakespeare was exposed to historical Rome by his grammar school education but his later authorial use of it is more than merely historical, more than a mere purloining of good stories. Much early scholarship usefully concentrates on the sources for Shakespeare's Roman explorations but Miola is concerned to explore beyond that critical landscape. Instead, the concentration is on the animating otherness of Shakespeare's Rome,

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[79] Walker, p. 288.
[80] Ibid., pp. 292-293.
[81] Robert Miola, 'Past the Size of Dreaming?: Shakespeare's Rome', *Shakespeare Survey 69* (2016), 1-16.
[82] T.S. Eliot, 'The Waste Land', lines 416-417 (New York, NY.: Boni and Liveright, 1922) pp. 47-48. Quoted in Miola (ibid), p.1.
[83] Miola, 'Past the Size of Dreaming?', p. 15.

a pagan pre-Christian palimpsest inscribed with full-blooded dramas. In all of this I suggest that we are located in a thickened present and can find that there is no contradiction in identifying with all points along the critical range mapped by Miola:

> Critics of Shakespeare's Rome have always occupied a place along the spectrum marked by these extremes, some thinking it depicts worlds elsewhere and long ago, others that it reflects contemporary times, either those of the playwright or of his audiences.[84]

The Rome with which I am concerned is that embodied in the five plays, an Eternal City in which students can discover, 'that the streets roads, and paths facing them are as many and varied as those that lead to its gates.'[85] Moreover I propose that we can chart some progress, by no means simplistically linear but detectable nonetheless, to the deployment by Shakespeare of Roman themes – from the murderous hotchpotch of history in *Titus Andronicus* through to the accommodation of the Pax Romana heralded in *Cymbeline*. We will eventually encounter Callan Davies' designation of *Cymbeline* as progenitor of the modern critical designation of metatheatre – stimulated by the *Cymbeline's* 'Matter Theatre' as Davies has it.[86] Walter Bagehot's writing will be a clarifying lens through which I refract Shakespeare's Rome.

III: Walter Bagehot: the Critical Context

Bagehot merits our attention. In *The English Constitution*, and in *Physics and Politics*, he offers us stratagems for analysing political sovereignty. However before proceeding to apply his strictures in a thickened present, I should address the accusation that his work (most particularly *Physics and Politics*) is irredeemably scarred by a pseudo-scientific racism that disqualifies him from critical relevance. This is of particular concern in the face of the proper and stimulating trend in Shakespeare studies to stress issues of race and post-colonialism. In their provocative introductory chapter to *Post_Colonial Shakespeares*, Ania Loomba and Martin Orkin assert that:

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[84] Ibid., p. 1
[85] Miola, *Shakespeare's Rome*, p. 238.
[86] Callan Davies, 'Matter Theatre: Conspicuous Construction in *Cymbeline*', *Shakespeare Bulletin*, 36:1 (Spring 2018), 69-88.

> [I]t is virtually impossible to seal off any meaningful analysis of English culture and literature from considerations of racial and cultural difference, and from the dynamics of emergent colonialisms.[87]

That qualifier 'virtually' affords the space into which I attempt to insert my political analysis. Furthermore, I do not desire to 'seal off' my analysis from a myriad-minded Shakespeare studies but rather to contribute to it. Taking up Loomba and Orkin once again, their perspective in 1998 laid down a challenge since taken up vigorously by the academy:

> Neither Shakespeareans nor post-colonial critics have so far considered in any significant detail the implications of analysing sixteenth-century Europe from models derived from contemporary culture or vice-versa.[88]

My thesis urges an apprehension of a thickened cultural present that renders Shakespeare, Bagehot and ourselves as politico-cultural contemporaries. Within that cultural present the ideology of institutions and politics (precisely Bagehot's field) has a part to play in understanding Shakespeare – Bagehot gives us hitherto undeployed tools. The correct atmosphere is that advertised by Loomba (this time writing alone) in 2002:

> In other words, what we call race does not indicate natural or biological divisions so much as social divisions which are characterized as if they were natural or biological.[89]

The accusation of disqualifying racism against Bagehot therefore requires unpacking. No purpose is served by offering some glib, blanket excuse that a mainstream Anglo-Saxon Victorian banker-cum-writer cannot remain untouched by the attitudes common in his day. It is a fact that if one comes to Bagehot intent on finding offence, one will find it. Much the same might be said of Shakespeare. Edward Beasley elegantly takes such offence (at Bagehot) in *The Victorian Reinvention of Race*.[90] Bagehot is not the only luminary in Beasley's sights – Charles Darwin is similarly excoriated. Beasley coins a pithy (dare we say

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[87] Ania Looma and Martin Orkin (eds) *Post-Colonial Shakespeares* (London: Routledge, 1998) p. 4.
[88] Ibid., p. 5.
[89] Ania Looma, *Shakespeare, Race, and Colonialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) p. 3.
[90] Edward Beasley, *The Victorian Reinvention of Race: New Racisms and the Problem of Grouping in the Human Sciences* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010).

Bagehotian) phrase to damn *Physics and Politics*: 'In stretching for science, Bagehot would achieve racism'.[91]

Beasley mines *Physics and Politics* for betrayals of racism. His argument is that as Bagehot reaches for some pseudo-science of societal evolution he supports his anecdotal posturings with racist stereotype. For Beasley, the (correct) truth is that; 'Any idea of what the supposedly separate human races might be is arbitrary, or at least culturally determined'.[92] Beasley succeeds in demonstrating that it is not difficult to locate flourishes in Bagehot's prose that offend against this proper orthodoxy. However, Beasley rather confounds his own condemnations when he concedes that, 'People act on their racial stereotypes. Then "races", however fictional, have social and economic consequences'.[93]

Bagehot deserves more sympathy than Beasley affords him. When Bagehot talks (in terms that can offend when selectively and forensically parsed) of race he distinguishes the French from the English far more often than his occasional and flippant remarks about Indigenous Australians and their European colonists. And if one concedes Bagehot more grace than Beasley allows him, we can see that Bagehot knows the limitations of his own science:

> As I have said, I am not explaining the origin of races, but of nations, or, if you like, of tribes […] But this easy hypothesis of special creation has been tried so often, and has broken down so very often, that in no case, probably, do any great number of careful inquirers very firmly believe it.[94]

Indeed the concluding words of *Physics and Politics* put Bagehot in his proper and useful context:

> I only profess to explain what seem to me the political prerequisites of progress, and especially of early progress. I do this rather because the subject is insufficiently examined, so that even if my views are found to be faulty, the discussion upon them may bring out others which are truer and better.[95]

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[91] Ibid., p. 80.
[92] Ibid., p. 8.
[93] Ibid., p. 7.
[94] *Physics and Politics*, pp. 78-79.
[95] Ibid., p. 144.

Beasley devotes considerable space to twinning Bagehot with the aristocratic and racist nonsense of Gobineau. That is several steps too far. I repeat – Bagehot merits our attention. He speculates stimulatingly on the adhesion of political power and he sits with Shakespeare as our contemporary as we consider sovereignty. Let us know a little of this man.

Bagehot was born at Langport, Somerset on 3 February 1826 and died there on 24 March 1877 after a brief illness. At this early death he was already in his sixteenth year as editor of *The Economist*, which magazine to this day still carries a commentary bearing his surname by way of tribute. He was variously a banker, economist, political thinker, commentator, critic, and man of letters. To his editor, Bagehot is nothing less than 'Victorian England's most versatile genius'.[96] Woodrow Wilson venerated him. For G.M. Young, having considered the claims to that title of Marx, Eliot, Tennyson, Arnold, Ruskin, Carlyle, Maurice, Kingsley, Peel, Gladstone, Faraday, Huxley, Browning, and Newman, it is Bagehot he deems 'The Greatest Victorian'.[97]

Not all have been so sure. To a more mordant analyst Bagehot was often no better than insolent and silly and 'lacked patience and humility before his subjects'.[98] The truth lies between the extremes, although closer to the plaudits than to the opprobrium. One does have to concede however that it is Bagehot's stylish and acerbic detractor, C.H. Sisson (poet, critic, civil servant, turbulent Anglican), who makes the most arresting biographer. Sisson eventually settled in Langport and, like Bagehot, is buried there. Viewed uncharitably, he might be said to have borne a professional grudge that Bagehot ranks above him in the town's affections. Sisson writes as a high church Anglican who sees piety as an intrinsic component of the English constitution and who deprecates its retreat. Moreover, he blames that retreat on men like Bagehot, those founding fathers of the 'apologetics of "fact"'.[99] Sisson's harsh summation of Bagehot merits

[96] Norman St John-Stevas' in *Collected Works*, vol. i, p. 29.
[97] G.M. Young, 'The Greatest Victorian', *The Spectator*, (17 June 1937), pp. 9-10.
[98] C.H. Sisson, *The Case of Walter Bagehot* (London: Faber and Faber, 1972), p. 40.
[99] Ibid., p. 140.

quotation at length and we should then unpack the criticism with the help of more charitable assessments:

> Facts were what Bagehot could use, to clear a way for himself in society and to make money. They are likewise the weapon of the contemporary civil servant, to turn away wrath and to make a game so complicated that no one else can play it.[100]

That Bagehot made his way in society is undeniable – he was a confidant of prime ministers and central bankers (referred to by Alastair Buchan as Gladstone's 'Spare Chancellor') and maintained a supervisory role in the family business, Stuckey's Bank, alongside his prolific journalism.[101] These activities gave him a very sound income but not extravagant riches – as Buchan observes he preferred the receipt of a salary to the rewards that might have been available to him if he had turned his acquaintance with the City to purely personal ends: 'he had a strong personal hatred of speculation for its own sake'.[102]

Sisson's suggestion of unseemly avarice does rather miss the mark and, in any event, it is his criticism of Bagehot's manipulation of 'fact' which is more germane. Sisson places Bagehot in the vanguard of what we have latterly come to know as 'spin' (Sisson writes five years before the first OED attribution of the modern political usage): 'He spins clever comment between himself and reality'.[103] Sisson paints Bagehot as the unclothed emperor and etches himself into the picture as the boy proclaiming the naked truth. Sisson is not the only detractor – writing in 1970, Trowbridge H. Ford contributes a closely argued essay that paints Bagehot as a mere 'popularizer' of the ideas of the under-adulated John Stuart Mill.[104] Ford falls short of alleging plagiarism but the implication is clear:

> Bagehot should have indicated his dependence on Mill, but he felt compelled to be secretive about the matter because he wanted great influence without working very hard for it.[105]

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[100] Ibid., p. 140.
[101] Alastair Buchan, *The Spare Chancellor* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1959).
[102] Ibid., p. 232.
[103] Sisson, p. 122.
[104] Trowbridge H. Ford, 'Bagehot and Mill as Theorists of Comparative Politics', *Comparative Politics*, 2:2 (January 1970), 309-324 (p. 312).
[105] Ibid., p. 324.

Ford is cogent and persuasive but would be even more so if he acknowledged the existence of three articles about Mill written by Bagehot between 1865 and 1873, most particularly the last of these, a note composed at Mill's death.[106] In that editorial note Bagehot concedes Mill's influence: 'In political economy the writer of these lines has long been in the habit of calling himself the last man of the ante-Mill period'.[107]

In contradiction of the negative impressions of Sisson and Ford we find six estimable memoirists/biographers who seem to have been, in Sisson's terms, fooled by Bagehot, or, more generously, can see beyond his defects.

Richard Holt Hutton, like Bagehot, was raised by a Unitarian father, though Bagehot had the competing influence of an Anglican mother. St. John-Stevas observes that this 'religious schism in his home' explains why Bagehot was a religious man throughout his life 'but never a dogmatic one'.[108] Hutton and Bagehot met at University College London and became firm friends. Both were at that 'infidel and godless college' because familial loyalty prevented them from acceding to the doctrinal requirements of Oxford and Cambridge.[109] They would edit the *National Review* together for ten years and whilst Bagehot edited *The Economist* for sixteen years, Hutton edited *The Spectator* for twenty-five. He wrote his 'Memoir of Walter Bagehot' in 1877.[110] It is a sober but affectionate précis of his great friend's life and in it we see opinion to set against Sisson's acerbity. Where Sisson sees the 'apologetics of "fact"', Hutton prefers to identify a 'glorification of compromise' and the operation of 'animated moderation', the very quality Bagehot lauds in *Physics and Politics*.[111] Where Sisson finds a

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[106] *Collected Works*, vol. iii , pp. 540-559. The last of the three articles, 'The Late Mr. Mill' appeared in *The Economist* 17 May 1873.
[107] Ibid., p. 558.
[108] St John-Stevas, 'Bagehot's Religious Views', in *Collected Works*, vol. xv, p. 246.
[109] From the *Evening Standard* 19 June 1828, quoted in Gordon Heulin, *King's College London: 1828-1978* (London: King's College, 1978), p. 3.
[110] Richard Holt Hutton, 'Memoir of Walter Bagehot', in *Collected Works*, vol. xv, pp. 83-127. The article had first appeared in the *Fortnightly Review* for October 1877 and was revised by Hutton as a preface to his own edition of Bagehot's *Literary Studies* in 1878.
[111] Ibid., p. 89.

calculating insincerity, Hutton locates an instinctive dualism that is not weakness but, rather, lends strength to Bagehot's analyses. He finds Bagehot to be 'generous in recognizing the independent value of divergent convictions in the less pliant present'.[112]

Hutton's memoir is the work of a friend. The first full life of Bagehot (from 1914) is the work of Bagehot's sister-in-law, Mrs. Russell Barrington.[113] The fondness felt by the author for her subject is obvious throughout, but she nevertheless writes with the insight of an editor of a substantial collection of Bagehot's writing. Like Hutton she applauds Bagehot's duality (what Sisson might see as venality) as giving strength to his observations:

> But Walter Bagehot was no bigoted partisan of either side – Liberal or Conservative; the Conservative, no less than the Liberal, would consult him.[114]

Barrington captures the spirit that underpins Bagehot's conclusions on sovereignty – a convinced belief (in the context of England) in the efficacy of an 'organised hypocrisy'.[115] Bagehot understands that, 'no great nation made its mark through political strife, but rather through the quality of its moral temperament, its art and its literature'.[116] I suggest that, at a much earlier and more tumultuous point in England's constitutional evolution (although within the thickened present), Shakespeare grasps the same essentials of governance and manifests them in the Roman Plays.

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[112] Ibid., p. 118.
[113] Mrs. Russell Barrington, *The Life of Walter Bagehot* (op. cit.). This *Life* was reprinted as the concluding volume of Mrs. Barrington's ten volume *Works and Life* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1915). The first attempt at a comprehensive collection of Bagehot's writing had been made under the editorship of Forrest Morgan in a five volume American edition published (rather bizarrely) by the Travelers Insurance Company of Hartford Connecticut in 1889. Both collections are superseded by *Collected Works*.
[114] Barrington, p. 11.
[115] Bagehot, *The English Constitution*, p. 352. In this instance Bagehot was quoting Disraeli's jibe at the Peel administration delivered in a speech in the House of Commons on 17 March 1845.
[116] Barrington, p. 24.

William Irvine's 1939 biography concludes that in the array of Victorian thinkers, 'Bagehot was perhaps not one of the greatest'; however Irvine leavens that mild assessment: 'As a writer and thinker he did not enjoy the luxury of pre-eminent genius, but he possessed a breadth and balance which such genius frequently lacks.'[117] Irvine also (beneficially in my view) punctures any inflated estimation of Bagehot as a literary critic and in that small regard he pre-empts Sisson: 'Bagehot's most serious limitation as a literary critic, and one very common in his time, was a want of scientific scholarship'.[118] Rather than rely on any science, Bagehot in his treatment of literary subjects beguiles us with the virtues of 'fine conversation'.[119] Irvine is equally accurate when he considers Bagehot's political writing and the instincts that underpin it:

> As a matter of fact his ideas have a colour, a vitality, a motive force entirely their own, and looking back over those ideas we must conclude that they proceeded from an imagination that was profoundly realistic.[120]

My suggestion is that Shakespeare shares that 'profoundly realistic' imagination but that his is made more incisive by its marriage to poetic and dramatic sensibilities.

Norman St John-Stevas is Bagehot's definitive editor. He has twice offered biographies of Bagehot – once in 1959 as an introduction to a selection of Bagehot's political writing, and then in 1965 in the first volume of the *Collected Works*.[121] Not unnaturally his enthusiasm for Bagehot carries through both pieces, although he accepts that Bagehot as literary critic lacks method. St John-Stevas has no reservations about Bagehot as a political thinker. As Bagehot does with Shakespeare in 'Shakespeare - The Individual', St John-Stevas perhaps identifies himself in his subject: he detects duality, so that Bagehot may have been an 'official Liberal' but his character was one of a joyous Conservative, that

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[117] William Irvine, *Walter Bagehot* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1939), p. 284.
[118] Ibid., p. 103.
[119] Ibid., p. 85.
[120] Ibid., p. 280.
[121] Norman St John-Stevas, 'Walter Bagehot 1826 – 1877', in *Walter Bagehot*, ed. St John-Stevas (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1959) pp. 1–117; 'A Short Biography', in *Collected Works,* vol. i, pp. 29–83.

of, 'the English cavalier, unmarred by the romantic excesses of Young England'.[122] On Bagehot's political theory St John-Stevas is acute – the key is Bagehot's happy pragmatism:

> One of Walter Bagehot's most characteristic political ideas was his appreciation of what he called *stupidity* … The obstinacy of stupidity was Nature's safeguard against the restlessness of genius.[123]

It is not, of course, too distant an intellectual step from St John-Stevas's ready admiration of this pragmatism to Sisson's denigration of it – the key for us must be the recognition of it.

Also writing in 1959, Buchan treads similar critical ground without quite the same effusiveness as St John-Stevas. He defines Bagehot as: 'one of the most difficult figures in English letters to treat with justice'.[124] Bagehot's wide-ranging mind is offered as the very reason for his comparative neglect: 'his was an original not a great mind, that he was an explorer rather than a cartographer'.[125] And it is Buchan who gives us perhaps the most useful and positive summation of Bagehot's worth: 'Bagehot was one of those rare men of real intellect who recognize that analysis is as worthy of man's best powers as advocacy'.[126] This is the best riposte to Sisson's animus.

Most recently, James Grant's prime concern is with Bagehot as a banker and economic theorist. He is very much alive to Bagehot's propensity for paradox and he highlights Bagehot's unfeasibly gymnastic stance on the American Civil War, steering the *Economist* to support of both emancipation and of the South.[127] He also makes full allowance for Bagehot's Victorian misogyny.[128] However Grant's admiration for Bagehot is generous and his estimation of one of Bagehot's most important works is an astute one that puts Beasley's aspersions in a more measured context:

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[122] St John-Stevas (1959), p. 45; p. 46.
[123] Ibid., p. 49.
[124] Buchan, p. 260.
[125] Ibid., pp. 260–261.
[126] Ibid., p. 263.
[127] Grant, p. 127.
[128] Ibid., pp. 228-229.

> *Physics and Politics* is a production not of science, but of imagination and supposition. It is anthropology without the fieldwork, science without the laboratory, and scholarship without the footnotes.[129]

Grant's concluding words are apt. He refers to the unpronounceability of Bagehot's surname: 'His name was impossible. His words live.'[130]

What we have then range from bold assertions of Bagehot's genius to his condemnation as a money-grubbing cynic. I suggest that Irvine, Buchan, and Grant get closest to the proper evaluation of the man. The very qualities that they acknowledge in Bagehot are those that equip him to help us when we consider the Roman Plays. Shakespeare acts alongside Bagehot in a thickened present – Shakespeare now. A widened critical method is called for as we attempt a myriad-minded Shakespeare studies. That critical method must acknowledge a concept of history that encompasses a thickened present. It is to the question of critical method that I turn in that next chapter. In my deployment of Bagehot I am encouraged by Brian Hanley, Roger Kimball and Silvano Colella, all of them modern enthusiasts for Bagehot.[131] In particular Colella welcomes a critical atmosphere where 'the relaxing of disciplinary boundaries is back on the agenda', and where it is acknowledged that 'the wisdom of fiction was far-sighted'.[132]

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[129] Ibid., p. 240.
[130] Ibid., p. 294.
[131] Brian Hanley, '"The Greatest Victorian" in the New Century', *Papers on Language and Literature*, 40:2 (Spring 2004), 167-198;
Roger Kimball, 'Introduction: the Age of Discussion', *New Criterion*, 31:5 (January 2013) online: http://www.newcriterion.com/articles.cfm/Introduction--the-age-of-discussion-7518 [accessed 10 August 2022];
Colella, (op. cit.).
[132] Colella, p233.

Chapter Two
Method: Towards a Myriad-Minded Shakespeare Studies

I: Critical Method

A definition of criticism is intrinsically elusive. It is no more than superficially helpful to attempt some distinction between criticism as art/criticism as science. As Philip Smallwood notes, all such a dichotomy can do is to over-simplify art and science themselves: 'It is as if those concepts were not themselves a mystery'.[1] Smallwood instead concludes that circularity in definition is unavoidable but that such circularity does not itself void the validity of the attempt.[2] His posited formula includes the proposition that 'criticism is only criticism when its own nature (and definition) is up for inspection.'[3] Smallwood goes on to address the question of 'useful purpose' in criticism and concludes:

> [T]he dichotomy between criticism with and without evaluation is not entirely false – as many aestheticians have attempted to show. It becomes problematic when it falls into the hands of polemic.[4]

Polemic, circularity and even self-absorption are then the enemies of useful purpose in criticism. To illustrate the potentially alienating effect of a drive for methodological purity, consider the interaction of two articles taken from the same edition of *Shakespeare Quarterly* in 2009. Christopher Pye contributes a dense and exhaustively argued case for *Othello* marking the distinctive turn at which Shakespeare achieved an aesthetic near-purity for the tragic form: 'the aesthetic comes into being in relation to those internally inscribed horizons, comparable to the vanishing point in pictorial art'.[5] This metaphor of the artistic vanishing point is useful in explaining the multiplicity underscoring both Bagehot and Shakespeare. For Pye this process of transcendent form has to be

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[1] Philip Smallwood, 'The Definition of Criticism', *New Literary History,* 27:3 (Summer 1996), 545-554 (p. 548).
[2] Ibid., p. 551.
[3] Ibid., p. 553.
[4] Philip Smallwood, 'Criticism, Valuation, and Useful Purpose', *New Literary History,* 28:4 (Autumn 1997), 711-722 (p. 721).
[5] Christopher Pye, 'To Throw Out Our Eyes for Brave Othello: Shakespeare and Aesthetic Ideology', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 60:4 (Winter 2009), 425-447 (p. 425).

read in conjunction with the modern emergence of the state as a formal entity (as opposed to 'an organically conceived sovereign body politic') and the emergence into common consciousness of the conflicted status of the citizen-subject.[6] Pye takes as a comparison to the mature techniques of *Othello* the less subtle dramatic mechanisms of *Titus Andronicus* and concludes that: 'The difference between the two plays is the distinction between pointing and pointing to pointing'.[7] For Pye this important distinction is the key to Shakespeare's greater achievement in *Othello*.[8] I will offer my own defence of *Titus Andronicus* as a nonetheless effective stimulant for political conjecture in Chapter Three; suffice it to say at this juncture that I would not agree (and certainly neither did Bagehot from his nineteenth-century vantage point) that the concept of the citizen-subject has been any more than remotely comprehended (yet alone accepted) by successive Shakespearean audiences. Rather the concept is commonly and, for the most part, unthinkingly acquiesced in.

Pye's article is fortunate in that it is carried alongside a critique from Hugh Grady, which interrogates and thereby opens up Pye's critical methodology.[9] Grady adopts a mildly defensive tone on behalf of modern schools of theory which he feels have been consigned before their time to some critical dustbin.[10] Admirable as it is, Grady's exposition of Pye's piece signals an obvious danger – can an article (Pye's) be of full value if it requires a companion piece to explain its intricacies? Grady is polite enough to avoid this bear-trap but the point is illustrative of the critical dilemma. Grady identifies numerous critical schools which will continue to compete for scholarly attention and assures us that: 'In short theory has not ended but instead developed – and moved in new directions'.[11] He offers Pye's closely-read analysis as an example of such a new direction: 'a convergence of deconstruction and Lacanian ideas of language […]

[6] Ibid., p. 425.
[7] Ibid., p. 446.
[8] Ibid., p. 439.
[9] Hugh Grady, 'Theory "After Theory": Christopher Pye's Reading of "Othello"', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 60:4 (Winter 2009), 453-459.
[10] Ibid., p. 453.
[11] Ibid., p. 454.

showing affinities, as well, with the Hegelian and Marxist traditions'.[12] In amongst the identification of the complexities of these convergent schools Grady succeeds in simplifying Pye and introduces his own core concept of the aesthetic, a key feature of which is its 'quality of autonomy from the "real" world in which it is located and which imprints it'.[13] There is a welcome echo here of Pye's vanishing point allusion. Grady equates successful Shakespearean tragedy (a status he specifically accords, inter alia, to *Antony and Cleopatra* though not to the other Roman Plays) with German *Trauerspiel* (mourning play) as theorised by Walter Benjamin and which is marked by the 'emptied world of modernity', a tabula rasa on which new meanings can be inscribed.[14] Taking his tone from Pye, Grady sees monetary gain (actuating Iago's immoral machinations) as the key theme in *Othello* and convincingly gives that theme and its dramatic achievement a current political resonance.[15] This venality is not the motif that will concern us in the Roman Plays but I do want to examine the 'emptied world of modernity' as it is utilised in those plays.

It is in response to Grady's urging of a myriad-minded Shakespeare studies that I frame my project. The route to that study touches on new historicism, presentism, and impure aesthetics. I also appropriate Harry Harootunian's notion of 'non-contemporaneous contemporaneity' in framing my method.[16]

II: Historicism

Paul Hamilton usefully interrogates historicisms both new and old in detail in his *Historicism* and anticipates Grady's assertion that a legitimate method should create space for a political expression.[17] It is Stephen Greenblatt's (and numerous successive others') 'new' historicism with which we are primarily

[12] Ibid., p. 455.
[13] Ibid., p. 456.
[14] Ibid., p. 457.
[15] Ibid., p. 459.
[16] Harootunian, p. 475.
[17] Paul Hamilton, *Historicism*, 2nd edition (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 5.

concerned, commencing with his *Renaissance Self-Fashioning.*[18] The critical method is predicated upon parallel reading of the literary text and a contemporary non-literary text, the latter referred to as the 'anecdote'. In concept each text informs and interrogates the other. The new historicism is distinguished from the old by its reliance on these co-texts rather than taking as read a pre-established historical context. History, in the 'new' approach is 'history-in-text'.[19]

Greenblatt never claimed infallibility for his practice ('a practice rather than a doctrine'), indeed preferred the designation 'Poetics of Culture' over 'new historicism' by the time of his lecture at the University of Western Australia in September 1989.[20] Nonetheless it is the latter label that has stuck. The limitations of the practice, conceded by Greenblatt at its outset, revolve around an acknowledgement that a practitioner's 'consciousness must extend to an acceptance of the impossibility of fully reconstructing and re-entering the culture of the sixteenth century'.[21] Hamilton charts the trajectory of new historicism by reference to Greenblatt's numerous publications whilst interceding for others who have practised historicist methods differently.[22] In summarising the objections of some Greenblatt detractors, Hamilton encapsulates the perceived political pessimism of new historicism as distinct from its close (largely British) methodological cousin, cultural materialism:

> Many of his critics have taken him to be expressing pessimism concerning both our ability to be historical and to escape from ideology. We are, they object, unreasonably confined to writing an unchallenged history of the present.[23]

I am not concerned here with the more ideologically challenging practices of cultural materialism (often Marxist in inflection), but it is useful to admit, in line

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[18] Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1980).
[19] Peter Barry, *Beginning Theory,* 3rd edition (Manchester; Manchester University Press, 2009), p. 168.
[20] Stephen Greenblatt, 'Towards a Poetics of Culture', *Southern Review*, 20:1 (March 1987), pp. 3-15 (p. 3).
[21] Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, p. 5.
[22] Hamilton, pp. 143-150.
[23] Ibid., p. 137.

with Rivkin and Ryan, that dissidence and dissonance together register in literary texts so that: 'even as the play may assert the right of nobility to rule, it evokes the reality that such rule was being contested at the time'.[24] Putting it more bluntly, Peter Barry deems cultural materialism and new historicism, notwithstanding their similarities of method, as providing 'a contrast between political optimism and political pessimism'.[25]

Whilst acknowledging vital critical departures and deviations, John Drakakis and Monica Fludernick also choose Greenblatt's critical development to emblemise new historicism in their 'Beyond New Historicism?' [26] In answer to the question they pose in their title, they express the views that we should not return to a 'pretheoretical literary impressionism' and that instead the optimistic stance is that: 'The preposition *beyond* is preferable to the adverb *after*. We are moving beyond theory rather than being on the brink of "after theory."'[27] I interpret this as endorsing the spirit of Grady's myriad-minded study and I will next trace an arc from new historicism to presentism and through to impure aesthetics.

III: Presentism

It is the inviolable history in new historicism (and the perceived danger that it or the anecdote will swamp the present resonance of the literary text) that provokes presentism to suggest itself as a more refined method of study, as a liberating answer to embedded historicity. Notwithstanding its difference in emphasis, presentism often borrows the new historicist trope of the anecdote as the launching point for critics.[28] The practice is comprehensively promoted and

[24] Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan, 'Introduction: Starting with Zero', in *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, 2nd edn., eds Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan (Maiden, MA: Blackwell, 2004), pp. 641-646 (p. 646).
[25] Barry, p. 178.
[26] John Drakakis and Monika Fludernik, 'Beyond New Historicism?', *Poetics Today* 35:4 (Winter 2014), 495-513.
[27] Ibid., pp. 495-496.
[28] Barry, p. 295.

described in Ewan Fernie's 'Shakespeare and the Prospect of Presentism'.[29] Fernie is direct in formulating the approach:

> This essay argues for the crucial importance of Shakespeare now. It reflects on presentism: a strategy of interpreting texts in relation to current affairs that challenges the dominant fashion of reading Shakespeare historically.[30]

From my perspective, this vivid mode of study must be quickly distinguished from the misguided presentism understood in wider scholastic fields of cultural studies and amusingly deprecated by Matthew P. Brown as the 'New Boredom'.[31] Instead what we should seek is an enlightened accommodation with temporality which responds to the earlier entreaty of J. Paul Hunter that, 'time itself is one of the dimensions of texts and that the texts of time past have to be reckoned with'.[32] Interestingly at the time of 'Prospect of Presentism' (four years before Grady's call for myriad-minded studies) it is a fusing of practised elements that Fernie is asking for: 'a deliberate synthesis of presentism's commitment to the "now" and historicism's orientation to what is "other" might reveal a way forward'.[33]

Fernie identifies Hugh Grady and Terence Hawkes as the chief apostles of this informed literary presentism. Grady and Hawkes would subsequently together edit *Presentist Shakespeares* in 2007.[34] However their individual approaches are already differentiated by Fernie: Grady's method is 'essentially historical'; Hawkes's 'more performative: an assertion and demonstration of the immediate freedom and energy of the critical act.'[35] Hawkes in particular, in new historicist

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[29] Ewan Fernie, 'Shakespeare and the Prospect of Presentism', *Shakespeare Survey*, 58 (2005), 169-184.
[30] Ibid., p. 169.
[31] Matthew P. Brown, 'Book History, Sexy Knowledge, and the Challenge of the New Boredom', *American Literary History*, 16:4 (Winter 2004) 688-706 (p. 688).
[32] J. Paul Hunter, 'The Future of the Past: Teaching Older Texts in a Postmodern World', *South Atlantic Review*, 59:2 (May 1994), 1-10 (p. 10).
[33] Fernie, p. 169.
[34] *Presentist Shakespeares,* eds Hugh Grady and Terence Hawkes (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007).
[35] Ibid., p. 171.

fashion, makes telling use of a launching anecdote in his essays.[36] Typically the anecdote is more nearly contemporary to Hawkes than to Shakespeare. John Drakakis provides an excellent overview of Hawkes's critical career and the gestation of his presentism to the point where his essays 'embrace the "present" in a dialogue with the "past"'.[37] There is a link in this method to my own use of Bagehot. Despite the readability of Hawkes's essays (Grady assesses them as 'Postmodernist artworks which embed the interpretation of Shakespearean texts in a kaleidoscope of changing contexts') it is Grady in whom I am more interested.[38] Writing together in the Introduction to *Presentist Shakespeares*, Grady and Hawkes's concerns at the methodological and political limitations of new historicism are tartly expressed. Their political commitment to understand 'a particularly interesting and demanding juncture in modern and Shakespeare studies', carries with it echoes of the concerns implicit in Harootunian's framing of history which we will encounter later in this chapter.[39]

IV: Impure Aesthetics

Grady's presentism fuses eventually into his posited impure aesthetic, explained at length in *Shakespeare and Impure Aesthetics*. It is the concluding sentence of that book which motivates my attempt at myriad-minded studies, 'in terms of a constantly changing present'.[40]

From its very outset *Impure Aesthetics* sets about rescuing the aesthetic from what Grady views as the threat of a politically motivated oblivion, observing that: 'For nearly a generation, in an era dominated by French poststructuralist theory, the aesthetic has been the opposite of the political'.[41] Notwithstanding his concerns at the perceived academic pre-eminence of apolitical historicist approaches, Grady does make space to compliment Greenblatt for his

[36] See in particular: Terence Hawkes, *Shakespeare in the Present* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2002).
[37] John Drakakis, 'The Critical Process of Terence Hawkes', *Shakespeare Studies*, 44 (2016), 23-46 (p. 24).
[38] Grady, *Impure Aesthetics*, p. 237.
[39] Grady and Hawkes in *Presentist Shakespeares*, p. 5.
[40] Grady, *Impure Aesthetics*, p. 239.
[41] Ibid., p. 1.

preservation of the aesthetic as an autonomous category for analysis.[42] Grady's prime concern is to distinguish his categorisation of the aesthetic from more classical and essentialist (principally Kantian) designations, and he suggests that his view is easier to comprehend if we accept that 'impure aesthetics' can only be understood in 'our Postmodernist present'.[43] Thus, for Grady, the aesthetic is a concept, thereby a social construct, and hence intrinsically impure – by his description: 'a place-holder for what is repressed elsewhere in the system'.[44]

For Grady literary texts are expressions of Nietzsche's will-to-power uneasily confined by modes of order.[45] In all of this I would suggest that there is not only a beneficial coming together with Pye's analogy of the uninscribed space at a picture's vanishing point, but also a distinct danger of tipping back into Drakakis and Fludernick's abhorred 'pretheoretical literary impressionism'.[46] Put rather crudely, there is a danger that 'beyond theory' becomes an excuse for critics both to have their methodological cake and eat it. Grady is alive to this danger and sets out to provide close Shakespearean studies where his impure and political aesthetic infects but does not overpower.[47] In those studies Grady is concerned to enrol Shakespeare as' 'a proto-theorist of the aesthetic with insights of his own – some prescient of later theorists, others uniquely his'.[48] My hope is to make a similar case for Shakespeare in the context of political theory, in particular by placing him alongside Bagehot, his non-contemporaneous contemporary. In passing it can be noted that Colella finds the application of an impure aesthetic within Bagehot's criticism: 'Bagehot's criticism thrives on an impure and sometimes awkward combination of aesthetic and business values'.[49]

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[42] Ibid., p. 2.
[43] Ibid., p. 3
[44] Ibid., p. 21.
[45] Ibid., p. 22.
[46] Drakakis and Fludernick, p. 495.
[47] Grady, *Impure Aesthetics*, p. 39.
[48] Ibid., p. 41.
[49] Colella, p. 222.

In his specific analyses within *Impure Aesthetics* (of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Timon of Athens*, *Hamlet*, and *Romeo and Juliet*) Grady is at pains not to distance himself completely from historicism but rather to avoid the essentialist traps of avid historicism. He cites Benjamin approvingly, in particular because: 'Benjamin's project has a historicizing dimension, but history for him is always a construct of our present moment'.[50] Finally Grady asserts that his presentism (out of which impure aesthetics is evolved) is a 'big tent' and that the primary motivation he and Hawkes shared at its outset arose from:

> [O]ur shared perception that the 'new materialism' … was rapidly evolving into an anti-political and anti-aesthetic critical methodology that threatened to negate thirty years of the field's self-education in cultural theory.[51]

V: An Evolutionary Element

New historicism, presentism and an acknowledgement of the impure aesthetic are all influential in my critical method. As will be seen in later chapters, Bagehot's *Physics and Politics* is vital in an understanding of his political science.[52] The spirit of Bagehot's enquiries in *Physics and Politics* must, having taken note of Beasley's concerns, also underscore my method. Bagehot's book endeavours to reconcile emerging natural science (most particularly the theory of natural selection) with social and political science. Bagehot searches for the 'political prerequisites of progress'.[53] We should enable the same search in our literary criticism. This is not to advocate disappearing down the semi-blind alley of Joseph Carroll's deterministic literary Darwinism, a practice that purports to understand the motives of literary characters by 'concentrating chiefly on the sexual aspects of reproductive success'.[54] For a tetchy debate on literary

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[50] Grady, *Impure Aesthetics*, p. 156.
[51] Ibid., p. 236.
[52] *Physics and Politics* was published in book form in 1872, a collation of five articles first published in the *Fortnightly Review* between 1867 and 1872 with the addition of a concluding chapter. Bagehot made minor alterations for the book edition. It is from the book version (which is used in *Collected Works*) that excerpts are taken.
[53] Ibid., p. 144.
[54] Joseph Carroll, 'Three Scenarios for Literary Darwinism', *New Literary History*, 41:1 (Winter 2010) pp. 53-67 (p. 54).

Darwinism, one should view the Winter 2012 issue of *Critical Inquiry*, which contains seven articles on the topic.[55] In amongst the intellectual sparring can be found two usefully mediated positions that feed into my use of Bagehot's particular deployment of evolution. That mediated critical position is best expressed by Blakey Vermeule. She does not share the literary establishment's scepticism about the account of the human mind provided by received positions in evolutionary psychology, but crucially (and at variance with Carroll) she asserts that: 'evolutionary psychology is very far from offering a compelling account of particular products of the human imagination'.[56] Thus evolution (or at least a restrictive anti-culturalist view of it) is not everything but a very meaningful something. All of which takes us neatly back to Walter Bagehot and indeed numerous other Victorian intellectuals. As Vanessa L. Ryan (again in that edition of *Critical Inquiry*) observes, our twenty-first century contestation of consilience has eerie echoes of mid-Victorian ambitions for a 'holistic conception of science'.[57] All of this reminds us of Bagehot's expressed aims in *Physics and Politics*:

> But we thus perceive how a science of history is possible […] a science to teach the laws of tendencies – created by the mind, and transmitted by the body – which act upon and incline the will of man from age to age.[58]

Bagehot goes on to categorise those tendencies as manifesting themselves in identifiable stages, firstly a 'Preliminary Age'.[59] 'The Use of Conflict' then follows through to 'Nation Making', and finally the rational 'Age of Discussion'.[60] It should not be imagined however that Bagehot prefigures Carroll in evolutionary fundamentalism; rather Bagehot is an enthusiastic eclecticist who finds an intellectual stimulus in applying the new science to his own musings on political science. It is this spirit of informed and enquiring eclecticism that we should try to harness whilst treating Shakespeare's plays as Drakakis suggests, 'not as

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[55] *Critical Inquiry*, 38:2 (Winter 2012).
[56] Blakey Vermeule, 'Wit and Poetry and Pope, or the Handicap Principle', 426-430 Ibid., (p.426).
[57] Vanessa L. Ryan, 'Living in Duplicate: Victorian Science and Literature Today', 411-417 Ibid., (p. 411).
[58] Bagehot, *Physics and Politics*, pp. 22-23.
[59] Ibid., pp. 17-40.
[60] Ibid., pp. 41-63; pp. 64-105; pp. 106-133 respectively.

allegories for the critic to unpick, but as possible ways of engaging in a dialogue between past and present.'[61]

I will therefore argue for an evolutionary context in the interrogation of the politics of the Roman Plays, an evolutionary context suggested by Bagehot rather than one as constricting as Carroll's. I categorically reject Beasley's reductivist interpretation of Bagehot as irredeemably racist. Before we can consider the meat of the five plays, there is one last theoretical element to be brought within the methodological circle – Harootunian's philosophy of history and his suggestion of non-contemporaneous contemporaneities.

VI: Remembering the Historical Present

In discussing literary presentism, I earlier sought to distinguish an enlightened presentism (as practised by Grady and Hawkes) from a mere obsession with present day cultural artefacts. In the context of his own academic discipline of History, it is this latter stamp of presentism that Harootunian is at pains to question in 'Remembering the Historical Present'. He writes of a mistaken assumption that the events of 9/11 were of such magnitude as to announce 'the installation of a new time marked by a boundless present'.[62] These proposed 'new temporal tectonics', he argues, ignore what have always been the mixed temporalities in dominant western cultures, that is to say that the privileging of the modern has caused a blind eye to be turned to substantial pockets of underdevelopment in the dominant developed world. He cites the Hurricane Katrina catastrophe as emblematic of a 'Third World' problem manifesting itself in the United States. [63] This posited conjuncture of deemed modernity and the archaic suggests to Harootunian that we are situated in a 'thickened present': 'a present filled with traces of different moments and temporalities, weighted with sediments'.[64] We can find evidence for this conception of mixed temporality at work artistically in Jennifer Flaherty's critique of two film adaptations of Roman

[61] Drakakis, p. 42.
[62] Harootunian, p. 471.
[63] Ibid., p. 472, p. 475.
[64] Ibid., p. 476.

Plays: the Julie Taymor *Titus* and Ralph Fiennes' *Coriolanus*.[65] For Flaherty both films 'use the Roman setting to locate the present in the past and the past in the present' by the deployment of what Taymor terms 'blended time'.[66] Flaherty also makes the case for the techniques of the two films (and by implication, I would suggest, for those of the Shakespearean source texts) operating as examples of Douglas Lanier's earlier theory of immanence (applied by him to Peter Greenaway's *Prospero's Books*) in which we encounter 'an artifact meditating on the theoretical grounds of its own existence.'[67] It is only a small step from here to Davies' Matter Theatre/metatheatre: 'Five times in *Cymbeline* a character asks "what's the matter?"'[68]

For Harootunian then presentism 'is not the same as the simple present any more than an indeterminable and unknowable future is synonymous with futurism'.[69] Rather: 'What this "provincialism [...] of time" or what temporal narrowing has opened up is the time of the present as the locus of non-contemporaneous contemporaneity'.[70] In terms of political theory I am suggesting that Shakespeare, Bagehot and we as auditors are non-contemporaneous contemporaries, bound together in a thickened present. I detect in particular Shakespeare's acknowledgement of the pertinence of such mixed temporality in the first and the last of the Roman Plays: in the youthful historical eclecticism of *Titus Andronicus*, and in the mature mixed temporalities of *Cymbeline*.

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[65] Jennifer Flaherty, 'Filming Shakespeare's Rome: The "Preposterous Contemporary" Eternal City', in *Interdisciplinary Literary Studies*, 17:2 (2015) 228-240. The films reviewed are *Titus*, dir. Julie Taymor (Foxlight Search Pictures, 1999) and *Coriolanus*, dir. Ralph Fiennes (The Weinstein Company, 2011).
[66] Flaherty, p. 229 and p. 231.
[67] Douglas Lanier, 'Drowning the Book', in *Shakespeare, Theory, and Performance*, ed. James C. Bulman (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 187-209 (p. 204).
[68] Davies, p. 69.
[69] Harootunian, p. 484.
[70] Ibid., 490. The quotation within the quotation is from T. S. Eliot, *On Poetry and Poets* (London: Faber and Faber, 1957) p. 69.

An acceptance of the existence of this thickened present helps to address some of the perceived weaknesses of both new historicist and presentist techniques by liberating the critic from the fear of respectively the present and the past. The anecdote that triggers a piece of criticism need not therefore be calendrically coexistent with the subject text but can be part of the same thickened present. As an example, I would argue that the critical value of this approach serves to bolster a relatively early example of Hawkes's style, his extended consideration of *Coriolanus* in 'Shakespeare and the General Strike', a chapter in his *Meaning by Shakespeare*.[71]

In an unslavish nod to the new historicist manner, I consider pieces taken from Bagehot's output alongside the Roman Plays. The intention is to interrogate the political and constitutional concepts unleashed in Shakespeare's Rome. Shakespeare knowingly problematises sovereignty and by viewing his deliberate oppositions through the lens of Bagehot (including the proto-Darwinism of *Physics and Politics*) we can begin to formulate our own modern solutions to the ever-present riddle of political power. The flexed modernity of that riddle means that this project tips its hat to presentism but also reaches towards the impure aesthetic locatable at the vanishing point of the Shakespearean picture.

The impertinence of Bagehot's reactions to events in Paris in 1851 will be my prompt for consideration of the youthful provocations of Shakespeare's bloodiest tragedy.

[71] Terence Hawkes, *Meaning by Shakespeare* (London: Routledge, 1992) pp. 42-60.

Chapter Three
Titus Andronicus

I: Bagehot and Louis Napoleon

There was a political knowingness in Louis Napoleon's selection of 2 December as the date for his self-coup of 1851: it was the anniversary of both the acceptance in 1804 (from Pope Pius VII with full state ceremony) of a crown of empery by his uncle Napoleon Bonaparte, and that same uncle's greatest military triumph at Austerlitz in 1805. Louis Napoleon chose that resonant date once more on the first anniversary of his coup for the formal proclamation of himself as 'the anointed of the Lord', Emperor of France.[1] Thus was the Second French Empire born – engineered by the man who was already President but whose office was shortly to be constitutionally time-barred. For a modern mirror of this bold chicanery a glimpse into Vladimir Putin's electoral history will suffice. This Second French Empire would last, by application of considerable political acuity, until 1870 and Louis Napoleon, just as his famous forebear, would die in exile, in his case in leafy Chislehurst.

A visitor in Paris on that December day in 1851 was Walter Bagehot. He had recently been called to the Bar and his extended French holiday reflected his lack of enthusiasm for the career others had wished upon him. Rather than draft Chancery pleadings the twenty-five-year-old Bagehot instead relished the ambience of the coup and located the journalistic voice that would mark his future. Imbibing the heady political mood and over a two-month period he wrote a sequence of seven scandalising letters to the sober readers of the Unitarian paper, the *Inquirer*.[2] For St. John-Stevas the Letters constitute, 'an extraordinary combination of rollicking cynicism and sound good sense'.[3] In more critical vein (as ever) Sisson readily accepts the designation of cynicism but otherwise offers up the Letters as, 'an excellent preface to *The English Constitution* because they

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[1] *Britannica*, vol. 16, p. 89.
[2] Bagehot, 'Letters on the French Coup d'Etat of 1851' (Letters'), in *Collected Works,* vol iv, pp. 29-84..
[3] St. John-Stevas, 'Walter Bagehot and Napoleon III', in *Collected Works,* vol. iv, p. 16.

reveal Bagehot's ideas so nakedly'.[4] For Sisson the despised apologetics of fact are already at play and Bagehot is to be execrated because: 'It is with regard to the fortunes of the winning classes that Bagehot sets out to examine the working of politics'.[5]

On the discrete matter of this new Napoleon, the judgement of Bagehot's contemporaries is largely in tune with Sisson's later verdict. Bagehot's sympathetic portrait of Louis Napoleon is out of kilter with the studied neutrality that marked British government policy - an innate fear of renewed Bonapartism tempered somewhat by a sense that this new Emperor had at least scuppered an unhealthy socialist advance. There are voices of approval for Louis Napoleon (indeed Palmerston would lose his position as Foreign Secretary when discovered as one such) but the view that predominates is that the French are to be pitied rather than trusted:

> Nothing contributed more to the British sense of political achievement than, firstly, the French Revolution of 1789, and secondly, France's continual oscillation thereafter between monarchy or empire on the one hand and revolution and 'anarchy' on the other.[6]

So concerned for the delicate sensibilities of his readers is the editor of the *Inquirer* that he introduces Bagehot's first Letter thus: 'It will be seen that his opinion on those events differs widely from our own'.[7] By the time of the second Letter his concern escalates and Bagehot is left standing on his own: 'The sentiments expressed in this letter render it advisable that we should again declare our entire dissent from the views of the writer'.[8] What crime against received opinion was Bagehot committing? I suggest he was doing no more than serving an early helping of the probing duomania that would be the engine of his mature writing.

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[4] Sisson, p. 63.
[5] Ibid., p. 64.
[6] J.P. Parry, 'The Impact of Napoleon III on British Politics, 1851-1880', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 11 (2001), 147-175 (p. 151).
[7] *Collected Works,* vol iv, n., p. 29.
[8] Ibid., p. 29.

In the Letters Bagehot starts to reach for the constitutional insights that will underscore his most enduring works, *The English Constitution* and *Physics and Politics*. The caustic observations on human nature will be the underpinning of his more mature (and still to purists impudent) assertion that the success of the English constitution is based not on some exquisitely configured division or even separation of powers, but on an amalgam of the dignified and the efficient elements of the constitutional machinery. Broadly speaking the dignified mechanism is the monarchy, the efficient is the executive appointed by and supervised by the legislature. Notwithstanding, as Crossman puts it, that Bagehot's minute analysis was 'out of date almost before it could be reviewed', this dignified/efficient dichotomy remains, in my assertion, a pertinent aid to political and constitutional analysis.[9]

With the Letters we stand in the foothills of Bagehot; with *Titus Andronicus* we stand in the foothills of the yet more impressive range of Shakespeare. It is instructive to consider the geographical backgrounds onto which Bagehot and Shakespeare inscribe these early forays into the political maelstrom – an alien France, and a highly mythologised Rome respectively. Each writer thereby lends himself some distance. In both cases this distance leaves a fertile safe space for rollicking cynicism. Within that safe space Bagehot reaches out for the theories he will (more temperately) expound in mature works. In his own invented safe space Shakespeare can not only cram in allusions to classical sources (J.K. Barret traces allusions to Virgil, Ovid, Horace, Seneca and Livy) but also operate in a provocative manner.[10]

II: A Barbaric Feast

Titus Andronicus is Shakespeare's first tragedy, albeit that the recent weight of academic opinion credits George Peele (1556-1596) with authorship of the first

[9] Richard Crossman (ed.), *The English Constitution, with an Introduction by R.H.S. Crossman* (London, Fontana, 1963) p. 1.
[10] J.K. Barret, 'Chained Allusions, Patterned Futures, and the Dangers of Interpretation in *Titus Andronicus*', *English Literary Renaissance*, 44:3 (Autumn 2014), 452-485.

act, perhaps with some mild Shakespearean amendment.[11] The whole bears the marks of being a young man's work. This is a play that kicks off with a vengeful human sacrifice, continues with copious death, dismemberment and rape and culminates with a barbaric feast at which Titus serves up to Tamora her two miscreant sons as the ingredients of a pie, four killings next ensuing around the feast table. Titus himself is a warrior who has already lost twenty-one sons in battle, yet as payment for a perceived slight himself summarily despatches another before us in (Peele's?) Act 1, and loses yet two more in the course of the play, their severed heads gloatingly delivered to Titus on stage.

Titus Andronicus was one of Shakespeare's great contemporary successes, only to subside into later neglect and squeamish critical denial of its authorship. Ravenscroft revised the text and notoriously denounced the original as 'rather a heap of rubbish than a structure'.[12] This much quoted denigration deserves to be read alongside Ravenscroft's own generally ignored qualification of his observation:

> However as if some great Building had been design'd in the removal we found many Large and Square Stones both usefull and Ornamental to the Fabrick as now Modell'd.[13]

Modern theatrical reassessment of this neglected text came with Peter Brook's 1955 Royal Shakespeare Company production. Brook himself looked back on that revival and made the case for the play's currency:

> The real appeal of *Titus* (over theoretically "greater" plays like *Hamlet* and *Lear*) was that abstract – stylised – Roman – classical though it appeared to be, it was obviously for everyone in the audience about the most modern of emotions – about violence, hatred, cruelty, pain.[14]

An arresting adaptation of the play in Hong Kong in 2009, *Titus 2.0*, converted the drama into a stripped-back third-person narrative delivered by seven black-

[11] As to the authorship question see Bate (ed.) *in Titus Andronicus, Arden Third Series (Revised Edition)* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), pp. 123-142.
[12] Edward Ravenscroft, *Titus Andronicus: or the Rape of Lavinia* (London: printed by J.B. for Joseph Hindmarsh, 1678), p. A2
[13] Ibid., p. A2
[14] Peter Brook, 'Search for Hunger', *Encore,* July – August (1961), 8-21 (p. 16).

clad performers.[15] The narrative opened with a blunt new prologue: 'This is a story of revenge.' That much is undeniable. We can and should go further. The text is also tersely political and it is in that open spirit that we should tackle this gory play. The enigmatic epilogue to *Titus 2.0* indeed invites to ponder all that has been laid before us in the context of Aaron's child, 'He [Lucius] looked at the baby and wondered'. We should then take our cue from within the disputed (the lines appear in the Folio and in the Second Quarto but not in the First Quarto) concluding four lines of the play:

> See justice done on Aaron, that damned Moor,
> From whom our heavy haps had their beginning:
> Then afterwards to order well the state,
> That like events may ne'er it ruinate. (5.3.201-204)[16]

It is the final rhyming couplet that acknowledges the ruination of the state consequent upon the multiple human frailties on display and this is how we should read the play.

In Chapter One I outlined the schools of criticism that ignore the very Romanness of the play. Such approaches ignore the play's role in laying down foundations for Shakespeare's political scheme within this sub-genre of Roman Plays. The better approach is, as ever, found in Miola's overview of. For him it will not suffice to dismiss the play's Rome as merely the setting for a revenge play. Rather Miola argues that we see the beginnings of Shakespeare's interest in the secular problems of power and order.[17] What we have, then, in *Titus Andronicus* is a play which overreaches itself in niceties of dramatic technique but which stands as an exuberant acknowledgement of a depravity that protrudes through the surface of sovereignty, what Bate terms: 'A glorious mishmash of history and

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[15] *Titus 2.0*, directed by Tang Shu-Wing, recording available at https://globalshakespeares.mit.edu/titus-2-0-tang-shuwing-2009/#video=titus-2-0-tang-shuwing-2009 [accessed 29 August 2022].

[16] As to the disputed provenance of these last four lines see Bate, *Complete Works*, p. 1620, and for a fuller consideration see Christine Cornell and Patrick Malcomson, 'The "Stupid" Final Lines of *Titus Andronicus*', *The Review of English Studies*, New Series, 58: 234 (April 2007), 154-161.

[17] Miola, *Shakespeare's Rome*, p. 44.

invention, it creates an imaginary Rome that is simultaneously democratic and imperial'.[18]

The play stands on its own merits but also as a primer for the wider project of the Roman Plays. Spencer had acknowledged the vigorous and sweeping ambition of the play's scheme in 1957:

> It is not so much that any particular set of political institutions is assumed in *Titus*, but rather that it includes all the political institutions that Rome ever had. The author seems anxious, not to get it all right, but to get it all in.[19]

In a more explicitly political context, Andrew Hadfield quotes Spencer's assertion approvingly.[20] In turn Hadfield's approach to contextualizing early-modern politics is endorsed by Robin Headlam Wells in the course of a good-natured but acerbic interrogation of theoretical approaches to political Shakespeare (most particularly new historicist and cultural materialist approaches). Wells' analysis is made under the mildly ironic heading 'Theory to the Rescue'.[21] Writing nine years after Hadfield, Barret not only tracks the mass of classical allusions in the Play but also observes that, 'Shakespeare pens a present moment bound to a problematically certain future'.[22] In my reading, all of this describes a present not merely confined to Shakespeare's era but alive in our thickened present.

More recently still, Paulina Kewes (whose piece is strong on Peele's co-authorship) identifies the fertile ground that Shakespeare cultivates with his composite Rome in what she deems 'surely a deliberate ploy'.[23] Viewed through Kewes' eyes *Titus Andronicus* becomes a highly political cultural artefact: 'an

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[18] Jonathan Bate, in his Introduction to *Titus Andronicus, Complete Works,* pp. 1616-1620 (p. 1616).
[19] T.J.B. Spencer, 'Shakespeare and the Elizabethan Romans', *Shakespeare Survey*, 10 (1957), 27-38 (p. 32).
[20] Andrew Hadfield, *Shakespeare and Republicanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 166.
[21] Robin Headlam Wells, *Shakespeare's Politics: A Contextual Introduction*, 2nd edn (London: Continuum, 2009), p. 185.
[22] Barret, p. 454.
[23] Paulina Kewes, '"I ask Your Voices and Your Suffrages": The Bogus Rome of Peele and Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*', *The Review of Politics*, 78:4 (Fall 2016), 551-570 (p. 554).

imaginary laboratory for political ideas and practices, above all the elective principle'.[24] This political angle returns us to Hadfield. He attaches particular significance to republican themes in *Titus Andronicus*. I would suggest that what Hadfield identifies as republican issues are more readily understood in modern parlance as issues of sovereignty and that Shakespeare is best understood in the same vein as his contemporary in a thickened present, Walter Bagehot. Thus Shakespeare's views on monarchy are infected by what we now deem republicanism (that is to say government free from monarchy and tyranny) but he settles upon pragmatic acceptance of a constitutionally constrained monarchy as the efficient model for governance. As Hadfield acknowledges, and as most certainly with Bagehot, there is no suggestion that such a constitutional fudge is an eternal verity, but that it suits its (in my designation thickened) present:

> *Titus*, in common with many of Shakespeare's early works, appears to argue a case for a limited monarchy, a mixed constitution and a fairer form of government.[25]

This is far from an unsophisticated stance. It might be argued that such a tempered advocacy of a mixed constitution is anachronistic in a worldly twenty-first century. I suggest otherwise and we need only point in support to the ill-informed and noisy furore (on both sides of a political chasm) surrounding the Supreme Court decision on the activation of Article 50 to instigate the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union.[26] The ignorant cacophony serves to demonstrate that we live in a thickened present, a present where Bagehot's diagnosis of political conditions still has its uses, moreover a thickened present in which the Roman Plays tell us something useful about the fragility of governance. In his programme notes for the 2013 Royal Shakespeare Company production of the play, Jonathan Bate (perhaps the play's most eminent defender) cogently makes the case for its modernity, 'Precisely because of all its extremities, *Titus* is the Shakespeare play for our extreme time, our post-

[24] Ibid., p. 554.
[25] Hadfield, p. 166.
[26] *R v Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union*, Hilary Term [2017] UKSC 5.

millennial moment of dark memory and fresh hope'.[27] A subsequent RSC production directed by Blanche McIntyre (2017, as part of a Roman season) is assessed by Justin B. Hopkins as most successfully (his comparison is with *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra*) living up to the season's protested pertinence:

> Many have dismissed *Titus* as a distasteful, even disgraceful play. I understand but do not share that reaction to the text's extremes. When well-interpreted, it can earn each outrageous moment, providing a kind of vicious catharsis.'[28]

Whether one views the ending of the Play as fully cathartic is a matter to which I will turn later in this chapter. Next, however, I will consider the bare bones of the political scheme of the play, refracted through Bagehot's polished cynicism.

III: The First Duty of Society

Alan Sommers summarises *Titus* as a play energised by the conflict between an urge for civility and primitive barbarism.[29] He concludes that this underscoring conflict is left deliberately unresolved.[30] This is the key to *Titus* – political institutions are in a permanent state of war with the 'barbarism of primitive, original nature'.[31] Sommers also (and here I depart importantly from him) suggests that Shakespeare (or, accepting the modern orthodoxy on authorship, we should say Peele) gives us a model for Rome's ideal leader in the shape of the ill-fated Bassianus:[32] This goes too far. We simply do not hear enough of Bassianus before he is killed in the play's fourth scene for this proposition to be supportable. We might engage in a neat conjecture that Peele envisages an exemplary role for Bassianus (the bulk of his lines are in Act I) but that Shakespeare is having none of it, preferring his own more sceptical scheme. In any event, in my reading of the play it is the near impossibility of singular

[27] Jonathan Bate, 'Ancient Myths, Modern Times', programme notes RSC production 2013 (5-7), p. 7.
[28] Justin B. Hopkins, 'Julius Caesar, Antony and Cleopatra, Titus Andronicus, Performance Review', *Shakespeare Bulletin*, 35:4, (Winter 2017), 689-699 (p. 699).
[29] Alan Sommers, 'Structure and Symbolism in *Titus Andronicus*, in *Titus Andronicus: Critical Essays* ed. by Philip C. Kolin (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 115-128 (p. 116).
[30] Ibid., p. 116.
[31] Ibid., p. 116.
[32] Ibid., p. 119

effective sovereignty that we need to discern from *Titus Andronicus*. In due course we will see that same proposition borne out by all the Roman Plays. We should not place dependence on the emergence of a single perfect sovereign. We have already encountered Bagehot's 'rollicking cynicism' in the Letters – in *Titus* we have Shakespeare's own exercise in intelligent cynicism.

Bagehot is clear: 'The first duty of society is the preservation of society'.[33] The achievement of that end trumps any intellectual constructs. For Bagehot this instinct for survival cannot be relegated below idealistic niceties:

> To keep up this system we must sacrifice everything. Parliaments, liberty, leading articles, essays, eloquence – all are good but they are secondary; at all hazards, and if we can, mankind must be kept alive.[34]

By these pragmatic terms of reference Bagehot approves of the 'temporary dictatorship' of Louis Napoleon.[35] As it transpires Bagehot will observe Louis Napoleon in power for almost two decades beyond the immediate contingency of 1851. To his credit Bagehot never (and he kept finding himself dragged back to the subject of this intriguing French statesman – twenty-five articles over two decades) loses his sense that the dictatorship must be temporary, but one detects a far-from-grudging admiration that Louis Napoleon has strung it out quite so long.[36]

How then does the peculiar multi-historical Rome of the Andronicii constitute itself in the face of society's duty of self-preservation? The answer can only be that it does so inadequately. Notwithstanding Sommers' advocacy of Bassianus, no single candidate for effective empery suggests himself – or, at a stretch, herself. The play contains only three female parts and all are killed on stage, but we should not blindly exclude Tamora from this question. In fact the state of Rome even manages to assemble the question incorrectly – at all stages the operative protagonists who try to steer Rome see sovereignty as singly

[33] Letter II, *Collected Works,* vol. iv, p. 36.
[34] Ibid., p. 36.
[35] Letter I, *Collected Works,* vol. iv, p. 30.
[36] For a valedictory assessment on the end of Louis Napoleon's Empire see Bagehot's 'The Collapse of Caesarism', *Collected Works,* vol. iv, pp. 155-159.

constituted in the person of an emperor. My assertion, influenced by Bagehot, is that one should seek for combinations of people (or more accurately the institutions those people represent) who might operate effectively together. The tragedy of the late/middle/early Rome assembled in *Titus* is that this is never appreciated – a theme of state failure that is revisited throughout the Roman Plays in increasingly nuanced patterns. One might argue that Bagehot's unfashionable approval of Louis Napoleon shows Bagehot making the same error in configuring his question, but to do so is a mistake – Bagehot is as sceptical of 'ideal' leaders as Shakespeare but he admires Louis Napoleon as a necessary and temporary expedient. No such expedient makes itself available for the Rome of *Titus* and the logic of Bagehot's evolving theories (grounded in the Letters) is that civilised societies should not rely on the emergence of such omnipotent expedients:[37]

Let us look at the candidates for leadership who are paraded before Rome in Act 1: Saturninus, Bassianus, Titus, and, very briefly, Tamora. Having said that we should properly include Tamora in the ambit of this enquiry, I do in fact first relegate her for my present purposes. She is manifestly too embroiled in villainy to be deemed dignified, though (until her grisly end) she is mighty efficient in the limited task of savage revenge that she sets herself.

The first of the posited contenders to speak is Saturninus and he disqualifies himself almost immediately from sensible contemplation by reason of his belligerent overtures:

> Defend the justice of my cause with arms.
> And countrymen, my loving followers,
> Plead my successive title with your swords. (1.1.2-4)

He opens with a call to arms and the title he asserts is hereditary – he makes no claims for his own intrinsic merit but pleads, 'Then let my father's honours live in me' (1.1.7). Bassianus is more moderate in his assertions and asks that Rome, 'let desert in pure election shine' (1.1.16). We should though note that he enters the stage, just as does his brother, with a coterie of followers and, hard upon his

[37] Letter I, *Collected Works*, vol. iv, pp. 30-31.

more reasoned words, rallies those followers to, 'fight for freedom in your choice' (1.1.17). However, before the two brothers and their followers can settle their differences, Marcus Andronicus enters and, in only the third speech of the play, provokes the last instance in the entire play of reason prevailing (albeit very briefly) over violence and vengeance. In this part imperial/part democratic hybrid Rome, Marcus stands 'a special party' (that is to say an elected Tribune – a notably less venal example of that office than the scheming Tribunes we will encounter in *Coriolanus*) for the people of Rome and fleetingly soothes the turbulence between the royal brothers by announcing that those people:

> [H]ave by common voice
> In election for the Roman empery,
> Chosen Andronicus, surnamed Pius
> For many good and great deserts to Rome. (1.1.21-24)

In response to Marcus's entreaties both Saturninus and Bassianus dismiss their followers and all is set for the entrance of Titus himself, recalled to Rome after ten years of wars with the Goths. Yet before the imperial diadem has even been offered to Titus, he and Lucius (a surviving warrior son) set in train the sequence of revenges that underpin this play.

By the end of the play Lucius has ascended to be emperor but at the beginning his behaviour hardly marks him as a candidate for empery and he defers to his father as his commander-in-chief. It is he who requests of his father (he does not think to appeal to any civic authority – the matter appears a purely military one) that a prominent prisoner be sacrificed:

> Give us the proudest prisoner of the Goths,
> That we may hew his limbs, and on a pile
> *Ad manus fratrum* sacrifice his flesh
> Before the earthly prison of their bones. (1.1.96-99)

Once Titus has nominated Alarbus for sacrifice, he stands unmoved by Tamora's eloquent plea for mercy: 'Sweet mercy is nobility's true badge; / Thrice noble Titus, spare my first-born son' (1.1.119-120). At this opportunity to show clemency Titus is able to do no more than stiffly permit the sacrifice on the grounds that, 'Religiously they ask a sacrifice; / To this your son is marked, and die he must' (1.1.124-125). All Tamora can publicly venture is to decry the, 'cruel

irreligious piety' of the sacrifice (1.1.130). The vicious train of revenge events has been set in motion as evidenced by Tamora's subsequent remarks:

> I'll find a day to massacre them all,
> And raze their faction and their family,
> The cruel father and his traitorous sons
> To whom I sued for my dear son's life. (1.1.453-456)

Intriguingly these four lines are within a speech directed in the Folio-based *Complete Works* as 'Aside to Saturninus', but Jane Howell's 1985 BBC television production has Tamora speak the lines direct to camera and ostensibly outside the earshot of all including Saturninus.[38] This sits well with the chosen portrayal of Saturninus as an ineffectual and weak emperor, cowed by his exotic queen. It does though partially, exonerate him (undeservedly in my estimation) from blame for the havoc that ensues. I must concede however that Howell's treatment of the dynamic between Saturninus and Tamora rests easily with the play's final speech, spoken by Lucius, whereby Saturninus is afforded a dignified burial whereas the alien Tamora's corpse is to be thrown 'forth to beasts and birds to prey' (5.3.198). It seems weakness, in a Roman at least, can be excused.

I have suggested that the insistence upon the sacrifice of Alarbus to the gods is the trigger for the cycle of revenge that follows. From where did Shakespeare/Peele get this story of religious murder? A lot of critical ink has been spilt on the question of sources for *Titus Andronicus*, among the most recent Jonathan Bate's revised edition for the *Third Series Arden Shakespeare*. In that edition Bate recants of his previous conclusion that authorship was solely Shakespeare's but remains of the view that the play has no direct traceable source, most particularly that both a chapbook and a registered ballad frequently cited as sources, post-date the play.[39] Bate goes on to endorse his own *Arden* conclusion in his editorial notes in the *Complete Works*.[40] He is equally adamant

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[38] Jane Howell (dir.) *Titus Andronicus* (BBC Worldwide Ltd., 1985) DVD.
[39] Bate, *Arden Third Series*, pp. 82-91.
[40] Bate, *Complete Works*, p. 1620. For a very detailed consideration of likely Roman source materials which also asserts more historical accuracy for the play than is commonly conceded see Naomi Conn Liebler, 'Getting It All Right: Titus Andronicus and Roman History', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Vol. 45, No. 3 (Autumn 1994), pp. 263-278.

on the issue of human sacrifice: 'Historically, human sacrifice was never practised in ancient Rome, but all cultures have their foundational myths of sacrifice.'[41] This remark would seem to be slightly wide of the mark. Celia E. Schultz points out that although Roman literature always affected an abhorrence of human sacrifice (characterising it as a practice of lower races) there were, particularly during the Republic (509 – 44 BC), occasions where the death of a human was required.[42] The Romans loftily excused these instances as being necessary to restore the natural order, for example the burying of unchaste vestal virgins or the drowning of hermaphroditic children. These were not, by Roman reasoning, a sacrifice to the gods. In only three recorded instances in the historic period can Schultz detect killings recorded as offerings to the gods – in each case the burying alive of pairs of defeated Gauls and Greeks, the justification being that the Sibyline Books had mandated these offerings.[43] There would therefore appear to be evidence that the Romans, albeit infrequently, offered up human sacrifices. There is also plentiful evidence that by their own casuistry the Romans had no great issue with ritual murder whilst abhorring its sub-set, human sacrifice: 'To sum up, one could say that in the Roman mind, ritual murder was an acceptable practice, but human sacrifice was not.'[44] Even allowing for Bate's mild inaccuracy we can then say that the manner of sacrificial offering described in *Titus* has no direct precedent in Roman history. Why then did Peele/Shakespeare include this bloody incitement to revenge? If we accept the theory of Peele's authorship of Act 1 (as I do) then it becomes all the harder to suspect an over-eager author at work - Peele was a substantial classical scholar at Oxford. No, the gory human sacrifice described in Act 1 is part of the deliberate provocation practised upon us by this play. In its Roman meta-history *Titus Andronicus* gives us no respite from human frailty and drags us to question how, in the resultant absence of authoritative leadership, governance is to be rescued.

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[41] *Complete Works*, p. 1616.
[42] Celia E. Schultz, 'The Romans and Ritual Murder', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 78:2 (June 2010), 516-541.
[43] Ibid., pp. 531-532.
[44] Ibid., p. 536.

IV: Candidatus

> Be *candidatus* then and put it on,
> And help to set a head on headless Rome. (1.1.185-186)

So Marcus enjoins his brother to don the candidate's 'palliament' (a word used elsewhere only by Peele – a stylometric indicator of his authorial hand) and to stand for the empery. Titus in response pleads (quite understandably) exhaustion from forty years of combat in Rome's cause and asks only that they 'Give me a staff of honour for mine age,/ But not a sceptre to control the world' (1.1.198-199). Here Titus, for a second time within the space of sixty lines, tragically fails to divine the requirements of governance. His prior error was to cast Alarbus into sacrifice. Borrowing Bagehot's terminology, this is an error of efficiency, needlessly exacerbating the threat of Tamora and, though Titus may not yet know it, Aaron. This second error is his failure to comprehend that it is his very honour, his very Roman nobility, that would equip him to stand aloft as the figurehead of the state, conveying a *dignified* sturdiness to the people of Rome but leaving the *efficiency* to a capable administrator. In this administrative capacity only one candidate crosses our radar – Titus's brother and elected Tribune, Marcus Andronicus. It is not impossible to envisage a Rome where ceremonial duty and visibility sit with the country's foremost military hero and the minutiae are left for a competent mandarin. Rome's crisis is not merely a tragedy of sorry individuals but a tragedy of the state itself, an unresolved (and perhaps irresolvable) conflict, in Sommers' terms described previously, between the self-identification of Rome and the base emotions of its ruling class. We have two parallel pairs of brothers who between them cannot diagnose Rome's need: Saturninus and Bassianus both seek the crown; Titus and Marcus between them potentially carry the dual competencies the state so requires, but neither is astute enough to understand this, much less to act upon it. Bagehot's Letters show him, in his own time's context, reaching for the formulation of effective governance. I am suggesting that Shakespeare's characters in *Titus* demonstrate to us that though they fall short of governmental competence, Shakespeare himself is all too aware that the human condition only rarely marries all the qualities in one candidate. Bagehot lauds (with proper qualifications) a temporary expedient in nineteenth century France. Shakespeare (with Peele's

introductory assistance) puts on painful display the outcome where not even such an interim candidate is conjured. Titus is fitted for a constitutional monarchy but not for absolute rule – it is to his credit that he realises the latter and it is his own and his people's tragedy that he overlooks the former.

That the task of governing is vexed is made the more obvious to us by the presence of a great (if troubling to modern sensibilities) Shakespearean villain – Aaron. He is silent in the tumultuous first Act but is in full flow in Act 2 Scene 1 and in his opening soliloquy, amidst a cocktail of classical allusion, he leaves us in no doubt that his malevolence and desire go beyond the merely personal – the Roman state is also in his sights:

> To wait said I? – To wanton with this queen,
> This goddess, this Semiramis, this nymph,
> This siren, that will charm Rome's Saturnine,
> And see his shipwrack and his commonweal's. (2.1.21-24)

What we must understand is that good governance is an elusive art and that those who are impelled to rule have need of all the governmental weapons one can muster, particularly in the face of enemies as lucid and skilful as Aaron.

By the end of Act 1 the new constitutional arrangements are in place: Titus has ceded the crown to the wastrel Saturninus and Saturninus has taken Tamora as his wife – the enemy is now literally within the palace walls. We should consider more closely the lessons implicit in this surrender to near-anarchy.

V: The Utter Inaction of the First Magistrate

> [T]he ingenious Abbe Sieyes had devised some four principal peculiarities, which were to be remembered to all time as masterpieces of political invention. These were [first] the utter inaction of the First Magistrate, copied as I believe, from the English Constitution.[45]

This is how Bagehot characterises the constitutional thinking that underwrote the French administration in the First Republic. The thinking was repudiated by the First Empire, reconsidered by the Second Republic, and jettisoned again in Louis Napoleon's Second Empire. The First Magistrate is the Head of State and in

[45] Letter III, *Collected Works*, vol iv, p. 45.

Sieyes' original contemplation, as with Bagehot's prescription for England, the supreme office holder is inactive in practical matters. Napoleon Bonaparte (whom Sieyes came to support) abandoned this particular 'peculiarity' on account of his, 'being at the moment working some fifteen hours a day at the reorganisation of France… he had no intention of doing nothing'.[46] The expectation in the Rome of Titus is not so much that the First Magistrate will do a nominal something but that he might have to do everything, an impossible burden for any but an extraordinary character acting in an extraordinarily fortuitous time. The salient point about Bagehot's views expressed in the Letters is that he was not (as his critics at home might have it) advocating dictatorship but that he was stating that Louis Napoleon's emergence was right for the peculiar time and place: 'Politics are made of time and place […] institutions are shifting things, to be tried by and adjusted to the shifting conditions of a mutable world'.[47] This may sound like lazy realpolitik (we might well suppose that we are back once again to Sisson's apologetics of fact) but is this not a description of precisely the reality that all bar Tamora and Aaron in *Titus* fail to grasp? The great tragedy of Rome, and the evil charm of Tamora and Aaron, lie in the fact that the only two participants in events who manifest any grip on political reality are not on the side of the gods. By the end even Tamora has lost her grip and is outfoxed by the 'mad' Titus. Aaron remains, spewing magnificent wickedness and utterly unrepentant as he is transported to his slow death: 'If one good deed in all my life I did / I do repent it from my very soul' (5.3.189-190).

Realpolitik of the type I describe was not unfamiliar to Elizabethans. Take for example Sir Thomas Smith's constitutional classic, *De Republica Anglorum,* written in English, not because Smith was anything other than a highly educated man (who might thereby be expected to write in the scholarly Latin) but with an eye to wider accessibility.[48]

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[46] Ibid., pp. 45-46.
[47] Ibid. p. 48.
[48] Sir Thomas Smith, (ed. Leonard Alston), *De Republica Anglorum, a Discourse on the Commonwealth of England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1906), p. xiii-xiv. Smith divulged his ambitions for the text in a letter to his friend Walter

De Republica Anglorum was not formally published (it had circulated in influential circles in manuscript for many years) until 1583, sixteen years after it was written and six years after Smith's death. Even if Shakespeare did not read this influential book, he might very well have encountered the summary of it that is included in the first and subsequent editions of Holinshed's *Chronicle*.[49]

Thomas Smith, rather as Bagehot does three centuries later, sets out to explain the English constitution at the particular time of his description – he is quite explicit about the date, 28 March 1565.[50] Bagehot, we should note, makes no mention of Smith. Just as with Bagehot's *English Constitution*, Smith in minor detail may be out of date even before publication but his overarching themes chime not only with Shakespeare's Elizabethan England but also Shakespeare's Rome, Bagehot's England, Louis Napoleon's France, indeed a contemporary thickened present. Smith may even, if we follow the logic of Anne McLaren, share in practising the dread apologetics of fact, McLaren's argument being that Smith tries to square the unmentionable philosophical circle of Elizabethan politics, that is to say, 'the central problem with which he and fellow apologists grappled throughout Elizabeth's reign: ungodly kingship in the guise of female rule.'[51]

Smith defines a commonwealth and accepts that his England is such a society:

> A common wealth is called a society or common doing of a multitude of free men collected together and united by common accord and covenauntes among themselves, for the conservation of themselves as well in peace as in warre.[52]

From that beginning Smith goes on to identify three categories of commonwealth: monarchy (where one alone rules, but to be distinguished from

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Haddon, itself referred to in Alston's *Introduction* to the 1906 edition of *De Republica Anglorum*.

[49] See Ibid., pp. xvi-xix, for Alston's detailed analysis of the history of the 'borrowing' of the Smith oeuvre in the pages of Holinshed.

[50] Ibid., p. xiv.

[51] Anne McLaren, 'Reading Sir Thomas Smith's *De Republica Anglorum* As Protestant Apologetic', *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 42:4 (1999), pp. 911-939 (p. 911).

[52] Sir Thomas Smith, p. 20.

a tyranny, which is per se not a commonwealth); oligarchy (where a minority govern); democracy (where the multitude rule).[53] However he goes on to say that effective governance is rarely a simple product of one type, rather it is an amalgam of elements of all three.[54] This is very nearly pure Bagehot, nearly three centuries before Bagehot is born.

On balance Smith characterises Elizabeth I's England as a monarchical commonwealth. Had he used this same taxonomy, Bagehot might have said the same of Victorian England. We might say the same of the second Elizabeth's United Kingdom. The Rome of the Andronicii certainly wants, at least at the drama's outset, to believe it is some sort of commonwealth – the term 'commonweal' is used to describe Rome four times in Act 1 Scene 1 alone and again by Aaron in Act 2 Scene 1. The word makes no further appearance in the text, perhaps a subliminal acknowledgement that Rome has ceased to be united by 'common accord and covenauntes'. What is certain is that while the Romans of *Titus* may well wish themselves in a commonwealth, there is a catastrophic lack of societal cohesion: Saturninus and (to a lesser extent) Bassianus plead hereditary right; Titus wants only to enjoy a peaceful retirement; Lucius will array an army against his own state; and Marcus Andronicus flounders from one misapprehension to another. Hadfield notes trappings of a workable republic (and in doing so, as per Sommers, praises Bassianus) but correctly points out that the rot has already set in:

> However, not only are such features too weak to protect the state against the unholy alliance of a self-declared tyrant and his barbarian allies, they are also already corrupted and complicit with the patrician and autocratic drift of Roman society.[55]

We can trace another line from Smith to Bagehot, in this case via Sieyes.[56] Sieyes had posited the inactivity of the First Magistrate and this designation echoes Smith. As Alston indicates in his *Introduction* to *De Republica*, Smith studiously

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[53] For a more detailed analysis of Sir Thomas Smith see Hadfield, pp. 19-25.
[54] Sir Thomas Smith, p. 14.
[55] Hadfield, p. 161.
[56] Emmanuel-Joseph Sieyes,'What is the Third Estate?', in *Political Writings* (ed. and trans. Michael Sonenscher) (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 2003) 92-162. Original French pamphlet published 1789.

avoids bare speculation on the crown function in the commonwealth he describes: 'For Smith the framework of a commonwealth consists almost entirely of its courts, its judicial system and its methods of police'.[57] What we should not overlook however is that, borrowing Sieyes' terminology, the Emperor/King/Queen is the First Magistrate and that Bagehot's own favoured constitutional model features an administratively inactive First Magistrate. Given the ill-starred actions of the candidates for primacy arrayed before us in *Titus*, a moderated inactivity would be very welcome.

Before I turn to the vengeful ire of Titus (the dramatic engine driving the second half of the play) and the play's ambiguous ending, I will consider first the character who, if we take Bagehotian thinking to its conclusion, may stand as Rome's most tragic failure – the administrative figure of Marcus Andronicus.

VI: A Special Party

Marcus Andronicus is a Tribune of the people, a democratic tint in the Roman spectrum. Yet, as we have already discussed, he fails to use his position to achieve for those people a workable government. Instead, he hurriedly proposes his war-weary brother for the empery without it would seem so much as a prior discussion between them, a discussion which might have prompted the admixture of dignified and efficient elements in an Andronicus regime. Having too hastily advanced his brother's cause, Marcus finds his plan thwarted by Titus's understandable reluctance. Moreover, Marcus's haste conveys Titus to the disastrous decision to favour Saturninus and to press that decision on the other Tribunes (1.1.294-297). By Marcus's haste is an Andronicus primacy lost and consequent upon Titus's unwise and unmediated nomination of the elder son the next best alternative of Bassianus is also cast away. Rome has foisted upon it an undignified Emperor who turns for advice to his corrupt queen who is, in turn, in thrall to a scheming and efficient (within the terms of his own aims, Aaron is most efficient) villain.

[57] Alston, in Smith, p. xxvi.

Marcus's elegant ineffectuality is best emblemized by his infamous speech delivered upon discovery of the grotesquely mutilated Lavinia. A.C. Hamilton has useful insight on this topic but before I delve into that I will briefly tackle the question, also posed by Hamilton, as to whether *Titus* fails as tragedy by virtue of its failure (unlike the mature tragedies) to pass from the death of the hero to a place where '[W]e are shown how out of the strong came forth sweetness'.[58] Hamilton refuses to see sweetness emerging at the play's end with Lucius installed as Emperor and the Goth army in the city of Rome. I concur with Hamilton and further agree that, notwithstanding this climactic bitterness, the play does not thereby fail. Instead we should acknowledge that this text is marked by excess, that the tragedy is a state tragedy of Rome as much as Titus's personal tragedy and that the mark of excess 'is the sign of strength not weakness'.[59] I suggest that the excess of which Hamilton speaks extends also to the political pictures painted in the play and that Marcus participates in the tragedy of Rome as a semi-detached spectator who helps us to read those pictures while failing himself to respond effectively to the societal crisis.

Excess is then one of the play's essential motifs and nothing better encapsulates that motif than the violence visited upon Lavinia: 'her hands cut off and her tongue cut out, and ravished'.[60] Marcus's rhetorical flourishes in describing the horrors exemplify what to many has seemed the immaturity of the writing. The forty-seven-line speech (during which Marcus emotes but gives no practical assistance to his mutilated niece) is the locus for a heavyweight critical difference between two academic knights, Frank Kermode and Jonathan Bate – a difference of opinion that serves as a useful signifier of debate about the play as a whole. For Kermode the speech is lucidly poetic but dismally undramatic:

> He is making poetry about the extraordinary appearance of Lavinia, and making it exactly as he would if it were a non-dramatic poem. To a modern director the scene is something of an embarrassment.[61]

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[58] A.C. Hamilton, '*Titus Andronicus*: The Form of Shakespearian Tragedy', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 14:3 (Summer 1963) 201-213 (pp. 201-202).
[59] Ibid., p. 202.
[60] *Titus*, stage direction at head of 2.4.
[61] Frank Kermode, *Shakespeare's Language* (London: Penguin, 2001,) p. 8.

Bate disagrees. He justifies the speech on grounds that:

> Marcus needs a long speech because in it he has to learn slowly and painfully to confront suffering. He has to make himself *look* steadily at the mutilated woman, just as we, the offstage audience, have to look at her.[62]

Hamilton is on Bate's side of the difference – he credits Shakespeare as knowingly deploying classical tones in Marcus's speech in order to augment his tragedy of excess.[63] Chikako D. Kumamoto tackles the scene head-on and also settles on the Bate/Hamilton side of the debate.[64] Kumamoto does not shy away from the difficulty of the text: 'This rhetorically leavened scene has contributed to the play's reputation as Shakespeare's worst.'[65] For Kumamoto however this speech is a brilliant assertion of Shakespeare's art, 'a conscious encapsulation of his "own design"'.[66] And what is that design? Kumamoto's assertion is that this 'transgressive awareness' is all as one with Shakespeare's rhetorical theme and that we are pointed towards, 'the larger truth that Marcus's speech conveys: once broken, wholeness (whether in personal, social or political embodiments) refuses to become whole again'.[67] This motif of a broken society advances our understanding of this play. Once again we fall short of Hopkins's catharsis. Instead, and at best, we are left with an unwhole Rome.

Whichever interpretation one prefers, the discovery scene confirms Marcus's place in the text – earnestly a step behind the pulse of the action, sincere and well-intentioned, but most frequently ineffectual or plain wrong. Symbols of Rome's decline are littered about the stage (several in states of dismemberment) but Marcus may even, in his ineffectual urbanity, be the most potent.

VII: A Subdivision of Immutable Ethics

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[62] Bate, in *Arden Third Series, Titus*, p. 61.
[63] Hamilton, p. 203.
[64] Chikako D. Kumamoto, 'The "Maruelous" Play of Marcus's Rhetorical Artifice in *Titus Andronicus*', *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association*, 47:2 (Fall 2014), pp. 13-39.
[65] Ibid., pp. 13-14.
[66] Ibid., p. 15.
[67] Ibid., pp. 30-31.

What would Bagehot have made of Marcus? We will have to speculate because nowhere can we locate Bagehot voicing an opinion on *Titus Andronicus*. Notwithstanding his ingestion of Shakespeare's works and copious borrowing of aphorisms, the Victorian squeamishness at the play seems to have infected Bagehot. The only stagings of the play (or anything resembling it) in London in Bagehot's lifetime were of the Aaron-centric version devised to showcase the talents of Ira Aldridge, as described in a weekly paper of the time:

> Aaron is elevated into a noble and lofty character. Tamora, the Queen of Scythia, is a chaste though decidedly strong-minded female, and her connection with the Moor appears to be of a legitimate description.[68]

My estimation is that Bagehot would have been frustrated by Marcus. Bagehot was a man with scant sympathy for those who failed to understand the mechanics of sovereignty but insisted on being involved. This impatience with a meddlesome bourgeoisie was something that Bagehot projected onto Shakespeare in 'Shakespeare – The Individual' and notwithstanding Bagehot's lack of humility, I think it gives us an inkling of the proper understanding of Marcus.[69] In short, there is precious little point in being a leader of the political class if one fails to comprehend the play of politics.

Reverting to the Letters we can locate Bagehot's disdain for intricately theorised constitutional arrangements. He excoriates the view that, 'politics are simply a subdivision of immutable ethics'.[70] To borrow from a pithier observer: 'Politics is no exact science'.[71] The France that Bagehot contemplates in December 1851 stands, as he sees it, on the brink of calamity. There has been too much Parisian chatter, a deleterious alternative to active government. Typically Bagehot identifies the adverse effects by the resultant stasis in commercial markets: 'The debasing torture of acute apprehension was eating into the crude pleasure of

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[68] *The Era*, 26 April 1857, quoted in Bate, *Arden Third Series, Titus*, p. 55.
[69] Sisson, p.40. As to Bagehot's projection of pragmatic politics see 'Shakespeare – The Individual', p. 203.
[70] Letter III, *Collected Works*, vol. iv, p. 48.
[71] Otto von Bismarck, speech to the Prussian Upper House 18 December 1863, *Penguin Dictionary of Quotations*, eds. J.M. and M.J. Cohen (London: Penguin, 1977), p. 58

stupid lives. No man liked to take a long bill'.[72] The only corrective is the intervention of a strong leader, even one whose very instigation of the coup is a breach of his earlier presidential oath. Given that 'lasting calamities' were on the point of being inflicted on France, Bagehot's argument is that, 'the keeping of oaths is peculiarly a point of mere science, for Christianity in terms, at least, only forbids them all'.[73] I will hope to demonstrate that it is not trite to place the societal failures we are shown in *Titus Andronicus* alongside the largely economic ills that afflict mid-eighteenth century France. The Rome of the play stands on the brink of the abyss of end of empire. France in 1851 stands stationary in an industrialising Europe where commercial progress has become a *sine qua non* – standing still is not a healthy option. Standing still will debase the character of the nation.[74] The difference between the two states, one imagined (but loaded in the eyes of its audience with preconceptions of Roman nobility) and the other real, is that the Rome of the play (in my calculation) has no saviour, where France has at its head a worthy saviour, even if the French must accept the temporary need for an absolutist head of state.

VIII: A Wilderness of Tigers

I will examine a little more my contention that no saviour is available to Rome. I have already considered the claims to the crown of Saturninus (damned both by his attitudes before his ascension, and his actions afterwards); of Bassianus (for Sommers and Hadfield an emperor manqué); and of Titus (who commits grievous errors as soon as he returns to the Eternal City). What of Lucius who, at the play's climax, is the new emperor? It is he who sets in motion the dramatic catalogue of revenges when he demands the ritual sacrifice of Alarbus. To his credit he scolds his father for the slaying of Mutius, a killing which ought to confirm in our minds that Titus is not equipped for efficient governance, even if his permission for the evisceration of Alarbus has not already convinced us of that fact. This last premise, that the killing of Alarbus is barbarous and wrong, seems, to our twenty-first century eyes quite obvious. However, Christopher

[72] Letter II, *Collected Works*, vol. iv, p. 36.
[73] Ibid., p. 37.
[74] Ibid., p. 37.

Crosbie and Danielle St. Hilaire both argue that in fact the actions of Titus (endorsed and prompted by Lucius) are proportionate.[75] If we can endorse that view then the conclusion of the play is not as pessimistic as I have suggested. Rome is not the 'wilderness of tigers' (3.1.53) that Titus describes to Lucius but instead (like the France of 1851) a realm that can be pulled back from the brink. Crosbie argues that we must not measure Titus's (and, by extension Lucius's) revenge by modern standards but by the standards of Aristotelian justice in exchange.[76] This treatment of the play invites the audience to consider ethical values as they present themselves in the text and suggests that the mean (being the point at which an equalization of wrongs committed is achieved) is discernible within the play.[77] By Crosbie's application of this logic he calculates that in ordering the slaughter of only one of Tamora's sons, Titus is manifesting a, 'redefined moderation within extreme circumstances'.[78] The methodology he applies to this equation weighs Tamora's loss of one son against the twenty-one Titus has lost in battle. This calculus strikes me as too simplistic – loss, no matter how heavy, in military engagement is surely to be expected whereas the rite of human sacrifice might be waived to the betterment of a truly civilised state. At some point the piling of wrong upon wrong must stop if the project of civilisation (the mythos of the Pax Romana) is not to be stopped in its tracks.

St Hilaire's assertion of moderation in the actions of Titus and Lucius also concentrates on the provoking sacrifice of Alarbus. Her argument centres partly on the Virgilian language to be found in Act I and (at her own estimation), 'more convincingly', on the statement that Titus has been 'surnamed Pius' thus aligning him with the legendary founder of Rome, Virgil's Pius Aeneas in the *Aeneid*.[79] St. Hilaire then points to a sacrificial revenge taken by Aeneas in Book 12 of the

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[75] Christopher Crosbie, 'Fixing Moderation: *Titus Andronicus* and the Aristotelian Determination of Value", *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 58:2 (Summer 2007), 147-173. Danielle A. St. Hilaire, 'Allusion and Sacrifice in *Titus Andronicus*', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 49:2 (Spring 2009), 311-331.
[76] Crosbie, p. 147.
[77] Ibid., p. 173.
[78] Ibid., p. 163.
[79] St. Hilaire, p. 314.

Aeneid.[80] In St Hilaire's reckoning the sacrifice of Alarbus does not break from Roman tradition but is rooted in Rome's foundational text. She, as we have already seen from Barret, goes on to cite other classical allusions in *Titus*, specifically those invoking Ovid, Seneca, Horace, and Livy and concludes that:

> [R]ather than just serving as 'source' material for the play, as the implicit background that the alert reader can recognize, these older texts are recognized explicitly and invoked by the play's characters themselves as the framework for the world in which they operate.[81]

For St. Hilaire the greatest catastrophe is the decision of Saturninus to take Tamora as his bride – only by this marriage can Tamora ascend to a position from which she can wreak havoc upon the Andronicii.[82] This reading has a certain appeal but I think the hypothesis of Titus's (and thereby also Lucius's) relative blamelessness is taken too far when, in addition to arguing that there is moderation in the killing of Alarbus, St. Hilaire defends Titus's decision to favour Saturninus for the empery on the grounds that by doing so he avoids a civil war.[83] St. Hilaire finally concedes that Titus's actions may not be admirable or right and locates the meaning of the play not in blaming Titus or Lucius but:

> [I]n confronting and thinking through the difficulties of turning what is wrong into something right, of moving forward from a past that leaves no one guiltless, that implicates all of us in the slaughter.[84]

This final summation by St. Hilaire is a good one but I rest with my assertion that on balance there is little encouragement for Rome in the ultimate elevation of Lucius. In this I take note of the conclusions of Molly Easo Smith.[85] She argues for a continual collapsing of the process of self-definition because the 'otherness' that ostensibly serves as a threat to society in *Titus* (otherness represented by the Goths and, to a more manifest degree, by Aaron) is constantly pulled out of focus by our own (that is to say the audience's) fascination with public punitive practices.[86] Most particularly she cites the Elizabethan taste for gory public

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[80] Ibid., p. 314.
[81] Ibid., pp. 315-316.
[82] Ibid., p. 319.
[83] Ibid., p. 319.
[84] Ibid., p. 327.
[85] Molly Easo Smith, 'Spectacles of Torment in *Titus Andronicus*', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 36:2 (Spring 1996), pp. 315-331.
[86] Ibid., p. 328.

executions but in our own modern sphere we might point to the profusion of violent material (real and confected) on the internet – our self-definition as 'not other' keeps collapsing in on itself.[87] In my suggested thickened present the play does not merely speculate about some imagined Rome but takes that city and positions it as a warning that constitutions have constantly to be tended to, that we cannot stand by ill-considered immutable ethics and that what is required is pliability of the sort that Bagehot recommends:

> Popular government has many forms, a thousand good modes of procedure; but no one of these modes can be worked, no one of those forms will endure, unless by the continual application of sensible heads and pliable judgements, to the systematic of stiff axioms, rigid principles and, incarnated propositions.[88]

We should not find optimism in Lucius's accession to the throne. The notion of Roman nobility is dead in him. Take for instance his reaction when Titus bids him raise an army of Goths: having vowed to himself to return ('Farewell, proud Rome, till Lucius come again!' (3.1.291)) he soon betrays himself – his stated aim is, 'To be revenged on Rome and Saturnine' (3.1.301). The city he pledges to take by force has now become his enemy. This very lack of salvation makes *Titus* seem a very modern play. It does not, as its detractors might have it, lack any aesthetic, rather it has its own brutal aesthetic and, as Carolyn Sale puts it, 'This aesthetic foregrounds bodies as the matter from which one may "wrest an alphabet"'.[89]

I cite Sale in support of my own view that we should not see Lucius as even one of Bagehot's expedient dictators. However we should note that Sale herself does find what she terms a 'grace note' at the play's finale, 'With Aaron and Tamora's baby taken into the Andronicii'.[90] The fate of the child has been a moot point in productions of the play. Aaron's love for the child seems to show us what Bate

[87] Ibid., p. 316.
[88] Letter IV, *Collected Works*, vol. iv p. 61.
[89] Carolyn Sale, 'Black Aeneas: Race, English Literary History, and the "Barbarous" Poetics of *Titus Andronicus*', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 62:1 (Spring 2011), 25-52 (p. 25). The incorporated line from the play is at 3.2.44.
[90] Sale, p. 51.

deems a surprising, 'transformation from devilish villain to protective father'.[91] That surprise provokes the question posed and answered by Ken Jackson in his chapter, 'Why Aaron Saves His Son – and Titus Does Not'.[92] Jackson's answer to this conundrum is that, in Abrahamic/Christian terms, Aaron's seeming compassion for his child:

> '[S]hould not be seen as compassion at all but as a dramatic effort on Shakespeare's part to engage in the multitude of Abrahamic elaborations that took place in the medieval and early modern worlds'.[93]

In Jackson's analysis Titus kills his disputatious son Mutius precisely because Titus has an unshakeable faith in Romanitas, a faith which is misplaced because unlike Abraham, there can be no divine intervention to save the son. Titus's actions are wrong-headed but at least honourable in the Roman terms that guide him. Aaron on the other hand has a furious will not to be silenced. He perhaps sees his child's survival as a means to speaking from beyond the grave. Certainly, Alexander Leggatt feels that the play resists closure, contrasting the roles of Lavinia, who perforce cannot speak, and Aaron who will not be silent – even as at the text's end he is sentenced to be buried alive in such a manner that he will 'stand and rave'.[94]

In Taymor's film the baby is taken away alive in the arms of Young Lucius (the new Emperor's son): 'A wager on hope', as Bate has it.[95] This ending was apparently only substituted (in place of the ambiguous ending Taymor had favoured in her 1994 off-Broadway stage production) at the behest of the actor (Angus Macfadyen) playing Lucius. By contrast in the BBC production the child is brought on for the final scene and is displayed almost gloatingly to the assembled citizenry in a tiny coffin. The BBC production ends with a horror-struck young Lucius holding and contemplating that coffin. Perhaps we are to detect some small hope for the future in a new generation not conditioned by

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[91] Bate, *Arden Third Series, Titus*, p. 161.
[92] Ken Jackson, *Shakespeare and Abraham* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 2015), the relevant chapter is at pp. 83-95.
[93] Ibid., p. 83.
[94] Alexander Leggatt, Shakespeare's *Tragedies: Violation and Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) p. 28. *Titus* 5.3.180.
[95] Bate, *Arden Third Series, Titus* p. 162.

participation in the blood-spattered world of the Andronicii. Bethany Packard perhaps provides us with another grace note with her tempered optimism bound in the character of Young Lucius.[96] Packard's reading cites the wretched figure of Lavinia, rendered mute by Demetrius and Chiron, as a co-author of the narratives running through the play. For Packard, Lavinia's very silence shouts loudly of virtue and gives ground for an optimism born of her positive relationship with her nephew: 'Shakespeare puts Lucius not in the position of heir to his grandfather, but of heir to his aunt'.[97]

IX: He Looked at the Baby

Should we concede the text the grace notes that Sale and Packard accord it – can small gestures of mercy serve to rescue Rome's wilderness of tigers?

When the captured Aaron and his infant son are brought before Lucius there is initially no doubt that Lucius wants the child to die: 'First hang the child, that he may see it sprawl - / A sight to vex the father's soul withal' (5.1.51-52). As he is interrogated, Aaron insists that Lucius must swear an oath to preserve the child before Aaron will impart any information. Impatiently Lucius concedes, 'Even by my god I swear to thee I will' (5.1.87). If we believe that Lucius keeps his word (and the text is silent on the point) I still question what comfort we should take from the child's survival. Do we really have evidence that Lucius has learned the lessons of all that has flowed out of his original request for human sacrifice and thereby equipped himself for either dignified or efficient rule? His mandated methods of despatch for Saturninus, Tamora, and Aaron tell us something about the stamp of the man who now rules Rome. Notwithstanding his manifest sins, Saturninus is given honourable burial in the family tomb. Tamora, also of royal blood but no Roman, is to be denied any funeral rite and is to be cast to the wilds as carrion. As for Aaron (still fabulously defiant), Lucius concocts a cruel living burial – in this instance he does not claim any divine requirement for the savage mode of death, the savagery is its own justification (5.3.190). The circle of

[96] Bethany Packard, 'Lavinia as Coauthor of Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*', *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*, 50:2 (Spring 2010), pp. 281-300.
[97] Ibid., p. 297.

vengeance keeps turning. To my eye Lucius is not a man who will waste any energy meditating about an oath he has given to a self-confessed unbeliever to spare a child he designates, 'base fruit' (5.1.43). And even if Lucius is troubled enough about his oath to give him pause, that oath is given to the very god who demanded the sacrifice that ignited the fires under Rome. There is scant comfort for embattled Rome – another unfit emperor has the diadem and long-sworn enemies, the Goths, are now his personal army. The exact Rome of *Titus* may be unlocatable in history, but a rudimentary knowledge of Roman history informs the reader/spectator that Rome was at end of Empire overrun by the real Goths. We are witnessing the early and unstoppable death throes of a civilisation.

Bagehot's diagnosis of the failure in 1851 of predominantly parliamentary government in France was that the French were at that very juncture by character unsuited to such government.[98] Bagehot had not yet fully formulated his twin test of constitutional effectiveness, but that test can be seen bursting to life in the Letters. The Letters allow us to measure an imaginary Rome which certainly has its own elements of convulsion, albeit they are bloody and brutal as opposed to the throttling economic stasis of 1851 France. The answer for France is the 'temporary dictatorship' of Louis Napoleon, a fortuitously qualified candidate who owes his political life to knowing his limits. Twelve years after the self-coup and with Louis Napoleon still in power, Bagehot writes admiringly of the very limitations that underscore his adhesion in office:

> To sum up all, he has a restless, scheming, brooding, cavernous mind; daring in idea – hesitating when it comes to action; a singular mixture of tenacity and inconsistency; recoiling before the difficult and hazardous; shrinking from the irrevocable; and certain not to venture on the desperate.[99]

Notwithstanding this grudging praise we must not forget that Bagehot eventually comes to see Louis Napoleon as outlasting even his peculiar efficacy. In the mythical Rome of the Andronicii no such self-limiting leader suggests himself, nor even do the political protagonists understand that their empire's survival

[98] Letter VII, *Collected Works*, vol. iv, p. 77.
[99] Bagehot, 'The Emperor of the French', *Economist,* 28 November 1863, *Collected Works*, vol. iv, pp. 101-104 (p. 104).

depends on finding some combination of individuals who can divide the running of the state. Above all else at the crucial junctures the candidates fail to appreciate the power of inactivity, of 'shrinking from the irrevocable'. How different might matters be if Titus had shown clemency to Alarbus, had Lucius not asked for the sacrifice, had Marcus not so badly misdiagnosed the requirements of office. These failures are Rome's tragedy and the only consolation lies in the possibility that a baby may be reprieved from execution. To borrow phraseology from *Physics and Politics*, what we are witnessing is not a state progressing towards the semi-ideal of Nation Making but rather regressing into the precursor Use of Conflict:

> And lastly we now understand why order and civilisation are so unstable even in progressive communities. We see frequently in states what physiologists call 'atavism' – the return, in part, to the unstable nature of their barbarous ancestors.[100]

'This is a story of revenge.' So began *Titus 2.0*. It is still more – it is a story of state tragedy and of the conflict between a Rome that believes itself noble and the untamed barbarity of its own aristocracy. It is perhaps then the story of Rome's own revenge upon that unthinking ruling class. Perhaps all we can do in the face of the carnage that this text ranges before us is to join with Young Lucius, as the epilogue of *Titus 2.0* directs, and to look at the baby and wonder.

In his riotous 2019 Broadway play, *Gary: A Sequel to Titus Andronicus*, Taylor Mac populates the stage with the domestic staff charged with clearing the mass of cadavers consequent upon the action of Shakespeare's play.[101] At the conclusion of Mac's text, one of the characters recovers the baby, still alive, from the mass of corpses. Any grace note signified by this discovery is soon qualified. A summary of the state of Rome is put in the mouth of the midwife Carol as: 'Turns out it was fine. Except, even though they promised, nobody was looking after it. Or even noticing it'.[102] This gives a nice metaphor for the state of Rome –

[100] *Physics and Politics*, pp. 104-105.
[101] Taylor Mac, *Gary: A Sequel to Titus Andronicus*, (New York, NY: Theatre Communications Group Inc., 2021).
[102] Ibid., p. 91.

a civilisation dying of neglect; dying of a lack, in Bagehotian terms, of any animated moderation.

The Lamentable Tragedy of Titus Andronicus foregrounds a man who tragically turns down constitutional leadership. *The Tragedy of Julius Caesar* directs our attention to a man whose personal tragedy is to be thought to covet such eminence. Both encapsulate Rome's own tragedy. Human failure in the face of sovereignty is the engine of both plays. That conclusion will be enlarged upon in the next chapter as I consider how Shakespeare and Bagehot react to the fact of Caesarism.

Chapter Four
Julius Caesar

> What had simply been the name of one aristocratic family – and a fairly obscure one at that – became effectively a title symbolising supreme and legitimate power. So strong was the association that when the twentieth century opened, two of the world's great powers were still led by a kaiser and a tsar, each name a rendering of Caesar.[1]

If *Titus Andronicus* is a window into the blood-drenched psyche of a failing Rome, *Julius Caesar* can seem a more civilised dissertation on that societal failure. After all, Shakespeare here appropriates real and widely recognised (most particularly Caesar himself) historical figures. However, we should avoid getting too misty-eyed or prescriptive about the scheme of the play. As Miola puts it: 'Shakespeare here creates a play that accommodates, even insists upon, the complexity and ambivalence of Caesar's story'.[2] Like *Titus Andronicus*, then, *Julius Caesar* is driven by that complexity and ambivalence, and also by catastrophic human ferocity. I will consider what Bagehot and others have to say of Caesarism, but will first unpack a little of the play's psycho-political context.

Julius Caesar is the briefest of the Roman Plays. This brevity does not dissipate its strengths, indeed may amplify them: it sparks a timeless political agenda; it sets its protagonists against each other spiritually and physically; it provokes debate; it leaves its audience to do its own thinking.

I: A Political Play

Julius Caesar is, of course a political play - 'This most political of plays'.[3] But it is rather more besides. It builds upon the pessimism of the first Roman episode in *Titus* and unfurls a tragedy of the male political class and of the state they purport to serve. It is a tragedy of individuals whose will to power costs them their lives. It is also that most dangerous creature for an Elizabethan dramatist, a play about regicide. This last element is very much a consideration

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[1] Adrian Goldsworthy, *Caesar* (London: Phoenix paperback edition, 2007), p. 1.
[2] Miola, *Shakespeare's Rome*, pp. 76-77.
[3] Emma Smith, 'Julius Caesar: The Play of the Moment', *programme notes* (Sheffield Crucible Theatre production of *Julius Caesar*, dir. Robert Hastie, May 2017) 10-11 (p. 10.).

notwithstanding the detail that Caesar himself never formally takes the absolute title. Rather the charge levelled against him by the conspirators is that he would become emperor and thereby fracture a (romantically) perceived republican order. As Robert Cooper points out, this nice distinction would not have troubled Elizabethan audiences: 'Renaissance palaces contained busts of the twelve Caesars, with Julius Caesar as the first of the line. His murder was regicide'.[4]

The delicate line that Shakespeare (and his contemporary dramatists) tread when tackling this historically inflected tale of regicide is highlighted if we consider Domenico Lovascio's dissection and distinction of William Alexander's 1607 closet drama, *Julius Caesar*.[5] Alexander's play is Jacobean and aimed at a limited, refined audience, while Shakespeare's is Elizabethan (1599) and written for the unrefined public stage. Nevertheless the delicacy of the subject matter touches both royal courts, even if, as Hadfield states, the 'republican moment' had passed with the death of Elizabeth.[6] Lovascio asserts that unlike 'all other contemporary plays featuring Caesar', (including Shakespeare's) Alexander's text portrays Caesar as a 'tyrant *ex parte exercitii* (that is, in execution)' as opposed to '*ex defectii tituli* (that is, as usurper)'.[7] There is no suggestion from Shakespeare that his Caesar has yet acted despotically (though his true history had been marked by brutality), merely that he might accede to a kingship to which no title exists.[8] Alexander makes what Lovascio deems (in the Jacobean context) a courageous assertion that a king may justifiably be put to death for his actions and not merely because of a defect in his title. There is no ambiguity about the endorsement in Alexander's play of Caesar's murder and Alexander's motive is clear to Lovascio. – this was a cautionary tale aimed courageously at King James

[4] Robert Cooper, 'Shakespeare's Politics', *The American Interest*, (20 June 2017) online at: http://www.the-american-interest.com/2017/06/20/Shakespeares-politics/ [accessed 28 November 2018].
[5] Domenico Lovascio, '"All our lives upon ones lippes depend": Caesar as a Tyrant in William Alexander's *Julius Caesar*', *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England*, 29 (2016), 68-102.
[6] Hadfield, p. 205.
[7] Lovascio, p. 68.
[8] For an account of the turbulent prelude to the end of the republic see Simon Baker, *Ancient Rome: the Rise and Fall of an Empire*, chapter 2 (London: BBC Books, 2007) 101-154.

I.[9] It should be said that Hadfield is slightly less convinced of Alexander's courage but can concede that:

> Nevertheless, it is clear that Alexander's version of the story is told to support James's political ideas – without lapsing into sycophancy – not to open up space for oppositional political thought.[10]

In Lovascio's terms, the Roman regicides of other dramatists are more temperate than Alexander's. We might accept this conjecture and point to the 'Tudor Myth' that some suppose underpins Shakespeare's History Plays. That myth is founded on a genealogical prissiness that dictates that a defective title to the throne will ultimately be confounded by divine right. However, we might also stretch our analysis and speculate that the assassination of a king/emperor *ex defectii tituli* is a yet more radical act if the reasoning that justifies it is that any claim to kingship is defective, that the very fact of kingship is itself a defect. In a polytheistic (and thereby pagan) Rome there is no question of a divine right at play. Interpreted in this way, Shakespeare's play becomes even more vexing – the extreme reading is that all monarchies are to be deplored. That is not what I take from the play but surely the great strength of Shakespeare's play (and a prime annoyance to its detractors) is that it can, by nuances of production, casting, and reception, be made to stimulate all manner of political nostrums.

Bagehot's political philosophy is practised in the main upon the English constitution, but we must remember that the prime signifier of Victorian England's self-confidence was the durability of that English constitution, even if in Bagehot's estimation the reasons conventionally given for that durability were misguided. The two principal foreign constitutions that Bagehot most often stands in comparison to that of England are the French and the American and it should be remembered that the French were prone to recurring constitutional instabilities and that America endured a vicious Civil War during the prime of Bagehot's journalistic life. The relative steadiness of England encourages Bagehot to laud the English arrangement and to propound his own particular interpretation of its success. In line with his stylistic duomania, Bagehot favours

[9] Lovascio, p. 88.
[10] Hadfield, p. 76.

the dignified/efficient dichotomy. As a test of constitutional soundness it still warrants application today. What St. John-Stevas writes in 1974 remains correct:

> Bagehot had hit upon a useful and continuing tool of analysis in his dichotomy […] It corresponds indeed to permanent needs of human society, the need for stability and the need for change, one set of institutions not impeding but facilitating the success of the other.[11]

Bringing political theory up to date we find Timothy Snyder in *The Road to Unfreedom* (2018) modishly fixated on Vladimir Putin and Donald Trump.[12] However, digging beneath those twin obsessions, we see a diplopic tool of analysis still in operation. Snyder excoriates the sterile evils of inevitablist (Marxist) or eternalist (Putin, Trump, Farage) politics and prescribes his antidote: humble constitutional institutions facilitating the success and the necessary regeneration of the administrative arm as the fulcrum of the constantly unfinished project of history:

> The mechanism that ensures that a state outlasts a leader is called the principle of succession. A common one is democracy. The meaning of each election is the promise of the next one. Since each citizen is fallible, democracy transforms cumulative mistakes into a collective belief in the future. History goes on.[13]

Julius Caesar is a play well-furnished with dichotomies, both thematically and in terms of its characters. All of these configurations can be submitted to the lens of Bagehot's constitutional thinking and can be analysed in terms of his dignified/efficient dichotomy: master/slave (in Nietzschean terms as Cantor would have us do); republican/imperial; progressive/reactionary; patrician/plebeian; epicurean/stoic; Brutus/Cassius; Antony/Octavius; Caesar/anyone amongst the principals.[14] The outcome of these comparisons renders a stew of provocative conflicts – every character or facet seemingly capable of both besting and being bested. As Emma Smith counsels, we should

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[11] Norman St. John-Stevas, 'The Political Genius of Walter Bagehot' in *Collected Works,* vol. v, pp. 35-159 (p. 81).
[12] Timothy Snyder, *The Road to Unfreedom* (London: The Bodley Head, 2018).
[13] Ibid., p. 38.
[14] Cantor, *Shakespeare's Roman Trilogy*, see in particular Chapter 2, pp. 100-159.

not make the mistake of asserting that Shakespeare betrays a preference for any of the political/philosophical schemes he sketches.[15]

The provocations thrown up by the play coalesce in questions for the audience: firstly, what do we believe about empery/kingship, particularly one that is perceived to have descended into tyranny; secondly, if not empery then what in its place? The answers to these questions lead us over several critical territories, amongst them contemplation of the nature and durability of Caesarism, and its alternatives.

Within this atmosphere of competing elements, characters, and questions, I will first consider what exactly Caesarism entails (most particularly for Bagehot), followed by a consideration of the most active characters and themes in the play. Finally I will suggest where the Shakespearean Rome of *Julius Caesar* stands in the scheme of societal development suggested by Bagehot .

II: Caesarism

OED cites Orestes Brownson in 1857 as the earliest user of 'Caesarism' which it defines as: 'The system of absolute government founded by Caesar; imperialism'.[16] Brownson was a prolific American commentator, a Catholic convert (from Unitarianism) and a polymath autodidact. It is pleasing to contemplate him as a less staid (though similarly copiously bearded) New England version of Bagehot. Rather disappointingly no mention of him appears in Bagehot's writing. Whatever, by 1865 Bagehot has picked up the term and writes of 'Caesarism as it now exists' for the *Economist*.[17] Within a little over five years he recounts 'The Collapse of Caesarism' for the same publication.[18]

The Caesarism 'as it now exists' and whose collapse he particularly interrogates is the Caesarism of Louis Napoleon, Bagehot indulging his continuing obsession

[15] Emma Smith (op. cit.).
[16] OED (*n* a).
[17] Bagehot, 'Caesarism as it now exists', in *Collected Works*, vol. iv, pp. 111-116. The article appeared in the edition of 4 March 1865.
[18] Bagehot, 'The Collapse of Caesarism' (op. cit.). First appeared in the *Economist* of 20 August 1870.

with, as Louis Napoleon styled himself, Napoleon III. Onto Bagehot's scheme of Caesarism I want to overlay Gramsci's ideologically motivated and more technical ruminations and then consider the whole in the context of Shakespeare's *Tragedy of Julius Caesar* – a play which is not only a tragedy of several individuals (be it Caesar as Shakespeare's full title emphatically suggests, Brutus as the weight of lines spoken might argue, or even Cassius as we will find suggested by some critics) but also, perhaps primarily, the tragedy of a city state embodied in its aristocratic political class.[19]

III: **Bagehot's Caesarism**

In Bagehot's designation, Caesarism is a form of democratic despotism, with Julius Caesar as history's first example.[20] He arrays Louis Napoleon alongside Caesar and of the former says (not unadmiringly):

> Louis Napoleon is a Benthamite despot. He is for the 'greatest happiness of the greatest number.' He says, 'I am where I am, because I know better than any one else what is good for the French people, and they know that I know better.' He is not the Lord's anointed; he is the people's agent.[21]

Bagehot's admiration for Louis Napoleon, first made distinct in the Letters, is out of step with received opinion back in London. We have already seen the troubles the editor of the *Inquirer* took to distance himself from the exuberant opinions of his correspondent. The *Economist* (Bagehot's permanent connection to which does not commence until 1859 when he becomes a director, his editorship beginning two years later) at the time of the coup sounds a far more careful note than Bagehot. In a piece of studied fence-sitting it accords Louis Napoleon a chance to submit himself to more democratic modes but otherwise decries him:

> In the meantime the act he has committed is one which, unless he can produce some strong and clear case in its defence, must command the severest condemnation of every honest mind.[22]

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[19] Antonio Gramsci, 'Caesarism', in *Selection from Prison Notebooks,* (translated and edited by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith) (New York, NY: International, 1971) 219-223. The notebooks were written between 1932 and 1934.
[20] Bagehot, 'Caesarism as it now exists', p. 111.
[21] Ibid. p. 111.
[22] Editorial, 'The Forlorn Hope of France', *Economist*, 20 December 1851, vol. 9, (July–December 1851),1397-1401 (p. 1400).

Whereas we will see Gramsci designate and distinguish progressive and reactionary Caesarisms from each other, Bagehot (in *Physics and Politics*) thinks progressive states (Caesarist or otherwise) extremely rare and even then mostly unsustainable.[23] Furthermore Bagehot betrays his customary cynicism as he concludes that even the benevolent despotism of Napoleon III for all its immediate usefulness is dire in the longer course: 'It is an admirable government for present and coarse purposes, but a detestable government for future and refined purposes'.[24] Nowhere does Bagehot advocate any principled betterment of the body politic – all he can champion is what his detractors deem an amoral (or worse immoral) fudge. Bagehot's point of view seems always to be that progress can only safely be taken so far and that societal dysfunction is the predestined product of an overthinking polity – he thinks this last description particularly apt for the French. In this last regard at least he is in step with the *Economist* of early 1852 – that paper's editorial on 24 January referring to 'the centralised administration and despotic bureaucracy which the French not only endure but cherish'.[25] Bagehot's eventual diagnosis is that a failure of what has since come to be termed subsidiarity (the moving down of political function to the lowest competent level) will always act alongside baser instincts to disfigure any ideal.[26]

Bagehot then is not a political optimist, but neither is he a dispiriting pessimist. This, I suggest, is where a critic such as Sisson finds Bagehot infuriating – he can seem comfortable with a conclusion that life is imperfect but that he (along perhaps with a few intellectual peers) has been clever enough to discern this fact and to forge himself a life around it. So, by 1870 Bagehot is quite comfortable writing of 'The Collapse of Caesarism'. Once again he writes about Louis Napoleon and this time he is prompted by the anticipated failure of the Emperor's France to match the military might of Prussia. In this instance Bagehot shows a little prescience - only twelve days after his article appeared, Louis

[23] Bagehot, *Physics and Politics*, p. 137.
[24] Bagehot, 'Caesarism as it now exists', p. 113.
[25] Editorial, 'The New French Constitution', *Economist*, 24 January 1852, vol. 10, (January- June 1852), 82-83 (p. 82).
[26] Bagehot, *Physics and Politics*, p. 105.

Napoleon's forces were defeated at Sedan and the defeat precipitated the foreshadowed fall of his empire. However, one should not imagine that Bagehot instead advocates the victorious Prussian system of a military monarchy – no, this system too contains the seeds of its own destruction being another flawed form of what Bagehot now describes as 'personal government'.[27]

We see Bagehot again hanging his pundit's hat on that most English of political creatures – an unwritten constitutional fudge, founded on neither faith nor logic. We can see how far this pragmatic approach deviates from the stern religiosity of his great critic, Sisson, by considering Sisson's unapologetic advocacy of establishmentarianism:

> We shall deny Bagehot's assertion that it is a 'fiction' that 'ministers are, in any political sense, the Queen's servants'. We shall say, on the contrary that the Queen rules through her Ministers, and that she does not rule any the less for that.[28]

In the final analysis Bagehot is describing a compromise that happens, in his view, to work but is not underpinned by anything more than a belief in the unambiguous integrity and self-restraint (qualities we might accuse the conspirators in *Julius Caesar* of signally lacking) of what we can term the administrative class, the very class with which Bagehot identified himself.

Gramsci (writing from his prison cell in fascist Italy) offers us a more theorised and politically driven cast of Caesarism and its overlaying onto Bagehot's scheme further aids a political reading of *Julius Caesar*.

IV: Gramsci's Caesarism

Despite the vicissitudes afflicting him (his thoughts on Caesarism are taken from the prolific prison notebooks) Gramsci has that advantage enjoyed by Marxists over both a conservative-minded liberal like Bagehot and a twenty-first-century liberal democrat such as Snyder – that is to say, a belief in the perfectibility of political society. For Gramsci history does not always have to 'go on' – pure

[27] Bagehot, 'The Collapse of Caesarism', p. 155.
[28] C.H. Sisson, 'A Note on the Monarchy', in *The Avoidance of Literature*, ed. by Michael Schmidt (Manchester: Carcanet, 1978) 125-133 (p. 127). The article first appeared in *Church Quarterly*, October-December 1953.

socialism can be achieved and the project of history will at that juncture be at an end. This 'end of history' is in stark contrast to that interrogated in Francis Fukuyama's notorious (and, it is often forgotten, speculative) 1989 text, 'The End of History?'[29] That lecture/article was provoked by and responded to the mooted triumph of western democracy at the fall of the Berlin Wall. In fact when, three years later, Fukuyama expands on the topic he is highly dubious that history has reached its end:

> Alexandre Kojeve believed that ultimately history itself would vindicate its own rationality. That is, enough wagons would pull into town such that any reasonable person looking at the situation would be forced to agree that there had been only one journey and one destination. It is doubtful that we are at that point now.[30]

If we translate this analysis into Bagehot and Snyder, they both see political history as a continuous and necessarily self-renewing project. They are not, in fact, so very far apart from Fukuyama. All are distinct from Gramsci but it is his fiercely acute analysis we should first master in order to interrogate *Julius Caesar*.

Driven by his stern ideology, Gramsci sees Caesarism in terms of political theory rather than as merely a manifestation of personality cult. In Gramsci's reasoning Caesarism may even be practised (albeit unusually) without the presence of a heroic and representative personality. He cites the Ramsay MacDonald National Government as an example of this phenomenon.[31] Rather than being, as popular belief might have it, 'the most "solid bulwark" against Caesarism', coalition is, he asserts, in all instances 'the first stage of Caesarism'.[32] This has interesting implications when we come to consider Bagehot's dignified/efficient constitutional dichotomy and the resonance (for which I argue) with Shakespeare's treatment of sovereignty. It becomes reasonable to ask, is not Bagehot's dichotomy itself a shaky coalition between the reactionary and

[29] Francis Fukuyama, 'The End of History?', *National Interest* (Summer 1989) 1-18.
[30] Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (London: Penguin, 1992) p. 339.
[31] Gramsci, p. 220.
[32] Ibid., p. 220.

progressive atmospheres of state? This question brings us full-circle back to how we assess the perfectibility (or otherwise) of history. That is a matter of personal persuasion. Ultimately, my assertion is that Shakespeare, like Bagehot, views history as imperfectible but that, with much endeavour and forbearance, civilised and balanced positions are achievable.

For Gramsci, Caesarism may sometimes be progressive, sometimes reactionary but is always born out of a situation 'in which the forces balance each other in a catastrophic manner'.[33] He cites as progressive Caesarisms those of Julius Caesar and Napoleon Bonaparte: in both cases the contesting progressive and reactionary forces, though distinct and in conflict, were not completely incapable, 'after a molecular process,' of arriving at a 'reciprocal fusion and assimilation'.[34] In both cases the resulting despotism (to borrow Bagehot's terminology) can be interpreted as a step towards (in the Marxist vision) the end of history. Gramsci is not so positive about the case of Napoleon III, classifying it as a reactionary putsch that did nothing more than opportunistically shore up the type of state that had existed beforehand. He summarises the progressive/reactionary binary thus:

> The problem is to see whether in the dialectic "revolution [progressive]/restoration [reactionary]" it is revolution or restoration which predominates: for it is certain that in the movement of history there is never any turning back, and that restorations *in toto* do not exist.[35]

This seems to me to be a refutation of the desirability of the type of perma-coalition (of dignified and efficient) that Bagehot portrays. The core difference between these two political theorists is the belief in progress to an ideal. Gramsci still holds onto that belief whereas Bagehot never shares in it. Moreover, Gramsci's analysis resonates with the Rome we encounter in *Julius Caesar* – the conspirators have no plan for political progress beyond the killing of Caesar and this very aimlessness dooms them to failure. In Gramscian terms the *status quo ante* can never be resuscitated. The genie of the project of history is out of the

[33] Ibid., p. 219.
[34] Ibid., p. 221.
[35] Ibid., pp. 219-220.

bottle. To take my analysis of the play further I will first contemplate how the Gramscian picture of a progressive Caesarism fits within the Shakespearean landscape and assists in engaging with a play that makes a virtue of facing in various political directions.

A perceived problem with *Julius Caesar* has always been the peripheral involvement of the title character – he speaks only one sixth as much as Brutus, one quarter as much as Cassius and one third as much as Antony. As Innes observes: 'Caesar functions mostly as a cipher in the play, there is very little "self" to go on'.[36] But a cipher for what? I suggest that he serves to represent Rome itself in its state of submission to the first Caesarism. Moreover, both before and after his assassination his name is never far from the lips of every other character – one hundred and forty-six utterances in total. Caesar is the prime political mover in the play, all others responding to his achievements. A Victorian critic correctly points to the motive force behind the play:

> The view which makes the bodily presence of Caesar the dramatic Centre, and the spirit of Caesar the moving force, of the whole play, seems to me to harmonise all.[37]

Cassius's scathing estimation, intended as a provocation to Brutus, is ultimately proven to be correct:

> Why, man, he doth bestride the narrow world
> Like a Colossus, and we petty men
> Walk under his huge legs and peep about
> To find ourselves dishonourable graves. (1.2.141-144)

We have to wait until the mid-point of the play to hear any sustained argument (in Antony's famous funeral oratory) in favour of Caesar and by this point he has already been slain. Can we then judge whether this Caesarism can be, as Gramsci would have it, designated a progressive one? In pure Gramscian terms, I think the answer is a simple one. Caesar's elevation to a position, at the very least *primus inter pares* even if not formalised as such, is not a re-assertion of an old type of rule but rather a step in the slow progress towards the vaunted end of

[36] Innes, *Shakespeare's Roman Plays*, p. 71.
[37] Frederick C. Kolbe, 'Shakespeare's Julius Caesar. 1: The Caesar Difficulty', *The Irish Monthly*, 24:279 (1896), 449-459 (p. 459).

history; progress 'from one type of State to another'; progress from republic to empire; progress (ultimately in the political personage of Caesar's adopted heir, Octavius) towards the Pax Romana.[38]

If we decide that Caesar represents progress, it is a matter of political taste whether or not we approve of that progress. There have been multiple attempts to appropriate the play (and thereby Shakespeare himself) to the Caesarist or to the Brutus camps. Most famous perhaps was the Orson Welles' 1937 production that portrayed the Caesarists as jackbooted fascists. More recent was the 2017 Central Park production which excited controversy (Bank of America and Delta Airlines both withdrew their sponsorship – outraged corporate reactions which, predictably, stoked a clamour for tickets) with its conceptualisation of, 'Caesar as looking and behaving exceptionally like recently-inaugurated President Donald J. Trump'.[39] The apparent depiction of the assassination of a President was too much for some sensibilities. In the final analysis, such fashions of production may be the greatest good fun but Clifford Leech (writing more than half a century ago) is wise in urging caution:

> What I would add is that where "coherence and unity" do not exist in the original play (and in Elizabethan writing such things are rarely total), the director should not try to impose them but should allow the unresolved contradictions of the playwright to emerge freely in performance.[40]

This caution is all the more advisable with a play, as Hartsock puts it, that functions as, 'a dramatic statement about the relative nature of truth'.[41] The play shows an aristocratic class at war with itself, dragging its society (depending on your persuasion) either forward to glory or down by means of a self-indulgent Nietzchean slave morality.[42] For Cantor there is no doubt – this is a dramatic descent that commences in *Julius Caesar*, and continues to its dire conclusion in *Antony and Cleopatra*. By contrast Cantor figures the republic of *Coriolanus* as the

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[38] Gramsci, p. 221.
[39] Dan Venning, 'Review: Julius Caesar, The Public Theater, New York', in Shakespeare Bulletin, 35:4 (Winter 2017), 711-720 (p. 713).
[40] Clifford Leech, 'The "Capability" of Shakespeare', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 11:2 (Spring 1960), 123-136 (p. 135).
[41] Mildred E. Hartsock, 'The Complexity of Julius Caesar', *PMLA* 81:1 (March 1966), 56-62 (p. 62).
[42] Cantor, *Shakespeare's Roman Trilogy*, pp. 105-107.

highest statement of the self-sacrificing master morality. He suggests that the republican virtues are more appealing and he seeks to impute that bias to Shakespeare.[43] As I have previously suggested (in the context of Hadfield's analysis) it is apt to designate Shakespeare not a republican in the sense we might nowadays understand (that is to say an anti-monarchist) but rather a stamp of constitutional monarchist or (to give it a new and more precise name) a constitutional dichotomist.

What of Louis Napoleon's Caesarism? Is it, as Gramsci has it, reactionary? In the fractured picture of French constitutional history (a juddering back and forth between empire and republic with chaotic interludes of monarchy thrown in) indeed it is. This is no part of the Marxist march to the end of history, rather a retracing of old paths. However, I do not think this disqualifies it from critical usefulness in our current context. The important characteristic of this Caesarism is not that it happens to be either reactionary or progressive in the larger picture of history, but that it carries the defining traits of its political genus, specifically:

> [I]t always expresses the particular solution in which a great personality is entrusted with the task of "arbitration" over a historico-political situation characterised by an equilibrium of forces heading towards catastrophe.[44]

'Caesarism' is then a term that Bagehot (in his usual style) deploys without ever stopping to define it other than loosely. Gramsci helps us to concentrate our view on the phenomenon and, most importantly for current purposes, aids us in accepting that Bagehot and Shakespeare are both interrogating the same political phenomenon – reactionary and progressive are two sides of the same coin. The play is concerned with the reactions to the first Caesarism, itself the precursor to the later Caesarisms of the Roman Empire (a topic yet further considered in *Antony and Cleopatra*). Bagehot homes in on the justifications for, and the inherent weaknesses of, Caesarism. In typical fashion we cannot be certain which Julius Caesar, the historical character or the Shakespearean, Bagehot reacts to when he uses the term 'Caesarism'. However, this lack of

[43] Cantor, *Shakespeare's Rome: Republic and Empire*, pp. 39-45.
[44] Gramsci, p. 219.

definition does not materially diminish his usefulness in shining light upon Shakespeare's Caesar. Bagehot is reacting to a particular 'democratic despotism' in France. The Rome of Shakespeare's imagining in *Julius Caesar* is a city state reacting to a similar political concatenation – specifically a charismatic leader elevated by wide public acclaim.

As I query how Shakespeare deploys plot and characters to historico-political ends, I will consider in turn the characters who are foremost in the constitutional scheme: Cassius; Brutus; Antony; Octavius; Caesar.

V: He Thinks Too Much. Such Men Are Dangerous

In the din of the Caesar/Brutus debate, Cassius's importance to the plot can get drowned out. Yet he is the assassination's prime mover and a skilled rhetorician, perhaps the best in a play that sets great store by rhetorical skills. Esther B. Schupak argues persuasively that Shakespeare enacts both sides of the contention so skilfully that 'the balanced nature of the drama makes it difficult to determine Shakespeare's point of view'.[45] Thus Schupak fails (candidly and elegantly) in her own ostensible mission of interrogating Shakespeare's alleged republican leanings. She also suggests that Shakespeare's own 'dance with censorship' serves to muddy already murky political waters.[46] In this she echoes Ernest Schanzer's earlier calibration of the play as a 'problem play'.[47] Schanzer argues that, to a small (barely detectable) degree, Shakespeare is opposed to the murder of Caesar but that the issue is artfully posed so that it, 'makes it remain sufficiently problematic to allow his audience to form varying views about it'.[48] Schupack tackles this same question by putting us in the position of the audience within the play (that is to say those characters, particularly the mob, who are exposed to the frequent rhetorical devices deployed in it) but admits defeat in detecting Shakespeare's political point of view: 'As such I have come to recognize

[45] Esther B. Schupack, '"Lend Me Your Ears": Listening Rhetoric and Political Ideology in *Julius Caesar*', *Shakespeare Survey*, 69 (2016), 123-133 (p. 123).
[46] Ibid., p. 133.
[47] Ernest Schanzer, 'The Problem of *Julius Caesar*', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 6:3 (Summer 1955), pp. 297-308 (p. 308).
[48] Ibid., p. 308.

that my commitment to listening finally prevented me from drawing any definitive conclusions'.[49]

The easy modern trope is to view Cassius as a scheming spin doctor, a type readily known (and abhorred) from contemporary politics. This is over-simplistic and there is interest in more nuanced interpretations. Justin B. Hopkins comments favourably on Martin Hutson's 'sympathetic' Cassius for the RSC in 2017: 'Hutson played Cassius not as a shrewd villain, but as a man genuinely angry about and afraid of Caesar'.[50]

We can be nudged further out of easy political parochialism and can more charitably estimate Cassius if we consider Ruth Minott Egglestone's post-colonial reading - a reading that spider-like weaves its way around three points: a heroic reading of Cassius; a contemplation of the Jamaican independence movement; and 'a model of a redeemed Anancy as a positive expression of the Jamaican self for the future'. [51] Anancy is the fabled spider-like King of Stories, Ashanti/Ghanaian in origin but found most developed in Caribbean (especially Jamaican) folklore.[52]

Egglestone acknowledges that for her father's generation of Jamaicans, Brutus was the conjectural hero, 'with the fault line being the betrayal of friendship in favour of patriotism'.[53] However Egglestone's initial juvenile reaction to the play (and it is telling that she refers to 'reading' the play rather than being first

[49] Schupack, p. 133.
[50] Justin B. Hopkins, 'Review: Julius Caesar, RSC 2017', Shakespeare Bulletin 35:4 (Winter 2017), 689-699 (p. 691).
[51] Ruth Minott Egglestone, 'Finding the Anancyesque in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* and the decolonisation project in Jamaica from 1938 to the present', in *Memory, Migration and (De)Colonisation in the Caribbean and Beyond*, eds. Webb, Westmass, Kaladeen, and Tantam (London: University of London Press, 2019), 153-171 (p. 153).
[52] As to Anancy (also spelt 'Anansi' but I follow Egglestone's designation) see for example mythology.net: https://mythology.net/mythical-creatures/anansi/ [accessed 7 November 2020].
[53] Egglestone, p. 154.

exposed to any directorial or actorly inflection) is to admire Cassius and his earnest (Anancyesque) storytelling:

> Contrary to the view that presents him as a spin doctor solely intent on the manipulation of truth for his own ends, I found to my surprise that I identified with this overt dissenter because he is so earnest.[54]

Like Anancy (who in typical folk tales comes to perceive any errors in his spinning ways and is redeemed through the love and forgiveness of others) Cassius in this reading deserves to be redeemed, certainly should be spared the ninth circle of Dante's Hell.

Cassius is intriguing not because he is a tragic overreacher but because he knows his own strategic limits and yet still fails in his aims – it is not his own abilities he overestimates but rather Brutus's ability to complement those abilities and thus make the plot succeed. Schupak refers to Garry Wills' list of seven decisive instances where Brutus overrules Cassius to the detriment of their enterprise; she concurs with all but the first listed instance (the refusal of Brutus to swear an oath).[55] [56] The six remaining 'mistakes' are: the omission of Cicero from the plot; the refusal to kill Antony; allowing Antony's funeral oration; speaking before Antony at the funeral; choosing Philippi as the field of battle; permitting Brutus to take military command of the plotting faction. For Schupack then:

> As soon as Brutus begins to mirror Caesar in egoism and inability to listen, his failure as a politician is assured; indeed from the context of the play, it would seem that had Brutus merely followed Cassius's advice, they most likely would have been successful.[57]

This last conjecture is central to a Bagehotian understanding of the play. In it lie the bones of a description of the failure of the conspirators. Where Brutus brings the dignified aspect of sovereignty ('O, he sits high in all the people's hearts' (1.3.163)), Cassius, with one vital qualification, might arguably bring the efficient. It is Brutus's own nascent Caesarism that dooms the conspirators. Brutus overreaches. We should remember that the assassins are not the only

[54] Ibid., p. 154.
[55] Schupack, pp. 126-127.
[56] Garry Wills, *Rome and Rhetoric: Shakespeare's Julius Caesar* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press) pp. 125-128.
[57] Schupack, p. 127.

people entertaining doubts about the heights Caesar may scale. The Tribunes in Act I Scene I anticipate the concerns that Cassius will shortly broach with Brutus:

> These growing feathers plucked from Caesar's wing
> Will make him fly an ordinary pitch,
> Who else would soar above the view of men,
> And keep us all in servile fearfulness. (1.1.69-72)

Cassius's turning of Brutus from self-involved contemplation (mired in 'Conceptions only proper to myself' (1.2.246)) to conscientious plotter is artful, Anancyesque in fact. He does not come immediately to the point but picks at his task, first inveigling his way into Brutus's thoughts by offering himself as the mirror ('I, your glass' (1.2.73)) by which Brutus may see himself. Only after Brutus is provoked by the cheers of the crowd ('I do fear the people / Choose Caesar for their king' (1.2.84-85)) does Cassius steer the conversation to his true target. He tackles Brutus with the very topic that guarantees him an audience – honour. It is beautifully ironic that Antony's broader rhetoric in his funeral oration in Act III will goad the mob by its repeated and sarcastic references to the honour of the plotters. Both Cassius and Antony know their audience – Cassius pitches his rhetoric at the level that appeals to Brutus's intellect and his vanity; Antony aims his at the fragile sensibilities of the crowd.

Once Cassius has Brutus hooked on the subject of honour (Brutus baited avers: 'For let the gods so speed me as I love/ The name of honour more than I fear death' (1.2.94-95)) Cassius breathlessly unleashes the longest speech of this first exchange with Brutus:

> I know that virtue to be in you, Brutus,
> As well as I do know your outward favour.
> Well honour is the subject of my story. (1.2.94-98)

Immediately after the end of this opening encounter with Brutus, the arch-pragmatist Cassius cautiously judges that he must do more to ensure Brutus's participation and sets Casca and Cinna to the subterfuge of false entreaties left for discovery by Brutus. In that meeting with Casca and Cinna we find corroboration of Cassius's judgement that Brutus must be brought to conspiracy: 'O Cassius, if you could, / But win the noble Brutus to our party' (1.3.46-47). In fact Cassius believes he is assembling what we might dub a dream ticket for the

plot – he has no false modesty about his own nobility but intuits that he cannot carry the mob as Brutus may do. What Cassius (so far as we might divine it at all – and this is the weakness in Cassius to which I will allude) wants for Rome is a return to the checks and balances of the pre-Caesarist republic where the efficiencies of an aristocracy of the able can be combined with the dignity of revered public figures such as Brutus. Charles Mills Gayley dubs this an 'aristodemocracy of *noblesse oblige*'.[58] Indeed Gayley even goes so far as to recruit Shakespeare to the advocates for such a moderated aristodemocracy, putting the dramatist retrospectively in the company of America's founding fathers.[59] Be that as it may and admire as we might Cassius's adroitness in turning Brutus to murder, the proposed political aftermath of the killing is never articulated by any of the conspirators, Cassius included. He does advocate, as a practical expedient, the simultaneous killing of Antony (a tactic which Brutus loftily and summarily rejects) but on the structure of any new government all is silence.[60] This is the essential defect in the conspiracy – it proceeds on some vain assumption that the perceived past glories of Rome will ride to the rescue of a leaderless state. The conspirators fail to understand that railing against Caesar's primacy is not enough without some plan that addresses sovereignty in the aftermath. Into the vacuum created by the killing rushes the poison of civil war. Turning back to Bagehot, we see how, in the early days of Louis Napoleon's self-coup, Bagehot rebukes fellow Englishmen for a similar failure to propose an alternative to Caesarism:

> Louis Napoleon has proposed a system: English writers by the thousand […] proclaim his system an evil one. What then? Do you know what Father Newman says to the religious reformers, rather sharply but still well, "make out first of all where you stand – draw up your creed, write down your catechism".[61]

In terms of Shakespearean criticism Daniel Juan Gil adds depth to the point – he talks of the 'counter-publics' (the grouping of the conspirators being one such) which may very well be 'interesting or seemingly transgressive', but which 'can

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[58] Charles Mills Gayley, *Shakespeare and the Founders of Liberty in America* (New York: Macmillan, 1917) p. 160.
[59] Ibid. pp. 160-161.
[60] See 2.1.169.
[61] Bagehot, Letter VII*, Collected Works*, vol. v, p. 83.

never free themselves, attack, break with, reform, or transcend actually existing sovereign power. Only a rival form of sovereign power can do that'.[62] Caesar's is a form of sovereign power, possibly an undesirable one, but it answers Bagehot's test of constitutional dichotomy in its immediate terms. As Bagehot (and Gramsci for temperamentally different reasons) would have it, all Caesarisms contain the seeds of their own destruction but that does not mean they cannot be temporarily effective. To assist us in transporting this Victorian diagnosis to Shakespeare's Rome we can usefully draw on some actual history as distinguished from the dramatically compressed version of that history. In reality there had been a gradual accretion of power to Caesar as his military triumphs (both in external conquest and internecine disputes) were amassed. For example, the magistracy ceased to be elected but was appointed at Caesar's discretion and the dissipation of the old 'aristodemocracy' came to be a source of extreme concern to the conspirators, who comprised more than sixty senators rather than the eight we see represented in the play:

> [U]nderlying everything was a sense that to have one man possessing as much permanent power as Caesar was incompatible with a free Republic.[63]

The deliberate historical licence of the play does not diminish the surrounding representation of underlying facts: that Caesar indeed became all-powerful and was murdered for his presumption; that the conspirators signally failed to plan for the denouement of the assassination; that Rome was thereby plunged into civil war; that from the wastes of civil war emerged the Roman Empire. Nor should we dismiss a notion that these historical facts were not perfectly well-known to Shakespeare's original audiences – Caesar was the most dramatized historical figure on the Elizabethan English stage.[64] For Penelope Woods the glory of the play lies in the way it embraces and involves its audience rather than preaching to it.[65]

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[62] Gil, Daniel Juan, 'Sovereignty, Communitarianism, and the Shakespeare Option', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 58:1, (2018), 77-89 (p. 86).
[63] Goldsworthy, p. 609.
[64] Penelope Woods, 'Skilful Spectatorship? Doing (or Being) Audience at Shakespeare's Globe Theatre', *Shakespeare Studies*, 43 (2015), 99-113 (p. 105).
[65] Ibid., pp. 105-106.

Cassius and his fellow conspirators are only partially successful in assembling the case against Caesarism – as Miola has it: 'Shakespeare transform[s] a confused welter of historical fact and legend into taut, balanced, and supremely ambivalent drama'.[66] In all of this we can understand the emotions behind some critical uncertainty about the play – the uncertainty of commentators who are unsure where the promised tragedy actually lies; who are uncertain who the hero is supposed to be; who are unsure what to make of it all. Carol Chillington Rutter, in reviewing Deborah Warner's 2005 RSC production of the play, is put in mind of Kenneth Tynan's comment on a much earlier production: in response to John Blatchley's Royal Shakespeare Company production, Tynan wrote in the *Observer*, that it is 'all snaffle and bit, and no bloody horse'.[67] I would suggest that this is not a trait merely of certain productions but, properly understood, of the play itself – standing proud in its ambivalence, there really is no bloody horse and it is that metaphorical lack that gives the play twenty-first-century currency. Rutter concedes as much:

> The time for horses of this kind has passed. (Tynan was writing just as Vietnam was mobilizing). These days we know there'll be no cavalry riding in to save us from the Philippis we're headed for, certainly not one the theatre can mount. And anyway, in today's geopolitical setup, who are 'we'? And whose side are 'we' on?[68]

Does Cassius think himself a better man than Caesar? Notwithstanding the tales he relates of Caesar's physical shortcomings ('Caesar cried, "Help me, Cassius, or I sink!"' (1.2.117)) I suggest that in fact he sees himself as a noble equal to Caesar and believes that they and their caste should together serve Rome, playing only as necessary to the despised mob. He does not view himself as Caesar's superior but nor does he cast himself subservient: 'I had as lief not be as live to be / In awe of such a thing as I myself' (1.2.101-102).

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[66] Robert Miola, 'Julius Caesar and the Tyrannicide Debate', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 38:2 (Summer 1985), 271-289 (p. 273).
[67] Carol Chillington Rutter, 'Facing History, Facing Now: Deborah Warner's *Julius Caesar* at the Barbican Theatre', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 57:1 (Spring 2006), 71-85 (p. 71).
[68] Ibid., p. 85.

As for Caesar's opinion of Cassius, it is blunt and accurate. Cassius is indeed to be feared: 'He thinks too much: such men are dangerous' (1.2.201). Caesar is a good judge of Cassius – it is himself and his own powers that Caesar misjudges. He thinks himself beyond fear: 'I rather tell thee what is to be feared / Than what I fear, for always I am Caesar' (1.2.217-218). The frail humanity of this Caesar is immediately hammered home to us, lest we should doubt it, by the next line in which he admits his partial deafness. Nor is Antony of great use to Caesar when he parries Caesar's opinion of Cassius: 'Fear him not, Caesar, he's not dangerous, / He is a noble Roman, and well given' (1.2.202-203). Perhaps we are to give the benefit of the doubt to Antony in this latter regard since Caesar ends the exchange as they exit the stage by entreating: 'And tell me truly what thou think'st of him' (1.2.220).

By the time of his second encounter with Brutus (now with the co-conspirators) Cassius takes no chance that Brutus might slip his grasp. His first words once again summon forth nobility and honour:

> … and no man here
> But honours you, and every one doth wish
> You had but that opinion of yourself
> Which every noble Roman bears of you. (2.1.93-96)

The avidity with which Cassius brings Brutus into the plot demonstrates his political acuity. He is the antipode of a rabble-rouser. He does not seek to stir the common crowd, he is not fitted for such things. Rather he seeks to rouse the nobility to duty. His mistake is that he entrusts to Brutus the pacifying of the lower orders, and his later error is to cede too easily the military leadership to Brutus. There is appeal in the interpretation that Rutter detects in the Cassius of Simon Russell Beale in the 2005 production, falling short perhaps of Egglestone's post-colonial, full redemption, but nonetheless sympathetic:

> This was no standard reading of a Cassius consumed by hate, grudge and loathing for Caesar. Rather, this man was an idealist, the most sophisticated political theorist in Rome, but also a man who had internalized his own history, the butt of every playground joke. So he'd learned to rent out his ideas to lesser men, like Brutus.[69]

[69] Rutter, p. 75.

At first reading we might take issue with the designation of Cassius as 'the most sophisticated political theorist', particularly as we look at the glaring failure to devise a political plan for a Rome without Caesar. However, we might weigh against that objection the complete lack of any other voice articulating a route to a bloodless aftermath. Might we, even if we do not share Egglestone's enthusiasm, argue for Cassius as merely the ablest of a poor bunch? What faces us is the tragedy of the Roman political class - even its finest minds are quite incapable of rescuing themselves from relegation, failing as they excitably plot their tyrannicide to grasp that durable sovereignty must bear two faces: the effective and the dignified. Instead, as Rebhorn identifies, the aristodemocracy turns inward and devours itself:

> *Julius Caesar* depicts a sick world in the process of succumbing to centralized, absolutist, one-man rule not because of the exceptional talents of characters such as Caesar and Octavius, but because of the emulation, the imperial will, which animates the behaviour of the entire class of aristocrats and leads ineluctably to their unintended, collective self-destruction.[70]

Cassius is the driver of the conspiracy and we should, possibly squeamishly, admire his adroitness in turning Brutus to join it. Cassius, at least in the conception of the plot if not in its repercussions, displays a political nous that is denied to any of his co-principals. We may take issue with Egglestone's elevation of Cassius and with Rutter's summation of the Cassius/Brutus axis, however we can understand Cassius only in the context of Brutus and Brutus vice versa. In this respect they are different from Caesar, who stands an unshackled figure whose eminence whilst alive, and enduring spirit once dead, illuminate his special context.

VI: This Was the Noblest Roman of Them All

Brutus speaks twenty-eight per cent of the lines in the play. But is he the heart of the text? He does not initiate the conspiracy and his is not the first murderous strike at Caesar but the symbolic final knife thrust. Although his is the articulated conscience that supports the narrative arc, we might still deem him a grandiose

[70] Wayne A. Rebhorn, 'The Crisis of the Aristocracy in Julius Caesar', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 43:1 (Spring 1990), 75-111 (pp. 108-109).

spectator of unfolding events, a pious commentator on a maelstrom of political ambitions (including his own) raging around him: 'a man as clever, decent and doomed as your local Liberal Democrat candidate'.[71] In the context of the 2005 RSC production Michael Billington lauds an unflattering reading of Brutus: 'Gone, I hope forever, is the notion of Brutus as a putative Hamlet or a decent pipe-smoking liberal. The man is a walking political disaster'.[72]

Does Brutus deserve to be rescued from this disparagement? Schanzer asserts we should banish the 'myth of the unpractical dreamer' when we consider Brutus and that we should instead find the 'Renaissance ideal of the encyclopaedic man'.[73] But this is an encyclopaedic man who thinks he knows that Caesar has become too grand but, in common with his co-conspirators, can conjure no better solution to the problem than to kill a man he purports to admire, moreover without any suggestion as to what governmental alternatives should be put in place once the murder is effected. In his role as choric conscience, does Brutus show us any intellectual development; by the time of his death does this noblest Roman acknowledge any mistakes?

The political scheme that faces Rome at the outset of the play matches neatly with the Parisian Caesarism described by Bagehot – that of a 'Benthamite despot'. Caesar has the support of a noisy section of the populace, yet even in the opening scene, the Tribune Marullus voices establishment doubts about the exultation of Caesar. Marullus and his companion Flavius are, to their own cost (they are later reported as 'put to silence' (1.2.275) for their effrontery in removing triumphal decorations from public statuary), deluded in thinking that their symbolic actions will suffice to make Caesar, 'fly an ordinary pitch' (1.1.70). This is wishful thinking, a thought that Cassius broaches in his first conversation with Brutus – 'And this man/ Is now become a god and Cassius is / A wretched creature' (1.2.121-123). The dignity of Rome and its efficiency are now tied in

[71] Dominic Maxwell, 'Review: *Julius Caesar*, Sheffield Crucible', *The Times*, 25 May 2017
[72] Michael Billington, 'Review: *Julius Caesar*, RSC', *Guardian*, 21 April 2005.
[73] Ernest Schanzer, 'The Tragedy of Shakespeare's Brutus', *ELH*, 22:1 (March 1955), 1-15 (p. 4).

one person, Caesar. Imperfect as this arrangement may be, it appears to have the current backing of the wider polity. Certainly it is more amenable than the factionalism that will follow the assassination. Bagehot's diagnosis of how such a situation comes to be imposed upon a state is that there has to be a failure of its political class, a failure to attend to the mundane in favour of indulging higher notions, thus creating the atmosphere in which a charismatic dictator enters the scene and by manifest efficiency assumes control. Thus Bagehot compares newly imperial France unfavourably with a more dullard England: 'Our thought may be poor and rough and fragmentary, but it is effectual'.[74] So it is in Brutus's Rome – an aristocratic mind such as his is fixated with broad philosophy while Caesar has beguiled the state of Rome and, as with the nineteenth-century French, 'She daily endures the presence of an efficient immorality'.[75] Brutus ought really to have seen this state of affairs as it arose and applied the considerable mechanics of the republic to its prevention. The salient question is, having allowed plausible sovereignty over Rome to fall into the hands of a dictator, how should Brutus's sense of duty compel him to act? Is the tyrannicide (if such it be) justified? Let us look at how Brutus accommodates himself morally to the act, for even when Brutus talks to others, one cannot help feeling that his real audience is himself.

Brutus's estimation of his own mentality is plain as soon as Cassius raises the topic of Caesar's possible kingship: 'For let the gods so speed me as I love / The name of honour more than I fear death' (1.2.94-95). Prior to this we have heard Brutus explain his hitherto solitary dilemma to Cassius:

> I turn the trouble of my countenance
> Merely upon myself. Vexed I am
> Of late with passions of some difference
> Conceptions only proper to myself. (1.2.43-46)

This chimes with the very core of Brutus's character. As Athanasios Boulukos terms it, while Brutus keeps his concerns to himself he occupies the self-contained-world over which 'the wise man can reign', but as soon as he persuades himself into the conspiracy he enters a realm where he lacks such

[74] Bagehot, 'Caesarism as it now exists', p. 114.
[75] Ibid., p. 115.

control - by taking to action he pre-destines his philosophic failure.[76] Boulukos's conclusion is that Brutus is a tragic hero but an 'erring' one.[77] He also points to Shakespeare's predilection for such characters, nominating Brutus as a character akin to Timon.[78]

For Boulukos, Brutus is the fulcrum of the play, as he is for Gordon Ross Smith. However Smith maintains a very different psychological perspective. For him, Brutus is driven not by his virtue but by his overpowering will and that very virtue is nothing more than a deliberately maintained smokescreen for his jealous ambition:

> His virtue is the splendid muffling that clothes his will, that hides it from all cynical, envious eyes, that garbs a thoroughly egotistical wilfulness in the white radiance of incorruptible principle.[79]

Smith's interpretation brings us back to the fatal 'imperial will' identified by Rebhorn. Each reader of the text is faced with the question of where on the spectrum of interpretations Brutus should register: is he Schanzer's tragic hero, Billington's walking disaster, Boulukos's stranded philosopher, or Smith's wanton hypocrite?

In considering the Brutus 'problem' it is instructive to consider our attitude to the duplicate revelation of Portia's death in Act 4 Scene 2. I find convincing the dismissal of the idea that this duplication is a mere textual error. Warren D. Smith, Brenta Stirling and Thomas Clayton all accept that this 'difficulty' should stand.[80] For Warren D. Smith the authorial intention is clear – we should admire Brutus and his reaction:

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[76] Athanasios Boulukos, 'The Cobbler and the Tribunes in *Julius Caesar*', *MLN*, 119:5, Comparative Literature Issue (Dec. 2004), 1083-1089 (pp. 1086-1087).
[77] Ibid., p. 1088.
[78] Ibid., p. 1088.
[79] Gordon Ross Smith, 'Brutus, Virtue, and Will', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 10:3 (Summer 1959), 367-379 (p. 367).
[80] Warren D. Smith, 'The Duplicate Revelation of Portia's Death', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 4:2 (April 1953), 153-161. Brenta Stirling, 'Brutus and the Death of Portia', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 10:2 (Spring 1959), 211-217; Thomas Clayton, '"Should Brutus Never Taste of Portia's Death but Once?" Text and Performance in *Julius Caesar*', *Studies in English Literature, 1500 – 1900*, 23:2 (Spring 1983), 237-255.

> [T]he dramatist intended it to be unmistakable witness to the unselfishness, fortitude and able generalship characteristic of Brutus in other parts of the play.[81]

For Stirling, Brutus is rather more the impatient man of action (albeit not as able a general as he thinks himself to be – echoes of Wills and Schupack here), trying desperately to get back to a council of war but whose firm intentions are thwarted by the path of his conversation with Messala.[82] Clayton for his part takes as the stimulus for his analysis the 1979 BBC production's treatment of the passage.[83] In the context of Richard Pasco's sympathetic portrayal of Brutus, Clayton accords the scene a place of high significance in the text: 'it bears significantly on the characterization of Brutus and the meanings of the entire play'.[84] We are invited to understand the action as affording to Brutus an opportunity, 'to make exemplary show of steadfastness with a modest display of stoic fortitude for the sake of morale and confidence in his leadership'.[85]

Warren D. Smith, Stirling and Clayton, then, are all broadly sympathetic to Brutus. I find it difficult however not to edge back towards Gordon Ross Smith and his delineation of Brutus as a man cloaking himself in virtue, not merely for the benefit of others but to convince himself of that very virtue:[86] As we reach for some conclusion as to Brutus's character we might also consider him in the context of the qualities Bagehot lists as supporting a successful (though ultimately fated – Bagehot always adheres to this view) Caesarism. We might very well ask, might Brutus himself pass muster as an emperor? In the final analysis we know that the answer is no, but where would his failure lie? Bagehot's listing of Louis Napoleon's qualities bears repetition:

> To sum up all, he has a restless, scheming, brooding, cavernous mind; daring in idea – hesitating when it comes to action; a singular mixture of tenacity and inconsistency; recoiling before the difficult and hazardous;

[81] Warren D, Smith, p. 154.
[82] Stirling, pp. 215-216.
[83] *Julius Caesar* (dir. Herbert Wise) BBC DVD (1979).
[84] Clayton, p. 238.
[85] Ibid., p. 250.
[86] Gordon Ross Smith, p. 378.

> shrinking from the irrevocable; and certain not to venture on the desperate.[87]

Bagehot is intimating that any sustainable Caesarism must be a skilfully calculated juggling act. Brutus is certainly restless, scheming and brooding within a cavernous mind. His first soliloquy evidences as much, but it is arguable that Brutus, in his thoughts, is not so much agonizing over whether Caesar should die but rehearsing how he will justify the killing. The inevitability of the decision to kill Caesar is apparent in the opening line of the speech: 'It must be by his death' (2.1.10). The assassination is a foregone conclusion notwithstanding that Brutus knows 'no personal cause to spurn at him' (2.1.11). Brutus knows what the resolution will be even as he concedes to himself that Caesar is not certain to wield power oppressively, merely that his nature 'might' (2.1.13) be changed. Even before Lucius brings in the missives urging Brutus to action, Brutus has decided how to present the murder, 'Fashion it thus: that what he is, augmented, / Would run to these and these extremities' (2.1.30-31).

Bagehot prays caution for his Caesars, 'recoiling before the difficult and hazardous'. Here Brutus manifestly fails – he has started from the conclusion that Caesar must die and then worked backwards to the justifications. In his dealings with the plotters he clothes his arguments in righteous aphorisms ('What need we any spur but our own cause' (2.1.128)) while starting along the sequence of mistakes suggested by Wills and Schupack. Quite brazenly venturing on the desperate, Brutus advocates replacing an efficient Caesarism by means of a strategy upon which no wise Caesar (and we should include in this configuration the nascent Gramscian coalition constituted between the conspirators) would embark. Brutus's lack of the skills of realpolitik is manifest. One might deem this a trait born of innocent honour or, instead, a signifier of more base character defects. Nowhere is the play's deliberate ambivalence more emphatic than in the character of Brutus. Hartsock urges an intellectual

[87] Bagehot, 'The Emperor of the French' *Collected Works*, vol. iv, 101-104 (p. 104). The article first appeared in *The Economist*, 28 November 1863.

neutrality in theorising the text and nowhere is this more urgent than in relation to its most prominent character.[88]

This neutrality or ambivalence can sit with the conflicting Renaissance views on the historical Julius Caesar. Miola traces these variant schools of thought: Salutati seeing Caesar as the entitled and benign ruler of the ancient world, with Dante therefore correct to cast Brutus and Cassius into the lowest circle of hell; Suarez, of the opposite school, believing Caesar to be the usurper of sovereign power who merits his assassination; somewhere between these extremes, we encounter the likes of John Milton who praise Caesar's qualities but acknowledge his acting the role of tyrant.[89] The paradox is tantalisingly amplified for us by Shakespeare, the opposing poles being the conflicted evils of tyranny and rebellion.[90]

Further evidence of the contradictions besieging Brutus is laid bare in the quarrel scene (in Act 4) with Cassius. Their exchange commences with Brutus adopting his most pious tone as the two discuss the taking of bribes by Lucius Pella. Cassius has appealed for clemency for Lucius, only for Brutus loftily to dismiss his plea: 'You wronged yourself to write in such a case' (4.2.63). Cassius's response is one of furious pragmatism: 'In such a time as this it is not meet / That every nice offence should bear his comment' (4.2.64-65). This drives Brutus to become yet haughtier and to accuse Cassius himself of having 'an itching palm / To sell and mart your offices for gold/ To undeservers' (4.2.67-69). Even worse and only sixty lines later Brutus grandly chides Cassius for not providing gold to fund Brutus's military endeavour, as much as admitting that his inability to raise funds himself is down to moral squeamishness, a squeamishness that does not extend to taking tainted money from Cassius:

> For I can raise no money by vile means:
> By heaven I would rather coin my heart
> And drop my blood for drachmas, than to wring
> From the hands of peasants their vile trash.
> By any indirection. (4.2.135-139)

[88] Hartsock, p. 62.
[89] Miola, 'The Tyrannicide Debate', p. 272.
[90] Ibid., p. 273.

It is difficult to see this as other than cant on Brutus's part. Indeed it is this particular episode that persuades William R. Bowden that we cannot align Brutus with other tragic heroes:

> The position which I think becomes untenable is this: that Brutus is a sensitive, introspective, intellectual soul, "the first of [the] new tragic heroes".[91]

The much-compromised Brutus seems to be engaged in a constant project to convince an audience that includes himself of his rectitude, his honour:

> There is no terror, Cassius, in your threats,
> For I am armed so strong in honesty
> That they pass by me as the idle wind,
> Which I respect not. (4.2.130-133)

All of this demands that we ask the question – just who does Brutus truly respect other than himself? Perhaps, in fact, it is only Caesar he respects and even then not sufficiently to inoculate himself against the chaos of the conspiracy. He constantly professes love for Caesar and murders him for what he might become rather than what he has actually yet become. Without knowing that he is doing it, Brutus is driven by the operation of what Rebhorn contemplates (in terms of Renaissance rhetorical and educational theory) as 'emulation'. Artemidorus uses the word in encapsulating his warning missive to Caesar and does so in the context to which Rebhorn alludes: 'My heart laments that virtue cannot live / Out of the teeth of emulation' (2.3.9-10). There is tragic irony in the lofty manner (referring to himself in the majestic plural) in which Caesar refuses to contemplate the letter when proffered by Artemidorus. This emulation that Rebhorn configures, comprises two elements that in their pure construction are opposed to each other: imitation of one's model; and at the same moment, the attempt to surpass that model:

> On the one hand, then, emulation means *identification* with another person […] On the other, it simultaneously means *rivalry*; it is a competitive urge that necessarily involves struggle, but which can also,

[91] William R. Bowden, 'The Mind of Brutus', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 17:1 (Winter 1966), 57-67 (p. 58). The internal quotation is cited as being from Margaret Webster.

> when taken to an extreme, entail feelings of hatred and envy and lead to factionalism and warfare.[92]

Rebhorn attributes this emulation to the entire Roman aristocratic class including Caesar himself. This is particularly intriguing as we might apply it to Brutus and Cassius. The case is more easily sustained with Brutus whose entire *modus operandi* centres on his efforts to prove to himself and to others that he is the soul of honour, the very paragon of Romanitas. He is self-consciously driven to out-Caesar Caesar. Certainly we can suggest similar motivations acting upon Cassius – his description of rescuing the floundering Caesar from the Tiber is instructive. However, Cassius's motives are not quite so centred on his personal position – unlike Brutus he does not see himself as the *sine qua non* of a successful coup, rather he feels the need to bring Brutus (and his precious nobility) on board before the conspiracy can be completed. In Bagehotian terms, Brutus believes himself dignified (not without reason) but, caught in his mood of emulation, grossly overestimates his capacity for efficiency. Conversely Cassius projects a ruthless efficiency in his promotion of the plot against Caesar but does not make claims for his ability to be a dictator. He appreciates that efficiency has to be wedded to dignity and that Brutus's image as a paragon of honour can bring that second quality to a restoration of the old aristodemocracy. Where Cassius is wrong is, firstly, in believing he can keep Brutus from believing that he (Brutus) must emulate Caesar, and secondly, in believing that emerging conceptions of sovereignty can simply be held back by a reinstatement of a past system that has already proved itself apt for conquest by Caesarism: 'In this perspective, then, the assassination is not regicide, but an attempt to restore the *status quo ante*'.[93]

Brutus asserts his own honour and dignity to the bitter end, never questioning the validity of his own motives:

> I shall have glory by this losing day
> More than Octavius and Mark Antony
> By this vile conquest shall attain unto. (5.5.40-42)

[92] Rebhorn, p. 77.
[93] Rebhorn, pp. 78-79.

At his death Brutus is lauded by both Antony and Octavius, this itself seemingly a deliberate departure by Shakespeare from the Plutarchan source – Plutarch has the magnanimity sitting solely with Antony.[94] Thus at the conclusion of *Julius Caesar* at least, Antony and Octavius can be presented as near equals in military graciousness. The later emotional chasm between them is the political fulcrum of *Antony and Cleopatra* although there are mild hints of that fractured political landscape in the abbreviated characterisation of Octavius in *Julius Caesar*. Regardless, the signal absence of any crowing over a vanquished Roman serves to assert yet again the ambivalence of the play, Rome tantalisingly both brutal and dignified. Brutus may speak more than a quarter of the lines but is not the text's unequivocal hero, rather he offers us the principal moral lesson. Kolbe strikes the right note: 'The moral teaching of the play is seen mainly in Brutus, from whom we learn the utter folly and futility of doing evil that good may come'.[95]

If we are looking for a hero in this play perhaps we should look to Antony, for now at least a captivating military hero undiminished by the character weaknesses we will see so vibrantly exposed in *Antony and Cleopatra*.

VII: Cry Havoc and Let Slip the Dogs of War

The Antony we first encounter is a willing acolyte of Caesar: 'When Caesar says "Do this", it is performed' (1.2.13). In a fatal underestimation Brutus casts Antony as nothing 'but a limb of Caesar' (2.1.172). He transpires to be rather more than that, even if his hedonistic defects are hinted at by Caesar himself: 'Antony, that revels long o'nights' (2.2.122). It is in the immediate aftermath of Caesar's death that the mettle of Antony is tested and he is found arrestingly resilient. Until the assassination Antony has been only a fleeting personality. Thereafter his is the major decisive presence, seemingly unweighted by the

[94] Plutarch, *Lives* in the translation of Sir Thomas North published as *Shakespeare's Plutarch* (ed. T.J.B. Spencer) (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964), p. 173.
[95] Frederick C. Kolbe, 'Shakespeare's Julius Caesar: The Brutus Difficulty', *The Irish Monthly*, 24:280 (Oct. 1896), 505-515 (p. 515).

mental anguish that plagues Brutus and which Brutus succeeds in refracting as a duplicate burden upon his ally Cassius.

Antony's response to the death of Caesar is admirably executed. Even before his funeral oration his calculations are swift and apt. When he enters on the scene of the killing, he ignores the salutation offered by Brutus and behaves exactly as a man of Brutus's pious dignity might expect himself to act. Rather than acknowledge Brutus, Antony first addresses Caesar's corpse and then cleverly disarms any conspirator who might still be contemplating Antony's murder (a course of action previously recommended by Cassius but decisively rejected by Brutus):

> I do beseech ye, if you bear me hard,
> Now, whilst your purpled hands do reek and smoke,
> Fulfil your pleasure. Live a thousand years,
> I shall not find myself so apt to die.
> No place will please me so, no means of death. (3.1.171-174)

The immediate responses to Antony's rhetoric from the two principal conspirators are instructive: Brutus responds at length and grandiloquently ('As fire drives out fire, so pity pity') (3.1.184); Cassius's contribution is to appeal curtly to any venality in Antony - 'Your voice shall be as strong as any man's / In the disposing of new dignities' (3.1.190-191).

Antony is chillingly myopic in his calculations. He will unleash havoc. Just as with his opponents, there is no concern with what should follow bloody revenge. He makes his bloody promise:

> A curse shall light upon the limbs of men:
> Domestic fury and fierce civil strife
> Shall cumber all the parts of Italy. (3.1.281-283)

Next follow the funeral orations by Brutus and Antony in turn. Brutus's is a temperate and prosaic appeal to reason; we might even say a further effort in his battle to convince himself that the murder is justified. It succeeds in its temperate aims – the crowd is subdued and even stirred to worshipful enthusiasm: 'Caesar's better parts / Shall be crowned in Brutus' (3.2.43-44). But what follows it is a justly prized piece of dramatic rabble-rousing by Antony. This

appears to be pure Shakespeare – there is no Plutarchan source for this compelling oratory. By its end the crowd are rallied to mutiny against the conspirators and Antony has achieved the first of his ends: 'Now let it work. Mischief thou art afoot: / Take thou what course thou wilt' (3.2.257-258). However, Shakespeare is too astute to suggest that we invest all of our moral capital in Antony. Hard upon the funeral scene we see what comes of so rousing the mob – Cinna the poet is dragged away by the Plebeians for a crime no greater than sharing a name with a conspirator. And the very next scene (our first encounter with Octavius and Lepidus) shows us Antony, in far from noble vein, icily bartering death sentences of noblemen with his fellow Triumvirs and then announcing his intention to pervert the spirit of Caesar's will, the very terms of which had aided his manipulation of the mob.

Brutus seems compelled by his nobilitas and the contrary urgings of emulation to endeavour to out-Caesar Caesar, so much that his heroism is imperfectible. As Miola astutely concludes, Antony in turn emulates Brutus, adopting the cloak of nobility and leading his own new rebellion while all the time calculating how to better Brutus and his cohort.[96] Beyond the immediate aftermath of Caesar's murder we see Antony as a skilled military leader and, in the finish, a humble victor. His final speech publicly designates Brutus, 'the noblest Roman of them all' (5.5.73). We must note that he has earlier and more sincerely bestowed the same compliment in his soliloquy over Caesar's corpse: 'Thou art the ruins of the noblest man / That ever lived in the tide of times' (3.1.275-276).

If, in Bagehotian terms, Cassius carries the strain (though not to the complete exclusion of other temperaments – life and drama are not that simple) of the efficient whilst Brutus carries that of the dignified, Antony, in this play is harder to categorize. His manipulation of the funeral mob is masterful and dignified, yet he is seen as both chillingly efficient in the proscription scene ('These many, then, shall die: their names are pricked' (4.1.1)), and, later, pragmatic in his battlefield dealings with a headstrong Octavius – an important contrast with the fissure between Brutus and Cassius. In this play Antony gives a tantalising

[96] Miola, *Shakespeare's Rome*, p. 102

glimpse of a marriage of dignity and efficiency in one man. The development of his hedonistic character in *Antony and Cleopatra* (enlarging on hints in *Julius Caesar*) will bring this image crashing down and endorse Shakespeare's vision that Caesarism is a chimeric political ideal.

I will briefly touch upon the claims to an elevation into serene political power of Octavius – a character little seen in this play but who in Robert P. Kalmey's estimation is often incorrectly lionised as an 'ideal prince':[97]

VIII: Two Caesars

By the end of *Antony and Cleopatra*, Octavius (heir to the potent name 'Caesar') stands as a dramatic possibility of that perfect prince. In *Julius Caesar* he is a peripheral figure but not an impotent one. His stature is in stark contrast to Lepidus his co-Triumvir who is denigrated by Antony without any demur as 'a slight unmeritable man' (4.1.13). Lepidus fares no better in *Antony and Cleopatra*. The Octavius we encounter in *Julius Caesar* is the first dramatic incarnation of Bate's 'mealy-mouthed pragmatist', ambitiously disavowing any Brutus-like enslavement to nobility.[98] There is no inconsistency here with the Octavius Caesar we will encounter in the later play. He is all business, even in his calculated nobility towards the dead Brutus, whose body, he prescribes, shall lie in <u>his</u> tent. Having issued that seemingly magnanimous diktat, he curtly turns to celebration of a 'happy day':

> Within my tent his bones tonight shall lie,
> Most like a soldier, ordered honourably.
> So call the field to rest, and let's away,
> To part the glories of this happy day. (5.5.83-86)

In all of this it is the original Caesar whose spirit remains dominant. In their very different ways (but all in the terms Rebhorn suggests) Cassius, Brutus, Antony, and Octavius are emulating Caesar. Kolbe's summation stands as a good one – the bodily presence of Julius Caesar is the dramatic centre of the text, while his

[97] Robert P. Kalmey, 'Shakespeare's Octavius and Elizabethan Roman History', *Studies in English Literature, 1500 – 1900*, 18:2 (Spring 1978), 275-287 (p. 275).
[98] *Complete Works*, p. 2158

spirit provides the motive force of the whole play. Kearney configures the aristocratic class trapped in a death spiral played out in three phases: 'If the play is symphonic, it is in three movements: Caesar's triumph, Caesar's fall and, finally, the resurgence of the Caesarist party'.[99] The Caesar we first see is magnificent by virtue of his reported triumphs but vain and frail in body. Cassius is cunning in the extreme but of all the conspirators the one most piqued by Caesar's singularity. Brutus loves words better than deeds.[100] Antony is blind to Caesar's defects and thus his own. Octavius betrays an inelegant pragmatism. From this stew of defects Rebhorn diagnoses only one outcome:

> Driven by the hunger of emulation to extend endlessly the terrain of the self, they destroy and will keep destroying one another until the stage is bare and only a single imperial will is left.[101]

Ivo van Hove's innovative Dutch production combined the three Plutarchan plays as *The Roman Tragedies* in 2009. At the end of the production the departing audience were invited to consider questions projected onto the screen that dominated the auditorium:

> 'How far should one go out of love for one's values?' 'Is everything communication?' 'Is politics war?' 'Is representative democracy the mother of confusion?' 'Are politicians actors?[102]

This list of questions has currency in the expanded present that incorporates Shakespeare and Bagehot. Particularly telling is a brief exercise that places the Caesarism of *Julius Caesar*, the reasons for it, and the attendant advantages and problems, within the scheme that Bagehot promulgates in *Physics and Politics*.

IX: An Arrested Civilisation

Bagehot charts the passage of a nation from its pre-economic age to a Preliminary Age. In this Preliminary Age a 'cake of custom' begins to emerge in each society, a 'hereditary drill', an instinct which is essential to the hoped-for

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[99] Colbert Kearney, 'The Nature of an Insurrection: Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*', *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, 63:250 (Summer 1974), 141-152 (p. 142).
[100] This is Octavius's blunt insult at 5.1.29.
[101] Rebhorn, p. 109.
[102] Christian M. Billing, 'Shakespeare Performed: *The Roman Tragedies*', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 61:3 (Fall 2010), 415-440 (p. 439).

forward march to an Age of Discussion.[103] However the route to this ultimate status (which should in no way be identified with the Marxist end of history) inevitably passes through the Use of Conflict both within and between nations. Moreover, the progress to settled civilisation within an Age of Discussion is not certain, there being a tendency for the occurrence of 'arrested civilisations'.[104] Such tribes or nations vacillate in and out of conflict and remain mired, at best, in Bagehot's fractious condition of Nation Making.[105]

Where does the Rome of *Julius Caesar* stand in this Bagehotian scheme? Bagehot (in his usual broad sweep manner: 'To make a single nation illustrate a principle, you must exaggerate much and you must admit much') himself cites Rome as the cradle of durable political society, that durability not unconnected to Rome's military prowess and its attendant ability to withstand and thrive upon the requisite Use of Conflict.[106] In the final analysis Rome's early success is accounted for by the small presence of adaptability alongside its nurturing cake of custom. This factor is, for Bagehot, the very key to the progression of nationhood. This small presence is essential but almost invisible and we should (perhaps counter-intuitively) view it in similar terms to the condition of Rebhorn's curse of emulation – for in the case of Rebhorn's Roman aristocracy the small urge to better those they emulate is a fatal flaw: 'Aristocratic emulation spells factionalism and civil strife, and it leads inevitably to the dead end of suicide'.[107] Compare this to the will to betterment that Bagehot describes. The two conditions are different sides of the same coin:

> [D]id not Rome – the prevalent nation in the ancient world – gain her predominance by the principle on which I have dwelt? In the thick crust of her legality there was hidden a little seed of adaptiveness.[108]

It is a fine margin that distinguishes the power-blinded inability of the conspirators to formulate their plans for a Rome after Caesar, from the little seeds of adaptiveness that can bear the fruit of peaceful sovereignty.

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[103] Bagehot, *Physics and Politics*, p. 32.
[104] Ibid., p. 48.
[105] Ibid., pp. 64-105.
[106] Ibid., p. 53.
[107] Rebhorn, pp. 108-109.
[108] Bagehot, *Physics and Politics*, p. 53

At the end of *Julius Caesar* Rome stands no further forward than at the play's opening – in tune with Kearney's symphonic allusion we are dancing once more to the tune of the Caesarists. Octavius commands Brutus's corpse, just as he will declaim over the bodies of Antony and Cleopatra at the culmination of their play. Bagehot's summit of politico-scientific development is a state that has endured and exhausted the Use of Conflict and ushered in an Age of Discussion. Such a state is Victorian England where the instinct for minor improvements has acted upon the cake of custom and eventually bequeathed a society in which sovereignty has split itself (without that split ever being a theorised solution) between the dignified and the efficient. Bagehot does not pretend that this society will always run smoothly, merely that it works at the exact moment at which he describes it, precisely because of that split. From our own position in a thickened present, we should go further and say that no better prescription for a constant state has been suggested and that this necessary dichotomy can be abstracted from *Julius Caesar*, a text very much alive in its understanding that for peace to prosper there has to be what Bagehot designated an atmosphere of 'animated moderation'.[109] There is a singular lack of moderation in the principals in *Julius Caesar*, rapt as they are in emulation and the Use of Conflict.

Almost as a postscript, I should concede that Bagehot overreaches himself and diverts, within *Physics and Politics*, to a consideration of the operation of this animated moderation as a signifier of greatness in literature. As ever his great favourite is Walter Scott, but of Shakespeare he concedes:

> Shakespeare is often perfect in it for long together, though then, from the defects of a bad education and a vicious age, all at once he loses himself in excesses.[110]

This inflicts an ill-deserved unkindness upon Shakespeare. Bagehot's ruminations do though have currency in the thickened present, alongside the themes of *Julius Caesar*, a play so besieged by the lack of properly animated moderation that it must feel very modern. It is Bagehot who reminds us that it is

[109] Bagehot, *Physics and Politics*, p. 131.
[110] Ibid., p. 131.

not what we call a state that matters most, it is rather how it operates and how it cherishes the crucial political dichotomies.[111]

Julius Caesar is a tersely political and masculine play. Shakespeare's Roman journey next mixes love and infatuation with its politics in a play, *Antony and Cleopatra*, that lays bare the elusiveness of singular sovereignty.

[111] Ibid., p. 107.

Chapter Five
Antony and Cleopatra

I: The Illness of the Prince of Wales

The Third French Republic was declared in September 1870 in response to public disenchantment with Louis Napoleon's losing military excursion at Sedan. Napoleon III's empire was at an end and the success of republicanism over the Channel excited some English republicans to agitate peacefully but not noiselessly against their own monarchy. As that atmosphere of perturbation persisted in late 1871 the Prince of Wales contracted typhoid, the disease that had taken his father a decade earlier. The public's mental investment in his recovery and genuine concern for his health did much to nip republican leanings in the bud. The *British Medical Journal* of 9 December 1871 carries a learned three-page interpretation of the regular medical bulletins emanating from Sandringham.[1] At another and less specialist extreme those same terse bulletins ('Sandringham, Friday 1 am. His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales is passing the night very quietly') are set out in full as the lead news story in a publication as parochial as the *Wrexham and Denbighshire Advertiser*.[2]

Walter Bagehot puts his own socio-political spin on the tale of the Prince's indisposition in *The Economist* of 16 December 1871.[3] He takes another opportunity to vent his constitutional theories on 24 February 1872, this time in the context of a service of thanksgiving for Edward's recovery.[4] Both articles reinforce thoughts Bagehot had expressed previously, also in *The Economist*, on 22 July 1871.[5] All components of this torrent of opinions are of a time with Bagehot preparing the revised edition of *The English Constitution* for publication in 1872. In short what we encounter is Bagehot in the full spate of his mature

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[1] 'The Illness of H.R.H. the Prince of Wales', *British Medical Journal*, 2:571, (9 December 1871), 671-673.
[2] 'The Alarming Illness of the Prince of Wales: Hopes of his Recovery', *Wrexham and Denbighshire Advertiser* (16 December 1871), p.8.
[3] Bagehot, 'The Illness of the Prince of Wales', in *Collected Works*, vol. v, 435-438.
[4] Bagehot, 'The Thanksgiving', *in Collected Works*, vol. v, 439-442.
[5] Bagehot, 'The Monarchy and the People', ('Monarchy') *in Collected Works*, vol. v, 431-434.

constitutional thought, all of it powered by his favourite constitutional dichotomy, the dignified/efficient. This is all part of the argument that dignified ornament matters. It is also, I will argue, a manifestation of a view (quite possibly an unconscious one) that dignity and ornament are feminine or soft traits while political efficiency is more commonly a masculine and rough gift. In this Bagehot finds an improbable ally in John Ruskin.

Bagehot's musings assist us to home in on the political core of *Antony and Cleopatra*, a core sometimes neglected by critics because of the surrounding love story. We need to be concerned with three modes of monarchy/sovereign power. Paul Lawrence Rose accurately locates these three divergent modes: 'The political attitudes of Antony, of Caesar, and of Cleopatra are all basically archetypes of conflicting sixteenth-century views on kingship'.[6]

II: Three Attitudes

First and foremost, Rose identifies Octavius Caesar as, 'politically speaking, the ideal ruler'.[7] Antony is to be distinguished from Caesar by means of his attitude to war: 'For Caesar, war is an instrument of high policy. For Antony, it is a vehicle for valor […] Antony's kingship then is a poetical ideal, not a political one'.[8] For Rose, both of these attitudes are defensible (notwithstanding the suicidal atmosphere that Antony's behaviour provokes) whereas Cleopatra's manifests only a lamentable despotic bearing, one that is stripped of its ennobling grandeur with the loss of Antony.[9]

In this categorisation of the kingships on display Rose is at his most perceptive, correctly labelling Caesar's 'cold, calculating nature', acknowledging the poetry in the soul of Antony, whilst deprecating Cleopatra (at least in political terms): 'Egyptian despotism was as alien to Shakespeare's Rome as Bloody Marianism

[6] Paul Lawrence Rose, 'The Politics of Antony and Cleopatra', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 20:4 (Autumn 1969), 379-389 (p. 381).
[7] Ibid., p. 381.
[8] Ibid., p. 381.
[9] Ibid., p. 382.

was to his England'.[10] To translate to Bagehotian terms, Egypt is a political backwater, its cake of custom stale and, the whole state crying out for some animated moderation to nudge it on the desirable track to an Age of Discussion.

Rose asserts that Octavius is, for Jacobean audiences a reassuring figure, an 'ideal ruler' who ushers in the *Pax Romana*, itself the patterning for the perceived benign Tudor era. This goes marginally too far. The analysis rather skates over how schools of history contemporaneous with the play's early performances viewed Octavius. Kalmey argues for an important dichotomy within those patterns of thought:

> Octavius is to be honored as a positive example of the ideal prince *only after* he is crowned Emperor in Rome after the defeats of Antony; *before* this precise occasion, the same Elizabethan histories of Rome characterize Octavius as a vicious tyrant.[11]

This underlying political understanding of Octavius serves to support critics who, like Kalmey, view the play, 'as a drama of transcendent love and being over a world subjugated to the bloody lust of ambition and power'.[12] I suggest that in fact Shakespeare is intrinsically wary of the 'ideal ruler' – Octavius really is Bate's 'mealy-mouthed pragmatist' ranged against Antony, a military hero reduced to a 'slave of sexual desire'.[13] It is this atmosphere which in turn tunes into the Bagehotian political dichotomy. There is an inherent fallibility in a political organism sustained by an unseparated ideal ruler. Peter Heylyn, Jacobean ecclesiastical polemicist, devotes a lengthy tract to Octavius/Augustus and captures the nature of the problem – these 'ideal' leaders are nothing more than unhealthily indispensable and irreplaceable:

> Finally such a one hee was, of whom I will only say what I find spoken of Severus. It has beene an ineffable benefit to the Commonwealth of Rome, if either he had never Dyed, or never been Borne.[14]

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[10] Ibid., p. 383.
[11] Kalmey, p. 278.
[12] Ibid., p. 279.
[13] *Complete Works*, p. 2158.
[14] Peter Heylyn, *Augustus* (London: printed by B.A. and T.F, 1632), p. 227.

On its face then Shakespeare's play is concerned with Antony's poetic enslavement to sexual desire and Caesar's more prosaic commitment to the garnering of power, with the gloriously complicating exoticism of Cleopatra bubbling under and, at turns, at the surface. Once again (as in the earlier Roman Plays) Shakespeare delivers a politically sensitive sub-text from which we should discern a constitutional dichotomist at work. We should take the hint inherent in what Shakespeare chooses to dramatise and, as Kalmey advises us, we should use the character of Cleopatra as a lens onto Octavius's political scheme:

> Shakespeare has presented only a calculating and cruel tyrant Octavius […] He has not yet become emperor at the end of *Antony and Cleopatra*, and Cleopatra, like the Elizabethan historians of Rome, holds his bloody civil war victories in abhorrent contempt.[15]

For Rose the clash between Impulse (represented by Antony) and Reason (Caesar) sparks the dramatic engine of the play.[16] If we are (as I suggest we should) to align Rose's dichotomy to Bagehot's terms, it is not difficult to see how Rose's Reason matches up with an understanding of Bagehot's efficiency. (Reason: 'the capacity for rational thought'; efficiency: 'fitness or power to accomplish the purpose intended').[17] Can we, though, similarly twin Rose's Impulse with Bagehot's dignity? If we accept Impulse as 'a sudden or involuntary inclination or tendency to act without premeditation', we should consider this question from two angles.[18] Antony's own conduct is often impulsive. It is, however, the obedience to his whims by his court followers that should also be considered. That obedience is an equally instinctive and compelling thing – witness Enobarbus's tortured plight in abandoning him. Antony's worthiness of command impels acquiescence to his wishes. In this way Rose's dichotomy aligns with Bagehot's and in that context Rose's conclusion becomes even more telling. Rose observes that nothing is permanently changed by Caesar's victory – the only gain is a political (and hence fleeting) one:

> Therefore, history, the artifact of man, will continue to evolve until either Reason or Impulse is entirely extinguished in man, and this political

[15] Kalmey, p. 287.
[16] Rose, p. 388.
[17] Definitions from *OED*, 'Reason', *n* II 5; 'Efficiency' 2 a.
[18] *OED*, *n* 3 c.

> victories are powerless to accomplish. Only if such a total extinction happens, though, will a Utopian static society be possible.[19]

A Utopian static society is not within Bagehot's contemplation. *Physics and Politics* sourly concludes that a stationary state, 'is by far the most frequent condition of man'; moreover such stationary states when encountered are, in reality, those mired in Nation-Making or, yet worse, in the Use of Conflict.[20] The inevitable spasms between periods of virtual stasis will be unhealthy and frequently violent. Bagehot's peak of societal development is the elevation to an Age of Discussion, where his 'animated moderation' is the gently acting motive force.[21] Such a happy state is not, in fact, truly stationary but one that oscillates gently. It is at the unhappy points of exaggerated oscillation that Shakespeare stages his dramas. We find a modern echo of this valuing of oscillation in Snyder's promotion of a democracy where the meaning of each election is bound up in the promise of the next. In any modern understanding of the term, Bagehot may be no democrat yet in his multiple observations on real states, Bagehot invariably comes down on the side of civil peace being the desirable corollary of the operation of his dichotomy. Only in the quieter social climates where his (or at least some equivalent form of) dichotomy is at work, can animated moderation be relied upon to act positively upon a society: 'It is only by the competition of customs that bad customs can be eliminated and good customs multiplied'.[22] Bagehot's most concentrated assertions of the action of dignity on the political climate appear in his considerations of the usefully moderated role of the monarchy in England.

III: The Ornamental Elements in the Constitution

In 'Monarchy' Bagehot (writing four months before the illness of the Prince of Wales) reasserts his belief in the constitutional usefulness of a showy but circumscribed monarchy.[23] Queen Victoria's retreat from ornament into an already decade-long state of mourning is therefore gently admonished:

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[19] Rose, p. 388.
[20] Bagehot, *Physics and Politics*, p. 137.
[21] Ibid., p. 131.
[22] Ibid., p. 139.
[23] Bagehot, 'Monarchy', p. 431.

> For causes which it is not difficult to define the Queen has done almost as much injury to the popularity of the monarchy by her long retirement from public life as the most unworthy of her predecessors did by his profligacy and frivolity.[24]

In a tone of mild warning (there is no nuance of revolutionary threat – Bagehot is too stylish and innately conservative for that) Bagehot observes that there is danger for the constitution if the public, 'pays for a pageantry it does not get, and which it finds that it can do very well without'.[25] Bagehot is not advocating the banishment of pageantry, rather that if such ornamentalism is abandoned then one of the remaining justifications for a monarchy is lost and we move a step closer to being at the mercy of what Bagehot views as less convivial forms of unmediated government, perhaps the type of 'democratic despotism' he had observed in Louis Napoleon's France. And we should be quite clear that Bagehot is never a radical republican. Nor is Shakespeare. Both our protagonists are constitutional dichotomists, wry enthusiasts for a constitutional monarchy. What separates Bagehot and his acolytes from an idealistic constitutionalist like Sisson is that most elusive quality – religious faith. Bagehot's faith is in a knowing acknowledgement of the value of what he most frequently terms the 'dignified'. I think an equally apposite term for this element, in the context of *Antony and Cleopatra*, is 'ornamentalism', and I use the terms interchangeably. Reading back into Rose's position, it is the impulse to be awed by such ornamentalism that is at work.

The historical and the Shakespearean Octavius both understand the power of monarchical ornament. A century before Juvenal coined the phrase '*panem et circenses*' (bread and circuses) Octavius (self-restyled, in a name suggestive of deity, Augustus) exploited the common love of pageantry to establish a 'Cult of Peace' as the signifier of his rule.[26] The historical Octavius played, to his political advantage, on his status as the man who had delivered Rome from decades of civil strife. Shakespeare's Octavius is seen only in his ruthless, military phase but the politician in him is already thinking in strategic terms. He intends to make

[24] Ibid., p. 431.
[25] Ibid., p. 432.
[26] Simon Baker, *Ancient Rome* (London: BBC Books, 2007) p. 172.

Cleopatra the prize exhibit in his triumphant (and, of course, ornamental) return to Rome: 'for her life in Rome / Would be eternal in our triumph' (5.1.75-76). Displaying the sagacity attributed to her by Kalmey, Cleopatra is alert to this scheme and, as David S. Berkeley suggests, thwarts Caesar's plan by her suicide.[27] This issue of Cleopatra's potential presence in a triumphal march sparks an interesting speculation by Berkeley who cautions against oversimplifying Antony. We should not fall into the trap of viewing Antony as no more than a great man so diminished by desire as to tumble entirely from grace. Antony's warning to Cleopatra, 'None about Caesar trust but Proculeius' (4.15.55), if heeded would deliver her to that very ornamental fate she abhors. Antony's motivation in this instruction is intriguing: is he merely misguided (as he has been in much else) or is there some residue of would-be avenger/piqued lover in his words? Berkeley's conclusion is to favour, 'a wise ignorance' on the matter since with these unresolved and conflicting readings of Antony: 'the play takes on more shadowy outlines and becomes a richer, more subtle, more dramatic and more human drama'.[28] These rich dramatic tones deliver to us an Antony who displays the complexities of the manic depressive, his darkest moments giving way to soaring rapture, as when he rages against Cleopatra's flight from battle at sea, only to temper his fury for nothing more than a kiss (3.11.76-78).

For Bagehot there is no divine right of kings, such a suggestion is to him laughable. In the context of the provocation that sparks 'Monarchy' (an alleged abuse by Gladstone's Liberal government of the royal prerogative), he summarises the remaining (yet important) power of the Crown:

> The prerogative of the Crown is hardly more real a cry just now than the divine right of kings … The social power of the throne is still a reality, but even it must be more used and displayed if it is to remain so.[29]

Bagehot's fears for the durability of this important 'social power' are to a large extent allayed by the public response to the illness of the Prince of Wales and

[27] David S. Berkeley, 'On Oversimplifying Antony', *College English*, 17:2 (November 1955), 96-99 (p. 96).
[28] Ibid., p. 96.
[29] Bagehot, 'Monarchy', pp. 433-434.

both 'Illness' and 'Thanksgiving' are unsurprisingly more confident in their disparagement of republicanism. We can, I think, take that phrase 'social power' as another metonym for those 'dignified' workings of the monarchy. Indeed 'social power' perhaps better (but less euphoniously) encapsulates the role of the crown. It is the necessity of some sense of allure that Bagehot is aiming to describe – an ornamentalism or dignity that underlies social power. It is not a phenomenon with its base in either cold logic or religious faith that Bagehot diagnoses as desirable, rather it is a feeling of wider society's ease with itself. In Bagehot's conception, religious faith does not raise its embarrassing head in all of this and it is this very faithlessness that makes him so unattractive to a seriously devout man such as Sisson. This social power or dignity is important because, as Paul Yachnin (who acknowledges his debt to Rose) observes , there is a small but vital portion of sovereignty that resides in the lowly subject - specifically his ability to decide to which of competing leaders he will choose to owe fealty.[30] Elsewhere, Yachnin attempts to dissect the political elements of the play that would have acted upon its first Jacobean audiences. He argues (again following Rose) for an immediate political atmosphere markedly more heated than we can easily now appreciate:

> *Antony and Cleopatra*'s account of the shift from the magnificent but senescent Egyptian past to the pragmatic but successful Roman future can be seen as a critical register of the symbolic constructions and political ramifications of the shift from the Elizabethan to the Jacobean style of rule.[31]

Yachnin develops his theme by diverging from Emrys Jones's opinion that this early-seventeenth-century political atmosphere is an excrescence best ignored in modern contemplation of the play.[32] Yachnin prefers to point up the politics: 'an integral part of the play's meaning'.[33] Yachnin's project, is in essence, a historicising one, persuasively arguing his case that *Antony and Cleopatra* might

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[30] Paul Yachnin, 'Shakespeare's Politics of Loyalty: Sovereignty and Subjectivity in *Antony and Cleopatra*', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 33:2 (Spring 1993), 343-363 (p. 343).
[31] Paul Yachnin, '"Courtiers of Beauteous Freedom": *Antony and Cleopatra* in its Time', *Renaissance and Reformation*, 15:1 (Winter, 1991), 1-20 (p. 1).
[32] Ibid., p. 5. The cited opinion of Emrys Jones is from Jones's 'Introduction' to the Penguin edition of the play (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977) pp. 46-47.
[33] Yachnin, p. 5.

be played in 1606-1607 with equal success at both court and at the Globe: 'It is the distinguishing feature of great drama that it can make itself at home before different audiences'.[34] Politics is a human mechanism and it is not immune to the intrusion of love. *Antony and Cleopatra* sees Shakespeare pitching a flamboyant love affair into a stew of fledgling Roman imperialism and decaying Egyptian monarchy. Here we locate something not hitherto foregrounded in the Roman Plays – characters at the very centre of the text who have to wrestle with the consequences of this volatile admixture. This provoking text points up the near impossibility of a flawless and singular political success, but that very impossibility is itself stimulating and we can do no better than approach the human condition with a degree of humility. Hailey Bachrach encapsulates the turmoil of the play when reviewing the 2018 National Theatre production: 'A special providence in the fall of a sparrow? Not in Egypt. There are only people and the messes they make'.[35]

I hope to unravel some of those political messes (of course entwined with the interpersonal chaos) and to try to apply the lessons we learn to a very broad present. I will consider Bagehot's own exposure to love and also his difficult ambivalence to one of the two dominant political figures of the second half of the nineteenth century, Benjamin Disraeli. Bagehot finds Disraeli's flamboyance distasteful, particularly when compared to the liberal asceticism of William Gladstone. In the final analysis I suggest that at one turn Bagehot, Enobarbus-like, struggles with (is perhaps even embarrassed by) an impulsive cavalier conservatism when faced with a choice between elegance and dry pragmatism. Of course at the other turn, Bagehot, in his self-satisfied un-Enobarbus-like mode, does not die of a broken heart. However, I do not believe we should cast Walter Bagehot as a man utterly in thrall to cynicism – in his personal life and his political impulses he knows something of dignity or ornamentalism.

[34] Ibid., p. 17.
[35] Hailey Bachrach, 'Antony and Cleopatra, Performance Review', *Shakespeare Bulletin*, 37:2 (Summer 2019), 251-254 (p. 254).

IV: That Dignified Woman

Walter Bagehot made the acquaintance of James Wilson and his family in 1857. Wilson was the founder and proprietor of *The Economist*, a Liberal Member of Parliament and serving cabinet Minister. Bagehot married Wilson's eldest daughter Eliza in 1858. Two years later James Wilson died in India where he was serving as the imperial Finance Minister. By his will he settled *The Economist* for the benefit of his six daughters with Bagehot as administrator for them. From 1861 to his own death in 1877, Bagehot was sole editor of the magazine. At a glance, one might assert that his marriage to Eliza Wilson was fortuitous or, worse, opportunistic – a stratagem to tilt the apologetics of fact further in his own favour. Sisson is too elegant to say that much quite so bluntly but his summation of the 'tactics' that marked Bagehot's progress is hostile in its implications – for Sisson, Walter Bagehot was a man who consciously evaded difficulties and,

> [W]ho conformed instead to the world of business but was cleverer than its other inhabitants; who was all the time worried about the sanity of his stock and did not have any children; who distrusted the hereditary powers and owed all his opportunities to family influence.[36]

Most damning of all, Sisson (perhaps with caustic glance to *Physics and Politics*) deflates Bagehot to insignificance: 'Bagehot operated in a field of natural selection from which the more desperate assaults, and the more desperate risks, had already been eliminated'.[37] If this audit of Bagehot is accurate then he is an unworthy companion in Shakespearean study. Bagehot can be rescued from this redundancy. If *Antony and Cleopatra* is a political play wrapped in a romance (or vice versa), we should look for some signal that Bagehot is not simply the godless journalist who 'slipped down the crack between Unitarianism and Anglicanism; who was the child of the Bank House as some are sons of the manse'.[38] We need to know that Bagehot's political ruminations are underpinned by some soul. We need to rescue him from the apologetics of fact. We can afford to side with Grant, his most recent biographer, for whom the Bagehot marriage was rather more

[36] Sisson, *The Case of Walter Bagehot*, p. 121.
[37] Ibid., p. 121.
[38] Ibid., p. 121.

than a convenient plot: 'If a Victorian courtship resembled a pair of simmering kettles, Bagehot's had come to a boil'.[39]

Bagehot seems to have had no urge to see himself immortalised in his correspondence. As St John-Stevas concludes in his Introduction to the surviving personal letters:

> Bagehot was immersed in the world of affairs and like many busy men preferred to communicate verbally when circumstances allowed rather than by letter. Bagehot's sister-in-law, Mrs Russell Barrington records that Bagehot never kept any letters he received save those from his parents, James Wilson and Richard Hutton.[40]

There is, however, one exception to St John-Stevas's summation – we do have both sides of the prolific correspondence between Bagehot and his fiancée between their engagement on 7 November 1857 and their marriage on 21st April 1858.[41] Into that happy interval are crammed seventy-six letters: thirty-nine from Walter and thirty-seven from Eliza. Their tone is bright and loving. Both correspondents are educated polyglots and conversant with matters of finance and state – the six Wilson daughters had been educated by private tutors and clearly understood their father's political milieu. If Walter Bagehot was manipulating a marriage of convenience, he went to considerable heights to feign love. The letters fit Barrington's description of Bagehot as, 'desperately, poetically in love' with her older sister.[42] That Bagehot can balance a burgeoning romance with his journalistic and family banking concerns is implicit in the first letter he writes to Eliza after the engagement. He refers without troubling to expand upon the point that, 'the panic is getting worse and requires watching'.[43] The 'panic' in question was a run on certain Northern banks provoked by the economic crisis in America. No explanation of this background is needed by Eliza. It would be her father's advice to the government to suspend the Bank Charter Act that would calm the markets. The panic is, though, of merely passing concern to the smitten Walter:

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[39] Grant, p. 83.
[40] St John-Stevas, *Collected Works*, vol. xii, p. 3.
[41] The sequence of letters can be found in *Collected Works*, vol. xiii, 391-538.
[42] Mrs Russell Barrington, p. 238.
[43] *Collected Works*, vol. xiii, p. 392.

> I cannot be in a panic at all myself. I have never felt such happiness as for the last two days, ever since our first walk in the *cemetery*. Before that it did not seem real, or that you would *indeed* take a share in my life but since that I have a repose of affection quite new to me and such a rest from the burning pain of a *man's* love.[44]

Bagehot often saw anachronisms standing in support of each other. My suggestion will be that this instinctive duality, shared with Shakespeare, acts upon persons of influence and that where one facet overwhelms another, the edifice of humanity topples in on itself. Nowhere is this better illustrated than in *Antony and Cleopatra*, where love swamps the title characters and makes them hopelessly ineffective against the machine-like Octavius. As illustrated in Heylyn's lament about the problems of 'perfect' kings, a human machine devoid of ornament is nothing more than a temporary answer. A semblance of balance is all. Viewed in this way, *Antony and Cleopatra*, stands as a play in which romance, or more cynically, as Zak asserts, its ugly relations, lust and narcissism, are set up in competition with sovereignty to an extent unmatched in the other Roman Plays.[45]

I have suggested that we might be able to discover a hint of a female/male dichotomy in Bagehot's dignified/efficient formulation. This is not something that Bagehot ever makes explicit, and I think we can, without any controversy, assert that, most certainly in a twenty-first-century lexicon, Bagehot must be charged with misogyny. The 'woman-scorning bachelor' of his early journalistic years may have been enraptured by Miss Wilson but marriage produces no change in the tenor of his commercial writing.[46] Wider male suffrage, yet alone women's suffrage, is never an enthusiasm that catches with Bagehot. He believes in his precious efficiency, coupled with an ornamental dignity that affords that efficiency the headroom it needs to get on with the important job in hand – decidedly man's work. It is telling that Bagehot chooses 'dignity' as his defining

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[44] Ibid., p. 392. The 'cemetery' was Bagehot's flippant name for Hamilton Gardens in St. John's Wood. He and Eliza had walked there two days after their engagement.
[45] William F. Zak, *The Tragedy of Antony and Cleopatra, Asp amidst the Figs* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2015) p. 12.
[46] Grant, p. 83.

characteristic of the more feminine ornamental trait of successful governance. It and 'dignified' are used by him on occasion in a telling manner. A short editorial piece, 'The Cost of Public Dignity', in *The Economist* of 20 July 1868 nicely captures Bagehot's position.[47] It is notable piece for its uncharacteristic siding with Disraeli against Gladstone, though Bagehot takes care not to labour this aspect. Rather he is adamant that appearances matter: 'A nation which is dignified will be thought to show power, and a nation which is mean and cheap will be thought to show weakness'.[48] Bagehot's scepticism about a widening franchise is also betrayed in his concluding paragraph: 'The more democratic we get, the more we shall get to like state and show, which have ever pleased the vulgar'.[49] Dignity is not then a straight substitute for democracy – instead it is its necessary bulwark against chaos.

'The Cost of Public Dignity' was written ten years after the letters between Walter and Eliza, but the word 'dignified' finds its place in that earlier correspondence and reveals Bagehot's attachment to the term and his instinctive attribution to it of feminine characteristics. Aside from the love letters, a letter from within the period of the engagement sent to his great friend Hutton evidences Bagehot's reflex (and hardly exceptional for the time) chauvinism. The tone is light-hearted. Hutton, it seems, was in the habit (as it transpires was Eliza) of using small sheets of writing paper. Bagehot jovially takes Hutton to task:

> My dear Hutton, I object to your microscopic pieces of paper. I lose *half* my mind in trying to keep them till they are answered. Besides it is treating one like a *woman*.[50]

What is said in jest can be revealing, and jest is one of Bagehot's default modes. He admits as much in one of his early (22 November 1857) letters to Eliza, a letter that lauds feminine dignity:

> I go about murmuring "I have made that *dignified* girl *commit* herself – I have I have" and then vault over the sofa with exultation. *Those* are the

[47] Bagehot, 'The Cost of Public Dignity', *Collected Works*, vol. v, 411-413.
[48] Ibid., p. 412.
[49] Ibid., p. 413.
[50] Bagehot, *Collected Works*, vol. xiii, p. 446.

> feelings of the person you have connected yourself with. *Please* don't be offended at my rubbish. Sauciness is my particular line.[51]

Thus is Eliza's dignity a thing to be admired. It does not seem to be a characteristic Bagehot requires of himself. For a man of affairs, one unfailingly gets the impression that it is efficiency that is the prerequisite. Bagehot endorses this maxim when he returns to the subject in his letter to Eliza on 28 November 1857.[52] He responds particularly to the following modesty in her letter of 26 November: 'I feel that I have told you nothing that you have not in some sort a right to know'.[53] Bagehot playfully scolds his fiancée: 'Don't talk about what I have "a right to know" as if *I* was a person of dignity'.[54] Bagehot returns to his theme in his letter to Eliza written over 11 and 12 January 1858.[55] He is enjoying reading Anthony Trollope's most recent novel, *The Three Clerks*, and contrasts the fate of two female characters, one dignified and the other not. In the first instance Bagehot finds time to congratulate himself on his own good fortune with Eliza:

> There is a dignified young lady with whom a young gentleman named Norman is on the point of succeeding, but he commits the *fatal* error of being respectful to her, keeping a large distance with awe and respect, whereas a rude young gentleman named Tudor goes in and cheerfully succeeds. I never felt so distinctly the extreme danger into which I had fallen from the naturally reverential nature of my disposition.[56]

This passage exemplifies another Bagehot trait – he writes in a hurry and is rarely mindful of inconsistencies. Having, in the prior November, boasted his sauciness, now, in January, he protests a reverential nature. These contrasting moods can be reconciled – in general Bagehot is irreverent but is prone to awe in the face of love. Sisson's charge of marital opportunism is unfair. From all of this we can synthesise an understanding of Bagehot's attitude and can take this forward into a consideration of political theory. I offer this formulation: Bagehot systematizes the dignified and the efficient; he understands these attributes as broadly feminine and masculine respectively; he feels himself above being taken

[51] Ibid., p. 402.
[52] Ibid., pp. 410-411.
[53] Ibid., p. 409.
[54] Ibid., p. 411.
[55] Ibid., pp. 455-458.
[56] Ibid., p. 456.

in by the charade of the dignified in politics, preferring to identify with the class of the administratively efficient; however, he is certainly not immune to the dignity (perhaps better understood as ornamentalism) of love. The final caveat in my formulation shelters Bagehot from the most ardent of his critics and also fits him for critical use on the love-infected play, *Antony and Cleopatra*.

We can utilise Bagehot to find our way in the play without having to endorse his chauvinism. Bagehot is prey to some verities that he never spares the time to divine. We can overlay them onto an astute feminist reading of the play such as that by Jyotsna Singh in 1989.[57] Singh argues that notwithstanding the antitheatrical tones that may seem to swirl around the text, it is in fact Cleopatra whose spirit is, if not transcendent, of equal power to others at work in the play: 'recent feminist studies view her theatricality as a source of empowerment and as a positive value in the play'.[58] Putting this in terms related to Bagehot's personal history, we might say that nothing becomes Bagehot so much as his marriage, a union that confirms romance in his soul and embeds his important attachment to dignity. By an irony detectable to neither, both Sisson and Bagehot find their beliefs underpinned by something joyous – religious faith and ornamentalism respectively. Neither, I suggest, would be an enthusiast for Octavius.

Categorically no enthusiast for any of Shakespeare's leading men we find John Ruskin, another (perhaps greater) Victorian polymath, about whom Bagehot declines to write save in scathing terms in two articles for *The Economist* in August 1860.[59] It is regrettable that Bagehot has no more in essence to say about the remarkable and versatile Ruskin than that, as a political economist, he peddles 'muddiness and fallacy'.[60] Regrettable because it would be instructive to read Bagehot's response to Ruskin's *Sesame and Lilies*, a volume that paired the

[57] Jyotsna Singh, 'Renaissance Antitheatricality, Antifeminism, and Shakespeare's "Antony and Cleopatra"', *Renaissance Drama*, New Series, 20 (1989), 99-121.
[58] Ibid., p. 100.
[59] Bagehot, 'Aesthetic Twaddle versus Economic Science' (18 August 1860), and 'The Merchant's Function' (25 August 1860), pp. 315-322, and 322-329 respectively *Collected Works*, vol. xiv.
[60] Bagehot, 'Aesthetic Twaddle', p. 316.

texts of two lectures delivered in 1864 (always intended to be taken together but often anthologised separately, thus concentrating critical attention on the second), 'Of King's Treasuries', and 'Of Queens' Gardens'.[61] Had Bagehot found time to concentrate on these two lectures he might have found the first uncomfortable in the context of his own writing and the second surprisingly supportive of his own under-explored postulation of the femininity of dignity. Rather as I have positioned Bagehot as our contemporary in a thickened present, so Deborah Epstein Nord argues for Ruskin's modernity: 'Ruskin joined other hard-to-categorize Victorian sages as our near contemporary'.[62] We can expand our thickened critical present to include both Bagehot and Ruskin. They are also, for these purposes, Shakespeare's contemporaries. All three are now out of time in their sexual politics but their valorisation of deemed female traits demonstrates an understanding of the existence of, and argument for the desirability of, these qualities.

V: No Heroes – Only Heroines

As a preamble to its successor lecture Ruskin explains that 'Of Kings' Treasuries' does no more or less than teach us 'How and What to Read', those questions themselves arising out of 'a far deeper one', namely '*Why* to Read'.[63] The second lecture takes forward the assembled answers to those questions and poses how good reading should be utilised by women. As Ruskin puts it in his own Preface to an 1882 edition of his texts, the several themes are these: 'the majesty of the influence of good books, and of good women, if we know how to read them, and how to honour'.[64] We can run against difficulties of motive as we decipher Ruskin's intentions. Epstein Nord entirely forgivably falls just short of the lofty (nigh on impossible) standards Ruskin requires of good writing and reading when she says:

> At the very least, he sees his antimaterialist critique of men in 'Of King's Treasuries' as parallel to his anti-ornamental critique of women in 'Of Queen's Gardens'. But we might go even further by detecting in the

[61] John Ruskin (ed. Deborah Epstein Nord), *Sesame and Lilies* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002).
[62] Deborah Epstein Nord, 'Introduction', *Sesame and Lilies*., p. xv.
[63] Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies*, p. 70.
[64] Ibid., p. 23.

> language of Ruskin's text the proposition that men and women might profitably exchange those characteristics that are commonly associated with their own sex.[65]

The last sentence of that quotation arguably manifests some authorial wishful thinking and offends against one of Ruskin's own urgings: 'at least be sure that you go to the author to get at *his* meaning, not to find yours'.[66] This puts one in mind of Bagehot's partial reading of Shakespeare in 'Shakespeare – The Individual'. I have said that a mindful Bagehot might find 'Of Kings' Treasuries' uncomfortable. Ruskin offers Milton's 'Lycidas' as an example of great writing. What he praises is the precision and tautness of Milton's vocabulary: 'Milton means what he says; and means it with his might too'.[67] Ruskin goes on to distinguish Milton's literary accuracy from lower forms of writing: 'Never think Milton uses those three words to fill up his verse, as a loose writer would'.[68] Even Bagehot's greatest admirer will find it difficult not to detect looseness in his journalism. Furthermore, it is easy to see Bagehot and his fellow adherents to the laws of supply and demand being firmly in Ruskin's sights when he complains that political economists have delivered England into a state of catatonic ignorance, what he deems an: 'insanity of avarice'.[69] Happily, Ruskin does not believe the cause is lost – it is not yet 'a corruption of the inner nature'.[70] He prescribes the founding of royal or national libraries 'in every considerable city, with a royal series of books in them, the same series in every one of them'.[71] His belief in the educability of the population is touching (even if his dictation of what they will read has Maoist connotations) and it is a far cry from the apologetics of Bagehot's facts and his characterisation of an insensate underclass kept in thrall by the presence of a dignified sovereign. As observed above, Bagehot's only engagements with Ruskin are his responses to Ruskin's *Unto This*

[65] Epstein Nord, 'Introduction', pp. xvii-xviii.
[66] Ruskin, p. 34.
[67] Ibid., p. 39.
[68] Ibid., p. 40.
[69] Ibid., p. 49.
[70] Ibid., p. 49.
[71] Ibid., p. 64.

Last and Other Essays on Political Economy.[72] This, for Bagehot is mere aesthetic twaddle and Ruskin's arguments for, inter alia, mandated equality of wages are evidence of nothing more than 'perverse extravagance'.[73] Ruskin is no more than a '*soi-disant* philanthropist'.[74]

Bagehot then, if he ever read the piece (and even an omnivore like Bagehot could not read everything), might stand upbraided for his slovenly writing by the elevated standards commended by 'Of Kings' Treasuries'. In his cavalier fashion (I use the term advisedly and in the sense employed by St John-Stevas when co-opting Bagehot as a conservative – 'the conservatism of the cavalier') Bagehot might be expected to find solace in 'Of Queens' Gardens'.[75] But I suggest that his insecurities will not permit him to do so. Bagehot regards himself as a Liberal and his repeated failures to enter parliament were always as such. Had he lived long enough Bagehot might have found himself suffering a disquieting fellow-feeling with the '*soi-disant* philanthropist' Ruskin when the latter opens his autobiography with the following provocative sentence: 'I am, and my father was before me, a violent Tory of the old school; - Walter Scott's school that is to say, and Homer's'.[76] The mention of his beloved Scott would catch at Bagehot, for what Ruskin is describing is that very cavalier conservatism that St John-Stevas ascribes to Bagehot - as Ruskin explains: 'That is to say, a most sincere love of kings, and dislike of everybody who attempted to disobey them'.[77] Is this not, at its heart, how Bagehot feels about the monarchy – that it is something worthy of honour because in its ornateness it impels the masses to live peaceably? The route to this conclusion may, for Bagehot, be strewn with cynicism, but the destination is almost the same – constitutional monarchy illuminated by an Age of Discussion. As for Bagehot, so for Shakespeare, though Shakespeare's path to this conclusion is far more attractively nuanced. I say 'almost the same' because

[72] John Ruskin, *Unto This Last and Other Essays on Political Economy* (London: Ward Lock and Co. Ltd., 1912. First published 1860).
[73] Bagehot, 'Aesthetic Twaddle', p. 319.
[74] Ibid., p. 321.
[75] St John-Stevas, *Walter Bagehot: Writers and their Work*, (London: Longmans, Green and Company, 1963) p. 16.
[76] John Ruskin, *Praeterita* (London: George Allen, 1907) p. 1.
[77] Ibid., p. 3.

there is an important distinction between Ruskin (and for that matter Sisson) and Bagehot and that distinction lies in the belief in the perfectibility of a sovereign state. In *Of Queens' Gardens* Ruskin strays into Bagehot's constitutional territory. Following his own strictures on avoiding loose usage, Ruskin first sets out to rescue the word 'State' from a perceived morass of political discussion and reminds us that its literal meaning signifies the standing and stability of a thing. Ruskin, himself deploying the term politically, next claims that:

> A king's majesty or 'state,' then and the right of his kingdom to be called a state, depends on the movelessness of both: -without tremor, without quiver of balance.[78]

Bagehot's best imagined state is not, in fact, a motionless one but one oscillating in its Age of Discussion. He lays down no greater vision than this. For Bagehot there is no Elysian state without even a 'quiver of balance'. In the modern age, Snyder actually lauds what seems to me to be that very quiver as man's best hope. We can, I suppose, allow ourselves a wry smile and suggest that, with his balance analogy, Ruskin falls short of his own rules on writing – after all his vision defies the laws of physics – even the tallest tower must sway in the wind. Whatever our preference, there is common philosophical ground for these various political thinkers and that common ground is the ground of divided power; divided between the dignified and the efficient, between impulse and reason, between female and male, between ornate and austere, call them what you will.

Having, in his first lecture, set out the type and style of good books and how they should be read, Ruskin, in 'Of Queens' Gardens', now asks what should be done with the 'calm, beneficent, and *therefore* kingly, power' that is the product of this writing and reading.[79] Most provocatively he asks:

> [W]hat special portion or kind of this royal authority, arising out of noble education, may be rightly possessed by women; and how far they are also called to a true queenly power, - not in their households merely, but over all within their sphere.[80]

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[78] Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies*, p. 69.
[79] Ibid., p. 69.
[80] Ibid., p. 69.

In the answers he provides to his own questions, I suggest that Ruskin pushes himself and Bagehot closer together than either might like. Bagehot's formulation of the dignified is feminine in its tone and Ruskin's ostensibly sexist and condescending relegation of the role of women is, once we look closely enough, clothed in the language of admiration – we even find him talking, Bagehot-like, of 'the true dignity of woman and her mode of help to man'.[81] If we test the ideas of these two eminent Victorians we find them strange bedfellows in both advocating kingship and good reading, even if they possess very different views as to how far down the social scale the benefit of reading will catch. Ruskin is far more sophisticated in his enquiry into the role of women in political society. However, if we read an inflection of Ruskin's spirit into Bagehot it becomes easier (and more helpful) to cast the operation of the dignified/ornate as a feminine trait. This train of thought of course offends against modern thinking on sexual politics but should not be discarded when we attempt to mesh the thinking of two Victorian writers and a Renaissance dramatist. Even in a thickened present the actions of sexual politics upon the writers in their moment are to be reckoned.

At this stage there is a minor terminological difficulty that should be surmounted. As quoted above, Deborah Epstein Nord, talks of Ruskin's 'anti-ornamental critique of women'. It will be obvious that in equating the dignified with the ornamental I diverge from Epstein Nord's categorisation and instead designate the qualities that Ruskin attributes to women as ornate for my own distinct purposes. The difficulty is, I confess, one of looseness of language. What Epstein Nord intends is to convey the sense that Ruskin is anti-decorative in his critique of women.

What is this critique of women that so aids us in picturing the divisions that underly viable sovereignty? It has at its core this supposition:

> [Y]ou may chisel a boy into shape, as you would a rock, or hammer him into it, if he be of a better kind, as you would a piece of bronze. But you

[81] Ibid., p. 70.

> cannot hammer a girl into anything. She grows as a flower does, - she will wither without sun.[82]

It is this caste of thought that licenses Ruskin to produce an epigram that Bagehot would savour, if only he had thought of it: 'Shakespeare has no heroes; - he only has heroines'.[83] Ruskin has to double back on himself – making exceptions for Henry V ('A slight sketch') and the 'still slighter' Valentine in *Two Gentleman of Verona*.[84] Warming to his theme Ruskin concludes that 'there is hardly a play that has not a perfect woman in it, steadfast in grave hope, and errorless purpose'.[85] No character from *Antony and Cleopatra* is included in the dozen Shakespearean women he lists. We might quibble and pause to suggest Octavia for inclusion, but she is, it has to be conceded, a minor character. Certainly (and understandably) Cleopatra is omitted and we must infer that *Antony and Cleopatra* is a play with neither hero nor heroine – it is one of Shakespeare's 'laboured and perfect plays' that leaves us to our own moral devices.[86]

What we begin to divine is a mood of analysis that views good governance as requiring multiple qualities and that is sceptical of perfect kings possessed of all those qualities. For Bagehot, a perfect finished state (in the extreme literal meaning posited by Ruskin) is not possible, however a highly liveable constitution is achievable with that very quiver of balance that Ruskin (admittedly in a rhetorical flourish) abhors. Shakespeare had got to the point of understanding the contrasts at work in statehood more than two centuries before either of them. Certainly, Ruskin is more disposed to optimism than Bagehot. Yet even Ruskin, with his analogy of perfect balance, does not project a society without a monarch. Instead he argues for a selfless constitutional leadership and is even encouraged enough to record that he finds such leadership within Homer and Scott, and that, 'the best of them were even ready

[82] Ibid., p. 82.
[83] Ibid., p. 70.
[84] Ibid., p. 70.
[85] Ibid., p. 71.
[86] Ibid., p. 70.

to govern for nothing!'[87] As for Ruskin's hope for the subjects of such self-denying monarchs, his typically elegant ambition is that they should learn to recognise and then obey proper kings (and one would hope also, with a modern inflection, queens):

> [M]y only hope of prosperity for England, or any other country, in whatever life they lead, is in their discovering and obeying men capable of Kinghood.[88]

If we understand Bagehot as a cavalier conservative, it makes all the more notable his antipathy for the man, Benjamin Disraeli, whom Bagehot himself acknowledges as the 'inventor of "Democratic Conservatism"'.[89] Bagehot cannot abide the fact that Disraeli 'understands how to work the system' and that he 'appeals to the "outsiders" in the Constitution – to the naturally non-voting element – to the "people" in the least agreeable sense of the word'.[90] Arguably what Bagehot finds so disagreeable about Disraeli is that he is ahead of Bagehot's constitutional game. Disraeli has anticipated the very twentieth-century progression by which political institutions moved away from parliamentary control and instead attempted to take on (with only limited success) some of the allure of the dignified in the dualistic operation of the constitution. Disraeli was himself a peacock figure, not afraid to be a political ornament. Bagehot cannot avoid unease when he finds himself in the position of siding with Disraeli on discrete issues.[91] On one such occasion Bagehot summarises Disraeli thus:

> He has always been an observing and thinking, and, in his way, an industrious man. But his work has been for the most part optional work, not involving much anxiety.[92]

Might this not have been written of Bagehot by a critic such as Sisson? When Bagehot turns his ire on Disraeli, it is usually for Disraeli's perceived lack of principle and his opportunism:

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[87] Ruskin, *Praeterita*, p. 4.
[88] Ibid., p. 8.
[89] Bagehot, 'The State of Parties', first published in *The Economist* of 15 January 1876, *Collected Works,* vol vii, pp. 220-224 (p. 223).
[90] Ibid., p. 223.
[91] See for example, 'The Cost of Public Dignity' (op. cit.), p. 411.
[92] Bagehot, 'The Premiership', first published in *The Economist*, 2 January 1875, *Collected Works*, vol. vi, pp. 65-68 (p. 65).

> Does not the very fact of their being led by Mr. Disraeli at once evince that they do not themselves possess that full mastery of principles which is necessary for their argumentative exposition?[93]

This last quotation comes early in Bagehot's journalistic journey (1856) and the article gives us a good clue as to Bagehot's cavalier conservatism. He makes concessions to a particular strain of conservatism in tones he cannot bring himself to repeat at later dates:

> To a great extent, every Liberal is now a Conservative. That moral and intellectual state – that predominance of the politically intelligent – that gradual training of the politically unintelligent – that unity of order and freedom which it is the aim of Liberalism to produce, already exists.[94]

What is wrong, then, with conservatism as the thirty-year-old Bagehot sees it is not that it is wrong to want to conserve the Liberal gains that have been made, but that new types of 'all -involving democracy and quickly striking despotism' have been unleashed by Disraeli's unprincipled party.[95]

The cavalier Bagehot inhabits an England that (by his knowing diagnosis) lives happily with its dichotomies. As we turn to Shakespeare's Rome and Egypt, the dichotomies are numerous and stark but are accommodated by neither Antony nor Cleopatra. Octavius rides roughshod over the political field powered by his singular drive but by virtue of that very singularity is himself flawed.

VI: Roman World, Egyptian Earth

There are copious dualities at work in this play. The first is the starkest – the contrast between male and female, casting its dramatic light and shade between the opportunistic male efficiency of Octavius, the denuded machismo of the love-struck Antony, and the forceful allure of Cleopatra. Next is the seeming philosophical chasm that divides Rome and Egypt. Care is needed in assessing what Mary Thomas Crane terms this 'binary division'.[96] As Crane puts it, the

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[93] Bagehot, 'Intellectual Conservatism', first published in the *Saturday Review*, 26 April 1856, *Collected Works*, vol. vi, pp. 95-98 (p. 96).
[94] Ibid., p. 98.
[95] Ibid., p. 98.
[96] Mary Thomas Crane, 'Roman World, Egyptian Earth: Cognitive Difference and Empire in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*', *Comparative Drama*, 43:1 (2009), 1-17 (p. 1).

division can seem vast but sophisticated criticism should acknowledge that, 'the contrast between the two blurs upon closer inspection'.[97] Crane can seem to be arguing against herself as her article proceeds but, in fact, what she is suggesting is not so much two wildly different nations as two different modes of perception clashing with each other. Romans are developing a scientific and, incidentally, colonial aspect:

> Their "world" is composed largely of hard, opaque, human-fashioned materials and its surface is divided into almost obsessively named – and conquered – cities and nations.[98]

The Egyptians meanwhile are standing in a more literary position:

> Egyptians, on the other hand, inhabit "the earth", in which they imagine themselves to be immersed and which they perceive and understand through all of the senses.[99]

In placing emphasis on the 'perceptual dichotomy' between Rome and Egypt, Crane sets up Octavius and Cleopatra as the chief antagonists, with poor, befuddled Antony attempting to maintain a foot in both camps.[100] Little wonder then that we can speculate on his possible manic depression or even his schizophrenia. In the end, of course, he chooses the losing camp although even that choice is marred by a messy, even comic, suicide.[101] So out of the obvious Rome/Egypt dichotomy has spun a science/literature perceptual dichotomy. Antony brazenly tries and fails to balance the two aspects. It is possibly more instructive to consider another character who walks this perilous line and dies for his troubles. Enobarbus speaks almost as much of the play as Octavius and is not encumbered by ambition or by romantic love. He is of the Roman world but dies, at his own choosing, in the Egyptian earth.

VII: An Egyptian in Rome and a Roman in Egypt

Bate is in no doubt:

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[97] Ibid., p. 1.
[98] Ibid., p. 2.
[99] Ibid., p. 2.
[100] Ibid., p. 15.
[101] For a convincing argument as to the proper and intentional comedy of Antony's suicide see Lois Potter, 'Shakespeare Performed: Assisted Suicides: *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Coriolanus* in 2006-7', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 58:4 (Winter 2007), 509-529.

> Enobarbus is as rewarding a role as any Shakespeare wrote. And it might just be the nearest thing anywhere in his complete works to a considered self-portrait.[102]

Bate backs up his reasoning by aligning Enobarbus's position in the play with Shakespeare's own position in London:

> In the play, his own perspective is that of an Egyptian in Rome and a Roman in Egypt, as in earlier life his viewpoint had been that of a country outsider in London. So he invented a new character, the only major player in the story who is absent from the historical source: Enobarbus.[103]

In this context and even more so in the spirit of David Read's article 'Disappearing Act', the character of Enobarbus commands attention.[104] In assessing Enobarbus's unusual, self-willed death, Read alludes to Cleopatra's dying invocation of untying 'this knot intrinsicate / Of life' (5.2.341-2) and points out that in this play:

> Rather than a "knot intrinsicate", the play attests to the persistent presence of ill-matching loose ends, even in the very heart of the action. Enobarbus is one such loose end.[105]

Read's interpretation is that Shakespeare refutes any universal single truth and revels in, 'the messiness of ordinary experience'.[106] In this glorification of messiness (a pre-sentiment here of Bachrach's 'people and the messes they make') Shakespeare deliberately confounds any easy dramatic unity in the fates of his characters – there is no one fate that finds what is 'meet' for all characters, such that for Read:

> I do see in *Antony and Cleopatra* an acknowledgment of the idea that the persons represented on stage have distinct beings and existences, that they do not lead one and the same "life".[107]

Just as Bagehot's diagnosis of duality in sovereignty opens up the play to us, so, in a stimulating inversion, Read's artfully deconstructed mess takes us back into

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[102] *Complete Works*, p. 2160.
[103] Ibid., p. 2160. There is in fact in North's *Plutarch* (Shakespeare's historical source) a passing reference to a Gnaeus Domitius Ahenobarbus, but Shakespeare does little more than draw the name for his character.
[104] David Read, 'Disappearing Act: The Role of Enobarbus in *Antony and Cleopatra*', *Studies in Philology*, 110:3 (Summer 2013), 562-583.
[105] Ibid., p. 583.
[106] Ibid., p. 583.
[107] Ibid., p. 583.

Bagehot and allows a more intricate pattern to emerge than is suggested by Bagehot's quick journalism. Sovereignty has its disparate parts but they are not together a knot intrinsicate, rather an unjoined collection of loose ends. Bagehot's vision is therefore best understood, per Rose, if we accept that neither Reason nor Impulse will ever become absolutely extinct leaving the field clear to the victor and thereby ushering in some bland Utopia. The conflicting natures (and we can configure them by many names but each always has a contrast which has to be accommodated) have to live with each other for society to function in a lasting manner.

Read also considers Enobarbus in the context of his death. After all: 'What is one to make of a scene in which a character dies simply by wishing to do so?'[108] One might cavil that Iras will die similarly causelessly in Cleopatra's death scene. However, Iras is not so prominent a character as Enobarbus and we can argue that the superficial similarity between their deaths, serves only to emphasise the non-violent and Egyptian quality of the Roman soldier's demise – yet another dichotomy in this divided text. Read asserts that the Roman characters place an ultimately destructive importance in what is 'meet' in any circumstance. Enobarbus comes to the realisation that this is a pointless exercise, that differences have to be accepted. Neither Reason nor Impulse can or should enjoy total superiority. Enobarbus ultimately tires of the prospect of unalloyed Romanness.[109]

Enobarbus inhabits the Play as Read's 'ironic commentator'.[110] That much is a critical commonplace – more important is the function Read allots to him, 'to distinguish, to compare, to *match* the two different worlds that he must perforce inhabit, to find a decorously "meet" arrangement of those worlds'.[111] Of course, in his own dramatic denouement, Enobarbus cannot locate any such arrangement – Rome and Egypt are on collision course with each other. Indeed neither is even reconciled to itself: Rome falling prey to the valour-driven

[108] Ibid., p. 563.
[109] Ibid., p. 573.
[110] Ibid., p. 569.
[111] Ibid., p. 569.

despotism of Octavius; Egypt incapable of looking beyond the ornamentalist despotism of Cleopatra. A mess indeed – of loose ends.

In the underpinning contrast between Rome and Egypt, Octavius is never anything but Roman, Cleopatra never other than Egyptian. Antony vacillates between the two extremes but is ever at either one end or the other – manic and effusive when with Cleopatra, depressive when forced into Roman garb. Only Enobarbus of the substantial characters allows the dichotomy to act upon him. Enobarbus holds up a partial mirror to a theorist (and most definitely an ironist) like Bagehot, his conservative inclinations thwarting any complete surrender to ornament. I would take this analogy just a little further: Bagehot's position (much as he may have resented it – see for example his humiliations in failing to enter parliament) is, as Enobarbus's, peripheral. He is neither aristocrat (dignified) nor minister of state (efficient). This position at the fulcrum of the scales of political fashion is, so it seems, amenable to the ironist Bagehot, but finally unbearable to the ironist Enobarbus. Bagehot's great good fortune, by his own estimation, is to inhabit a society that has acquired the happy habit of living with dichotomy. No such accommodation exists in Enobarbus's world. Bagehot is happy with his lot. Enobarbus enjoys no such good fortune. If, as I am suggesting, the entire play is founded on a swirl of contradictions, not in fact so much a knot intrinsicate, but a Hydra of poisonous loose-ends, then nothing suggests this quite so well as Enobarbus's pithy soliloquy (not a device much used in the play) in which he makes his fateful decision to abandon Antony. In the space of just seven lines Enobarbus contrasts the dove and the estridge, brain and heart, and valour and reason. The supreme ironist captures the essence of the schisms that rupture the three kingships (Octavius, Antony, Cleopatra) on display:

> Now he'll outstare the lightning. To be furious
> Is to be frighted out of fear, and in that mood
> The dove will peck the estridge; and I see still,
> A diminution in our captain's brain
> Restores his heart. When valour preys on reason,
> It eats the sword it fights with. I will seek
> Some way to leave him. (3.13.227-233)

Caught between the unmediated ambitions of three leaders, it is Enobarbus who beats all of them to the grave.

In arguing for Enobarbus as conflicted victim of an unbalanced society it is necessary to be slightly at variance with some orthodox critical positions. The possible mistake that such criticism makes is to ignore the lesson that Bagehot teaches us and thus to misunderstand the central political lesson of the play. Lawrence E. Bowling provides a lucid example of this (for me) misguided thinking:

> The major theme of *The Tragedy of Antony and Cleopatra* is the idea that every organism or organization , if it is to function properly, must achieve and maintain perfect unity. To state the matter geometrically, a circle can only have one center.[112]

Bowling returns to the same analogy in a later article in which he concentrates tellingly on Antony's personal disunity:

> If, at any time, two or more points attempt to function equally as dual or multiple centers, disunity and discord will prevail until a single center is established.[113]

This school of reasoning is tempting and certainly the lack of unity in individual characters in the play is correctly diagnosed. However, the societal analogy of a circle is flawed. To desire a single centre to be established, is to wish for the total victory (in Rose's terms), one at the expense of the other, of either Impulse or Reason. In Bagehot's scheme no such singular end to the project of History is imaginable. It is to Bagehot's more caustic school of philosophy that Shakespeare, in a gloriously nuanced manner, belongs. The better analogy is of a balance that accounts for the differing appetites of different castes of the citizenry. Although Bagehot's critics find this type of reasoning unattractive, we might argue for a weird and essentially snobbish humility at play in his thinking. The humility in question is that of the educated and intelligent who must settle for being subjects of a divinely ordained crown they know to be chimerical. As we have seen, Sisson accuses Bagehot of exploiting his faux humility for his own gain and I agree that in 'Shakespeare – The Individual', one might justly charge Bagehot of co-opting Shakespeare to his own rentier class. However, I hold to my

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[112] Lawrence E. Bowling, 'Duality in the Minor Characters in *Antony and Cleopatra*', *College English*, 18:5 (Feb. 1957), 251-255 (p. 251).
[113] Lawrence E. Bowling, 'Antony's Internal Disunity', *Studies in English Literature*, 4:2 (Spring 1964), 239-246 (p. 239).

central tenet that both Bagehot and Shakespeare see sovereignty as a matter of balance rather than, per Bowling, as one of centredness. Despite much else of value in Bowling's analysis, his central analogy under-theorises the play. What is not in doubt is that his final words on Enobarbus take us very nearly to the heart of the matter:

> And with Antony's name on his lips, he dies of a broken heart, a heart divided between practical judgement and personal loyalty. Enobarbus' tragedy, like Octavia's and Lepidus' and Pompey's, is due not to the fact that he makes one choice instead of the other but to the fact that he is unable to make a clear and firm decision either way.[114]

This is nearly, but not quite the kernel of the play's politics. Bowling gets closer still when, in 1964, he returns to the subject of centredness, concentrating this time on Antony's personal tragedy:

> Antony's greatest mistake was not that he failed to choose honor over love but that he kept the two interests "equal", thereby effecting the disunity by which he was destroyed.[115]

The point should be this: Enobarbus' personal tragedy is not that he cannot choose between honour and love (and we can equally say between Reason and Impulse, the dignified and the efficient, masculine and feminine) but that he, an underling, must make any choice at all. Even in a Bagehotian balanced society, dual leadership is required – dignified leadership in which the polity can place faith (be it religious or merely superstitious), and efficient leadership that gets on with the grubby job of governance. Enobarbus' tragedy is that no such balance is on offer for him – Octavius wants only unencumbered power, Cleopatra only unquestioned obeisance, whilst Antony is incapable of coming down on one side or the other. For the mode of power-sharing implicit in Bagehot's reasoning to operate, it is implicit that the dual factions of leadership do not trespass on each other's province of sovereignty. Self-sacrifice of a type never betrayed by these three antagonists of the play is a *sine qua non*.

Enobarbus may be an ironist but he is one we can trust, in. One great problem in modern viewings of the play is what might be termed the Elizabeth Taylor effect

[114] Bowling (1957), p. 255.
[115] Bowling (1964), p. 246.

– due to a portrayal of Cleopatra in a moderate but grandiose film, we have an expectation of stratospheric physical allure. Shakespeare's audience had no such hindrance – the Queen of Egypt was played by a boy and they would be used to suspending disbelief and placing belief in their commentator, Enobarbus. If this gruff soldier can be moved to poetry (as in the description of the barge at Cydnus in Act 2, Scene 2) then so should we be alerted to the astonishing ornamentalism of the Queen of Egypt and her retinue. It is guided by this spirit of unwanted but ironic rapture that we should consider the raddled lovers. When first we encounter Enobarbus he captures Cleopatra's qualities in a measured prose. He perhaps understands her atmosphere even better than his master, but for all the acknowledged dangers in her company he cannot but enjoy it. What is more, Cleopatra herself gives every appearance of understanding what is required of her. She revels in her splendour. What she does not accede to is the separation of the efficient from the dignified – she is the monomaniacal obverse of the ultra-efficient Octavius. She does love Antony but even as their linked fates career to a military destruction, she is still playing the game of ornamental appearances. She calculates the effect her subterfuge may have, even upon her lover:

> To th'monument!
> Mardian, go tell him I have slain myself:
> Say that the last word I spoke was 'Antony',
> And word it – prithee – piteously. Hence Mardian,
> And bring me how he takes my death. To th'monument! (3.13.8-12)

In the far more prosaic world of Victorian politics, Bagehot understands the need for regal display. He defends 'The Income of The Prince of Wales' in *The Economist* of 10 October 1874.[116] This short article is a useful primer on all that Bagehot believed. The principal usefulness of monarchy (a point lost on Octavius and Cleopatra and beyond the comprehension of the befuddled Antony) is confined to the dignified: 'It cannot be denied that the usefulness of the monarchy in almost all countries, and as much as any in England, is bound up with ceremonial display'.[117] In reading this piece of mature Bagehot journalism we have to acknowledge the dangers in placing too much theoretical reliance on

[116] Bagehot, 'The Income of the Prince of Wales', from the *Economist* 10 October 1874, *Collected Works*, vol. v, pp. 418-420.
[117] Ibid., p. 418.

his exact words. He makes a point about 'national unity' that might casually lead us back down Bowling's semi-blind alley: 'In countries such as ours, it is the function of the throne to be rather a symbol of national unity rather than its cause'.[118] The distinction between Bowling's posited centredness of a circle and my own preference for a balance, may seem unimportant but I think there is a neat distinction to be made. We must handle analogies carefully and the image of a perfect circle suggests a lack of duality, an achievable perfection of the supremely knowledgeable polity. Neither Bagehot nor Shakespeare believe in that image but do have an optimistic (Shakespeare) or opportunistic (Bagehot if we are of the Sisson faction) belief in a balance that perches the polity safely in the middle of counter-poised forces. Bagehot may seem less impeachable when he avers that: 'High rank and power should be splendid, or they fail to fulfil the very reason of their existence'.[119] As ever his pleader's flourish lets him down – we should take out the reference to 'power' – its presence clouds the true issue of the duality of dignity and efficiency.

This sprawling play, even when assessed from a political stance alone, begs questions. Its politics are wider even than its geography. I hope to suggest that it may well be a Problem Play but that the intrinsic problem is not the play's but ours the audience.

VIII: A Problem Play

A.C. Bradley, in his magnum opus, is in no doubt: *Antony and Cleopatra* does not merit headline status for one of the book's source lectures and is relegated in an aside to a position as, 'the most faultily constructed of all the tragedies'.[120] Bradley bemoans in particular, the play's stringing together of short scenes with changing dramatis personae, 'as though a novelist were to tell his story in a succession of short chapters, in which he flitted from one group of his characters to another'.[121] This filmic (not a word that could have concerned, we must

[118] Ibid., p. 419.
[119] Ibid., p. 419.
[120] A.C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy: Lectures on Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, Macbeth*, 2nd edn (London: Macmillan and Co.: 1905) p. 260.
[121] Ibid., p. 71.

concede, Bradley) treatment of the unfolding drama is partly excused by Bradley on the grounds that, 'the historical material was undramatic'.[122] Michael Neill's Introduction to the Oxford Edition of the play is more generous and his view sits more easily with modern affection for the text: 'To cope with this unwieldy mass of material Shakespeare devised a dramaturgy of extraordinary cinematic boldness'.[123] For Neill the play is, 'recognizably the work of a dramatist at the confident height of his powers – an artist who feels he can do *anything*'.[124] What we can unmistakably glean from both Bradley and Neill is that there is a lot going on in this play. This very complexity confounds a quick critical eye but rewards repeated readings. Is it, to borrow what is itself a hotly disputed term, a 'Problem Play'? It would be easy to disappear down that particular critical rabbit-hole but we can pragmatically confine ourselves to Ernest Schanzer's promotion of *Antony and Cleopatra* into the category. Schanzer's entertaining romp through his successful candidates for problematic status (*Julius Caesar*, *Measure for Measure, Antony and Cleopatra*) cuts quickly to a point – his definition of a Shakespearean problem play concentrates on the moral dilemma confronting the audience. Such a play is:

> A play in which we find a concern with a moral problem which is central to it, presented in such a manner that we are unsure of our moral bearings, so that uncertain and divided responses to it in the minds of the audience are possible or even probable.[125]

Regardless of whether this definition is adequate to the massive task it sets itself, I suggest that this does provide us with a very apt description of how we feel at the conclusion of a good production of *Antony and Cleopatra* – a sort of breathless delight coupled with enjoyable intellectual befuddlement. Who is our hero/heroine? Is it the cold-eyed Octavius whose triumph ushers in the cult of peace, purloining the moral centre of a play in the way that his adoptive father has been argued to loom over *Julius Caesar*? Is it Cleopatra, a woman in a

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[122] Ibid., p. 71.
[123] Michael Neill (ed), *Anthony and Cleopatra* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994) p. 2. This edition uses 'Anthony' rather than 'Antony'. I retain the latter traditional spelling as in the *RSC Complete Works*.
[124] Ibid., p. 1.
[125] Ernest Schanzer, *The Problem Plays of Shakespeare* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965) p. 6.

masculine world who lives and dies on her own terms? Is it the deracinated Antony, torn by love from his rooted Romanness and thereby the figure who tries (conspicuously unsuccessfully) to reconcile government and private passion? I suggest that this confusion is perfectly intentional on Shakespeare's part and betokens a mature intellectual attachment to the inevitability of duality in any peaceable civic life.

Schanzer cites John F. Danby's chapter on the play as, 'probably the most illuminating essay on the play known to me', even as, in characteristic manner, he states his, 'radical disagreement with some of its conclusions'.[126] I side with Danby on the dramatic intentions of the play. What Schanzer and Danby do share is an enthusiasm for the play's structure – the very thing castigated by Bradley. From Danby we again get that key-word, 'cinematic', to describe the hyperactive plotting.[127] From Schanzer we get a concentration on the jump-cut contrasts within the play but combined with a wise acknowledgement that the very strength in it is its complicating of the contrasts (all flowing out of the broadest distinction, that between Rome and Egypt) so that they blur into and out of each other by means of a practised 'dramatic coquetry'.[128] Brent Dawson nicely characterises the effect of this as 'a cosmos of multiple worlds'.[129] Danby has an even more evocative phrase for the play's motive force: 'the deliquescent reality at the heart of the play which incarnates itself most completely in the persons of the hero and heroine'.[130] This deliquescent facility, this making liquid the solidities of character, has for me a natural critical companion in the infinite point of a picture that we encountered in Chapter Two. We find this same limitlessness described in the analysis by Gillian Knoll which explores the erotics of place in the play and which theorises Cleopatra's investment in the erotics of binding just as she, parenthetically, releases herself to the infinite possibility of love: 'Binding and then presenting the immensity of infinite space – to Antony, to

[126] Ibid., p. 141. The chapter cited is from: John F. Danby, *Poet's on Fortune's Hill* (London: Faber and Faber, 1952), 128-151.
[127] Danby, p. 128.
[128] Schanzer, *The Problem Plays of Shakespeare*, p. 146.
[129] Brent Dawson, '"The World Transformed": Multiple Worlds in *Antony and Cleopatra*', *Renaissance Drama*, 43:2 (Fall 2015), 173-191 (p. 173).
[130] Danby, p. 134.

herself, and to us – is what makes it erotic'.[131] This meaningful void at the vanishing point of the picture is nowhere better realised in the Roman Plays than in *Antony and Cleopatra*.

There is about the play none of the single-minded bluntness of *Titus Andronicus*, none of the stark and relatively unobscured politics of *Julius Caesar*, none of the brilliant monomania of *Coriolanus*. Much of what Schanzer sets out for us is provoking and his conclusion about the play sets the correct tone:

> *Antony and Cleopatra* develops and brings to perfection methods and techniques used with less consummate skill before. It is by far the greatest, as well as the most quintessential, of Shakespeare's Problem Play.[132]

To this I suggest we should add that this is the greatest, and the most quintessential, of Shakespeare's Roman Plays. At every corner its structure, far from being defective as Bradley would have it, constitutes a dizzying maze of theatrical, political, and critical possibilities.

In moving to a concluding analysis of the play I confirm that in locating my political phrasing my bias is to look not to early Imperial Rome, not to Ancient Egypt, not to Shakespeare's England, but to Victorian England and the atmosphere of England's glancingly understood but instinctively cherished constitutional monarchy. Into that atmosphere intrudes the humility of a usually trenchant commentator (Bagehot) in love. What results is a political climate underscored by a duality that might logically be expected to pull the constitution apart but that in practice acts to blur the edges of the scheme and to practise a political equivalent of Danby's deliquescence. We can read that political atmosphere into the swirling contrasts at work in the play and the deliberate moral uncertainty that so deftly unpicks any belief in a perfect ruler. In answer to my own earlier question: Octavius is not our hero – he is too drily pragmatic for that; equally the volatile and unreliable Cleopatra, notwithstanding her infinite variety, cannot stand as exemplar; that leaves Antony – a man ultimately laid low

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[131] Gillian Knoll, 'Binding the Void: The Erotics of Place in *Antony and Cleopatra*', *Criticism*, 58:2 (Spring 2016), 281-304 (p. 299).
[132] Schanzer, p. 183.

by his own conflicted self and abandoned by even his closest follower, Enobarbus. As Hailey Bachrach comments of Ralph Fiennes' 2018 Antony what we have is, 'a man who had always been doomed to unravel the moment his good looks and good luck ceased to pave the way for him'.[133] This is no hero – this is an inescapable element of Schanzer's 'problem'.

Lauren Leigh Rollins constructs an intricate political scheme out of *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra*, reading the two plays together and accounting for their important differences.[134] She highlights the deployment of historical anachronism by Shakespeare and judges that both plays are products of a deliberate ploy to create 'an intricately stitched tapestry that often conflates factual and legendary history in order to obscure a clear-cut polemical reading'.[135] Rollins asserts that this intricacy is knowingly skilful and testament to the dramatist's (perfectly understandable) talent for avoiding trouble with the authorities. This leads on to an intriguing consideration of the different portrayals of Antony in the two plays, differences that, for Rollins at least, signify the earlier play as Elizabethan in its political sensitivities, and the second as more subtly Jacobean. Into both plays, she suggests, Shakespeare 'anachronistically' inserts his own model of the 'Monarchical Republic' in order to suggest it as the best constitutional 'foundation for empire'.[136] Rollins then embarks on a detailed dissection of the two plays as she unpicks her own political tapestry and goes in search of proof of Shakespeare's own views. Her first important point is that Shakespeare (in common with other less distinguished contemporary dramatists) may be keen to avoid perceived dangers of polemic, but that his very method betrays awareness of his own historicity and an innate politicisation of drama.[137] From this point, the next step for Rollins is to read authorial intention into the texts she investigates and to

[133] Bachrach, p. 252.
[134] Lauren Leigh Collins, '"Republicans" Behaving Badly: Anachronism, Monarchy, and the English Imperial Model in *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and* Cleopatra', *Medieval & Renaissance Drama in England*, 30 (2017), 165-180.
[135] Ibid., p. 165.
[136] Ibid., p. 166.
[137] Ibid., p. 166.

justify that mode of reading.[138] The impressive mental energy expended in following this critical step is somewhat less daunting if we accept the layout of history as occurring in Harootunian's thickened present. If we can regard Shakespeare, Bagehot, Ruskin, and countless others as our non-contemporaneous contemporaries, then anachronism becomes mere dichotomy/duality/multi-facetedness, and we are better placed to apply Bagehot's observations in a critically useful manner. The tapestry can start to make a little more sense without being ravaged by unpicking. Rollins's reading of that intricate tapestry is correct in its sensing of the duality of a monarchical republic, even if we might want to doubt that Shakespeare was much concerned with proselytising for a particular political scheme. Like Bagehot, Shakespeare's first aim was to entertain his preferred audience, with the vital distinction that Shakespeare aimed high and low at the same time – a trick that Bagehot saw no reason to attempt, lacking as he did the requisite humility.

After the deliquescent complexity of *Antony and Cleopatra* comes the arid fixedness of *Coriolanus*, a play that unflinchingly places its principal at the point of political balance just as the quiver of balance tips calamitously. In *Coriolanus* the dignified and the efficient are more starkly exposed as we witness an insufficiency of both attributes within a city state that is thereby mired in Bagehot's Use of Conflict.

[138] Ibid., p. 166.

Chapter Six
Coriolanus

> The Nazis banned Hans Rothe's 1932 translation for radio and exiled the author, then adopted *Coriolanus* as a schoolbook to demonstrate to Hitler Youth the unsoundness of democracy and to idealize Martius as an heroic *fuhrer* trying to lead his people to a healthier society.[1]
>
> It was not until the 1930s that overtly left-wing interpretation began to appear; and, as might be expected, this first showed up in the communist countries of Eastern Europe . These invariably interpreted the play as a 'tragedy of individualism', idealizing the plebeians and Tribunes, and criticizing Martius as a proto-dictator.[2]

As his play climaxes in the heat of a Volscian revenge ('Kill, kill, kill, kill, kill him' (5.6.149)) the ability of this titular hero to engender differing reactions is given stark immediacy. The Volscian First Lord observes the slaughter of Coriolanus and then counsels the killers: 'And mourn you for him. Let him be regarded / As the most noble corpse that ever herald / Did follow to his urn' (5.6.166-168). The furious and principal actor in the slaying of Coriolanus, Aufidius, cools swiftly and closes the play in terms which befit the charged (and itself disconcerting in its enigmatic and unspoken sexuality) relationship between Coriolanus and himself:

> Though in this city he
> Hath widowed and unchilded many a one,
> Which to this hour bewail the injury,
> Yet he shall have a noble memory. (5.6.176-179)[3]

This schizophrenic reaction to our haughty anti-hero epitomizes the allure of the play. It lacks the romance and vast geography of its close companion (both in time of composition and political schemes) *Antony and Cleopatra*, and lacks also the stimulating brevity of *Julius Caesar*. However, in the analytical terms that we can understand from Bagehot, *Coriolanus* is arguably the most satisfying political text among the Roman Plays. Shakespeare wrote *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Coriolanus* in succession, tackling first the dawn of Roman Empire in *Antony and*

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[1] R.B. Parker in 'Introduction' to the *Oxford Shakespeare: Coriolanus* (Oxford: 2008 reissue) pp. 123-124.
[2] Ibid., p. 127.
[3] For ease I will use throughout the name 'Coriolanus' for the lead character even though the honorific is bestowed upon Caius Martius only at the culmination of Act 1 Scene 9.

Cleopatra (tying up the political and historical loose ends of the earlier-penned *Julius Caesar*) before skipping back half a millennium to the birth pangs of the Roman Republic in *Coriolanus*. At first glance it might suit Paul A. Cantor's nomination of these two later plays as deliberate companion pieces (echoing perhaps the style of Plutarch's paired *Parallel Lives of the Greeks and Romans*) if Shakespeare could be shown to have tackled the respective subjects in historical order rather than, as seems likely, back to front.[4] In fact this inconvenient 'truth' matters hardly at all, as Norman Rabkin demonstrates. In interrogating the competing claims of these two plays to be Shakespeare's 'last tragedy', Rabkin pithily anticipates Cantor:

> I am going to argue that in *Coriolanus* Shakespeare creates a vision of the possibilities of life almost identical to the vision of *Antony and Cleopatra.* In *Coriolanus* the focus is politics and the canvas is small. But the point of view is profoundly similar to that of *Antony and Cleopatra*.[5]

Rabkin also anticipates Bate's reference to Shakespeare's 'double vision', the very quality required to match up with Bagehot's political duomania.[6] The timbre of the political strains in *Coriolanus* can be played through Bagehot's theory of political history outlined in *Physics and Politics*.

I: Merit From Conquest

As we have seen, Bagehot's nirvana of an Age of Discussion (the best state he can conceive for a nation) is a rarity. A Preliminary Age, then growth by the Use of Conflict and Nation Making must all be endured before the Age of Discussion dawns. A cake of custom not only has to develop but it must also sometimes be broken and the cake reconfigured as the price of political progress:

> What is most evident is not the difficulty of getting a fixed law, but getting out of a fixed law; not of cementing (as upon a former occasion I phrased it) a cake of custom, but of breaking the cake of custom; not of making the first preservative habit, but of breaking through it, and reaching something better.[7]

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[4] Cantor, *Shakespeare's Rome*, p. 16. Cantor warms to his theme in his later *Shakespeare's Roman Trilogy*, in which latter volume *Julius Caesar* gets a more diligent consideration.
[5] Norman Rabkin, 'Coriolanus: The Tragedy of Politics', *Shakespeare Quarterly,* 17:3 (Summer 1966), 195-212 (p. 195).
[6] Ibid., p. 195.
[7] Bagehot, *Physics and Politics*, p. 48.

For Bagehot this process is gradual rather than by means of a series of political schisms. This is the manifestation of the 'connective tissue of civilisation' in operation, such that, in the larger scheme, Bagehot can diagnose a 'subtle materialism' at play, a societal operation that he argues should be seen in like terms to theories of natural selection and of inheritance.[8]

It is in its juvenile condition of disputatious flux that the Rome of Coriolanus finds itself. We are not here dealing with the vast swathe of the proto-empire of *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra*. Rather this is a Rome largely constituted within its own city walls – at odds with Southern Italian foes in the Volsces and all too prone to be at war if not with itself, certainly with its most lustrous citizen. These growing pains of Rome are not fatal to the Roman project of history, but they are fatal for Coriolanus himself. This towering character is marked for death by the incompatibility of his unbounded self with the city state he has vigorously promoted in battle. In his Introduction to the Oxford edition of the play, Brian Parker opens by quoting not a speech of Coriolanus but one by his Volscian analogue, Aufidius, deeming it 'one of Shakespeare's bleakest comments on human history': 'One fire drives out one fire: one nail, one nail: / Rights by rights foulder, strengths by strengths do fail' (4.7.56-57).[9] The ungilded message is that only might is right. Parker stresses the bleakness of this stance by pointing out that Shakespeare chooses to omit the end detail of the play's Plutarchan source, specifically, 'that Rome eventually vanquished the Volscians and Aufidius himself was killed'.[10] We might respond to this observation by saying that any such coda would dull the drama and that its audiences have always appreciated, without needing to be told, the irony that it is the Romans who will write their own history on the face of the known world, not the Volscians. Where however we can wholeheartedly endorse Parker is in his assertion that, there is a chilling element of truth in what Aufidius says.[11]

[8] Ibid., p. 21.
[9] Parker, p. 1. For 'foulder' the Oxford edition has 'falter' as an emendation to the text of the First Folio.
[10] Ibid., p. 1.
[11] Ibid., p. 1.

Perhaps we can better see for ourselves this stark drama at work when we are animated by Bagehot's smoothly knowing diagnosis:

> But the first elements of civilisation are great military advantages, and roughly, it is a rule of the first times that you can infer merit from conquest, and that progress is promoted by the competitive examination of constant war.[12]

For what we have at play between Romans and Volscians is a state of near-constant war – war that can act as an ironic salve for their internal political crises.

The play has been appropriated to bolster wildly different political preferences. There is particularly arresting critical consideration by James Kuzner that seeks to dismantle what he perceives as a modern trend towards reading the play as one that, 'advocates an English republic that would foster subjects who are recognized as bounded, discrete, and delineated'.[13] Kuzner methodically refutes this genus of reading. For him the play's republicanism abuses its legal process so as to place individuals outside its laws, rendering life within the city a 'bare life' that can be ended without due process, such that: 'Advocating a prorepublican reading of *Coriolanus* is thus quite difficult to do'.[14]

Kuzner's own interpretive conclusion is better yet expressed in the later (2011) book that takes his thinking forward. That conclusion is not unproblematic (for society as a whole and for the reader tangled in Kuzner's web of political theory and philosophy) and it now brings *Titus Andronicus* into its frame of reference:

> [A]ntagonistic positioning has brought thinking about the subject of non-violence to an impasse, and Shakespeare's first and last tragedies offer a way out. They refuse to oppose forms and degrees of openness, as though a choice had to be made - on the grounds that the more attuned we are to the complexity of our boundaries and the ways and degrees to which they can be opened, the more difficult it is to imagine unwanted violence.[15]

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[12] Bagehot, *Physics and Politics*, p. 64.
[13] James Kuzner, 'Unbuilding the City: *Coriolanus* and the Birth of the Roman Republic', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 58:2 (2007), 174-199 (p. 174). Kuzner goes on to both repeat and expand his argument in a derivative chapter 'Unbuilding the City: *Coriolanus, Titus Andronicus* and the Forms of Openness' in his book *Open Subjects* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 84-124.
[14] Kuzner (2007), p. 174.
[15] Kuzner (2011), p. 117.

In simplified terms: we can believe that *Coriolanus* and *Titus Andronicus* (the latter, as the lesser dramatic accomplishment, less so) are worthy props in a contemplation of the path to a Bagehotian Age of Discussion for the very reason that, as Bagehot has it, 'discussion, to be successful, requires tolerance'.[16] Shakespeare habitually stages problems rather than pressing solutions upon us and Ineke Murakami stresses this point in the context of *Coriolanus* as she analyses the intrusion into the play of the jurisprudential concept of natural law.[17] I will examine the uneasy dance between natural law and its antonymous cousin, the bounded self. Murakami's conjecture about Shakespeare's problematizing role in cultural discourse is axiomatic. This conjecture is not some defeatist abdication of critical responsibility – it is rather an acknowledgement of a recurring Shakespearean trait. In the context of a much earlier and less weighty play, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, Jonathan Bate's almost throwaway concluding assertion serves as a commentary anticipating much of the later canon:

> We do get the ending we expect and desire, but the abruptness with which it comes about is a sign of impatience or immaturity on Shakespeare's part – but then again, his mind was so restlessly inventive that he never really cared for endings.[18]

In the context of *Coriolanus*, I suggest it is not the ending on which we should ruminate but on the fractious journey to that ending – a journey that problematizes politics and lays bare the fact that, 'the political potential of natural law is not without its shadowland'.[19]

I have stressed the schizophrenic reactions to the play and, of course, these reactions are hugely dependent on the reaction of auditors to Coriolanus himself. He is our focus throughout the play: more so than Titus in his Play - there is no Machiavel such as Aaron to amuse/distract us; more than *Julius Caesar's* Brutus, who is never free from Caesar's shade; more than Antony who shares the

[16] Bagehot, *Physics and Politics*, p. 110.
[17] Ineke Murakami, 'The "Bond of Privilege and Nature": in "Coriolanus"', *Religion and Literature*, 38:3 (2006), 121-136 (p. 128).
[18] *Complete Works*, p. 55.
[19] Murakami, p. 128.

dramatic limelight with Cleopatra. This play is about one man, huge in valour, yet childlike in his petulance. An unnuanced performance can easily make him unsympathetic thereby feeding a pro-republican atmosphere but that atmosphere requires a patronising aloofness on the part of the spectator to the venality of the Tribunes. It bears repeating what 'Shakespeare – The Individual' has already taught us about Bagehot's view: 'The author of *Coriolanus* never believed in a mob, and did something towards preventing anybody else from doing so'.[20] Typically, Bagehot overloads his argument and rubs salt into the socio-political wounds that he opens by averring further to Shakespeare's absolute, 'disbelief in the middle classes. We fear he had no opinion of traders'.[21] Shakespeare (for Bagehot) believed in what Bagehot himself set such store by, namely the ancient polity: 'not because it was good but because it existed'.[22] Bagehot's sweeping generalisation is loosely tenable, but we do have to dig rather deeper than within 'Shakespeare – The Individual' to sustain this position. We cannot simply take Bagehot's word for it. Our stepping-off point directs us to some defining discussion of two jurisprudential concepts: natural law (with its adjuncts of due process and, most modishly, the pursuit of happiness as an immutable right); and the metaphor-laden comprehension of the bounded self. Venturing into and beyond these concepts we find another constitutional dichotomy at work (one analogous to the dignified/efficient), that between inherent and man-made rights at law.

II: Natural Law

Bagehot is not so much concerned to discern the base ingredients of his cake of custom as he is to point out that the cake exists. The cake (and the necessary gradual improvements to the recipe) are a launching point for him to proceed to the desired Age of Discussion. Natural law theories, to adapt Bagehot's metaphor, assert that all juristic cakes have the same base ingredients. Argument as to the identity of those ingredients is highly complex and not my present concern. For present purposes I will concentrate on the most common Western statement of

[20] Bagehot, *Shakespeare – The Individual*, p. 203.
[21] Ibid., p. 203.
[22] Ibid., p. 203.

natural laws, found within the United States Declaration of Independence. I do not attach to Shakespeare a fixed view on the complexities of the jurisprudential debate on natural law, rather I suggest that *Coriolanus* lays open the issues at play.

The natural law debate sits comfortably with *Coriolanus* as a schizophrenic text. Just as with our doomed principal, the natural law debate has been deployed to differing political ends as Marek Maciejewski records:

> During the modern period the development of natural law was undoubtedly aided by the growing popularity of liberal ideology, which readily invoked (at least in the initial stages of its formation) the terms 'natural law' or 'natural state' to justify the need for liberty or freedom of action. Conservatism … looked to natural law – typically understood as divine law – guided by different ideological motives and political objectives.[23]

The foundation stone of natural law theory for our present and limited purposes is that there are naturally occurring laws (which in today's common liberal parlance translate to inherent rights) which cannot be overridden by man-made (statutory or posited) laws. Such ideas of this duality for law first circulated in Ancient Greece, three centuries before the life of the historical Coriolanus. The Greek Sophists advanced the philosophical notions in the field but it is Cicero, a Roman of much later vintage (and whom we find as a largely silent character in *Julius Caesar*, reported dead at the hands of the Triumvirate) who attracts Llano Alonso's credit as history's first 'Legal Philosopher' and whose 'intellectual footprint' can be found in the works of Renaissance jurists, most particularly Hugo Grotius.[24] The trail of those intellectual footprints leads us up to and beyond Shakespeare's age. The subject of natural law is most certainly pertinent in the politics of the turn of the sixteenth century. In 1598 King James VI of Scotland (later James I of England) published *The True Lawe of Free Monarchies*

[23] Marek Maciejewski, 'The Relationship Between Natural and Statutory Law in Ancient and Medieval Concepts', *Politeja*, No. 48 (2017), 5-22 (p. 6).
[24] Fernando H. Llano Alonso, 'Cicero and Natural Law', *Archives for Philosophy of Law and Social Philosophy*, 98:2 (2012), 157-168 (p. 168).

or the Reciprock and Mutuall Dutie Betwixt a Free King, and his naturall Subjects.[25] King James' treatise comprises advice to his 'naturall' (natural and thereby immutable) subjects as to the divine right of kings. The laws of the divinely appointed king are not to be subject to mediation unless they are in breach of God's own law:

> [T]he duety, and allegiance of the people to their lawful king, their obedience, I say, ought to be to him, as to God's Lieutenant in earth. Obeying his commands in all things, except directly against God.[26]

What we see in this entreaty is an acknowledgement of a stamp of law (in this case divine) that underpins and overwrites any law of men, in other words a natural law. Care is needed not to oversimplify in this contested area. After all, it was only some three decades after Shakespeare's death that a 'divinely' appointed King of England would be judicially killed by a usurping faction who believed devoutly that they too were following the due process of God's law. Thus we see how James' understanding of natural law (one shared by his ill-fated son, Charles I) can seem a perversion of another man's understanding of the same mandate. For my present purpose I seek only to emphasise the phenomenon of apparently immutable laws and the tensions they create in as adept a piece of drama as *Coriolanus*.

Shakespeare is no advocate of the divine right of kings but *Coriolanus* probes both the duality of law and how humans negotiate that duality. A prime weapon in the communication of the duality is metaphor – we see a hackneyed specimen in Act 1, Scene 1 - Menenius's fable of the belly with which he attempts to placate the mob. I will consider such metaphorical method in turn, but first want to trace how two elements embed themselves in our thinking about natural laws - firstly a conception of due process, and secondly the promotion of the pursuit of happiness as a human right. I will suggest that both elements are so ingrained in contemporary thinking that it requires a step back from our conditioned position to allow us to fully understand the play. Moreover, these elements were

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[25] King James VI, *The True Lawe of free Monarchies: or The Reciprock and Mutuall Dutie Betwixt a Free King, and his naturall Subjects* (Edinburgh: Robert Waldegrave, 1598).
[26] Ibid. 32nd page, original published pages unnumbered.

understood both in Victoria's reign and by Shakespeare's contemporaries. Indeed we can paint this picture of comprehension back two and a half millennia.[27] We should concede that the modern Western picture separates divine law from other innate 'natural' laws (although those confected natural laws can look very like old-fashioned biblical ordinance) but the scheme is the same – some things are immutable, or, bowing here to Bagehot's reforming animated moderation, are mutable only gradually and in the extreme.

III: Due Process

When arguably the greatest jurist of Britain's twentieth century, Lord Denning, looks to define 'due process' for a modern audience, this most forward-thinking of judges reaches not for any contemporary reference book (nor indeed for any of his own recorded decisions – Denning shares Bagehot's lack of shyness in quoting himself) but instead reaches back to the late fourteenth century and the Statute of 28 Edward III, chapter 3, which states:

> That no man of what estate or condition that he be, shall be put out of land or tenement, nor taken nor imprisoned, nor disinherited, nor put to death, without being brought in answer by due process of the law.[28]

Proving the point about the historical and geographical ubiquity of the topic and in illuminating his own contention, Denning then turns his gaze forward to 1791 and a subsection of the Fifth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States. The relevant excerpt reads: 'No person … shall be deprived of life, liberty or property, without due process of law'.[29]

Having cited fourteenth- and eighteenth-century sources Denning goes on to catalogue his own (very much twentieth-century) judicial contributions to the still developing law of due process. His concern (one that, to this day, continues to occupy Western courts) is with 'keeping the streams of justice clear and

[27] Maciejewski, p. 8.
[28] The Lord Denning MR, *The Due Process of Law* (London: Butterworth & Co, 1980) p. v.
[29] Denning, p. v. The entire text of the Constitution with a useful commentary can be viewed at the Cornell Law School website: https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/fifth_amendment [accessed 11 August 2022].

pure.'[30] In the landscape of our thickened present, Western obsessions might be hoped to be exclusively with the purity of the stream rather than about the existence of the stream at all. That is an overly-optimistic view. In particular there are very modern concerns about attempts to make matters less justiciable than before. Sovereignty (a term perhaps rather too casually bandied about, though not by Shakespeare who uses it but once in *Coriolanus*) does not reside in one part of the constitution – it lies in a complex balance between legislature, executive and judiciary. In our local context, another distinguished jurist brings us almost up to date: the Rt. Hon. Lord Judge, speaking in 2016, warns against the habit of an over-empowered executive deploying overreaching legislation to denude parliament of its potency.[31] His central theme (one that plays into Bagehot's propositions) is that balance is required of any sustainable constitution and that due process is a signifier of such balance. In this sphere, due process relates as much to the making of laws as it does to their administration. Judge is properly scornful of faux justifications for such impure process:

> We shall be told, and I shall scornfully be told, that life is so hectic, that there is so much to be done, that there is no time for too much refinement. That is as may be. If it is true, an increase in executive influence is not the remedy.[32]

In *Coriolanus* we see a travesty of due process in Coriolanus's banishment. However, that defect in process alone is not the key to the play. Nor is the defect in a system that sees the mob denied access to grain. These are symptoms. Lying beneath the scarred surface of the defects there is an infection of bad law and to understand that infection we find ourselves revolving back to concepts of natural law. We have already seen King James' delineation of a hierarchy of laws – first comes God's Law, then comes the word of God's lieutenant, the rightful monarch, and finally comes man-made law. Not all of James's subjects saw it that way and, as noted above, Shakespeare is no tone-deaf monarchist, rather he writes and

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[30] Denning, p 3.
[31] The Rt. Hon. Lord Judge, 'Ceding Power to the Executive', internet lecture transcript available at https://www.kcl.ac.uk/archive/news/law/newsrecords/2015-16/ceding-power-to-the-executive---lord-judge---130416.pdf [accessed 11 August 2022].
[32] Ibid., p. 16.

deliberates at Hadfield's 'republican moment'.[33] The tone of intellectual life when Shakespeare writes is attuned to the inherent contradiction in being citizen-subjects:

> [A]lthough forms of official propaganda tried to define those living within Elizabeth's realms as 'subjects' of the crown, many cosmopolitan urban intellectuals from the early part of the sixteenth century onwards saw themselves as citizens, akin to the influential figures who dominated the histories of the Roman republic they had all read.[34]

This tone of republicanism is carried forward to King James' own reign and when we read *Coriolanus* in a thickened present, we should again remind ourselves that Shakespeare is writing only twenty years before the reign of Charles I, who would fall fatally foul of those who had the temerity to doubt the divine right of their king. Oliver Arnold, writing about the politics of *Coriolanus*, brings this point home rather neatly:

> In 1642 Henry Parker claimed that Charles' power to veto bills passed by the Lords and Commons 'subjects [the English people] to as unbounded a regiment of the King's meere will, as any Nation under Heaven ever suffered under'. When, in 1649, Charles doggedly refused to part with the negative voice, the champions of liberty parted his head from his body.[35]

Arnold also hints at the contradictions that Shakespeare brings to bear in the play, indeed he identifies these factors at work as well in both *Titus Andronicus* and *Julius Caesar*. He points to the contradiction that assaults all discussion of natural law:

> [S]eventeenth-century resistance to arbitrary power turned on a distinctly republican definition of freedom as the absence of domination that neither promoted active citizenship as a "bedrock value" nor required for its maintenance widespread participation in political life.[36]

This is the crux of the matter and *Coriolanus* can help us to wrestle with an ageless political quandary – if we are to operate in a rights-based society, how are we to construct the political furniture by which those enjoying the rights are

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[33] Hadfield, Chapter 1, pp. 17-53.
[34] Ibid., p. 17.
[35] Oliver Arnold, 'Occupy Rome. Citizenship and Freedom in Early Modern Political Culture, Recent Political Theory and *Coriolanus*', in *To Be Unfree*, ed. by Christian Dahl and Tue Andersen Nexo (Bielefeld, Germany: Transcript Verlag, 2014) 117-138 (p. 136).
[36] Ibid., p. 119.

in turn constrained? Among Kuzner's more challenging assertions is that individual freedom is only possible in a genuinely unbounded state of mind, such as that which Coriolanus and Aufidius glimpse when acting out their homoerotic relationship: 'A possibility for thinking through how we ought to live out our exposure, how we can manage and inhabit open life'.[37] That is Kuzner writing in 2007. When he rounds out his subject four years later, he is more assertive about Shakespeare's intentions: 'For Shakespeare, bounded selfhood is a pernicious fiction, and openness, despite the abyss into which it can lead, ought to be embraced anyway'.[38] This caste of libertarian thought may be a step too far for some audiences but it does signal the jurisprudential line I suggest we should tread when considering *Coriolanus*. Our next steps are, to tackle, firstly, the deceptively simple assertion of the right to pursue happiness and, secondly, its troublesome cousin, the bounded self.

IV: Self-Evident Truths

Declared on 4 July 1776 the United States Declaration of Independence (out of which flows the Constitution) gives us the baldest summary of a natural law manifesto:

> We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.[39]

Carli N. Conklin gives a detailed history of the origins of the right to the pursuit of happiness, tracing these to John Locke's *Two Treatises of Government*, a text influential on the Founding Fathers of the United States and most particularly on Thomas Jefferson, the first drafter of the Declaration.[40] As for Locke, there is a significant distinction between his formulation of innate and unalienable rights and that of the Declaration – the pursuit of happiness is not mentioned, rather we have the less abstract 'estate' (which we can take to mean both land and

[37] Kuzner (2007), p. 199.
[38] Kuzner (2011), p. 115.
[39] Full text of the Declaration can be found in numerous internet sources – see for example https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration-transcript [accessed 11 August 2022].
[40] Carli N. Conklin, 'The Origins of the Pursuit of Happiness', *Washington University Jurisprudence Review*, 7:2 (2015), 195-262 (p. 198).

chattels).[41] In comprehending Locke's scheme we have to understand that he theorises that the power of punishment attached to the protection of property has to be surrendered to the community as a fundamental of the social contract: 'there only is political society, where every one of the members hath quitted this natural power; resigned it up to the hands of the community'.[42] This is the foundation of due process.

How then does Locke's influential formulation get bastardised by Jefferson away from the preservation of property to the pursuit of happiness? The most persistent explanation is encapsulated by Conklin: 'Jefferson was uncomfortable enough with slavery to want to avoid perpetuating a property ownership in slaves by including an unalienable right to property'.[43] This interpretation might seem to relegate Jefferson's drafting to a mere rhetorical flourish, but Conklin artfully avoids such cynicism and plots a route to a more stimulating conclusion:

> [T]he pursuit of happiness is not a legal guarantee that one will obtain happiness […] It is instead, an articulation of the idea that as humans we were created to live at liberty, with the unalienable right to engage in the pursuit.[44]

In *Coriolanus* we encounter a text fully conversant with its own sub-text of natural law, due process, and the pursuit of happiness. It is in Locke that we find an elegant expression of how the voluntary abandonment of certain (but not all) natural rights can usher in a state of grace:

> Those who are united into one body, and have a common established law and judicature to appeal to, with authority to decide controversies between them, and punish offenders, are in civil society one with another.[45]

Bagehot indeed groups Locke, Newton, and Charles Darwin as totemic thinkers, deeming them proud examples of the winning product of a nation governed by discussion.[46] In the Roman context Bagehot puts it thus:

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[41] John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government* (First published 1690) C.B. McPherson (ed.) (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1980).
[42] Ibid., p. 28.
[43] Conklin, p. 198.
[44] Ibid., p. 262.
[45] Locke, p. 28.
[46] Bagehot, *Physics and Politics*, p. 133.

> The gift of 'conservative innovation' – the gift of *matching* new institutions to old - is not nowadays a warlike virtue, yet the Romans owed much of their success to it. Alone among ancient nations they had the deference to usage which combines nations, and the partial permission of selected change which improves nations; and therefore they succeeded.[47]

Seen in these terms, the valiant Coriolanus is not so much a casualty of war as a casualty of progress. What we may also obtain from the play is the sense of the tragedy of a man caught between two times. Proceeding a little deeper, we discern the unwanted, possibly irresolvable conflict between unalienable rights (the assertion of which, albeit in differing tones, are a common factor in our thickened present) and a functioning political society. That brings us to the notion of the bounded self.

V: The Best Possibilities of Human Autonomy

For Jennifer Nedelsky (an academic lawyer who is not addressing Shakespeare) there is no difficulty in the leap from Locke's property rights to the right to happiness (or rather its pursuit).[48] In Nedelsky's scheme, the projection onto political consciousness of unalienable property rights has always been consistent with the ambitions of the Framers of the Constitution. Furthermore, it is a narrative of metaphorical property and attendant boundaries that sustains orthodox natural law thinking. Her observations may be made in the context of American law but they are perfectly transferable to orthodox first-world thinking:

> In the American tradition of constitutionalism, property has served as a powerful symbol of rights as limits to government. This notion of 'rights' functioning as 'limits' to 'government' involves a complex set of abstractions and metaphoric links that nevertheless is taken as common sense by most Americans.[49]

In fact Nedelsky, not unlike Kuzner (who speaks from a different place within the academy, but the point still stands), argues for the failure of this boundary

[47] Ibid., p. 64.
[48] Jennifer Nedelsky, 'Law, Boundaries, and the Bounded Self', *Representations*, 30 (Spring 1990), 162-189.
[49] Ibid., p. 162.

metaphor and advocates that we must encompass some new unbounded picture of governance, difficult as that may be:

> We can try to transform our own language, push it in the direction of the barely articulated 'intimations' that have reached us. Disintegration entails promise. If we can let go of our walls of rights, the reintegration is likely to be far fuller and more promising.[50]

Despite this metaphysical tilting of the frame, Nedelsky still aids us in an interpretation of *Coriolanus* - it is not so much that the play gives us the answer to these abstract questions but rather that it helps to capture the problem and provokes us to attempt ways of, 'exploring the best possibilities of human autonomy'.[51]

What is this metaphor that moulds our thinking? It has been employed to picture natural rights that can seem to adhere to individuals without suffocating the body of society. Property in its fullest sense is taken to mean anything possessed by a citizen – most obviously (and figuratively the most potent) this means land but also any other possession. The easiest route to comprehending the boundaries implicit in the metaphor lies in these statements: '"Government can't take what's mine" or the more elegant "A man's home is his castle"'.[52] As a stepping-off point for making natural laws comprehensible, this is deceivingly apt. However, the metaphor starts to come unglued when we add to the picture the extant facts of inequality of possession. In her particular example of the American Constitution, Nedelsky again spears the dilemma:

> Property thus posed a problem for popular government because this inequality required protection, those with property had to be protected from those who had less or none. Without security, property lost its value.[53]

Translated to the world of *Coriolanus*: the Roman Patricians possess grain and the mob seeks to infringe the boundaries of that possession; but what has happened to the Plebeians' natural right to life if they can be left to starve – whose boundary is then infringed? Nedelsky's answer to questions of this ilk is

[50] Ibid., p. 184.
[51] Ibid., p. 163.
[52] Ibid., p. 162.
[53] Ibid., p. 164.

that our default explanatory metaphor (that of possession of property) is awry because it draws human autonomy as a 'static human characteristic … posited as a presupposition of legal or political theory', whereas it is in truth a mere capacity that 'must be developed'.[54]

It is our individual choice how we conjure (if we are able) solutions to the multiple failures of characters (acting both in concert and severally) in *Coriolanus*. What I suggest is an interpretation that takes us to a point where we must decide for ourselves - Shakespeare will not do the heavy lifting for us. Are we as cynically resigned about mankind as Bagehot's detractors would paint him; or are we are accepting of Bagehot's alleged genius in having located, Pangloss-like, a best of all possible worlds in his Age of Discussion? Shakespeare may not have been interested in endings, enjoying the problems more, but he takes us to a place where we can turn our minds to a proper estimation of a political thinker like Bagehot.

VI: Resolved Rather to Die Than to Famish

The play opens and without delay the audience knows that the Plebeians are roused to violence and that the animating cause is their hunger: 'You are all resolved rather to die than to famish?' (1.1.3-4). It takes only two more lines to resolve against whom the mob directs its greatest ire – Coriolanus, 'is chief enemy of the people' (1.1.5). Already it is signalled that the Rome of the play stands at the apex of a constitutional turn. As we are shortly to learn, the Plebeians' grievances have been addressed by the expedient of appointing Tribunes to speak for them in the Senate (1.1.200). Those grievances are matters of the operation of the Republic:

> We are accounted poor citizens, the patricians good. What authority surfeits on would relieve us. If they would yield us but the superfluity while it were wholesome, we might guess they relieved us humanely, but they think we are too dear. (1.1.14-18)

[54] Ibid., p. 168.

We, the audience, know then where things stand. Soon, we also know that Coriolanus is a renowned soldier for his country but that this does not sufficiently off-set his perceived pride:

> SECOND CITIZEN: Consider you what services he has done for his country?
> FIRST CITIZEN: Very well; and could be content to give him good report for't, but that he pays himself with being proud. (1.1.24-31)

The dissentious political ground having been laid, enter Menenius, a Patrician who seeks to placate the Plebeians with his fable of the belly. Whether this most patronising of Patricians succeeds with this metaphoric diversion is open to debate since hard upon his delivery of the fable our attention is pulled in yet other directions, first by Coriolanus's haughty entry and then by the news that the Volsces are again (constant war?) in arms against Rome. At this latter development we now see Coriolanus in his contrarian safe-space - at war. What other men fear, he thrives upon and takes it as a welcome distraction from the demands of the mob. However, there is a telling hint in Coriolanus's reaction to the contemporaneous news of the appointment of Tribunes. He betrays a foreboding about the turn there will be in the Patricians' political fortunes:

> The rabble should have first unroofed the city,
> Ere so prevailed with me: it will in time
> Win upon power and throw forth greater themes
> For insurrection's arguing. (1.1.203-206)

This foresight touches upon Coriolanus's tragedy. He is a man seemingly of his time, a warrior in martial times. However, the political ground is shifting. Such shifts are glacial and it is extreme ill-fortune to be, with a perverse perfection, the bestriding warrior for whom the ground will open up. Befitting his tragedy, Coriolanus will countenance no temporising and will eventually suffer death gladly. But that is later. At this stage, by the mild foresight I have highlighted, he shows himself a shrewder analyst of politics than the supercilious Menenius, whose diagnosis of this opening situation rests complacently on an under-appreciation of the rising potency of the mob:

> [Y]ou may as well
> Strike at the heaven with your staves as lift them
> Against the Roman state, whose course will on
> The way it takes, cracking ten thousand curbs
> Of more strong link asunder than can ever

Appear in your impediment. (1.1.47-52)

Coriolanus in contrast perceives that the mob is the genie that cannot be put back in its bottle. He is the military man who, in Bagehotian terms, has mastered the Use of Conflict and who will find himself relegated by the ensuing Nation Making phase: 'Military morals can direct the axe to cut down the tree, but it knows nothing of the quiet force by which the forest grows'.[55] Tragically and with great dramatic impact, Coriolanus discerns that quiet force but chooses to rage against it.

What should we make of these Roman commoners who so disquiet Coriolanus? Claire Hansen asserts a dual pedagogical function for the mob in each of the first four Roman Plays.[56] That function creates a sense of public space that acts not merely upon the characters in the individual plays but also upon the audience to the contained dramas. In *Titus Andronicus* Hansen finds an effectively silent public who stand as victims of outmoded transmission teaching, a teacher-centred model in which pupils are expected to acquire knowledge passively: 'The public depicted here is not understood to be complex: it is predictable, controllable and organised by leaders'.[57] *Julius Caesar* witnesses a more complex public that is, 'neither absent nor compliant' and that shows possibilities of self-organisation.[58] Hansen argues that this emphasises the operation of a complexivist (and for Hansen more desirable) pedagogical model where teacher/leader and pupil/populace are participating in a joint voyage of exploration.[59] Hansen suggests that this theme is further advanced in *Antony and Cleopatra*, not because of any vociferous crowd at work but because Antony comes 'painfully' to recognise that the 'system' (of which the public is now an organic part) plays an undeniable part in his own self-organisation as a leader,

[55] Bagehot, *Physics and Politics*, p. 63.
[56] Claire Hansen, '"Not stones but men": Publics and pedagogy in Shakespeare's Roman plays', *Cogent Arts & Humanities*, 3:1 (2016) https://www.cogentoa.com/article/10.1080/23311983.2016.1235854 [accessed 11 August 2022] (p. 1).
[57] Ibid., p. 3.
[58] Ibid., p. 4.
[59] Ibid., p. 6.

that is to say: 'Antony recognises his own incompleteness'. [60] I find the extension of this pedagogical designation to *Antony and Cleopatra* the least supported textually but the portrayal of Antony as a man plagued by his own incompleteness is an attractive one and we find an even plainer example of this phenomenon in Coriolanus. My argument is that Coriolanus angrily (yet futilely) knows that he can no longer be a man complete unto himself (the day for such unmediated individual valour is passing) but refuses to change with the times. Hansen concludes strongly on *Coriolanus*:

> [T]he play envisages its people as 'shreds' and 'fragments'; the Roman power is in 'parcels'. In repeatedly enacting this rhetorical violence upon the holistic idea of a single body and a common people *Coriolanus* seems to be trying to find an answer to the question: 'What is the city but the people?'[61]

We must consider both the play and its principal protagonist in the context of what, if anything, they provoke us (as distinct from directing us) to think of Coriolanus's rise and fall. Are we somehow pointed in the direction of an Age of Discussion? We have already seen how Kuzner steers us away from a prorepublican understanding of *Coriolanus*. We have also previously encountered how Bagehot stands as what we might deem a knowing monarchist. I will next set that against the more optimistic stance recently taken by Stephen Greenblatt, in his *Tyrant: Shakespeare on Power*.[62]

VII: Dangerous but Useful Qualities

Coriolanus attracts arresting sobriquets, so vivid and unbending is his persona. Bate has him as 'Peter Pan in full body armour'.[63] For theatre director Ivo van Hove he is, 'a total monster, but society needs him'.[64] Most picturesquely, Melissa Croteau reacts to a 2009 production (citing overhearing an audience member) with, 'Rambo meets Joan Crawford' – this rather nicely captures the potential for

[60] Ibid., p. 5.
[61] Ibid., p. 9.
[62] Stephen Greenblatt, *Tyrant: Shakespeare on Power* (London: Vintage, 2019).
[63] *Complete Works*, p. 1538.
[64] Andrew Dickson, 'He's a total monster, but society needs him' *Guardian*, 4 April 2016.

a collision of militarism and Oedipal melodrama in the play.[65] Into this school of (admittedly rather queasy) admiration for Coriolanus as a tragic figure strides Greenblatt with a less sympathetic eye in his *Tyrant: Shakespeare on Power*. This book makes no mention of Donald Trump but it manages to bellow his name loudly between almost every line. It is a masterpiece of American liberal angst/guilt about the forty-fifth President and makes the understandable point that nothing in politics is beyond Shakespeare's dramatic imagination. Greenblatt may be at his most scathing when probing the tyrannical model offered to us by Shakespeare's King Richard III, but his admission (in the Acknowledgements appended to the back of the text) that he started to write the book in an atmosphere of, 'growing apprehensions about the possible outcome of an upcoming election', betrays the unsubtle subtext.[66] If one is asked about whom an author writing between 2016 and 2018 is writing in the terms that I quote below, who would one imagine to be the object of the author's barbs?

> He divides the world into winners and losers. The winners arouse his regard insofar as he can use them for his own ends; the losers arouse only his scorn. The public good is something only losers like to talk about. What he likes to talk about is winning.[67]

Ostensibly Greenblatt is analysing *Richard III*. The great liberal consolation is encapsulated three paragraphs later: 'Sooner or later, he is brought down. He dies unloved and unlamented. He leaves behind only wreckage. It would have been better had Richard III never been born'. It is legitimate to ask whether this critique-a-clef embodied in the villainous Richard quite serves the purpose its enthusiastic reviewers (the cover trumpets Margaret Atwood: 'Brilliant, timely') might assert for it. Surely this is preaching to the choir. Notwithstanding the fine literary autopsy on *Richard III*, yet more pertinent is the concluding chapter, 'Resistible Rise', a chapter given over to a potential tyrant whose rise is resisted – Coriolanus. Greenblatt is alert to the paradox bound up in *Coriolanus*. For Greenblatt tyranny is not the norm of social organisation but:

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[65] Melissa Croteau, 'Review: Coriolanus/Twelfth Night', *Shakespeare Bulletin*, 28:2 (Summer 2010), 277-287 (p. 277).
[66] Greenblatt, *Tyrant*, p. 191.
[67] Ibid., pp. 53-54.

> In special circumstances, however, protection proves more difficult than it would at first seem, for some of the dangerous qualities found in a potential tyrant may be useful.[68]

This is the problem with Coriolanus – Rome undeniably needs him at some junctures. With his martial valour and relatively sparse armoury of political machinations, Coriolanus makes a far less satisfactory analogue for Trump than does Richard III (though even Richard goes out on his shield) and Greenblatt's commentary is the better for the lack of that very contemporary intrusion. In the case of *Coriolanus*, Greenblatt may not quite make the case for Shakespeare as a republican but he does put us in mind of Shakespeare as democrat, and here I use the terms not with their American party connotations but in their wider context. Whereas we have seen how Bagehot is dismissive of the mob as anything other than mean and despicable, Greenblatt may have his doubts about the Tribunes and their constituents but ultimately he cannot help casting them as the saviours of Rome. On the Tribunes, Greenblatt may deem them, 'Ignoble and self-serving', yet:

> Without their stubborn insistence and their crafty maneuvering, Rome would have fallen into the hands of a man who affected "one sole throne / Without assistance" [4.6.39].[69]

When we compare this to Bagehot's denigration of the mob, we again see the schizophrenic capacity of *Coriolanus* looming large. Nevertheless we can bring the two critics into a measure of harmony if we re-concentrate on Bagehot's vaunted Age of Discussion. Bagehot eulogises animated moderation as the prime quality of a civilised nation state. This condition is found when there are enough voices at play to avoid an excessive rapidity of action:

> If you want to stop instant and immediate action, always make it a condition that the action shall not begin till a considerable number of persons have talked over it, and have agreed on it.[70]

The two writers may have markedly different views as to whose voices should be heard but, starting many miles apart, they terminate at critical destinations which although not adjacent are, at least visible to each other. Both their

[68] Ibid., p. 155.
[69] Ibid., p. 182.
[70] Bagehot, *Physics and Politics*, p. 126.

conceptions of peaceful sovereignty rest on the desirability of a sort of opinionated cacophony, an Age of Discussion, no less. Greenblatt speaks of the mature Shakespeare being a quiet optimist about practical statehood:

> Rather, as he imagined toward the end of his career, the best hope lay in the sheer unpredictability of collective life, its refusal to march in lockstep to any one person's orders.[71]

What Bagehot lays on top of this desirably noisy form of government is his detection of the efficient/dignified dichotomy as the 'secret' of English governmental success. It is the operation of the dignified arm of the constitution that keeps the lower orders from becoming harmfully noisy. Greenblatt shies away from imputing any such cynicism to Shakespeare: 'The best chance for the recovery of collective decency lay, he thought, in the political action of ordinary citizens'.[72] Tellingly Greenblatt signs off his summation of the rejoinders to tyranny in his final chapter with the same quotation as Hansen: 'What is the city but the people?' (3.1.232). Greenblatt asks this rhetorically (whereas Hansen speculates that we find Coriolanus himself searching for an answer to the question) and has already supplied us with his answer – the city/state is nothing but the collective.[73] Only very briefly does Greenblatt betray any sympathy for Coriolanus and, intriguingly, this is when he compares him to the rest of his patrician class: 'Nothing tempers Coriolanus's obnoxiousness, and yet the play is oddly sympathetic to him, at least compared to the others of his class'.[74] This observation opens up a new line of critical enquiry. We can take a triangulated approach to the power-play in *Coriolanus*. At one corner sit the Plebeians (largely articulated by the Tribunes); at another rest the Patricians, these last most usefully wrapped-up for us in Menenius, Cominius, and Volumnia; at the third corner we find the flawed magnificence of the principal character. I will consider each corner in turn.

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[71] Greenblatt, *Tyrant*, pp. 187-188.
[72] Ibid., p. 189.
[73] Ibid., p. 189.
[74] Ibid., p. 162.

VIII: Dissentious Rogues

At the very outset of the play, we can perhaps detect some marginal movement in the types of citizenry put to dramatic use by Shakespeare in his last tragedy. As with so much else in criticism, receptiveness to this mooted marginal gain may depend on the prejudices one brings to the table. The 'company of mutinous Citizens, with staves, clubs and other weapons', (opening stage direction Act 1.1) are quite direct in their purpose and its intended effect:

> FIRST CITIZEN: First, you know Caius Martius is chief enemy to the people.
> ALL: We know't, we know't.
> FIRST CITIZEN: Let us kill him, and we'll have corn at our own price. Is't a verdict?
> ALL: No more talking on't: let it be done: away, away. (1.1.5-8)

In this we hear an echo of what Greenblatt has to acknowledge as the mob-endorsed 'voodoo economics' of Jack Cade in Shakespeare's much earlier *Henry VI Part II*.[75] The Roman Citizens' desire of 'corn at our own price', is arguably hardly more sensible than Cade's quasi-comical demagoguery:

> There shall be in England seven halfpenny loaves sold for a penny: the three-hooped pot shall have ten hoops, and I will make it felony to drink small beer. (*H6 II* 4.2.48-50)

Greenblatt detects a beneficial issuing from the citizenry in *Coriolanus*, indeed he seems, notwithstanding his denunciation of Cade, to infer such an impact in all of Shakespeare. Bagehot, as has been said, is categorically of the opposite view. What I think can be suggested with some confidence is that Shakespeare does not invite us to believe in some straight-line and universal historical development in the wisdom of crowds – after all, the more reasonable mob (if we accept Greenblatt's interpretation) in *Coriolanus* exercises its voice almost two millennia before Cade's insurrectionists in *Henry VI Part II*. Confining ourselves to the Roman Plays, we should ask: is the fickle crowd we see in *Julius Caesar* (swayed first by Brutus and then immediately suborned by Antony) any more sophisticated than that four-and-a-half centuries earlier in Coriolanus's Rome? I suggest not. We might seek to trace some development in Shakespeare's own thinking on this point as his writing reaches its maturity, but I would venture

[75] Ibid., p. 37.

that this is misleading. In any event a non-linear historical development of crowd behaviour sits conveniently with my chosen landscape of the thickened present and, yet further, it plays back into Bagehot's musings on arrested civilisations simmering within seemingly unbreakable Use of Conflict:

> And then they themselves were caught in their own yoke. The customary discipline, which could only be imposed on any early men by terrible sanctions, continued with those sanctions, and killed out of the whole society the propensities to variation which are the principle of progress.[76]

This quandary of the arrested civilisation is brought to life by Shakespeare in swift order in *Coriolanus*. No sooner has he given the crowd a voice and, by that means, highlighted their proper concerns, than he has moved on to something more violently dramatic. Menenius has just finished his fable of the belly (the efficacy of which in quelling the crowd we are never given time to judge) and is distracted by the entrance of Coriolanus whose first words leave us in no doubt as to his estimation of the Plebeians:

> What's the matter, you dissentious rogues,
> That, rubbing the poor itch of your opinion,
> Make yourselves scabs? (1.1.145-147)

The next fifty lines are almost exclusively taken up by Coriolanus's denigration of the Plebeians, vexed as he is by the decision to grant them, 'Five tribunes to defend their vulgar wisdoms' (1.1.200-201). So contemptuous of this new constitutional dispensation is Coriolanus that he can name only two of these new Tribunes. This oversight may also be a clue to Shakespeare's frame of mind in shaping the play – the appointment of five Tribunes is referred to in both Plutarch and Livy, but the playwright follows the lead of North's translation of Plutarch by naming only two of them, indeed making only those two into speaking characters in the play. Is the dramatic device of forming the opinions in the two mouths alone, intended to concentrate our minds on those opinions, or does it reflect, not so much a contempt for those opinions, as a reflection of their relative unimportance? The Patricians (leaving aside Coriolanus) of Rome speak fifty-five per cent of the lines in the play, the Plebeians only twenty-one.

[76] Bagehot, *Physics and Politics*, p. 50.

The two named Tribunes, Sicinius and Brutus, will have their say in the remainder of the play but we should briefly note that before the entrance of these two there is a voice in the crowd who counters the otherwise universal condemnation of Coriolanus. The Second Citizen raises the awkward and potentially redeeming fact of Coriolanus's military prowess: 'Consider you what services he has done for his country?' (1.1.19). That Second Citizen is curtly overruled by the vehement First Citizen. Intriguingly these two nameless Citizens reverse their roles in Act 2 Scene 3 – the First Citizen ('He has our voices, sir' (2.3.135)) now giving Coriolanus the benefit of the doubt, only for the Second Citizen to cut the First down: 'Not one amongst us, save yourself, but says / He used us scornfully' (2.3.141-142). It may be a small point but this inconstancy does mark the perfidiousness of the mob and makes more difficult an interpretation that some sort of democratic wisdom lies within them.

Just as Coriolanus can be accused (quite properly) of brooking no argument that sees merit in the Plebeains, so the loudest voices in the common citizenry gauge no prospect for the redemption of Coriolanus's reputation. In Act 1 Scene 1 Coriolanus's warrior accomplishments are deemed outweighed by his pride. Indeed the (at this point) querulous First Citizen embarks (in only the play's twenty-third line) upon a summary of Coriolanus's psychological condition that prefigures a fair weight of modern criticism. One is left to wonder if we need expend any more mental energy upon the subject: 'he did it to please his mother' (1.1.25).

If we do not have to trouble ourselves about any great shift during the passage of the play in Coriolanus's frame of mind, nor do we have to seek for any journey of understanding by the two Tribunes. Even as Coriolanus vaults into the defence of the Roman realm (Plebeians and all), even before he engages the Volscians in battle, Sicinius and Brutus are cataloguing the defects in his warrior motives, perhaps awestruck (and politically fearful) at the inevitability of his success in battle. Sicinius wonders at Coriolanus's willingness to serve under Cominius's command – Brutus has a ready and surely over-certain response:

> Fame, at the which he aims,
> In whom already he's well graced, cannot

> Better be held nor more attained than by
> A place below the first, for what miscarries,
> Shall be the general's fault. (1.1.262-266)

This is political casuistry, and for all his manifest faults, at least we need not accuse Coriolanus of that sin. Katherine A. Craik examines in depth the role of rhetoric in the play and forms the view that the principal's overpowering presence within the text is attributable, not to the power of his speech, but to the combination of his physical indomitability and, above all else, the reports of him given by others:

> Shakespeare is, however, centrally interested in the shortfall between such versions of Coriolanus, drawn in words, and the man who appears in person before the Roman citizens.[77]

In this rhetorical battle which will determine Coriolanus's fate, Craik positions Coriolanus as the clear loser, a manifestation of, 'the mortal risks involved in speaking, rather than being spoken about'.[78] I think we should add to this equation the rhetorical defeat suffered by the Patricians other than Coriolanus. It is they (most notably Menenius) who fail to save Coriolanus from both himself and from the newly empowered Plebeians. The rhetorical (Pyrrhic) victory is enjoyed by the Tribunes. We should remark, as we contemplate that victory, the dramatic symbolism of Sicinius and Brutus delivering, just as their betters, their barbs in blank verse and not in the prose of the mob.

I have described the nascent power of the Plebeians as the genie that cannot be put back in the bottle – this becomes all the more true when we see in operation the poetry of the Tribunes. Their verse may lack Coriolanus's domineering bluntness but it is phrased better to provoke the Plebeians to action:

> Get you hence instantly, and tell those friends
> They have chose a consul that will from them take
> Their liberties, make them of no more voice
> Than dogs that are as often beat for barking,
> As therefor kept to do so. (2.3.196-200)

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[77] Katharine A. Craik, 'Staging Rhetorical Vividness in *Coriolanus*', *Shakespeare Studies*, 47 (2019), 143-168 (p. 144).
[78] Ibid., p. 164.

As the Tribunes manipulate the crowd, Coriolanus's fate is sealed. The fate of his Patrician class burns out on a slower fuse - the Roman Republic will tip back and forth in its dalliance with democracy, the state periodically arrested by the disruptive near-permanence of wars. Coriolanus will be the totemic casualty of this small moment of change because of his singular immutability.

In applying Bagehot's constitutional theory to the political conditions of *Coriolanus*, we must acknowledge that the dignified condition in a constitution is one aimed principally at the lower orders. It is the acquired magic of an ostensibly ruling class (specifically in Victorian England the crown and aristocracy) that holds the awe of the lower classes and thereby clears space for the administrative class to govern. How might we apply this to Coriolanus's Rome? What first has to be said is that the Rome of the play does not stand at the point where, in Bagehot's conception, the dichotomy can yet permanently operate. It is an infant city state undermined, yet paradoxically underpinned by, conflict. We do, however, perceive the beginnings of the long evolutionary process by which an enlightened state might emerge. Taking the account set out in *Physics and Politics*, we are, I suggest, beyond that stage where a polity starts to emerge and thus most men have some meagre constitutional expectations, have acquired some 'clockwork' cognition:

> No one can now without difficulty conceive how people got on before there were clocks and watches … And much more is it difficult to fancy the unstable minds of such men as neither knew nature, which is the clockwork of material civilisation, nor possessed a polity, which is a kind of clockwork to moral civilisation.[79]

That rudimentary clockwork has been acquired and the appointment of the Tribunes is its signifier. Rome is at the start of society's long march. The Plebeians have their nominees. Those nominees will win their small victory in the rhetorical battle with the Patricians. They will make a sacrifice of the despised Coriolanus, yet by the play's climax those same Tribunes will already have become the prey of the mob that spawned them – Rome's fate lies at the mercy of Coriolanus, its last hopes vested in the entreaties of a Patrician woman, Volumnia. In Act 5 Scene 4, Menenius and Sicinius promenade together,

[79] Bagehot, *Physics and Politics*, p. 27.

fatalistically despondent of Rome's prospects but now tellingly conversing in prose - perhaps a truce has been declared in rhetorical war. A messenger brings them news that the fickle Plebeians aim to hold Sicinius and Brutus responsible for military defeat. The Tribunes' populistic pomp has been short-lived: 'They'll give him death by inches' (5.4.29). The final sheepish words of the Tribunes serve to emphasise their swift failure: Sicinius signifies his gratitude for Volumnia's unexpectedly successful intercession: 'We'll meet them, and help the joy' (5.4.56). The mob have emerged as a political force but as yet show no talent for self-determination. They are instead in need of leadership to which they can cleave. They lack something dignified in which to place their faith. Such dignity is everywhere lacking: their own Tribunes are venal; the Patricians dissemble and promote Coriolanus for unworthy reasons (in this respect I agree with Greenblatt); Coriolanus has an unimpeachably efficient military record in an age when such things matter existentially but his singularity makes him fluff his lines when he is pushed into the more multi-faceted role of Consul. The Rome of the Plebeians in *Coriolanus* is not yet what Bagehot would have as a happy case:

> Progress is only possible in those happy cases where the force of legality has gone far enough to bind the nation together, but not far enough to kill out all varieties and destroy nature's perpetual tendency to change.[80]

The next task is to ponder the behaviour of the Patricians who, arguably, deal even more shamefully with their military hero. Taking our own patrician stance (as would Bagehot) we might forgive the Plebeians on the ground that they know not what they do, whereas the actions of the governing class at this small but acute moment in history are often plain wrong.

IX: The Head of the Sage and the Arm of the Soldier

In *Physics and Politics* Bagehot ruminates on the desirability of a dignified manner in early society. Here he is endorsing his own earlier conclusions in *The English Constitution*. It is in the context of his two Nation Making chapters that Bagehot speculates on the doughtiest formulation for a state that might master the slow march through Nation Making to an Age of Discussion:

[80] Ibid., p. 54.

> In general, too, the conquerors would be better than the conquered (most merits in early society are more or less military merits), but they would not be very much better, for the lowest steps in the ladder of civilisation are very steep, and the effort to mount them is slow and tedious.[81]

Bagehot goes on to deprecate 'priestly civilisations' which are likely to survive only with martial assistance:

> But such a civilisation will not perish if a warrior *caste* is tacked on to it and is bound to defend it. On the contrary, such a civilisation will be singularly likely to live. The head of the sage will help the arm of the soldier.[82]

Here we have Bagehot, as is so often his method, describing a political phenomenon by means of a duality. In this case we have an uneasy alliance between the primitive religious (or we might better term it superstitious) and the military. If we want to relate this forward to Bagehot's most famous dichotomy, I would suggest that the superstitious stands in anticipation of the dignified and the military foreshadows the efficient. The Rome of the play is an early society susceptible to this preliminary dichotomy, but there seems to me to be a difficulty inherent in nascent constitutions such as this. If we are to accept the dignified/efficient dichotomy as a marker of a sustainable political mechanism, in examples such as early republican Rome where the superstitious/military dichotomy is at work, we find a complication in allocating dignified and efficient roles between the superstitious and the military castes. The Patricians seem to propose Coriolanus to fulfil both roles. Cominius is a Consul and a military leader but his championing of Coriolanus to stand as Consul suggests a merging of the two fields – does Coriolanus's martial accomplishment fit him as dignified or as efficient? There is, as observed, an element of both in operation here. That cannot stand. As we have seen, for example in the temporary but doomed hegemony of Louis Napoleon in nineteenth-century France, the two cannot reliably repose in one place. It is therefore no great surprise that Bagehot's cynicism about the rarity of secure societies, can seem a fitting diagnosis:

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[81] Ibid., p. 99.
[82] Ibid., p. 101.

> The first work of the first ages is to bind men together in the strong bonds of a rough, coarse, harsh custom; and the incessant conflict of nations effects this in the best way.[83]

In *Coriolanus* there is no difficulty in pinpointing the arm of the soldier, but the head of the sage is more elusive. For the reasons I have outlined earlier in this chapter, I do not believe we are offered any constant sagacity among the Plebeians. Much less, though they are disarmingly lucid, do we find honour in the mouths of their Tribunes. Turning next to the Patricians, we find ample fine words but little perspicacity. What unequivocal (albeit unscrupulous) sense we can locate among the upper orders comes from a disenfranchised female voice - that of Volumnia. First however let us consider the male voices of that 'right-hand file' (2.1.17).

Menenius is the play's principal Patrician spokesman. Greenblatt damns him with the faintest of praise:

> Shakespeare draws a deft portrait of a successful conservative politician, altogether in the camp of the rich but adept at presenting himself as the people's friend.[84]

We should be grateful to Greenblatt for a commanding dismissal of Menenius's fable of the belly, pouring measured scorn on its intended pacifying of the mob. Greenblatt even manages to couch his criticism in an ironic deployment of the vocabulary of Reaganomics:

> In this account, it is entirely proper that everything flows first into the coffers of the wealthy; properly digested by them, it then trickles down in appropriate amounts to everyone else.[85]

Is there more to this character than meets Greenblatt's eye? I suggest that there is a milder echo in him of the honourable yet, to many intents, inept, Marcus Andronicus in *Titus Andronicus*. Menenius is, notwithstanding his loquacity (only Coriolanus speaks more), a step removed from the motive force of the play, more alarmed spectator than agent in the unfolding tragedies of Rome and of Coriolanus. His close ties to Coriolanus (he refers to Coriolanus as a 'son' to him

[83] Ibid., p. 141.
[84] Greenblatt, *Tyrant*, p. 160.
[85] Ibid., p. 161.

(5.2.58)) mask from him the enormity of the character defects that send Coriolanus plummeting from hero to outcast. Yet Menenius is not without discernment – his defining fault is that his ardour for the heroic Coriolanus steers him away from completing the philosophical processes that his insights might trigger in an uninvolved observer. That no one else in the Patrician class foresees the incipient downfall emblemises the state tragedy of Rome. The city state is functional only in its military garb and, as the play's denouement attests, that garb is woven of one man's spirit – Coriolanus.

Menenius does discern dichotomies swirling around the atmosphere of sovereignty. He understands due process – and we have already seen that this cherished concept sits with the metaphorically-described (bounded/unbounded self) mythos of natural law. When the Tribunes first connive (skilfully we must concede) to convert Coriolanus's putative coronation as Consul into, instead, a sentence of death, it is Menenius who pleads with them to observe due process:

> Proceed by process,
> Lest parties, as he is beloved, break out,
> And sack great Rome with Romans. (3.1.371-373)

This entreaty signifies an understanding that there is a difference between *zoe* and *bios* , terms explained by Giorgio Agamben thus: 'The Greeks had two words for life, *zoe* (the physical life of plants and animals), and *bios* (a life in community that has a story, a meaning, and is protected by law)'.[86] Due process ('Proceed by process') is a signifier of *bios* – bare unmediated life is mere *zoe*. The irony in Menenius appealing to the Plebeians for reversion to due process is enormous. I have already spoken of the shifting political tectonic plates represented by the appointment of five Tribunes. Menenius, now that he finds his political machinations under threat, seems to realise too late that the very elevation of the Tribunes has opened a small crack in the door to *bios* for the Plebeians. This whole process of opening is slow and fraught with danger but the door cannot be locked shut again. The movement to political maturity has begun and yet again we see (in Agamben's terms this time) a duality at play:

[86] Giorgo Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. By Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998) p. 1.

> [T]he rights won by individuals in their conflicts with central powers always simultaneously prepared a tacit but increasing inscription of individuals' lives within the state order.[87]

David G. Hale pays particular attention to what he deems the failure of a political metaphor in the play: 'Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* contains a sustained attempt to impose the analogy of the body politic on a political situation. The attempt fails'.[88] Hale is not exact on the point but I suggest that the failure is not the playwright's – rather we are talking about, most crucially, the failure of Menenius to sustain any internal logic in his own imagery as he attempts (most pointedly in Act 1 Scene 1 and in Act 3, Scene 1) to manipulate the Plebeians and their Tribunes. Most tellingly in the second of these encounters (which includes the appeal to follow due process) Menenius seems, disquieted as he is by the intransigence of the Tribunes, to abandon the logic of his fable of the belly. Hale highlights Menenius's curious statement at 3.1.361-364: 'The service of the foot, / Being once gangrened, is not then respected / For what before it was'.[89] In Hale's analysis, Menenius, that once jovial and conservative political operative, has been so discomfited by events that he unthinkingly turns his own metaphor against his own political class:

> By comparing Coriolanus to a foot, Menenius compromises the patrician position by accepting the danger of Coriolanus and reducing the peril of amputation.[90]

Hale goes on to criticise the play's structure and laments the lack of a choric figure to propel the metaphor of the body politic in the concluding two acts.[91] Might we not better suggest that the metaphor has done its dramatic job by Menenius's own heedless atomisation of it? The metaphor is too simplistic and therefore merits no further use. The body politic metaphor once deconstructed is an example of the boundary-based imagery so frequently deployed in the urge to articulate the tensions between antagonistic elements in that body politic. The

[87]Ibid., p. 121.
[88]David G. Hale, '*Coriolanus*: the Death of a Political Metaphor', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 22:3 (1971), 197-202 (p.197).
[89] Ibid., p. 202.
[90] Ibid., p. 202.
[91] Ibid., p. 202.

metaphor is a starting point in trying to understand sovereignty but just as the pursuit of different happinesses will butt against each other, so the various constituents of the body politic will tear apart unless and until some happy near-stasis is achieved. For Bagehot this stasis is the Age of Discussion, for a more theoretical jurisprudentialist such as Nedelsky we have to reach for something more abstract and in the process overcome our mute acceptance of the bounded self:

> [R]ights define our obligations as well as our entitlements and that as long as we have violated no one's rights, we are doing nothing wrong in our daily nonresponsiveness. / That particular form of freedom would, I think be radically transformed if we were to come to see ourselves as "inseparable from all other beings in the universe".[92]

The most captivating aspect of Nedelsky's difficult recipe is that, having first discarded the boundary metaphor, our process can bring us back full circle to a new reintegrated understanding – a new body politic that should not be confused with a passive acceptance (per Menenius) of the *status quo ante*: 'Disintegration entails promise. If we can let go of our walls of rights, the reintegration is likely to be far fuller and more promising'.[93]

Thus in *Coriolanus*, Shakespeare is not making some half-formed reach for the grail of a figurative political understanding, rather he is pointing up the complexities of that goal. His abandonment, as highlighted by Hale, of the motif of the body politic in the final two acts of the play is not a dramatic failure. It instead makes room for an escalation of the picture of human complexity and neurosis. It is those very human elements that can tilt us into what we might term the Bagehot camp with its view that it is near-miraculous that political stability is ever achieved.

Menenius is not alone in his defective thinking on the question of Coriolanus's elevation to consulship. We hear no voice against it from within the ranks of the Patricians. The vibrant enthusiasm of Volumnia seems to communicate itself first to Menenius and thereafter to his peers. However, Menenius is, as we have

[92] Nedelsky, p. 183.
[93] Ibid., p. 184.

already seen, far from a slavish advocate of an unbending authoritarianism - his smooth style is that of, as Greenblatt would have it, the successful politician. The Plebeians seem to admit that this style is not unsuccessful: 'Worthy Menenius Agrippa, one that hath always loved the people' (1.1.35). Menenius, as already seen and to his credit, sets store by due process. To revert to the boundary metaphor by which natural laws are most readily understood (whilst cognisant of the limits of that metaphor when exposed to extremes of juristic thought), men will only accept their perceived boundaries if they can rely on the protection at law of their own confined rights. The boundaries of personal and societal rights must abutt each other rather than overlap. Menenius instinctively grasps this but not acutely enough to perceive the competition of rights inherent in Coriolanus's promotion to Consul. The old Patrician is so comfortable in his conservatism that he lets down his guard and trusts to a good sense that Coriolanus does not possess. And here we should give Menenius some credit for not over-flexing his conservative principles in the face of Coriolanus's hubristic intransigence. Just as he appeals to the Plebeians to 'Proceed by process', so he urges that Coriolanus should, as precedent demands, beg the voices of the people: 'go fit you to the custom' (2.2.137). In urging this seemingly small (though to the petulant Coriolanus almost unbearable) act of humility, Menenius is acknowledging the miniscule due process that protects the 'right' of the Plebeians in the election of a Consul. This is a small matter of custom and even the citizens seem to be aware that they have no real power: 'We have power in ourselves to do it, but it is a power that we have no power to do' (2.3.3-4). Coriolanus grudgingly goes before the people and seems to win their voices, but the Tribunes next conspire to turn the mob against him. The genie is out of the bottle; the political plates have shifted; these small increments are enough to see Coriolanus banished. This small power-play by the Tribunes is enough to put the city state of Rome in existential peril. There has been a wholesale failure of the superstitious/dignified arm of state and its military/efficient capacity has been turned in on itself.

If Menenius has an almost familial regard for Coriolanus, the patrician Cominius (already a Consul and Commander-in-Chief of the Roman armies) provides us

with a more dispassionate but distinctly military outlook on the character of Coriolanus. We should not ignore Cominius's estimation of Coriolanus – it is by his reports that we can understand quite how remarkable a warrior this man-child is. Cominius suggests that even the despised Tribunes should be in awe of this extraordinary soldier. Nor should we overlook Coriolanus's selfless reaction to Cominius's praise, directed to him in the immediate aftermath of the battle at Corioles. There is, hidden in the first lines of his deflection of adulation, another telling hint at the unusual relationship with his mother:

> Pray now, no more: my mother,
> Who has a charter to extol her blood,
> When she does praise me, grieves me. I have done
> As you have done: that's what I can, induced
> As you have been, that's for my country: (1.9.15-19)

If nobility, honour and valour are paramount in Coriolanus's warped mind, then we have to admit that his comportment in the heat of battle and its aftermath is noble indeed.

It falls to Cominius best to encompass Coriolanus's qualities when speaking to the Patricians at the moment of the nomination for the consulship. It is these sincere words we should remember when faced with Coriolanus's undoubted defects:

> I shall lack voice: the deeds of Coriolanus
> Should not be uttered feebly: it is held
> That valour is the chiefest virtue, and
> Most dignifies the haver: if it be,
> The man I speak of cannot in the world
> Be singly counterpoised. (2.2.74-79)

Cominius, then, is a partisan for Coriolanus and he perceives the self-inflicted wound that Rome foists upon itself by his banishment: 'You have holp to ravish your own daughters and / To melt the city leads upon your pates' (4.6.99-100). This perception of Coriolanus's extraordinary qualities (tragically over-matched by his singular flaw) is one that Cominius correctly identifies as shared by his enemies – this is a man who inspires awe. We find proof of this in the assessment by Coriolanus's enemy (later ally), Aufidius, who concedes that Coriolanus conquers, 'By sovereignty of nature' (5.1.37). Ironically it is Aufidius who best

diagnoses Coriolanus's adamantine pride: 'Yet his nature / In that's no changeling, and I must excuse / What cannot be amended' (4.7.11-13). The Patricians seek to elevate Coriolanus because of his matchless bravery. At a time when there is civil unrest in Rome they blithely reach for a military hero to cure the civil ills. They choose not to apprehend his flaws. The head of the sage is not present.

We have seen how Menenius and Cominius are, in their different styles, unqualified admirers of Coriolanus. Menenius has a conception of due process but does not understand that the balance of due process has tilted with the first steps to enfranchising the Plebeians. As for Cominius, he, like Coriolanus, is a career soldier and cannot see beyond valour as the measure of a man's talents. These two principal spokesmen for the Patricians, fail their city by their incomprehension of the delicate equation of sovereignty. If these two elders, quite possibly for the best of motives, manage to miss the point much of the time, we should acknowledge the only Patrician who exerts any meaningful control over Coriolanus – his mother Volumnia. Twice in the play it is Volumnia who moves Coriolanus to action – it is she who presses Coriolanus to feign humility in seeking the consulship, and it is her entreaties at the play's climax that persuade her son to turn the Volscian forces away from the gates of Rome. By these actions she signs her precious son's death- warrant. Her warped logic promotes death or glory - nothing else exists. Within the self-imposed incarceration of this dangerous world-view she is always in control. Volumnia's reading of any situation is based upon a lethal combination of narrow ambition (the glorification of her only son) and a clever but fascistic realpolitik. Kent R. Lehnhof analyses her attitudes (and those of others in the play) in the terms of Elizabethan Anti-theatricality.[94] In adopting this critical tactic Lehnhof opens another window on the dichotomies at work in the scheme of political power, specifically the anti-theatrical (embodied in the stiffly non-performing Coriolanus) and the theatrical postures of others – most notably Menenius in his

[94] Kent Lehnhof, '"Rather say I play the man I am": Shakespeare's Coriolanus and Elizabethan Anti-theatricality', *Shakespeare and Renaissance Association Selected Papers*, 23 (2000), 31-41.

deployment of the fable of the belly, and the Tribunes in their deft management of the mob. Lehnhof asserts that Volumnia understands the benefits that can be won by theatricality and that, when she beseeches/instructs Coriolanus to seek the consulship, she demonstrates her commitment to hypocritical displays of humility:

> Volumnia argues that in order to maintain their advantage, the patricians must employ all of the tactics that Coriolanus uses on the field of battle, including 'policy', or the tactic of 'seeming'.[95]

For Volumnia the tactics of war meld seamlessly into politics; for her war is all and political manoeuvring is merely an interval in the din of constant war. She is happily mired in Bagehot's Use of Conflict. We can view Lehnhof's theatricality/anti-theatricality dichotomy as a sub-set of Bagehot's dignified/efficient formula: the dignified part is that of the 'seeming'. Insofar as Volumnia has a political opinion, it is a conviction that might is right, that might is most vested in Rome, most vested in her own brood, and that, if the genie of democracy is out of the bottle, it can be cowed to retreat in terror back whence it issued. Her instruction to her reluctant child is in that vein and as unequivocal as it is unprincipled:

> If it be honour in your wars to seem
> The same as you are not, which for your best ends
> You adopt your policy, how is it less or worse
> That it shall hold companionship in peace
> With honour, as in war, since that to both
> It stands in like request? (3.2.58-63)

That Coriolanus is conditioned to bow to his mother's lucid hectoring (In Act 2 Scene 3, she loads four successive speeches with the plaintive 'prithee') is an interesting psychological conundrum but beyond my present political purpose. Suffice to say that she is the only character in the play who wields the power to divert him from his chosen course. It is typical of Shakespeare's dramatic skill that the political waters of this highly political play are muddied by all too human psychology. It is by reference to the blind honour that she has imbued in him that Volumnia demands mercy for Rome. She argues (with measured theatricality we might concede) that Coriolanus will be wrong to think Volumnia,

[95] Ibid., p. 37.

and the female (bar young Martius) party who entreat him to spare Rome, 'poisonous of your honour' (5.3.146). Instead she appeals to the vanity overspilling any uncorrupted honour in Coriolanus:

> Thou know'st, great son
> The end of war's uncertain: but this certain,
> That if thou conquer Rome, the benefit
> Which thou shalt thereby reap is such a name
> Whose repetition will be dogged with curses. (5.3.151-155)

A.L. Rowse is correct when he brushes aside romantic notions of Volumnia:

> Much is made by critics of the beauty of this character and the touching nature of their relationship. She is in fact a stern Roman matron, a kind of female Cato, and is much to blame for the fault in her son – what makes him virtually another of Shakespeare's psychotic characters.[96]

In considering the Patricians as part of our triangulation of the power-play of the text, I have suggested that Menenius appreciates the dichotomy at work in the requirement for due process – however he is not acute enough to see how to adjust the required balance. Cominius is a more moderate stamp of soldier than his protégé Coriolaunus, but he too fails to read the political and psychological runes. Volumnia, for her part, is the sole character capable of bending Coriolanus to her will. She understands the theatrical/anti- theatrical dichotomy but purely in selfish terms. She has no belief in societal development and does not project her understanding forward to any pacific moment. She does not even countenance a dignified/efficient dichotomy – the military moment will suffice and any political ploy is to be adopted in service of her family and the patrician state she identifies with it. Ivo van Hove, in the interview with Andrew Dickson already cited above, makes the intriguing assertion that Volumnia is the most competent politician in the play;

> She's the real politician of the play, she knows exactly how it goes, while he [Coriolanus] behaves like a child. One of the tragedies Shakespeare is interested in is how she should have been a great leader, but can't be.[97]

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[96] A.L. Rowse (ed.), *The Annotated Shakespeare,* vol. iii (London: Orbis, 1978), p. 544.
[97] Dickson (op. cit.).

If we are to follow the logic of this assertion, we can speculate that a Volumnia consulship would not have seen the election of the Tribunes and the immediate tragedy/crisis might have been avoided. But hers would surely be a military regime and would only postpone the shifting of the tectonic plates. Volumnia's Rome would not so much be Victorian England as Louis Napoleon's France – an uneasy political peace as a place-holder for a political eruption.

The final element of my triangulation considers the surly warrior Volumnia has raised, the man everyone else is always talking about.

X: Author of Himself

Two episodes portray Coriolanus at his most imperious – in the first he is dazzlingly, perhaps crazily, courageous. He single-handedly takes the fight into Corioli, ultimately facing Aufidius in single combat from which Aufidius flees cowed and defeated. As all aver (an awe-struck Volscian soldier: 'He's the devil' (1.10.17)) Coriolanus is an unmatchable combatant. This scene is Coriolanus at the apex of his upward procession. But later and in what ought to be his most ignominious moment, the banishment from Rome, Coriolanus is once again (this time perversely) magnificent. He summons all his scorn for the mutable mob before delivering an illogical but fierce rejoinder:

> You common cry of curs, whose breath I hate
> As reek o' th' rotten fens: whose loves I prize
> As the dead carcasses of unburied men
> That do corrupt my air: I banish you. (3.3.144-147)

That 'I banish you' gives us the brilliant, spoiled child at his most alarming. A dozen lines later and as his parting shot at the Romans who have spurned him, Coriolanus spits defiance: 'There is a world elsewhere' (3.3.159). The great tragedy of Coriolanus is that he is ultimately proved wrong in this his first assertion of rootless singularity. He believes what he says. In his military caste of mind he has imbibed this lesson as mother's milk but, in his understandable fury, and buoyed by the failure/refusal of his Patrician peers to temper his indomitability, he has overlooked that the honour his mother advocates is tied up in Romanitas. The honour she so cherishes, to the exclusion of maternal concern for his physical well-being ('O, he is wounded, I thank the gods for't'

(2.1.86)), cannot be transferred to a new domicile in Antium. Hence Coriolanus does at his end find himself stateless and motherless. He becomes, in the play's ultimate irony, a nothing – neither Roman nor Volscian, not even a son. He lives a barren *zoe*, fenced off from a more meaningful *bios*. Throughout his life his military conditioning has fed him the lie that he is a man unbound, that he can exist in a warrior world free from the metaphorical boundaries that circumscribe a nascent constitutional democracy. In the end he has become as he describes himself as his world unravels:

> Let the Volsces
> Plough Rome and harrow Italy: I'll never
> Be such a gosling to obey instinct, but stand,
> As if a man were author of himself
> And knew no other kin. (5.3.43-45)

The Rome of *Coriolanus* stages a political world churning in the strange slow vortex that Bagehot describes in *Physics and Politics*. Military advantage still holds sway but the political protagonists are ill-equipped to control the maelstrom. The Tribunes overplay their hand and almost deliver Rome to its doom. The Patricians try to endow their military hero with impossible powers to graft the dignified onto the efficient. That hero (tutored by his stern mother) thinks himself called to soldiery at the behest of an impregnable aristocracy. They are not impregnable and his vocation is denied, rendering him a nothing. As Robert McCutcheon properly identifies, Coriolanus is outside the protection of either Roman or Volscian law:

> This apocalyptic vision captures all the ambivalence of Coriolanus as he contemplates accepting the consulship, assuming his place in the body politic at the cost of his individual identity, and becoming 'a kind of nothing,' promoted to non-existence.[98]

The putative enforcer of Rome's laws is thrown into oblivion by a concatenation of political events. He is indeed a monster but one conceived by those who destroy him.

[98] Robert McCutcheon, 'The Call of Vocation in "Julius Caesar" and "Coriolanus"', *English Literary Renaissance*, 41:2 (Spring 2011), 332-374 (p. 373).

Shakespeare's Roman journey has now seen political power problematized and rent asunder. It remains to synthesize a concluding critical method from enigmatic *Cymbeline*, a play that wanders thematically across multiple locations and (more importantly) times and directs us to contemplate sovereignty in its proper context of a thickened present.

Chapter Seven
Cymbeline and the Myriad-Minded Criticism

I: Bagehot's Animated Moderation

In *Physics and Politics* Bagehot nominates 'animated moderation' as the best motive force towards his vaunted Age of Discussion:

> It tends to strengthen and increase a subtle quality or combination of qualities singularly useful in practical life – a quality which it is not easy to describe exactly.[1]

If we bring into our terms of reference not only *Physics and Politics* but also *The English Constitution*, we detect another crucial ingredient of constitutional durability: deference. It is animated moderation being exercised in a gently deferential atmosphere that succours the efficient secret of the English constitution. This is nowhere better scrutinised than in Norman St John-Stevas's substantial prefatory essay to the fifth volume of *Collected Works*. That essay's title tells us what to expect: 'The Political Genius of Walter Bagehot'.[2] The essay is a thorough examination of Bagehot's political writing (which occupies four volumes of *Collected Works*), precise in its extraction of Bagehot's opinions and, if lavish in its praise, not shy to point out where time has proved Bagehot overly pessimistic, most particularly in relation to the supposedly dread effects of a broadened franchise.

The ordering of the sub-chapters of the St John-Stevas essay is instructive. The first gets us straight to the point – 'Bagehot's Conservatism'.[3] This is a detailed and commendably unapologetic pitch for Bagehot as cavalier conservative. As we ponder Bagehot in this charmed circle of liberal conservatism, we should concede that he has appeal across the political spectrum. Even as he operates as hero to St John-Stevas, sitting across the aisle of the House of Commons from St John-Stevas is Richard Crossman, an approving editor of one of the many editions of *The English Constitution*, and most decidedly a creature of Labour's

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[1] In *Physics and Politics* (op. cit.) pp. 130-131.
[2] St John-Stevas 'The Political Genius of Walter Bagehot', in *Collected Works,* vol. v, pp. 35-160.
[3] Ibid., pp. 39-55.

intellectual left. It was Crossman who admitted that his ambition had been to write 'a book which fulfilled for our generation the functions of Bagehot's *English Constitution*'.[4] This, he averred, could never be achieved by someone not embedded in politics. He died in 1974 and never achieved his ambition but left for posthumous publication three vast volumes of *Cabinet Diaries* and another of *Backbench Diaries*. At points in the *Cabinet Diaries* he speculates on the modern applicability of Bagehot's efficient secret, most particularly he muses that the cabinet had morphed into one of the dignified elements of the constitution.[5] What Crossman and St John-Stevas have in common as auditors of Bagehot is that they do not dispute the usefulness of the dignified/efficient dichotomy in political analysis, even as they differ on where in practice the split between the elements falls.[6]

As a final and modern signifier of Bagehot's appeal across the spectrum I offer his lionisation by Roger Kimball, a conservative by any measure, who lauds the concept of an Age of Discussion (something Kimball vehemently believes is under threat in contemporary society) and acknowledges animated moderation as its proper motor: 'Liberty, Bagehot points out, is not a static endowment'.[7] We are reminded in this last remark of Snyder's (himself no conservative) diagnosis of the dangers of eternalist and inevitablist politics.

Bagehot's viewpoint finds supporters on the intellectual left and the intellectual right but is most comfortably enjoyed by an inquiring centre. Shakespeare is yet more provocative and my final objective is to mine the last of the Roman Plays for its nuances. *Cymbeline* transpires to be a fitting (though less dramatically satisfying) terminus for Shakespeare's Roman project. Both Shakespeare and

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[4] Richard Crossman, *The Diaries of a Cabinet Minister, Volume I, 1964-1966* (London: Hamish Hamilton and Jonathan Cape, 1975) p. 11.
[5] Ibid., p. 198.
[6] At much the same time that Crossman (whose fatal cancer was incipient) was preparing his *Cabinet Diaries* for publication, St John-Stevas was submitting to print volumes v - viii of *Collected Works*, including of course his introductory essay (op. cit.), as to which see the sub-chapter 'The Commons – a Dignified Institution?' (pp. 145-159) in which he exercises his own judgement on the dichotomy as applied in the Heath government.
[7] Roger Kimball, 'Introduction: the age of discussion' (op. cit.).

Bagehot are slow optimists about mankind's political journey. It is difficult not to be aggravated by Bagehot's cynicism about how far man can progress beyond the mild perfections of the Victorian age. Shakespeare on the other hand paints on a broader and more stimulating canvas, hence his power in the thickened present. Having so satisfactorily and dramatically problematized sovereignty in the first four Roman Plays, Shakespeare deviates from pure drama in *Cymbeline* so that we can see that though society may not be perfectible, it is possible for sovereign players to be activated towards radical (animated) moderation. The play, even as it skilfully engages with Jacobean concerns, acts at all times in the thickened present and in this ubiquity it is a closer cousin to its ahistorical companion *Titus Andronicus* than it is to the intervening Plutarchan plays. It is also a dramatic cousin to a late Bagehot political fragment, 'The Chances for a Long Conservative Regime in England'.[8]

II: A Conservative Victory

By St John-Stevas's count Bagehot makes two ventures into what much later (1949 is the first usage recorded by the *OED*) comes to be called psephology. The first appears in *The Economist* of 1 January 1874.[9] It analyses and mildly laments some unfavourable (for the Liberals) by-election results. Bagehot's fear is that a malaise may creep over the (expanded) electorate and that, 'A generation of sanguine innovators is succeeded by one of languid indifferentists'.[10] Behind this elegant phraseology is the familiar spectacle of Bagehot having his political cake and eating it. At one turn (*The English Constitution*) he lauds indifferent deference, at the next he abhors indifference as a political course. Languid indifferentists are, one must assume, perfectly in order so long as they vote Liberal and leave the sanguine innovators to get on with governing. At this juncture Bagehot did not foresee electoral catastrophe for the Liberals. In fact defeat was just around the corner. Gladstone's cabinet fell to bickering and Gladstone called a general election which was held between 31 January and 17 February 1874. The outcome was the first Conservative majority in the House of

[8] 'The Chances for a Long Conservative Regime in England', *Collected Works*, VII, pp. 225-240.
[9] Bagehot, 'The Results of Recent Elections', *Collected Works*, vol. vii, 192-197.
[10] Ibid., p. 195.

Commons since 1841. Gladstone blamed his unpopular Licensing Acts and colourfully complained that, 'I have no doubt what is the principal [reason for defeat]. We have been borne down in a torrent of gin and beer'.[11]

Bagehot's other psephological effort is 'The Chances for a Long Conservative Regime in England'. It is an incomplete article, found amongst Bagehot's papers at his death in 1877 and it reacts to that Liberal defeat in 1874. Published posthumously (with a brief editorial speculation on how the article was to have been concluded), the fragment (a substantial one at seven thousand words) appeared in the *Fortnightly Review* on 1 December 1878. It is telling. On its face it shouts Bagehot's preference for a government of moderate liberalism, but I suggest that its abandonment by the author actually signals the truth that his instincts are equally those of a cheerful but moderately animated conservative. Arguably it was this realisation that led Bagehot to abandon the article and we should in that spirit treat Bagehot as feeling uneasy with the descent into Liberal partisanship that the fragment signalled. The article was, for Bagehot, uncomfortably close to adamantine party politics and it is legitimate to speculate that Bagehot disliked his own sectarian tone. The strains on the author can be detected as the article contends with itself. For example, Bagehot maintains his antipathy to the victorious Disraeli: 'a novelist who is near to seventy – who hates detail, and who knows no detail'.[12] Yet later in the very same paragraph Disraeli is grudgingly praised for possessing the same political sense that Bagehot so cherishes in his own soft left:

> It is said that if it were not for his influence this Cabinet would not try to adapt itself to the world which it inherits from the Liberals, but that more or less it would try to return to the past, and to remake an unmade world.[13]

The refusal to acknowledge the slow-shifting tectonic plates of democracy is what distresses Bagehot about a certain type of Conservative. In the final analysis he feels the over-animated absurdities of the left are more

[11] Quoted in Tony Little, 'A torrent of gin and beer: the election defeat in 1874' in *Liberal History*, online at https://liberalhistory.org.uk/history/a-torrent-of-gin-and-beer-the-election-defeat-in-1874/ [accessed 5 March 2022].
[12] 'The Chances for a Long Conservative Regime in England', (op. cit.) p. 236.
[13] Ibid., p. 236.

tolerable/controllable. Bagehot is at his most charming when not sectarian and he perhaps knows that of himself. Perversely it is when he is proselytizing for animated moderation that Bagehot is also at his most frustrating – minting a telling term and, in thrall to his own acuity, wandering away from the point and leaving us to determine for ourselves a political truth. We should not complain. Bagehot's very readability imprints his charm on politics. He was a royalist for pragmatic reasons but no sycophant; a low-church conservative but, thanks to his dissenting father, no prig; a self-declared Liberal but no leftist radical. His political journey meandered from the insolent Paris Letters, by way of wry musing on Caesarism, through the metaphysics of *Physics and Politics*, and into the Nirvana of an Age of Discussion. Never was there sustained rancour and this instinct for affability may explain why Bagehot abandoned 'the Chances for a Long Conservative Regime in England'.

No matter the fallibilities and internal contradictions in Bagehot, what he gives us, if we trouble to look for it, is a script for an Age of Discussion. The correct pitch of that script is one of intelligent but not too abrasive agitation- animated moderation indeed. In a play, *Cymbeline*, that designedly ranges around various locations and times, Shakespeare delivers a recipe for that same quality. The key ingredient is deference: the deference that King Cymbeline learns for his own subjects; the deference they re-acquire for him; and, most symbolically, the mutual deference between Rome and Britain. In all the other Roman Plays we encounter fractured political climaxes. A Bagehotian duality is never realised: in *Titus Andronicus* the Goths are within Rome; in *Julius Caesar* there is merely a pause in civil war; in *Antony and Cleopatra* an ascetic emperor rules joylessly; in *Coriolanus* the great warrior has been slain and Rome is subject to an impossible alliance between aristocracy and ill-motivated Tribunes. In all of these instances we should not mistake obeisance born of fear for a deference born of respect. The climax of *Cymbeline* is a different matter – for a time at least (this is after all an imagined ancient Britain which must perforce give way to the quasi-documentary torments of the History Plays) the optimism of the closing lines need not be laced with irony: 'Never was a war did cease, / Ere bloody hands were washed, with such a peace' (5.4.568-569).

For mankind as political animal the climax of *Cymbeline* is more hopeful than those we encounter in the earlier Roman Plays. To get to that hopefulness we have to endure a final act that must tax the play's most ardent defender. Our stamina is rewarded - the compromise underwriting that ending unwraps the political scheme that has gone before. As ever Shakespeare plays a remarkable political hand – subtly downplaying the role of his fictional king while at the same time inserting complimentary allusion to the cherished project of James I – the project of a united Britain. *Cymbeline* reveals itself as an intensely clever play: clever about a liminal Roman moment; clever about a liminal Stuart moment; clever about Victorian politics; clever about twenty-first-century politics.

III: The Full Impact

For Roger Warren the undoubted sprawl of the play, acts as compensatory confirmation:

> [T]hat some sense of sprawl is the price to be paid for the play's range and achievement in creating its own mythical world, and that it needs space and time to unfold and to make its full impact.[14]

Innes goes further and finds justification for the entire Roman project in the untangling of the knotty plots of *Cymbeline*: 'The play therefore offers an opportunity to analyse the various meanings generated by the other Roman Plays in very specific form'.[15] He describes the play's style as 'anamorphic', a designation that plays satisfyingly alongside the critical metaphor of the disappearing point of the picture.[16] This is indeed a play that can range in and out of focus depending upon the position from which we view it. Innes asserts this dizzying quality for each of the Roman Plays but nowhere, he suggests, is it more deliberate than in *Cymbeline*.[17]

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[14] Roger Warren, 'Introduction' to *The Oxford Shakespeare: Cymbeline* (Oxford: OUP, 1998) p. 77.
[15] Innes, *Shakespeare's Roman Plays* (op. cit.) p. 213.
[16] Ibid., p. 211.
[17] Ibid., p. 209.

The theme on which I concentrate is that of political sovereignty and I suggest that the play gives us a lesson in how sovereignty asserts itself within a thickened present. This leads to the conclusion that an initial impression (from which this writer undoubtedly suffered) that *Cymbeline* is a clumsily structured play and thereby unsatisfactory, fails to pay sufficient regard to its intricacies. As we have seen, Callan Davies pinpoints a deliberate self-reflexiveness at work and coins the term 'matter-theatre' as, 'an early modern alternative to the twentieth-century critical term "metatheatre"'.[18] We come to see that the play manages to be 'then' (Augustan Europe), 'then' (Renaissance Europe); 'then' (Jacobean Britain), 'then' (Victorian/Bagehotian Britain), 'now' (as this is written), and infinite other place-holders in history. My assertion is that the whole structure of Davies' 'matter-theatre' is held together by the action of deference.

IV: Rome and Italy

The ostensible time of the play's action is that of the emergent Roman Empire. The Octavius of *Julius Caesar* and of *Antony and Cleopatra* has grandiosely morphed himself into the god-like persona of Caesar Augustus, but we see (in stark contrast to the other Roman Plays where the aristodemocracy is analysed) nothing of any such Roman eminence. What we get is Caius Lucius, a solemn and honourable presence, the general of the Roman army in Britain. He is the only character of substance who exemplifies the qualities of Romanitas which so infuse (for good and ill) the other plays. He speaks only three percent of the play's lines. Contrast this to Iachimo, who speaks four times as much, indeed half as much again as the eponymous king. Iachimo and Caius Lucius may both come from Rome but Iachimo is an unalloyed creature of Renaissance Italy, a signifier of the mixed temporalities of the play. As Huw Griffiths describes it:

> When Leonatus leaves Britain for ancient Rome, he arrives in Renaissance Italy instead. As in contemporary prose fiction, Italy is perceived as a land where the virtuous Englishman may get into all sorts of trouble.[19]

Moreover, in the scene where we first encounter Iachimo (the wager scene, wherein the gullible Posthumus does indeed fall into all sorts of trouble) there

[18] Davies, p. 85.
[19] Huw Griffiths, 'The Geographies of Shakespeare's "Cymbeline"', *English Literary Renaissance*, 34:3 (Autumn 2004), 339-358 (p. 355).

are on stage with him a troupe of minor characters – the Roman Philario, a Frenchman, a Dutchman and a Spaniard. The nameless continentals have presented difficulties for producers – why are they there at all? Innes (seven years before his book, *The Roman Plays*) develops an interesting justification for their presence and, in doing so, prefigures his own later attribution of anamorphism to the play.[20] Innes accepts the play's historical murkiness but concludes that the presence on stage of these various nationalities is a deliberate nod to the competing powers of Renaissance imperialism.[21] This is just one of the concerns that the play pulls in and out of focus.

We begin to see how this challenging play requires effort from its audience. In a close-read examination of the use in the play of the word 'fit', Maurice Hunt steps out of the confines of his deliberately limited critical position and presents, I would suggest, a neat summary of the rewards on offer not merely for his own method of readership but for concentrated reading generally:

> Cryptonymy in a postmodernist manner fits together the parts of this strangely indecorous play. But to do so, playgoers and readers alike […] must expend a significant amount of intellectual effort and ingenuity.[22]

Griffiths extends his ingenuity to a conclusion that, in this play at least, Romanitas can only be achieved in Britain since we only ever detect its operation when it is exercised in Britain (where Caius Lucius utters all his lines). Whenever we stray into Rome itself we encounter Griffiths' 'nation of idlers and philanderers'.[23] This is an inference that would have been pleasing to James I. Bate offers us an intriguing conjecture on James as the possible audience for the play: a self-assessed 'composite version of Cymbeline and Augustus, both a

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[20] Paul Innes, '*Cymbeline* and Empire', *Critical Survey*, 19:2 (2007), 1-18.
[21] Ibid., p. 2.
[22] Maurice Hunt, 'The "Fittings" of *Cymbeline*", *South Central Review*, 16:1 (Spring 1999), 73-87 (p. 84). Also of interest and from the same author is, 'Dismemberment, Corporal Reconstitution, and the Body Politic in *Cymbeline*', *Studies in Philology*, 99:4 (Autumn 2002), 404-431. In this latter article Hunt ventures another close reading of the play and endorses his earlier conclusion that the play merits such close examination. As we will see later in this chapter, Hunt also has much of merit to say about the ultimate political acuity of Cymbeline.
[23] Griffiths, p. 354.

British king and a neo-Roman emperor'.[24] Seen in that light, the emptiness of Cymbeline as a dramatic character makes sense since, 'it would not do to inquire too closely into the monarch's interior life'.[25] We can even see the lack of depth in the drawing of the king as the very embodiment, in Bagehot's terms, of an ideally dignified monarch. Cymbeline's limited deployment of his faculties, merely asking questions and expressing surprise at the answers he finally gets, is not, when seen in these terms, any handicap at all – rather it is dignified and kingly. It is deferential .

V: The Thickened Present of Cymbeline

Although the rudiments of the historical elements of the plot can be found in Holinshed's *Chronicles*, *Cymbeline* is no more a history play than its thematic British cousin *King Lear*. Rather it is pseudo-history mixed with romance – the shreds of the romantic plot themselves traceable to Boccacio's *Decameron. Cymbeline* is a mind-bending play both in geography and temporality. The one effect bleeds into the other – Renaissance Italy's seaminess bumping uneasily against the dignified tones of Caius Lucius. These contrasting atmospheres are suggestive of one land at two different times. What of the other locations for the play? These too are anachronistic. We flit from a Lud (London) that feels decidedly English, to a more British Milford Haven – that location itself loaded with Tudor/Jacobean significance as the port where the eventual Henry VII landed to herald the supposed elevation of England (and with James I's later accession in England to add to his Scottish throne, a projected Great Britain) as the Christian successor to a benighted Rome.

We have in this play, as Harootunian might have it, sediments of Roman historicity, of Renaissance Italian historicity, of Renaissance English historicity, of Renaissance British historicity, all weighing upon its present. But even that wide-ranging analysis does not tell us enough. We have also to consider all the supervening temporal sediments: the present of Walter Bagehot; the present of the writing of this thesis; and (this point is vital for Harootunian) the future as

[24] Bate, *RSC Complete Works*, p. 2243.
[25] Ibid., p. 2243.

part of the proper project of history. What Harootunian argues against is what he terms a dire 'presentism' in the study of history. He uses the term pejoratively.[26] It cannot be overstressed that this is not the literary 'presentism' of Fernie and Grady.[27] Their presentism understands that any view of the past is formed within discourses of the present. Literary presentism prompts the rewarding discovery that *Cymbeline* is artfully unrooted. We are in a thickened present that, inter alia, comments: upon a vital moment in Roman history; upon an England, both at the time of Augustus and at the time of James I, wrestling with the prospect of a Great Britain; upon Bagehot's strange hybrid Victorian semi-utopia; upon our very own moment.

VI: Liminal Moments

Linda Woodbridge delivers a telling interrogation of the Augustan moment in the context not only of *Cymbeline*, but also in those of *Lucrece* and *Titus Andronicus*.[28] She describes Rome as the locus of three historical phases, each considered in the light of anthropological theories that treat the human body as an image of society.[29] Firstly, 'Rome the implacable invader, thrusting its masculine armies deep into the virgin territory of the Goths'; secondly, 'Rome the invaded, the sacked city, ravaged by Goths'.[30] The crucial third phase is that which mediated between these crude binaries:

> [A] historical "time-out" like calendric intercalary days, was a third Rome, Augustus Caesar's, a Rome that had finished its invasions, acquired its colonies, and was enjoying its empire in peace, a Rome yet unsacked.[31]

Woodbridge terms this a 'liminal zone of history' and asserts that it, 'fascinated Renaissance England partly because it spun from it images of itself'.[32] This is an ancient Rome that sits slightly ahead of the position it occupies at the climax of *Antony and Cleopatra*, in a fleeting time of constitutional sagacity. Even as we see

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[26]Harootunian, p. 474.
[27] Fernie, p. 170.
[28] Linda Woodbridge, 'Palisading the Elizabethan Body Politic', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 33:3 (Fall, 1991), 327-354.
[29] Ibid., p. 327.
[30] Ibid., p. 329.
[31] Ibid., p. 329.
[32] Ibid., p. 329.

it in *Cymbeline*, the Rome in question is not perfect. We see the virtues of Rome only when they are deployed in Britain and the sub-text (one gratifying to the Augustan figure of James I) is that a new and better Pax Romana is possible only in a blessed Britain. The Augustan Rome we encounter in *Cymbeline* may produce the unfailingly dignified Caius Lucius but when we are in Rome itself all is unseemly. The Rome of these scenes is not Rome at all but a pastiche of some Italianate Renaissance city state. Iachimo is Italian rather than Roman.

There is no suggestion that this liminal golden age of the Roman empire will persist – in fact history tells the audience that Rome will eventually be sacked. In all of this *Cymbeline* emerges as a designedly optimistic text, one which pulls off the unlikely triumph of allowing a spectating King James to see himself as Bate's composite version of Cymbeline and Augustus. But we must remember that it is the changed King Cymbeline of the play's final lines with whom James might be persuaded to identify, rather than the careworn figure who populates the earlier action. No matter, we see at work here the mingling of temporalities which is a key to the play's thickened present. As we move forward to Bagehot's particular moment, the type of wise deference that I impute to Cymbeline is precisely the dignified behaviour Bagehot wanted from his monarch. Casting forward to our own contemporaneity with these historical and dramatic figures we can ponder the clear affection of subjects for an aged monarch demonstrated in the Platinum Jubilee celebrations of 2022, even as that monarch's first minister was greeted by the jeers of patriotic crowds outside St. Paul's Cathedral. I understand Woodbridge's 'liminal zone of history' in these terms: 'being on a boundary or threshold especially by being transitional or intermediate between two states, situations etc.'.[33] There is a clear confluence here with my own earlier reliance on the metaphor of Coriolanus standing astride the rift in shifting tectonic plates of history. The moments of fissure (the liminal moments) carry the greatest potential for the dramatist. In my conception of history these moments are littered throughout human history and a miniscule tear in the fabric of political progress is sustained over the different temporalities of a thickened present. As Harootunian explains, the difficult conceptual step is to distinguish this

[33] *OED*, *adj*. 2.

understanding of history from the more easily grasped (but in fact illusory) suggestion of 'the installation of a new time marked by a boundless present'.[34] This is the key point where Harootunian departs from Fukuyama's acolytes and their 'perennial present'.[35] None of the other Roman Plays tackles this fractured theoretical landscape as thoroughly as *Cymbeline*. The play has the resonance of a great poet thinking aloud. Arthur C. Kirsch comments on the self-conscious and 'distinctive idea of theatre' cultivated by the new private playhouses (principally the Blackfriars Theatre, in which Shakespeare was a shareholder) and places *Cymbeline* firmly in that scheme.[36] Kirsch describes the play as 'the least harmonious' of Shakespeare's late plays and ventures the opinion that, 'The salient fact about *Cymbeline*, to begin with is that it is resistant to any coherent interpretation'.[37] The play's effect, Kirsch asserts, is kaleidoscopic (as with the blended contemporaneities in the play) and suggests a mature and financially secure playwright experimenting to his heart's content. Kirsch defends this characterisation of the play on the grounds that:

> Most of the features of the play which cause trouble for critics are precisely those which are most typical of self-conscious tragicomic dramaturgy.[38]

Kermode makes an appealing suggestion that the play sometimes overdoes itself, serving up puzzles (the garment-body plot for example) as posers for a new self-satisfied audience who might revel in such things, rather as with a 'conceited poem'.[39] Kermode offers a nice distinction between this type of coterie drama and the blood and thunder of *Titus Andronicus*: 'One would not have tempted the audience who turned up for *Titus Andronicus* with teasers of this sort'.[40] *Cymbeline* puts before us a multifarious practical politics, one springing out of multiplicity and an animated centrist inclination – call it cavalier conservatism or moderate liberalism, it matters not. This is no political fudge but an attitude born

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[34] Harootunian, p. 471.
[35] Ibid., p. 471.
[36] Arthur C. Kirsch, '*Cymbeline* and Coterie Dramaturgy', *ELH*, 34:3 (1967), 285-306 (pp. 285-286).
[37] Ibid., p. 294.
[38] Ibid., p. 295.
[39] Kermode, p. 268.
[40] Ibid., p. 268.

of a sophisticated and profoundly human instinct. Even as he seeks in the canon for traces of latent republicanism, Andrew Hadfield properly concedes that nothing is simple, rather it is 'messy and more interesting'.[41] This observation comes in Hadfield's final chapter. It perhaps says much for the 'messy' and 'interesting' body of Shakespeare's work that Hadfield comes, to my mind, closest to a convincing summary of Shakespeare's 'republicanism' (and Bagehot's as it happens, though he does not achieve a mention in Hadfield's text) at the very outset of his opening chapter:

> If republicanism stood for any clear and coherent doctrine in late sixteenth-century England, it was the intellectual conviction that it was necessary to control the powers of the crown by establishing a means of ensuring that a coterie of virtuous advisers and servants would always have the constitutional right to counsel the monarch.[42]

Underlying this shifting (as administrative power flows away from the crown) balance of competencies is the desirability of the very duality that Bagehot asserts in his dignified/efficient dichotomy. In *Cymbeline* this elusive political truth is wrapped up in an enigmatic fable.

VII: Fabled *Cymbeline*[43]

At this the conclusion of my own discrete project, my attempt at a multi-faceted criticism locates itself in a presentist mood. *Cymbeline* suggests itself as the most intricate of the Roman Plays in its tapestry of allusion and meaning. It marks, 'the sheer newness of his work'.[44] Gibbons, in his book, references the entire canon but it is instructive that the first play he considers in detail in his comprehensive argument for multiplicity is *Cymbeline*. Gibbons unpacks many of the possible complexities of the play, stressing that 'Shakespeare presents his own age as itself a historical phase: this is an inevitable consequence of the design of *Cymbeline*'.[45] This observation augments the argument for mixed temporalities in the play. If we were to take a literal approach to our reception of the play, we

[41] Hadfield, p. 230.
[42] Ibid., p. 17.
[43] 'Fabled *Cymbeline*' is the title of chapter 2 in Gibbons' *Shakespeare and Multiplicity* (op. cit.).
[44] Gibbons, p. xi.
[45] Ibid., p. 19.

would concern ourselves only with an imaginary Augustan-era Britain. Gibbons' contention is that the play's design means that a larger portion of history is open to us than merely the time of the action.[46] What Gibbons does not do (as distinct from Hawkes, to whom I will turn) is to consider the future temporalities, albeit he makes the leap to acknowledging that history, as conceived by the text, is not a finished item.

There is support from Gibbons for the critical commonplace that the play unpacks itself too uncertainly to be as satisfying on stage as the other Roman Plays. For him the uncertainty as to what exactly we are watching is the by-product of the play's wilful multifariousness.[47] Wordiness is part of the deliberate provocation. Gibbons suggests just this as he posits Shakespeare's use of a bastard form (tragicomedy) as a knowing response to the fusty classicism advocated by Sidney's 'An Apology for Poetry'.[48] Gibbons likes to imagine the unrestrained Shakespeare kicking over the traces of literary theory:

> Sidney's mocking description of 'mongrel' tragi-comedy may be suspected as the root provocation which Shakespeare eventually answered with *The Winter's Tale* and *Cymbeline*.[49]

Gibbons is reluctant to attach any simple linear development in style or method to Shakespeare across his career although he concedes an expanding gift of characterisation in the second half of the playwright's works.[50] Shakespeare's characters, he suggests, do not react as they do because the plot demands it but because they are uncannily human. Gibbons encapsulates why we must acknowledge multiplicity in the plays – the multiplicity of themes, psychologies and behaviours is the spark for a form of myriad-minded Shakespeare study carried out two decades before Hugh Grady calls for it:

> In this approach to the plays the concept of the artist's critical intelligence remains useful; it emphasises the play of mind as an aesthetic pleasure in

[46] Ibid., p. 24.
[47] Ibid., p.23.
[48] Sir Philip Sidney, 'An Apology for Poetry' appears in *A Defence of Poesie and* Poems (ed. Henry Morley) (London, 1891). Sidney's text was written in 1581 but not published until 1595.
[49] Gibbons, p. 204.
[50] Ibid., p. 209.

> itself, and as a source of Shakespeare's power to keep generating new interpretations, and new life in the theatre.[51]

Gibbons' approach is stimulating and sends us back to *Cymbeline* almost as if to give this difficult play a second (third etc.) chance to act upon us.

I next bring into play Terence Hawkes' brilliant 2002 chapter on *Cymbeline* in his *Shakespeare in the Present*. This speaks to the present of the chapter's composition as well as to the multiple presents of the play. Hawkes is adamant: 'Facts do not speak for themselves. Nor do texts'.[52] This school of criticism is liberating, if not without its risks. Hawkes is alive to those risks and acknowledges that though he rails against a deterministic historicism, he is just as sceptical of lazy modernity:

> Of course, if the alternative is to deal with plays in blissful ignorance of their historical context, to impose on them, as many teachers unthinkingly seem to do, some kind of absurd contemporaneity with ourselves, usually justified by windy rhetoric about the Bard's 'universality', then perhaps historical specificity of some sort is an acceptable antidote.[53]

Hawkes adroitly steers through the methodological minefield. We have already encountered a deemed liminality of time in the play – now we are invited by Hawkes to consider the liminality of a place, Milford Haven, or, to give it (as Hawkes provokingly does) its Welsh name, Aberdaugleddyf.

VIII: Aberdaugleddyf

Hawkes delights in explaining that the translation of the Welsh name itself suggests liminality, referring to two entities, confluence (*aber*) of two (*dau*) streams. The English name on the other hand, 'like many things English […] has a slightly dodgy air'.[54] An atmosphere of disjointedness underpins the entire play and renders the pacific ending, for Hawkes, potentially ludicrous. He cites Cymbeline's diplomatic *volte face* embodied in the last seven lines of the play and ponders that the associated events are potentially incomprehensible in the

[51] Ibid., p. 211.
[52] Hawkes, *Shakespeare in the Present* (op. cit.), p. 3.
[53] Ibid., p. 1
[54] Ibid., p. 48.

context of all the liminality that has gone before. He quotes an unnamed critic of the ending:

> Unsurprisingly , another critic, no less forceful, if slightly more polite than the first, finds 'much incongruity', even 'unresisting imbecility', in the piece. It is hard to imagine, on the face of it, that many would want to disagree with such a judgement.[55]

Hawkes resiles from full association with such easy denigration of the play's ending. He concedes that the abrupt reconciliation between Rome and Britain does at least signal that, 'An updated *pax Romana* clearly burgeons'.[56] The end of the play may indeed be clumsy, Cymbeline coming to his regal senses only in the final pages, but those last seven lines do at least pull things together:

> Set we forward: let
> A Roman and a British ensign wave
> Friendly together: so through Lud's town march.
> And in the temple of great Jupiter
> Our peace we'll ratify, seal it with feasts.
> Set on there! Never was a war did cease,
> Ere bloody hands were washed, with such a peace. (5.4.563-569)

For a more generous treatment of the culmination of the play we can turn to Maurice Hunt.. Hunt manages to take Cymbeline's part in the submission of tribute to Rome:

> Cymbeline's clear-headed, humble decision is actually part of Christian rather than Jovian Providence, for it makes possible the Pax Augustus, the condition that all the world be at peace necessary for the birth of Christ.[57]

Applying a Bagehotian sense to the play, this ending, no matter how rushed, does play to a theme of Cymbeline learning the lesson of duality in sovereignty and showing deference to the political realities. I suggest the correct stance to take on the climax of the play is that it is indeed hurried but that it serves its instructive purpose. It leaves us, at the conclusion of a play that poses questions throughout, with one final clue to unravel as we muse on the king's new-found assertiveness and his kingly display of deference.

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[55] Ibid., p. 47.
[56] Ibid., p. 55.
[57] Maurice Hunt, 'Dismemberment, Corporal Reconstitution, and the Body Politic in *Cymbeline*', *Studies in Philology*, 99:4 (Autumn 2002), pp. 404-431 (p. 428).

Having established the liminality that underscores the play, Hawkes turns his attention to his presentist task:

> As has been said, presentist criticism's involvement with the text is precisely in terms of those dimensions of the present that most clearly connect with the events of the past.[58]

This pithy agenda for presentism triggers Hawkes' diversion into the devolution promises made in the 1997 Labour Party manifesto. Hawkes asserts that the then current political issues make manifest a truth that even the contrived (a spectacle of 'agile opportunism') ending of the play cannot disguise, specifically that England and Wales are and always have been two, not one.[59] Hawkes outlines Shakespeare's frequent mining of this 'truth' in the History Plays, in *Macbeth*, *King Lear,* and in *Cymbeline*. Hawkes is more than a mite over-certain when he boldly states that:

> The commitments to devolution made in 1997, and realised in 1999, also require that the 'Great Britain' project, chronicled and reinforced throughout Shakespeare's plays, must henceforth be seen, not just as a beginning, but as the inception of an enterprise that has now, after four hundred years, reached its conclusion.[60]

This assertion rather ignores the often silent but habituated preferences for unionism in Wales, Scotland and Ulster. Even at a distance of only twenty years one suspects that Hawkes would be surprised to find a post-Brexit England perhaps more angrily disposed in favour of devolution than its Celtic counterparts and a political horizon clouded to the point of unnavigability by another and more massive devolution – that of the United Kingdom from the European Union. Just as Hawkes puts *Cymbeline* to stimulating use in the presentist context of the 1999 devolutions, so I can happily argue that the play remains fair game for a presentist critic, most particularly one who accepts the notion of a thickened present. Fair game as well would be the posing of the question, 'How do these newly devolved jurisdictions stand up to the Bagehot test of constitutional solidity?' The first four of the Roman Plays, as we have seen, show us the tragic consequences where no division of the efficient and the dignified is made. The plays also highlight the extreme improbability of these

[58] Hawkes, p. 61.
[59] Ibid., p. 60.
[60] Ibid., p. 62.

two qualities being married in one sovereign ruler. *Cymbeline* fortifies my chosen critical method, that is to say one that accepts with reservations the evolutionary tenets of Bagehot's *Physics and Politics*. My method further accepts Harootunian's complex description of contemporaneous sediments of time and uses that acceptance to liberate itself from the potential prison of historicism and the inanities of trendy presentism.

IX: The King's Deference

In *The English Constitution* Bagehot returns time and again to deference as the underpinning of the efficient secret he thinks himself to have discovered in the constitution. A fault in his analysis is that he concentrates largely on the deference shown by the ruled to the constitutional apparatus: 'In fact, the mass of the English people yield a deference to something else than to their rulers. They defer to what we may call the *theatrical show* of society'.[61] I want to suggest that this deference has to be a reciprocal element of sovereignty. This is perhaps implicit in Bagehot's scheme because a *de facto* dignified sovereign operating in tandem with an efficient executive surely cannot help but be aware of the limit of his or her actual power. Bagehot does acknowledge this deference (or perhaps we might term it humility) when he considers the allegedly Glorious Revolution of 1688. Here Bagehot is most definitely no cavalier. The cavaliers of that age were sustained by a belief that, 'the monarchy was a divine institution'.[62] Bagehot thinks no such thing and genially records that the affection (or deference) attaching to James II ('the Lord's anointed') soon dissipated and by the time Queen Anne had succeeded to the throne, 'the old sacred sentiment began to cohere about her'.[63] That was sufficient for the whole constitutional super-structure to survive the Act of Settlement in 1701. The English constitutional system may be a resolutely man-made apparatus but it is one that has been successfully sustained by deference and obedience (perhaps out of a wise fear of the alternatives) to a notion of dignity.

[61] Bagehot, *The English Constitution*, in *Collected Works*, vol. v, p. 378.
[62] Ibid., p. 230.
[63] Ibid., pp. 230-231.

The notion of deference plays into the political scheme in *Cymbeline*. Cymbeline should expect deference but the king we see at the outset of the play, indeed for the substantial majority of the play (until that late *volte-face* so disturbing to Hawkes), has surrendered his powers to the point that he is, almost throughout, a blank canvas. In his meeting with Lucius, Cymbeline cedes centre-stage first to the idiotic Cloten and then to his own scheming wife. Cloten's words in Act 3 Scene 1 attract Hawkes' attention. They are superficially compelling:

> There be many Caesars
> Ere such another Julius: Britain's
> A world by itself, and we will nothing pay
> For wearing our own noses. (3.1.13-16)

It is not hard to imagine a Brexiteer heedlessly quoting these words, perhaps tired of reaching for John of Gaunt from *Richard II*. Any such appropriation of Cloten's words has to ignore that they are put in the mouth of a dolt whose ultimate reward is to have his head severed in combat. A proper reading of the play will also note that even the somnambulant Cymbeline knows enough to cut Cloten off, albeit to surrender the diplomatic floor to his faithless wife – 'Son, let your mother end' (3.1.40).

As we move forward to Act 3 Scene 5, the diplomatic dialogue with Lucius is reconvened. Tellingly Cymbeline still has at his shoulder his queen and her vainglorious son. He delivers a rejoinder to Lucius that merits some unpacking:

> Our subjects, sir,
> Will not endure his yoke; and for ourself
> To show less sovereignty than they, must needs
> Appear unkinglike. (3.5.6-9)

My own attitude to these lines has undergone an evolution. It is an arresting line in the context of this thesis, concerned as it is, with the durability of sovereignty. It is the only occurrence of the word in the play. At the point where it occurs, Cymbeline has appeared to the audience as no more than a cypher acted upon by the malign influence of his wife – he has alienated his natural daughter and banished her husband. Now he comments on what he deems kinglike. The lines trip from the tongue but, as with so much in this play, we are set a puzzle. How can a king possibly show less sovereignty than his subjects? Once the ease of the

poetry is surmounted these words sound suspiciously like those ascribed (apocryphally it would seem) to Alexandre Auguste Ledru-Rollin and much favoured by Bernard Levin when describing Harold Wilson's style of leadership: 'I must follow them, for I am their leader'. Accountability, or the illusion of it, is a double-edged sword. In an ultra-modern context (that of the aftermath of the Brexit referendum) Albert Weale emphasises the paradox of a perceived mandate:

> The paradox of a referendum is that […] it increases executive power, as the government seeks the freedom from Parliament and legal constraint in order to implement what it sees as the popular will.[64]

I would confess that my own initial reaction to these lines was one of amused disdain – Cymbeline elegantly passing the buck to his subjects under the malign influence of his late acquired family. A trace of that sentiment remains in my amended view, but I will offer a different perspective, one that perhaps helps to foreshadow the bizarre ending of the play. I return to my previous suggestion that one of the difficulties in this most self-conscious play is that we are witnessing characters (and indeed a dramatist) thinking aloud. If we listen to these lines of Cymbeline in that spirit and project forward to the play's climax, what we are seeing is a king learning that his dignity depends on deference to the man-made deity that is political sovereignty, and upon a degree of humility before his subjects. That this process is betrayed in a line justifying a position that the revivified Cymbeline will abandon at the play's conclusion is merely another example of multiplicity deployed in the text.

Under repeated consideration *Cymbeline* unfurls itself as an unlikely (due to its later authorship) primer for the other Roman Plays . Taught the intricate lessons of *Cymbeline*, we can better sympathise with the bloody mess that the protagonists make of the Rome of *Titus Andronicus*. We can perceive better than Brutus the inadequacy of a plot to assassinate Caesar that makes no plan for accommodating the resistant portion of the aristodemocracy. We can sympathise yet more with Enobarbus as he is sacrificed to the plain inadequacy of that

[64] Albert Weale, 'Brexit and the improvised constitution', in *Brexit and Beyond* ed. by Benjamin Martill and Uta Staiger (London: UCL Press, 2018), 28-36 (p. 36).

aristodemocracy. We can discern the hopelessness of Coriolanus as he becomes the sacrificial lamb of liminality.

X: Primed by Cymbeline

As we, primed by *Cymbeline*, open up the Roman Plays to a thickened present we return to Bagehot. Cavalier conservative, centrist liberal, it hardly matters which. If we grant Bagehot a thickened present of his own it makes sense to concede that he might accommodate himself within the ranks of that almost forgotten species, the One Nation Tory:

> Toryism of the twentieth century, the Conservatism of Baldwin and Chamberlain, of Macmillan and Heath, of which Disraeli was the founder - one of the few contemporary facts of importance which Bagehot failed to perceive.[65]

What of Shakespeare? I cannot be as impertinent as Bagehot who appropriated Shakespeare as an honorary Victorian man of affairs. Shakespeare is altogether too complex a figure to be pigeon-holed in this way but I will venture that when it came to politics his analytical mind arrived at a useful truth two-and-a-half centuries before Bagehot. That truth is that sovereignty is and has to be divisible. Bagehot had a smug belief that progress beyond his comfortable Victorian idyll and its Age of Discussion was unlikely. I like to imagine Shakespeare as a better man – a pragmatist and, yes, a man of substance but one who believed that though the world may not be perfectible it is manifestly open to improvement and that deference from low to high, from high to low, deference before the law, carries its own existential reward. In the Roman Plays he gives us four rip-roaring entertainments encompassing blood, guts, love, lust and life, and a fifth that asks us to humour its author by paying attention to his ruminations, and rewards our attention in that matter by opening up new avenues to our better enjoyment of the canon. The conclusion that Hunt brings to his consideration of *Cymbeline* is apt for the entire Roman corpus:

> By implying in *Cymbeline* that success comes to the monarch who keeps a tight grip on his passions and the doings of his court, one who also practises Christian-like self-sacrifice, Shakespeare shows James and his

[65] St John-Stevas, in *Collected Works,* vol. v, p. 39.

> subjects the keys to building an inclusive, enlightened body politic out of fragmented and fragmentary bodies.[66]

The first footnote in Chapter One of this thesis referenced Grady's call for 'a myriad-minded Shakespeare Studies'. At my conclusion, Grady (this time as a co-editor) brings us full-circle. In the introductory chapter to *Shakespeare and the Urgency of Now*, Grady and Cary DiPietro offer an argument for a discipline that conducts a dialogue between the past of Shakespearean texts and the intervening sediments of critical method.[67] Their ambition is passionately expressed:

> We hope that by forging analogies between the felt immediacies of our world now and the historically situated texts of Shakespeare's plays, the essays presented here will help to forestall a deradicalized historicism by emphasizing, rather than the *facts* of the past, the ever-shifting nature of historical context, and rather than the inevitable inescapability of our presentness, its necessity.[68]

The 'felt immediacies of our world now', incorporate all manner of political wildness. If we view these events through the lens of the Roman Plays, we perceive that sovereignty is best exercised when divided, the alternative being a tragic fracture. By adding Bagehot's ruminations to the lens we better refract this political truth.

The path through the five plays is littered with fractured lives, sundered by failures of deference. Only at *Cymbeline's* unlikely climax do we encounter a redeeming hint of regal self-restraint. Shakespeare is our contemporary. Bagehot is our contemporary. As Grady and DiPietro urge, we must seek 'new understandings of our own world and its urgently felt crises'.[69] The tools for that search are scattered throughout our thickened present and my aim has been to describe the utility of Bagehot's political theories within that present. However,

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[66] Hunt, 'The "Fittings" of *Cymbeline*', p. 431.
[67] Cary DiPietro and Hugh Grady (eds.) *Shakespeare and the Urgency of Now: Criticism and Theory in the 21st Century* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).
[68] Ibid., p. 6.
[69] Ibid., p. 7.

Bagehot is just one gatekeeper to the fields of study. I will conclude by summarising where we might take matters further.

I commenced this thesis with an inkling that Bagehot needed to be rescued from a too-easy redundancy. He is, in my estimation, our critical contemporary – a flawed and over-expressive contemporary, but contemporary nonetheless. I judged (and remain content on this point) that the Roman Plays comprise a manageable yet meaningful sub-genre in the Shakespeare canon and that they afford a sturdy platform from which to launch a psycho-political analysis. As I now complete my survey of the bare politics of these plays, I have become conscious that there are copious possibilities for further Shakespearean deployments of Bagehot's duomania. What, for example, might one make of a king, Lear, who abdicates his throne with no proper thought as to what will follow? Or what of a nobleman like Macbeth who adopts a ruthless efficiency and utterly abandons dignity? What, as well, might we make of a motley collection of English monarchs in the History Plays? Even Henry V, ostensibly the most successful of Shakespeare's kings, vacates the stage and abandons its audience to a blunt epilogue that reminds them of the misery that will follow this outwardly perfect kingship:

> Henry the Sixth, in infant bands crowned King
> Of France and England, did this king succeed,
> Whose state so many had the managing,
> That they lost France and made his England bleed. (*HV, Epilogue,* 9 -12)

Even in this brief contemplation of *Henry V* we are shunted forcibly back to confront Heylyn's bleak denigration of ideal rulers -better they never die or had never been born.[70]

The critical by-ways suggested in the previous paragraph might add to the preliminary work carried out by this thesis – Bagehot is revived and we can afford him a role in mining Shakespeare as he (Shakespeare) leaves traces in multiple sediments of Harootunian's thickened present. There is more however - a larger and more rewarding exercise will be one that ponders more fully the

[70] Cited at note 14 in Chapter Five, (p. 117 of this thesis).

retreat of dignity (and its concomitant denuding of deference) in modern governance. In this way, political science and Shakespeare studies can mesh beneficially. For example the United Kingdom faces its second post-Elizabethan age with a senior member of the royal family enmeshed in tawdry litigation. Consider also, the United States (a country that has instinctively stood to metaphorical attention for its constitution and its poster-child, the Supreme Court), now with a hopelessly politicised Supreme Court and a citizenry split down the middle, each side certain only of its contempt for the other. These are profoundly Shakespearean times.

Yet more exciting (and more explicitly in tune with much modern criticism) is the prospect of work that can yoke this Bagehotian inflection to a post-colonial attitude. Consider, half of the world's democracies (and a majority of those formerly in the British Empire) operate bicameral legislatures.[71] For Bagehot, the House of Lords flagged dignity, the Commons efficiency. How does this bicameral model carry-over to new-minted states?[72] Perhaps in understanding Shakespeare's knowing 'othering' of Aaron and Othello, we should open ourselves to detecting the seed of adaptability that may ultimately render Bagehot's dichotomy truly redundant. For Jeanette S. White the kernel of this truth is, if we condition ourselves to look for it, already to be found writ large in the first of the Roman Plays:

> As Othello's literary ancestor, Aaron, Shakespeare's trailblazing Moor, leaps boldly into the consciousness of the Elizabethans, daring to assert that black is a hue like any other, no more base than white.[73]

I hope that I have rescued Bagehot for critical use. His conclusions, to my mind, are still apt in contemporary theorising of sovereignty. Bagehot saw nothing better (and nor, we should note, does a modern liberal like Snyder) than an Age of Discussion tempered by the quiver of balance. Yet modes of government are

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[71] For an abundance of data on the world's parliaments and governing structures see Parline at https://www.ipu.org/

[72] Egglestone (cited at note 51 in Chapter Four above) does venture an analysis of post-colonial government in Jamaica but does not apply the lens of Bagehot. Rather her concentration is on a valorisation of Cassius.

[73] Jeanette S. White, '"Is black so base a hue?": Shakespeare's Aaron and the Politics and Poetics of Race', *CLA Journal*, 40:3 (March 1997), 336-366 (p. 366).

man-made and underpinned by intellectual abstraction. We should not reject out of hand the possibility that better answers are possible and that descriptions such as Bagehot's that so ably capture the nature of institutions, might have a more radical role as we plough forward to reach beyond what has served for centuries. Nedelsky (cited in Chapter Five when discussing the jurisprudence of *Coriolanus*) challenges us to become inseparable from all other beings in the universe.[74] It is not necessary to abandon Bagehot's taxonomy simply because we do not share his scepticism.

The future (as Harootunian reminds us) is part of history. Possibly we may discover, with Shakespeare's unparalleled insight, that there is a form of sovereignty beyond Bagehot's contemplation and yet still within an Age of Discussion. For now and for my own deliberately limited purpose, Bagehot's writing is an analytical tool we can profitably use. Within the confines of his own tragedy, Coriolanus is wrong when he asserts that for him, 'There is a world elsewhere' (3.3.159). We are more fortunate. Bagehot gives us the skills to understand where we have got to. Shakespeare may help unlock the future.

[74] Nedelsky, p. 183.

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