

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: FEIGNING A COMMONWEALTH: THE ROMAN
PLAY AND PUBLIC DISCOURSE IN ENGLAND,
1594-1660

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Of some eighty Roman history plays written or performed in English between 1550 and 1635, forty-three are extant. The task of studying the political resonances of the whole corpus (rather than focusing solely on Shakespeare and Jonson's Roman plays) remains to be undertaken. This dissertation begins that task with a selection from the fourteen to sixteen extant plays about the Roman Republic, focusing on three key moments: the founding of the Republic, its death throes, and the reign of Tiberius, when Romans looked back nostalgically to the Republic. The five plays examined here presented a model of republican political culture that contrasted with the monarchical ideology of late-sixteenth- and early-seventeenth-century England. The spirit, principles, and actions of the republican heroes who inhabited the stage may well have inspired audience members, both those whose reading of classical texts had familiarized them with the historical events presented on stage and those encountering that history for the first time.

Three of these plays—Heywood’s *The Rape of Lucrece*, Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*, and Jonson’s *Sejanus His Fall*—were composed for performance at public theaters and remained popular well into the seventeenth century. Kyd’s *Cornelia* and Chapman’s *Caesar and Pompey* were published but never performed. All five plays share a sense that a republican form of government, more than any other, promotes nobility of character and enables human beings to live fulfilling lives. They also share a complex vocabulary that centers on the association of tyranny with slavery: the tyrant is a ruler who treats his subjects as a master treats his slaves. While only one play, *Cornelia*, appears to condemn monarchy outright (as a violation of the Roman constitution), all appear to suggest that monarchy can easily slide into tyranny.

In the early seventeenth century, these plays, and the history they presented, would have called to mind contemporary concerns about the corrosive effects of royal favoritism and the growth of the royal prerogative. More radical perspectives, closer to the Roman republican model, would emerge as differences between the king and Parliament escalated into open conflict in mid-century.

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by

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Introduction. Political Discourse, History, and Drama

This study explores the ways in which Elizabethan and early Stuart drama encoded, transmitted, and perpetuated a model of republican political culture within a deeply monarchic society. Plays about the Roman Republic presented a polity with a constitution and ethic very different from those of England and Scotland; moreover, they generally portrayed that republic in a favorable light. The spirit, principles, and actions of the republican heroes who inhabited the stage may well have inspired the audience, both those whose reading of classical texts had familiarized them with the historical events presented on stage and those encountering that history for the first time. Through drama, the language and stories of Roman republican history became available to all, and the sense of their relevance to contemporary events would increase as conflicts between king and Parliament escalated. Here, I examine the resonance of three moments in Roman history—the founding of the Republic, its death throes, and the nostalgia for the Republic in the reign of Tiberius—in five of the sixteen extant British plays about the Roman Republic that were performed or published between 1559 and 1660. I consider both the playwrights' interpretations and the uses of the episodes they present in political discourse from the late Elizabethan era through the Commonwealth and Protectorate.

I

For much of the twentieth century, literary scholars imagined Elizabethan and early Stuart England as a realm of harmonious consensus. That view, first challenged in the 1980s, has by now receded far into the shadows. In the second decade of the twenty-first century, it seems obvious that if all English men and women had believed in the

rightness and naturalness of hierarchy, as articulated in Ulysses' famous speech on "degree" in *Troilus and Cressida* (I.iii.81-124), and in the wickedness of resistance, as expressed in the *Homily against Disobedience and Wilfull Rebellion*, these legitimations of the status quo need not have been written. In fact, sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England had its share of domestic dissent, crime, conspiracies, and rebellion, as well as threats from abroad. It was also alive with discussion and debate. At markets, shops, and taverns, in Paul's Walk, the Exchange, and Westminster Hall, people inquired after, and discussed, the news (Fox 340-52; Cust 70). Orally and in print, they debated issues such as church government and ritual, Queen Elizabeth's suitors and succession, intervention in foreign wars to aid the Protestant cause, and union between England and Scotland. They criticized and mocked the Pope, Puritans, Anabaptists, Arminians, courtiers, and foreigners; they praised popular heroes, such as John Felton, the assassin of the Duke of Buckingham. They set forth their ideas and opinions in private letters and diaries, commonplace books, histories, satires, poetry, advice books for princes, works of political philosophy and description, law books, controversial tracts, sermons, petitions, and parliamentary speeches and acts.

Some issues, of course, lay outside the sphere of permitted discourse. Direct challenges to the established order and the higher authorities—the monarchy and the Church of England, the monarch and the bishops—were not tolerated. But other forms of government that had existed in the past, or that existed elsewhere in the present, could be studied and theorized. Sacred history offered one example: the polity of the Israelites from the Exodus until the anointing of King Saul was widely held to have been a theocratic republic, as evidenced by Samuel's warning to the people about "the manner of

the king that shall reign over you” (1 Sam. 8:10-18; Nelson, esp. 16-22). Secular history offered others: many of the ancient Greek city-states, as well as Rome for a significant portion of its history, had been republics whose political arrangements, ideas, and arguments were transmitted by their historians, rhetoricians, dramatists, satirists, and philosophers. Italian city-states such as Padua, Lucca, and, most famously, Florence had been republics in the recent past, and Venice remained republican. The Swiss cantons, of which Geneva and Zürich were of particular interest to the Protestant English, had long been republican; the Dutch Republic, in rebellion against the King of Spain, was newly formed.

Just as the cultural pre-eminence of the Greeks and the military prowess of the Romans lent luster to the republics of classical antiquity, so too did the financial and commercial activities, and the religious and cultural contributions, of recent and contemporary republics ensure their prominence. Renaissance thinkers and men of action drew deeply on ancient republicans or admirers of republics, such as Livy, Cicero, Tacitus, Aristotle, and Polybius, for political understanding and guidance. They were also influenced by modern republics and republican thought, through the works of poets such as Dante and Petrarch, historians such as Guicciardini and Contarini, and political theorists such as Machiavelli and Grotius. So ardent a eulogist of Elizabeth as Edmund Spenser could still write a commendatory poem for Lewes Lewkenor’s 1599 translation of Contarini’s *De Magistratibus et Republica Venetorum*, calling Venice the “flower of the last worlds delight” and ranking it near Babylon and Rome in beauty but superior to them “in policie of right” (4).

Not only real but also imagined republics engaged the attention of Renaissance Europe. The *Republic* of Plato, who had deprecated democracy but envisioned his ideal polity as a meritocracy ruled by a philosopher class, was read and admired. So was *Utopia* (1516), Sir Thomas More's fiction about a rational and moralistic communist republic in the New World, thinly disguised as a travel narrative. A century later, Johann Valentin Andreae's *Reipublicae Christianopolitanae Descriptio* (1619), also disguised as a travel narrative, portrayed an egalitarian republic, this time a Christian one, partly inspired by Calvinist Geneva.¹ In addition, intellectuals had their own imagined republic: the *respublica litteraria*, a term possibly coined by the Venetian humanist Francesco Barbaro in a 1417 letter commending Poggio Bracciolini for his work in discovering ancient manuscripts. The "republic of letters" would come to describe the networks of correspondence among scholars seeking to revive classical learning and promote classical ideals of citizenship (Bots and Waquet 11-27, esp. 11-12, 23).

But what exactly was a republic, or, as the English called it, a commonwealth? In fact, the term was often used loosely for any state. Thus, Sir Thomas Smith entitled his book about English government *De Republica Anglorum* (composed in the 1560s). More precisely, however, "republic" was generally understood to mean a polity governed according to laws openly proposed, debated, and promulgated; aimed at promoting the common good rather than the interests of one individual or faction; filling public offices by election, on the basis of merit and ability; holding officials accountable to the citizenry; requiring the active participation of citizens in the functions of government; and safeguarding their property and liberties (including liberty of conscience, freedoms of

¹ I omit Tommaso Campanella's *Città del Sole* (1623) here because, though communistic, this utopia was not a republic.

speech and the press, freedom from arbitrary arrest and imprisonment, and freedom from the obligation of self-incrimination).²

In this sense, too, the English may have considered their government to have some of the characteristics of a republic. The Magna Charta (1215) promised freemen protection from arbitrary arrest, imprisonment, dispossession, and exile. In the late fifteenth century, Sir John Fortescue called England's form of government *dominium regale et politicum*, a combination of kingly and political rule, in that both king and people participated in framing the laws, and the king could not order judges to disregard them (Burns 780). Patrick Collinson has argued that some Elizabethans, while loyal subjects of the Queen, also thought of themselves as citizens actively participating in the public life of the realm ("Monarchical Republic"). He offers as examples independent towns that were governed by an assembly of stakeholders and elected magistrates, and the Bond of Association, an extragovernmental movement to defend the Queen and, in the worst event, avenge her murder.

Whether or not the "descending thesis" of authority in England allowed much room for active citizenship (Pocock 334, 355), Markku Peltonen has claimed that elements of humanism and republicanism³ still manifested themselves in English political thought in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, an era when this set of political values had been considered moribund in England. He identifies the following closely related values: the mixed constitution (as opposed to any of the simple forms of

² My definition of "republic" is based on Quentin Skinner's *Foundations*, Markku Peltonen's *Classical Humanism and Republicanism*, and works from the period under study and slightly beyond, including Jonson's *Sejanus*, Milton's *Tenure*, *Eikonoklastes*, and first *Defence*, and Algernon Sidney's *Discourses concerning Government*.

³ Republicanism, for the purpose of this study, may be defined as the practice, advocacy, or admiration of a republican form of government (as defined above).

monarchy, aristocracy, or democracy), the active life in the service of the commonwealth (as opposed to the contemplative life, or learning without application), virtue as true nobility (the qualification for political office), and education to inculcate virtue and teach useful skills (2, 9-12, 18-53). While Johann P. Sommerville has countered that these values were commonplaces accepted by thinkers of widely divergent viewpoints (“English and Roman Liberty,” esp. 207-11), it is likely that some had republican origins and purposes but were appropriated, diluted, limited, and reinterpreted to serve the needs of absolutists. In addition, Peltonen’s comprehensive survey of original treatises and translations in the period from 1570 to 1640 has turned up more radical and recognizably republican ideas, such as the need for a citizen militia and the weakness of monarchy in its dependence on the virtue of one individual (40-43, 50-51).

Prominent among the questions that British, and indeed European, political thought addressed at this time were the origins of governments and the proper relations between the different functionaries in a government, between the rulers and the ruled, and between rulers of different nations. Of particular interest were questions concerning the limits of authority and obedience. What practical accountability did a prince have to his or her church, his or her people, or other nations? How far did the obligation of obedience on the part of a wife, a servant, or a subject extend? If a husband, master, or sovereign commanded one to act in a way that violated one’s conscience, was one still obligated to obey? If he committed, or was about to commit, an immoral or tyrannous act, was it permissible to [try to stop him](#)? The struggles and upheavals of the Reformation, as a result of which the dictates of one’s conscience or church often conflicted with those of one’s prince, made these questions salient, at times even

stimulating the development of resistance theory, as among the Marian exiles and, later, the Huguenots after the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre.

II

In their efforts to understand the field of human action, to chart a course of action, to predict the likely consequences of a given action, to formulate rules and guidance for personal and political behavior, and to imagine new possibilities for social organization, Renaissance people drew on history as well as on their knowledge of contemporary events and actors. The reading of history, as already mentioned, vastly expanded the experience available for analysis and theorizing, with the advantage that episodes already long completed constituted models in which, though the variables could not be controlled, the results of actions could be observed. Of course, the same episode could be interpreted in various ways: a particular outcome could be judged fortunate or unfortunate, or attributed to different causes, and actions could be evaluated as prudent, lawful, moral, or the opposite, independently of their apparent consequences. History was a fertile source of evidence for arguments on multiple sides of an issue; how one used the evidence depended on the length of one's perspective, one's values, and what one wanted to prove.

Royalty, courtiers, civil servants, members of Parliament, diplomats, generals, lawyers, and scholars used history in this way. In formulating and implementing national policy, representing the nation to foreign powers, fighting its wars, governing its colonies, navigating their individual ways through the maze of court intrigue or parliamentary maneuvers, and pleading and deciding cases—or in advising and teaching—they considered the lessons that could be drawn from Polybius, Livy, and

Tacitus, among others. Lisa Jardine and Anthony Grafton, writing on the employment of scholars to read and interpret classical works in such a way as to guide action, have recounted how Gabriel Harvey read portions of Livy with Philip Sidney in preparation for his embassy to the Holy Roman Emperor Rudolf II and with Thomas Smith, junior, in preparation for his Irish colonization enterprise (36-37, 40-42).

In addition, history was required to teach a less-nuanced official lesson: the obligation of obedience and conformity to the established order for all subjects, from the lowest to the highest. Historians and antiquarians had to state their purposes for writing the history of a given period or region, and the mere transmission of an accurate record of what had happened in the past was not considered a credible purpose. The prefaces of Tudor and early Stuart histories, therefore, uniformly proclaimed that they were written to demonstrate the evils of civil war and sedition; if they had not, they might well have been charged with promoting the same. Ian W. Archer cites the examples of Edward Hall's *Union of the Two Noble and Illustre Famelies of Lancastre and Yorke* (1548) and John Stow's *Chronicles of England* (1580). Hall wrote that his account of the Wars of the Roses was meant to show "what mischief hath insurged in realms by intestine division," while Stow's encomium of history included among its many purposes the "discouragement of unnaturall subjects from wicked treasons, pernicious rebellions, and damnable doctrines" (213).

Even more than practical lessons, history was used to teach moral lessons. In the tradition beginning with Boccaccio's *De Casibus Virorum Illustrium* (1355-74), writers produced historical narratives, both in prose and in verse, to demonstrate the transitory nature of power, wealth, and good fortune. The lofty were bound to fall, especially if

they were proud or incautious. Such were the workings of Fortune. Reflection on these cautionary tales would lead one to rely on God, who was above Fortune, and to place one's hopes in Heaven.⁴ More sanguine historians tried to show that virtuous individuals and nations had flourished, while disaster had overtaken the vicious. This line of argument probably persisted long after Philip Sidney effectively refuted it in his *Defence of Poesie*: “. . . the Historie being captived to the trueth of a foolish world, is many times a terror from well-doing, and an encouragement to unbrideled wickednes.” Yet Sidney agreed with the historians that “the ending end of all earthly learning” was “verteous action.” He did not actually take issue with the historians' practice of holding up eminent men and women of the past as models of moral action to be emulated, but only contended that “poesie” could improve on historical heroes. And indeed the beauty (rather than the success) of virtue, and the lasting fame that followed great deeds, was the primary moral lesson that historians sought to impart.

Apart from its instructive value, some concept of history, however much mythologized, formed the basis for national self-identification and nation building, in England as elsewhere. Chronicling the past of the nation, including its ruins and the origins of its customs and institutions, promoted a sense of national unity and pride. The English clung tenaciously to the myth, popularized by Geoffrey of Monmouth in the twelfth century, that Britain was first settled by a Trojan prince, Aeneas' great-grandson Brutus. Even the unlearned knew the names of past kings and queens, both real and legendary, each of whom had, in their times, given the nation a face and a personality (Archer 210). The whole nation could take pride in the chivalry of Arthur, the military

⁴ This summation of the tradition is based on Paul Budra, *A Mirror for Magistrates and the De Casibus Tradition*.

proWess of Henry V, the magnificence of Henry VIII. By the time of Elizabeth, England had added a new layer of identity as a Protestant nation, even an elect nation; John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* told the story of the struggles and martyrdoms that had brought her to that point.

Finally, like poetry, history was not only instructive and inspiring but also entertaining, serving up thrilling battles, heroic exploits, narrow escapes, sudden reversals, and stirring speeches. It was so by design; the humanist curriculum subsumed history under literature or rhetoric. Historiographers were expected to write elegantly, and many continued the classical practice of composing fictional speeches for historical characters. Accordingly, William Painter entitled his renderings of Roman and other historical narratives *The Palace of Pleasure* (1566), asserting that "these Nouelles" "recreate, and refresh weryed mindes" and are "[d]electable . . . for all sortes of men . . . The sad shall be discharged of heauinesse, the angrie and cholérique purged, the pleasaunt maintayned in mirth, the whole furnished with disporte, and the sicke appaised of griefe."

Both in form and in content, John Stow's preface to the reader in his *Chronicles of England* exemplifies the contemporary view of the purposes of history and demonstrates how they harmonized in the Renaissance mind:

Amongst other Bookes which are in this our learned age published in great numbers, there are few, eyther for the honestie of the matter, or commoditie which they bring to the common wealth, or for the pleasantnesse of the studie and reading, to be preferred before the Chronicles and Hystories. What examples of men deseruing immortalitie, of exploits worthy great renowne, of vertuous liuing of the posteritie to

be embraced, of wise handling of weighty affaires, diligently to be marked, and aptly to be applied: what incouragement of nobilitie to noble feates, what discouragement of unnaturall subjects from wicked treasons, pernicious rebellions, and damnable doctrines: to conclude, what perswasion to honestie, godlynesse, and vertue of all sorts, what dissuasions from the contrary is not plentifully in them to be found?

Of the purposes of history described above, the only one omitted in this preface is nation building. Interestingly, it appears prominently at the beginning of Stow's antiquarian work *A Survey of London* (1598):

As Rome the chiefe Citie of the world to glorifie it selfe, drew her originall from the Gods, Goddesses, and demy Gods, by the Troian progeny. So this famous Citie of London for greater glorie, and in emulation of Rome, deriveth it selfe from the very same originall. For (as Ieffery of Monmoth, the Welche historian reporteth) Brute descended from the demy god Eneas, the sonne of Venus, daughter of Iupiter, aboute the yeare of the world 2855. the yeare before Christes natiuitie, 1108. builded a Citie neare unto a riuer now called Thames, and named it Troynouant, or Trenouant.

“For greater glorie, and in emulation of Rome.” Rome held a special place in British history, as in European history. The most formidable military power ever known, it had been the mistress of the world, renowned for its beauty and grandeur. On the Mediterranean region, and beyond, it had imposed a uniform system of government and a universal language and culture; it had brought roads and aqueducts, theaters and baths.

Like most of Europe, Britain had once been largely conquered and colonized by Rome; there were Roman ruins to prove it, although England was unique in lacking Roman laws. Somewhat paradoxically, the English took pride both in their forebears' resistance and in the civilizing influence of the Romans. Just as the colonized British nobility had adopted Roman ways and had come to think of themselves as Romans, so English people of the Renaissance sometimes elided the fact of conquest, viewing the Romans as predecessors rather than conquerors. Like other rising European states, England considered itself the heir to Rome's imperial power and cultural influence.

Europeans of the Middle Ages had long recognized the Roman Empire in the East, ruled from Byzantium since the fourth century, and another Roman Empire in the West, beginning with the coronation of Charlemagne by Pope Leo III in 800 CE. They used Latin as the language of diplomacy, scholarship, and Church business, and they were governed, as they thought, by Roman laws. To them, the world of ancient Rome was still alive in the present, although in fact the language and the institutions had changed so much that they bore only a faint resemblance to the originals. That paradigm began to change with the new cultural movement launched by Petrarch in the fourteenth century: the Renaissance. Petrarch, and the scholars who followed him, attended to—and deplored—the difference between their own times and classical antiquity, which they regarded as the standard of human excellence. They sought to recover classical texts, reconstruct the layout and architecture of the ancient city of Rome from its ruins, and study its institutions in an effort to restore Roman language, law, learning, and values to the world. They imagined themselves in conversation with classical authors; Petrarch wrote letters to Livy and Cicero, among others, and Machiavelli in 1513 spoke of

“step[ping] inside the venerable courts of the ancients, where, solicitously received by them, . . . I am unashamed to converse with them and to question them about the motives for their actions, and they, out of their human kindness, answer me” (letter to Francesco Vettori).

As a result of the efforts of Renaissance scholars to resurrect Rome, educated Europeans of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were steeped in the Latin language and Roman culture. Seminal works of ancient Greek authors such as Homer, Herodotus, Thucydides, Plato, Aristotle, Demosthenes, and Plutarch were read largely in Latin translation (Ford 1-4; Botley 5, 6, 9, 12-14, 19, 23; “Rome Reborn.”). Humanists wrote poetry as well as prose in elegant Latin. In schools and universities, students spoke Latin, studied classical Latin texts, and staged Latin plays written by their schoolmasters. It was no surprise, then, that Rome was the model of a commonwealth, the *imperium* was the model of an empire, Roman courage and self-sacrifice for the common good were the model of virtue, Latin poetry and oratory were the models for European poetry and oratory, and Roman ruins inspired European sculpture and architecture—as well as meditations on the mutability of all human things. Joachim du Bellay’s introductory sonnet to his *Antiquitez de Rome* expresses the hope that the French king may one day “rebastir en France une telle grandeur” (rebuild such grandeur [as that of the ancient Romans] in France) (246).

Yet early modern Europe’s love affair with ancient Rome was tinged with ambivalence. From its beginnings, Christianity had elevated contemplation and spiritual attainments over the active civic values of the Romans, instructing the faithful to pursue salvation rather than a reputation for virtue and valor, and the worldly rewards it might

earn (honor and high public office). In *The City of God*, Augustine, probably the most influential and most widely read of the Church Fathers in the early modern period, went further. Not only did he exhort his readers to set their hopes on the Heavenly City rather than mourning for the stricken earthly city (after Rome was sacked by the Goths under Alaric in 410 CE); he also attacked Roman religion and values, critiquing traditional models of virtue such as Lucretia and Cato the Younger (esp. I.1-3, 19, 23). His purpose was to refute those who blamed Christianity for depriving Rome of the protection of her old gods, and to dissuade the victims of the Goths from committing suicide. Later readers, however, may have taken Augustine's judgments at face value, without considering the historical moment that produced them.

Hence, Europeans had to manage the tensions between their two major traditions: the Greco-Roman and the Judeo-Christian. Some, like Augustine, judged classical antiquity harshly, or rejected it altogether, as Milton appears to do in *Paradise Lost*, when he finds every classical myth superseded by the true circumstances of sacred history.⁵ At the opposite extreme, some humanists seemed blithely to ignore their Christianity, like Pietro Bembo, who sought to write the purest Ciceronian Latin and reportedly "advised [his fellow papal secretary Jacobo] Sadoletto not to read St Paul's letters, as they would corrupt his prose style" (Tuck 16). Others, perhaps the majority, took a middle way. Petrarch wrote that when reading Livy, he felt as though he were living among heroic Romans such as Scipio, Fabius, and Camillus, "and not with the thievish company of today among whom I was born under an evil star"; yet his letter to Livy closes with the mention of "Him whom thou wouldst have seen, or of whose birth thou wouldst have

⁵ For example, IV.268-87, V.379-82, IX.13-19. See also *Paradise Regain'd*, IV.288-90: "he who receives / Light from above, from the fountain of light, / No other doctrine needs . . ."

heard, hadst thou lived a little longer” (qtd. in Burke, *Renaissance Sense* 22).⁶ Biondo Flavio, the archaeologist whose book *Rome Restored* (1446) reconstructed the ancient city of Rome from the study of its ruins and textual evidence, passionately admired everything about the Romans except their religion, which he termed “*perridiculum*” (thoroughly ridiculous) (Mazzocco 188-89, 192). There were those who attempted to reconcile the two traditions, emphasizing similarities, such as that between Stoicism and Christianity, rather than differences. Finally, some writers cited Christian and classical sources and examples side by side, or one after the other, as complementary to each other. The Huguenot author of the *Vindiciae contra Tyrannos* cites biblical sources exclusively when dealing with questions of religion but intermingles references to Cicero, Solon, Aristotle, Herodotus, and Harmodius and Aristogeiton when dealing with secular issues of governance (e.g., 121, 142, 144, 146, 148, 150, 163, 174, 192). Francis Bacon, in *The Advancement of Learning*, follows his examples of learned men of the Bible and the early Church (“divine testimony and evidence concerning the true dignity and value of learning”) with “human proofs,” including the examples of Julius Caesar and six Roman emperors who were either learned themselves or patrons of learning (150-52, 155-58, 161-63).

In addition to the reservations with which Christians were obliged to view ancient Rome, two other considerations tarnished its luster for some, if not for all, early modern Europeans. First, it was undisputed that Rome had become corrupted, whether due to the wealth and luxury that conquest had brought, or to ambitious generals, or to degenerate post-Augustan emperors. Cato and Juvenal had famously complained about corruption;

⁶ See also “To Titus Livy,” in *Letters to Classical Authors*, 101-103.

Tacitus and Suetonius had documented it. Second, contemporary Rome was widely viewed—and not only by Protestants—as a sink of vice and the source of ecclesiastical corruption. Joachim du Bellay, in *Regrets* 80, finds “nothing . . . but pride,” “dissimulated vice,” and “pomp” in the papal palace, “endless usury” at the exchange, and “Venus’ great lascivious gang” in the city.⁷ Machiavelli deplors the failure of Giovanpaolo Baglioni, ruler of Perugia, to kill Pope Julius II and all the cardinals when they were in his power—“an enterprise,” asserts Machiavelli, “. . . that would have left an eternal memory of himself as being the first who had demonstrated to the prelates how little is to be esteemed whoever lives and reigns as they do” (*Discourses* 63). And Roger Ascham writes in *The Scholemaster*,

. . . time was when Italy and Rome have been, to the great good of us that now live, the best breeders and bringers up of the worthiest men, not only for wise speaking, but also for well doing, in all civil affairs, that ever was in the world. But now that time is gone; and though the place remain, yet the old and present manners do differ so far as black and white, as virtue and vice. . . . For sin, by lust and vanity, hath and doth breed up everywhere common contempt of God’s word, private contention in many families, open factions in every city . . . (qtd. in Ramsey ix).

While du Bellay and Ascham clearly distinguish between the glory of Rome in the past and the ignominy of Rome in the present, the present may well have colored the perception of the past in the popular if not the scholarly mind. Lisa Hopkins finds a

⁷ Richard Helgerson’s translation in *The Regrets with the Antiquities* (131).

multitude of allusions to Roman Catholicism in *Titus Andronicus* (27-30), and Iachimo in *Cymbeline* has the character of a contemporary Italian gentleman, not an ancient Roman.

III

Beginning in the late 1560s, the commercial theater offered Londoners a new venue for gathering; a pastime that, while not entirely new, was newly available on a regular basis; and a fund of stories and characters that would pass into the culture.⁸ The opportunity, as of 1574, to stage daily performances (except on Sundays) created a tremendous demand for new plays, especially since no play was performed two days in a row. Everything that might engage an audience was grist for the mill: clowning, romances, domestic scandals, witchcraft accusations, the faults and foibles of courtiers or citizens, political and ecclesiastical corruption, British, Continental, and classical history, and more. Material formerly known mostly to the literate and multilingual now became more widely disseminated. As the antitheatricalist Stephen Gosson put it, “the Palace of pleasure, the Golden Ass, the Æthiopian history, Amadis of Fraunce, the Round Table, bawdy Comedies in Latin, French, Italian, and Spanish, have been thoroughly ransacked, to furnish the Play houses in London” (*Plays Confuted*). Cambyzes and Hieronimo, Faustus and Tamburlane now took their places beside Herod of Jewry in the popular imagination. In the process of working up their material, playwrights both reflected and shaped audiences’ interests, concerns, self-concepts, and fantasies. A play might reinforce or even inflame received opinions and prejudices, or it might problematize them

⁸ This discussion is based largely on Brockett (92-95, 118, 117-24, 157-59, 166-68, 170) and on Gurr, *Playgoing* (11).

and provoke thought—or both. In either case, the drama fulfilled a “need . . . to share a common memory.”⁹

Numerous records attest to the popularity of London commercial theater and the excitement it generated: playgoers’ accounts, complaints about traffic jams in the Blackfriars district, antitheatrical pamphlets and petitions, laws and regulations to control the theater companies and their practices. So, too, does the investment of the Master of the Revels with the authority to license all plays written for performance in the London theaters. In *Anatomy of Abuses* (1583), Philip Stubbes wrote of “the flocking and running to Theaters and Curtains, daily and hourly, night and day, time and tide, to see plays and interludes . . .” (qtd. in Heinemann 20).¹⁰ Not only did audiences fill the theaters; by the 1590s, fashionable young men were imitating the characters played by Richard Burbage and Edward Alleyn, the leading actors of the day (Gurr 82). John Marston scoffed at a typical gallant whose conversation consisted exclusively of theater news and lines from plays, remarking, “H’ath made a common-place booke out of plaies” (qtd. in Gurr 82, 255).¹¹ It was probably common practice, if not to make a whole commonplace book of plays, to record memorable lines, return to them, and use them in speech and writing.¹²

Thomas Middleton’s *A Game at Chess*, performed at the Globe in 1624, reveals the potential of drama to generate excitement and to solidify a national community through the expression and amplification of public feeling. With this play, the King’s

⁹ Words actually spoken of film, by Martin Scorsese; qtd. in Keillor.

¹⁰ Stubbes was exaggerating, of course; the public playhouses staged performances only in the afternoon.

¹¹ *The Scourge of Villainy* (1598), G7v, H4r.

¹² According to Jeffrey S. Doty, “many plays were printed with commonplace markers already in place” (184).

Men brought the talk of the market, the tavern, Paul's, and the Exchange onto the stage, playing on long-term anti-Spanish and anti-Papal sentiment, and on the recent mood of celebratory relief at the failure of the Spanish marriage negotiations. They used the former Spanish ambassador's own litter, "chair of ease," and cast-off clothing, as well as the usual stage business, to heighten the effect of the spoken words in ridiculing and demonizing the Jesuits and the Spaniards. As a result, *A Game at Chess* created an unprecedented sensation. According to contemporary accounts, "all sorts of people" flocked to see it: "old and younge, rich and poore, masters and servants, papists and puritans, wise men *et.ct.*, churchmen and statesmen" (qtd. in Gurr 281).¹³ The smallest audience was estimated at 3,000 people (Coloma 477, 480), and playgoers were turned away for lack of space.¹⁴ In contrast to the usual practice, *A Game at Chess* played nine days straight, and might have continued, had the authorities not closed it down. The current Spanish ambassador, Don Carlos Coloma, complained of the "merriment, hubbub and applause" of the audiences and claimed to have been informed that they "come out of the theatre so inflamed against Spain that . . . my person would not be safe in the streets . . ." (Coloma 477, 480).

Granted, few plays generated quite as much excitement as *A Game at Chess*. Its transgressiveness in depicting living princes and other prominent persons was exceptional, as was the censor's apparent inattentiveness. This transparently public and political drama offered a comic outlet for the audience's resentments while articulating

¹³ John Chamberlain to Dudley Carleton, 21 August 1624, *Letters*, II. 577-78.

¹⁴ Letter of John Holles to the Earl of Somerset, 11 August 1624, *Holles Letter Book*, Nottingham University Library, Ne C 15,405; qtd. in *A Game at Chess*, ed. T. H. Howard-Hill (Manchester,: Manchester UP, 1993), 198-200; requoted in Gurr, *Playgoing* 134.

their view of their place in the world as a nation, their fears, and their hopes for eventual triumph. However, plays that addressed political issues less directly accomplished similar cultural work. And plays of all types fascinated audiences, whether by transporting them to the courts and camps of famous kings and generals, fulfilling fantasies, or anatomizing common experiences such as marital jealousy. Leonard Digges wrote,

. . .when Cesar would appeare,
 And on the Stage at halfe-sword parley were,
 Brutus and Cassius: oh how the Audience,
 Were ravish'd, with what wonder they went thence . . .¹⁵

Theater evoked wonder—or mirth, indignation, or other emotions—through the synergistic deployment of poetry with costume, props, gesture, movement, stage action, music, and dance. With the banning of religious drama, the stripping of altars, and the drastic curtailment of traditional rituals in the English church, only theater (and the occasional civic or royal pageant) satisfied the popular appetite for pomp and ceremony.¹⁶

Indeed, the pageantry and poetry of theater lent its productions an aura of authority. Moreover, by representing an ordered world with its own structures of authority—political, religious, familial, and moral—theater authorized itself to teach how the world works and to judge the rights and wrongs of a situation. As Louis Montrose points out, audience support was key to this authorization; the theater, he writes, was “an

¹⁵ This commendatory poem (excerpted in Gurr, *Playgoing* 280) was apparently composed for Shakespeare’s *First Folio* (1623) but was first published in 1640.

¹⁶ Louis Montrose makes a similar point (30).

alternative site of cultural authority, reciprocally constituted by the professional players and their paying audiences, and based upon a contract freely entered into by the parties, rather than upon traditional hierarchical relations of patronage and clientage, dominance and deference” (202). The audacity, even subversiveness, of the theater’s claim to authority was not lost on contemporaries; as one wrote, “God onely gave authority of publique instruction and correction but to two sorts of men: to his Ecclesiasticall Ministers, and temporal Magistrates: hee never instituted a third authority of Players.”¹⁷

Much of theater’s appeal was due to its immediacy: the action represented appeared to take place right in front of the audience. This made theater a uniquely effective medium—arguably making a deeper and more lasting impression than public reading or recitation, preaching, or solitary reading, where more was left to the imagination. Even the Puritan Philip Stubbes, no great friend to the theater, said as much. Conceding in the preface to *Anatomy of Abuses* that some plays are “honest and commendable exercises” conducive to virtue, he compared them favorably to preaching: “For such is our gross and dull nature, that what thing we see opposite before our eyes, do pierce further, and print deeper in our hearts and minds, than that thing which is heard only with the ears” (qtd. in Heinemann 29).

Of course, there were those who went to the theater mainly to gather with their fellows, or to display their wealth, status, or physical attractiveness. Some undoubtedly failed to pay attention; others, like Polonius, were interested only in “a jig or a tale of bawdry” (*Hamlet* II.ii.477). But there must always have been playgoers who were deeply engaged with the drama, who were moved by the poetry, the characters, the action

¹⁷ I.G., *A Refutation of the Apology for Actors* (1615), facsimile ed., 57, 58; qtd. in Montrose 50.

portrayed, the moral lessons taught, or the issues raised. These included those naïve enough to believe in the illusion presented, like the yokel reportedly so moved by the plaint of a boy actor that he vowed not to sleep until he had taken revenge on her rapist.¹⁸ A woman writing about her religious conversion recalled that when a preacher had expostulated with her, she had associated him with a figure of fun in a play she had seen: Ananias, “a holy brother of *Amsterdam*” (qtd. in Gurr 230).¹⁹ The antitheatricalist John Northbrooke deplored the claim of some playgoers “that playes are as good as sermons, and that they learne as much or more at a playe, than they do at God’s worde preached” (qtd. in Montrose 59).²⁰ Lucius Cary, Viscount Falkland, requesting a playbook from a correspondent, remarked, “[I]f I valued it so high at the single hearing, when myne eares could not catch half the wordes, what must I do now, in the reading when I may pause upon it” (qtd. in Gurr 98, 226-37).²¹ Cary, the central figure of the Great Tew circle of skeptics and political moderates, would have valued plays of high intellectual caliber; so did the scholar Gabriel Harvey, who wrote that *Hamlet* had the depth “to please the wiser sort” (qtd. in Gurr 234).²²

Whether, and to what extent, plays influenced the political outlook of their audiences—not simply reinforcing accepted views, but introducing new ideas and

¹⁸ T.M., *The Life of a Satyirical Puppy called Nim* (1657), 102-7 (sig. H3v-H6); qtd. in Gurr 284.

¹⁹ From Pritchard, “Puritans and the Blackfriars Theater,” 92. Doubtless the play was Jonson’s *Alchemist*.

²⁰ From *A Treatise wherein Dicing, Dauncing, Vaine playes, or Enterluds, with other idle pastimes, &c., commonly used on the Sabbath day, are reproved by the Authoritie of the word of God and auintient writers* (1577) (excerpts rpt. in Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, 4:198). Richard Schilders (qtd. in Cartelli 53) wrote similarly of “the gentlewoman that sware by her trouth, *That she was as much edefied at a play as ever she was at any sermon*” (preface to John Rainolds, *The Overthrow of Stage Plays* [1600; A3v-4r]).

²¹ Letter to Thomas Carew, in Kurt Weber, *Lucius Cary* (New York, 1940), 63.

²² Marginalia in Harvey’s copy of Speght’s Chaucer, published in 1598.

perspectives, or stimulating a reevaluation of the old—is controversial. Jeffrey S. Doty cites a notebook with extensive quotations taken down during a performance of *1 Henry IV* as “evidence that for some playgoers the theater was a place to go for useful political language and information” (183). Still, the available evidence for audience responses is scanty, anecdotal, and unreliable. Moreover, different individuals, even those roughly equivalent in socioeconomic status and education, would be likely to apprehend the same play differently. The social heterogeneity of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century audiences, which included apprentices, mechanics, servants, citizens, students, lawyers, gentry, and courtiers, would have magnified these differences. And even the most educated, like Lucius Cary, would not have been able to grasp all the nuances of meaning in performance. Furthermore, most playgoers were seeking entertainment, not political insight or moral edification. Yet the contention that plays made *no* impression on the majority of audience members is untenable.

David Scott Kastan has argued that plays about royalty reversed the usual order of authority, putting the audience in the position of judges of the stage king, whether he represented a historical or a fictional monarch. Kastan notes that even real-life spectacles of power, such as royal progresses and coronation parades, which were designed to evoke only positive responses from the crowd, suggested the possibility of choice. In the theater, unreality ensured safety. Audience members who hissed or applauded a sovereign in a stage production, or even those who watched quietly, would have formed the habit not only of judging the actions of kings but of considering themselves entitled, as an assembly, to do so (“Proud Majesty”). Louis Montrose makes a related point with regard to the complaint of the Merchant Taylors that in a public performance staged by

their school, “every lewd persone thinketh himself (for his penny) worthye of the chiefe and most comodious place without respecte of any other either for age or estimacion in the comon weale” (47).²³ According to Montrose, the same market forces that gave working people a sense of entitlement with regard to seating in the Merchant Taylors’ hall might have led them to “think their own judgments and opinions to be equally worthy of authority in the commonweal” as those of their “betters” (48).

Kastan’s and Montrose’s arguments call to mind Jurgen Habermas’ model of the development of the public sphere in the eighteenth century: as private individuals engaged in reasoned analysis and debate on public affairs, whether in physical spaces such as coffeehouses and salons or through journals, the force of their collective opinion pressured governments to justify, or even change, their policies. Certainly late-sixteenth-century England did not have a robust public sphere capable of verbally challenging the government, however vigorously people might have voiced their opinions on public affairs, or even engaged in isolated acts of political violence. Still, the theater provided a kind of training ground for the attitudes and functions of citizenship. Habermas considers judgment to be the main function of a public and speaks of a “literary precursor of the public sphere operative in the political domain” (*Structural Transformation* 29; see also 2, 25-27, 29-30).²⁴ For our purposes, we might speak of a “theatrical precursor.” Writing in 1582, Stephen Gosson recognized that the claim that drama promoted a reformation of

²³ Accounts of the Master of the Merchant Taylors Company for 16 March 1574” (qtd. in Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, 2:75).

²⁴ While Habermas, who is interested mainly in the Enlightenment and the eighteenth century, does not focus on any English institution before the Restoration coffeehouses, his model has informed the work of scholars of early modern English literature and history. David Norbrook, for example, thinks that Jacobean literary clubs partially fulfill Habermas’ criteria for a “literary public sphere” and comments as follows on Habermas’ dating: “In the highly uneven development of early modern England, . . . strong pressures towards a political public sphere can be traced much earlier” (*Poetry and Politics* 190-91, 287-88).

manners by exposing vicious behavior implied a faculty of judgment on the part of the audience. He objected that “the common people which resorte to Theaters being but an assemblie of Tailers, Tinkers, Cordwayners, Saylers, olde Men, yong Men, Women, Boyes, Girles, and such like” were too ignorant and irrational to be “the iudges of faultes there painted out” (*Plays Confuted*; qtd. in part by Doty 192). This common slander notwithstanding, plays addressed themselves to all who paid the price of admission, most frequently for the purpose of soliciting applause. Seventeenth-century sources frequently speak of the audience as judging the merit of plays,²⁵ and at least one attributes judgment of a contemporary political figure to the playwright and actors—a judgment that would presumably have been seconded by the audience. John Holles, Lord Haughton, wrote of the traitorous white pawn in *A Game at Chess*, “this by the charaxcter is supposed Bristow: yet it is hard, players should judge him in jest, before the State in earnest” (qtd. in Gurr 135).²⁶

All in all, the ability of players to hold up political figures for the audience’s judgment remained limited. It was axiomatic that the king could do no wrong. Thus, Cleanthes, the protagonist of Middleton and Rowley’s *Old Law*, speaking to Duke Evander at the denouement, accuses himself of the most unnatural crime imaginable: “That I should be so vild / As once to think you cruell” (67). Rulers who *were* depicted as cruel were most often usurpers, or distant in time or place. Indeed, living princes were not to be depicted on stage at all. If a legitimate monarch was flawed, as in Marlowe’s *Edward II* or Shakespeare’s *Richard II*, his person was still sacred. No rebels against

²⁵ For example, Beaumont, in a commendatory poem for Fletcher’s *Faithful Shepherdess* (1609), wrote that in the Blackfriars, “a thousand men in judgement sit” (qtd. in Gurr 268).

²⁶ Letter to the Earl of Somerset, 11 August 1624.

their sovereign could be shown to have good intentions or a good cause; they must be portrayed as fools, rogues, or unscrupulous manipulators.²⁷ Misrule must give way, -at play's end, either to the established order or to a legitimate successor.

The extent of the playwrights' inward assent to these orthodoxies must remain forever unknown. The penalties for *lèse majesté*, however, were rigorous enough to give any writer, printer, or player second thoughts. In 1579, John Stubbes lost his right hand for writing a harshly worded pamphlet opposing the marriage of Queen Elizabeth to the Duke of Alençon. In 1593, John Penry was hanged, ostensibly for treason, but actually for his role in the production of the notorious Marprelate Tracts. In 1600, John Hayward was sent to the Tower for his history of Henry IV, dedicated to the Earl of Essex, which the authorities read as suggesting a parallel between the deposed Richard II and Elizabeth. In 1605, Ben Jonson and George Chapman were imprisoned for deriding Scots in their play *Eastward Ho!* In 1626, in spite of the traditional privilege of immunity for parliamentary debate, Sir John Eliot was sent to the Tower for a speech in Parliament comparing the Duke of Buckingham to the Roman Emperor Tiberius' cruel favorite Sejanus. In 1629, Ben Jonson was interrogated on suspicion of having written a poem in praise of John Felton, Buckingham's assassin.

For dramatic performance, though, most censorship took the form of prior review by the Master of the Revels, who sometimes disallowed plays but more often demanded changes. Annabel Patterson has argued convincingly for the existence of an informal understanding between censors and playwrights, whereby playwrights forbore from direct

²⁷ For example, Ian Archer notes, "Shakespeare's Cade was markedly at odds with the reformer of the commonweal to be found in the chronicle accounts. By omitting the rebel demands, suggesting that Cade was a tool of the Duke of York, and portraying the rebellion as an indiscriminate attack of the illiterate on the written word, Shakespeare aligns himself with the forces of order" (214).

challenge to authority and censors tolerated a wide range of expression. Thus, the ambiguity long prized by literary scholars as a hallmark of genius transcending the limited political and religious allegiances of its day was in fact a “functional ambiguity” (*Censorship* 18; also 10-15, 17-18, 44-119). Patterson identifies certain strategies used in writing and interpretation. For example, while some characters and some elements of the action of plays might resemble contemporary persons and events, the correspondences were never exact. Topical allusions were scattered throughout a play, not concentrated and sustained. Speech that might otherwise be considered provocative was embedded in a neutralizing context, which might be provided by any of a variety of mechanisms, such as prefatory material, contradiction by another character, the discrediting of the speaker, or the unraveling of the plot. Thus, the central issue of *The Old Law*—the conflict between the state’s law and “the common laws of reason and of nature” (65)—is rendered moot when the law and its enforcement are finally unmasked as an elaborate ruse to test the virtue of subjects. Still, the imaginative construct did not quite dissolve “into thin air”; the performance lingered in memory, and the words remained on the page. Audiences and readers could make of it what they wished.

Attendance at the London theaters was not the only form of encounter with drama available in the reigns of Elizabeth and the early Stuarts. Except for the religious plays, which were suppressed in the 1570s, earlier dramatic forms and venues—civic pageants, performances by travelling troupes in the provinces, interludes and masquerades at noble and royal courts, plays based on classical models produced at schools, universities, and the Inns of Court—continued side by side with the commercial theater. The same play might be presented in a London theater, at court, in the provinces, and at the universities.

An increasing number of plays were published, and closet drama (such as the tragedies of Fulke Greville and William Alexander) was written exclusively for solitary reading, or perhaps for dramatic readings by small groups. But from 1567 on, the commercial theaters—both the large amphitheaters and the smaller, more exclusive indoor playhouses—were the driving force for the creation of English drama.

IV

Having canvassed political discourse, the uses of history, and the emergence and impact of drama in the sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries, we now approach the dramatic form that encompasses all these: the history play. Because interest in the English drama of this period has focused primarily on Shakespeare, scholars have tended to define “the history play” as a genre on the basis of Shakespeare’s chronicle plays about medieval English kings listed under “Histories” in the First Folio (1623). This narrow focus has led to definitions that exclude foreign and ancient histories²⁸ and, as a corollary, to the claim that Shakespeare originated the genre.²⁹ In fact, generic labels were assigned inconsistently; the same play might be categorized differently, as a history or a tragedy, in different editions, or even in different places in the same edition.³⁰ Further frustrating efforts to rely on sixteenth- and seventeenth-century title pages for generic identification is their frequent usage of the term “history,” as in French, in the sense of “story” or

²⁸ See, for example, Griffin, esp. 16-17. Griffin does, however, reject the process of definition that “took Shakespeare’s plays as normative, and constructed a genre around them” (6).

²⁹For example, see Rackin 31. Even within English history, one would have to explain away prior works such as John Bale’s *King Johan* (1538) and Thomas Legge’s three-part *Richardus Tertius* (1579).

³⁰ For example, Michael Hattaway points out that *Richard II*, listed as a history in the First Folio (1623), had been published as *The Tragedie of King Richard the Second* in a 1597 quarto and that within the First Folio, the play listed in the catalogue at the front as *The Life and Death of Richard the Third* is entitled *The Tragedy of King Richard the Third: with the Landing of Earle Richmond, and the Battell at Bosworth Field* in the text (“Shakespearean History Play” 3).

“narrative,” whether factual or fictional.³¹ In the case of the First Folio, Margreta de Grazia speculates that the construction of a new category of “Histories” that appeared to be both internally coherent and parallel to the two traditional genres of tragedy and comedy reflected a need to carve out a niche for Shakespeare as a uniquely modern and English poet in contradistinction to the classical imitator Jonson, who had published his collected plays in 1616 (52-61). Given these considerations, it is more useful, and more accurate, to regard history plays not as a distinct genre but as a set of works that deal realistically with historical events of any nation and any period (even if they also include fictional episodes) and are based on accounts recognized as historical.³²

To be sure, a subset of history plays does exhibit some of the characteristics claimed for the “genre”: they stage a lengthy series of events over a sweeping expanse of time delimited by the reign of a particular monarch or a political struggle (thus, Thomas Lodge’s *Wounds of Civil War* covers the whole period of the wars of Marius and Sulla). According to Benjamin Griffin, this “formlessness,” rather than a defect, is a conscious strategy, situating the action of the play in the context of events that preceded and followed it. These plays “resist closure,” presenting tragic or comic elements but not shaping the action around them; thus, they represent history as a continual unfolding (Griffin ch. 4, esp. 65-66, 70-75). Of course, as *Richard II* and *Richard III* testify, when

³¹ See Griffin 8-9.

³² Theoretically, a history play could be written by an eyewitness or participant in the events presented, but I am unaware of any such instance. Insofar as my formulation excludes both allegorical representations and wholly fictional plays such as *Titus Andronicus*, it is slightly more restrictive than that of Paulina Kewes: “If we want to understand the place and uses of history in early modern drama, we should be willing to consider any play, irrespective of its formal shape or fictional element, which represents, or purports to represent, a historical past, native or foreign, distant or recent . . .” (“The Elizabethan History Play” 188). Kewes’ definition leaves out the requirement for a historical source.

staged history leans noticeably in the direction of tragedy, unity of action supplants formlessness.

History was considered a particularly suitable subject for both poetry and drama. In his *Arte of English Poesie* (1589), George Puttenham writes that “the Poesie historical is of all other next the diuine most honorable and worthy” but holds such poetry to standards less strict than those of historiography proper. He tolerates poetic license in the service of the ends of history, that is, moral instruction and entertainment (31-32). The latter attitude was shared by at least several other sixteenth-century critics.³³ Certainly many English tragedies were based on accounts of events considered historical. As Madeleine Doran points out, these included Marlowe’s *Tamburlane* and *Faustus* as well as his *Edward II* and *Massacre at Paris*; Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, *Lear*, *Hamlet*, and *Timon of Athens*; and Chapman’s *Bussy* and Byron plays (80-81).

Various sources and precedents for the Elizabethan history play have been alleged, starting with the civic religious drama of the Middle Ages, which portrayed episodes in sacred history—events that both the actors and the audience believed had really happened. Griffin finds precedents for historical drama in medieval saint plays and festive victory plays such as Coventry’s *Conquest of the Danes*.³⁴ The earliest secular English history play, John Bale’s *King Johan* (1538), clearly derives from the morality tradition, as does R.B.’s *Apus and Virginia* (c. 1559-67). However, humanist civic and court drama (and later, humanist academic drama) appears to have been the history play’s

³³ For example, Giovanni Battista Giraldi and Girolamo Fracastoro (according to Doran 80).

³⁴ See ch. 2, esp. 22, 28-37, for saint plays and ch. 3 for festive victory plays. *The Conquest of the Danes* is the only convincing example of a precedent, since the other play discussed in this chapter, *The Famous Victories of Henry V*, was performed in London in the 1580s.

most direct ancestor. The first secular historical drama of early modern times was Albertino Mussato's *Ecerinis* (c. 1314), a Latin verse tragedy on the Senecan model depicting the tyranny of the thirteenth-century ruler Ezzelino III da Romano. While *Ecerinis* was never performed, it was apparently read aloud to the citizens of Padua in an effort to encourage them to resist contemporary attacks on their city (Skinner, *Foundations* I.13, 26, 38-39). Other Latin plays representing historical events, from ancient to very recent, followed in late-fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Italy. These included Leonardi Dati's *Hiempsal* (1442), based on Sallust's *Jugurthine War*, and Carlo Verardi's play on the conquest of Grenada, *Historia Baetica* (1492), performed at the palace of Cardinal Raffaele Riario in Rome (Grund xxx-xxxvi). By the mid-sixteenth century, French, Spanish, German, and English dramatists were also writing historical dramas, both in Latin and in the vernacular.

In sixteenth-century England, as in fourteenth-century Italy, the study and imitation of Seneca's tragedies contributed importantly to the development of the history play. Michael Ulliot considers *Gorbuduc* (1561/2) the first play based on the Senecan model (as well as the *de casibus* tradition) to take English chronicle history as its subject matter (98, 100-2).³⁵ The playwrights, Thomas Sackville and Thomas Norton, adopted Seneca's use of "deliberative, declamatory, and descriptive rhetoric" to create a plausible representation of the way historical events might have happened, imaginatively filling in the human dimension of the bare events narrated in their chronicle source (Ulliot 98).

Through deliberative rhetoric, they presented arguments for alternative courses of action;

³⁵ Ulliot confines his discussion to English history plays. Roman history plays were performed at least by the mid-1550s, but since those predating Lodge's *Wounds of Civil War* (1586) are lost (except for R.B.'s *Apus and Virginia* [1559-1567], a morality), it is impossible to judge whether any or all of them were constructed on the Senecan model.

through declamatory rhetoric, they revealed characters' mental and emotional processes; and through descriptive rhetoric, they provided detailed accounts of key events. In the 1580s and 1590s, writers for the London theaters would follow Sackville and Norton in these strategies, though the role of descriptive rhetoric was diminished as violent deeds came to be considered suitable for staging.

Audiences which seemed to be witnessing "history being made" before their eyes apparently experienced a pleasure more intense than that afforded by reading histories or listening to historical ballads.³⁶ As one seventeenth-century theatergoer put it, historical drama brought to life

What story coldly tells, what poets feign

At second hand, and picture without brain

Senseless and soulless shows . . . (qtd. in Griffin ix)³⁷

Livelier entertainment, fuller detail, and broader dissemination made for more effective instruction. Thomas Heywood famously defended the theater from its detractors on the grounds (among others) that it taught history:

. . . playes haue made the ignorant more apprehensiuē, taught the vnlearned the knowledge of many famous histories, instructed such as cannot reade in the discouery of all our *English Chronicles*: & what man haue you now of that weake capacity, that cannot discourse of any notable

³⁶ The quotation is from Hattaway, "The Shakespearean History Play" 11. Griffin (76-77) quotes passages from Sir George Buc and John Aubrey as evidence that ballads constituted a major source of historical knowledge for the illiterate and, where written records were lacking, for the literate as well.

³⁷ I.M.S., "On Worthy Master Shakespeare and his Poems," Second Folio (1632).

thing recorded euen from *William the Conquerour*, nay from the landing
of *Brute*, vntill this day . . . (*Apology for Actors*)

In addition to historical facts (modified as they were by poetic license and the biases of sources), playgoers might absorb political analysis and commentary, moral principles, patriotic fervor, and a sense of the accidental or providential nature of history. The religious cycles had told audiences their own story by enacting the whole sweep of sacred history from Creation to Last Judgment; secular history plays now told them their story on a smaller scale by portraying events that, however indirectly or remotely, had shaped the world in which they lived. Some in the audience may have been led to reflect on the laws of history and to consider questions such as the sources of dissension or harmony, the proper roles of kings, nobles, and commoners, the ideal character of a ruler or a constitution, and the means by which a commonwealth might be corrupted or reformed.

V

Renaissance writers frequently figured their transactions with the past as a species of resuscitation of the dead (Rackin 17; Greene 32-3). Meditating on the ruins of Rome, the speaker of du Bellay's *Antiquitez* is struck not only by the glimpse of past glory that the architectural remnants afford but also by the unalterable pastness of that glory. His efforts to communicate with the "divine spirits" of the past culminate in a longing for Orpheus' harp, to "awaken . . . these old Caesars," or for Amphion's, to raise the ruins of Rome—a longing that modulates into the ambition "to rebuild in the compass of the pen" (Sonnets 1 [249] and 25 [273]). What du Bellay hopes to accomplish in poetic portraiture, Thomas Nashe claims for the drama: "our forefathers' valiant acts, that have lain long buried in rusty brass and worm-eaten books, are revived, and they themselves

raised from the grave of oblivion” (*Pierce Penniless* 113). So, too, the writer of a commendatory poem in the Second Folio marvels at Shakespeare’s ability to “blow ope the iron gates / Of death and Lethe” and to “give . . . sudden birth” to “shades” (qtd. in Griffin ix).³⁸

The purpose of such an imaginative revival was not only to evoke wonder but also to stimulate an actual revival of past glory through emulation. In his *Apology for Actors*, Heywood recounts that Aristotle had a play about “the destruction of Troy” staged for his pupil Alexander, who then modeled himself after Achilles; Julius Caesar, in turn, seeing the exploits of Alexander represented, could never rest until his conquests rivaled Alexander’s. Englishmen might likewise be moved to heroism, Heywood suggests, upon witnessing the valor and victories of their forebears on the stage. This was an argument designed to appeal to the authorities, like the contention that plays show “the vntimely ends of such as haue moued tumults, commotions, and insurrections” and “the flourishing estate of such as liue in obedience.” But Heywood had himself written one play, and co-written another, depicting very different heroes, whose civic virtue equaled or surpassed their martial prowess, and very different themes: not kings seeking to enlarge their territories through conquest but legitimate and successful popular uprisings against rulers who abused their authority.

Of course, in Heywood’s time, no one imagined, much less advocated, that the English should imitate the actions of those who founded the Roman Republic or toppled the regime of the Decemvirs. Rather, the model of the Republic was capable of partial application within the English political system, and the cultural tradition transmitted by

³⁸ I.M.S., “On Worthy Master Shakespeare and his Poems,” Second Folio (1632).

Roman histories, oratory, and other writings occupied a prominent place in the English political imagination. English writers on affairs of state might invoke the maxim *Salus populi suprema lex esto* (“Let the well-being of the people be the supreme law”) (qtd. in Skinner, “Classical Liberty” 12),³⁹ while magistrates, parliamentarians, councilors, and generals might draw inspiration from such heroes of the Roman Republic as Scipio Africanus, Cicero, and Cato the Younger. Yet however impracticable, even unthinkable, republicanism was as a political alternative in England before 1649, works by Roman republicans such as Livy and Cicero, and books and plays based on those works, exposed readers and spectators to that very alternative.

Did this exposure spark a desire to see a republic on the Roman model established in England? Thomas Hobbes apparently thought so. In *Behemoth* (ca. 1667-69),⁴⁰ he lists among seven causes of the English Civil War

an exceeding great number of men of the better sort, that had been so educated, as that in their youth having read the books written by famous men of the ancient Grecian and Roman commonwealths concerning their polity and great actions; in which books the popular government was extolled by that glorious name of liberty, and monarchy disgraced by the name of tyranny; they became thereby in love with their forms of government (168).

Hobbes was not alone, nor was his assessment merely a product of hindsight. David Norbrook cites two similar comments, made long before the Civil War. On a young man

³⁹ Cicero, *De Legibus*, III, 3.8.

⁴⁰ For the date of composition, see Seaward 6.

sent to prison for a speech in the 1614 Parliament, Sir Henry Wotton commented as follows: “a young gentleman fresh from the school, who having gathered together divers Latin sentences against kings, bound them up in a long speech, and interlarded them with certain Ciceronian exclamations” (qtd. in Norbrook, *Writing the English Republic* 42).⁴¹ And in 1634, Edmund Bolton wrote of Tacitus that “the noble and other the ingenuous youth of this monarchy [may be] taking harm by their unwary reading that historian (who is no friend to regality)” (qtd. in Norbrook, “Lucan” 56).⁴² Such reading, Bolton argued, “will teach, or invite . . . readers . . . to dote vpon popular States, and either to hate or vnderualue Monarchie, though borne therein,” as well as “to prie into, examin, iudg, and foreiudg the deeds, and words of theyr sovereign to the worse.”⁴³ In their condescension or outright hostility, Hobbes, Wotton, and Bolton chose to ignore the considerable political acumen of many of those who opposed the growing absolutism of the English monarchy. Their observations, however, attest to the potency of the Roman republican model and remind us that young and impressionable boys first encountered Sallust, Cicero, and excerpts from Livy in grammar school (Baldwin 564-66, 573).

Of course, classical reading, a bedrock of the *studia humanitatis*, lent itself to many applications, not all of them republican (Smuts 27, 37; also section II above). Royalty were as immersed in the classics as monarchomachs. Mary, Queen of Scots read Livy with George Buchanan in the early 1560s; Queen Anne and Prince Henry saw a performance of Heywood’s *The Rape of Lucrece* at Court in 1612 (Peter Hume Brown

⁴¹ *Life and Letters of Sir Henry Wotton*, ed. Logan Pearsall Smith, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1907), ii, 37-9.

⁴² British Library, Ms. Add. 64908 (Coke Papers, vol. 39), fols. 160r-163v (citation from Osmond 329).

⁴³ From Bolton’s summary of the conclusions of *Averrvnci*, transcribed in Osmond 342.

180, 326; Kewes, “Roman History” 241). A number of writers produced translations of classical authors, or interpretations of Roman history, specifically to counter possible republican readings. Such were Hobbes’ translation of Thucydides, William Fulbecke’s history of Rome, Bolton’s *Nero Caesar or Monarchie depraved* (1624), and his unpublished *Averrvnci or The Skowrers*, a defense of the Emperor Tiberius.⁴⁴

Particularly multivalent was the wide-ranging influence of Tacitus in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Some Tacitists, like Justus Lipsius in the 1570s, excoriated contemporary tyrants as versions of Tiberius, while others (including, to some extent, Lipsius in his later writings) took their political lessons from Tiberius, counseling secrecy and duplicity as paths to success, or at least necessary tools of statecraft (Tuck ch. 2; Smuts 34). *Qui nescit dissimulare, nescit regnare* was much quoted.⁴⁵

The lessons drawn from the classics differed not only according to the interpretation one placed on particular works or historical events, but also according to the period one considered the culmination of Roman achievements. For some, this was the Republic; for others, the Empire, particularly the Empire under Augustus, the emperor who could afford to be moderate after all his opponents and rivals had been defeated or proscribed. The Augustan era—the Golden Age of Virgil, Horace, Ovid, and Livy—had brought peace to Rome after a generation of devastating civil war. James I, whose entry into London was elaborately staged as a Roman imperial triumph, used Roman imagery to promote himself as a benign and potent British emperor under whom

⁴⁴ For Hobbes’ translation, see Norbrook, *Writing the English Republic*, 58-62. Fulbecke’s title hints at his book’s near-fanatical antirepublicanism: *An historicall collection of the continuall factions, tumults, and massacres of the Romans and Italians during the space of one hundred and twentie yeares next before the peaceable empire of Augustus Caesar* (London: William Posonby, 1601). For Bolton’s works, see Osmond 331-43 and Smuts 39.

⁴⁵ “He who knows not how to deceive, knows not how to reign.” See Goldberg 68-69.

the arts and commerce could flourish, and prided himself on keeping England out of war (Goldberg 33-53, esp. 33, 43, 46). Along with the Roman imperial style went a theory of monarchy that can best be described as absolutist, despite James' qualifications.

According to James, it was the monarchy, not the people, that was and of right ought to be free. The king, though in conscience bound to reign justly and reasonably, was in practice accountable to none but God. Talk of classical liberty, the supremacy of the law, or the participation of the people in governance, not to speak of the sovereignty of the people, was frowned upon.

In turn, the House of Commons insisted that "the liberties, franchises, privileges, and jurisdictions of Parliament are the ancient and undoubted birthright and inheritance of the subjects of England" (Protestation of December 18, 1621, qtd. in Tanner 49). Although, as here, members generally used the language of ancient constitutionalism in asserting their rights, Quentin Skinner has argued that their position was based in part on Roman republican principles, particularly and fundamentally the distinction between freedom and slavery, generalized from the legal status of an individual to that of a people ("Classical Liberty"). A slave was subject to the domination of another; a free individual was able to act as he or she saw fit. In a commonwealth, of course, laws had to be established to keep order, but in a free state, those laws were framed by the people's representatives and consented to by the people as a whole. Everyone, including the magistrates, was subject to the laws. A state ruled by one person who was above the law (even one who voluntarily undertook, as James did, to abide by the law) was subject to that individual just as a slave was subject to his master. The monarch, like the master of a slave, might be benevolent, and the monarch's subjects might be free to pursue their

lives as they wished, but, as Cicero observed in his *Philippics*, the wretchedness of a subject's condition lay in the fact that the monarch, like the master, could at any moment become oppressive, should he so desire (Skinner, "Classical Liberty" 10).⁴⁶

Not only were these principles found in Roman law and articulated by classical writers; they were kept alive by editions, commentaries, translations, and literature and drama based on Roman history. Andrew Hadfield has characterized pre-Civil War republicanism in England as a complex of "*topoi*," "stories," and "images" that constituted a collective mental and emotional reservoir (13). Junius Brutus swearing revenge on the dagger plucked from Lucretia's breast, Horatius singlehandedly fending off the enemy at the bridge, Scaevola thrusting his hand into the fire—these were just a few of the emblematic moments in the sweep of Roman history that illustrated the steadfastness of a people intent on gaining and defending its liberty. The mere transmission of such stories may have been more important for political consciousness and discourse than their particular treatment by a writer, preacher, or dramatist.

Scholarly interest in republicanism (thus broadly defined) in Elizabethan and Jacobean literature and drama appears to date back only to the mid-1980s. With *Poetry and Politics in the English Renaissance*,⁴⁷ David Norbrook became the first literary scholar in the twentieth century to undertake a critical survey of Renaissance English

⁴⁶ Johann Sommerville has contested Skinner's argument, claiming that the English framed the distinction between slavery and freedom in terms of English common law rather than Roman principles ("English and Roman Liberty" 211-16).

⁴⁷ London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984. Citations of this work will be to the revised edition of 2002. Some slightly earlier works had also found traces of oppositional politics, or at least criticism of courts and monarchs, in literature and drama. For example, in *The Tragedy of State* (1971; based on a series of lectures delivered in 1970), J. W. Lever had reinterpreted Jacobean revenge tragedy as reflecting not a taste for gratuitous cruelty but the ruthlessness and corruption of contemporary rulers, while Margot Heinemann, in *Puritanism and Theatre* (1980), had presented evidence for a popular "Puritan" strain in early Stuart theater.

literature that reflected and transmitted “radical politics” (sometimes including republican ideas) instead of, or in uneasy coexistence with, the dominant view of state and society as divinely ordained, harmonious works of art. His *Writing the English Republic* (1999) continued to trace the development of political discourse both inside and outside of literature, beginning with the pivotal influence of Lucan in the early-seventeenth century and moving into the overt republicanism of the Civil War, Republic, and Protectorate. A few years later, Andrew Hadfield’s *Shakespeare and Republicanism* (2005) placed Shakespeare in the context of republican and oppositional ideas available in the political treatises, literature, and drama of the late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries, attending to some of the lesser-known plays about the Roman Republic along the way.⁴⁸

Drama on Roman republican history would almost inevitably have portrayed republican institutions and practices, and its characters would have articulated and modeled republican values. Yet, considering the potency of the influence of the Roman Republic, its historians, and its moralists on Renaissance England, scholarship on this corpus of plays remains remarkably sparse. The obvious exception, of course, is Shakespeare’s Roman republican plays (and, to a much lesser extent, Jonson’s). The centuries-long flood of studies on these, as on all of Shakespeare’s works, shows no sign of abating, though *Coriolanus* and *Julius Caesar* have seldom been considered in the context of other Roman plays of the period. Much earlier critical work on Shakespeare’s Roman plays took up the question of their historical accuracy or concentrated on themes

⁴⁸ Hadfield analyzes Thomas Lodge’s *Wounds of Civil War*, the anonymous *Caesar’s Revenge*, William Alexander’s *Julius Caesar*, the anonymous *Tragedie of Claudius Tiberius Nero*, and George Chapman’s *Caesar and Pompey* (66-79).

and images, or on tracing the development of Shakespeare's attitudes toward Rome.⁴⁹ Coppélia Kahn, in an influential feminist study (1997), called attention to the masculine character of Roman virtue and argued that Shakespeare's Roman plays critiqued this "ideology of gender" (*Roman Shakespeare* 1). Some few scholars have actually considered the politics of these plays and their embeddedness in the political discourse of Shakespeare's time. G. K. Hunter pointed out that "Roman" was a code word for a constellation of virtues rooted in a republican political outlook, which playwrights, in contrast to historians, presented sympathetically ("A Roman Thought" [1977]). While Robert Miola denied any ideological influence of the classics on Elizabethans in *Shakespeare's Rome* (1983), he went on to consider the relevance of early modern views on tyrannicide to *Julius Caesar* in a later essay.⁵⁰ Paul Cantor, setting *Coriolanus* and *Antony and Cleopatra* side by side, maintained that Shakespeare was contrasting the austere virtues of the Republic with the self-serving attitudes of the Empire, to the disadvantage of the latter.⁵¹ More recently, Oliver Arnold has argued that Shakespeare's Roman plays, rather than accurately portraying the politics of ancient Rome, reflect the disempowerment of early modern Englishmen by their political representation in the House of Commons.⁵²

Two recent books take different tacks in their examination of Roman history plays by Shakespeare and others. Warren Chernaik's suggestively titled *Myth of Rome in*

⁴⁹ See the discussion in Miola, *Shakespeare's Rome*, 12-14; also Spencer, "Shakespeare and the Elizabethan Romans," and Thomas, *Shakespeare's Roman Worlds*.

⁵⁰ "Julius Caesar and the Tyrannicide Debate" (1985).

⁵¹ *Shakespeare's Rome, Republic and Empire* (1976).

⁵² *The Third Citizen* (2007).

Shakespeare and His Contemporaries (2011) includes brief discussions of plays on the same historical episodes as those treated by Shakespeare, but the light these plays might shed on Shakespeare's plays or on the Renaissance "myth of Rome" remains obscure.⁵³ Clifford Ronan's "*Antike Roman*" (1995) ambitiously considers all forty-three extant Roman history plays written or performed between 1585 and 1635, arguing that they reveal the dark side of the Roman character: pride, savage cruelty, and the will to domination. However, Ronan's engagement with the political impact of these plays (which he tends to minimize) is confined to a twelve-page section on "political topicality" (49-61).

Aside from several articles and book chapters on individual plays, such as Paulina Kewes' essay on Heywood's *The Rape of Lucrece* and Curtis Perry's on Kyd's *Cornelia*, no study of the representation of republicanism in English Renaissance drama on Roman history has been carried out.⁵⁴ Approximately forty English plays on the Roman Republic were written or performed between 1559 and 1660, of which fourteen to sixteen are extant, depending on whether one counts Marston's *Sophonisba* (1605), which focuses on Carthage and the Carthaginians, and Ben Jonson's *Sejanus His Fall* (1603), which, though set in the Empire, explicitly and consistently looks back to the Republic as a moral reference point. In the following pages, I will examine selected plays from this corpus in order to gain some sense of how playwrights represented a form of government and a set of political principles so different from the official Tudor or Stuart monarchist doctrine, and how they molded and interpreted the tradition that had grown up around the

⁵³ Chernaik defines the "myth of Rome" as "the received tradition of Roman history and Roman values" (5).

⁵⁴ Kewes, "Roman History and Early Stuart Drama" (2002); Perry, "Uneasy Republicanism" (2006).

Republic and its history. In addition to the work of Roman historians, they may also have consulted narratives by Lydgate, Chaucer, and Painter, as well as Continental writings and drama. Whether deliberately or unconsciously, they would have responded to the issues of the moment at which they were writing, and their plays may have influenced political discourse both immediately after their initial performance or publication and for decades into the future.

Drama necessarily centers on conflict, and we should not expect (nor do we find) portrayals of a happy, flourishing Roman Republic, without internal conflicts or external wars. The ideal state of the Republic is illuminated on stage by the abuses, dangers, and conflicts that precipitated its birth or restoration, or that threatened to extinguish it. Its virtues are upheld and embodied by the abilities and virtues of its citizens. Few characters, however, manifest the relatively uncomplicated virtue of Junius Brutus in Heywood's *The Rape of Lucrece* or of Cato in Chapman's *Caesar and Pompey*. Coriolanus' disdain for the plebeians, Marius' vengefulness in Lodge's *Wounds of Civil War*, the maneuvering of Cicero in Jonson's *Catiline*, and the conflicting loyalties of Marcus Brutus in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* reveal both the forces that eventually tore the Republic apart and the measures to which its defenders found it necessary to resort.

Drama on the history of the Roman Republic was written for both public and private theaters; for performance at court, schools, or universities; or exclusively for reading. The earliest extant play, R.B.'s *Apus and Virginia* (ca. 1559-67), is a morality; Kyd's translation of Robert Garnier's *Cornélie* is a compilation of rhetorical pieces reflecting action that has taken place offstage. The latest of these plays in the period considered here, *Marcus Tullius Cicero*, was published in 1651, nine years after the

closing of the theaters in 1642. The flood of publications in the Civil War period, and the ensuing Republic and Protectorate, included many plays—some, like the collected works of Beaumont and Fletcher (1647), never before published. Arguably, printed plays may have influenced political discourse for a longer period, and more profoundly, than performances. For these reasons, I have chosen the period from 1594, the date of first publication of Shakespeare's narrative poem *Lucrece* and Thomas Kyd's closet drama *Cornelia* (the earliest of the works considered here), to 1660, the year marking the end of the English Republic (though not of English republicanism), for examination of the political contexts in which Roman history plays were composed and their impact on political discourse, particularly republican political discourse, in England. As political language and thought within the Parliamentary faction moved closer to full-blown republicanism over the course of the 1640s, the historical episodes these plays represented, and the republican principles inherent in them, acquired new currency.

Occasionally one encounters direct quotations from these plays, apparently solid evidence for their impact on political thought and argument. Frequent performance or multiple printed editions also suggest that a dramatic work was popular and therefore influential. Since the educated classes read classical authors in Latin, it is often impossible to tell whether their use of examples and analogies from Roman history owed anything to the drama. Still, many of them likely attended theaters and read playbooks (Gurr 90, 98), so plays that brought to life scenes from Livy, Sallust, or Tacitus would have reinforced or modified the impressions gained from their classical reading.

Some of the early modern English plays on the Roman Republic, such as Kyd's *Cornelia*, were never performed and probably had a limited readership (Perry, "Uneasy

Republicanism” 536). Yet all participated in an ongoing conversation, one in which the historical tradition was constantly reinterpreted to serve current rhetorical purposes. Thus, material excerpted from a play would take on its own life, quite apart from the original author’s intentions. For example, Buckingham was not yet King James’ favorite in 1603, when Jonson’s *Sejanus* was first performed, yet he was dubbed Sejanus as early as 1621, in a popular libel (“When Charles, hath got the Spanish Gearle,” lines 60-64). And when the actor turned Leveller printer John Harris appropriated Cassius’ language in 1648 to mock the folly of Parliament in requesting the imprisoned King Charles to confirm their actions, the ulterior motives of Shakespeare’s character never surfaced (*Mercurius Militaris*, Oct. 7 to Nov. 8, 1648, 4; *Julius Caesar* I.ii.135-38, 144-47).⁵⁵ Harris earnestly and vigorously used Cassius’ argument to demystify, not the new and constitutionally questionable authority of a dictator for life, but the established authority of a hereditary monarch.

Roman republican history and thought constituted only one strand of a republican tradition that also encompassed biblical history and prophecy as well as the experience and political thought of the Italian city states, the Marian exiles, the French and Scottish monarchomachs, and the Dutch republicans. But it was a dominant strand, inspiring and influencing all subsequent republicanism, and a vital strand, whose continuing force is the subject of the chapters that follow.

⁵⁵ See also Heinemann 252-55.

Chapter 1. The Founding of the Republic: The Rape of Lucretia

To the Romans, their Republic represented the highest and best form of political organization attainable, the form that most reliably promoted the public good as well as the highest realization of individual character. The images that Roman and Greek orators, historians, and biographers created of that Republic elicited admiration not only from their contemporaries and successors in the ancient world but also from readers and audiences in early modern Europe. For this reason alone, their narratives about the origins of the Republic, from the rise of Tarquin the Proud to the end of his allies' wars against Rome, would have engaged the interest of early moderns. Here was a set of events and characters that constituted a model of tyranny, its overthrow, the establishment of a new political order, and the defense of that new order against the forces of the *ancien regime*. And this was no bare account; rather, it was a complex, multidimensional, and vivid model, presenting, among other elements, social, religious, and political norms, familial dynamics, strategies for seizing and retaining power, the ruler's treatment of his subjects, a subject's strategy for survival, the moment of crisis at which change becomes possible, and the means for moving a people to revolt. On a theoretical level, this historical experience—this network of causes and effects—could lead to reflection on the proper conduct of princes, the basis of legitimacy, the limits of obedience, the meaning of liberty, the duties of citizens, and the relative merits of different forms of government. On a practical level, in a culture that viewed history analogically, this cycle of historical legends offered opportunities for interpreting current situations and advocating action. The very names of Tarquin, Lucretia, and Brutus

encapsulated the whole train of events leading to the founding of the Republic and their political adumbrations. Any of these names, or any episode from the narratives, might be deployed to dissuade rulers from tyranny—but they could just as easily sound a call for resistance, or justify resistance once mounted.

This chapter interrogates the uses and meanings of the cycle of historical legends about the origin of the Roman Republic and their pivotal episode, the rape of Lucretia, in a narrative poem, a tragedy, and political discourse in England between 1594 and 1660. Because these texts cannot be properly understood without reference to earlier accounts, I begin by introducing Livy's *Ab urbe condita*, the earliest extant source for this history, focusing on the characteristically Roman virtues he endeavored to promote and the ways in which he was read in early modern Europe. I then address Livy's account of the founding of the Republic, as well as those of other classical historians, and the political meanings contained therein. Moving from historical to poetic, dramatic, philosophical, polemical, and moralistic works, I trace retellings, interpretations, and mentions of that historical moment in the ancient world up to Augustine. Turning to early modern works before Shakespeare, I note how the political meanings of the Lucretia story were sometimes carried forward but often softened, diverted, or even disregarded in favor of themes more salient for the narrators. In light of this extensive and diverse tradition, I analyze Shakespeare's narrative poem *Lucrece* and Thomas Heywood's tragedy *The Rape of Lucrece*, the only extant English Lucretia play written before 1660. Finally, I consider the importance of these works for the transmission of this republican origin legend and its political uses in England up to 1660.

I

In Renaissance England, the major primary source for the early history of Rome was the surviving books of Livy's *Ab Urbe Condita*. Although a complete English translation was not published until 1600, the work was familiar to many in the sixteenth century. A severely abridged translation of the third decade by Anthony Cope, entitled *The Historie of Two the Moste Noble Capitaines, Annibal and Scipio*, appeared in 1544. In grammar schools, where Latin was taught and spoken, excerpts from Livy were taught, mainly as models for prose style and oratory, and as sources of moral exempla (Baldwin 2:563-68, 573-74). University students read Livy, among other classical historians (Curtis 113, 120; Kearney 38, 42). In addition, as mentioned in the Introduction, scholars and courtiers consulted Livy for the light he might shed on the contemporary political situation and as a guide to action.

By his own account, Livy wrote to instill in his fellow countrymen a sense of pride in Rome's accomplishments and to inspire them, individually and collectively, to emulate the virtues of their ancestors (I.pr.9-11).¹ Two complementary exploits emblematic of these virtues are set, back to back, in the early days of the embattled Republic, when the Etruscan king Lars Porsenna, an ally of the ousted tyrant Tarquin the Proud, is besieging Rome. One man, Horatius Cocles, stands against the whole Etruscan army while his fellow Romans demolish the bridge behind him; then, fully armed, he jumps into the Tiber and swims to safety under a shower of enemy missiles (II.11). As the siege continues, the noble youth Gaius Mucius, thinking it unworthy of a free people to suffer a siege, hatches a bold scheme to enter the enemy camp and assassinate

¹ For Livy, I use the 1919 edition and translation of Benjamin Oliver Foster in the Perseus Digital Library. Translations of passages from Livy here are my own except where otherwise indicated.

Porsenna. Apprehended after his failed attempt, Mucius speaks as one “*metuendus magis quam metuens*” (more to be feared than fearing):

‘Romanus sum,’ inquit, ‘civis; C. Mucium vocant. hostis hostem occidere volui, nec ad mortem minus animi est quam fuit ad caedem: et facere et pati fortia Romanum est.’

(‘I am a Roman citizen,’ he says; ‘they call me C. Mucius. I, an enemy, wanted to kill an enemy, nor do I have less courage for death than I had for killing; both to act and to suffer bravely is Roman.) (II.12.8-9)

Warning that a long line of Roman youths stands ready to repeat the attempt on Porsenna’s life, he thrusts his right hand into the fire to demonstrate his scorn for any torture the enemy can inflict. The king, unnerved at the prospect, releases Mucius (henceforth called Scaevola, the left-handed) and makes peace with Rome.

The tale is fictional; Porsenna did in fact conquer Rome (Ogilvie 19). Mucius’ claim that three hundred Roman aristocratic youths have pledged to attack Porsenna is a bluff, an invention within a fiction. But an instructive fiction. Like Rome, Mucius is *destitutus*, alone and friendless, in desperate straits. His only advantage lies in the audacity and resourcefulness with which he manages to terrify the whole enemy camp and its leader. Free of fear and seemingly oblivious to pain, he cannot be compelled; with hundreds more like him on the move, he cannot be stopped. Here again, as with Horatius, one Roman bests a whole army of Etruscans. But in addition to modeling Roman *virtus* (virtue in its root sense of manliness, valor), Mucius defines it, in a series of terse statements beginning and ending with “Roman.” He claims his primary identity as a Roman; only then does he give his name—not as what he is, but as what people call

him. The word order, with *inquit* separating *Romanus sum* from *civis*, emphasizes each term: “‘A Roman am I,’ he says, ‘a citizen.’” To be Roman, then, is to be a citizen, a free man within a city of free men, eager to defend that city. To be Roman, Mucius goes on to say, is also to be master of oneself, to face all circumstances courageously, whether they call for acting or for suffering. The reward for such self-mastery and self-sacrifice is glory: the fictitious long line of Roman youths waiting to take Mucius’ place are “seeking the same honor” (*idem petentium decus*) (II.12.10).

Livy does indeed tell of a long line of Romans of superhuman valor and patriotism, though over a span of several hundred years. These characters exemplify the qualities that Romans in the time of Augustus believed had existed in their country’s past and could be revived in its future. It was because of men (and some women) like these, they believed, that Rome had won and retained her freedom and eventually conquered much of the known world. In the Renaissance, Europeans from Petrarch on largely agreed with ancient Romans in admiring these qualities and attributing Rome’s success to them, despite their discrepancy with Christian values. Peter Burke’s survey of the popularity of classical historians in Europe from 1450 to 1700, based on the number of editions of their works, found that Livy was the sixth most popular (“Survey” 135-36).² Jacob Burckhardt recounts that Federigo de Montefeltro, Duke of Urbino, had Livy read to him while he dined and that Alfonso the Great of Aragon, King of Naples, had the historian Antonio Panormita “instruct . . . [him] and his court in Livy, even during military expeditions” (38, 164-65).

² According to Burke’s further breakdown by 50-year periods, Livy was the fourth most popular historian in 1500-49, the third most popular in 1550-99, and the sixth most popular in 1600-49 (137).

Renaissance rulers read Livy to find the recipe, as it were, for Rome's stupendous success. Some city-states, looking only to maintain their independence, civic harmony, and prosperity, might draw lessons from Rome's experience. But to princes in general, Rome meant empire in all its magnificence—and it was to empire that they aspired. Du Bellay in "Au Roy," the dedicatory sonnet to his *Antiquitez de Rome* (1558), expressed the hope that this work would one day be considered a happy omen of the king's "*Monarchie*," a word that Helgerson translates as "universal dominion" but perhaps would be better rendered simply as *imperium* (du Bellay 246-47; Helgerson 1-2). A century earlier (1443), Alfonso of Aragon had assumed the Roman imperial style upon his conquest of Naples: ordering a large hole cut in the city wall, "he drove [through] in a gilded chariot like a Roman Triumphator" (Burckhardt 165). Reading Livy, it was thought, would reveal what domestic and foreign policies, and what military strategies and tactics, had built Rome's empire. Moderns could then apply these, *mutatis mutandis*, to chart their own course to empire (Burke, "Survey" 147-48; Jardine and Grafton 38-41).

But the fact remained that Livy's sympathies were clearly republican. Astute readers would have recognized that the heroic characters depicted in his pages were shaped by republican institutions and that they fought to defend not just their homes and families but also their liberty. Such readers may well, as Hobbes complained, have developed an admiration for "popular government" (*Behemoth* 168). Indeed, some scholars have attributed the late date of the first complete English translation (by Philemon Holland, in 1600) to the clash between Livy's republicanism and the monarchical ideology of Tudor England (Hunter 193). That republicanism was

accentuated by Livy's most famous early modern commentator, Niccolò Machiavelli, whose *Discourses on Livy* were known in England.³

II

The rape of Lucretia is the key episode in the cycle of legends about the birth of the Roman Republic. Briefly, Lucius Tarquinius, at the instigation of his wife, Tullia, moves to seize the throne from his father-in-law, King Servius Tullius, who is killed in the ensuing struggle. Tarquin rules oppressively: he puts to death the most prominent Senators and anyone else who might challenge his authority, excludes the Senate from its traditional role in governance, and forces the plebeians to labor at menial tasks, including the construction of the Cloaca Maxima (Great Sewer). For his actions and demeanor, he becomes known as Tarquinius Superbus (Tarquin the Proud). When Tarquin's son Sextus rapes Lucretia, a virtuous young matron of Collatia, she swears her husband and father to revenge, then kills herself. Lucius Junius Brutus, Tarquin's nephew, who has been playing the idiot for safety's sake, sees the opportunity he has been waiting for. Pulling the dagger from Lucretia's breast, he swears by her blood to pursue Tarquin and his family "with sword, with fire, and with whatever force I can, nor will I suffer them or anyone else to reign in Rome" (Livy I.59.1). He rallies the citizens of Collatia and marches with them to Rome, where he not only tells the assembled people of Lucretia's violation and death but rehearses all the crimes and tyrannies of the Tarquins. The Romans agree to expel the Tarquins and replace the monarchy with the consulship, a

³ Gabriel Harvey read the *Discourses* with Thomas Preston (Jardine and Grafton 42-43), and wrote in a letter of "an odd crew or two that are as cunning in [Machiavelli's] Discorsi sopra la prima deca di Livio, in his *Historia Fiorentina*, and in his *Dialogues della arte della guerra* too . . . as university men were wont to be in their *Parva Logicalia* and *Magna Moralia* and *Physicalia* of both sorts" (letter to Mr. Wood, qtd. in Curtis 119).

two-person executive elected annually. Brutus and Collatine, Lucretia's widower, are elected the first consuls. After a series of battles against the Tarquins and their allies, Rome emerges as an independent republic.

As Livy tells it, the violent usurpation and equally violent and arbitrary rule of Tarquin were unprecedented in Rome, which up to that point had been a mixed state governed according to laws. Romulus, who already held power as the founder, invested himself with kingly authority in order to induce the people to obey the laws he had established (Livy I.8.1-2). After Romulus, kings were elected by the people and confirmed by the Senate, and they consulted the Senate on all important business. Tarquin the Proud was the first to rule without the support of either, and therefore without legitimacy (Livy I.49.3). His reign, according to Machiavelli, introduced corruption into the state that would have irrevocably corrupted the whole people if two or three kings like himself had succeeded him (*Discourses* I.17.1). While Machiavelli does not define corruption here, he is clearly referring to the predatory violence and fraud of the royal family, and the licentiousness of the young princes' companions (Livy II.3.2-3). By the corruption of the people, he appears to mean loss of any aspiration to freedom and of the ability to maintain a free state (*Discourses* I.16.1-2). Where the king governs through fear (Livy I.49.4), his subjects may become brutalized: their sense of mutual obligation may weaken, and they may lose respect for law and religion (*Discourses* I.11-12), which keep a state well ordered. Fortunately for Rome, as Machiavelli thought, this process either had not begun or had not advanced very far (*Discourses* I.17.1).

The rape of Lucretia was not only the last in a long series of atrocities but a summing up, an emblem, of Tarquinian corruption. Now the Tarquins were striking not

only at public life but also at domestic life; not only at their enemies, but also at their kinsmen and friends; not only at the lives, privileges, and liberty of Romans, but also at their honor, the integrity of their bloodlines, their very identities. In a sense, too, the Tarquins were striking at virtue itself: Lucretia the chaste, the hospitable, the faithful keeper of domestic order represented the very heart of Rome. Livy's remark that Sextus' lust was aroused as much by Lucretia's chastity as by her beauty (57.10) implies that this assault on virtue was intentional rather than incidental.⁴

This rape was the kind of sensational crime, as Brutus recognized, that could fire the indignation of the Romans and, with some instigation, rouse them to revolt. The legitimacy of the revolt was based on the fact that it was Sextus Tarquin who had first committed a hostile act—“*hostis pro hospite*” (an enemy for a guest), Lucretia calls him (Livy I.58.8), and Brutus exhorts the men of Collatia to “take up arms . . . against those who had initiated hostilities”⁵ (I.59.4). Lucretia appeals to an implied right and obligation of men, as heads of households, to avenge wrongs done to their families (Livy I.58.7, 10), while Brutus speaks as to citizens and warriors who should strike back when an enemy attacks (I.59.9). Both glance at their hearers' manhood. Sextus, says Lucretia, speaking to her husband and father, “stole a pleasure ruinous to me—and to himself, if you are men” (Livy I.58.8). Brutus echoes her when he rebukes the tears and complaints of the Collatians, calling on them to take up arms “as befit men and Romans” (Livy I.59.4).⁶ There is no mention here of any obligation of obedience, either absolute or

⁴ See also Robinson 489.

⁵ Literally, “who had dared hostile things” (*hostilia ausos*).

⁶ *Brutus castigator lacrimarum atque inertium querellarum*.

conditional, to the monarch; only the bonds of family and community, the code of masculine honor, and, later, religious precepts are recognized.⁷ The Romans' sense of themselves as free citizens with legitimate political agency emerges even more clearly at Rome. There, assembled by Brutus in his capacity as a magistrate, the Tribune of the Celeres, and spurred on by his impassioned oration, the people "abrogate the king's authority" (*imperium regi abrogaret*; Foster trans.) and order the exile of Tarquin and his family (Livy I.59.11).

Livy begins a new book here, celebrating the freedom of the Roman people and "laws superior in authority to men" (*imperiaque legum potentiora quam hominum*; Foster trans.) (Livy II.1.1). Machiavelli calls attention to the crucial importance of the rule of law when he remarks that it was not the rape of Lucretia *per se* that moved the people to rebellion but the certainty that the king would not execute justice against his son (*Discourses* III.5.1). The new republic soon experienced a parallel incident, the handling of which contrasted starkly with Tarquin's arbitrary rule. After the expulsion of the Tarquins, the young companions of the king's sons, who had been used to doing as they pleased, complained that living under the laws, which are "a thing deaf and inexorable" (*rem surdam, inexorabilem*) (Livy II.3.4), was a kind of servitude for them, since there was no king to understand and pardon their misdeeds. While Livy reports the complaint in general terms, it seems plausible that these youths resented a loss of sexual freedom, including the freedom to rape. They conspired to readmit the Tarquins to the city, and were caught and sentenced to death—among them the sons of Brutus, drawn into the conspiracy by their uncles. Brutus, suffering a father's agony, still performed his duty as

⁷ Brutus, in his speech at Rome, invokes "the gods, avengers of parents" (I.59.10) against Tarquin and particularly Tullia, who had ordered her chariot driven over the body of her murdered father.

consul to order and witness the execution (II.5.5, 8). In human terms, this event was a tragedy, but for the Republic, saved from destruction, and for the rule of law, it was a triumph.

Besides Livy's account, the narratives or comments of several other classical authors on these legends of the founding of the Republic have survived. There are mere fragments of an account in the *Library* of the first-century BCE historian Diodorus Siculus (10.20-22), and a brief summation by the second-century CE epitomist Lucius Annaeus Florus (1.1.7.10-11, 1.2.8.7, 1.3.9.1-2). Latin translations of accounts by two Greek historians, Cassius Dio (c. 150-235 CE) and the rhetorician Dionysius of Halicarnassus (fl. 20 BCE), were available in the sixteenth century.⁸ Dio's account, of which only fragments remain, accords closely with Livy's but attributes explicitly political language to Lucretia: "avenge me, free yourselves, and show the tyrants what manner of men you are and what manner of woman of yours they have outraged" (II.19). Dionysius' narrative, which differs in some particulars,⁹ also presents, at length, imagined scenarios and speeches in which political theory (evincing a strong Aristotelian influence) and strategy are discussed. An informal council of Roman patricians, convened by Brutus, agrees to expel the Tarquins, deliberates on how to effect this end,

⁸ Peter Burke found a total of 25 editions of Cassius Dio, including 13 Italian translations and 1 French translation, published between 1500 and 1649 ("Survey," 136, 137, 139). A Latin edition of Cassius Dio that may have contained the fragments of Book II was published in Frankfurt am Main in 1592. Latin editions of Dionysius of Halicarnassus were published in Basel (1549) and Geneva (1588).

⁹ There is no contest of the virtue of wives, no display of the body in Collatia, and no march of an armed band led by Brutus from Collatia to Rome. Lucretia goes as a suppliant to her father in Rome and asks him to summon the most prominent men of the city, to whom she tells her story before killing herself. Shocked by her violation and suicide, they send Valerius to the camp at Ardea to inform Collatine of what has happened and to rouse the army to revolt. But Valerius meets Collatine and Brutus just outside the gates of Rome and brings them to Lucretius' house, where Brutus draws those present into consultation on how to avenge Lucretia.

and debates what form of government to adopt. Brutus, laying out the rationale for the few reforms he proposes, analyzes the strengths and weaknesses of monarchy. Valerius' objection that only a magistrate can lawfully assemble the people reflects a common concern that the expulsion of the Tarquins and the abrogation of kingship be accomplished legitimately. The basis for the legitimacy of these actions, and of the newly established republic, implied in Livy, is made explicit in the course of Brutus' long oration to the plebeians: Tarquin's crimes, he says, should not be called merely "unlawful acts" but "the subversion and extinction of all that is sanctioned by our laws and customs" (IV.80.1).

Roman poets doubtless produced literary and dramatic treatments of the founding legend, including two lost plays entitled *Brutus* (one by Lucius Accius [170-c. 85 BCE] and one by Gaius Cassius Parmensis [dated c. 43 BCE]), but Ovid's account in Book II of the *Fasti*, his unfinished poem on the Roman calendar, is the only significant one remaining. Where Dionysius elaborates on the political dimension of the legend, Ovid plays up its drama and pathos. Lucretia weeps for the risks her husband runs in battle; Sextus, swept off his feet, cannot put her out of his mind. Her lack of options when Sextus accosts her in her bedchamber is particularly clearly articulated:

What could she do? Fight? In battle a woman loses.

Cry out? But the sword in his right hand restrained her.

Fly? His hands pressed down hard on her breast . . . (801-3; Kline

translation)

The prospect of rape, and the rape itself, reduce Lucretia to silence. Instead of calling insistently for vengeance, she can barely bring herself to tell what happened—and then she leaves the end unspoken.

Similes heighten the tension at transitional points in Ovid's narrative: Sextus' passion, which continues to rage after he has left Lucretia's presence, is likened to a wave still swelling after the flood has subsided; Lucretia's plight is compared to that of a little lamb caught wandering from the fold, now lying prostrate under a ravening wolf (*parva sub infesto cum iacet agna lupo*) (775-79, 799-800). Ironically, though, this lamb has remained at home but is as solitary and vulnerable as though she had strayed.¹⁰

While the purported purpose of the *Fasti* is etiological, and the Lucretia episode mostly strikes a tragic tone, Ovid's rather precious poetics, with its apostrophe and its many figures of repetition, aestheticize what was originally a serious account of a shocking crime and a regrettable, though heroic, act of self-sacrifice. Moreover, with the lengthy passage on Sextus' obsession with Lucretia, the poem slides generically into love elegy, possibly evoking sympathy for the prospective rapist, although he is clearly represented as a slave to passion—a characteristic of tyrants. An even more striking departure from the tragic tone is the prurience of the similes: note the wave's tumescence (*unda tumet*) in line 776 and the graphic verb *sub . . . iacet* in line 800. Whether intentionally or not, in the process of producing an entertainment, the poet undermines the quintessential Roman political and cultural values that the Lucretia legend was designed to transmit.

¹⁰ An alternative possibility is to understand the ablative absolute of *stabulis relictis* (line 799) as referring to abandonment of the stable by its keeper rather than by the lamb.

Ovid blunts the political force of the Lucretia legend through summary and elision, hinting at Tarquin's criminality by calling him *vir iniustus* (an unjust man) (688)¹¹ and *dire Superbe* (relentless proud one) (18), and referring to his "stratagems" (*turpi arte* [690] and *insidiis* [718]), rather than giving a full account of his offenses. Brutus' vow (841-44) is weakened—the blood he swears by is only *castum*, not *castissimum* (most chaste) as in Livy, and the resounding crescendos are gone. Lucretia's body is taken to its funeral rather than displayed in the Forum; the assembly of the people, the review of the royal family's crimes, and the institution of the consulship are hastily told; and the departure of the Tarquins is made to appear voluntary (847-52).

The poet's reticence about the revolt and its antimonarchical spirit may be due to reluctance to offend the Emperor, who was in fact, though not in name, a king. Still more awkward than the overthrow of kingship in the late-sixth century BCE was the fact that advocates of the assassination of Julius Caesar had invoked the example of Marcus Junius Brutus' ancestor Lucius (Robinson 463). Ovid does, however, indict the Tarquins through synecdoche, narrating in some detail the capture of Gabii through trickery and murder, and letting that incident exemplify the nature of their rule. Further, by juxtaposing Sextus' actions in Gabii with his rape of Lucretia, and portraying Sextus himself as explicitly linking the two (783), the poet demonstrates that this rape is no mere private wrong but an act of tyranny. His choice of words, too, has political overtones. Sextus' unrighteous love (*iniusti amoris* [779]) echoes his father's injustice. Against Lucretia, as against Gabii, Sextus uses both force and fraud (*vimque dolumque*) (780)—recognized in classical political thought as the means by which a tyrant attains and holds

¹¹ Perhaps quoting Livy at I.53.1: *iniustus in pace* (unjust in peace).

power. According to Aristotle, “any one who obtains power by force or fraud is at once thought to be a tyrant” (*Pol.* 5.1313a). Thus, a sensitive reader might find in Ovid’s narration a condemnation of tyranny, if not of kingship.

Other classical works feature brief discussions of the Lucretia legend. Several authors praise Lucretia’s “manly” courage as well as her “womanly” chastity (*pudicitia*) (Manning 88), perhaps following Dionysius of Halicarnassus, who has Brutus contrast her “woman’s nature” with her demonstration of “the resolution of a brave man” in the context of an *a fortiori* appeal to the Romans (“shall we, who were born men, show ourselves inferior to a woman in courage?”) (*Roman Antiquities* 4.82.3). Ovid calls her “a matron of manly spirit” (*animi matrona virilis*) (*Fasti* 2.847), while Valerius Maximus asserts her gender exceptionalism in extreme terms: “The leader of Roman chastity is Lucretia, whose manly spirit by a malign error of fortune was assigned to a woman’s body” (6.1.1). Seneca, however, following Stoic doctrine, cites the example of Lucretia as evidence that women have as much “capacity for virtue” as men (Manning 87): “In what city, good heavens, are we thus talking? In the city where Lucretia and Brutus tore the yoke of a king from the heads of the Romans—to Brutus we owe liberty, to Lucretia we owe Brutus” (*Ad Marciam De Consolatione*, 16.1-2).

While Seneca treats Lucretia and Brutus as *de facto* partners in the liberation of Rome, some accounts of the founding of the Republic pass quickly over Lucretia to emphasize the active role of Brutus. For example, Cicero, staunch defender of the dying Republic, mentions the rape of Lucretia in his *Republic* but singles out only Brutus for praise, as “a man of exceptional courage and ability” who “struck the cruel yoke of harsh

servitude from the necks of his fellow-Romans” (2.42-49; quotation at 2.46).¹² Vergil, the poet of empire, is decidedly ambivalent, attributing to Brutus the same “proud spirit” that animated the Tarquins, though conceding that in ordering the execution of his sons, he acted to advance “beautiful liberty,” moved by “love of country” and “an immense desire for glory” (not necessarily a pejorative in a political culture where glory is the chief motivator of civic virtue) (*Aeneid* VI.817-23). Plutarch, writing in his biography of Valerius (*Publicola* 3.1) more than a century after the fall of the Republic, calls Brutus “a man of harsh and unyielding temper.” Contradicting Livy, he reports that Brutus watched the execution of his sons without pity, an act “either god-like or brutish” (*Publicola* 6.4) but definitely not human. In concluding, Plutarch defers to the great esteem in which the Romans hold Brutus as the founder of the Republic, but that deference cannot dispel his unease.

The classical historians, poets, rhetoricians, and philosophers who wrote about Lucretia all understood that her suicide was necessary to prove her innocence and thus to stir the populace to revolt. A living woman accusing a man of rape could always be suspected of consent, however irreproachable her life to that point, but a woman who preferred death to disgrace would be believed (a point made explicitly by Diodorus Siculus, 10.21.3-4). Even so, Lucretia’s chastity became the subject of a *controversia* commonly used in the schools of rhetoric: “Should she be judged an adulteress or chaste?” (Manning 88) Augustine, himself a former teacher of rhetoric, expanded on this question as part of his attack on traditional Roman values in *The City of God*, both

¹² Cicero’s *De Republica* was well known in antiquity, but all except the “Dream of Scipio” was lost in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, to be rediscovered only in 1820. It is included here to illustrate a tradition stressing the political meaning of the Lucretia legend that is evident in Dionysius’ *Roman Antiquities*, and later, in Petrarch’s *Africa*.

raising doubts as to the absoluteness of Lucretia's chastity and arguing that if she was indeed perfectly chaste, she had murdered an innocent—herself (I.19).¹³ Augustine's objective here was to challenge the chorus of praise for Lucretia, lest her model appeal to the Christian women raped by the Goths during the sack of Rome (410 CE). He contrasted her "Roman love of glory" with the patient endurance of Christian victims of rape, who knew they were innocent in the sight of God. Of course, the inwardness he demanded of Lucretia was unavailable in her society, and he failed to consider the ancient Romans' concept of bodily pollution (Donaldson 23, 24). His treatment of the Lucretia story illustrates the very real conflicts between Christian doctrine and classical republican principles, according to which virtue serves the common good and reaps honor as its reward. A virtue known only to God may lead one toward the heavenly city, but only virtue publicly manifested and recognized can generate, defend, and continue to inspire a republic.

III

Augustine's views were not shared by all Church Fathers. Jerome wrote approvingly of Lucretia as an example of pagan chastity (*Adversus Jovinianum* 173 [I.46]), and Eusebius and Ambrose thought it permissible for women to commit suicide in order to avoid rape (Murray 202; Donaldson 25-26). While many writers followed Augustine in condemning Lucretia's suicide at least through the seventeenth century, others neither noted his condemnation nor replicated it explicitly. In the Middle Ages,

¹³ Augustine does not dispute that Lucretia was forced but speculates, "what if she was betrayed by the pleasure of the act, and gave some consent to Sextus, though so violently abusing her, and then was so affected with remorse, that she thought death alone could expiate her sin?" Ancient medical theory held that women always took pleasure in sex, even in rape (Saunders 29-31). Augustine eventually dismisses the possibility that Lucretia was subject to such feelings, but he is well aware, as a rhetorician, that this dismissal does not cancel out the doubt he has raised.

Lucretia was often treated as an exemplar of married chastity, with no political resonance whatsoever. For example, a late-fourteenth-century French conduct book, purportedly written by an elderly husband for his young bride, rather chillingly offers the story of Lucretia as an “example of how to protect marriage and chastity” (*Le Ménagier* 90-92 [1.4.13-22]; quotation at 1.4.13). At the outset of the tale of Lucretia in his *Legend of Good Women* (c. 1385-86), Chaucer states that his purpose is not to focus on the exile of the Tarquins for their crimes “[b]ut for to preise and drawn to memorie / The verray wyf, the verray trewe Lucesse,” for “her wyfhood and her stedfastnesse” (V.1684-87).¹⁴ In his account, Lucretia swoons immediately before the rape, canceling out Augustine’s speculations on her possible complicity in adultery, since she could not have experienced any pleasure (V.1812-18). Christine de Pizan adduces the example of Lucretia to defend the reputation of women and to refute the common opinion that they enjoy being raped (*Cité des Dames* 147-48 [II.44]). Where these works report the Romans’ abrogation of kingship, they treat it as a curiosity underlining the impact of Lucretia’s violation rather than as a basis for political reflection (*Roman de la Rose* 158 [lines 8691-92; Chaucer, *Legend*, lines 1869-70; *Le Ménagier* 92 [1.4.22]; *Cité des Dames* 148).

In contrast, Dante, Boccaccio, Petrarch, and Salutati all called attention to the political meaning of the Lucretia legend, whether briefly or at length. That fourteenth-century Florentine men of letters should do so is hardly surprising: not only was Florence a republic, and thus responsive to Livy’s republican ideology, but the city traced its origins to ancient Romans, whether claiming Julius Caesar or Sulla’s veterans as its founders. In his *Inferno* (c. 1308-14), Dante places Lucretia in a noble castle among

¹⁴ The word “legend” in Chaucer’s title means a saint’s life, in contrast to my usage of “legend” as a traditional tale of doubtful veracity.

virtuous pagans, those who “did not sin” (*non peccaro*) (IV.34),¹⁵ and sets her prominently in the catalogue of “great spirits” (IV.119), after King Latinus and his daughter Lavinia, ancestors of the Roman people, and “that Brutus who drove out Tarquin,” highlighting her importance as the inspiration for the founding of the Roman Republic (IV.125-28).

Boccaccio includes a section on Lucretia in *De Mulieribus Claris* (*Famous Women*; composed 1361-62), where he notes that her expiation of her disgrace gave rise to Roman liberty (Brown xii, xix-xx; Boccaccio, *De Mulieribus*, 194-99; XLVIII), and briefly mentions her role in the attainment of liberty again in his chapter about Tarquin the Proud in *De Casibus Virorum Illustrium* (*The Falls of Illustrious Men*; 1355-74) (Book III, section III).¹⁶ What Boccaccio does briefly, Petrarch does at length in *Africa*, the unfinished Latin epic in praise of Scipio Africanus for which he was awarded the laurel (composed c. 1338-39, 1343-44).¹⁷ Asked to discuss the ending of kingly rule at Rome, Scipio’s friend Laelius speaks glowingly of liberty and deplors the shamefulness of the Romans’ submission to a tyrant, “unmindful of what was their own” (III.830). Harking back to his praise of the “innumerable multitude” (III.652) of heroes that Rome had bred, he calls it monstrous that “so many thousands” to whom “Virtue had opened all

¹⁵ Dante’s inclusion of Lucretia among the sinless may imply a rejection of Augustine’s condemnation of her suicide.

¹⁶ Henry Parker, Lord Morley, made a partial English translation of *De Mulieribus Claris*, including the biography of Lucretia, during the reign of Henry VIII. Laurent de Premierfait translated *De Casibus* into French twice (1400, 1409), and John Lydgate translated the second of de Premierfait’s versions into English as *The Fall of Princes* (composed c. 1431-39).

¹⁷ Petrarch’s *Africa* first came out in manuscript in 1396-97 and in print, in the *Opera Omnia*, in 1501; several other editions were published in the sixteenth century, including those of 1503, 1541, 1558, 1570 (with Italian translation), and 1581. Lydgate mentions *Africa* in a 1494 “Prohemium” to Book 4 of the *Fall of Princes*, and copies could be found in the libraries of Cambridge and Oxford (Boswell and Braden 13, 131, 297, 490).

paths,” and “the multitude . . . that had subjugated so many kings and peoples, feared one unworthy head” (III.840-44).¹⁸ Lucretia is treated sympathetically, but the focus soon shifts to Brutus, the revolution he leads, and his efforts to preserve the new Republic. The meaning of liberty is spelled out in terms of the Romans’ new political arrangements: two magistrates instead of one king, elected annually instead of reigning for life, with restrained rather than absolute power. Brutus’s zeal is commended even when he oversees the execution of his sons:

As unfortunate a father, as he was a virtuous citizen;

As unbending a consul, as he was a lover of Liberty. (III.998-99)

His own end symbolizes the obliteration of the tyrants by the victorious Republic: Brutus and a son of Tarquin kill each other in battle, but Brutus, the stronger, falls on top of the prince and “covered the supine man with his body, / Victor to the last.” (III.1009-10).¹⁹

Coluccio Salutati’s *Declamatio Lucretiae* (c. 1367), a rhetorical exercise comprising an effort by Lucretia’s husband and father to dissuade her from suicide followed by her refutation, foregrounds Lucretia’s personal plight. Her husband and father make an Augustinian argument: “Never will one be thought innocent who punishes herself as if guilty.” Lucretia, though, fears not only that Sextus may have

¹⁸ To speak well of “the many-headed beast” was highly unusual in early modern times; to think it absurd for many to submit to one, as Étienne de la Boétie (*Discours de la Servitude volontaire*) would do in the sixteenth century and Tommaso Campanella (“Della Plebe”) in the seventeenth, was even less usual (although for Petrarch, the disparity between the valor of this multitude and the unworthiness of this monarch are crucial to the absurdity). The word I translate as “multitude” is *turba* (“the crowd”) in both passages. The same word is used later of the citizens who arm themselves and follow Brutus: *ingens turba*, a huge crowd.

¹⁹ The image is developed from Florus’ *Epitome*, 1.4.10.8: “Brutus killed the king’s son Arruns with his own hand and died on top of him from a reciprocal wound, clearly as if he would pursue the adulterer even to the underworld” (*Arruntem filium regis manu sua Brutus occidit superque ipsum mutuo volnere expiravit, plane quasi adulterum ad inferos usque sequeretur*). Also from Florus is Laelius’ statement that the Romans suffered the Tarquins’ oppression until pride became mixed with lust (*Africa* III.854-56; Florus 1.1.7.10).

impregnated her but also that her violated body will corrupt her mind. Here chastity and lust have political implications, as can be seen in the language of Salutati's writings denouncing Milanese aggression (Jed 27-29). Chastity stands for self-control and freedom under the rule of law. Lust is a figure for greed for power; rape, a figure for aggression, domination, tyranny. Thus, Lucretia's husband and father refer to her rapist as "the tyrant" and invoke the past crimes of the Tarquins in absolving her of blame. Lucretia, for her part, in demanding vengeance, challenges her menfolk to show their "Roman spirit" (*Vestrum autem erit siquid in vobis romani spiritus est scelus illud ulcisci* ["it will be your part, if there is any Roman spirit in you, to avenge that wickedness"]),²⁰ and explicitly wills the overthrow of the Tarquins. Apostrophizing her body, she says, "Pour out all this blood so that from here may begin the destruction of the proud king and his inauspicious offspring." Her suicide is an indictment of the regime and a call to arms.

Rather than celebrating liberty, whether implicitly or explicitly, English retellings of the story of Lucretia in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries tend to fall into the "mirror for princes" genre. In keeping with the deeply monarchist culture of England, the overthrow of past kings for crimes against their people is taken as a warning to present kings to refrain from similar offenses. While these accounts do not mention liberty or the republic, some of them are clearly anti-absolutist, with a sensibility common to advocates of limited monarchy and republicans. They stress the moral obligation of monarchs to act justly, to abide by the laws, and to cultivate love rather than fear in their subjects. And if they do not endorse the revolt against the Tarquins, neither do they condemn it.

²⁰ In Livy (58.8), her words are *si vos viri estis* ("if you are men").

In his largely apolitical account of Lucrece in the *Legend of Good Women*, Chaucer breaks off the narrative to reproach the rapist for violating the code of chivalry, especially in view of the moral obligation of royalty to model knightly conduct:

Tarquinius, that art a kinges eyr,
 And sholdest, as by linage and by right,
 Doon as a lord and as a verray knight,
 Why hastow doon dispyt to chivalrye?
 Why hastow doon this lady vilanye?
 Allas! of thee this was a vileins dede! (V.1819-24)²¹

In contrast to Boccaccio and Petrarch, Chaucer sees virtue as residing in nobles and princes, not in the people as a whole. A crime against a noblewoman is villainy—the kind of deed one might expect of a peasant or villager. This perspective implicitly justifies monarchy: power is rightly vested in the wellspring of virtue. Sextus, apparently, is a mere aberration.

Unlike Chaucer, both John Gower, in Book 7 of his *Confessio Amantis* (c. 1386-90), and John Lydgate, in his *Fall of Princes* (c. 1439; based on Laurent de Premierfait's *Des Cas des Nobles Hommes et Femmes* [1409; an amplified French paraphrase of Boccaccio's *De Casibus*]) offer what Nigel Mortimer aptly calls “weakly political” versions of the Lucretia legend (67). Following Ovid, Gower tells of the conquest of Gabii as a prelude and parallel to the rape. He charges Tarquin and his son with “tresoun” (in the sense of treachery [“Treason,” def. 1a]) and “tirannie” (VII.4601),

²¹ Chaucer cannot be thinking of the “historical” Sextus Tarquinius, who could not have known of the code of chivalry (invented many hundreds of years after his time) and whose conduct even before the rape would lead no one to expect gallantry or restraint of him. It is the men of Chaucer's own time at whom this apostrophe is targeted.

words that recur throughout his account, and echoes Ovid's characterization of Tarquin as *vir iniustus*: they "token hiede of no justice" (VII.4603).²² Still, Gower's sympathetic treatment of Brutus and the Romans, who consider in council all the wrongs of Tarquin's regime and "taken betre governance" (VII.5123), inevitably yields a monarchist lesson: that kings must avoid giving way to lust or risk being overthrown.

Lucretia appears twice in Lydgate's *Fall of Princes*, once in II.967-1344, where Lydgate "follows the traces" of Salutati at the behest of his patron, Duke Humphrey of Gloucester, and again in III.932-1148, within a sequence of tales about Roman kings, where he translates de Premierfait's "complaint of Lucrece" (Mortimer 73). In the first instance, Lydgate translates selected sentences of the *Declamatio Lucretiae* and expands on them, blunting the rhetorical force of the original and omitting its political language. Like Gower, however, Lydgate condemns the royal family with a few choice descriptors, charging Sextus with "luxure," "tresoun," and "vicious outrage" (II.1018-19), characterizing him as a "tirant" (II.1181, 1190), and, in conclusion, adducing the "luxur[y]e," "cruelte," "tirannye," and "fals extorsioun" (II. 1343-44) of the Tarquins in apparent support of their exile.

The moral that Lydgate draws from his second Lucretia piece is simply, as in Gower, a condemnation of lust in princes, but along the way he invokes two important proto-republican principles. First, he states that Tarquin's son is

²² Here the rapist is not Sextus but another of Tarquin's sons, Aruns, after an alternate tradition. In addition to their occurrence in VII.4601, various forms of the words "tyrant" and "treason" can be found in lines 4889 ("tirannyshe knyht"), 4899 ("tirannie"), 4959 ("tirant"), 4900 ("tricherie"), 4906 ("tresoun"), and 4936 ("tresoun"). Gower's "treason" may be considered a rough equivalent of Ovid's *turpi arte*, *insidiis*, and *dolum*.

Nat louyd but drad; for tirannye off riht

Is thyng most hatid in the peeplis siht. (III.958-59)²³

Cicero had first introduced the question of whether a person seeking to gain or maintain power should do so by evoking love or fear. Early modern political thinkers generally answered the question, like Cicero, in favor of love, with the understanding that “no amount of power can withstand the hatred of the many” (*De Officiis* II.23). This principle implies that rulers must act justly and compassionately, but Lydgate’s formulation moves further along the continuum toward republicanism by endorsing the judgment of the people.

Second, Lucrece’s complaint pivots not only on the contrast (apparently elaborated from Chaucer’s reproachful apostrophe to Sextus) between the ideal character of a king’s son as the chief exemplar of chivalry and Sextus’ action “in contraire off knythod” but also on the violation of both civil and natural law (III.1086-92). She charges that Sextus has

Wrong[e] weies and crokid menys souht

Off lawes tweyne to breke the liberte,

And difface the auctorite (III.1088-90)

and calls for the crime to be “pun[y]shed off riht and equite” (III.1129), thus implying that the king and his family are, or ought to be, subject to the law’s authority. This appeal to law may recall Livy’s (and Dionysius’) legitimation of the revolt against the Tarquins by the Romans’ longstanding laws and customs, and their sense of sacred law (which may be considered equivalent to natural law). It may also be relevant that less

²³ This echoes Boccaccio, *De Casibus* II.V, *In superbos reges*, which concludes by advising rulers, if they wish to reign long, to be loved more than feared (*magis diligere quam timeri*).

than half a century after the composition of the *Fall of Princes*, Sir John Fortescue would write about the preeminence of the laws in the English frame of government (c. 1463-71).

While most early modern accounts of Lucretia praised her chastity and courage, some took a skeptical approach to her story, whether influenced by the doubts Augustine had raised or reflecting the misogyny that was prevalent in the culture. As early as 1275, the “jealous husband” character in Jean de Meun’s *Roman de la Rose* had averred that a skilled seducer could have won over even Penelope and Lucretia (the classical paragons of chastity) (158 [lines 8645-53]). The notorious Pietro Aretino, in a letter of 1537, called Lucretia mad for killing herself for honor (Donaldson 89-90, 182). Most notable among the skeptical or parodic treatments is Machiavelli’s comedy *La Mandragola* (written c. 1518; published, 1524), partially based on tales from Boccaccio’s *Decameron* (Lord 809) but containing many significant echoes of the Lucretia story.²⁴ The heroine, Lucrezia, who appears to be a woman of exemplary virtue, still cannot withstand her husband’s demand that she lie with another man, or her spiritual advisor’s casuistry. Fra Timoteo’s argument that “it is the will that sins, not the body” echoes and perverts the words with which the Roman Lucretia’s husband and friends had attempted to comfort her (III.11). The sudden collapse of Lucrezia’s virtue at the end of the play may reflect Jerome’s statement that chaste women like the Roman Lucretia can no longer be found (Galinsky 17)—or an even more misogynistic denial that such feminine virtue ever existed. But given Machiavelli’s scorn for conventional Christian virtues and his glee in deflating them, chastity itself, as well as the pervasive corruption of Florentine society, is likely his target in *La Mandragola*. For him, the point of Livy’s Lucretia story has little

²⁴ Hanna Fenichel Pitkin has characterized the plot as an “inversion” of the Lucretia story (44).

to do with chastity and much to do with justice, revolution, and the politics of the possible.

The sixteenth century saw a number of plays and *novelle* (tales) on the subject of Lucretia, often written with an eye more to entertainment value than to moral or political instruction. In addition to *La Mandragola*, the plays included *Lucretia and Brutus* (written c. 1526; performed and published 1533) by the German/Swiss reformer Heinrich Bullinger, the *Tragedia von der Lucretia* (performed 1527; published 1561) by Hans Sachs of Nuremberg, Juan Pastor's *Farsa de Lucrecia* (c. 1528), Nicolas Filleul's *La Lucrèce* (acted before King Charles IX and the royal court in September 1566), a lost English *Lucrece* (1596), and Latin tragedies by Fridericus Balduinus (1597) and Samuel Junius (1599). Among these, the didactic popularizations of Sachs and Bullinger, composed in the aftermath of the German peasants' revolt of 1524-25, emphasize the political meanings of the legend. Sachs' short and simple play moves from domestic tragedy to political awareness and justifiable revolution. In Collatine's efforts to console Lucretia, and in his anger and sorrow after her suicide, the longstanding treachery and criminality of Tarquin and Sextus are prominently mentioned. Prominently featured, too, is Brutus' plan to urge the people to "drive out the royal family / And from itself elect . . . / A worthy successor government / And place itself in a free condition."²⁵ The epilogue presents the moral clearly and at length: tyranny leads to rebellion, while a just, compassionate government (perhaps not necessarily republican) brings peace, prosperity, and strength to the land and people.

²⁵ My translation, from the Hartmann edition.

Bullinger's lengthier, more sophisticated drama devotes far less time to Lucretia than to the tyranny of the Tarquins, their overthrow, and the establishment and safeguarding of the new republican government. While the Herald, in the prologue, calls Lucretia to the audience's attention as a positive model of womanly virtue, he places more weight on the negative model of Tarquin, who

. . . shows the great danger

Faced by those who are ruled

By men who are blind with lust.

They feast on the blood of the poor. . . .

They observe neither the law nor justice. (65)²⁶

Lucretia and Brutus follows Dionysius of Halicarnassus in setting forth the principles behind the new republican government, and its purposive anachronisms (e.g., "burgomaster" for "consul," "Council" for "Senate") make clear the applications of the story to the contemporary situation. Bullinger even introduces an ahistorical peasant who cannot obtain justice in the courts at Rome and is beaten and arrested when he tries to bring his case to the king. When the Romans rise against the Tarquins, "country folk" come to join them in their fight (83), and Brutus accepts their help respectfully and gratefully. The conspiracy to return Rome to kingly rule and its suppression are dealt with at length to demonstrate "how freedom is never without / Opposition" and how it may be protected (61). While Brutus' punishment of the conspirators (including his own sons) appears harsh, it is portrayed as necessary and even praiseworthy; not only does he insist that the new republic cannot survive unless strict and impartial justice is

²⁶ Citations of Bullinger's *Lucretia and Brutus* are to Susannah Jill Martin's translation.

administered (116), but his judgment is affirmed by a Council member (121), and the preface to the reader commends him as “an example of how a courageous / And faithful man handles power” (62).

Few people in England would have been familiar with Lucretia plays from other countries, although Marian exiles in Germany and Switzerland may have known Bullinger’s *Lucretia and Brutus*, and *La Mandragola*, in the original Italian, appeared in a collection of Machiavelli’s works published in London in 1588 (with a false imprint) by the enterprising John Wolfe. Readers of Italian might also have known the chatty Lucretia tale (incorporating a considerably padded version of Salutati’s *Declamatio*) in Matteo Bandello’s *Novelle* (1554, 1573). William Painter’s more concise English narrative, based closely on Livy, in his popular collection of tales *The Palace of Pleasure* (1566; reprinted in 1569 and 1575) was probably widely read. But even the illiterate were familiar with Lucretia, through ballads (two are mentioned in the Stationer’s Register for 1568 and 1570), the business signs of the printers Thomas Berthelet and Thomas Purfoot, and other visual representations, such as the painted cloth of “Ralph and Lucrece” mentioned in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (II.8) and Olivia’s seal in *Twelfth Night* (II.5.89-90) (Sidney Lee, 11-12). Lucretia’s image and her story, at least in its broad outlines, permeated English culture.

IV

Shakespeare’s narrative poem *Lucrece* (1594, quarto running title “The Rape of Lucrece” and retitled as such in 1616) was popular with readers through much of the seventeenth century, going through eight editions by 1640 and a ninth in 1655 (the latter with a continuation, *Tarquin Banished: or, The Reward of Lust*, by John Quarles). The

poem appears, at first blush, to follow Ovid—and outdo him—in elaborating on the personal and psychological dimensions of the story while minimizing its political significance. Neither the violent usurpation nor the tyrannical acts of Tarquin the Proud are mentioned. Nor is Sextus’ betrayal of Gabii to his father, which Ovid treated as synecdoche for Tarquinian tyranny and a precedent for the rape. Lucrece’s suffering, and her attempts to come to terms with what has happened to her and to determine the best course of action, form the center of the poem. The exhortation of Brutus (1818-41) takes up a mere 24 lines, and 2 more stanzas suffice to wrap up the narrative with the lords’ oath of revenge and the exile of the Tarquins. Yet the strongly Livian Argument, which begins with the tyranny of the Tarquins and ends with the establishment of the consulship, is explicitly republican.

Ian Donaldson, in his survey of the Lucretia tradition, has argued that Shakespeare’s poem inverts the republican values of the legend, offering as evidence the following three points: first, Lucrece makes the “flattering” comparison of a king to the sea and pleads for “exil’d majesty’s repeal” (640); second, Tarquin is compared to “a foul usurper” (412), suggesting that “the worst thing Shakespeare can find to say about Tarquin is that he is like a man who deposes a king”; third, words such as “rebel,” “insurrection,” and “mutiny” are used to signify “sexual and spiritual disorder” (Donaldson 116-117). Annabel Patterson strongly disagrees with Donaldson but does not actually refute him, charging rather that he bases his argument on minute, insignificant details of the text. She maintains that the poem’s republicanism inheres in its frame, consisting of the Argument and the last seven stanzas, which emphasize the importance of the people’s suffrage and consent; however, she devalues the rest of the poem as

excessive verbiage, to which Brutus applies the necessary corrective (“Framing” 305-309). Colin Burrow offers a more nuanced consideration both of the relation between the Argument and the poem and of the politics of the work, suggesting that Shakespeare may have consulted Paulus Marsus’ edition of Ovid’s *Fasti*, which contained parallel readings from other classical texts as well as commentary, and may have chosen, similarly, to present two different, complementary versions of the same story (48-50).²⁷ Furthermore, Burrow notes that Lucrece’s “royalist” arguments (Donaldson 116) are typical of humanist political orthodoxies, somewhat outdated by 1594, such as a counselor might present to a king, and suggests that the rape of their speaker signals a crisis of government (Burrow 51-52). According to Burrow, the questions that Shakespeare raises about politics, ethics, intention, and “reading” (perception, interpretation, judgment) remain unanswered, and intentionally so (54, 59, 66).²⁸

I agree with Patterson and Burrow that the Argument is Shakespearean, a point that has been disputed in the past (Patterson, “Framing” 306; Burrow 47-50), and find the poem largely consistent with the Argument, though differing in emphasis. Patterson’s

²⁷ Since Painter’s novella about the rape of Lucrece in *The Palace of Pleasure* does not even mention Tarquin’s usurpation and tyranny until after the rape, it cannot have been Shakespeare’s only source for Livy’s account. Notably, Painter does not tell why Lucretia’s father and husband marvel at Brutus’ forceful speech.

²⁸ Other scholars have gone farther afield. Barbara Parker does actually invert the republican message of the Lucretia story by forcing it into a Platonic mold, positing that monarchy is the ideal form of government (and that the monarch represents reason), calling the reign of Tarquin the Proud a timocracy rather than a tyranny, and decrying the establishment of the Republic as leading to mob rule. Andrew Hadfield offers valuable insights on the importance of the rule of law and the implications of Lucrece’s arguments and observations for political action, but overstates his case in treating Lucrece herself as a republican. She does indeed change from a “servile subject of the king to an outspoken critic,” as Hadfield states, but a critic of the crime of a prince rather than of “the excesses of monarchy” (139-40). Nowhere within Shakespeare’s poem does Lucrece suggest that monarchy leads to tyranny. She does not “[absorb] the political transformation which she had traditionally been seen to cause,” taking over Brutus’ role, as Hadfield argues (140), because she imagines at most the deposing of a king, not the institution of a different form of government. She could, rather, be considered a monarchomach. What she asks of her menfolk is only justice, or vengeance, on her “foe” (1683, 1698).

devaluation of the bulk of *Lucrece* reflects an earlier consensus that more-recent scholars have reconsidered in light of the poem's contemporary reception and the meanings conveyed by its poetics.²⁹ Heather Dubrow, for example, has demonstrated how the poem explores issues through, not in spite of, rhetorical and poetic figures (18, 84). The frequent use of syneciosis, she argues, "aptly expresses the tensions in the Roman culture that Shakespeare is evoking": both conflicts between and within individuals and conflicts between the culture's values (84). Burrow's observation that the republicanism of the Argument is muted in the last two lines of the poem is indisputable (47-48): the people's role is minimized, and neither Brutus' "bitter invective" nor the change of government is mentioned. But it is significant that while the Argument has a Roman setting, the poem itself is primarily Elizabethan, replete with chivalric, heraldic, and Christian terminology, Tudor household furnishings, and characters with recognizable, Shakespearean consciousnesses. In her apparent education, wide sympathies, and political articulateness, Shakespeare's *Lucrece* resembles a Tudor noblewoman such as Lady Jane Grey or Mary Sidney Herbert more than a Roman matron of the late sixth century BCE. Shakespeare may have toned down the politics of the poem to fit its setting; as Donaldson notes, he would have had reason to express republican sentiments cautiously (115).

I propose that Shakespeare's *Lucrece* does not elevate kingship over republicanism, or vice versa, but implies a proto-republicanism, or constitutionalism, according to which ultimate sovereignty resides in the people. Kings are bound by divine

²⁹ Katharine Eisaman Maus, writing in 1986, names Richard Wilbur, Douglas Bush, J. W. Lever, Coppélia Kahn, and even Ian Donaldson as critics who dislike the "elaborate rhetoric" of the poem ("Taking Tropes Seriously," 66). Except for Donaldson's *The Rapes of Lucretia* (1982), the works to which Maus refers were published between 1963 and 1976. Those who have found value in the figurative language of *Lucrece* include Maus herself, Robert Miola (*Shakespeare's Rome* [1983]), Nancy Vickers ("The Blazon of Sweet Beauty's Best" [1985]), Joel Fineman ("Shakespeare's Will: The Temporality of Rape" [1987]), and Linda Woodbridge ("Palisading the Elizabethan Body Politic" [1991]).

authority and human law; therefore, a king who degenerates into a tyrant *ipso facto* relinquishes his throne. At various points, Shakespeare's poem, like the medieval mirrors for princes (such as Lydgate's *Fall of Princes* and the seventh book of Gower's *Confessio Amantis*), hints at the danger of tyranny for the tyrant without explicitly advocating (or condemning) his overthrow by human means. For example, Lucrece tells Tarquin, "kings' misdeeds cannot be hid in clay" (609), and in asking for revenge, she calls Tarquin "his own" foe (1683-84). In contrast to the Argument, the poem submerges the people's political agency in perfect passive participles, in phrases such as "This deed will make thee only loved for fear" (610), until the penultimate line.

Moreover, Shakespeare's *Lucrece* employs a kind of synecdoche different from Ovid's, compressing the whole tyrannical family of Tarquin the Proud into the single character called "Tarquin" (although the son of Tarquin the Proud is called by his own name, Sextus Tarquinius, in the Argument) and their whole rapacious reign into a single act of sexual violation. The son is described in terms that recall his father's usurpation, as one "Who like a foul usurper went about / From this fair throne to heave the owner out" (412-413; Livy 1.47-48). The father silences opposition by inspiring terror in his subjects and surrounding peoples (Livy 1.49-51); the son silences Lucrece viciously, by gagging her (an apparent innovation of Shakespeare's) (677-81). The father sentences subjects to death or exile for no other reason than to confiscate their property (Livy 1.49.5); the son, in his pursuit of Lucrece, is portrayed as a thief (35, 126, 30, 693, 736, 997) who takes a "treasure," "wealth," a "rich jewel" (16, 17, 34) owned by another (18, 27, 35). In sum, the prince displays the same temperament and behaviors that Livy

attributes to his father: ambition, pride, greed, treachery, willfulness, violence, and refusal to listen to counsel.

Tarquin's pride is introduced early on as the possible motivation for his tyrannous enterprise:

Perchance his boast of Lucrece' sov'reignty

Suggested this proud issue of a king . . .

Perchance that envy of so rich a thing,

Braving compare, disdainfully did sting

His high-pitched thoughts that meaner men should vaunt

That golden hap which their superiors want. (36-42)

Tarquin (perchance) thinks that his position as a king's son should work to his own advantage—a key component of Aristotle's definition of a tyrant, in contrast to a king, who "aims at the common advantage" (*Pol.* 3.1275a, 4.1295a). He considers himself elevated above others—even a nobleman, "kinsman," and "dear friend" (237), such as Collatine—and thus entitled to the best of everything, whether lawfully obtainable or not. His frequent invocation of his "will" as sufficient justification for his actions (e.g., 486-87) recalls Aristotle's other key distinction between kings and tyrants: kings govern according to law, while tyrants govern arbitrarily, according to their own desires (*Pol.* 3.1285a, 4.1295a).³⁰ Thus, in accordance with the traditional figuration of tyrants as predatory beasts (Bushnell 13, 46, 50-56)—which epitomize murderousness, desire uncontrolled by reason or conscience, and disregard of human laws (Aristotle, *Pol.* 3.1287a; Bushnell 53)—Tarquin is likened to a serpent, a gripe, a "foul night-waking

³⁰ According to Rebecca Bushnell (11), this distinction was first formulated by Xenophon (*Memorabilia* 4.6.12).

cat,” and a wolf (362, 543, 554, 677), among others. Lucrece “pleads in a wilderness where are no laws / To the rough beast that knows no gentle right” (544-45).

Tarquin’s tyrannical personality is manifested through the descriptions of his gaze, his arousal, and his movements. Love is initiated by the eye gazing at beauty, in wonder and admiration, but the eye is also a symbol of covetousness:

What could he see but mightily he noted?

What did he note but strongly he desired?

What he beheld, on that he firmly doted,

And in his will his wilful eye he tired. (414-417)

Tarquin moves from intrusion into Lucrece’s bedchamber to a momentary stasis of enchanted gazing that leads to renewed arousal and aggressive action. Mightily, strongly, firmly. The admiring eye becomes active as the strong feelings evoked confirm Tarquin’s resolution to possess the object of his unlawful desire; it is thus characterized as traitorous, greedy, lustful, and unhallowed (73, 179, 368-69, 392) as well as willful, and soon turns deadly in its effects, “a cockatrice’ dead-killing eye” (540). The pride of his “high-pitched thoughts” finds an echo in his state of arousal: his veins “swell in their pride” (432), and the hand he places on Lucrece’s breast is “smoking with pride” (438). As many critics have noticed (e.g., Miola 25-26; Woodbridge 330), his advance toward her is narrated through a series of martial metaphors. His body parts appear to constitute a whole army: his “drumming heart” strikes an alarum; his veins, like pitiless soldiers, await the charge; his hand leads, marches, makes a stand, and batters; his tongue, like a trumpet, sounds a parley (428-39, 463-64, 470-71). He views Lucrece as a “never-conquered fort” (482); her breasts appear like “a pair of maiden worlds unconquered”

(408). Having left the siege of Rome's actual enemy, the Rutuli at Ardea, Tarquin treats one of his own people as a "foe" (471).³¹ That the tyrant was a public enemy was a well-worn commonplace (e.g., John of Salisbury 8.19; Boccaccio, *De Casibus* 2.5); the corollary was that it was lawful, even necessary, to depose or kill him. This is Brutus' view when he says that Lucrece "should have slain her foe" (1827).

Yet Shakespeare's prince, though insistently referred to as false and foul, a thief and a traitor, is so only in intention at first; he is not irredeemable until the moment of the rape. The Sextus of earlier versions arrives at Collatia already bloodstained, notorious for his betrayal of Gabii and presumed complicit in his father's crimes. In *Salutati's Declamatio Lucretiae*, Lucretia's father and husband ask, "Is not the cruelty of the father, the barbarity of the sons, sufficiently known to you? That corruptor of your body, how much slaughter did he accomplish in Gabii? How many innocents died there?" Shakespeare's Tarquin, however, appears clouded by no such history; though impelled by lust, he still has his honor intact at the opening of the poem and is newly endowed with a conscience. The reproach that Chaucer's narrator addresses to the prince in *The Legend of Good Women* ("Why hastow doon dispyt to chivalrye?" [143]), he voices himself here: "O shame to knighthood and to shining arms!" (197). He is capable not only of anticipating the "dangers of his loathsome enterprise" (184) but also of understanding and deploring the hatefulness of the deed he is about to commit (187-240). This novel characterization of Tarquin enables Shakespeare to depict the process by which a prince

³¹ Tarquin, or, more properly "his traitor eye" (73), is called a foe as early as line 77, when Lucrece is welcoming him to Collatia.

may degenerate into a tyrant.³² He does so by repeatedly choosing to follow his desire (or will) rather than conscience and reason: “My will is strong past reason’s weak removing” (243).

Against the tyranny of Tarquin stands the “sovereignty” of “holy-thoughted” Lucrece (36, 384). Ostensibly, the sovereignty of which Collatine boasts is Lucrece’s superiority in beauty and chastity to the other matrons of Rome. But the word has deeper connotations. What provokes Tarquin is not only Collatine’s possession of something richer than anything of his, but also the fact that Lucrece’s virtue places her outside the control of his princely power. Hers is a moral sovereignty, arising from devotion to her husband and honoring of human and divine laws. While martial images portray Tarquin’s attitude and actions, civic images are used for Lucrece: she is a “sweet city,” or the “dear governess and lady” of “her land”; her heart is a “citizen” (439, 443, 465, 469). Of course, these images position her as the target of Tarquin’s attack, but they also convey the order and lawfulness of the world she inhabits and that part of it over which she presides.

It comes as no surprise, then, that such a character as Lucrece appeals to divine authority, moral principles, laws, and social norms in an effort to dissuade her assailant:

She conjures him by high almighty Jove,
By knighthood, gentry, and sweet friendship’s oath,
By her untimely tears, her husband’s love,
By holy human law and common troth . . . (568-71)

³² As Katherine Duncan-Jones and H. R. Woudhuysen suggest, the poem may also be read as a cautionary tale for a young aristocrat, such as Shakespeare’s patron Southampton (65-67) (and, I would suggest, for Shakespeare’s gentleman readers).

Annabel Patterson (308) and Catherine Belsey (320, 329) have called attention to the centrality of consent in *Lucrece* and the prominent use of the word “consent” in the Argument and the penultimate line of the poem: Tarquin the Proud seizes the throne “not requiring or staying for the people’s suffrages,” and his son takes possession of Lucrece without her consent. Later, both Lucrece’s friends and the Roman people move “with one consent” to extirpate the Tarquins from Rome. As important as consent is in *Lucrece*, however, the phrase in the Argument directly preceding “not requiring” is equally important: “contrary to the Roman laws and customs.” These laws and customs are the local expression of the universal principles of justice and social cohesion with which the poem is deeply concerned (e.g., 158-59, 189, 195, 897-908, 1687). Lucrece upholds them; the tyrant and his son the rapist flout them; Brutus invokes them; the new (republican) regime, based on consent, restores them.³³

In the moments before the rape, as Lucrece moves from the mode of pleading (568-95) to the mode of counsel (596-644), she posits the modelling of virtue and the administration of justice as the primary functions of a king. Tarquin’s deliberations have concerned only whether to commit or abstain from a vicious deed; the best outcome he can think of is to do no harm. Lucrece, though, speaks of the positive good he should accomplish. He thinks of his princely status in terms of power and entitlement; she reminds him of the responsibilities imposed on him by its source (624, 627). His power is derivative and conditional, not supreme. The sword he wields is only “lent” to him for

³³ When the narrator compares Tarquin to a “foul usurper” (412), it is likely the lawlessness and violence of usurpation that he is condemning rather than, as Donaldson claims, the fact that a king is deposed (117).

the purpose of putting down iniquity (626-28).³⁴ After hinting obliquely at the dangers of developing into a vicious monarch who would be feared rather than loved (603-11), Lucrece argues that the rape would impede Tarquin's ability to govern. As the model for his subjects, he would breed widespread crime and corruption, and would lack the moral standing to punish criminals (612-23, 629-30). He would thus subvert his "princely office" (626-28).

Predictably, these arguments do not impress Tarquin. But they do reflect an idealized vision of kingship based on Aristotle's concept of rule by one individual according to law in the interests of the realm. Accordingly, at the beginning of her counsel on kingship, Lucrece professes to disbelieve that her assailant is Tarquin, accusing him of *lèse majesté*—"wound[ing] his princely name"—for appearing in Tarquin's likeness (596-99), because a true prince would not commit rape. If, on the other hand, the intruder in her bedchamber really is Tarquin, he is already estranged from himself. Thus, she wraps up her counsel by "su[ing] for exiled majesty's repeal," that is, appealing to Tarquin to manifest the dignity and sense of justice proper to a prince. However, she is not as uncomplicated a "Royalist" as Donaldson makes her out to be (117). Her statement that "kings like gods should govern everything" (602) does not so much glorify kings as remind Tarquin that only those who govern themselves are fit to govern others.

Hast thou command? By him who gave it thee,

From a pure heart command thy rebel will. (624-25)

³⁴ Lucrece's language in lines 624-27 is reminiscent of *Romans* 13.1-5, particularly verse 4: "For he is the minister of God for thy wealth. But yf thou do evyll, feare: for he beareth not the sworde in vayne, for he is the minister of God, revenger of wrath on hym that doth evyll" (1568 Bishop's Bible).

Exiled majesty, upon its return, would see things in their true light and “prison false desire” (642).

A king who fails to live up to this “true type” of kingship—or, worse, subverts it—disqualifies himself. In essence, he is no longer a king. While Donaldson is correct that the poem uses words such as “rebel” to signify “sexual and spiritual disorder,” these words are always, with one exception, applied to Tarquin; they are never used of Brutus or the Roman people.³⁵ By giving free rein to his will, Tarquin becomes a rebel against reason, compassion, law, his own soul, and God.

Figuratively, Tarquin falls from the highest to the lowest status in Roman society: from royalty to slavery.³⁶ The word “slave” had at least four meanings to early moderns: (1) an individual who serves, and is dominated by, a master; (2) a subject whose ruler(s) treats him or her as a master treats a slave, with no recognition of any rights; (3) an individual who cannot or will not control his or her passions and appetites; (4) a “slave by nature,” one who, by reason of intellectual and moral deficiencies, is unfit to be free (Aristotle, *Pol.* 1254b). The elder Tarquin has reduced the Romans to the status of slaves in the second sense; the younger Tarquin, like many tyrants, becomes a slave in the third sense (Bushnell 13). The tyrant as a slave of passion was a Renaissance commonplace. Sir John Stradling, for example, in the preface to his translation of Lipsius’ *Two Books of Constancy*, refers to “those selfe affections, which do tirannize over the greatest tyrants,

³⁵ Lucrece is said to be “in mutiny” with herself as she tries to work out whether to live or die (1153).

³⁶ For a different perspective on royalty and slavery in Shakespeare’s *Lucrece*, see A. R. Bossert III, *The Golden Chain: Royal Slavery, Sovereignty and Servitude in Early Modern English Literature, 1550-1688*, Diss. U of Maryland, 2006, 183-98 (<http://drum.lib.umd.edu/bitstream/handle/1903/4120/>).

holding their minds in more servile subjection, than they do the bodies of their vilest captives" (70).

Thus, when Tarquin boasts of the "uncontrolled tide" of his passion as if it were an attribute of sovereignty, comparing it to the sea (645-51), Lucrece upends his metaphor. It is Tarquin himself (whether as heir to the throne or as an individual) whom she calls "a sea, a sovereign king," while his "black lust, dishonour, shame, misgoverning" threaten to contaminate, diminish, and even bury his sovereignty: "Thy sea within a puddle's womb is hearsed" (653-58). She warns him what will happen if "all these petty ills" prevail:

So shall these slaves be king, and thou their slave;
 Thou nobly base, they basely dignified;
 Thou their fair life, and they thy fouler grave;
 Thou loathed in their shame, they in thy pride. (659-62)

The "slaves" in this case are vices and the consequences of vices, attributes characteristic of slaves in the third and fourth senses, which engulf and muddy the sea of Tarquin's being, rendering him, in Lucrece's metaphor, a slave of slaves. As these "ills" flourish, feeding on Tarquin's noble birth, royal status, and youthful vigor, they will debase and destroy him ("they thy fouler grave").

The rape, which occurs almost immediately after this prediction, brings it to pass. Tarquin "hates himself," realizing that he is shamed for all time and has rendered his soul (figured as a "spotted princess") "thrall" to damnation (718, 721, 724-26, 738). Brutus will call the Tarquins "abominations" who bring disgrace upon Rome (1832-33). Lucrece, cursing her rapist, will wish on him the life of "a loathed slave" and then imply

that he has already become a “base . . . slave” through “deeds degenerate” (984, 1001, 1003). His metamorphosis from prince to slave is completed in her imagination.

To Tarquin’s characterization as a rebel and a slave, one may add “traitor,” defined broadly as “one who betrays any person that trusts him, or any duty entrusted to him” (“Traitor,” def. 1). Tarquin betrays not only his friend Collatine and his hostess Lucrece but also his duty as a knight and a prince, and thereby his very identity (“in vent’ring ill we leave to be / The things we *are* for that which we expect” [148-49; emphasis added]). The words “treason” and “traitor” are used eight times in *Lucrece* (73, 361, 639, 770, 877, 888, 909, 1686), either directly of Tarquin or indirectly, in contexts that allude to him (as when Lucrece calls Opportunity a ravisher, traitor, and thief [888]). In one instance, the “high treason” of his “greedy eyeballs” misleads his heart. High treason is a legal term meaning “an offence against the king’s majesty or the safety of the commonwealth” (“Treason,” def. 2). The eyes, which set off a chain of events leading to the rape, attack the sovereignty of the heart (seat of reason and compassion), which should rule the passions and appetites; Tarquin’s sovereignty insofar as he conforms to the “true type” of a prince; Lucrece’s moral sovereignty; and the body politic, which Lucrece (though far more than a mere symbol) represents (Hadfield 142).

Having degenerated into a tyrant, rebel, slave, and traitor, Tarquin has, in effect, dethroned himself. The movement to banish him is thus entirely legitimate. Lucrece, formerly a loyal subject, says, “Let the traitor die / For sparing justice feeds iniquity” (1686-87). Brutus grounds his call to action on the hoped-for approbation of the gods (1830-35) and the rights of the Roman people (1838). The Romans respond with applause and consent (1854-55).

Shakespeare's *Lucrece* does not explicitly advocate—and the poem does not even mention—a republican form of government. Nor does it suggest that monarchy depends too much on the virtue of a single man or woman, who can all too easily slip into tyranny. But it does show that justice is, or should be, the guiding principle of government, and that allegiance is ultimately owed to that principle rather than to a ruler who violates it. And it portrays the people as entitled to a role in government and competent to assemble, confer, and agree on a course of action. In the end, Lucrece's moral sovereignty and the Romans' popular sovereignty triumph over the willfulness of the tyrant. "Tarquin's everlasting banishment"—the banishment of tyranny—implies a reconstitution of government that secures the people's rights through suffrage and the rule of law. The legacy of Lucrece is a Rome in which civic virtue safeguards and fosters individual virtue.

V

Thomas Heywood's "true Roman tragedy" *The Rape of Lucrece* (first performance, c. 1607), while heavily influenced by Shakespeare's poem, follows Livy fairly closely, foregrounding the politics in the story of Lucrece.³⁷ Whereas Shakespeare deploys the rape as synecdoche for all the crimes of Tarquin the Proud, Heywood represents and describes those crimes explicitly. Critics have generally characterized this drama as a chronicle play (Symonds xx; Clark 221), but it is actually shaped not simply to cover a period of historical time but to portray the rise and defeat of a tyrannical regime. As Paulina Kewes has pointed out, this is one of very few Elizabethan and Jacobean plays to represent a revolution against a reigning king or governing body as

³⁷ All citations of Heywood's *The Rape of Lucrece* refer to numbered lines in Allan Holaday's 1950 edition. The play is not divided into acts.

legitimate (“Roman History” 244-45).³⁸ In keeping with its theme of the rise of the Roman Republic, *The Rape of Lucrece* highlights the value of the engaged life of public service (*vita activa*) and the obligation of a ruler to take counsel, and celebrates the Roman virtues of patriotism, self-sacrifice, valor, honor, chastity, and frugality. It effectively portrays the despair and frustration of the nobles under Tarquin’s tyranny and the suffering of Lucrece after her rape. And it shows how their heroism brings about the liberation of Rome.

This solemn and high-minded tragedy, however, is interspersed with scenes of low comedy and a plenitude of songs, almost half of them bawdy. The first and second editions of the playbook (1608 and 1609) contained eleven songs; the third (1614) had two added at the end; the fourth (1630) had another four inserted within the play; and the fifth (1638) had five more inserted, for a grand total of twenty-two. These include songs of political commentary, songs on English themes (with no connection to the plot or theme of the drama), and romantic songs.³⁹ It is the bawdy songs (seven in 1608, ten by 1638) that pose the greatest challenge: with their casually exploitative attitude toward women, they appear to undermine the values of chastity and honor, and the dignity of the

³⁸ According to Kewes, two other Livian dramas of the period, Shakespeare’s *Coriolanus* and Webster and Heywood’s *Appius and Virginia*, similarly depict such revolutions as legitimate. This is true of *Appius and Virginia*, but I find *Coriolanus* much more ambivalent.

³⁹ There are three songs of political commentary in 1608 (“When Tarquin first in Court began” [546-49], “Let humor change and spare not” [553-58], and “Lament Ladies lament” [591-98]), one added in 1630 (“Come list and harke” [2214-31]), and two added in 1638 (“Though the weather jangles” [1207-20] and “I’d thinke my selfe as proud in Shackles” [2267-76]), for a total of six. While the 1608 edition contains no songs on English themes, one is appended to the text in 1609 (“The Cryes of Rome” [2999-3061]), two are inserted into the text in 1630 (“The Gentry to the Kingshead” [1148-71] and “The Spaniard loves his ancient slop” [1747-86]), and one song inserted in 1638 contrasts city and country life (“O yes, roome for the Cryer” [1662-81]), for a total of four. One romantic song, an aubade (“Packer clouds away, and welcome day” [2119-38]), is added in 1630, and another, a praise of Lucrece (“On two white Collofms archt she stands” [2154-85]), in 1638. In addition, the Clowne sings a very short piece, probably a parody of a popular ballad (“Iohn for the King has beene in many ballads” [1240-43]).

heroine, essential to the sense of tragedy here. Consider, for example, the first stanza of the song about “all the pretty suburbians”⁴⁰ (1039):

Shall I woe the lovely Molly,

She's so faire, so fat so jolly,

But she has a tricke of folly,

Therefore Ile ha none of Molly. No. no no, no no, no. (1042-45)

To add to the rambunctiousness, the audience may have joined in on the refrain (Corrigan 148).

As songs performed for Roman statesmen and soldiers, men who boast about the virtue of their wives and eventually wage war to avenge the rape of Lucrece and free their country, these would be jarring enough. But the nadir is apparently reached when Valerius and Horatius, on the pretext of coaxing information out of the Clown, sing a catch with him on the morning after the rape. It begins as follows:

Val. *Did he take faire Lucrece by the toe man?*

Hor. *Toe man.*

Val. *I man.*

Clow. *Ha ha ha ha ha man.*

Hora. *And further did he strive to go man?*

Clow. *Goe man.*

Hor. *I man.*

Clow. *Ha ha ha ha man, fa derry derry downe ha fa derry dino.*

(2296-2304)

⁴⁰ The “suburbians,” of course, would have been prostitutes, since the brothels were in the suburbs (near the theaters).

The catch proceeds, in an obscene blazon, to ascend the imagined body from the heel through the shin, knee, and thigh to the final question, “*But did he do the tother thing man?*” (2337) The performers may well have mimed the moves, and the audience, again, may have joined in on the refrain (Bamford 73).

The bawdy songs in general, and the catch that appears to jest about the rape in particular, have repelled and baffled critics. In 1825, Charles Baldwin, editor of *The Rape of Lucrece* in *The Old English Drama*, called the play “a sort of dramatic monster, in the construction of which every rule of propriety is violated, and all grace and symmetry are set at defiance. The author, one would suppose, must have produced it when in a state of inebriety . . .”⁴¹ John Addington Symonds, in his introduction to an 1888 edition of Heywood’s works, concluded that the catch cancelled out any claim the play might make to tragedy: “The whole matter is turned to ridicule, and it is difficult after this musical breakdown to read the tragedy except as a burlesque” (xxiv). More recent literary scholars have generally concurred with Baldwin and Symonds in deploring the play’s lack of decorum and the songs’ “crudeness and bad taste” (Clark 219-21; Donaldson 86; quote from Baines 111). Feminist critics, especially, have interpreted the songs in the worst possible light. Mercedes Maroto Camino calls Valerius, the Roman aristocrat turned musician, a “deeply distasteful character” who introduces the “possibility of doubting Lucrece’s resistance” and “whose catches wholly dissipate the sense of ‘tragedy’ from the stage” (101).⁴² Karen Bamford suggests that “the tension

⁴¹ Still, Baldwin went on to remark that the play contained “much that is really excellent” (qtd. in Wright 142-43, fn.).

⁴² In fact, the catch is all about the rapist’s moves; it says nothing about Lucrece’s reaction. The grave tone of Lucrece’s letter, the haste of the messenger, Collatine’s quick reaction, and Horatius’ summing up of the situation (2287-92) suggest that while Valerius and Horatius suspect rape, they do not doubt Lucrece’s resistance.

between these songs and the overt theme of the play reveals an ambivalence about rape characteristic not just of Heywood's play, but of social attitudes in a patriarchal society (rape matters very much/rape does not matter at all)" (73). Nora Johnson, focusing on the dissonance between the comic tone of the catch and Lucrece's passionate voicing of her grief in the very next scene, speaks of the play's "failure to be troubled about its own contradictions," stating that "there is something about theatrical pleasure—and particularly something about the charisma of actors—that Heywood cannot keep himself from engaging, even when good taste dictates that he should distance himself from the popular and the histrionic" (148).

In contrast, those who find dramatic and ethical value in Heywood's *Rape of Lucrece* have relied on the play's clear introduction of Valerius' musicality as a "humor" adopted to disguise his discontent with Tarquin's regime (512-42, 630-38) (Kewes, "Roman History" 258, Culhane 36). All six of the "lords" or "peers" (the words Heywood uses for Roman men of the senatorial class) in the play who constitute its collective protagonist, deprived of their rightful roles as statesmen and soldiers, take on "humors": Brutus feigns madness, Lucretius weeps, Horatius frets, Scaevola laughs (and frequents brothels), Collatine "neutrizes"⁴³ (971)—and Valerius sings. But this explanation, while indisputable, is insufficient: too many of the songs are bawdy, they are too long, and they have too much fun. So critics have tried to tease moral or political meanings out of them. Barbara J. Baines finds them "a dramatically efficient commentary upon a world of appetite and perversion" (111), and Peter Culhane suggests that they are "symptoms of the dangers of the passive life" (36). It is true that the

⁴³ "Neutrize" is defined by the *OED* as "to remain neutral."

unrestrained sexuality of these songs reflects the misrule of the Tarquin regime (see below), but this point is deemphasized in the play. Above all else, it is the clear purpose of these songs to entertain the audience.

In fact, the songs were key to the popularity of the play, which was performed into the 1630s (Kewes 241) and printed in five editions between 1608 and 1638. The author and printer apparently considered the lyrics a major attraction for prospective buyers of the playbook; the title pages of all editions advertise “the severall Songs in their apt places,” and that of 1638 further features “sundry Songs before omitted.” Nor was this plethora of songs, and their miscellaneous character, as exceptional as it appears. Louis B. Wright cites many examples of songs with little or no relation to the action or characterization of the plays into which they are inserted.⁴⁴ While the 1638 edition of *The Rape of Lucrece* contains more song texts than any other extant playbook of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, other plays might have had as many in performance (Wright 268). Songs tended to circulate separately from play texts (for purposes of composition and rehearsal) and often were not printed with them (Sternfeld 22; Stern 135, 137, 140, 141). How many songs, and which ones, were sung at any given performance would have depended on factors including the actors’ assessment of the mood of the audience and the time available. The English were “lovers of music and song” (Wright 274); they enjoyed singing themselves, at home, in the street, and in taverns, and they expected instrumental music, song, and dance at the theater (Austern 122, 133, 134). At least one Elizabethan was reported to have said, “I have often gone to

⁴⁴ “Extraneous Song in Elizabethan Drama after the Advent of Shakespeare,” *Studies in Philology* 24.2 (April 1927): 261-74.

plaies more for musicke sake, then for action” (*Ratsey’s Ghost*, A3v–B1v, qtd. in Gurr, *Shakespearean Stage* 80).

Certainly the Red Bull, with its citizen audience, had a reputation for “ribald entertainment and uproarious amusements” (Wright 267). Here, especially, there was no reason for the playwright to refrain from “the popular and the histrionic” in favor of “good taste”; it was the former that sold tickets. Heywood, in fact, specifically justified the insertion of comic scenes (and, by implication, song) into serious drama in the front matter to his *Gunaikeion* (1624):

. . . our Historicall and Comicall Poets, that write to the Stage . . . least the Auditorie should be dulled with serious courses (which are meere weightie and materiall) in euerie Act present some Zanie with his Mimick action, to breed in the lesse capable, mirth and laughter: For they that write to all, must strive to please all. And . . . such fashion themselves to a multitude, consisting of spectators seuerally addicted . . . (A4v; qtd. in Johnson 123)

Such practices were not new, and did not cater only to the uneducated; they could be traced back at least to the fifteenth century (as seen in the morality *Mankind* [c. 1470] and Henry Medwall’s humanist interlude *Fulgens and Lucrez*). It was this type of play that Philip Sidney condemned in his *Defence of Poesie* (1595) as “mongrell Tragicomedie,” “neither right Tragedies, nor right Comedies.” Yet John Dryden was to defend, and even praise, tragicomedie in his *Essay on Dramatic Poesy* (1668), maintaining that “compassion and mirth in the same subject” need not “destroy each other” (qtd. in Sternfeld 7).

Jeffrey Knapp has linked Heywood's defense of fashioning himself to a multitude to St. Paul's self-characterization in I Corinthians 9:22: "in all things I fashioned myself to all men, to save at the least way some" (Tyndale translation; qtd. in Knapp 27). Knapp argues that many playwrights aimed to teach religious lessons in an inclusivist manner (14), believing "that the church ought to minister to the ignorant and corrupt as well as to the enlightened and virtuous" (27). Adapting Knapp's argument, and extrapolating from Heywood's assertion in his *Apology for Actors* that plays have "taught the vnlearned the knowledge of many famous histories" (see Introduction, 32), I propose that in *The Rape of Lucrece* (among other works), Heywood considered it his mission to bring the classics, and the lessons they taught about individual character and just governance, to the masses. If it took bawdy songs and drinking songs to keep his audience engaged, so be it. Yet these songs did not always remain separable from the historical/tragic content; the two elements could, and sometimes did, intermix.

Thus, *The Rape of Lucrece* was a multilevel experience, or, as Allan Holaday puts it, something of a "variety show" (43). It appealed to all with song, comedy, pageantry, and battle scenes, and to the learned with echoes of earlier narrations (Livy, Dionysius, Ovid, Chaucer, Lydgate, Shakespeare).⁴⁵ Tragic and comic scenes, spoken word and song, Rome and England, the late sixth century BCE and the early seventeenth century CE, occupied the stage in quick succession, sometimes simultaneously. Actors readily stepped into and out of character. Since the Red Bull was an amphitheater and its plays

⁴⁵ In fact, some features of the plot that might be taken as Heywood's inventions are actually from sources other than Livy and would likely have been recognized as such by educated auditors and readers. For example, Zonaras (7, 9) in his epitome of Cassius Dio mentions that Tullia followed Tarquin to the Senate house in preparation for the usurpation, and Dionysius of Halicarnassus (IV.69) explicitly states that Tarquin's sons kept Brutus around as their fool (see Corrigan 142-43).

were performed in daylight, audience members were aware of each other and their surroundings; the illusion of immersion in the world of the play was never complete. Valerius sings his first statement of discontent with Tarquin's regime in character as a Roman senator, but the song is composed of two-line snippets from two English ballads (Holaday 32-33). Later in the same scene, however, the performance of "Now what is love" (a shortened version of a song anthologized in two English collections),⁴⁶ does not appear to be grounded in the fictional situation; here, the audience likely perceived the singer not as Valerius but as an English entertainer.

Along with translations for "the less capable" and infusions of Christian concepts (e.g., the devil [1246, 2003, 2561], sin [1929, 1975, 2036]), the songs contribute to anachronism and anachorism in *The Rape of Lucrece*. They are English (with one Scottish and one Dutch song) of necessity; not enough was known about Roman song to enable an imitation, and it would not likely have pleased the audience in any case. Heywood wrote at least one of the songs ("Packe clouds away" [2119-28]), originally as an epithalamion for James and Anna Waade (Moore 174-75), and possibly also "The Spaniard loves his ancient slop" (1747-86), which appears in *A Challenge for Beauty* (published 1636). Others are excerpts, collages, and parodies of traditional and contemporary songs—so many, in fact, as to lead to the speculation that few or none of the songs were written specifically for this play.

A subset of the songs foreground the geography and culture of England, particularly London. For instance, "The Gentry to the Kingshead" plays on the names of various taverns in London; "Shall I woe the lovely Molly" mentions seven English

⁴⁶ *The Phoenix Nest* (1593) and Robert Jones' *The Second Booke of Songs and Ayres* (1601). (See Holaday 32.) Heywood uses (or prints) only the first and last stanzas of five.

feminine names; “The Cryes of Rome” are clearly recognizable as London street cries. “The Spaniard loves his ancient slop” is a jocular characterization of the English, “a strange people, in the westerne Islands” (1741) who would surely have been unknown to Romans in the late sixth century BCE. Such songs made playgoers comfortable (as well as merry) by allowing them to frolic on familiar ground. Thus refreshed, they would have turned back the more willingly to the “weighty” matters of virtue, tyranny, and revolution—though these, too, for the most part, are presented in so lively a manner as not to “dull” the audience.

Music is equated with mirth in *The Rape of Lucrece* (and probably in the theater in general); asked for a song, Valerius replies, “I had ever a fit of mirth for my friend” (2113-14; see also 599, 601-03, 1000-01, 1026-28). It makes sense, then, to look at the songs and comic scenes in *The Rape of Lucrece* together, as species of “mirth,” and, instead of deploring them or explaining them away, to consider them as integral to the theatrical experience (though not always to the action or themes of the drama). Indeed, some scholars have already done so, notably Eva Griffith in her study of the Red Bull, and Katrine Wong and Nora Corrigan in their work on gender and song. Griffith discusses the songs in the context of the action in which they are embedded but only hints at an interpretation (161-71). Wong calls attention to the importance of Valerius’ songs in maintaining and strengthening the bonds among the lords while providing a disguise for their discontent (74-75, 102), though she overstates her case (97). Corrigan offers sensitive interpretations of some of the songs, and rightly points out that they “[build] community” (148). But her arguments that singing and listening to songs constitute a form of political resistance, that in turning away from duty and toward pleasure the lords

embrace an alternative ideal of Roman manhood, and that scenes of a lord singing with a commoner represent an egalitarian ideal, are neither borne out by the play nor consonant with the social attitudes of its time (140, 148-49, 152).⁴⁷

The bringers of mirth in *The Rape of Lucrece*, in order of appearance, are Brutus, Valerius, and the Clown. Brutus, feigning madness for protection, is an artificial fool posing as a natural fool (like Amleth). Shortly after the opening scene, in which Tarquin and Tullia plot their usurpation, he enters the Senate “very humorously” and is thrust out by Tarquin and his family as a “[strain] of Ideotism,” “Mome,” “[fool],” and “[Madman]” unworthy to take part in the proceedings (173, 175, 178, 184, 196). Brutus responds with bitter and direct satire:

who would seek innovation in a Common-wealth in publike, or be over-
rul’d by a curst wife in private, but a fool or a madman? give me thy hand

Tarquin, shall we two be dismiss together from the Capitoll? (200-204)

His aside on the sickness of the state (221-24) and his impassioned soliloquies pleading for justice from the gods (362-87, 447-57) reveal the anguish from which this fooling springs. Brutus keeps up his satirizing when Tarquin and Tullia’s sons Sextus and Aruns ask him to accompany them to the Delphic Oracle “to be [their] foole and make [them] merrie” (418-19); also at the Oracle, when, after kissing the earth, he pretends that he has

⁴⁷ First, while some of the songs do indeed voice dissent, they do so within a small private circle, not in public; they have no effect on the populace or the regime, and therefore cannot be considered resistance. The lords in fact comply with the regime’s demands; they answer the call to serve in the campaign against Ardea. Second, Heywood upholds a single ideal of courageous, civic-minded, self-sacrificing Roman manhood throughout; the lords’ enforced vacation from that ideal does not constitute a new, alternative ideal, as Brutus’ speech enjoining them to cast off their humors and “[r]eceive your native valours, be your selves,” makes clear (2470-78; quotation at 2476). Third, while Heywood shows sympathy for the plight of common people in this play, it would have been extremely atypical for him to embrace egalitarianism as an ideal. It is more likely that the scene of Valerius singing advice to the Clown on how to choose a wench exemplifies his displacement from his proper position as a statesman.

only fallen (“The blood of the slaughter’d sacrifice made this floore as slippery as the place where Tarquin treads” [749-50]); and upon their return to Court, when Aruns’ false report of the Oracle’s pronouncements provokes him into parodic embellishment (“though it be paracide for a childe to kill her father, in *Tullia* it was charity by death, to rid him of all his calamities, *Phoebus* himself said she was a good childe . . .” [915-17]). After *Tullia* threatens Brutus (926-30), though, he becomes more circumspect, and his role in generating mirth subsides.

Valerius, who has already appeared onstage as a statesman, makes his first entrance as “a mere Ballater” (541) while Brutus is traveling to the Oracle. In sixteenth- and seventeenth-century drama, aristocratic men generally do not sing unless they have fallen from their station through madness, love, or misfortune (Sternfeld 7; Heetderks 63, 66-67). Of course, Scaevola, Horatius, Lucretius, and Collatine, who have been discussing the tyranny of Tarquin, have also lost status through Tarquin’s refusal to consult the senators, individually or in assembly, on matters of state (473-80, 493-502). But Valerius, like Brutus, degrades himself further through behavior below the dignity of his class. (“Vpon my life he’s either mad or love-sicke,” comments Horatius [559].) However, whereas Brutus’ satire is transparent, Valerius chooses a mode of expression—excerpting, patching together, and adapting bits of song from various sources—that fits the situation only approximately and keeps his own emotions at an unknowable distance. Rather than speaking plainly from the heart, as the others have been doing, he is performing. There is an irony, a flippancy to the very act of singing in this scene, whereby Valerius repeatedly frustrates his friends’ efforts to draw him out of this musical mode; every question or remonstrance only elicits more song. Most outrageous is his

response to Lucretius' rhetorical question: what can he sing to the "Romane Ladies" who are still grieving for the murdered King Servius? (580-89) Instead of weeping, speaking, or falling silent, Valerius breaks into "Lament Ladies lament," a fragment of a Scottish ballad about the death of a king that was apparently well known at the time (Holaday 33, 150 n. 591). This is not the response Lucretius hoped for, but at least the song seems to be in sympathy with his grief—until the last lines:

And when we se him dead,
We ay will cry alas. Fa la la lero la
Ta ra ra ra rounne ta re &c. (597-98)⁴⁸

Since fa and la are solfège terms, they may be placed here merely to indicate the tune. But "fa la la" refrains in this period are commonly associated with love or with music in general (e.g., short songs may be sung entirely with "fa la la" instead of words), while "ta ra ra," imitating the sound of a trumpet, is used in upbeat martial refrains.⁴⁹ We might

⁴⁸ In the 1638 edition, the refrain is given simply as "Fa la," but all four previous editions have the refrain given here, with variations only in the spacing.

⁴⁹ A catch in A. B.'s *Synopsis of Vocal Musick* (1680) consists of "Fa, la, la, la, la, la, Fa, la, la,—Fa, la, la,—liro, Fa, la, la,—Fa, la, la,—liro, Fa, la, la,—liro, Fa, la, la,—liro" (101). A song in Antony Holborne's *The Cittham Schoole* (1597) begins,

Change then for loe she changeth
fa la la fa la la la
And after new loue rangeth
fa la la fa la la la.

Satire 62 of William Goddard's *A Mastif Whelp* (1616) asks,
Is dubb a dubb Bellonas warlike noates,
Chaung'd to fa la la, streind through shrill Evnukes throates?
Art turn'd from grimm-face't Mars his valiaunce,
To smiling Venus hir tempting daliaunce?

[“Dub a dub” appears to be the conventional approximation of a drumbeat.]

“The Winning of the Ile of Man” in Thomas Deloney's *Strange Histories* (1612) has the refrain
Drumes striking on a row,
Trumpets sounding as they goe,
tan ta ra ra ra tan.

In Thomas Shadwell's *The Woman-Captain* (1680), several characters sing,
March on bravely! forward let us go,
Tara ra rant tan tant, tan tan tan ta ra ra
rant tan tan! The Trumpets they do blow. (35)

even say that Valerius is straying from the genre of lament into a tongue-in-cheek musical miscellany.⁵⁰ That such slippage has taken place is borne out by Horatius' reaction: "This musicke mads me, I all mirth despise" (599).

In Scaevola, unlike the others, Valerius' music strikes a responsive chord. He urges his friends, "since the court is harsh," to "be merry, / Court Ladies, sing, drinke, dance . . ." (601-04). Valerius' fifth and final song in this scene echoes Scaevola's advice, and at the end of it, he finally speaks: "Come Scevola shall we goe and be idle?" (624). Having been excluded from the active life of engagement in civic affairs (*vita activa*, or *negotium*), the lords are forced into a retired life of "leisure" or "idleness" (*otium*). Traditionally, men spent such leisure in the management of their own households, lands, or businesses, or in the pursuit of philosophy (*vita contemplativa*). Here, though, *otium* provides an opportunity for indulgence in pleasures, and this song, celebrating the joys of love and the countryside, sets the tone for the rollicking bawdy songs and drinking songs that will predominate in the middle section of the play. In fact, Valerius and Scaevola's *otium* mirrors the "idleness" of the theater audience, many of whom have stolen a few hours from work to enjoy themselves (Leggatt 30). As the scene closes, though, the other lords are not convinced; they withdraw separately, each to his humor.

While this scene unleashes a cascade of song for the amusement of the audience, Valerius' lyrics betray an underlying sadness. He lays out his rationale at the beginning, in a fragment pieced together and adapted from two English ballads, "The Noble Acts of

⁵⁰ I am grateful to Professor Scott Trudell for his insights and guidance on the songs in general and the refrain to "Lament Ladies Lament" in particular.

Arthur of the round Table” (published in Thomas Deloney’s *Garland of Goodwill* [1596]) and a religious ballad by the Marian martyr John Careless:

When Tarquin first in Court began,
 And was approved King:
 Some men for sudden joy gan weep,
 But I for sorrow sing. (546-49)

Through this bricolage Valerius generates a meaning that fits his own circumstances: Tarquin’s manner of governing has given rise to his sorrow, which motivates his singing. But those in the audience who were familiar with the sources would also have been aware of the penumbrae. The villain of “The Noble Acts,” who has imprisoned sixty-four knights of the Round Table, is named Tarquin. Thus, the first two lines of Valerius’ piece, which differ from the first two lines of “The Noble Acts” only by substituting “Tarquin” for “Arthur,” constitute an inversion of the original, signaling that the villain has displaced the prototypical good king. The last two lines were probably appropriated for their striking expression of a paradox, but they would also have reminded the audience of the sufferings of prisoners of conscience under a tyrannical regime.⁵¹ The threat of imprisonment, or worse, hangs over the lords throughout the play, and they feel the inability to speak freely and exercise their own talents as virtual confinement (473-80, 980-84).

⁵¹ These lines, as has often been noted, are also appropriated by the Fool in *King Lear* (I.iv.170-71 [1608 quarto]) and perhaps had become commonplace; Thomas Nashe also quoted from them (Rollins 88). John Careless died in prison. The audience would have known about him through Foxe’s *Acts and Monuments*, Miles Coverdale’s 1564 collection of the letters of several Marian martyrs (which includes the ballad), and the publication of the ballad alone in 1586 (Rollins 88).

Sadness also lies at the root of all four of the songs that follow in this scene. “Let humor change and spare not” contrasts the singer’s former delight in Tarquin with present dismay at his cruelty. “Now what is love” offers a melancholy view of love as fickle, and likely to lead to “repentance” as well as to “pleasure” (570). “Lament ladies lament,” of course, is openly mournful, though followed by refrains associated with love and war. And the fifth and final song in the scene, carefree and self-indulgent as it seems, begins with grief:

Why, since we souldiers cannot prove,
And griepe it is to us therefore, . . . (lines 608-09)

Thus, Valerius’ songs embody a contradiction between music, perceived as inherently mirthful, and the grief, fear, and frustration that give rise to it here. In case this is not sufficiently clear, Collatine spells it out in a soliloquy after the others exit: “so doe’s thy soule weepe, Valerius, / Although thy habit sing” (631-32).

Immediately afterwards, the third bringer of mirth enters: the voluble Clown, a servant of Collatine and Lucrece. With a ready if ordinary wit and a store of old saws and topical allusions, he jests and puns his way through a report of the news at court and in the camp, city, and country. Food, drink, sleep, sex, and song are his main interests. He is a figure of appetite and unruly energies, amoral yet innocent of malice, subversive of the stern Roman virtues that the play highlights. At the end of this scene, he puns shockingly on Collatine’s order, “follow, away,” commenting (probably to Collatine’s receding back), “I marry, sir, the way into her [Lucrece] were a way worth following . . .” (687-88). Later, he is unrepentant when Lucrece reproaches him for loose behavior (1116-37). In the course of the comic relief he provides before and after the rape, he

(perhaps inadvertently) parodies Roman values: “I thinke for the two vertues of eating and sleeping, there’s never a Roman spirit under the Cope of heaven can put me downe” (1901-03).⁵² And when Sextus’ servingman awakens him before dawn to unlock the stables, he responds mock-heroically: “Well, Pompey was borne to do Rome good in being so kinde to the young Princes Gelding” (2084-85).⁵³ This way of “breed[ing] mirth and laughter” appears to deflate—if only momentarily—the high ideals and self-importance of the aristocratic characters. But these are gentle, affectionate parodic moments that ultimately serve the play’s heroic and tragic vision by releasing tension. By the last “act” of the play, when Lucrece vindicates herself, and the lords and people unite to liberate Rome, both the Clown and the songs have disappeared.

Most of Valerius’ songs after the Clown’s first entrance are about sex, drinking, or fashion. They partake more of the Clown’s physicality and Scaevola’s newly embraced licentiousness than of Valerius’ own earlier irony and sadness. But the dynamic of his singing has changed; he now sings mostly upon request (including a request from the Clown himself). Brutus, returned from the oracle, decides that the lords, “all subjects under one tyranny, . . . therefore should be partners of one and the same unanimity” (962-63). He asks Valerius to “sing us a baudy song, and mak’s merry” (1000-01). Valerius, reluctant at first, eventually complies, with “Shall I woe the lovely Molly” (1042-70), and Brutus commands Horatius and Lucretius, despite their distaste, to stay and listen. Considering Brutus’ indignation at the Tarquins’ crimes, his later role in

⁵² The Clown may simply not understand the connotation of “Roman spirit.” See the discussion of Salutati’s *Declamatio* above.

⁵³ In these lines, the Clown echoes (unconsciously, of course) Brutus’ early self-characterization: “what I seeme to be, / Brutus is not, but borne great Rome to free” (219-20.)

instigating and leading the revolution, and his reputation as a “womans champion” (1453-54; Livy II.7.4), this insistence on what Alexander Leggatt calls “disreputable entertainment” (100) seems totally out of character. But Brutus wants to keep the lords together and out of danger while they await an opportunity to oust the tyrants. Listening to songs gives them an excuse to assemble, and bawdy songs afford deep cover (Wong 102). No one will suspect them of a “discontented thought” (999), or indeed of any thought at all.

Of course, these bawdy songs conflict with the virtues of “*pudor* (modesty),” “*continentia* (self-control),” and “*gravitas* (seriousness)” that Cicero attributed to the Romans (Schofield 199). And this is reflected in Horatius and Lucretius’ reproaches of Scaevola’s new habit of frequenting brothels:

Hor. The more thy vanity.

Luc. The lesse thy honour. (1006-07)

But under the circumstances, bawdy songs can be useful, and are therefore acceptable for the moment. Where the civic and martial spheres are closed off, pleasure is one of the few fields of activity that offer a measure of freedom. Nor is pleasure, which, as Heywood allowed, audiences sought in London’s theaters, a necessary impediment to their endorsing the avenging lords when they throw off their humors and reassume their sober Roman identities.

Proof that these lords never abandon their principles or forget the nature of the regime under which they live is furnished when Horatius narrates Sextus’ treachery at Gabii. Valerius speaks more than he has since the day Tarquin came to power: “I like it, I applaud it, this will come to somewhat in the end, when heaven has cast up his account,

some of them will be calde to a hard reckoning” (1202-04). In the 1638 edition, he adds, “For my part, I dreamt last night I went a fishing” (1205) and segues, with no prompting, into an ominous song of unknown provenance, about fishing in stormy weather (“Though the weather jangles,” 1207-20), ending,

Heres no demurring, no fish is stirring.

Yet something we have caught. (1219-20)

What is “caught” here is a further cause for the gods to punish Tarquin and his family, bringing the day of their overthrow closer. With or without the fishing song, this passage is a reminder that, merry and licentious as his songs may be, Valerius maintains the ironic stance of his first musical scene.

The series of scenes at the camp on the morning after the rape features five songs fairly close together, two of which were added in 1630 and two in 1638. The first, “Packer clouds away” (2119-38), is an aubade, hopeful and lyrical, and the first song in the play about love rather than sex. But Collatine is unaccountably sad, so Valerius sings a blazon “in the praise of Lucrece” (214-85), to cheer him. Both songs exude a painfully sharp dramatic irony, celebrating things already lost: innocent love and the chastity of Lucrece.

After Sextus enters and, out of sorts, answers the lords’ greetings and questions curtly, the mood of the scene shifts. Valerius’ self-conscious irony surfaces again (as in his commentary on Sextus’ treason at Gabii): “Nay if he be dying [as] I could wish he were, Ile ring out his funerall peale” (2212-13). In the dirge that follows, “Come list and harke” (2214-31), the sunny atmosphere of “Packer clouds away” gives way to “black

night,” and the sweet notes of the lark, nightingale, and robin to the ominous cries of bats and screech-owls, and the howls of wolves (2220-24)

The aural images evoked are discordant. But even more discordant is the antic mood of Horatius, once the melancholy holdout, upon the arrival of a somber letter from Lucrece:

The newes, the newes, if it have any shape
 Of sadnesse, if some prodegie have chanst,
 That may beget revenge, ile cease to chafe,
 Vex, martyr, grieve, torture, torment my selfe,
 And tune my humor to strange straines of mirth,
 My soule divines some happinesse, speake, speake:
 I know thou hast some newes that will create me
 Merrie and musicall for I would laugh,
 Be new transhapt, I prethee sing Valerius that I may ayre with thee.

(2257-65)

The repetitions in this speech (“The newes, the newes”; “speake, speake”), the pileup of verbs (2259-60), the insistent assonance and alliteration (2260-62, 2264), the shift from speaking mostly to himself to addressing the Clown and Valerius in turn, and the paradoxical impulse to turn sadness into mirth, music, and laughter reveal Horatius’ state of nervous excitement. If this impulse seems callous in view of Lucrece’s obvious distress (Corrigan 150), it should be considered, first, that Horatius does not know, as the audience knows, that Lucrece will kill herself. He probably envisages a future in which she will be vindicated and live. Second, he has never ceased “to chafe, / Vex, martyr,

grieve, torture, torment” himself since the beginning of the tyranny (2259-60). The welfare of Rome, not that of any individual, has always been his primary focus. For this, he is quite as ready to sacrifice himself as to welcome, even celebrate, news of the latest Tarquinian atrocity (950-55, 2630-704).

In the first four editions of the play, Valerius responds to Horatius’ request with the catch, or three-men’s song, about the rape. That is the song in which Horatius “airs” with Valerius, and “strange straines of mirth” describes it aptly. In the 1638 edition, however, Valerius sings a different song first (“I’de thinke my selfe as proud in Shackles” [2267-76]), claiming that, if imprisoned or enslaved, he would “dance to th’ musick of my Irons” (2276). In fact, while the shackles are not literal, Rome under the Tarquins is indeed in a state of slavery (see Introduction, 38), as Horatius has articulated earlier: “I’me vext to see this virgin conquesse weare shackles in my sight” (956). But whereas Valerius’s early songs had responded to tyranny with grief, feigned indifference, or resignation, this one breathes defiance.

The catch, coming only nineteen lines later, is an imaginative reconstruction of the rape. The interrogatory about the progress of the rapist makes clear that Lucrece has fallen. Shortly before, she had commanded such respect that the song in her praise could describe her only by metaphor and circumlocution; now her body parts are named, starting with the lowest, in ascending order. But it is equally clear, in light of the last line of the earlier song (“To wrong them it were sinne” [2185]), that she has been wronged. Whereas the bawdy songs are generally about desire and choice, the catch is about violation, the denial of choice: in short, slavery. The framing of what has happened as seduction is a euphemism, because the facts, and the emotions appropriate to them, are

too grim for music. It is quite possible, in fact, considering how many songs in this play are excerpted or adapted from elsewhere, that the catch is a contemporary song about a seduction, imported into the play by Heywood and adapted by substituting “faire Lucrece” for “the Lady” (or perhaps another name) in two lines (2296, 2305).⁵⁴

In the catch, Valerius and Horatius are acting out the “shackles” song: dancing to the music of their irons, tossing and shaking their fetters (2272, 2276). They are not identifying primarily, as males, with the rapist, whose dirge Valerius has wishfully sung, and whose treachery against the Gabini they deplore (although they may, in spite of themselves, take vicarious pleasure in imagining this forbidden sexual encounter; an ensemble of three women would not have sung this song). They identify as Romans, and their sympathies lie with the latest victim of Tarquinian tyranny. To imagine in detail the wrong done to Lucrece, the Roman paragon of feminine virtue, is to emblemize the sufferings of Rome, the “virgin conqueress.” In the same spirit as the fishing song, the catch is a reckoning, a report of a new crime paradoxically welcomed because it will, finally, provoke divine punishment or popular revenge. Sextus, referred to only as “he,” “takes” the lady again and again, but in doing so, he is himself taken (or, as the fishing song had put it, “caught”).

Valerius and Horatius’ playfulness in the catch is ironic and defiant, an assertion that the enemy has not broken their spirit. The laughing refrain of the Clown—sung because he has sworn not to speak—may reflect his penchant for comedy and his

⁵⁴ An argument for this possibility is that the word “faire” falls on an unstressed syllable, although its long vowel would fall more naturally on a stressed syllable. The songs known to be adapted or excerpted from elsewhere include “When Tarquin first in court began,” “Let humor change and spare not,” “Now what is love,” “Lament Ladies lament,” the Dutch drinking song (“O Mork giff men ein man”), and “Packe clouds away.”

inveterate focus on appetite, even in inappropriate settings. But it is also possible that for him, as Corrigan writes, “music and laughter have become, rather than signs of genuine mirth, a way to communicate the unspeakable” (150-51). Without hearing this song performed in an early-seventeenth-century production, we cannot know whether the melody was harmonious or discordant, the tempo fast or slow, the words spoken, shouted, or whispered, the tone casual or urgent, the laughter hearty, mechanical, sardonic, or manic. What looks, on paper, like another bawdy song, and a particularly heartless one at that, may have conveyed a very different feeling in performance (Rowland 9-10).

Most of all, the catch enacts a self-immolation of music and laughter. Both come to an end at this point. Dramaturgically, the songs and clowning enliven a long “intermission” during which the lords and Lucrece are unable to act, and only the Tarquins initiate action. In the theater—especially a public theater catering to a citizen audience, like the Red Bull—extended complaints voiced by subjects under tyranny are worse than idle; they are boring. A grab-bag of songs with varying themes and moods, many imported from elsewhere and fitted awkwardly into their contexts, keeps the audience amused and engaged. In the fictional situation, for the characters who sing, request, or listen to them, the songs function as a mask for discontent, a distraction from discontent, or a way to vent discontent. The very inconsistency of the bawdy songs with Roman values signals misrule—in this case, not the carnivalesque initiated from below but the inversion of social and political norms imposed from above. The songs that are already familiar to the audience, and those that deal with their everyday life in early-seventeenth-century England, facilitate their identification with the “Roman” characters.

Through this model, the play invites the citizens of London to enjoy the bawdy songs, among others, but also implicitly encourages them to rise to the occasion when heroic action is called for. The songs that reflect on the political situation do not add new republican or monarchomach ideas to those already expressed in dialogue but do reinforce them, sometimes with new images (as in the fishing song). These especially are emotionally ambivalent: in them, music, mirth, pleasure, or seeming indifference springs from sorrow, and their humor is sometimes quite black.

The “intermission,” and with it the songs and humor, draws to an end when an opportunity for action arises. As the play turns back to tragedy, *Romanitas*, and heroism, it is the passion of Lucrece and the excitement of battles that command the audience’s attention.

For the framework of Heywood’s *The Rape of Lucrece* is indeed tragic and historical. As far as the matter of Lucrece has traveled from Livy’s sober and dignified history to this commercial entertainment product interspersed with antic humor and boisterous songs, the tale, and the issues it raises, remain largely intact. In Heywood’s play as in Livy’s history, this is a tale about tyranny within which the rape of a noblewoman is the final atrocity that spurs the people to revolution. It is also, with less clarity and emphasis, a republican origin story. To be sure, some changes are made in the play, mostly for dramatic effect, poetic justice, and simplicity. The two sons of Tarquin who are sent to the Delphic Oracle fight for the opportunity to be first to kiss their mother (and thus secure succession to the kingship) rather than casting lots, as in Livy; Tarquin and Tullia do not go into exile but are killed in battle; Sextus, rather than returning to Gabii only to be assassinated by the citizens he has betrayed, dies in single combat with

Brutus; Collatine is not banished for bearing the name Tarquin but succeeds Brutus in a one-man consulship for which no term is specified.⁵⁵ The treason and execution of Brutus' sons are omitted, likely to preserve audience sympathy for Brutus. All this is in keeping with Renaissance dramatic theory, according to which historical accuracy takes second place to moral instruction and entertainment (see the Introduction, p. 28).

The overarching classical republican principle expressed in Heywood's *The Rape of Lucrece* (and hinted at in Shakespeare's poem *Lucrece*) is that a ruler must be worthy of holding power. Virtue (which may be usefully thought of in terms of the four cardinal virtues: justice, prudence, fortitude, and temperance) qualifies one for a position of authority; vice disqualifies. This principle was controversial; James VI of Scotland (later James I of England) wrote *The Trew Law of Free Monarchies* (1598, 1603) specifically to deny that any such a qualification applied to hereditary monarchies, and to refute the notion that a people could lawfully judge or depose its king, or prevent his accession, for any reason. Yet the principle can be found elsewhere in Renaissance drama—for instance, in Marston's *The Malcontent* (1602-1604):

. . . birth doth ne'er enroll

A man 'mong monarchs, but a glorious soul. (5.6.131-32)

Yet thus much let the great ones still conceit,

⁵⁵ Lucius Tarquinius Collatinus was the son of a nephew of Tarquin's father. Lucius Junius Brutus was a nephew of Tarquin, but on his mother's side. In Livy, the sons of Tarquin who consult the oracle are not named, but Sextus is explicitly excluded. Brutus does die in single combat with a son of Tarquin, but a different son, Arruns, well before the exploits of Horatius and Scaevola. It is worth noting, also, that the antic and musical Valerius bears little resemblance to the distinguished senator described by Plutarch (*Publicola* 1.2).

When they observe not Heaven's imposed conditions,

They are no kings, but forfeit their commissions. (5.6.143-45)⁵⁶

But perhaps nowhere is the point so insistently hammered home as in Heywood's *The Rape of Lucrece*. The lords, and even Tarquin, speak of Servius' merits and the love he inspired in his subjects (106-07, 111, 312-13, 321, 582-87). Scaevola offers his allegiance to Tarquin conditionally, "whilst he rules with justice and integrity" (323). Horatius calls Porsenna "unworthy of a scepter" because he allies with those guilty of "pride, lust, rape, and tyrannie" (2554-55). An exasperated Brutus even momentarily challenges the qualifications of Jove in similar terms:

*I*ove art thou just . . . ?

. . . if thou be worthy,

As well we know thou art, to fill the Throne

Of all eternitie, then with that hand

That flings the Trisulke thunder, let the pride

Of these our irreligious Monarkisers

Be Crown'd in blood . . . (378, 381-86)

The "irreligious Monarkisers" demonstrate their unworthiness throughout; their policies and actions explicate republican principles by inversion. At the opening of the play, Tullia commands the senators to withdraw while she speaks privately with her husband (68-69); later, as king, Tarquin orders them to stand out of earshot while he and Tullia confer (789-91). Thus, Tullia's first words, directly before she incites Tarquin to

⁵⁶ This wording apparently did not go unchallenged by the censors. Some copies of the version of *The Malcontent* used by the King's Men, in which these lines appear, have "men" in place of "kings" in line 145 (McKay 128).

usurp the throne, already usurp the place of the Senate. In the later scene, Tarquin finds it useful to have the senators remain in his presence as courtiers, but at a distance that signifies their inferiority to the royal family. These traditional partners with the king in government are reduced to the status of mere attendants. As Paulina Kewes writes, this tableau is “a powerful visual emblem” of the Tarquin family’s pride and disdain both for the senators and for Roman constitutional arrangements (“Roman History” 261).

Implicit in these scenes is the violation of a principle that was especially important to humanists in early modern European monarchies, because it offered them an opportunity for political participation: the obligation of a ruler to take counsel. Livy states that Tarquin “was the first to break with the custom handed down by his predecessors, of consulting the senate on all occasions” (I.49.7; Foster trans.). Heywood makes this point repeatedly in *The Rape of Lucrece*. In a scene between the lords shortly after the usurpation, Lucretius, returning discouraged from an effort to speak with Tarquin about a matter concerning the public good, complains that the king “abandons conference with his Peeres” and “despises / The intent of all our speeches, our advices, / . . . thinking his owne judgement only / To be approved” (494, 496-99). Collatine testifies that in the “Counsell chamber,” “nones tongue is powerfull save the Kings” (536, 538). Horatius, deploring Valerius’ sudden turn from statesmanship to music, says his “voice should thunder counsell in the eares / Of Tarquin and proud Tullia” (563-64). Later, Tarquin himself confirms their observations, telling Tullia, “thou art our Oracle and save from thee / We will admit no counsell” (801-02). Not only does this policy deprive the senators of the power and influence that rightfully belongs to them; not only does it deny them the opportunity to live the highest kind of life according to republican thought, the

vita activa; it also weakens Rome by depriving it of the wisdom and experience of its ablest men (474-76).

Tarquin and Tullia gain the throne by treachery and violence, stirring up the peers and senators against the reigning king (120-27), deposing him, having him murdered, and desecrating his corpse. Their sons Aruns and Sextus take after them, laying hands on Brutus to eject him from the Senate chamber and fighting each other for the kiss that they believe will guarantee the succession. Sextus, in his anger at losing that contest, joins his father's enemies, the Gabines, and leads them in battle, but later switches sides again and betrays them to his father.

A scene of counsel between Tarquin and Tullia that closely follows Livy I.49 shows how violence and treachery characterize Tarquin's reign as well as his accession.⁵⁷ Tarquin enthusiastically accepts Tullia's advice to kill those loyal to Servius and to maintain his authority by striking fear into his subjects rather than earning their love (796-800). His policies are to be based on this strategy of "fear," as reflected in the way the words "love," "fear," and their synonyms and antonyms echo throughout this scene (804, 806, 818-20, 833, 843). Tarquin plans to judge all capital cases himself, confiscate the property of his opponents, exile citizens at his pleasure, and impose servile labor on "[t]he poorer" (796-97, 809-16). Some of these policies have apparently been put into effect already; Collatine has mentioned "these new Edicts, / Which so distaste the people" (533-34). The lords also testify to the climate of fear in Tarquin's Rome: it is dangerous to speak one's thoughts or even to attain prominence in any field of endeavor (394-410, 462, 633-37, 980-84, 990-94).

⁵⁷ Allan Holaday has called this scene "little more than translation" (20).

All audience members, both the learned and the unlearned, would have found this kind of government appalling. However, for those familiar with the classics, the echoes of Aristotle and Cicero here, as well as Livy, would have lent added force to the portrayal of Tarquin's reign and foreshadowed his eventual overthrow. The violence of the usurpation, the arbitrariness of Tarquin's rule, his disregard for law, and his elevation of self-interest over the public interest correspond rather neatly to the characteristics of tyrants mentioned in Aristotle's *Politics*: "obtaining power by force or fraud" (5.131a), ruling arbitrarily rather than according to law (3.1275a), and ruling in one's own interest rather than in the public interest (4.1295a). To the last passage, Aristotle adds, "No freeman, if he can escape from it, will endure such a government." Cicero, similarly, warns about the danger of relying on fear rather than love in governing (*De Officiis* II.23). Thus, Tarquin and Tullia's commitment to fear reveals shortsightedness as well as moral bankruptcy.⁵⁸

In *The Rape of Lucrece*, all the tyrannical acts and attitudes of Tarquin and Tullia are subsumed under the word "pride"—a word used of them more often even than "tyranny." Heywood departs from Livy, who states that the epithet Superbus (the Proud) is secretly, though commonly, muttered at Rome (I.50.3), to portray Tullia as acknowledging, even boasting of, her pride and encouraging pride in Tarquin (85-94, 97-98, 794). Pride impels them to set themselves high above their people and above both human and divine laws. Rather than honor, they aspire to power, and are willing to commit any crime to attain it. Having attained power, they consider themselves "as

⁵⁸ It may be thought that Tarquin and Tullia are following Machiavelli's dictum in *The Prince*, chapter 17, that fear is a more dependable motive for obedience to authority than love. If so, they are careless readers. Machiavelli cautions against incurring the people's hatred, and specifically against confiscating their property and taking their women.

Gods,” accountable to no one (817, 843; see also 483-86). Others exist merely to fulfill their desires. “The poorer are our drudges, rich our prey” (815). The opposite of pride is justice; Brutus prays before a battle, “Let not Iustice be opprest with Pride” (2617).

Not only the Tarquins’ actions against others but also the disorder of their souls marks them as tyrants. In Shakespeare’s highly metaphoric poem, the single character “Tarquin,” standing in for his whole family, epitomizes the psychology of the tyrant in his inability, or unwillingness, to control his passions and his determination to force others to submit to his will. Heywood’s drama, with its wider range of characters and actions, shows the genealogy of Sextus’ character. His mother, Tullia, signals her unfitness to rule by yielding to her ambition, even becoming sick and feverish with it, like a woman on the verge of childbirth (lines 85-88). Tarquin, in turn, signals his unfitness by yielding to his wife.⁵⁹ It is not surprising, then, that their son Sextus later yields to lust, characterizing himself as “all impatience, violence and rage” and “depriv’d all reason” (lines 1850, 1996). Like his mother, Sextus describes his unrestrained passion in imagery of heat and fire. Tullia says, “With ardency my hot appetite’s a fire” (86); Sextus speaks of his “fire,” “heat,” and “fierie lust,” calling himself “lust-burnt,” an epithet both Lucrece and Brutus will repeat (1851, 1962, 2051, 2052, 2435, 2588).⁶⁰ He foresees the dire consequences of the rape he is about to commit but declares himself powerless against fate, a complaint at odds with his established pattern of violence (against Brutus, Servius’ faction, his own brother, and the Gabines) and his willfulness in

⁵⁹ Since women were, in general, considered moral and intellectual inferiors through the early modern period and beyond, political, religious, and social thinkers of every stripe held that men should govern their wives and daughters, as reason should control passion. The king dominated by his wife was a slave to his wife’s passions, and hence a tyrant.

⁶⁰ Compare “lust-breathed” in Shakespeare’s *Lucrece* (3).

planning and carrying out the deed (1845-47, 1936-39).⁶¹ To one unused to keeping his passions in check, their force may indeed seem irresistible.⁶²

The unworthiness of the royal family—as evidenced by their violence, treachery, pride, refusal of counsel, oppression of their subjects, and subjugation to their own passions—is highlighted by contrast to the worthiness of the good king who preceded them and the republicans who follow. Servius “protected Rome” throughout his long reign (107) and was generally loved (312-13, 321, 582-87). Brutus is proud of his position as consul (2585-88, 2935-41) but values honor more than power (2938-41, 2948-49, 2952-53). He takes counsel with the lords (2616-51) and honors their contributions (2768-72), treating them more like companions than like subjects. And he is committed to protecting Rome and avenging Lucrece (2616-20, 2794-97).

In addition, Lucrece is contrasted to Tullia as paragon to monster. Whereas Tullia longs for sovereignty, cannot brook obedience to a ruler, and wants to “[mount] / Above the base tribunals of the earth” (lines 85-94, 97-8), Lucrece is determinedly submissive to authority (“Husbands and Kings must alwayes be obaid” [1692]) and careful of her reputation. In her husband’s absence, she turns down dinner invitations (1554-66) and applies herself to the management of her household (1544-53, 1698-1704). She governs her servants as strictly as she governs herself, admonishing two of them for lewd behavior and warning them to “grow more civill” if they want to keep their positions

⁶¹ Against this background, Sextus’ sudden access of conscience (in apparent imitation of Shakespeare) appears more unlikely in Heywood’s play than in Shakespeare’s poem.

⁶² Barbara Baines sees the rape of Lucrece as providential (107), an interpretation in line with Sextus’ claim to be powerless against fate but ultimately unconvincing. Lucrece is unable to defend herself, but her rape is an act of Sextus’ will, not divine will: “Lucrece th’art mine: / In spight of Iove and all the powers divine” (lines 2061-62). Of course, Collatine’s gullibility and lack of caution are contributing factors (lines 1715-25, 2445-48).

(1092-93). Yet she also speaks kindly to her maids (1532, 1544-45), who show affection and concern for her (1541-43, 2370-74, 2385-86). This balance between love and fear is endorsed as the ideal at the end of the play, when Collatine, newly elected consul, declares, “may our powre so just appeare, / Rome may have peace, both with our love and feare” (2972-72).

If vice disqualifies a ruler, as Malevole says in *The Malcontent*; if a proud king, as Boccaccio wrote, is a public enemy (*De Casibus* II.V, *In superbos reges*); if the king exists for the sake of his people and not they for his sake, as James I asserted (*Trew Law* 55)—might it then be lawful to depose a vicious king? The author of the Huguenot resistance tract *Vindiciae contra Tyrannos* (1579) (tellingly pseudonymed Stephanus Junius Brutus) answered in the affirmative but stipulated that only magistrates had such lawful authority. George Buchanan, a distinguished Scottish scholar and James’ tutor, extended this authority more broadly, arguing that sovereignty was conferred by the people as a whole, who could take it back if the king broke his promise to rule justly (*De Jure Regni apud Scotos*, Chapters 40 and 47). However, James, while deploring tyranny, categorically denied that anyone had any right to depose a king (*Trew Law*, *passim*). The only recourse was to pray for relief (*Trew Law* 61). That is exactly what the lords do through most of Heywood’s play; they ask the gods to change the king’s heart or punish his misdeeds (378-87, 449-57, 503, 1202-04, 1221)—though they also await an opportunity for “just revenge” (995-98). When that opportunity arrives, and the lords seize it, their rebellion against the Tarquins is explicitly and unambiguously

legitimated—an exceptional stance for an English play of its time, and a daring one in view of its direct contradiction of James’ position.⁶³

The contest for legitimacy takes place in the parley before the first battle scene, when the two sides trade insults and accusations—tyrant on one side, traitor on the other. The princes echo early modern commonplaces on obedience to established authority. Sextus calls the Roman leaders “Traytors to heaven” in that “Treason to Kings doth stretch even to the Gods” (2557-60); Aruns maintains that they are “privat subjects” and thus not authorized to fight their king (2571-72). In rebuttal, the lords claim divine approval and support, invoking the oracle that foretold Brutus’ primacy and the “Ethereal deities” to whom Lucrece’s blood “still cries for vengeance” (2585-89, 2565-66). Brutus, seconded by Horatius, announces that he is no private subject but the consul, empowered by the Roman people (2576-84).⁶⁴ Further, the lords declare their intention to avenge all the crimes of the Tarquins, from the murder of Servius through their tyrannous reign to the rape of Lucrece (lines 2589-97). Thus, the rebellion is authorized by the gods, the Roman people, and the demands of justice.⁶⁵ The only answer from the Tarquins and their allies is Sextus’ threat that they will either regain power in Rome or see it “drown’d in blood” (line 2604). Their side seems to have lost the war of words, since they no

⁶³ Livy never explicitly defends the revolt, apparently taking its legitimacy for granted.

⁶⁴ This is especially daring in view of the closeness of Aruns’ language here (“Must you being privat subjects dare to Ring / Warres loud alarum gainst your potent King?” [2571-72]) to James’ in *The Trew Law of Free Monarchies* (“And if it be not lawfull to a priuate man to reuenge his priuate iniury vpon his priuate aduersary [since God hath onely giuen the sword to the Magistrate] how much lesse is it lawfull to the people, or any part of them [who are all but priuate men . . .] to take vpon them the vse of the sword, whom to it belongs not, against the publicke Magistrate, whom to onely it belongeth”).

⁶⁵ Brutus’ speech in Shakespeare’s poem also appeals to the gods, the Roman people’s rights, and (obliquely) justice (1830-41) but makes no mention of the oracle or Brutus’ election as consul.

longer make any claim on the basis of human or divine law; they only assert their will. And they are continuing, as tyrants, to terrorize rather than protect Rome.

The people, who consent by acclamation to mount the revolt (signaled by “A great shout and a flourish with drums and Trumpets” [2539]) and make up the bulk of the troops (2505-07, 2703, 2809-11, 2867-68, 2912-13), are treated respectfully here. Even before the revolt, the Romans as a political and social collectivity—referred to variously as the “people,” the “weale” or “publicke weale” (commonwealth), the “nation,” “the Roman state,” or simply “Rome” (e.g., lines 326, 473, 534, 561, 1110-11, 2582)—form the play’s essential substructure. Public opinion is invoked throughout (e.g., 533-34, 584-89, 1932-33, 1940-42, 2058-59). No aspersions are cast on the multitude; rather, as in Petrarch’s *Africa*, where the Roman *turba* is praised for its valor and conquests, here it is called “the sprightfull youth of Rome” and “our warlike people” (2505, 2583).⁶⁶ In contrast to representations of the “many-headed beast” in other Renaissance dramas (such as *Julius Caesar* and *Sejanus His Fall*), there is no hint that the people are changeable, ungrateful, ignorant, gullible, bloodthirsty, or untrustworthy. Their actions are reasonable and restore a balance that has been disrupted. Their dignity is underlined by the fact that Brutus as consul not only governs them but also represents them: the hand that grasps his “imperiall sword” is “the powerfull hand of Rome” (2578-79), and when Horatius prepares for his solitary stand against the enemy, Brutus bids him

⁶⁶ Heywood may have known the *Africa*; there are records of copies in Pembroke College, Cambridge and in the Bodleian (Boswell and Braden 191, 297, 490). Although Heywood is associated with Peterhouse rather than Pembroke College (and Arthur Melville Clark thinks it more probable that he attended Emmanuel College [6]), presumably there were other copies besides those recorded.

. . . thinke in us

The universall arme of Potent Rome,

Takes his last leave of thee in this embrace. (2645-48).

Brutus not only acts *for* Rome; he acts *as* Rome. Upon his death, it is “the peoples voyce” that declares Collatine his successor as consul (lines 2966-71).

Essential as the people are to the establishment, maintenance, and defense of a republic, it is their leaders who take center stage. And although Brutus has taken command in Lucrece’s disclosure scene, gently persuading her to tell what has happened and subsequently organizing the revolt, the spotlight does not remain on him consistently. Rather, the play focuses on all six of the lords (Brutus, Lucretius, Valerius, Horatius, Scaevola, Collatine) who constitute its collective protagonist.⁶⁷ During their enforced idleness under Tarquin, from whom “[n]one great in love, in counsell, or opinion, / Can be kept safe” (lines 636-67), they have wasted time fretting, whoring, or listening to Valerius’ bawdy songs. After Lucrece’s rape, Brutus adjures them:

As you are Romans, and esteeme your fame

More then your lives, all humorous toyes set off. . . .

Receive your native valours, be your selves . . . (lines 2473-74, 2476)

To be a Roman, here as in Livy, is to be superlatively brave and to seek honor by serving one’s country. The lords take up the challenge, competing with each other for honor (2724-26, 2789). Horatius stands alone against thousands; Scaevola risks his life and

⁶⁷ The collective protagonist may have been inspired by the group of republican-leaning senators who constitute the protagonist of Ben Jonson’s Tacitist tragedy *Sejanus His Fall* (1603), and who can express their political views only in private conversations and asides saturated in black humor. The difference is that *Sejanus* presents a Rome that has fallen away irredeemably from its republican past, while Heywood’s *The Rape of Lucrece* stages the liberation of Rome. Perhaps the fact that *Sejanus* was hissed off the stage at the Globe spurred Heywood to use all the theatrical strategies at his command to avert such a fate.

loses his hand in a failed attempt to assassinate the enemy king Porsenna; Brutus falls in single combat with Sextus.⁶⁸ They elicit admiration even from their enemies: when Horatius leaps into the Tiber, Sextus says, “his spirit soars too high / To be choakt in with the base element / Of water” (lines 2697-99), and Porsenna spares Scaevola’s life with praise for “that nation that breeds / such noble spirits” (2757-58). Clearly, it is freedom that inspires such nobility of spirit. As in Livy’s history, so in this tragedy, there is not just one liberator. What makes Rome admirable, and powerful, is that she breeds many brave, free-spirited people willing to give their lives to liberate her, defend her, and uphold her principles. These are the kinds of “glorious souls” who are qualified to rule, as senators or consuls.

Yet it is Lucrece who sets them in motion, performing the first act of heroism and framing it didactically:

Let all the world, learne of a Roman dame,

To prise her life lesse then her honor’d fame.⁶⁹ (2489-90)

⁶⁸ Historically inaccurate, but dramatically apt. According to Livy, after the expulsion of the Tarquins from Rome, Sextus goes to Gabii, which he considers his own realm, but where the citizens remember his treachery and assassinate him. Brutus falls later in combat with another son of Tarquin.

⁶⁹ The didacticism of Lucrece’s suicide is particularly striking in its defiance of Christian doctrine. Livy’s Lucretia does not claim to teach anything by her suicide, only to avoid setting a precedent for adultery with impunity. A marginal annotation by one “Grendon John,” dated 1633, in a copy of the 1608 edition takes the Augustinian stance:

But though some men commend this Act Lucretian
She shewd her selfe in’t (for all that) no good Christian
Nay ev’n those men that seeme to make the best ont
Call her a Papist good, no good Protestant.

Surely a reader educated enough to couch his objections in (bad) rhymed couplets would have been aware that Lucrece lived long before the time of Christ. Grendon was using fanciful language to deplore the example this character was setting for Christian women who might suffer rape. For his part, Heywood could not have been ignorant of Augustine’s pronouncement on Lucretia; his *Pleasant Dialogues and Drammas* (1637) includes a translation of an epigram by Theodore Beza on Lucretia that is little more than a poetic paraphrase of Augustine. He therefore must have made a conscious choice to transmit the Roman valorization of Lucretia’s suicide as heroic, especially in view of its political impact. Such an extreme model was probably not meant to be followed literally, any more than prisoners of war would have been expected to burn their hands off, like Scaevola.

She alone has maintained her virtue throughout Tarquin's reign, perhaps because the domestic sphere in which she operates is initially untouched. She exemplifies the influence of home and family, which, according to Livy, helped transform Rome from an assemblage of ruffians and outcasts into a civilized community, bound by human sympathy and capable of governing itself in a free state. In Heywood's play, Lucrece maintains the home to which both her father and her husband return when court becomes too dangerous. When that sanctuary is invaded and the core of her feminine virtue is destroyed, her virtue turns masculine. With the domestic sphere shattered, she moves out into the public sphere, taking the lords with her. For the first time, her speech becomes political: she calls Sextus "the Tyrant" and refers to "his tyranny" (lines 2455 and 2456). She demands revenge, which necessarily involves taking up arms against the Tarquins. And she strikes the first blow in that effort, with a knife to her heart.

In this sense, Heywood's Lucrece precipitates the republican revolt, though she never quite articulates a republican perspective. She does not, as in the account of Cassius Dio, tell her kinsmen, "free yourselves." But in her virtue and her determination to restore her honor, she is emphatically Roman. The Tarquins have made it impossible for her to live as a chaste Roman matron, just as they have made it impossible for their male subjects to be statesmen. To reclaim their freedom and recover their Roman identity, the Romans must overthrow the Tarquins. And the extremity of the Tarquins' tyranny leads them to choose a republic rather than another king.

To sum up, *The Rape of Lucrece* stages a fair representation of many of the principles of Roman republicanism: the participation of the Senate and the people in governing, the common good as the highest priority, the supremacy of law (or justice)

rather than arbitrary personal rule, the rule of reason over passion, respect for the gods and for the bonds of kinship and community, virtue as a qualification for rule, popular consent as a prerequisite for a ruler's legitimacy, the right of revolt, the dependence of the country on a pool of dedicated citizens, and those citizens' desire to attain glory in the service of their country. Not surprisingly, the deeply monarchical nature of English political culture also finds expression here. According to Livy, the Republic's main innovation in the executive was annual election; according to Dionysius, a second important feature was its doubling: two consuls instead of one king. These were means of holding the consuls accountable and safeguards against the accumulation of too much power in one individual. However, as Paulina Kewes points out, in Heywood's play there is only one consul at a time, and he rather resembles a king ("Roman History" 250); the first consul is referred to as "royall Brutus," and the Romans are said to kneel to him (2582-84). Nor is any mention made of a fixed term of office. One may wonder if there is really any difference, aside from their titles, between Brutus the consul and Servius the good old king. But if in the brief episode in which Servius appears, he is imperious and paternal, Brutus' style is more fraternal. It is worth remembering, too, that republicanism and monarchy need not be mutually exclusive.⁷⁰ An executive—whatever his or her title—elected on the basis of merit, acknowledging the supremacy of the laws, and governing in consultation with a representative body of citizens or major stakeholders is consistent with a republic.

Unlike *A Game at Chesse*, *The Rape of Lucrece* was not an incendiary play. We have no record of its audiences rioting in the streets, or of the playwright being

⁷⁰ See the Introduction, p. 5, for Patrick Collinson's thesis of an Elizabethan "monarchical republic"

imprisoned or called before the Privy Council to answer for potentially subversive content. The play's appeal, moreover, was not limited to tailors, tinkers, cordwainers, and sailors; it was presented to Queen Anne and Prince Henry at Court in 1612, and the Duke of Buckingham attended a performance at the Cockpit in 1628. What *The Rape of Lucrece* did was more subtle and more far-reaching than what it did not do. It provided a set of criteria for judging the legitimacy of a king or magistrate; it exercised audiences in the practice of judging stage kings and queens; and, through the voices of individual characters and reports of the actions of the collectivity, it represented a people judging its own king.⁷¹ Moreover, it presented models of domestic, civic, and heroic virtue in the characters of Lucrece, Brutus, Horatius, and Scaevola.

VI

The question remains whether audiences and readers of Heywood's *The Rape of Lucrece* found it relevant to their own political situation, either in 1607 and 1608, the dates of first performance and first publication, or later. Paulina Kewes identifies "a series of topical allusions" in the play touching on the reigning monarch, James I, and his court ("Roman History" 259), including Tarquin and Tullia's arrogation of divine status to themselves (483-86, 817-18, 842-44), the use of the word "prerogative," Tarquin's foreign alliances (821-33), and the assertion that children bring a monarch security (834-38). She contends, further, that Tarquin's refusal of counsel reflected concern among James's new subjects that he "consult English counsellors and seek advice on vital issues of state policy" ("Roman History" 261).

⁷¹ See the Introduction, pp. 21-22, for David Scott Kastan's thesis about the importance of audience judgments of stage kings and queens in the development of a public sphere ("Proud Majesty Made a Subject"). James rejected any right of subjects to judge their king: "The wickednesse . . . of the King can neuer make them that are ordained to be iudged by him, to become his Iudges" (*Trew Law* 66).

However, several of the similarities Kewes cites appear merely superficial. James was no usurper, having acceded peaceably in 1603, to the great relief of the English, who had feared civil war after Elizabeth's death. He had no need to repress his subjects through the threat of revenge by his children or war by his foreign allies. His children ensured an orderly succession, and his peace with Spain (1604) protected the realm and ended a major drain on the treasury. As to seeking counsel, James retained Elizabeth's councillors and judges, favored Englishmen over Scots in appointments to high office, and called a Parliament as soon as feasible after his accession (Lockyer 33, 74, 128; Croft 137). He did, however, appoint five Scots to the Privy Council, and Scots held a near-monopoly of positions in the king's Bedchamber (Croft 135-36, 144-45).⁷²

The use of the word "prerogative" and Tullia's boast "Kings are as Gods" (811, 816) hit nearer home. James's rhetoric was certainly absolutist—a position understandable for a king whose mother had been forced to abdicate, who had himself been kidnapped by factious nobles in his youth, whose authority had been challenged by the Scottish Presbyterians, whose right to succeed to the English throne was disputed by Roman Catholic polemicists, and whose life was threatened by a Catholic conspiracy in 1605.⁷³ In *The Trew Law of Free Monarchies*, he claimed that monarchs had a hereditary right to rule and were "the authors and makers of the Lawes" (62) but were not bound by them, being accountable to God alone. Still, James, like all educated men of his time, had read Aristotle, and he promised the first Parliament of his reign that he would always put the interests of the realm above his private interests, "[a] point wherein a lawfull King

⁷² Curtis Perry suggests that the Scottish grooms and gentlemen of the Bedchamber, by virtue of their intimate access to the king, constituted a sort of *de facto* council ("Crisis of Counsel" 62-63).

⁷³ See Introduction, 37-38.

doeth directly differ from a Tyrant” (1604 speech to Parliament 277, 278). Even his boldest statement of divine right, in his March 1610 speech to Parliament, has often been taken out of context. There James does indeed compare kingly power to divine power, asserting that kings “euen by GOD himself . . . are called Gods” (307) and that they can “make and vnmake their subiects” “like men at the Chesse” (308). In the same speech, however, he makes clear that such power is abstract and theoretical, pertinent to the first kings of ancient times but not to “ciuill Kingdomes” with established laws, where a ruler “leaues to be a King, and degenerates into a Tyrant, assoone as he leaues off to rule according to his Lawes” (309).

These pieties are diametrically opposed to Tarquin and Tullia’s mode of governing. Yet for James’ subjects, a structural problem inhered in his theory of kingship: it offered them no guarantee of the protection of the laws beyond the honesty and good will of the king. This is precisely the condition of slavery as Cicero defined it in his *Philippics*,⁷⁴ and it was a condition that many Englishmen, and particularly many members of the House of Commons, were not willing to accept. Commons was concerned with preserving the “ancient rights and liberties” of subjects, such as the right to have their representatives in Parliament vote on all new laws and taxes. As the guardian of the people’s rights, the House asserted its own privileges, including freedom of debate on matters relating to the welfare of the realm (Lockyer 88, 126). These rights, liberties, and privileges, it maintained, were not granted by the king but were of long standing and inalienable, enshrined in the Magna Carta and the common law (Lockyer 4-7, 88, 89). James, for his part, was set upon maintaining his prerogative and passing it on

⁷⁴ See Introduction, 38-39.

to his heirs; he was prepared to deal with particular issues that Parliament raised but not to have his prerogative limited or even discussed (1610 speech to Parliament, 310; Lockyer 24, 80, 126).

Heywood's Tarquin represented a nightmare vision of a regime that was not only arbitrary but also rapacious and murderous. James was no monster, but there were fears that his insistence on the limitlessness of his prerogative could gradually lead to the erosion of his subjects' rights and to government, in effect, solely by the will of the king. Indeed, the House of Commons would state as much in a 1610 petition against the proliferation of royal proclamations, giving voice to "a general fear" that these would "in process of time bring a new form of arbitrary government upon the realm" (qtd. in Lockyer 24). Already by 1607, Commons had differed with James along similar lines: impositions (duties on imports and exports assessed by the Crown) bypassed the taxation function of Parliament just as royal proclamations would bypass its legislative function. The language in Commons debates and political treatises could become almost as heated as that in Heywood's play. In 1610, Thomas Wentworth told the House of Commons, "if we shall once say that we may not dispute the prerogative, let us be sold for slaves" (qtd. in Lockyer 125). And Fulke Greville, in *A Dedication to Sir Philip Sidney* (composed c. 1610), has Sidney characterize royal proclamations as "bastard children of tyranny" (qtd. in Herman 981).

As Kewes points out, Englishmen and -women would have seen more parallels to Tarquin's mode of governing in the later reign of James, and the reign of Charles, than at the time of the play's composition ("Roman History" 261). In the English context, "counsel" would have meant Parliament and the Privy Council; very few officeholders

and noblemen would have been able to hold a private conference with James, as Lucretius attempted with Tarquin in Heywood's play (490-502). Unsurprisingly, given their opposing views of their respective powers and rights, James' relations with Parliament were often contentious, so much so that he dissolved the Parliament of 1614 prematurely, did not call another until 1621, and dismissed that one abruptly as well (Sommerville, "James I" 67-68). Not only was the role of Parliament thus diminished; its very existence appeared to be threatened. The influence of favorites and James' practice (continued by Charles) of consulting with small committees—so-called "Cabinet Councils"—also aroused suspicions that such counsel as the king obtained was serving special interests rather than the common good (Lockyer 177). And the alliance that James attempted to negotiate with Spain in the early 1620s, through a marriage between Charles and a Spanish princess, was opposed by many of his subjects as a betrayal of their religion.

James' absolutism, his preference for private over public counsel, and his unpopular efforts at an alliance with Spain were not the only features of his reign that were reminiscent of Tarquin's. On occasion, James bent the law, or exploited a legal technicality, for his own advantage or that of his favorites (Adams 31). For instance, in late 1607, he began proceedings to confiscate Sir Walter Raleigh's manor of Sherborne in order to bestow it on his then-favorite Robert Carr (Lockyer 32-33; Wallace 233-35).⁷⁵

Tarquin. We challenge too by our prerogative,

The goods of such as strive against our state. (811-12)

⁷⁵ The manor should not have been subject to attainder, because Raleigh had put it in trust for his wife and son, but there was a defect in the conveyance: the omission of several critical words by the clerk who copied the document. James eventually offered monetary compensation to Raleigh's wife and son, but this was far less than the value of the estate (Wallace 234; Nicholls and Williams 232).

In addition, certain well-established methods of raising revenue victimized the middling sort and the poor as well as wealthy landowners (Lockyer 117). Wardship, purveyance, and monopoly impaired subjects' ability to inherit property, to receive adequate payment for their goods and services, or to pursue a trade (Lockyer 38, 113, 130; compare Tarquin's "The poorer are our drudges, rich our prey" [815]).

Moreover, James could, and did, imprison members of Parliament for speech on the floor that displeased him. Nine members of Commons were brought before the Privy Council after the Parliament of 1614, and four of them were imprisoned; three members were imprisoned during or after the 1621 Parliament (Lockyer 90). Pointing to their experience, another member's constituents urged caution (Lockyer 92). With this, we may compare:

Collatine. You are madmen all that yeild so much to passion. . . .

In danger's bloody jawes where being humerous,

Cloudy and curiously inquisitive

Into the Kings proceedings, there arm'd feare

May search into us, call our deeds to question . . . (979, 990-93)

If the resemblance of events later than the first performance of Heywood's *The Rape of Lucrece* to the issues it raises seems surprising, it should be recalled that James' actions fell within the ordinary exercise of monarchical power.⁷⁶ Monarchs had done such things before and would do them again; some were legal (though considered harsh or unfair), others of disputed legality. In James' day, while people might criticize the king's deeds,

⁷⁶ James did not invent wardship, purveyance, and monopoly, and was hardly the first monarch to imprison individuals for their speech or writing. But the raising of revenue became more burdensome in James' reign than in Elizabeth's because his expenses were greater, partly due to his extravagance but also because he inherited a depleted Treasury and had a wife (with her own court) and children to maintain.

no one in England openly questioned the desirability of monarchy. But the similarities between some of Tarquin's and James's attitudes and practices may have tended, however slightly, to erode the distinction between tyranny and monarchy for audiences and readers of Heywood's play.

Unlike his father, Charles did come to be regarded as a tyrant, although not until the late 1640s would anyone dare to attribute tyrannical intentions to him,⁷⁷ or to draw any parallel between him and Tarquin. Still, Tarquin was one of the primary models of tyranny known to the English, whether from Livy, Heywood, or both. The continuation of performances of Heywood's play well into Charles' reign (including a Cockpit performance attended by Buckingham in 1628), and the publication of new editions of the playbook in 1630 and 1638, ensured the currency of that model. Charles' violations of his subjects' property rights and liberties were more severe than James': to impositions were added Tonnage and Poundage, Ship Money, and the Forced Loan, and many were imprisoned without due process for refusal to pay the latter. We cannot know whether these violations, the suspicion that Charles colluded in the alleged poisoning of his father, the harsh punishments inflicted on critics, and the 11-year Personal Rule caused any of Charles' subjects to think of Tarquin's usurpation, confiscations, arbitrary judgments, cruelty, and refusal of counsel. But it is not unlikely that they saw a resemblance.

In 1627, the resemblance between Tarquin's treatment of the Romans and Charles' encroachment on the rights of the English was indeed noted, if in an academic

⁷⁷ The earliest instance I have found is the statement in the 1647 Agreement of the People that the nation is "yet made to depend for the settlement of our peace and freedom upon him that intended our bondage and brought a cruel war upon us" (Gardiner, *Constitutional Documents of the Puritan Revolution*, 335).

context. In December of that year, the Dutch scholar Isaac Dorislaus, the first occupant of the chair of history that Fulke Greville had established at Cambridge, gave two lectures, ostensibly on Tacitus. In fact, Dorislaus never got beyond the first sentence of Tacitus' *Annals*: "In the beginning, the city of Rome was ruled by kings; Lucius Brutus established liberty and the consulship." In the surviving excerpts of these lectures, the main historical source is Livy, with possible echoes of Machiavelli; the historical episode under discussion, the reign and expulsion of Tarquin, leads to a consideration of issues of kingship and legitimacy.⁷⁸ Dorislaus distinguishes between two kinds of kingship: absolute rule, where "kings command their subjects as masters their slaves," and rule constrained by laws. Both kinds, according to Dorislaus, derive their legitimacy from an original grant of power by the people; thus, the Roman people, which had granted power to its kings but retained ultimate authority for itself, had the right to take back kingly power when it was abused.⁷⁹ He further considers the case in which sovereignty is divided between a king and a senate or people, concluding that it is permissible to use force against a king who intrudes on the part that is not his own, as the king of Spain did in the Netherlands (Dorislaus, "Excerpts").

Dorislaus certainly had no intention of imperiling his new position by advocating armed resistance against the king of England. But in 1627, the year of the Forced Loan and the Five Knights' Case, Charles could plausibly have been perceived as intruding on

⁷⁸ In the course of the discussion, there are indeed some allusions to Tacitus, among others: Dorislaus speaks of Cremutius Cordus and "those princes who usurped kingly power in a free republic." All quotations and paraphrases of the excerpts from Dorislaus' lectures refer to the reprint published in Ronald Mellor's essay.

⁷⁹ Mellor thinks that Dorislaus derived his political principles from Huguenot resistance theory, specifically Beza's *De Iure Magistratum* (1574) and the *Vindiciae contra Tyrannos* (1579) (177). However, I find that some of Dorislaus' statements are almost word-for-word the same as Buchanan's in *De Iure Regni*. Of course, there would have been additional sources, both ancient and early modern.

the spheres of Parliament and the courts. Dorislaus' argument was too "applicable to the exasperations of these villanous times" (qtd. in Maccioni and Mostert 425). That, at least, was the judgment of Matthew Wren, master of Peterhouse, by his own admission the only one of Dorislaus' auditors who took exception to his lectures (Mellor 178). Apparently, the vast majority of faculty and students of Cambridge University saw nothing wrong with a discussion of political principles based on analysis of Roman history, even if they disagreed with Dorislaus' contract theory and republican sentiments.⁸⁰ In the 1614 Parliament, Sir Edwin Sandys' assertion in Commons that kingly authority derived from the people, who retained the right to depose tyrants, had offended the Lords (Lockyer 128). But speech in the university was theoretical, far removed from the sphere of political action, though more direct and prosaic than speech in the theater. Still, Wren wrote to William Laud, then Bishop of Bath and Wells, and to Buckingham, Charles' favorite, with his concerns. As a consequence, Dorislaus was ordered to discontinue his lectures, and Wren was ultimately rewarded with a bishopric. Perhaps the advocates of the royal prerogative were too quick to draw parallels between Roman history and contemporary politics, and to envision practical applications of theoretical discussions. Yet we have no record of anyone taking exception to the reprinting of Heywood's *The Rape of Lucrece* in 1630 (with four new songs) and 1638

⁸⁰ Dorislaus considers kingship legitimate insofar as it is based on the people's grant of authority. He cautions private citizens against seizing the initiative that belongs to the people as a whole, and denounces the Jesuits for presuming to release subjects from their obedience. Yet he also speaks glowingly of the "glory of freeing the Republic," which was given to the family of the Junii "with the applause of gods and men" (a perspective consonant with that in Heywood's *The Rape of Lucrece*), applies to Rome Theseus' statement in Euripides' *The Suppliants* that "the city is not ruled by one man but is free" (a quotation later used by John Milton, possibly one of Dorislaus' auditors), and refers to the Roman emperors as "those princes who usurped kingly power in a free Republic." Still, Dorislaus apparently made the obligatory disclaimer; Wren reported that "he highly praeferd a Monarchie before all other formes, and ours above all" (qtd. in Mellor 178).

(with five new songs) or to its performance. However much the songs encoded oppositional perspectives, their proliferation in these later editions may have helped camouflage the presence in the play of political principles that could no longer be voiced even in an academic setting.

The principles that Dorislaus gleaned from his reflections on the reign and expulsion of the Tarquins would in fact be applied twenty-one years later (January 1649), under drastically altered political conditions, when he participated in drawing up the Rump's legal charge against the king. In contrast to the early Stuarts' divine right claims, the charge treated kingship as a strictly human institution based on an agreement between parties that were accountable to each other. It asserted that Charles had been "trusted with a limited power to govern by and according to the laws of the land, and not otherwise" and "by his trust, oath, and office, obliged to use the power committed to him for the good and benefit of the people, and for the preservation of their rights and liberties" (Gardiner, *Constitutional Documents* 371-72). The prerogative, no longer recognized as a legitimate component of kingly authority, was now criminalized as "an unlimited and tyrannical power to rule according to his will" that Charles was attempting to introduce (372). Thus, instead of a protector of the people, Charles had become a public enemy, waging war against Parliament and its supporters for the "advancement and upholding of a personal interest of will, power, and pretended prerogative to himself and his family, against the public interest, common right, liberty, justice, and peace of the people of this nation, by and from whom he was entrusted as aforesaid" (373-74). He

had, in short—according to the charge—committed treason against his people, the source of his authority.⁸¹

It had taken nine years of conflict, and the realization of the futility of efforts to reach a settlement with Charles, before the most radical elements of a purged House of Commons shed the deference traditionally accorded to monarchy—the reverential language, the conscious fiction that the king could do no wrong, the protestations of loyalty and good will—and adopted this proto-republican (or monarchomach) stance. Like Heywood’s stage Romans forty years earlier, the representatives of the English people proceeded to judge their king. But not until several weeks after Charles’ execution (February 1649) did Parliament declare its intention to establish a republic. In March 1649, the Act Abolishing the Office of King set forth the inductive reasoning behind this decision:

. . . whereas it is and hath been found by experience, that the office of a King in this nation and Ireland, and to have the power thereof in any single person, is unnecessary, burdensome, and dangerous to the liberty, safety, and public interest of the people, and that for the most part, use hath been made of the regal power and prerogative to oppress and impoverish and enslave the subject; and that usually and naturally any one person in such power makes it his interest to incroach upon the just freedom and liberty of the people, and to promote the setting up of their own will and power above the laws, that so they might enslave these

⁸¹ The concept of treason as a crime against the sovereignty of the people, rather than against the monarch, was new to English law but consistent with classical republican thought according to which the tyrant is a public enemy. It also resonates with the Lucretia story, in which Sextus’ “treason” against Lucrece represents a crime against the Roman people as a whole.

kingdoms to their own lust; be it therefore enacted and ordained by this present Parliament . . . that the office of a King in this nation shall not henceforth reside in or be exercised by any one single person . . .”

(Gardiner, *Constitutional Documents* 385-86)

At this point, Parliament had arrived at an antimonarchical republican position—a position far beyond Heywood’s and even Livy’s.⁸² This Act treated some of the same issues as the charge against the king—the conflict between private and public interest, between regal power and the people’s liberty, between will and law—but to different effect. Rather than positing a contractual basis for kingship, the Act made a statement about the nature of kingship that was based on the actual exercise of kingly power. Experience had shown that most monarchs, most of the time, had used their power to the detriment of their subjects; hence, monarchy was “burdensome” and “dangerous”; furthermore, the violation of the people’s rights occurred “usually and naturally.” It was not a particular king alone who was at fault for the recent troubles of the nation, but the institution of monarchy. Abuse of power is inherent in the rule of one person.

Such was likely the view of the legendary Junius Brutus when he swore “*nec illos nec alium quemquam regnare Romae passurum*” (“not to suffer them [the Tarquins] or anyone else to reign in Rome” [Livy I.59.1]), made the people swear the same oath (Livy II.1.9), and instituted the consulship. In early 1649, Parliament could hardly have failed to remember and emulate Brutus’ liberation of Rome from the Tarquins. Like Bullinger a century earlier, the English now found that historical moment strikingly relevant to their own. The very use of the word “lust” in the Act Abolishing the Office of King—a word

⁸² Livy says that the first six kings of Rome governed in such a way “that there is good reason to regard them all as successive founders of parts, at least, of the City” (II.1.2).

that in its meaning of “desire or wish; good pleasure” (“Lust,” def. 2c) could well apply to Charles’ use of the prerogative—calls to mind Sextus Tarquin, whose subjection of Lucrece to his will is the *locus classicus* both of uncontrolled “animal passion” (“Lust,” def. 4) and of tyranny. Further, the Engagement to be Taken by All Men of the Age of Eighteen, promising loyalty to “the Commonwealth of England, as it is now established, without a King or House of Lords” (Gardiner, *Constitutional Documents* 391), echoed, however faintly, the Roman people’s abjuration of kingship (Norbrook, *Writing* 192-93). And when the statue of Charles was removed from the Royal Exchange, its base was inscribed with the words “*Exit tyrannus, regum ultimus, anno primo restitutae libertatis Angliae 1648*” (“Out goes the tyrant, the last of the kings, in the first year of the liberty of England restored, 1648”)—an unmistakable allusion to Tarquin the Proud (Norbrook, *Writing*, 197-98).

Polemicists remembered Tarquin and Brutus as well. In 1649, several cited the deposition of Tarquin the Proud as a precedent for the judgment against Charles (John Goodwin, *Hybristodikai* 80-81). Enoch Grey derived from the banishment of the Tarquins the “knowne maxime in civill law . . . that he who changeth Government, (from a Monarchy to a Tyranny) loseth the right of the former” (*Vox Coeli* 43). Others even argued that Charles was worse than Tarquin. A versifier in 1650 told Rome to

Set her proud *Tarquin* lower on Record,
 His pettie Tyrannies can naught afford
 May equall *Charles’s*? (*Somnium Cantabrigiense* 9)

And a tract of 1651 in defense of Parliament spoke of what “the *Romans* of old have left in president, in the case of *Tarquinius*, and the expulsion of his Posterity *for lesse*

Tyranny . . .” (*Life and Reigne of King Charls*, Preface; emphasis added). The precedents set by the Romans were still cited as late as 1659, when an anonymous pamphleteer urged, “[L]et it be Treason unpardonable to endeavor to bring in the Kingly power: For this cause *Brutus*, the Founder of the Roman Liberty, caused his own sons to be put to death, for conspiring to bring back the *Tarquins* to the Kingdom” (*Lilburns Ghost* 9).

Among those invoking the Roman model for England was the gleefully iconoclastic Marchamont Nedham, who surnamed Stuart family members “Tarquin” in his assault on the mystique of monarchy. In early issues of his newsbook, *Mercurius Politicus* (1650–1660), Charles II was dubbed “young Tarquin” (as well as “the *Thing* of *Scotland*” and “His Baby Majesty”); the Duke of York, “James Tarquin”; Prince Rupert, “Rupert Tarquin.”⁸³ For Nedham, the name reflected actual parallels: young Charles’ amorous adventures were reminiscent of Sextus Tarquin’s lust, and the attainder of the descendants of Charles I recapitulated the banishment of the Tarquins.

[L]et them take heed he do not turn their wives into *Lemmans*; for, they say, he hath that way an excellent faculty . . . (*Mercurius Politicus* no. 1, p. 14)

Alass poor *Thing!* he hath plaid his part long enough in this Tragedy, so that now it is high time to quit the Stage, since it is resolved above and below too, that none of the *Tarquins* shall have any inheritance in *England*. (*Mercurius Politicus* no. 8, p. 127; qtd. in *Rope for Pol* 10)

The moniker appears to have passed into general circulation. A Mr. G. Forsington wrote to Cromwell from Salisbury in 1654 that some residents had asked “for some horse to be

⁸³ For examples, see *Mercurius Politicus*, no. 2, pp. 17, 21, 22, 32; no. 4, p. 62; no. 5, pp. 78-80; no. 14, p. 211.

quartered hereabouts, for there hath byn some, which have not byn ashamed to shew themselves in young Tarquin's cullours” (State Papers, 1655: February, 162). An affidavit against a waterman named Elton in 1682 affirmed that when asked “what would be done to the King if he were taken after the said fight at Worcester, Elton. . . answered, A young Tarquin, meaning the King, what should they do with him but serve him as they served his father” (“Entry Book: July 1682,” 545). And in 1660, the arch-royalist John Allington attested to the common usage of the appellation “Tarquin” during the Commonwealth and Protectorate. Preaching on the text “The Stone which the Builders refused, is become the Head stone of the Corner,” Allington exclaimed, “And hath not even this been the case of the Kings Son? . . . [T]hose who to the rebellious cry, your *Excellency*, your *Honour*, your *Lordship*, call the corner stone, even below a Gentleman, *Charles Stuart, Tarquin*, one of the *cursed Family!*” (*Period of the Grand Conspiracy*, 68).

Allington’s indignation exemplifies the Restoration perspective on the use of the Tarquin-Lucretia-Brutus legend to discredit monarchy, and to advocate, justify, and glorify the abolition of monarchy and the establishment of a republic. Such speech was now, again, considered treasonous. But this historical legend had become part of the “common memory” in late-sixteenth- and early-seventeenth-century England.⁸⁴ While Lucrece had long been known to popular culture as an emblem of chastity, the full history of the tyranny of the Tarquins and the founding of the Roman Republic had once been the sole property of the elite, who read Latin with private tutors or in schools and universities. By the early seventeenth century, this history, with its political resonances,

⁸⁴ See Introduction, 18.

had reached readers of English through the poems of Lydgate, Gower, and Shakespeare, the tale in Painter's collection, and the translation of Livy by Philemon Holland.

Through Heywood's play, it reached all classes of society, with an immediacy unique to the genre of drama, and in the 1640s, it became one of the models through which the English made sense of events as dramatic as any staged in the theaters. Tarquin was a name that people recognized and understood, a name that represented everything Parliament and its army were fighting against. The parallels that the Parliamentary faction drew between the overthrow of the Tarquins and their own actions enabled them to garner and solidify support. The reaction of the royalists in 1660 suggests that this strategy was at least partially effective; there were those who called for Nedham to be hanged. But once the Tarquin story had come alive in the popular mind, both through literature and drama and through its deployment in political controversy, it could not be completely laid to rest. It would remain available, and ready for reactivation, for many years to come.

Chapter 2. The Death of the Republic: Julius Caesar and the Civil Wars

I

The Roman Republic lasted about 450 years, from the establishment of the consulship in 509 BCE to the First Triumvirate and civil wars in the middle of the first century BCE. Within that time, Rome grew from a small town fighting defensive as well as offensive wars with its neighbors to a world power. The plebeians attained a greater role in government through the institution of the tribunes of the people (494 BCE), and Rome fought three wars with its most powerful rival, Carthage, and came to dominate not only all Italy but most of the Mediterranean region. However, both internal and external pressures threatened the fabric of the Republic. The plight of the urban poor, dispossessed farmers, and landless veterans led to the division of Rome into popular and aristocratic factions; in 133 BCE, a band of senators killed Tiberius Gracchus and more than 300 of his supporters on the Capitoline Hill for proposing a redistribution of land. In addition, the drive for empire created powerful, ambitious generals with armies at their disposal. The first to bring an army into Rome was Sulla, in 88 BCE; both he and his enemy Marius, who captured Rome the next year, massacred their opponents. Even after the restoration of order through Marius' death and Sulla's resignation, electoral and legislative procedures were marred and disrupted by bribery and intimidation. In this atmosphere, Gaius Julius Caesar sought to realize his political goals by forming an alliance, in 60 BCE, with the successful general Gnaeus Pompeius Magnus and the superrich businessman Marcus Licinius Crassus. He obtained provinces—Transalpine and Cisalpine Gaul, as well as Illyricum—and four legions (Plutarch, *Caesar* 14.6), and proceeded to conquer Gaul, push into Germany, and invade Britain. In 49 BCE, ordered

to disband his army, return to Rome, and face legal charges, Caesar instead led his army to Rome. When Pompey, now Caesar's rival and the Senate's champion, fled, Caesar took control. In a subsequent series of battles with Pompey, his allies, and his sons, Caesar emerged victorious; returning to Rome in 45 BCE, he was created dictator for life and allegedly hoped for the title of king.

The institutions of the Republic apparently remained in place, but they now functioned subject to Caesar's will. Appian represents Marcus Brutus as saying, in his speech to the plebeians after the assassination, that

he restored to you neither the magistracies of the city nor those of the provinces, neither the command of armies, the priestly offices, the leadership of colonies, nor any other posts of honor; . . . he neither consulted the Senate about anything nor asked the authority of the people, but . . . Caesar's command was all in all. (*Civil War* 2.19.138)

Rome was once again ruled by one man, as in the time of the kings. Caesar attempted to secure his power by eliciting love rather than fear: extending clemency to his former enemies, debt relief and grain distributions to the poor, and honors to the aristocrats (Plutarch, *Caesar* 37.1, 57.5, 58.1). But the concentration of power at the top violated the republican principle of freedom through self-government, in which citizens of all classes participated. Cicero would later articulate the case for the Republic in his *Philippics*: subjection even to a kind master is dangerous, because he can become cruel should he ever take a mind to (Skinner, "Classical Liberty" 10). Caesar's dictatorship, therefore, already offended many in the political class, but the prospect of the return of monarchy alarmed all the people (Plutarch, *Caesar* 60.1). The name of king had remained hateful

to the Romans throughout the generations; the foundational story of Tarquin the Proud, Lucretia, and Lucius Junius Brutus was doubtless told and retold, and a statue of the latter, sword in hand, stood on the Capitoline Hill.

Efforts to save the Republic by arms had failed; Caesar could not be brought to trial; and he would not relinquish control as long as he lived. The only way to stop him was to kill him. Instigated by Gaius Cassius Longinus and led by Marcus Junius Brutus (considered a descendant of the Brutus who expelled the Tarquins), a band of senators assassinated Caesar on the Ides of March, 44 BCE. While in hindsight their efforts appear to have been doomed, considering the forces at play, Brutus and Cassius raised considerable armies and came close to winning the war against Caesar's avengers and would-be successors: his sister's grandson, Gaius Octavius, and his friend, general, and fellow-consul Marcus Antonius. The outcome is well known: the defeat of the republican armies at Philippi in 42 BCE, the victory of Octavius over Antony at Actium in 31 BCE, and the attainment of supreme power by Octavius, later called Augustus. "Caesar" became an imperial title, and both Julius Caesar and the emperors who succeeded him were apotheosized after death.

Ancient historians and biographers generally disapproved of the assassination of Caesar but did not necessarily idealize him. Both Appian and Plutarch made clear that his goal was always to be "the first and chiefest man of war and authority" (*Shakespeare's Plutarch* 4) and detailed the unsavory methods by which he built up his political power. Suetonius and Cassius Dio enumerated, disapprovingly, the extravagant honors that Caesar accepted, including "a gilded chair of state in the senate-house and on his tribunal, a consecrated chariot, . . . temples, altars, statues among the gods"

(Suetonius, *Divus Julius* 76)—honors that provoked even those who were well disposed toward him. Altogether, most historians and biographers, while praising Caesar’s considerable talents and virtues, criticized his ambition (Bullough 17). Plutarch, for example, wrote that Caesar “reaped no other fruit of all his reign and dominion, which he had so vehemently desired all his life and pursued with such extreme danger, but a vain name only, and a superficial glory that procured him the envy and hatred of his country” (*Shakespeare’s Plutarch* 105-6).

Those of Caesar’s contemporaries who tried to save or restore the Republic viewed him unfavorably or praised his assassins, as did later writers nostalgic for the Republic. Cicero, who wrote that “to gain that sovereign power which by a depraved imagination he had conceived in his fancy, [Caesar] trod underfoot all laws of gods and men” (*De Officiis* 1.26), heartily approved of the assassination but regretted that Antony had been spared (*Letters* 10.28). In the reign of Tiberius, the historian Cremutius Cordus was accused before the Senate for writing a book in which “he had praised Marcus Brutus and called Caius Cassius the last of the Romans.” In his defense, Cordus noted that Livy “repeatedly” described Brutus and Cassius “as illustrious men” and that “Asinius Pollio’s writings too hand down a glorious memory of them” (Tacitus, *Annals* 4.34). Lucan’s unfinished epic on the civil wars (commonly known as the *Pharsalia*), written in the reign of Nero, portrayed Caesar in an unrelievedly negative, even defamatory light.

In the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, Caesar’s far-flung conquests and domination of a great empire inspired envy and emulation among monarchs. Many churchmen, statesmen, poets, and thinkers admired his military genius, valor, industry,

generosity, and clemency. Dante placed “Caesar armed, with falcon eyes” (*Cesare armato, con occhi grifagni*) in a noble castle among “the great spirits” (*gli spiriti magni*) (*Inferno* IV.119, 123), while Brutus and Cassius, along with Judas Iscariot, occupied the lowest places in Hell: the mouths of Lucifer (XXXIV.55-67). Yet others, including Ptolemy of Lucca, Poggio Bracciolini, Leonardo Bruni, Francesco Patrizi, Niccolò Machiavelli, Francesco Guicciardini, and Martin Luther, condemned Caesar for destroying the Republic and setting himself up as a tyrant (Skinner, *Foundations* 55, 83, 161; Bullough 21). Some few, such as Justus Lipsius, even expressed understanding or approval of the assassination (Jensen 159-60). Michel de Montaigne, though obviously fascinated by Caesar, summed up the case against him thus:

the furious passion of ambition . . . ruined in him the finest and richest nature that ever was, and has made his memory abominable to all good men, because he willed to seek his glory in the ruin of his country and the subversion of the most powerful and flourishing republic that the world will ever see. (*Essays* 554; qtd. in Bullough 21)

Among those who sympathized with the conspirators, Machiavelli attributed the failure of their effort to restore the Republic to the corruption of the Roman people (*Discourses* I.17, 47-48), while Isaac Dorislaus, who called Marcus Brutus “a zealous young man with outstanding courage,” simply observed that “although he had bravely dared such a great deed, fortune failed him” (189).

As this long-running controversy shows, the career of Caesar and the fall of the Roman Republic raised important issues for early modern political thinkers. For example, which form of government (if any) is best? Or are different forms suited to

different peoples? Is there a limit to the amount of territory a republic can control effectively? What factors contribute to the stability and long continuance of a polity or to its degeneration? Are the laws and institutions most important, or the temper of the citizens? How can conflicts among factions be resolved without bloodshed or harm to the state? How can the integrity of a failing state be restored? What circumstances or procedures might legitimize a change in the form of government? What are the identifying characteristics of a tyrant? Is it permissible to resist a tyrant, and if so, by what means? (This last is the third of the four questions posed by the *Vindiciae contra Tyrannos*.)

As well as the political thought, the imagination of early modern Europeans was stirred by Caesar and his times. For them, Caesar, the greatest of Roman generals and, for all intents and purposes, the first Roman emperor, epitomized Roman power and glory. References to Caesar abounded in all kinds of works: not only histories and political tracts but even sermons and schoolboy grammars. The cycle of stories concerning the fall of the Roman Republic and the personalities involved—Caesar, Pompey, Cato, Marcus Brutus, Cassius, Antony, and Octavius—inspired at least as much poetry and drama as the legends of the Tarquin-Lucretia-Lucius Junius Brutus cycle. Caesar appears, for example, in Lydgate's *Fall of Princes*, the monk's tale in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, and the 1587 edition of the *Mirror for Magistrates* (Bullough 25). Plays about Pompey, Caesar, or the Roman civil wars (up to and including the Battle of Philippi in 42 BCE) include Juan Luis Vives' *Pompeius Fugiens* (1519), Marc Antoine Muret's *Julius Caesar* (Latin; 1544), Jacques Grévin's *César* (1561), Robert Garnier's *Cornélie* (1574), Richard Eedes' *Caesar Interfectus* (1581/2), and Orlando Pescetti's *Il*

Cesare (1594) (Bullough 26-32; Jensen 134). Of the many such dramas in English written or performed between 1590 and 1660, seven are extant: the anonymous *Caesar's Revenge* (probably performed in the 1590s; published in 1606), Thomas Kyd's *Cornelia* (published in 1594 and 1595; a translation of Garnier's *Cornélie*), Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* (performed c. 1599; published in 1623), William Alexander's closet drama *Julius Caesar* (first published in 1607), George Chapman's *Caesar and Pompey* (published in 1631 but written much earlier),¹ John Fletcher and Philip Massinger's *The False One* (first performed c. 1619-20; published in 1647), and the anonymous *Tragedy of that Famous Roman Oratour Marcus Tullius Cicero* (published in 1651).

This chapter will sample English dramatic portrayals of the death throes of the Roman Republic by examining three of these plays: Kyd's *Cornelia* (which Geoffrey Bullough thinks Shakespeare "probably" read [36]), Chapman's *Caesar and Pompey*, and Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*. The first is generally classified as a closet drama; the second, though containing some elements of popular theater, was (according to the playwright) never performed; the third was performed at the Globe. These plays stage events occurring at different historical moments within the period, focus on different characters, and offer different perspectives. Both *Cornelia* and *Caesar and Pompey* present the perspective of the Pompeian (republican) faction, but in neither is Pompey the hero. Cato is the hero of *Caesar and Pompey*, and Pompey never appears in person in *Cornelia*, where the most authoritative voice belongs to Cicero. *Julius Caesar* presents multiple perspectives and has no single protagonist but features Cassius, Brutus, Caesar, and Antony prominently. *Caesar and Pompey* begins with political conflicts in Rome in

¹ Various dates have been assigned to the writing of *Caesar and Pompey*, ranging from 1604-1605 to 1612-1613 (Berger and Donovan 529).

62 BCE, while *Cornelia* begins around the time of the Battle of Pharsalus (48 BCE); both deal with selected episodes in the civil wars, and both end shortly after the Battle of Thapsus and Cato's suicide (46 BCE).² The action of *Julius Caesar* begins a year later, with Caesar's triumph after his victory over Pompey's sons at Munda in Spain (45 BCE), depicts his assassination, and ends with the battles of Philippi in 42 BCE. For members of the audience at the Globe who had read Kyd's *Cornelia* or seen other plays (now lost) about the rivalry between Caesar and Pompey, *Julius Caesar* may have functioned as a sequel.

II

Thomas Kyd's *Cornelia*, a translation of Robert Garnier's *Cornélie*, consists solely of orations, dialogue, and lyric interludes by the chorus. The important actions occur offstage; onstage, they are reported, reflected on, prepared, celebrated, or deplored. Cicero reflects on the defeat of the republican forces in the battles of Pharsalus and Thapsus; Pompey's widow, Cornelia, mourns for her husband, receives his ashes, and hears of the death of her father, Metellus Scipio, in a naval encounter off the coast of Africa; Cassius stirs up Decimus Brutus against Caesar; Antony tries to persuade Caesar to kill those he suspects of plotting against him. The scenes are arranged impressionistically rather than clearly progressing in time, and the characters are curiously impervious to each other, resisting all efforts at persuasion. More classical in

² Chapman fictionalizes the sequences of time and place in *Caesar and Pompey* and omits the battle of Thapsus. The first act collapses events occurring in 62 BCE (Metellus' proposal to allow Pompey's army to enter Italy) and 49 BCE (the demand for Caesar to disband his army or be declared a public enemy). The last scene (V.ii) collapses events occurring in 48 BCE (the presentation of Pompey's head to Caesar in Egypt [Plutarch, *Pompey* 80.5]) and 46 BCE (Caesar's reaction to Cato's suicide [Plutarch, *Caesar* 54.1; *Cato* 72.1-2]). Chapman presents the murder of Pompey as taking place in Lesbos, directly after his reunion with his wife, and Cato's suicide, two years later, as occurring soon thereafter. In the last scene of *Caesar and Pompey* (V.ii), Caesar is in Utica, just after Cato's death, when the murderers bring him Pompey's head.

form and outlook than most English plays, this work is accessible only to readers well versed in Roman history and Greek mythology.

Cornelia presents a republican perspective almost exclusively (one scene, IV.ii, presents the perspectives of Caesar and his friends). The majority of the characters on stage—Cicero, Cornelia, Philip, Cassius, the Messenger, and every chorus but one—belong to the Pompeian faction, which is understood as fighting for the preservation of the Republic and republican freedom. Only in one instance does anyone cast doubt on Pompey’s motives. Cicero sees the battle of Pharsalus as stemming from the contention of Pompey and Caesar for supremacy:

‘But faith continues not where men command.

‘Equals are euer bandying for the best :

‘A state deuided cannot firmly stand.

‘Two kings within one realme could neuer rest.³

Thys day, we see, the father and the sonne⁴

Haue fought like foes Pharsalias miserie . . . (I.34-39)

Later, though, Cicero tells Cornelia that Pompey has died “for his Countries weale” (II.162), for the defense of Rome against tyranny (II.167-68).

Cornelia’s father, Metellus Scipio, is similarly idealized. The Messenger who brings news of his death tells how the venerable general “with a cheerefull looke” (V.107) encouraged his troops before the Battle of Thapsus:

³ Following Garnier, Kyd uses single open quotes to mark *sententiae*, or aphorisms. These lines are apparently derived from Cicero’s *De Officiis* 1.26.

⁴ Long after the death of Julia, Caesar’s daughter and Pompey’s wife, in 54 BCE, the former allies continued to be referred to as father-in-law and son-in-law.

For now (quoth he) is come that happie day,
 Wherein our Country shall approue our loue.
 Braue Romains, know this is the day and houre,
 That we must all liue free, or friendly die. . . .
 We fight not, we, like thieues, for others wealth :
 We fight not, we, t'enlarge our skant confines ;
 To purchase fame to our posterities . . .
 But t'is for publique freedom that we fight,
 For Rome we fight, and those that fled for feare.
 Nay more, we fight for safetie of our lyues,
 Our goods, our honors, and our auncient lawes.

(V.110-13, 119-21, 123-26)

The defeats of Pompey at Pharsalus and Metellus Scipio at Thapsus leave Cornelia—and Rome—“sad and desolate” (I.215). Their plights are parallel: they are left without protectors. As Metellus Scipio’s words suggest, much of Rome’s population has fled; others are not safe; the goods of Caesar’s adversaries are likely to be confiscated; his rule will violate Rome’s republican constitution (its “auncient lawes”) and deprive its people of freedom and the opportunity to hold public office (honors). The chorus of Act I speaks of “worthless Gorse” growing wild and crowding out the grain in the fields, an image of human corruption as well as wartime scarcity (I.216-18).

Cornelia’s descent from the old and honorable family of the Scipios heightens the pathos of her plight (II.116-19) and recalls Rome’s republican heritage. Her illustrious ancestors, who fought in the Punic Wars (II.260-64; IV.ii.37, 67-68; V.395-98, 415), and

others who risked their lives for Rome's independence and freedom (I.14-19; IV.i.5-7; IV.ii.37-39) are mentioned throughout the play. In particular, the name of Brutus, the leader of the revolution against the Tarquins, is invoked (II.406-409; IV.i.174-79). Both Cicero and Cassius contrast these ancient heroes with present-day Romans, deploring the shameful cowardice of the latter in yielding to Caesar (I.14-16, 21-23; III.ii.5-7, IV.i.40-46). In the Roman republican tradition, subjection to one man holding supreme power was considered slavery, a debased condition that no free-born person could endure without disgrace. Accordingly, Cicero predicts, and Cassius urges, the assassination of Caesar (III.ii.74-81; IV.i.67-76). And the Chorus of IV.i praises tyrannicide at some length (IV.i.186-221).

The text of *Cornelia* fairly bristles with the vocabulary of classical republicanism, the cumulative force of which implies the following argument: Rome, which formerly enjoyed *liberty*, or *freedom*, is now *tamed*, *yoked*, *enthralled*, in *bondage*, in *servitude*, a *slave*, to an *ambitious tyrant*, intent on "*signorie*"; its condition is *base*; if the Romans accept it, they have "*bastard harts*."⁵ Love of country and acting for the good of one's country are also important republican expressions, signifying the preservation or restoration of liberty (II.162-63, III.iii.108, IV.i.63-66, 187, 197; IV.ii.116; V.111). Decimus Brutus makes this connection in asserting his readiness to kill Caesar if he retains dictatorial power at the end of the civil war:

⁵ Citations for these words and their cognates are as follows: liberty (I.14, 66, 142; II.159, 324; III.i.30, 114; III.ii.79; IV.i.50, 76, 197; IV.ii.122; V.196, 393, 436), freedom (I.27, 121; IV.i.46, 150; V.113, 123, 320), tame (I.44, 122; III.ii.7, 10), yoke (I.122; II.102, 218, 402; III.ii.6; IV.i.35, 153, 158), enthrall (I.14; II.403; III.ii.61), bondage (II.295; III.ii.61), servitude (I.143; II.217, 294, 403; III.ii.62, 67; III.iii.68; IV.i.11, 45, 141, 152-53, 212; V.135), slave (II.325; IV.i.160; V.116, 320), ambition (I.24, 132; II.152; IV.i.53, 89, 114, 121), tyrant (I.21; II.140, 144, 148, 152, 155, 168, 325, 383, 402, 408, 409; III.i.32; III.ii.75; III.iii.113; IV.i.2, 31, 39, 169, 178, 191, 195, 220, 240; V.142, 394), signorie (I.55; III.ii.8, 72; III.iii.107, 212; IV.i.98, 133, 146); base (I.23; II.180, 218, 309, 399; III.ii.5; IV.i.41, 163; V.5), bastard (I.21; II.403; III.ii.74).

I loue, I loue him deerely. 'But the loue
 'That men theyr Country and theyr birth-right beare
 'Exceeds all loues, and deerer is by farre
 Our Countries loue then friends or chyldren are. (IV.i.63-66)

In accordance with the underlying republican perspective of this play, the characterization of Caesar is almost unrelievedly negative. He is called a tyrant by Cicero, Cornelia, Cassius, Metellus Scipio, and the Chorus. Moreover, the Chorus twice calls him a Tarquin (II.390; III.i.32), the first time in the context of an elaborate description of the cyclical motion of history culminating in Rome's current return to monarchy and the hope for a new Brutus. Caesar's crimes are enumerated: he attacked the peaceful Germans, invaded his own country, initiated the civil wars, pursued Pompey with intent to kill, showed no mercy to Metellus Scipio's troops when they surrendered, has "despoild and robd" his countrymen of their "ancient freedom," and now governs Rome arbitrarily (I.120-21, III.ii.36-38; III.iii.81-84; IV.i.102-115, 124-29; V.269-73). Cicero figures him as a "rebell sonne" of Rome who "violates both God and Natures lawes," celebrating a triumph over his mother (III.ii.12-15, 38).⁶

The appearance of Caesar himself, ready for his triumph, in Act IV initially confirms his enemies' opinions of him. He is almost comic in his *hubris*, imagining that the very walls of Rome are "styrred with a strange delight" by his "matchles victories," while the Tiber rushes to tell the seas about his conquests (IV.ii.9-10, 13-20). Glorifying in his military exploits, he proclaims that he has surpassed all the famous Roman generals of former times (IV.ii.36-43). He tolerates no opposition, boasting that he has conquered

⁶ According to Plutarch (*Caesar* 55.1), the triumphs Caesar celebrated at this time were for his victories in Egypt, Pontus, and Africa (the latter nominally over the Numidian king Juba).

Pompey, who “(ill aduis’d) repined at my glory,” and Metellus Scipio, who “durst affront me and my warlike bands” (IV.ii.58, 69). In this context, his protestation that he fought the civil wars only out of necessity and took no pleasure in the death of fellow Romans rings rather hollow (IV.ii.82-87). He goes on to claim supremacy as an entitlement:

Howbeit I neuer meant my greatnes should

By any others greatnes be o’re-ruld.

For as I am inferior to none,

So can I suffer no Superiors. (IV.ii.94-97)

Yet Caesar is not wholly lacking in virtue. Arrogant and tyrannical though he is, and though his wars have caused wholesale bloodshed, he is not bloody in civil life. He rejects Antony’s advice to kill everyone he suspects of plotting against him, hoping instead to win over his former enemies by kindness (IV.ii.113-17, 128-34). And he persists in this mild policy despite his awareness that it may hasten his death (IV.ii.135-42, 161-65).

The moral anchor of *Cornelia* is the republican statesman Cicero, who advocates the pursuit of virtue and the control of passions by reason (I.151-57). He tries, unsuccessfully, to assuage Cornelia’s grief with philosophical reflections (that human affairs are subject to change, that many others have lost loved ones in the civil wars, that all human beings die) and admonishes her that suicide is against heaven’s will (II.124-57, 214-21, 253-82, 326-37). And he articulates the republican opposition to Caesar’s rule in terms of justice:

“Think’st thou to signiorize, or be the King

Of such a number nobler then thy selfe?” (III.ii.72-73)

As Aristotle states, when many citizens in a state are virtuous, they no longer tolerate a king, demanding broad participation in government instead (*Politics* 1286b).

Strikingly, at the very beginning of the play, Cicero declares that Caesar's tyranny is just punishment for Rome's oppression of other nations. While the historical Cicero did indeed write this in *De Officiis* (2.27-29), he idealized the behavior of Rome toward conquered nations in earlier times, asserting that "our government could be called more accurately a protectorate (*patrocinium*) of the world than a dominion (*imperium*)" (*De Officiis* 2.26-27; quotation from 2.27). But the Garnier-Kyd character goes beyond the historical Cicero, invoking the Golden Rule (I.126-29) to condemn the very idea of empire:

What right had our ambitious auncestors

(Ignobly issued from the Carte and Plough)

To enter Asia? What, were they the heires

To Persia or the Medes, first Monarchies?

What interest had they to Afferique?

To Gaule or Spaine? . . .

Are we not thieues and robbers of those Realmes

That ought vs nothing but reuenge for wrongs? (I.132-37, 139-40)

This radical critique of empire, the only element in the play uncharacteristic of Greco-Roman culture,⁷ casts a shadow on Cornelia's pride in Pompey's conquests (II.81-104)

⁷ But see the next paragraph. Surprisingly, Curtis Perry, who finds a number of Christian allusions in Kyd's *Cornelia*, does not mention the Golden Rule or the critique of empire, which does problematize the otherwise admired Roman Republic. Some of the images and ideas that Perry notes, such as the self-sacrifice of one person for the preservation of a community (I.7-12), may recall Roman historical figures (Horatius at the bridge; Curtius riding fully armed into the chasm) as easily as Christ. They may thus serve not, as Perry argues, to place the world of the play at an "ironic distance" (545, 547), but to assimilate the best of classical pagan thought to Christianity. To be convincing, Perry's argument for a Christian subtext

and is echoed by Cassius' condemnation of Caesar's wars (IV.i.105-15, 124-49) and Cornelia's later conceptualization of the defeat at Thapsus as revenge upon Scipio's descendants for the destruction of Carthage. Caesar's exultant pride in his own conquests mirrors the pride of Rome in its empire and perhaps hints at his imminent downfall. But the connection between the expansion of Rome's empire and the demise of the Republic may be viewed through a political as well as a moralistic lens. As Rome came to depend on generals commanding large armies to conquer and hold territories, it was only a matter of time before one of those generals used his army to impose his political will on Rome itself.

Similar critiques of empire may be found in other works produced in late-sixteenth-century Europe. Consider, for example, Thomas Fenne's characterization of Caesar in *Fennes Frutes* (1590):

for his owne vaine glorie and pride of heart, so manie Nations were subdued, so manie stately Townes beaten downe & sacked, so manie people slain and mured most lamentably, that all *Europa* stood floating with y^e blood of his slaughters. (9)⁸

And this from the author of *Romes Monarchie* (1596):

(Alas) what woe, what miserie, and wrack,
(Vile wretchednes, and torments cruelly

invoking a providential view of history (according to which the transition from Republic to Empire was a necessary precondition for the birth of Christ) would have to be supported by more substantial evidence, such as any expression within the play of a view (other than Caesar's or Antony's) favorable to monarchy, or a prediction of the coming of Christ.

⁸ As in Garnier's *Cornélie*, so in *Fennes Frutes*, deprecation of empire is linked to a version of the Golden Rule, here attributed to Cato: "*Sic facias alteri, quòd tibi vis fieri: So doo vnto another, as thou wouldst thy self be done vnto*" (9).

Her Empire causde, causles many to dye) (qtd. in Jensen 129)

This view may be traced back to Augustine, who, while refraining from direct criticism of the Roman Empire, implied general disapproval in statements such as the following: “But to make war on your neighbors, and thence to proceed to others, and through mere lust of dominion to crush and subdue people who do you no harm, what else is this to be called than great robbery?” (*City of God* IV.6) And, as Clifford Ronan has pointed out (“*Antike Roman*” 47), even Tacitus, writing toward the end of the first century CE, cast a British leader’s denunciation of the Romans in compelling words: “To robbery, slaughter, plunder, they give the lying name of empire; they make a solitude and call it peace” (*Agricola* 30).

The condemnation of war by the Chorus at the end of Act I (I.177-221) and of unjust wars by Cassius (IV.i.105-19) likely conveys the reaction of Garnier, a moderate Catholic, to the French Wars of Religion. Iris Oberth has noted the frequency of gruesome images of bloodshed in *Cornélie* (279). Perhaps, like Cicero, Garnier hoped that his compatriots could take melancholy comfort in the suffering of others during their own civil wars and political upheaval. England, too, looking nervously across the Channel, had reason to fear that civil war might erupt due to rebellion against Elizabeth or to contention for the succession upon her death.

If one is tempted to ask why Garnier, a prominent lawyer and the author of a *Hymne de la monarchie* (Oberth 281-82), chose to present a republican perspective in *Cornélie*, consideration of the parallels with Muret’s *Julius Caesar* complicates the question. Caesar’s readiness to die, the assertion that his dictatorial power is already regal, the sentiment that one’s country should command more loyalty than a tyrant, and

especially a chorus praising tyrannicide, and specifically mentioning Harmodius and Aristogeiton—all these are found in the earlier work (MacCallum 21-23). The republicanism of Garnier’s tragedy may owe more to an intellectual tradition, “the ‘civic humanism’ that originated in Italian city states” (Norbrook, *Writing* 11-12), than to the fluctuating politics of the author.⁹ For Kyd, who aggressively exposes the criminality of the ruling class in *The Spanish Tragedy*, republican or oppositional sympathies appear more likely. Andrew Hadfield has suggested that in England, literature and drama featured republican themes and stories as often as they did because these genres allowed a freer play of ideas than historiography or political theory (51-52). Curtis Perry argues that Kyd used Roman republicanism as “an exaggerated mirror” for the change in the 1590s from the model of a constitutional monarchy bounded by law (Fortescue’s *dominium regale et politicum*) to a more absolutist paradigm—a change that tended to exclude his aristocratic readers from the circles of power (536, 543-44; quotation at 545). Whatever the authors’ intentions, the Garnier-Kyd plays drew on early modern Europeans’ admiration for the Roman Republic and their sense of loss at its fall, as expressed, for example, by Montaigne. Kyd’s English readers in 1594 would probably have interpreted the tragedy differently than Garnier’s French readers in 1574, and later readers would have heard still different resonances. They may have appreciated the extended meditation on the causes and consequences of political upheaval, the principle of distribution of high offices according to virtue, the hot valor of Cassius and the cool, deliberate valor of Metellus Scipio, or the imperative to overthrow illegitimate power. In

⁹ For Garnier’s politics, see Oberth 281-84.

giving voice to such ideas and qualities, Kyd's *Cornelia* contributed to the preservation and dissemination of the classical republican tradition.

III

Like Kyd's *Cornelia*, Chapman's *Caesar and Pompey* is solidly republican in its sympathies. It presents, at the beginning, something absent from both *Cornelia* and Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*: a meeting of a policy-making body during the Republic.¹⁰ But the violence and bribery referred to and displayed, the nature of the bill to be considered, and the petty public quarrel between Pompey and Caesar testify to the dysfunction of the political process. Caesar has placed armed men in the Forum and the temple of Castor and Pollux to intimidate Cato, who opposes the bill (I.i.47-56). The unsavory tactics Caesar uses are further exposed when he asks Metellus whether Cato might be won over by gifts and honors or suppressed by force (I.ii.5-10), and when Cato, challenging them both, demands ironically, "Haue you already bought the peoples voices?" (I.ii.64). The bill, on the pretext of protecting Rome from the Catilinarian conspiracy, calls for allowing Pompey's army to enter Italy, in effect giving him the means to become a tyrant (I.ii.45-48). In this play, "tyranny" clearly means one-man rule (I.ii.45-48, 65-69, 193-95), either because such a government would violate Rome's constitution or because it would lead to arbitrary and unjust behavior on the part of the ruler. Cato refers to the republican principle of rule by consuls, Senate, and people when he asserts that Pompey himself does not want to bring his army in:

. . . since he loues his Country,

In my great hopes of him, too well to seeke

¹⁰ This appears to be a citizens' assembly but is presented with no effort at historical accuracy.

His sole rule of her, when so many soules
 So hard a taske approue it . . . (I.ii.135-38)

Love of country, here as in *Cornelia* and *Julius Caesar*, is understood to be synonymous with the preservation of the Republic. To be sure, Caesar advances an alternative definition, claiming that his many conquests and his extension of the empire prove his own love of his country (I.ii.84-123). But he is clearly in the minority and, more importantly, in the wrong according to Cato, who is the moral arbiter in this play.

The open break between Caesar and Pompey in Act I, and the consul's order to Caesar to disband his army or be declared an enemy to Rome, set the stage for civil war. Acts II and III, and the first three scenes of Act IV, deal with two battles of that war—those of Dyrrhachium and Pharsalus—while the rest of Act IV and Act V present the aftermath. Pompey, who in Act I has disavowed any aspiration to supreme power (I.ii.149-56), is understood to be fighting for the Republic. That is why Brutus joins him, calling him “the ablest fautor of [my Countreys] safty” (II.iv.107, 109). Pompey declares his readiness to sacrifice body and mind “in sacred offering to my Countreys loue” (III.i.20-21) and prays for divine assistance for the cause of Rome and justice (III.i.134-37). His reaction to Caesar's peace overture, though, calls his motives into question:

I rest in *Cæsars* shades? walke his strow'd paths?
 Sleepe in his quiet waues? Ile sooner trust
 Hibernian Boggs, and quicksands; and hell mouth
 Take for my sanctuary . . . (III.i.100-104)

Here Pompey is shown to be concerned primarily with his own prestige rather than with Rome's liberty. His mistrust is mixed with indignation at the thought of taking second

place to Caesar. Although Cato, for whom he professes the deepest respect, has urged him to accept any “fit offer” of peace (II.iv.50-54), he chooses to regard Caesar’s offer as a trap and therefore to reject it. It appears that while fighting for Rome, Pompey is also fighting for his position as its most prominent and powerful citizen.

A dignified commander, Pompey welcomes allies graciously and, for the most part, makes reasonable decisions in consultation with others. However, he is overly proud of his glorious reputation, announcing that he does not want to be blamed if his forces are defeated (III.i.22-27), allowing the taunts of his followers to draw him into battle at Pharsalus against his better judgment (IV.i.1-12, 45-54, 57-59), and even threatening friends who urge him to reconsider. Once defeated, he briefly admits his error (IV.iv.1-3, 69-70) but spends more words on finding fault with those to whose overconfidence and taunts he had yielded (IV.iv.6-14, 24-30). He adopts a stoical attitude, taking comfort in the thought that

. . . I am still my selfe in euery worth

The world could grace me with, had this dayes Euen

In one blaze ioynd, with all my other Conquests. (IV.iv.60-62)

There is rather too much self-praise in this, and too much bitterness against “the rotten-hearted world” (IV.iv.66), to convince a reader that Pompey has truly attained philosophical detachment. When he arrives at Lesbos, though, his wife and friends admire his fortitude and his resolve to be good rather than (as he was formerly known) great (V.i.176-206).

As for Caesar, his offenses against Rome are made abundantly clear. His violence, corruption, and ambition are reported in particularly distasteful terms in the first

scene of Act I and are displayed in the second. After his victory at Pharsalus, Cato denounces him as

Taking vpon him to giue life, when death
Is tenfold due to his most tyrannous selfe.
No right, no power giuen him to raise an army,
Which in despight of *Rome* he leades about
Slaughtering her loyall subiects, like an outlaw . . . (IV.v.34-38)

And Caesar's *hubris* is nothing short of breathtaking. Braving a tempest to bring his troops from Brundisium, he imagines himself as godlike, able to bend nature to his will or at least pass through its most dangerous manifestations unharmed:

I that haue ransackt all the world for worth,
To forme in man the image of the gods,
Must like them haue the power to check the worst
Of all things vnder their celestiall Empire,
Stoope it, and burst it, or breake through it all,
With vse and safety, till the Crowne be set
On all my actions . . . (II.v.12-18)

Having changed the geopolitical landscape and constructed himself as a hero through his conquests, he thinks like a warrior, regarding the elements as enemy ranks. In this heroic vein, he invokes his own name as a force backed by "the necessity of fate" (II.v.6, 10-11).

Yet, all in all, Caesar is a rather attractive overreacher. Directly after this boast, he acknowledges his peril and resolutely proceeds (II.v.24-38). After the Battle of Dyrrhachium, he admits that the defeat was his fault (II.iii.10-13, 41-45). In his interactions with his soldiers, Vibius (a prisoner of war), and Brutus, he shows the

warmth that Pompey lacks. He graciously releases Vibius without ransom and entrusts him with a peace overture to Pompey (II.iii.55-67). He prays for as little bloodshed as will be consistent with victory at Pharsalus (III.ii.84-89). He stops, improbably, in the midst of battle to close the eyes of his fallen soldier Crassinius and pronounce an impromptu eulogy (IV.iii.3-17). Unlike Garnier-Kyd's Caesar, who is surprised to learn that some think of him as "their Countries foe" (*Cornelia* IV.ii.117), Chapman's Caesar is aware that he is considered a tyrant (III.ii.110-116; IV.iv.3-7) and hopes to convince the Romans otherwise (IV.v.32-47). He appears to be sincere in wanting to make Rome happy and glorious under his rule (III.ii.130-32).

Still, Cato's judgment about Caesar is right. As Caesar puts it, he wants his former adversaries to "enjoy life in the good of *Cæsar*" (IV.v.31). Benevolent as this scenario sounds, it confirms Caesar's primacy: by sparing people's lives, he asserts control over them, makes them beholden to him. Moreover, the power to spare life is also, conversely, the power to kill, a power that Caesar has won by the sword and exercises according to his sole judgment—both in violation of Rome's laws. He intends to exercise such power, not only on the battlefield and in the provinces, but also in Rome. His hopes of binding Brutus and Cato to him by love, and his offer to share power with them (IV.v.42-47), represent an effort to legitimize his rule by co-opting prominent members of the republican faction who are famous for virtue, justice, and serving the common good (I.i.57-61; I.ii.24, 27-28; II.iv.117-18; V.ii.101-104).

Thus, the title characters of *Caesar and Pompey*, "the two Suns of our Romane Heauen" (I.i.1), whose rivalry and battles occupy most of the play, are both self-interested, though both are partially redeemed, Pompey by his defense of the Republic

and his effort to accept his adverse fortune with fortitude, Caesar by his kindness both to his soldiers and to his former enemies. The real hero of this tragedy is Cato, whose life, as Caesar says, “was rule to all liues” (V.ii.183). Near the beginning, the citizens testify to Cato’s character as not only virtuous, but the very standard of virtue:

4 [*Cit.*] Thou seek’st the peoples good; and these [Caesar and Pompey] their
owne. (I.ii.24)

6 [*Cit.*] Be bould in all thy will; for being iust,

Thou maist defie the gods. (I.ii.27-28)¹¹

Cato’s actions validate the citizens’ praise, though his harshness toward political opponents in this scene and, later, toward members of his own household is unappealing. In the public assembly, he boldly opposes the proposal to allow Pompey’s army to enter Italy (I.ii.40-74, 130-44, 205, 211). Once the war has started, he makes every effort to diminish the bloodshed. He admonishes Pompey not to boast about the number of Caesar’s soldiers killed at Dyrrhachium, asks him not to sack any cities of the Empire or to kill any Roman citizens outside of battle, advises a strategy of attrition, and urges him to accept any reasonable offer of peace (II.iv.5-6, 40-54). He departs from the field, at the Senate’s command, to keep order in the cities and kingdoms near the armies (II.iv.63-69).

With the defeat of the republican forces at Pharsalus, and the advance of Caesar toward Cato in Utica (IV.v.43-47; IV.vi.5-7), the focus shifts from the public to the private, from the assembly and the battlefield to Cato’s house. The Republic, which had

¹¹ Caesar’s tribute reflects Virgil’s line in *Aeneid* VIII.670: *his dantem iura Catonem* (Cato giving them their laws). The sixth citizen’s lines recall Lucan, *Pharsalia* I.128, *Victrix caussa deis placuit, sed victa Catoni* (The gods chose the victorious cause, Cato the vanquished). Both lines are quoted in Montaigne’s essay “Of Cato the Younger.” The translations used here are those in Donald Frame’s edition (171-72).

once bred upright and just citizens—of whom Cato had been a prime exemplar—and had depended on their service in public life and battle, is now dead. Virtue can now be exercised only in private life. Cato thus advises his son to abstain from politics, which, from now on, will inevitably corrupt anyone who takes part (IV.vi.105-117). Determined not to owe his life to Caesar’s clemency (IV.vi.8-10, 43-44) and thus be made to “serue iniustice” (IV.vi.63), Cato kills himself, pronouncing as he dies, “Iust men are only free, the rest are slaues” (V.ii.177). The unjust man one immediately thinks of is Caesar, a slave to his ambition, who is bound by the unforeseen consequences of his actions (such as the murder of Pompey). Arriving, as it were, on cue, Caesar recognizes that Cato’s defiant suicide has deprived him of the legitimation he had hoped for:

All my late Conquest, and my lifes whole acts,
 Most crownde, most beautified, are basted [*sic*]¹² all
 With thy graue lifes expiring in their scorne. (V.ii.180-82)

Caesar has won the military victory only; “conquer’d in his Conquest” (IV.vi.32), he yields the moral victory to Cato.

Just as Cato represents the exemplary Roman citizen, the Roman Republic in its pure form—before the corruption revealed in Act I of *Caesar and Pompey*—had once been the very model of a virtuous state. The flight of virtue from public to private life, and from this world to the next, where Cato hopes to be reunited with the souls of the consuls, suggests that the Republic will survive as a kind of Platonic pattern, perhaps in heaven and certainly in the memory of posterity. As such, there may be a hope that this pattern will be realized again on earth. This suggestion mitigates the bitterness of the

¹² Emended to “blasted” in the editions of Pearson, Shepherd, and Parrott, as noted in the historical collation of Berger and Donovan (600, 605).

defeat of the republican cause. So does the behavior of Caesar, who orders a funeral, tomb, and statue for Cato (V.ii.221), and, with Brutus at his side, punishes Pompey's murderers and resists the temptation to gloat over his death. The memory of Cato and the presence of the "worthy" Brutus (V.ii.103-104) may be guiding Caesar to preserve the Republic's sense of justice and to honor its defenders. While Cato and the Republic represent a rigorous—and now dead—ideal, Caesar's governance is likely to be largely benevolent.

Thus, while the politics of Chapman's *Caesar and Pompey* initially appear similar to those of Kyd's *Cornelia*, the two plays end very differently: Kyd's on an uncompromisingly elegiac note, Chapman's on a note of fortitude and even a measure of hope. Athenodorus' verdict that the world is "a heape . . . of digested villany (V.ii.80) is not entirely borne out. The victor—soon to be dictator—is capable of nobility, and accommodation to his semi-monarchical rule may enable one to serve the common good. In contrast, the behavior of Antony and Octavius in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* gives no cause for such hope, although the moral victory of Shakespeare's vanquished hero, and the praise and honor accorded him by his adversaries, may have influenced the ending of *Caesar and Pompey*.

IV

In contrast to Kyd's *Cornelia* and Chapman's *Caesar and Pompey*, Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* does not explicitly name Caesar's offenses against Rome, its laws, and its constitution. In fact, Shakespeare's is the only English Caesar play written or performed between 1590 and 1660 that fails to do so. Even in *The False One*, a play largely sympathetic to Caesar, pangs of conscience keep him awake at bedtime:

How happy was I, in my lawfull warrs
 In *Germany*, and *Gaul*, and *Britany*? . . .
 But since I undertooke this home-division,
 This civill war, and past the Rubicon,
 What have I done, that speakes an antient *Roman*?
 A good, great Man? I have enterd Rome by force,
 And on her tender wombe, (that gave me life)
 Let my insulting Souldiers rudely trample,
 The deare vaines of my Country, I have opend
 And saild upon the torrents that flowd from her, . . .
 I rob'd the treasury, and at one gripe
 Snatch'd all the wealth, so many worthy triumphs,
 Placed there as sacred to the peace of *Rome*; . . .
Pompey I overthrew; what did that get me?
 The slubbord name of an authoriz'd enemy; . . .
 What friends have I tyde fast, by these ambitiones?
Cato, the lover of his Countryes freedom
 Is past now into *Affrik*, to affront me,
Juba, (that kill'd my friend) is up in armes too:
 The Sonnes of *Pompey*, are Masters of the Sea . . .
 . . . say I defeate all these too:

I come home Crown'd an honourable Rebell (II.iii, p. 128)

Not only does Fletcher and Massinger's Caesar reproach himself for taking Rome by force of arms, starting the civil wars, and robbing the treasury in the service of his ambition; he does so in the highly charged language one expects from Cato, Cicero, or Lucan. He has violated things tender, dear, worthy, and sacred. He speaks of Rome as his mother, a metaphor that captures the horror of his deeds: his marching soldiers have

trampled her womb (earth), and he has sailed on the torrents of her blood (the blood of his fellow Romans) toward his goal of supreme power. In contrast to the “lawfull” wars he once pursued, his current wars, impelled by ambition, make him an enemy to his country. Even if he is eventually crowned—whether as the celebrator of a triumph or as a king—he will still be a rebel against his country’s laws, an offense that no honorable conduct on his part, and no honors conferred on him, can wipe clean.

The sudden arrival of Cleopatra, wrapped in a packet, interrupts these somber reflections, and no further reproach of Caesar surfaces in *The False One*. For the rest of the play, he is the protagonist—flawed, to be sure, by avarice and amorous passion, but still valiant and noble. *Caesar’s Revenge*, too, as the title implies, is largely favorable to Caesar. This play presents the perspectives of both sides in the civil war but accords more sympathy to the defenders of the Republic until Caesar’s assassination in Act III. At that point, the presentation of the characters pivots sharply: the assassins appear bloody and cruel, and Caesar’s ghost, demanding revenge, drives the rest of the action. Alexander’s *Julius Caesar*, while giving Caesar his due, articulates the arguments of Cicero and the conspirators in extraordinary fullness, throwing the weight of sympathy on their side—though the play ends with Calpurnia mourning her husband and the Chorus reflecting on the mutability of human affairs. The *Tragedy of Cicero*, like Kyd’s *Cornelia* and Chapman’s *Caesar and Pompey*, solidly favors the republican side.

In Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*, in contrast, the means by which Caesar came to rule Rome, and the offenses he committed in the process, are nowhere spelled out. Neither is the fundamental law of the Roman Republic, according to which the most important officials—the two consuls and the tribunes of the plebs—were chosen by

popular election, nor that the Senate held the preponderance of power, and citizens' assemblies participated in governance. The republican principles of Cicero, the tribunes Flavius and Murellus, and the conspirators, and the history of the subversion of the Republic, are conveyed only by allusion, suggestion, and metaphor. Shakespeare even weakens the republicans' case by changing significant details and characterizations. For instance, according to his main source, Sir Thomas North's translation of Plutarch's *Lives*, it was diadems (*Shakespeare's Plutarch* 93), not "ceremonies," "trophies," or "scarves" (Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar* I.i.65, 69; I.ii.285),¹³ that Flavius and Murellus pulled off Caesar's statues, bespeaking not an animus against Caesar but a determination to prevent the institution of a monarchy. The tribunes did not reproach the people for taking a holiday to view Caesar's triumph over Pompey's sons; rather, the people themselves voiced displeasure at such a triumph (Plutarch, *Caesar* 56.4). And whereas Plutarch's Brutus is recognizably human, though sometimes stern, and well loved "for his virtue and valiantness, . . . because he was a marvellous lowly and gentle person, noble-minded . . ." (*Shakespeare's Plutarch* 151), Shakespeare depicts Brutus as upright but wooden and self-important. Shakespeare's Cassius, alone after his effort to "seduce" Brutus, all but admits that his plotting against Caesar is motivated by a private grudge (*JC* I.ii.312-15), although Plutarch, while acknowledging Cassius' grudge, says that his primary motive was an inborn hatred of tyranny (*Brutus* 9.1).

Shakespeare's departures from Plutarch, which tend to exonerate Caesar and cast doubt on his opponents' motives, have been widely recognized (e.g., Arnold 145, 149-50; Blits 45; Miola, "Tyrannicide Debate" 284). They appear to tilt the play in a monarchic

¹³ Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* is cited below as *JC*.

direction, though Oliver Arnold argues that Shakespeare is critiquing the conspirators from the left rather than from the right, exposing their pretensions to represent the people, who in fact exercise power directly over Caesar (143-44, 146, 173).¹⁴ Among scholars who interrogate the politics of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, Robert Miola usefully considers the influence of the ongoing debate about the rights and wrongs of tyrannicide. Exploring the arguments for and against categorizing Caesar as a tyrant, Miola concludes that Shakespeare's Caesar is relatively benign despite some tyrannical characteristics. He faults the conspirators for a deed that lacks the requisite divine or popular approval—because the gods' wills are unknowable and the people “dangerously unstable” (“Tyrannicide Debate” 285-88; quotation on 288)—and that leads to proscriptions, civil war, and worse rulers than Caesar. Yet, as he himself acknowledges, the conspirators do have the authority of the Roman constitution (276), and according to at least one of the tyrannicide tracts he cites, the *Vindiciae contra Tyrannos*, as officers of the realm (senators), they have the right and duty to depose the tyrant (*Vindiciae* 197-201).¹⁵

Rebecca Bushnell takes observations such as Miola's (273) about the ambivalence of *Julius Caesar* a step further, arguing that the play's “discontinuities,” and its ability to frustrate efforts at “coherent” political interpretation, should not be viewed as defects; rather, they result from the intentional embedding of different ideologies, different times and places, and different types of discourse within the same text (“*Julius Caesar*” 340-

¹⁴ Arnold appears to be reading Shakespeare's Roman plays as reflecting on early modern England rather than on Rome. While the connections he makes are interesting, I am focusing on the specifically Roman consciousness that *Julius Caesar* conveys. I note also that the power that Arnold sees the people as exercising is extremely limited: Caesar is unwilling to defy popular opinion on the question of kingship, the third rail of Roman politics, and he makes himself available to consider petitions. He does not preside over a popular assembly in which the people vote on legislation.

¹⁵ The *Vindiciae* specifically commends Brutus and Cassius (192, 194).

41). Therefore, she suggests, attending to these differences may be more useful than attempting a unitary reading.

In addition to the discontinuities that Bushnell notes within the text of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, I propose that two kinds of differences among members of the audience would have influenced their reception of this play. First, those with strong, fixed political loyalties would interpret the play as bolstering their own positions. Second, the more knowledge audience members brought to the play from independent sources, the more likely they would have been to view Caesar as a tyrant and to sympathize with the conspirators' aims, if not their means; the less they knew beforehand, the more likely they would have been to interpret the play from a monarchical perspective, seeing Caesar as a benevolent ruler and the conspirators as traitors to their prince. While the most educated spectators would have read a wide range of classical writers in Latin, readers of English still had access to sufficient materials for a rounded understanding of the issues: Plutarch's *Lives* (including those of Cato, Pompey, Caesar, Brutus, and Antony), Appian's history, and Cicero's *De Officiis*, all translated before 1599.¹⁶ Even the illiterate may have been familiar with the basic outlines of the story, through ballads, "religious and civic pageants, folk plays, and tavern signs" (Ronan, "Caesar On and Off" 71), and commercial drama. *A History of Caesar and Pompey* appears to have been performed at the Theatre in 1582, and another play, entitled *Seser and Pompie*, by the Admiral's Men in 1594 (Jensen 134).

Acknowledging, then, that Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* is far from advocating republicanism, I propose to examine the elements in the play that do support the

¹⁶ Plutarch's *Lives* were first translated into English in 1579, Appian's history in 1578, and Cicero's *De Officiis* in 1534.

republican cause. First, there are allusions to Pompey, the general who had led the forces fighting for the Republic; to Cato, its most principled advocate; and to Lucius Junius Brutus, its founder. Both Pompey's inglorious murder by Ptolemy's henchmen in 48 BCE and Cato's suicide in 46 BCE were attributable to Caesar's victories in the civil wars. It was after his victory over Pompey's sons ("Pompey's blood" [JC I.i.51]) at Munda in 45 BCE that Caesar celebrated the triumph mentioned in Act I, scene 1, of *Julius Caesar*. As the commoners prepare to "rejoice in his triumph," the tribunes accuse them of "ingratitude" to "great Pompey" (JC I.i.37, 55), whose own triumphs they had formerly watched—a charge that problematizes Antony's later allegation of Brutus' "ingratitude" to Caesar (III.ii.182). Triumphs were traditionally awarded to generals who had conquered other nations (I.i.32-34), not their fellow Romans. The tribunes thus remind the commoners, and the audience (including those who see themselves reflected in the commoners on stage), of Caesar's culpability in starting the civil war.

The memory of the ill-fated Pompey continues to be invoked. The conspirators meet at the theater that Pompey had constructed, or on its porch (JC I.iii.126, 147, 152). Caius Ligarius joins the conspiracy because Caesar "rated him for speaking well of Pompey" (II.i.215). When Caesar is stabbed, he falls "at the base of Pompey's statue" (III.i.115, III.ii.189), suggesting that Pompey is thus avenged (Plutarch, *Caesar* 66.7). Even toward the end, before the battle of Philippi, Cassius links his own cause and plight with Pompey's, since against his will, he must stake Roman liberty on the outcome of one battle (V.i.73-75).

Cato's name is invoked, more briefly, by his children. Portia claims that her upbringing by her father, Cato, whose sense of justice and steadfastness were legendary,

has raised her to a level of strength and constancy beyond her sex (II.i.293-96). Her brother, young Cato, fights and dies valiantly at Philippi, proclaiming,

I am the son of Marcus Cato, ho!

A foe to tyrants, and my country's friend. (V.iv.4-5)

Portia supports the effort to restore the Republic by sharing Brutus' counsels; young Cato, by fighting on the battlefield. Their conviction that they are carrying on their father's legacy lends luster to the cause of Brutus and Cassius. And Brutus recalls Cato's suicide, which he formerly condemned but will soon emulate, before the battle at Philippi, marking the end of the struggle on behalf of the Republic (V.i.100-112).

Popular consensus against kingship represents another republican strand of *Julius Caesar*. Brutus' famous ancestor who drove the last king from Rome is invoked several times as evidence that Romans throughout the ages have held their republican form of government sacred (*JC* I.ii.159-62; I.iii.146; II.i.52-54, 321), and in the first instance, Cassius implicitly compares a king (in the abstract) to "th'eternal devil"—an incongruous importation of a Christian concept into Roman thought, but one that aptly illustrates Roman attitudes. The interlocking keywords repeatedly deployed by the republicans, to which the citizens respond, are based on this consensus: liberty, freedom, nobility, honor, and Romanitas are opposed to slavery, bondage, the yoke, bastardy, baseness, vileness, and tyranny.¹⁷ If these terms sound like abstractions, their meanings had been

¹⁷ Citations for most occurrences of these words are as follows: liberty (III.i.77, 80, 111, 119; V.i.75), freedom (I.ii.99; III.i.77, 80, 111; III.ii.24), nobility (I.ii.64, 152, 172, 198, 298, 308, 311; I.iii.121, 141; II.i.93, 136, 302; III.i.127, 136, 157, 200, 259; III.ii.11, 64, 77, 116, 163, 181, 195, 201, 228, 237; IV.ii.11, 36; V.i.59, 92, 111; V.iii.11, 51, 73; V.iv.9, 15, 22; V.v.13, 67), honor (I.ii.87-91; I.iii.123; II.i.287, 316, 321; III.ii.15, 82, 83, 87, 94, 99, 124, 127, 151, 153, 206, 208; IV.ii.12, 77; V.i.60, 61; V.v.46, 57), Romanitas (II.i.93, 124, 136, 222; III.i.106, 139; III.ii.13, 31, 73; IV.ii.157, 239, 240; V.i.111; V.iii.88, 97-98; V.v.67), slavery (I.i.75; III.ii.23), bondage (I.iii.89, 100, 112; III.ii.29; V.i.43; V.v.54), the yoke (I.ii.63, I.iii.83), bastardy (II.i.137; V.iv.2), baseness (I.iii.109; III.i.43; III.ii.28; IV.ii.76), vileness (I.iii.110; III.ii.32; IV.ii.126, 129; V.i.40, 103; V.v.38), and tyranny (I.iii.91, 98, 102; II.i.117; III.i.77; III.ii.69;

elucidated by centuries of history. Leadership ability, for example, was noble; keeping faith was honorable; valor in battle was both noble and honorable; guiding one's actions by reason rather than passion, and setting the common good above one's private interests, even to the point of self-sacrifice, were noble, honorable, and to be expected of a Roman. Such qualities, the Romans believed, made them capable of self-government and had helped both establish and preserve their Republic (through which they enjoyed liberty). With such a political culture, it is unsurprising that in *Julius Caesar*, not only the tribunes and the conspirators, but also the people as a whole, reject monarchy (equated with slavery): they cheer each time Caesar refuses the crown that Antony offers (I.ii.236-48).

Of course, the main arguments for the Republic, and against Caesar's ambitions, are voiced by Flavius and Murellus, Cassius, and Brutus. They refer to general principles rather than to Caesar's specific actions. Flavius, directing Murellus to strip Caesar's images of "ceremonies," uses a metaphor from falconry for Caesar's designs. Caesar, says Flavius, should be made to "fly an ordinary pitch"—that is, to return to the falconer, to remain (or become) responsive to the citizens. His aspiration, though, is to "soar above the view of men"—as king, to be accountable to no one, and thus to turn citizens into subjects who live in "servile fearfulness" (*JC* I.i.73-75). This had been the state of affairs under the last king, Tarquin the Proud, whose reign had made the name of king hateful to the Romans. Thomas Heywood's play about the founding of the Republic, *The Rape of Lucrece* (first performed about eight years after *Julius Caesar*), uses a similar metaphor of flight for kingship and its effect on subjects. Tullia, inciting Tarquin to

V.iv.5). Italics indicate the overuse of the adjective "noble" by the plebeians in the course of Brutus' and Antony's speeches or the ironic usage of the adjective "honorable" by Antony in his oration. Note the overlap with the keywords in Kyd's *Cornelia*.

usurp the throne, speaks of longing to “[mount] / Above the base tribunals of the earth, / Vp to the Clouds, for pompous sovereignty,” and Horatius later predicts that Tarquin’s “soaring high” will “make us to flag our wings” (lines 97-99, 476).¹⁸

Cassius’ exposition of the republican cause is the fullest in Shakespeare’s play. It begins similarly to Flavius’, but whereas Flavius is concerned about the people as a whole (“us all” [I.i.75]), Cassius speaks in personal terms, on behalf of men like himself—patricians, generals, senators, magistrates—who see their status and authority superseded.

I had as lief not be, as live to be

In awe of such a thing as I myself. (I.ii.97-98)

Like Flavius and Murellus, Cassius sees the power differential between Caesar and others (in this case, other men of the ruling class) as contrary to Roman tradition and sensibilities. Although initially he posits his equality with Caesar, Cassius proceeds to portray Caesar as actually inferior to himself in strength and endurance, telling of a swimming contest that ends with him rescuing “the tired Caesar” from “the troubled Tiber” like Aeneas bearing his aged father, Anchises, away from burning Troy (I.ii.104-17). Here Cassius figures himself as heroic, implicitly comparing himself to the father of the Roman people (perhaps in anticipation of his planned role as a liberator). The relative positions of Caesar and Cassius, then, appear all the more absurd:

And this man

Is now become a god, and Cassius is

¹⁸ The image of soaring flight for sovereignty may have been common in the late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries. In Marlowe’s *Tamburlaine the Great*, Theridamas praises Tamburlaine as one who “by princely deeds / Doth meane to soare aboute the highest sort” (II.vi).

A wretched creature, and must bend his body

If Caesar carelessly but nod on him. (I.ii.117-20)

Cassius is not speaking metaphorically here; Caesar is in fact honored as a god, and this divine status sticks in Cassius' craw ("Tis true, this god did shake" [I.ii.123]). Cassius reinforces his point of how Caesar's overblown greatness diminishes the citizenry with the metaphor of the Colossus. Traditionally, Rome has depended on the active participation of all citizens, and has rewarded outstanding service with public offices and honors. Now, Romans have built up Caesar to such a colossal stature that he leaves little space for others to attain distinction:

When could they say till now, that talked of Rome,

That her wide walls encompassed but one man?

Now is it Rome indeed, and room enough

When there is in it but one only man. (I.ii.155-58)

Cassius sees this claustrophobic state of affairs as a fall from republican greatness (I.ii.255-56). His arguments are cogent but are compromised (though not, as Miola implies, canceled out ["Tyrannicide Debate" 277]) by his obvious malice and manipulative style. His tales of Caesar's weakness may signify nothing more than temporary illnesses.¹⁹ Certainly the way he belittles Caesar, calling him monstrous and a "vile . . . thing," betrays excessive animosity (I.ii.102-117; I.iii.69-77, 110). He also appears to be tempting Brutus to aspire to power, perhaps to supplant Caesar (I.ii.53, 57-64, 68-72, 144-148), though Brutus, focused on the "general good," does not take the bait (I.ii.87, 163-76).

¹⁹ Plutarch states that Caesar was constitutionally weak but improved his health by exposing himself to all the rigors of a soldier's life (*Caesar* 17.1-3).

Brutus' reasons for joining the conspiracy appear, at first, less clear than Cassius'. When Cassius first approaches him, Brutus is already troubled by Caesar's desire to be crowned (*JC* I.ii.39-49, 84, 172-76). His conflicting emotions are doubtless due to Caesar's kindness to him; he abhors the idea of killing his benefactor (II.i.10, 63-69, 167-71). In his first deliberations alone (II.i.10-34), according to Douglas Trevor (1300), Brutus bases his decision on what Caesar *might* become were he crowned, "since the quarrel / Will bear no color for the thing he is" (*JC* II.i.28-29). But the issue is precisely what Caesar *already is*: a usurper who, ostensibly leaving the institutions and procedures of the Republic in place, controls them from the top. The fact of this kind of rule, not the justice or injustice of the ruler, is at issue.²⁰ As Cassius tells Brutus in Kyd's *Cornelia*, "He doth what pleaseth hym (a princely thing)" (IV.i.103).

But is Shakespeare's Brutus really unaware of this? The first words in the soliloquy are "It must be by his death" (II.i.10). What can that "it" be but the restoration of the Republic? Yet, for whatever reason—whether a recoil from the thought of "his death," concern about public opinion, or a tendency to explore questions from various angles—Brutus circles back to consider the nature of the ruler. This muddling of the issue is atypical of Brutus; at other times, he is clear on what is at stake. Shortly after the "serpent's egg" soliloquy, he states the issue succinctly when, reading a note with only lightning for illumination, he fills in the illegible parts: "Shall Rome stand under one man's awe? What, Rome?" (*JC* II.i.44, 52) The terms clearly do not equate.

Monarchies may exist elsewhere, but Rome is meant to be ruled by a balanced concert of

²⁰ According to Plutarch, this is precisely Brutus' position when he reproves Cicero in a letter, after the assassination, for allying with Octavius. "'For our predecessors,' said he, 'would never abide to be subject to any Masters, how gentle or mild soever they were'" (*Shakespeare's Plutarch* 141).

the few and the many, never by one.²¹ When the conspirators arrive, Brutus speaks in even stronger terms, in the course of arguing against an oath:

So let high-sighted tyranny range on
Till each man drop by lottery. (II.i.117-18)

Like the tribune Flavius, Brutus uses an image from falconry, but to different effect. Caesar, the falcon, is figured as already a tyrant, arrogantly looking down from the heights, but this time, the Romans are not the falconer but the prey. After the assassination, Brutus' very clarity, embedded as it is in the core values of Roman political culture, leads him to think it sufficient to invoke those values in his speech to the plebeians without spelling out the "offenses . . . for which [Caesar] suffered death" (II.ii.38-39). Much later, in his quarrel with Cassius when their armies meet near Sardis, Brutus adduces yet another reason for the assassination, maintaining that Caesar was killed "for justice' sake," because he tolerated "robbers" (IV.2.70-75).

The character of Caesar and the nature of his rule also support the republican arguments against him. The mix of benevolent and tyrannical characteristics that he displays leads Robert Miola to disparage the conspirators' labeling of Caesar as a tyrant, especially if one compares him to the Shakespearean tyrants Richard III and Macbeth ("Tyrannicide Debate" 282-84). However, it may be seen that absolute power is

²¹ The message hinted at here is stated explicitly in Muret's *Julius Caesar*:

*Reges adorent barbarae gentes suos,
Non Roma mundi terror, et mundi stupor.
Vivente Bruto, Roma reges nesciet.* (Qtd. in MacCallum 32)
Let barbarous nations adore their kings,
Not Rome the terror of the world, and the wonder of the world.
While Brutus lives, Rome will not know kings. (my translation)

changing Caesar, even without a crown.²² On the one hand, he is generous and probably does, as he claims, act according to his sense of justice (III.i.48). He reads and listens to petitions, putting matters that concern himself last (III.i.3-10). He receives the conspirators graciously, as friends, when they arrive at his house to accompany him to the Senate. On the other hand, he is indeed treated as the “only man” in Rome and insists on being so regarded. Unlike Brutus, he lets his wife kneel to him (II.i.277; II.ii.54, 80-82). In the procession of the Lupercalia, everything stops when Caesar speaks (I.ii.1, 16), and as Antony says, all his commands are obeyed (I.ii.12). He has become arrogant, advertising himself as “constant as the Northern Star,” the only man “that unassailable holds on his rank, / Unshaked of motion” (III.i.60, 69-70).²³ He speaks of himself grandiosely in the third person and claims superhuman qualities.

I rather tell thee what is to be feared
 Than what I fear, for always I am Caesar. (I.ii.212-13)

Danger knows full well
 That Caesar is more dangerous than he.
 We are two lions littered in one day,
 And I the elder and more terrible. (II.ii.44-47)

Caesar’s investment of his name with monarchical, even semi-divine dignity shows how far Rome has drifted from the time of the early Republic, when a heroic youth, caught in

²² According to Clifford Ronan, Sir Thomas Elyot portrayed Caesar as becoming tyrannical: “more study in langage, and straunge in countenance” (“Caesar On and Off” 73).

²³ Perhaps Caesar’s claim to superlative virtue is an effort to justify his position as dictator for life. Aristotle had stated that a man who surpassed his fellow citizens in virtue was naturally qualified to govern them (*Pol.* 3.1283b).

the tent of an enemy king and asked his name, replied, “I am a Roman citizen; they call me C. Mucius” (see Chapter 1, 49-50).²⁴

The hallmarks of tyranny follow upon arrogance. Caesar distrusts Cassius, calling him dangerous, because he “thinks too much” (I.ii.196, 209-11). He speaks of the traditionally independent Senate as an instrument of his: “Caesar and his Senate” (III.i.32). He rejects Metellus Cimber’s suit in a violent and insulting manner: “I spurn thee like a cur out of my way” (III.i.48). Murellus and Flavius, who removed “scarves” from Caesar’s statues, “are put to silence” (I.ii.285-86), a phrase as ominous as it is vague.²⁵ Most disturbing is the “cause” Caesar gives for not going to the Senate:

The cause is in my will; I will not come.

That is enough to satisfy the Senate. (II.ii.71-72)

Ruling by will rather than law is, of course, a prime characteristic of a tyrant (see Chapter 1, 78).²⁶

The republican ends of the conspirators, then, are well enough justified, but their means are problematic, perhaps fatal to their success, and certainly, in the world of *Julius Caesar*, fatal to the righteousness of their cause. Casca hopes that the “countenance” of Brutus will transmute the popular perception of the assassination from “offense. . . to

²⁴ In Heywood’s *The Rape of Lucrece*, though, Gaius Mucius, rather absurdly referred to as Scaevola (left-handed) from the beginning of the play (long before the loss of his right hand), laments, just before his attempt at assassinating Porsenna, “we ha done nought worthy Scevola, / Nor a Roman” (lines 2725-26). The protagonists of that play contend to make their names glorious through heroic service to the new Republic, but none wins exclusive honor (line 2789).

²⁵ According to Plutarch, Caesar deprived the tribunes of their office and publicly insulted them (*Caesar* 61.5).

²⁶ Even James I, whose absolutist style raised some alarm, promised the Parliament, “I shall euer be willing to make the reason appeare of all my doings, and rule my actions according to my Lawes” (1610 speech to Parliament 310).

virtue and to worthiness” (I.iii.158-60). But even Brutus cannot effect such alchemy. Disturbed by the prospect of murder (II.i.10), he expresses revulsion when told that the conspirators, their faces hidden, are at his door:

O conspiracy,
 Sham’st thou to show thy dang’rous brow by night,
 When evils are most free? O then by day
 Where wilt thou find a cavern dark enough
 To mask thy monstrous visage? (II.i.77-81)

Strategizing with the other conspirators, Brutus still wrestles with the necessity of shedding blood:

O, that we then could come by Caesar’s spirit,
 And not dismember Caesar! But alas,
 Caesar must bleed for it. (II.i.169-71)

He exhorts the others to limit the bloodshed to Caesar alone and to act as “sacrificers, but not butchers” (II.i.166); that is, to isolate and elevate the act of killing, keeping in mind the purity of their purpose of restoring the Republic. But this noble impulse gives rise to a grotesquely cannibalistic image:

Let’s carve him as a dish fit for the gods,
 Not hew him as a carcass fit for hounds. (II.i.173-74)

Brutus may be alluding to the lines in Seneca’s *Hercules Furens* proclaiming “an unjust king” the fattest sacrifice, and his blood the most acceptable libation, to the gods.²⁷ But

²⁷ *Utinam cruorem capitis invisi deis
 Libare possem! gratior nullus liquor
 Tinisset aras: victima haud ulla amplior*

Caesar, at this point in his career, as depicted by Shakespeare, is simply not villainous enough for such an image to be applied to him without evoking horror rather than sympathy.

Brutus then follows one infelicitous image with another:

And let our hearts, as subtle masters do,
Stir up their servants to an act of rage,
And after seem to chide 'em. (II.i.175-77)

At this point, Brutus' good intentions lead him into advocating dishonesty: the hearts seeming to chide the hands that they themselves ordered to commit an "act of rage." If the act is justifiable, it may be regretted but should not be disavowed. While Brutus succeeds in convincing the conspirators to spare Antony, he fails miserably at making the assassination sound virtuous.

After the assassination, when Brutus calls on his comrades to "stoop" and "bathe our hands in Caesar's blood," Atë, the Greek spirit of delusion, appears already to be acting on him (even before Antony's summons) (III.i.106-107, 273-74).²⁸ There is unconscious irony in the word "stoop," used twice by Brutus and repeated by Cassius; it

*Potest, magisque opima mactari Jovi
Quam rex iniquus.*

Jasper Heywood's translation of *Hercules Furens* was published in 1561 and, as part of Seneca's collected tragedies, in 1581. Milton would quote the last three lines above in *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*, and John Cook, the chief prosecutor at the trial of Charles I, would allude to them in the title of his 1651 book *Monarchy no creature of Gods making, &c.: Wherein is proved by Scripture and reason, that monarchical government is against the mind of God. And that the execution of the late King was one of the fattest sacrifices that ever Queen Justice had . . .* Shakespeare may have also been familiar with Lipsius' statement in *Two Books of Constancy* that Caesar fell as a sacrifice to the ghost of Pompey (Jensen 160). Plutarch in the *Life of Brutus* (10.1) uses language associated with sacrifice, but this is lost in North's translation. According to a more modern translation by Bernadotte Perrin, those whom Cassius tried to recruit to the conspiracy wanted Brutus to lead it, because he would "ensure by the mere fact of his participation the justice of the sacrifice."

²⁸ This appears to be Shakespeare's invention. Plutarch states that the assassins went to the Capitol with bloody hands (presumably bloodied by the killing, not by further immersion) (*Brutus* 18.4).

signifies that the conspirators are debasing themselves, not only by committing murder, but also by celebrating it. Stooping, kneeling, falling, and bending one's body describe the postures of a slave, a conquered enemy, or the subject of a king (I.ii.118-19; III.i.36, 45, 56, 76, 106, 112, 124-26; V.i.43). Here, the conspirators are enthralled by the moral and political consequences of their act, as well as by a curious blindness to public opinion. There is, it seems, no way to kill, even in a "good" cause, without incurring guilt, inspiring terror, and begetting revenge. Perhaps, for that very reason, the republican cause has been doomed from the start.

Antony's masterful oration over the dead body of Caesar—the center of the play—delivers the monarchical counterthrust. Brutus has promised "a place in the commonwealth" for everyone (III.ii.42), but citizenship entails thought, consultation, responsibility. Antony offers the people something easier: identification with the power and glory of a hero, a father figure, who has benefited them. He dwells, not on values such as freedom and love of country, but on concrete things: the body, the robe, wounds, blood, tears, money. In his opening argument, he mercilessly hollows out two of Brutus' keywords, "ambition" and "honor," by frequent repetition and seeming refutation. The points of the refutation are specious. None of Caesar's deeds that Antony mentions are inconsistent with ambition. Faithful friends can be ambitious; bringing captives home to Rome increases the conquering general's prestige as well as Rome's wealth; Caesar had refused the offered crown because the crowd applauded at each refusal (I.ii.222-45; III.ii.85, 88-89, 95-97). As for Antony's assertion, "When that the poor have cried, Caesar hath wept," one has only his word for it (III.ii.91). But the plebeians are inclined to believe it, because Caesar has indeed given them cause to love him (III.ii.102).

By mentioning Caesar's will, Antony appeals to his audience's self-interest, at the same time constructing an image of Caesar as a monarch who loved his people and deepening the pathos of his death (III.ii.141, 172, 180). Caesar's blood is "sacred" (an attribute of a king or a martyr), his heart "mighty"; he is "noble Caesar," "great Caesar," "our Caesar," "sweet Caesar"—and, as a plebeian climactically exclaims, "royal Caesar" (III.ii.133, 181, 186 193, 219, 238). On Antony's eighth iteration of "honorable men," the plebeians are provoked enough to call the assassins traitors (III.ii.153). Antony runs with it, refiguring the assassination as the killing of a monarch by traitors:

O, what a fall was there, my countrymen!

Then I, and you, and all of us fell down,

Whilst bloody treason flourished over us. (III.ii.187-89)

Cassius had seen Caesar's dictatorship as the "falling sickness" of the Republic and its citizens; here Antony persuades the plebeians that the monarch's fall is their own.

If Antony's apparently genuine grief at Caesar's death (III.i.149-64, 195-211, 257-64) and his brilliant funeral speech (III.ii.73-244) moved the audience at the Globe to sympathize with him as well as with the slain Caesar, the violent reaction of the plebeians, and especially the lynching of the innocent poet Cinna, may have given them pause. Indeed, Antony's soliloquy immediately before the funeral (III.i.257-78) warns the audience that he does not wish the people well. For the sake of revenge, he wants to bring "domestic fury and fierce civil strife," "blood and destruction" upon them (III.i.266, 268). The Globe audience may also have taken note of Antony's manipulative style (for instance, he tantalizes the plebeians by mentioning the will that he does not mean to read [III.i.128-37]) and his satisfaction as his hearers prepare to set fire to the conspirators'

houses: “Now let it work. Mischief, thou art afoot” (III.ii.252). Shortly after his reading of Caesar’s will, which leaves a modest sum to each Roman citizen, has been instrumental in inciting violence, Antony is seen planning to cheat the citizens out of this legacy, or at least whittle down the expense (IV.i.8-9). In the same scene, he draws up the proscription list with Octavius and Lepidus (the other members of the Second Triumvirate), sends Lepidus on an errand, and, in his absence, suggests to Octavian that Lepidus is unworthy to share power with them (IV.i.12-15). The callous, almost casual decisions of the triumvirate on whom to kill contrast with Brutus’ earlier insistence on not killing Antony and discredit the cause of the Caesareans. We learn later that seventy to one hundred senators have been killed, including Cicero (IV.ii.225-30).

As the battle between the republicans and the Caesarians approaches, the former are portrayed in more depth, and more sympathetically, than the latter, suggesting that theirs is, after all, the nobler cause. Antony and Octavius are rivals and temporary allies; Brutus and Cassius, who are in fact brothers-in-law, epitomize the fraternal nature of republics.²⁹ Neither is a saint. Brutus’ inner conflict has led him to treat his wife dismissively, even impatiently, in the past (II.i.240-48), and his indignation at Cassius in the quarrel scene (IV.ii) degenerates into harsh contempt. Cassius is proud, hot-tempered, violent, and likely, as Brutus charges, avaricious and corrupt.³⁰ But both characters are redeemed: Brutus by his unwavering adherence to principle and his

²⁹ Although most of the six protagonists of Heywood’s *The Rape of Lucrece* (Brutus, Horatius, Scaevola, Valerius, Collatine, and Lucretius) are not related to each other, they, too, act as a “band of brothers” in their fight against the Tarquins. Brutus and Collatine are cousins, and Lucretius is Collatine’s father-in-law.

³⁰ In North’s translation of Plutarch’s *Brutus*, Cassius is called “a hot, choleric, and cruel man, that would oftentimes be carried away from justice for gain” (*Shakespeare’s Plutarch* 152).

underlying gentleness, and Cassius by his love of Brutus. Their commitments to each other and to their cause are strong enough to outlast misunderstandings and quarrels.

Brutus' self-righteousness and self-importance can be wearing (IV.ii.121-30; V.i.111-13), but these qualities differ fundamentally from Caesar's arrogance. Rather than asserting an essential superiority to support a claim to monarchical power, Brutus wants others to act nobly and honorably, like him: "I shall be glad to learn of noble men" (IV.ii.108). Republics depend on the virtuous action of many citizens, not just one, both in civic affairs and in war. Thus, when Brutus rejects a request of Cassius' that he considers unjust, he does not initially insult him, as Caesar had insulted Metellus Cimber, but turns Cassius' complaint ("you have wronged me") back on him: "You wronged yourself to write in such a case" (IV.ii.53, 58). For Brutus, honor is a man's most prized possession (IV.ii.70-78), and to compromise one's honor by tolerating corruption is therefore to wrong oneself as well as others.³¹

Acts IV and V portray primarily the action on the republican side: the quarrel and reconciliation of Brutus and Cassius, their counsels, the appearance of Caesar's ghost, the last farewells of Brutus and Cassius, the bravery of their soldiers, their deaths, and the testimony of others to their greatness. The Caesarians receive much less attention—scarcely more than 100 lines, in contrast to almost 600 for the republicans and 40 for the parley between the two sides. Antony and Octavius, of course, attempt to claim the moral high ground, branding Brutus and Cassius as flatterers and traitors, and declaring

³¹ Robert Miola finds it hypocritical of Brutus to boast that he "can raise no money by vile means" (V.ii.126) and then complain that Cassius, who does, has denied him money to pay his soldiers ("Tyrannicide Debate" 287). But Cassius has collected the money already, and Brutus needs it to keep his forces together. According to Plutarch, Brutus has spent all his money on building a large fleet (*Shakespeare's Plutarch* 153).

their intent to avenge Caesar. Their accusations have some validity.³² But the audience may remember, from Act IV, Scene 1, that their primary motivation is self-interest and that their hands are much bloodier than their adversaries'. In the battle that follows, little is seen of Antony, Octavius, and their armies, and none of their friends or followers are named. On the other side, though, the multitude of characters represents a republican consensus. They display heroism, loyalty, self-sacrifice, and grief at the outcome of the battle, which effectively ends the hope of restoring the Republic. Thus, Titinius proclaims over Cassius' corpse,

O setting sun,

As in thy red rays thou dost sink tonight,

So in his red blood Cassius' day is set.

The sun of Rome is set. Our day is gone.

Clouds, dews, and dangers come. Our deeds are done. (V.iii.59-63)

What we are witnessing, then, in these last two acts is the tragedy of Brutus and Cassius, which is, simultaneously, the tragedy of the Republic. This part of the play presents few statements of political principle, instead evoking sympathy for the republicans by immersing the audience in their actions and emotions. The last scene affirms the goodness of their cause by concentrating it in the figure of the noble Brutus. Despite the palpable grief and despair of Brutus and his friends, his dying words are triumphant:

I shall have glory by this losing day,

More than Octavius and Mark Antony

³² The conspirators have not committed treason against Rome, as Octavius implies, but they have been treacherous to Caesar.

By this vile conquest shall attain unto. (V.v.36-38)

The conquest is vile because it elevates raw power over principle. The spirit of Caesar is indeed mighty: not only the shade that “walks abroad” and takes vengeance on his killers, but the spirit of ambition, the will to rule, against which the conspirators had risen (II.i.167-70, V.iii.93-95). That spirit, of course, wins the day. Yet the republican cause, though compromised by its one act of bloodshed, still claims the moral victory.

V

The extent to which the three plays examined here—Kyd’s *Cornelia*, Chapman’s *Caesar and Pompey*, and Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*—influenced attitudes toward Caesar, Brutus, and the end of the Roman Republic, and the political lessons drawn from these historical characters and events, should not be exaggerated given the ubiquity of these themes in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England. However, these plays would have added texture and color to the rich fabric of political discourse based on this history. For the educated readers of *Cornelia* and *Caesar and Pompey*, the plays brought great historical characters and events to imaginative life, enhancing their emotional impact. Members of the audience of *Julius Caesar* who may have been acquainted only with the broad outlines of the history heard republican principles—perhaps for the first time—voiced with force and conviction, and saw them defended bravely, in a spirit of solidarity. In their minds, as in those of schoolboys and university students reading Livy, Cicero, and Sallust, a vision of a different, freer polity—a commonwealth in which each of them would have a place—may have taken hold.

Much scholarly work has been done on various discourses in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England that dealt with Julius Caesar and the fall of the Republic.

Freyja Cox Jensen, in *Reading the Roman Republic in Early Modern England*, has surveyed treatments of Caesar in commonplace books, histories, and other writings of the late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries. In *Writing the English Republic*, David Norbrook has not only demonstrated the importance of translations of Lucan's *Pharsalia* by Christopher Marlowe (Book I only; published in 1600), Sir Arthur Gorges (1614), and Thomas May (1627) for "the emergence of republican literary culture" (34-50; quotation at 34) in the second and third decades of the seventeenth century but also discussed the multifarious uses of the Caesar material in political discourse leading up to the English Civil War and extending through the Commonwealth and Protectorate periods. For example, some of the verses in praise of John Felton, Buckingham's assassin, compared him to Brutus or invoked Lucan (53-55), and Cromwell was frequently figured as Caesar both by his admirers and by detractors such as the parliamentarian Henry Marten and the newsbook writer John Streater (299, 317-22).

Because so many sources of information on Caesar were available, hardly any references to this history can be traced specifically to the drama, much less to a particular play. An exception is the newsbook *Mercurius Militaris*, published in 1648 by John Harris, a former actor turned printer who worked for the Army (Heinemann 252). In arguing the absurdity of Parliament asking the king, then imprisoned on the Isle of Wight, to confirm their laws, he writes:

I wonder what strength it would add, or what goodnesse to the Propositions if he should sign them; can a single man compell 300000 men to observe them when they are lawes? Or can he compel them to break them? What virtue unknown is in his subscription of *Carolus Rex*?

Why is this name adored more then another? Write that and *Denzil Hollis* together, is not this as fair a name? Sound them, doth it not become the mouth as well? weigh them, is it not as heavy? Coniure with them, *Denzil Hollis* will start a spirit as soon as the name *Carolus Rex*; and yet this meer puff of breath, this powerlesse name *King Charles* set so high in the vulgars hearts, that what would be vice in others, his name like richest *Alchemy*, change to virtue and worthinesse; and the subscribing his name to that which he can neither promote nor hinder, must set him above his Masters and conquerours, and permit him to bestride this narrow *world* like a *Colossus*; when you victors must *walk* like petty slaves, and peep about under his huge legs to finde your selves dishonorable graves . . . (no. 1, p. 4)

Playing fast and loose with Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* (I.ii.136-39, 144-48, I.iii.157-60), Harris pokes fun at Denzil Holles on the way to his main point, the demystification of kingship. Holles was no Brutus; at the time, he was a member of a parliamentary commission negotiating with Charles in an effort to reach a peaceful settlement, a move opposed by Army radicals such as Harris. Cassius' words, appropriated by Harris, take on an entirely different meaning in this context. Denzil Holles and the other members of Parliament have only to act like the masters and conquerors they already are. To Harris, who rejects hereditary monarchy, Charles is as illegitimate a ruler as Caesar, and has committed similar offenses: breaking the laws and starting the civil wars. The problem is "the vulgars" reverence for the name of king, a thing without substance, but which

appears to change Charles' misdeeds into virtue.³³ In attacking that reverence, Harris throws at it everything he has.

At the same time that Harris was using Shakespeare's words to demystify kingship, the king himself was reading Shakespeare on the Isle of Wight. Like the Bible, Shakespeare's plays were susceptible to different interpretations, supporting radically divergent ideologies. In fact, all the English Caesar plays of the sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries would have appealed to people with divergent political and religious loyalties. Yet all these plays transported the spectator or reader to a time before "Caesar" was recognized as an imperial title solidified by centuries of usage—a time when the Roman state was in flux, and Julius Caesar was shaping, and being shaped by, his world. By the 1640s, with their own nation in flux, reflection on the struggles of Caesar's time might have enabled the English to imagine a hopeful outcome, whether they envisioned the restoration of the monarchy (in analogy to the Principate of Octavius) or a renewal of liberty after the death of a tyrant (in analogy to a victory by Brutus and Cassius). In its decision to establish a republic in a country as deeply monarchical as England, and to present it, not as an innovation, but as "the liberty of England restored," the Rump Parliament must have taken inspiration from the efforts of Cicero, Cato, Pompey, Brutus, and Cassius to restore the Roman Republic, as well as from the legends of that Republic's founding.³⁴ As John Harris' appropriations attest, the drama brought those ancient struggles to life for a broad segment of the population.

³³ In Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, of course, the image of alchemy is applied to Brutus, not to Caesar, and it is his countenance, not his name, that changes offense (not vice) to virtue and to worthiness. Brutus sits high in the hearts of the people (not the vulgar, a pejorative word).

³⁴ See Chapter 1, 137.

Chapter 3. Looking Back: The Reign of Tiberius

I

Within twelve years of the defeat of Brutus and Cassius at Philippi, Octavius emerged as the sole ruler of the Roman Empire, having forced Lepidus into exile and defeated Antony and Cleopatra at Actium. After the proscriptions of the Second Triumvirate, the wars against his rivals, and the murder of Caesarion (Julius Caesar's son by Cleopatra), Octavius' reign was moderate. The same could not be said for his stepson Tiberius, who succeeded Octavius—now known by his title of Augustus—upon his death in 14 CE.

That, at least, was the verdict of most classical writers. In early modern Europe, the preeminent source for the reigns of the Roman emperors from Tiberius through Domitian (covering the years from 14 to 96 CE) was the historian Tacitus. Tacitus' works, largely ignored or forgotten from late antiquity on, began to circulate in manuscript in late-fourteenth-century Italy (Schellhase 4-8). After the first printed edition came out in 1470, the works were frequently published, with numerous textual improvements thanks to the labors of philologists, culminating in the seven editions of Justus Lipsius in the late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries (Schellhase 14-15). The sixteenth century also saw translations into Italian, French, German, and English (the *Historiae* and *Agricola* were Englished by Henry Savile [1591]; the *Germania* and *Annales*, by Richard Grenewey [1598]) (Schellhase 15-16).

According to Kenneth Schellhase, Leonardo Bruni was the first to use Tacitus for political purposes as opposed to strictly historical, geographical, or philological purposes (17-18). In his *Laudatio Florentinae urbis* (c. 1404), Bruni adapted Tacitus' statement at

the beginning of the *Historiae* to assert that “after the republic had been subjected to the power of one man, those brilliant minds vanished” (qtd. in Schellhase 18). While Tacitus, according to Schellhase, was referring only to the accuracy and talents of historians, Bruni broadened the meaning of Tacitus’ *magna ingenia* to apply to all fields of human achievement (17-18), which, he argued, flourished under republican governments, such as those of ancient Rome and contemporary Florence, and withered away under monarchy. More than a century later, Machiavelli, in his republican *Discourses on Livy* (written c. 1517; first published in 1531), used Tacitus to support his dismal view of monarchy in general and the Roman Empire in particular (Schellhase 69-81). Not without reason would Edmund Bolton in 1634 call Tacitus “no friend to regality.”¹

Renaissance scholars generally considered Cicero’s Latin the standard of excellence, and thus, many disliked Tacitus for his harsh, laconic, and obscure style, as well as his unheroic subject matter (Schellhase 26-29). Others, among them Juan Luis Vives, Baldassare Castiglione, and Thomas Elyot, defended and even commended Tacitus’ style (Schellhase 102). On the objections to his content, Tacitus himself concurred:

Descriptions of countries, the various incidents of battles, glorious deaths of great generals, enchain and refresh a reader’s mind. I have to present in succession the merciless biddings of a tyrant, incessant prosecutions, faithless friendships, the ruin of innocence, the same causes issuing in the

¹ See Introduction, p. 33.

same results, and I am everywhere confronted by a wearisome monotony in my subject matter. (*Annals* 4.33)

Yet Europeans of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, including Jean Bodin and Francesco Guicciardini, came to value Tacitus because they saw their own times reflected and explained in his accounts. Lipsius praised Tacitus highly for exactly the qualities that Tacitus himself had deprecated:

Tacitus is a penetrating writer . . . and a prudent one: and if ever there was a time when men could profit from reading him, it is now. For he does not recount the dismal victories of Hannibal over the Romans, nor the dramatic death of Lucrece . . . nor all the other things which entertain more than they instruct the reader. Instead, this writer deals with princely courts, with the inner life of princes, their plans, commands and actions; and he teaches us . . . that the same effects may come from the same causes. You will find under a tyrant flattery and treachery not unknown in our age; nothing sincere, nothing straightforward, and not even good faith amongst friends; constant accusations of treason (the one crime of those who abstain from vice); mass slaughter of good men, and a peace more brutal than war. (qtd. in Tuck 46)

The last sentence reads like a synopsis of Ben Jonson's *Sejanus His Fall*, for which Jonson used one of Lipsius' editions of Tacitus.²

² Jonson used the 1600 edition (*Sejanus* 52). (Page numbers for "*Sejanus*" refer to the front matter in Philip J. Ayres' Revels edition of 1990. Page numbers for "Ayres" refer to the introduction or critical apparatus.) Lipsius wrote the dedication to the Emperor Maximilian, from which this quotation is excerpted, for his 1574 edition (Tuck 46). Even if the 1600 edition no longer contained that dedication, Jonson was capable of drawing the same conclusions from the text.

Lipsius had his own take on the relevance of Tacitus; in the Roman emperor Tiberius he found “the clear image of that bloodthirsty and furious Tyrant, the Duke of Alba.”³ In fact, there were few Europeans who could not find parallels to the reigns of Roman despots in their own countries, whether they thought, like Lipsius, of the brutal suppression of rebellion and Protestantism in the Netherlands; like Montaigne, of a France torn by the Wars of Religion; or, like Ben Jonson, perhaps, of the censorship, religious persecutions, and extensive spy network of late Elizabethan England.

Tacitus’ own sympathies were indeed republican, as Bruni, Machiavelli, and, later, John Milton understood, and he deplored the cruelties he recounted (Burke 164). He made clear his intentions to teach both ethical and prudent behavior to the subjects of tyrants:

[N]ow, . . . when Rome is nothing but the realm of a single despot, there must be good in carefully noting and recording this period, for it is but few who have the foresight to distinguish right from wrong or what is sound from what is hurtful, while most men learn wisdom from the fortunes of others. (*Annals* 4.33)

However, readers could take more than one lesson from Tacitus’ accounts of the reigns of emperors such as Tiberius, Claudius, Nero, and Domitian. Guicciardini summed up the double-edged nature of these texts neatly: “Cornelius Tacitus teaches those who live under tyrants how to live and act prudently, just as he teaches tyrants how to establish tyranny” (*Ricordi* 45). Accordingly, some rulers, councillors, and writers referred to Tacitus in developing political thought and political strategies based on “reason of state”:

³ *Orationes octo* 32, 34 [lecture given in the early 1570s at the University of Jena]; qtd. in Tuck 46.

the principle that the necessity of preserving the state and the power of its ruler justified any action. This application was by far the more common, according to Peter Burke and Richard Tuck (Burke, “Tacitism” 156-58; Tuck 42-45, 47). A corollary of this principle was that those who served the prince were to carry out all his or her commands, no matter how vicious.

II

Ben Jonson’s *Sejanus His Fall* (first performed in 1603; first published in 1605) expresses the Tacitean view of history that came into vogue in England in the 1580s, especially among the Sidney and Essex circles (Salmon 171-74). Jonson takes Tacitus’s *Annals* as his main source—even translating one speech, that of Cremutius Cordus, verbatim—though he also draws from Suetonius, Cassius Dio, Lucan, Seneca, and Juvenal. And like its primary source, Jonson’s tragedy rigorously analyzes the mechanisms and effects of tyranny while looking back nostalgically to the now-defunct Republic. While Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar* (1599) may have functioned as a sequel to Kyd’s *Cornelia* (1594) or to earlier popular dramas depicting the rivalry of Caesar and Pompey, Jonson appears to have deliberately framed *Sejanus* as a sequel to *Julius Caesar*.⁴ Not only does *Sejanus* explore the consequences of Brutus and Cassius’ defeat; it also echoes, and sometimes contests, particular passages in *Julius Caesar* (as discussed below).

A Tacitean perspective does not necessarily render a play less dramatic, but in *Sejanus*, Jonson enacts the very qualities Tacitus complains of in his subject matter: the

⁴ Jonson’s familiarity with Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar* is clear from his criticism in *Discoveries* of the line “Caesar never doth wrong but with just cause.” It is perhaps relevant that Shakespeare is listed as one of the actors in the 1604 Globe performance in the First Folio (Ayres 37).

“wearisome monotony” of one accusation or arrest after another, and the stasis—the failure of events to bring about any basic change (“the same causes issuing in the same results”). The play privileges ethical teaching and political analysis over character development, entertainment, and the elicitation of emotion. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that *Sejanus* was hissed off the stage at its performance at the Globe in 1604 (Ayres 38). Cold and intellectual, it has more in common with academic dramas, such as Thomas Sackville and Thomas Norton’s *Gorboduc* and George Buchanan’s *Baptistes*, and with closet dramas, such as Kyd’s *Cornelia*, than with popular tragedies—even those, such as *Hamlet*, that appealed to “the wiser sort” (Gabriel Harvey, qtd. in Gurr, *Playgoing* 234).⁵ Perhaps readers were better able than theater audiences to appreciate the play’s craftsmanlike construction, aptness of phrasing, and mordant irony, as well as its political acumen. In any case, *Sejanus* was both admired and influential through the first half of the seventeenth century. Curtis Perry discusses three Roman tyrant plays influenced by Jonson’s *Sejanus—The Tragedy of Nero* (first published in 1624), Philip Massinger’s *The Roman Actor* (performed in 1626; printed in 1629), and Thomas May’s *Julia Agrippina* (performed in 1628; printed in 1639)—that also contrast “imperial tyranny” with “republican virtue” (*Literature* 231). *Sejanus*, however, is unique in that it portrays a time when the republican past was still within living memory. Junia, the sister of Brutus and wife of Cassius, died in 22 CE, sixty-four years after the Battle of Philippi. Cassius and Brutus, says Tacitus, “outshone” all those whose images were carried in

⁵ *Gorboduc* was first performed at the Inner Temple in 1561/62. *Baptistes* may have been performed at the Collège de Guyenne in Bordeaux in the early 1540s; it was first published in the original Latin in 1577 and was translated as *Tyrannicall-government anatomized* in 1643.

Junia's funeral procession by virtue of the *absence* of their likenesses (*Annals* 3.76). The sense of such an absence pervades Jonson's *Sejanus*.

The action of *Sejanus His Fall* takes place between 23 and 31 CE, during the reign of the Emperor Tiberius, and stages the systematic extermination, orchestrated by Tiberius and his favorite Aelius Sejanus, of anyone suspected of opposition to the current regime. Sejanus, meanwhile, works on his own secret plan to supplant the Emperor. In Act III, the direction of the action turns: while the surveillance and persecution of supposed enemies of the state continue, Tiberius sniffs out Sejanus' purpose and engineers his fall. In line with the play's focus on ethics, the cast of characters falls into two sharply demarcated camps: the virtuous and the vicious. Most of the former had placed their hopes for a virtuous successor to Tiberius in his nephew Germanicus (now dead) and remain loyal to Germanicus' widow, Agrippina, and her sons, Nero, Drusus, and Caligula. These characters, the Germanicans, are republicans at heart. The vicious characters, associated with tyranny, are Tiberius, Sejanus, and their creatures.

In its association of virtue with republicanism, *Sejanus* clearly belongs to the category of plays celebrating the Roman Republic and deploring its demise. However, Jonson's reputation as a conservative court poet and thoroughgoing royalist has militated against this interpretation, and the heavy-handedness of the moralizing has aroused suspicion. David Norbrook and Jonathan Goldberg read the play ironically, focusing with a certain degree of admiration on the tyrant Tiberius' skillful manipulations (Norbrook, *Poetry* 161-62) and the "theatricalization" of power (Goldberg 185). But most critics consider *Sejanus* an ethically serious work. Katherine Eisaman Maus sees

Jonson as following in the tradition of the “Roman moralists” (*Ben Jonson* 5-6), and Philip Ayres argues that Jonson does not treat his virtuous characters ironically (36-37).

Attempts to reconcile the political thought of *Sejanus* with that in Jonson’s other works, especially the pageants, entertainments, and court masques, have proven troublesome. Robert C. Evans suggests that Jonson had no political ideology but believed all that was necessary for political renewal was for every individual to act ethically (84-86). Blair Worden sees Jonson as not opposing monarchy or even absolutism but corruption and “arbitrary rule” (“Ben Jonson” 82). In this connection, it is useful to consider the playwright’s situation at the time of writing. *Sejanus His Fall* was first produced in 1603, and Jonson appears to have spent two years researching and writing it. In 1601, he was not yet in favor at court; he was a Roman Catholic with a felon’s brand on his thumb who had spent three years working his way up from poverty and ignominy. He had been imprisoned twice: once in 1597 for his part in a satirical play, *The Isle of Dogs*, and again in 1598 (narrowly escaping execution) for killing another actor in a duel. Two informers had been placed with him during one of these imprisonments. Upon his release in 1598, all his possessions were confiscated (Riggs 53, 55, 92, 93). It stands to reason that Jonson may have felt somewhat alienated from the machinery of the late-Elizabethan state.

Increasingly, critics are reading *Sejanus* as a republican play rather than as a work that employs republicanism merely as a trope for good government or as necessary baggage that goes with the setting. Julie Sanders sees *Sejanus* as one of a number of political plays of its time that “constructed themselves partially as forums for the debate about republican theory that was circulating in contemporary political discussions” (13).

Albert Tricomi's brief chapter on *Sejanus* in *Anticourt Drama in England* emphasizes the play's republicanism and recognizes that it focuses not so much on the character Sejanus as on the workings of tyranny (72-79). To Curtis Perry, the role of the favorite as an instrument of tyranny is central to *Sejanus* and later Roman tyrant plays; where once the whole citizenry had been politically empowered, now the government has shrunk to only the ruler and one or several favorites (*Literature* 232, 252, 255). In the setting of early imperial Rome, Perry suggests, where monarchy is not traditional but an "innovation," characters who regret the loss of the Republic express views of monarchic government and culture startlingly different from those of the English (234). This chapter explores those republican views, according to which the line between monarchy and tyranny is very thin.

III

Sejanus His Fall condemns the tyrannical regime of Tiberius and its justification by "reason of state," but does not present a single clear alternative. The ambivalence of Jonson's play has a different quality than that of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, in which the characters' political positions are clear but the question of who, if anyone, has the best cause is unclear. In *Sejanus His Fall*, the Germanicans have undoubted moral authority but express two contradictory political ideals: republicanism and the reign of a virtuous prince. This ambivalence may owe much to the political atmosphere in which Jonson was writing (as discussed below). Moreover, plays, which are not political tracts, need not present, much less advocate, a unitary political ideology. Hence, I address both ideals of the Germanicans, beginning with republicanism, the more strongly and persistently expressed of the two.

The active life had been the ideal of the Roman Republic, but tyranny reduces citizens to subjects and makes service to the state inconsistent with virtue. In *Sejanus*, the virtuous man either cannot participate in public life at all or perhaps, like the independent Lepidus, may manage to stay in the good graces of the ruler and mitigate some evils (III.359-69).⁶ Tiberius had felt threatened by Germanicus because he was loved by his soldiers and the people, as Tiberius is not. The Emperor now feels threatened by Agrippina because she tries to build up a political following for her sons; by her sons because they speak of restoring the Republic (II.235-38); by Silius because his major role in keeping the mutiny in the army from spreading has made Tiberius too beholden to him; and by Cordus because in his history he praises those who tried to save the Republic. Anyone with the potential to rise to prominence on the basis of his own merits or popularity, independently of the Emperor and his minions, or to whom the Emperor too clearly owes his position or continuance in power, or who praises (however indirectly) another form of government, is perceived as a threat to the Emperor's monopoly of power. Under an absolute government, the only person with the freedom and scope for action is the ruler, as Cassius had complained in *Julius Caesar*:

Now is it Rome indeed, and room enough,

When there is in it but one only man. (*JC* I.ii.156-57)

The virtuous characters in *Sejanus* therefore look back to the Republic as an alternative model, a free state that had encouraged an active life serving the common good. They are probably not old enough to remember it themselves but would have heard about it from their parents and grandparents. The Republic had fostered and

⁶ All citations and quotations from the play are from Philip J. Ayres' Revels edition of 1990; only act and line numbers are given.

depended on virtue just as tyranny fosters and depends on vice, and it had rewarded virtue with high public office. The very idea of what it meant to be a Roman—brave, free-spirited, self-sacrificing, incorruptible—was forged by the history, real and mythical, of the Republic. Thus, the virtuous characters are out of their sphere in Tiberius’ court; they belong in the Senate of republican Rome, seventy years in the past (I.3-6). There is, however, no realistic prospect of the Republic’s restoration; it had been lost decisively, more than a generation earlier, at Philippi. A pervasive pall of hopelessness envelops *Sejanus*. The Republic is reduced to the moral compass of the virtuous characters while their dialogue adumbrates an implied republican argument beneath the surface of critique and complaint.

Act I begins as Silius and Sabinus, meeting in court, comment how out of place they are there in contrast to the men who flourish in these times. Their conversation slips into description of the typical courtier, first in terms of manners (“shift of faces, . . . cleft tongues” [I.7]), then of deeds (“These can lie, / Flatter, and swear, forswear, deprave, inform, / Smile, and betray . . .” [I.27-29]). There is nothing unusual in this—English Renaissance satire and drama abound with criticism and mockery of courts and courtiers—except for a distinctive angle that becomes evident through a single word.

Among other things, says Sabinus, he and Silius do not

on our breasts,

Creep up, to fall from that proud height to which

We did by slavery, not by service, climb. (I.9-11)

The very use of the word “slavery,” its opposition to “service,” and the paradox constructed by its juxtaposition with “proud height” and “climb,” bespeak a republican

sensibility. Sabinus is not opposed to the institution of slavery, as he demonstrates when he objects to Cordus later that Germanicus' life "did as much disdain / Comparison" with that of Alexander of Macedon "as mine/ Doth with my bondman's" (I.144-46).

Apparently he believes, with Aristotle, that men are by nature fitted to be either masters (through excellence of mind and ability to restrain the passions) or slaves (through strength of body and deficiency of reason) (*Politics* I.1254b). Here, Sabinus uses the term "slavery" somewhat differently from its use in Kyd's *Cornelia*, Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, and, indeed, later in the same scene of *Sejanus* (I.63), where it means the political condition of subjection to one-man rule. Sabinus speaks of "slavery" in the sense of an individual's voluntary, unnatural, ignoble submission to the will of another for unworthy purposes. Those he taxes with enslaving themselves are gentlemen, members of the master class, who abdicate their responsibility to make ethical decisions and choose instead to flatter a powerful patron and perform unsavory tasks for his benefit. Though these actions enable them to "climb" to a "proud height"—to attain wealth or high office—or simply to stay out of trouble (I.44), they have, by renouncing their independence of thought and action, lowered themselves ethically to the level of a natural slave.⁷ The term opposed to "slavery," "service," here means working honorably for the public good; under the Republic, such action would have led to advancement, as it does not at present.

Silius' and Sabinus' critique, to this point perhaps darkly playful, turns ominous as it widens to encompass the Senate, where men vie "Who shall propound most abject

⁷ That Alexander the Great had also lowered himself to the level of a bondman, not by submitting to another, but by giving his passions and appetites free rein, is clear not only from Sabinus' implied double comparison of himself with Germanicus and Alexander with his bondman but also from his characterization of Alexander as "voluptuous, rash / Giddy, and drunken" (I.145-6).

things, and base” (I.50). The corruption, then, is not limited to the court, which might be expected to function through patronage, but extends to the putatively independent governing body of the Empire. Many, perhaps most, of the Senators, traditionally the most powerful and dignified men in Rome, choose to act like courtiers, currying favor with the Emperor through gratuitous proposals to glorify him and his favorite, thus demeaning themselves and diminishing their own authority. What kinds of proposals these might be we see later, when the Senate proposes to grant the request of Further Spain to erect a temple to Tiberius and his mother, and to place a statue of Sejanus in Pompey’s theater (I.454-75, 518-20). Tiberius himself, no friend to “public liberty,” is said to be shocked by the Senate’s “flat servility” (I.54, 55). Sabinus’ strong language here reveals his political loyalties: “vile / And filthier flatteries,” “sordid acts,” showing eagerness for “servitude” (I.42-3, 45, 53). The Senate’s abdication of its responsibilities has more serious consequences than the sycophancy of courtiers, because it undermines the residual structure of republican government and denies redress by law to those falsely accused at the behest of powerful lords. And elevating one man to near-godlike status encourages him to act as he pleases rather than in accordance with law—in a word, to become absolute.

Silius’ reply lays out the republican ideology clearly. He attributes the present unhappy state of affairs to the fall of the Republic, due to “our riots, pride, and civil hate”:

We that (within these fourscore years) were born
 Free, equal lords of the triumphèd world,
 And knew no masters but affections,

To which betraying first our liberties,
 We since became the slaves to one man's lusts,
 And now to many. Every minist'ring spy
 That will accuse and swear is lord of you,
 Of me, of all, our fortunes, and our lives. (I.58-66)

Under the Republic, the Romans had conquered most of the world, remaining free and equal to each other. When they fell from virtue, allowing their passions (“affections”) to become their “masters” in place of the rightful guide of human action, the soul, they were no longer free as individuals; they had thus already betrayed their liberties. As slaves of passion, they were both disinclined and unfit to perform the duties of citizens. Their consequent actions—living in luxury and debauchery, pursuing excessive ambitions, and fanning the flames of struggles between classes and factions into outright civil war—led to the dominance of a strongman. The Romans thus have become slaves in the political sense as well as the moral sense: subjects under an absolute monarch (“one man”), who rules at his pleasure (“lusts”) instead of by law, and who can take their property, imprison them, or kill them at will (“lord of . . . our fortunes, and our lives”). But that is not the full extent of their fall: from slaves of their own passions, and then slaves of the Emperor’s passions, they have become slaves of “many”—those who accuse individuals of treason in order to receive the portion of their estates set aside for informers. The power of informers is due to the insecurity inherent in tyranny. And indeed the word “tyrant,” along with the play’s primary metaphor for tyranny, feeding on human flesh, occurs for the first time directly after this speech by Silius, when Sabinus sums up their analysis in a “sentence,” or maxim:

Tyrants' arts

Are to give flatterers grace, accusers power,

That those may seem to kill whom they devour. (I.70-72)

The republican argument is in a sense complete at this point, but it is augmented, almost immediately, when Arruntius complains of the “degenera[cy]” of the men of the present, who lack the “mighty spirits” of their ancestors (I.88, 97). Cassius and Cicero had voiced the same complaint in *Cornelia* (I.14-23; IV.i.5-7, 40-46), as had Cassius in *Julius Caesar* (I. ii.151-52; I.iii.79-83), but heroic action had still been possible in their time, as it is no longer. The era of Cicero and Cassius becomes Arruntius’ reference point. The great Romans whose bravery and virtue he praises—Cato (who refused to live as Caesar’s “slave” [I.92]), Brutus, and Cassius—were all opponents of Caesar who died trying to save the Republic. Arruntius firmly links republicanism with virtue in two ways: he praises men who grew up in and were formed by the Republic as superior to those who grow up under the rule of an emperor, and he equates the struggle for the Republic with virtue. In particular, his praise of Brutus for placing the Republic above his personal friendship with Caesar both recalls Silius’ point that those who prize freedom must not let their “affections” master them and refutes the charge of ingratitude leveled by Antony in *Julius Caesar* (III.iii.176-86). Echoing Antony’s “This was the most unkindest cut of all” (*Julius Caesar* III.iii.183), Arruntius condemns Caesar as a “monster” who “sought unkindly to captive his country” (I.95, 96). He thus denies the legitimacy not only of Julius Caesar but, by implication, of all the “Caesars” who follow him. Rather than a lawful prince whose subjects owed him obedience, Caesar was “a person . . . exhibiting such extreme cruelty or wickedness as to appear inhuman”

(“Monster,” def. A.5); his assumption of dictatorial power by entering Rome as a conqueror—taking Rome captive—was unnaturally (“unkindly”) cruel.

Clearly, Rome is by right a republic according to Arruntius and his friends, and to be a Roman is to be an active, free-spirited citizen of that republic, willing to die to preserve its freedom. This is the definition of “Roman” implied in the defense of Caesar’s assassination by Shakespeare’s Brutus:

Who is here so base that would be a bondman? If any, speak; for him
have I offended. Who is here so rude that would not be a Roman? If any,
speak; for him have I offended. Who is here so vile that will not love his
country? If any, speak; for him have I offended. (*JC* III.iii.28-33).

Now, as Cordus says, the race of Romans is extinct (I.103-4). Those who bow to Sejanus may be born and bred in Rome, but they are not Romans; they are “most creeping base” (I.176).

Sejanus’ entrance, accompanied by “the stoops, / The bendings, and the falls” (I.175-76)—postures characteristic of sycophancy and political slavery—points up the corruption consequent upon the loss of a crucial practice of the Republic: voting. Satrius, a client of Sejanus, petitions him on behalf of a gentleman who wants to buy a tribuneship; Sejanus asks what the man is willing to pay, apparently likes the answer, and agrees (I.177-89). Arruntius reacts explosively: “O desperate state / Of grov’ling honour!” (I.196-97) Now that the honor of the tribuneship (“honor” in the sense of public office) is no longer earned but sued for and bought, the Romans have no real honor (in the sense of integrity) left, only the trappings of honor, won by self-abasement. Sabinus later provides a cooler assessment: Sejanus, he says,

Commands, disposes every dignity;
 Centurions, tribunes, heads of provinces,
 Praetors, and consuls, *all that heretofore*
Rome's general suffrage gave, is now his sale.
 The gain, or rather spoil, of all the earth,
One, and his house, receives. (I.220-25) (emphasis added)

“One, and his house” echoes “the slaves to one man’s lusts” above, with the added refinement that this “one” is not even the Emperor, who might claim some tenuous right of succession from Augustus, but his favorite, whose power derives from no right of birth and no popular base. The wealth Sejanus rakes in is “spoil” because it is wrongly acquired. The right and normal state of things, according to Sabinus and Arruntius, is for all the Romans to confer honors by vote, presumably as a reward for merit.

This comment by Sabinus concludes the republican argument at the beginning of Act I, which serves as an introduction to the action and dictates the perspective from which it should be viewed. The proponents of this argument, obviously virtuous (though not flawless) characters whose judgment the audience should trust, establish the lost Republic as the standard of good government and the nurse of virtue. These principles continue to be reflected strongly through the first three acts, after which the accelerating action that “drives on [all] to ruin” (IV.215) captures center stage.

Curtis Perry suggests, on the basis of the narrations and commentary about the mob’s irrational fury in Act V, that the Germanicans bemoan only the disenfranchisement of aristocrats like themselves, not that of the commoners (*Literature* 236). But there is no reason to believe that by “Rome’s general suffrage” (I.223) Sabinus means the votes of

aristocrats only. The mob that drags Sejanus' statues through the streets and tears his corpse in pieces is maddened by "rage of power" (V.771), an ambiguous phrase suggesting both the people's rage against the oppressive power of Sejanus and the intoxication of the temporary license they are able to seize after the Senate's hasty condemnation and execution of the fallen favorite. Elsewhere, the Germanicans speak sympathetically of the people and respect their judgment. When Agrippina and her children are arrested, Lepidus exclaims,

But yesterday, the people would not hear
Far less objected, but cried, Caesar's letters
Were false, and forged . . . Where are now
Their voices? (IV.345-50)

And Arruntius replies,

Hushed.
Drowned in their bellies. Wild Sejanus' breath
Hath, like a whirlwind, scattered that poor dust
With this rude blast. (IV.351-54)

Earlier, Sejanus tells Tiberius that Agrippina's sons are courting the people "with hope / Of future freedom" (II.236-37). They, too, are hoping—"though emptily" (II.238), as Sejanus says—for the restoration of the Republic.

If hypocrisy is the homage that vice pays to virtue, as La Rochefoucauld famously put it, Tiberius himself affirms the value of republicanism. In public, where he poses as "a good and honest prince" (I.440), his demeanor and talk are ostensibly republican. He dislikes to have men kneel to him, disavows any claim of divinity (I.375-78, 469-73, 476-

78), and pretends that he is no more than Rome's leading citizen, under the command of the Senate:

Style us not
Or lord, or mighty, who profess our self
The servant of the Senate, and are proud
T' enjoy them our good, just, and favouring lords. (I.391-94)

He professes to serve the public good (I.439-44, 482-84) and follow "both divine and human laws" (I.494). His prayer for Germanicus' sons reflects a republican valuation of virtue above noble lineage and fortune:

Let Fortune give them nothing; but attend
Upon their virtue—and that still come forth
Greater than hope, and better than their fame. (III.88-90)

And as an excuse for refusing to postpone Silius' trial until after the consulship of his enemy Varro, Tiberius pleads the necessity of maintaining the "privilege" of the consul,

By whose deep watches and industrious care
It is so laboured as the commonwealth
Receive no loss, from any oblique course. (III.204, 206-208)

If anyone were fooled by this elaborate charade, he might think the commonwealth (the English translation of *res publica*) was still intact. Apparently there is enough residual republican sentiment in Rome that Tiberius finds it profitable to appeal to it.

While republican virtue is a topic of discussion and an object of tribute (sincere or hypocritical) from the beginning of Act I, it is not made manifest in action until Silius and Cordus are put on trial in Act III. Before and after these trials, which occur at the

very center of the play, the virtuous characters speak their minds only when they are alone together, or in asides. At this point, though, facing trumped-up charges before a timeserving Senate, Silius and Cordus have nothing to lose. They behave as republicans: Silius as a man of action defending his integrity, Cordus as a contemplative man championing freedom of speech.

Silius defies his accusers. He calls the consul Varro a liar and corrupt, thou's Tiberius and accuses him of bad faith, and lays open the whole machinery of tyranny that is operating against him. When Afer admonishes him, "Patience, Silius," he retorts, "Tell thy mule of patience, / I'm a Roman" (III.167-68). Arruntius and Sabinus approve his behavior (I.191, 286); it shows the Roman virtue of "spirit" (I.151, III.232, 316), in the senses of both valor and nobility of mind. A free man does not tolerate insult, slander, or injustice. It may be objected that Silius is giving way to anger, as Afer charges (III.230, 269-73), but while anger fuels Silius' defiance, he never quite loses control. He remains eloquent and incisive, mocking his tormentors:

Tiberius. Is this true, Silius?

Silius. Save thy question, Caesar.

Thy spy, of famous credit, hath affirmed it. (III.284-85)

Silius is a soldier, and just as he had "charged, alone, into the troops / Of curled Sicambrians" and "routed them" (III.260-61), he now stands alone against the tyrant and his minions, though he has no hope of victory.

Silius not only acts like a republican; he also articulates his republican principles when he characterizes Tiberius' hatred of him as typical of the behavior of monarchs in general:

So soon, all best turns,
 With princes, do convert to injuries
 In estimation, when they greater rise
 Than can be answered. (III.302-305)

The “great service” Silius has performed in keeping his troops loyal amidst a general mutiny (III.300) would have earned him high honors and enduring gratitude under the Republic. But monarchs cannot tolerate great merit or great popularity in others, nor can they tolerate clearly owing their position to another. Their dominion must appear to be second nature:

It is your nature to have all men slaves
 To you, but you acknowledging to none. (III.309-10)

Finally, after delivering a lecture on the superiority of virtue to fortune (III.319-36), Silius models the way a Roman acts in defeat. In his battle against the Sicambrians, he

came
 Not off with backward ensigns of a slave,
 But forward marks, wounds on my breast . . . (III.261-63)

Now, too, in his singlehanded, doomed stand against tyranny, he comes off with “forward” wounds that show his freedom of spirit, stabbing himself to forestall disgrace and execution. His final words turn his suicide into the most directly didactic moment of the play:

Romans, if any here be in this Senate,
 Would know to mock Tiberius’ tyranny,

Look upon Silius, and so learn to die. (III.336-68)

The first of these lines delivers a challenge. It may be read, or heard, as simply addressing the Romans, so that “if any here be in this Senate” applies forward to “would know.” However, the phrase looks backward as well, meaning “if there are any Romans—in the true sense of the word—here in this Senate.” Silius thus completes his demonstration of what it means to be a Roman.⁸

Cordus, the historian, takes a different but equally republican approach when he is put on trial for writing annals that reflect ill upon “[t]he present age” (III.385), and particularly for praising Brutus and stating “that ‘Cassius was the last of all the Romans’” (III.391-92). He does not interrupt or confront his accusers but waits until Tiberius silences them. Then, knowing that he is already condemned (III.457), he calmly and without rancor defends his writings, the reputation of Brutus and Cassius, and the principle of freedom of speech in a long, well-reasoned oration, as if he stood before a just tribunal. While Silius has exhibited the virtues of the battlefield, Cordus exhibits the virtues of the forum: prudence and temperance (like Brutus himself [I.152]). As a historian, it is his function to bring the knowledge of the past to bear on the present, and thus to promote virtue and censure vice (III.471-83). His speech exemplifies that function and demonstrates both sound judgment and rhetorical and interpretive skills—qualities that would have been valued in an independent deliberative body, such as the Senate used to be. And, as befits a Roman, Cordus’ reason remains firmly in control throughout his ordeal: he is “not moved by passion” (III.462). If he and Silius appear to

⁸ Note the similarity to Lucrece’s didactic suicide in Heywood’s *The Rape of Lucrece*. Since Heywood’s play is later (c. 1607), Silius’ suicide here may have influenced Lucrece’s.

disprove his own statement that Cassius was the last of the Romans, it is also true that their Roman qualities and republican sympathies ensure their destruction.

Admittedly, the Germanicans present an idealized picture of the Roman Republic, disregarding the early struggles of the orders and the later factional struggles, public violence, and rampant bribery. Still, according to classical historians, the Republic had managed to correct abuses and attain some balance and justice for a large portion of its history. To sum up the republican argument in *Sejanus*, then, the Republic had promoted and depended on active citizenship. It had been governed according to law, by the Senate, consuls, and people. Public office had been conferred by vote, on the basis of popularity and merit. Sound judgment, eloquence, and freedom of speech had been valued in public assemblies and the Senate, valor and loyalty on the battlefield. Romans had been free-spirited and had served the common good, elevating it above their private interests. In contrast, from the Roman republican perspective, practices common in monarchic political cultures, such as bowing, flattery, and royal favoritism, appear unnatural and servile. Moreover, the Germanicans' condemnation of Senate proposals of divine honors to Tiberius and Sejanus as "abject things, and base" (I.50) may imply a critique of the claim of early modern English monarchs to be God's vicegerents on earth (and indeed, James I would assert that kings "euen by GOD himself . . . are called Gods" [Speech of 1609-1610, 307]). Because these republican opinions are voiced, and so aggressively voiced, in settings similar to their own royal court and Parliament, even Jacobean audiences and readers familiar with Livy, Sallust, Cicero, and Tacitus may have found them shocking; they posed a more direct challenge to monarchism than plays set in the Republic.

IV

It may be objected that the ideal that Jonson counterposes to tyranny in *Sejanus His Fall* is not the Republic at all, but the virtuous prince. That, indeed, is Peter Lake's contention (147-49). The strongest evidence for this interpretation is Silius's unambiguous statement, after Tiberius professes to be the servant of the Senate, that the government of a virtuous prince is the best constitution:

If this man

Had but a mind allied unto his words,

How blest a fate were it to us, and Rome!

We could not think that state for which to change,

Although the aim were our old liberty:

The ghosts of those that fell for that would grieve

Their bodies lived not now, again to serve.

Men are deceived who think there can be thrall

Beneath a virtuous prince. Wished liberty

Ne'er lovelier looks than under such a crown. (I.400-409)

Clear as this statement is in its general outlines, its hyperbole, internal confusion, and inconsistency with everything else Silius and his friends say before and after signal that it is to be viewed with caution. As a rule, the virtuous characters' speeches in *Sejanus* are hard-edged and analytical. Here, though, liberty and subjection are confused together with no rationale offered to resolve into a paradox what remains a mere absurdity. The rule of a virtuous prince is both opposed to "our old liberty" and declared to enable the loveliest form of liberty; there can be no thrall under him, yet men will serve him.

Furthermore, this speech—actually half a speech, for Silius abruptly turns to sharp criticism of Tiberius—ill fits the character who shortly before has deplored the Romans’ fall from their position as “free, equal lords of the triumphèd world” and who later will fault princes in general with ingratitude. More shockingly, it tells a palpable lie about those who died to save the Republic. Cato, Brutus, and Cassius would never have consented to live under even a virtuous prince, much less grieve at the loss of the opportunity. The four lines beginning with “We could not think that state for which to change” (I.403-406) lend a Tiberian quality to the passage: where a more restrained statement might have been believable, the inclusion of an obvious untruth “poisons all” (III.319).

How to account for this passage, then? William Drummond of Hawthornden records that Jonson told him “he was called before the Council for his *Sejanus*, and accused both of popery and treason” by Northampton (602). No date is given, but presumably this happened soon after the play was performed, either at Court in 1603 or at the Globe in 1604. And Jonson writes in the preface of the 1605 Quarto (the first printing) that

this book, in all numbers, is not the same with that which was acted on the public stage, wherein a second pen had good share; in place of which I have . . . chosen to put weaker (and no doubt less pleasing) of mine own . . .
 . (*Sejanus* 52)

It stands to reason that Jonson’s revision for publication would have eliminated some of the more incendiary passages that had given rise to the charges against him as well as adding passages that proclaimed his loyalty to “the present state” (I.79). The Argument

in the Quarto concludes with exactly such a passage, drawing an unlikely moral from the play: “a mark of terror to all traitors and treasons; to show how just the heavens are in pouring and thundering down a weighty vengeance on their unnatural intents, even to the worst princes” (*Sejanus* 71). Silius’ hyperbolic praise of virtuous princely government also serves to protect the author from any suspicion of disloyalty and perhaps imply a graceful compliment to James I, who had quoted Claudian, the source of lines 407-409, in his *Basilikon Doron*. The astute reader, though, would note its self-consuming quality.

Of course, if one must live under a monarch, one who refrains from censorship, judicial murder, expropriation, and systematic sexual abuse of subjects is preferable. That is why the virtuous characters in *Sejanus* have hopes for Tiberius’ likely successors: the two Drusi and Nero. A virtuous prince is the best they can hope for under the circumstances.

The dead hero Germanicus, however, clearly represents an ideal, not just the best alternative that was once available in an imperfect world. He was more than virtuous; he was a wellspring of virtue, “the soul of goodness” (I.154). Does not the unanimous admiration, even devotion, that Germanicus inspires in Silius, Sabinus, Arruntius, and Cordus suggest that he represents the lost possibility of a virtuous prince?

At the point in the heavily annotated 1605 Quarto where Germanicus’ name is first mentioned, Jonson cites, among other sources, Tacitus’ *Annals* 1.33-34 (Ayres 85-86), which includes the following:

ipse Druso fratre Tiberii genitus, Augustae nepos, set anxius occultis in se patruī aviaeque odiis quorum causae acriores quia iniquae. quippe Drusi magna apud populum Romanum memoria, credebaturque, si rerum potitus

foret, libertatem redditurus; unde in Germanicum favor et spes eadem.

(He was the son of Drusus Tiberius' brother, and the grandson of Augusta, but he was troubled by the secret hatred of his uncle and grandmother, whose cause was the fiercer because unjust. For great was the remembrance of Drusus among the Roman people, and it was believed, if he had come into possession of the empire, he would have restored liberty; whence for Germanicus there was favor and the same hope.)⁹

Later, Sejanus, inflaming Tiberius against Germanicus' sons, attributes to them the same intention, or professed intention:

. . . to their thirst of rule they win the rout,
That's still the friend of novelty, with hope
Of future freedom . . . (II.235-37)

At this point, too, Jonson cites Tacitus, *Annals* 2.82 (Ayres 125), recounting the complaints that broke out when Germanicus' illness was made known in Rome:

*vera prorsus de Druso seniores locutos: displicere regnantibus civilia
filiorum ingenia, neque ob aliud interceptos quam quia populum
Romanum aequo iure complecti reddita libertate agitaverint.* (It was the absolute truth that the elders had spoken about Drusus [Germanicus' father and Tiberius' brother]: the democratic temperaments of sons displeased their reigning parents, and they were cut off for no other reason than

⁹ I have chosen to translate two passages from Tacitus in this paragraph because Church and Brodrigg do not render literally enough *libertatem reddere*, to give back liberty, meaning "to restore the Republic." Jonson uses the word "liberty" in this technical sense: "who least the public liberty could like" (I.54), "although the aim were our old liberty" (I.405), "a professed [sic] champion / For the old liberty" (II.311-2).

because they would have included the Roman people in equal right with restored liberty.)

Silius' report of Germanicus' democratic temper—his lack of “self-love” (I.130) and his habit of calling his followers “friends” (I.123)—lends credence to this assessment, which accounts for the near-worship of Germanicus by men who have articulated their republican principles (I.125-26). For Jonson, consigning Germanicus' program to the paratext and the jaundiced perspective of his enemy, and allowing ambiguity in the text, may have been the most discreet course.

Whether the prince is virtuous or vicious, *Sejanus* appears to insist on the subject's duty of obedience, a monarchist principle that coexists awkwardly with the republicanism of the Germanicans. Closer inspection, however, reveals more of an argument *in utramque partem*. The major opposition of the play, between Stoic virtue and “reason of state” (the amoral opportunist ideology of princes and courtiers), is too clearly marked as a contest between good and evil to allow for “Tudor play of mind,” but the question of resistance to an unjust ruler is debatable. Agrippina's query (more to herself than to Gallus) whether she should plot against Tiberius, since she will be accused of treason in any case (IV.36-42), may perhaps be dismissed as the musings of an agitated mind. She soon collects herself and counsels her sons to “suffer nobly” (IV.74). Latiaris' incitement to rebellion (IV.142-61) is discredited by its insincerity (though surely his professed impatience with the passivity of the virtuous characters must resonate with the audience); it is spoken in an effort to entrap Sabinus. Ironically, it demonstrates why resistance is hopeless: Rome is too honeycombed with spies and informers. Arruntius, however, though rash, is one of the major moral authorities of the

play, and early on he has apparently been advocating either assertion or revolt, when Sabinus says, “But these our times / Are not the same, Arruntius” (I.85-86). Arruntius’ responding rant invokes the resistance of Cato, Brutus, and Cassius to Julius Caesar as exempla of Roman virtue.

And yet, in Act IV, two well-respected characters, Sabinus and Lepidus, strongly deny the subject any right of resistance. Sabinus repels Latiaris’ incitement forcefully:

’Twere better stay
 In lasting darkness, and despair of day.
 No ill should force the subject undertake
 Against the sovereign, more than hell should make
 The gods do wrong. A good man should and must
 Sit rather down with loss, than rise unjust— (IV.161-66)

This declaration (which Ayres considers “anachronistic—perhaps a sop to Jonson’s critics on the Privy Council” [187n.]), though it aligns the good subject morally with the gods and the tyrant with hell, maintains the unassailable legitimacy of the ruler and imposes an absolute duty of obedience. Sabinus apparently believes in an original contract between ruler and ruled, the terms of which Tiberius is breaking, but from which the subject cannot be released (IV.167-70). In a recapitulation of the argument soon afterwards, Lepidus concisely echoes Sabinus’ assertion of the subject’s political obligation and even carries it further, implying that Tiberius’ subjects must actively prevent his overthrow, due to “Zeal, / And duty; with the thought he is our prince” (IV.371-72). Sabinus’ and Lepidus’ dicta on the subject are the most memorable and, like Silius’ panegyric to the virtuous prince, serve as tokens of the playwright’s loyalty to

his own sovereign. But Lepidus does not have the last word. Arruntius immediately rejects the definition “prince,” countering, “He is our monster: forfeited to vice / So far, as no racked virtue can redeem him” (IV.372-73). Arruntius has used the word “monster” once before, of Julius Caesar—a much more benign ruler than Tiberius—in praising Caesar’s assassins. While resistance is not practicable under the circumstances of the play, the issue of its moral defensibility remains unresolved.

Apparently, in *Sejanus*, Jonson is more interested in raising questions about the respective merits of different forms of government and about the right of resistance than in answering them. Within the world of the play, neither the succession of a virtuous prince nor the restoration of the Republic is possible, and no attempt at resistance has any prospect of success. A character may reasonably look back with longing at the Republic yet believe that he has a duty to obey and support the current ruler. But we may, alternatively, view Sabinus’ and Lepidus’ insistence on the obligation of obedience as an obligatory disclaimer, similar to the House of Commons’ declarations of loyalty to the king, in the course of petitions, remonstrances, and even wars, through the first half of the seventeenth century. In the case of a drama that forcefully presents a republican perspective, such a disclaimer may protect both play and playwright against charges of subversion.

V

The actual political world of *Sejanus*, in spite of Tiberius’ pretenses and the Germanicans’ aspirations, is one of imperial tyranny. Jonson, following Tacitus, both “anatomizes” that tyranny (that is, both exposes it in detail and analyzes it) and offers

instruction in prudent and virtuous conduct for the subjects of tyrants.¹⁰ Sir Philip Sidney's *Defence of Poesie* (published in 1595, only eight years before the play's first performance) also authorizes both the moralizing and the anatomy of tyranny in *Sejanus*. First, Sidney maintains that "the ending end of all earthly learning, being verteous action," it is the duty of a poet to "illuminate" the beauty of virtue and the deformity of vice.¹¹ Second, he ascribes to tragedy the function of exposing tyranny, thus making "Kings feare to be Tyrants, and Tyrants [to] manifest their tyrannicall humours," and teaching "the uncertaintie of this world, and uppon how weak foundations guilden roofes are builded." The lesson of mutability applies particularly to *Sejanus*, but for the most part, the play focuses more on Rome as a whole than on its title character.

Silius and Sabinus present the plight of Rome and its origins at the beginning of Act I. Subsequent scenes represent the hallmarks of tyranny and the various means by which it is maintained: the selling of public offices, flattery of the Emperor, seduction, spying, plotting to murder enemies or to accuse them of treason, manipulation of trial procedures, entrapment, censorship. Tiberius' assertion of royal privilege with regard to the *arcana imperii*, spoken at court to men of high rank, sabotages his own pretense of republicanism:

Princes have still their grounds reared with themselves,
Above the poor low flats of common men,

¹⁰ "Anatomize," in the figurative sense of "to lay open minutely; to analyse" ("Anatomize," def. 3.a), was a keyword in late-sixteenth- and early-seventeenth-century England. The word "anatomy" combines the senses of the division of phenomena into their component parts, the display of the whole and the parts, and the discovery of their relations, causes, and effects. The usage of the word is illustrated by two book titles from this period: Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621) and the anonymous *Tyrannicall-government anatomized* (1643; a translation of Buchanan's *Baptistes*).

¹¹ All quotations from Sidney's *Defence of Poesie* refer to R. S. Bear's online *Renascence Editions*.

And who will search the reasons of their acts
 Must stand on equal bases. (I.537-40)

The futility of any hopes for relief is symbolized by the fact that the place of hero, or virtuous counterpart to the vicious Sejanus-Tiberius duo, is occupied by a dead man, Germanicus. None of the virtuous characters—Arruntius, Cordus, Silius, Sabinus, Lepidus, and Agrippina—stands out from the others, and even as a group they are impotent in the face of oppression. All they can do, when Tiberius tightens the screws, is witness, comment, argue, and suffer. Speech is as dangerous as action. They live in a state of constant anxiety:

Our looks are called to question, and our words,
 How innocent soever, are made crimes;
 We shall not shortly dare to tell our dreams,
 Or think, but 'twill be treason. (I.69-70)

The only ways to defy Tiberius and Sejanus are to “suffer nobly” (IV.74), as Agrippina exhorts her sons to do, or, like Silius, to forestall their murderous intentions by suicide.

Sejanus as emperor is everyone’s nightmare, but his fall cannot and does not end the tyranny; instead, the machinery he has set in motion is turned against him. Upon the reading of Tiberius’s letter in Act V, the Senate subjects Sejanus to the same kind of judicial lynching that his enemies Silius and Cordus endured. The execution of Sejanus’ children, preceded by the rape of his little daughter, demonstrates that tyranny, if anything, grows worse under the direction of “[t]he wittily and strangely cruel Macro” (V.861). Meanwhile, Tiberius remains as devious, suspicious, and cruel as ever. In his retirement at Capreae, he practices murder “as an art” (IV.389), along with torture and

the systematic sexual abuse of children.¹² And the later career of Caligula, Germanicus' youngest son, who is shown taking Macro's advice to seek Tiberius' protection, is well known. The face of tyranny may change, but thanks to the watchfulness of Tiberius and the viciousness of his "instruments" (III.718), tyranny perpetuates itself quite efficiently.

Under these circumstances, there is little scope for practicing the active virtues of civic engagement. Virtue under tyranny becomes a matter of withdrawing from public life, if not literally, at least in spirit: rejecting any action in the pursuit of honor, wealth, or favor that would tarnish one's integrity. But even such irreproachable conduct does not guarantee safety. So, if the tragic poet is to recommend virtue, he must demonstrate that it confers some advantage. Jonson shows three advantages. First, and most importantly, despite the anxiety of the virtuous characters and the many shocks, betrayals, and attacks they sustain, they derive comfort and tranquility from their Stoic philosophy.¹³ According to Stoicism, no evil can befall a good man or woman, because the only real evil is to be evil. The mind can, in a sense, conquer adversity, not by changing outward conditions (figured as Fortune) but by refusing to be changed by them, remaining calm, clear-eyed, faithful to one's friends, honest, and just. The prime virtue in *Sejanus* is constancy, an unwavering commitment to the good, which serves as a lodestar. When Arruntius laments that he and Lepidus "are almost all the few / Left to be honest in these impious times," Lepidus responds,

¹² We may hear an echo of Sextus' provocation by Lucrece's chastity in Arruntius' description of the boys and girls who are taken to serve Tiberius' lusts:

Out of our noblest houses, the best formed,
Best nurtured, and most modest. What's their good
Serves to provoke his bad. (IV.393-95)

¹³ This discussion of the Stoic view of virtue and vice is informed by Katherine Eisaman Maus, *Ben Jonson and the Roman Frame of Mind*, particularly pp. 14-16, 25, and 31.

What we are left to be, we will be, Lucius,
 Though tyranny did stare as wide as death
 To fright us from it. (IV.280-82)

Virtue is a treasure, something to be vied for, and it confers a strong sense of identity, self-worth, even pride. Agrippina boasts that she would not change one word or deed even if Tiberius and Sejanus could see and hear her every move (II.449-57). Silius takes pride in his courage in meeting his unexpected death: Fortune herself, he says, “When virtue doth oppose, must lose her threats” (III.324-25). Arruntius, on hearing that Sabinus’ dog has jumped into the river and drowned with his master’s corpse, exclaims, “O act, to be envied him of us men!” (IV.288)

The second advantage of virtue, which the play suggests tentatively, and only once, is that the virtuous will escape punishment in the afterlife, if such a thing exists (III.20-21). In general, though, the commitment to virtue does not depend on the supernatural. Its third advantage, which is strongly emphasized, is its reward in the real afterlife, the memory of future generations: “Posterity pays every man his honour,” says Cordus (III.456; see also I.495-501, III.456-60).

The corollary of teaching virtue is discouraging vice. In *Sejanus*, the depiction of individuals as evil is ancillary to the depiction of the vicious regime that they help maintain. Characters such as Livia, Eudemus, Afer, and Latiaris, who “follow fortune” (IV.117), promote tyranny, whether knowingly or unthinkingly, in seeking to satisfy their own lust, greed, or ambition. Referred to as “organs” and “instruments” (I.27, II.11, III.237, 649, 718, IV.133, 192, 226, V.664), they are cogs in the machine that Tiberius and Sejanus, the tyrant and his accessory, control. In fact, they fare no better than the

virtuous characters. Toward the end of the play, Latiaris is arrested; Livia and Eudemus are soon to be brought to justice for the murder of Drusus; and Sejanus, most spectacularly, is summarily tried, executed, and his body torn to pieces by a mob. While Tiberius appears to escape harm, his state of mind is hardly enviable: just as his subjects must continually fear accusations of treason, so he, too, lives in continual fear and suspicion. Sidney's quote from Seneca's *Oedipus* in the *Defence* aptly describes Tiberius: "*Qui sceptrum Saevus duro imperio regit, / Timet timentes, metus in authorem redit.*" [He who cruelly wields the scepter with harsh command, / Fears those who fear him; fear rebounds against its originator.]

While the virtuous characters retain their sense of self and their humanity (V.763-64), the vicious characters become degraded through their disregard for justice and decency. Two systems of imagery running throughout the play figure their degradation: images of beastliness and abnormal (uncontrolled or unmanly) motion.

The vicious characters, especially the powerful ones, are figured as ravening beasts and their characteristic action as feeding on human flesh and blood (I.70-72, 428-29; III.376-77). Tiberius is compared to a wolf (III.347-38, 487), Sejanus to a lion (III.659-60) or a mongrel (IV. 366, 368), the opportunistic orator Afer to a crocodile (II.424), spies and informers to "greedy vultures" (IV.140), beagles, bloodhounds, snails, or "palace rats" (I.9, 427; II.410; III.376). Arruntius sums up: "Of all wild beasts, preserve me from a tyrant; / And of all tame, a flatterer" (I.437-38). These characters have "forced all mankind from [their] breasts" (V.764) and thus are no longer recognizable as human.

Further, the vicious characters who serve the machinery of government appear incapable of independent action, figured as motion. They enact their subjection in low bows to Tiberius and Sejanus (“the stoops, / The bendings, and the falls” [I.175-76]). As spies and informers, they are said to “lean” (I.20) and to “stick” to walls (I.8) and “creep” (I.10, 176), like insects. The enraged “multitude” is said to “reel” (V.890). In contrast, Agrippina exhorts her sons to “stand upright” when Tiberius strikes: not to resist, but to “suffer nobly,” like the princes they are (IV.73-74).

Baseness—the failure to stand upright, to be constant—is related to an attachment to Fortune, the way things fall out through the collision and collusion of forces known and unknown. The vicious characters “follow fortune” (IV.117) in the sense of seeking to make their own fortunes by honoring and serving, to the point of idolatry and absurd servility, whoever is currently in power and by working for the ruin of those who are out of favor. In matters of state, says Macro, “men’s fortune . . . is virtue” (III.740). The Senators act out this timeserving in Act V as they rush to accompany Sejanus into the Senate (V.446-60), and again, within the hour, as they move away from Sejanus when Tiberius’ letter becomes clearly condemnatory (V.616-32). Whether from ambition or fear (V.490-99, 503-504, 791-95), they have surrendered control of their motion—the most elementary form of action—to the will of another. Arruntius captures their loss of selfhood in a telling image:

Like as both

Their bulks and souls were bound on Fortune’s wheel,

And must act only with her motion. (V.712-14)

Both in portraying the workings of tyranny and in demonstrating the grandeur of virtue and the loathsomeness of vice, Jonson has certainly “discharged” one of the “offices of a tragic writer” in *Sejanus His Fall* (*Sejanus* 51). The political message is comfortless and fatalistic: one may, like Lepidus, mitigate the evils proposed by a tyrant, but cannot hope to bring about a more humane government. Of course, to any accusations that he was “tax[ing] the present state” (II.308), Jonson may well have responded, with Aristotle in Trajano Boccalini’s *Advertisements from Parnassus*, “that Tyrants were a certain sort of men in the old time, the Race whereof was wholly lost now” (145).¹⁴ At least in their details, Jonson’s portrayals of court life, the motives and actions of princes and their favorites, and the functioning of government were widely admired and quoted. These features of *Sejanus* may have commanded more attention from Jonson’s contemporaries than its austere vision of virtue. It is to contemporary uses of Jonson’s tragedy, and of the historical character of Sejanus, that I now turn.

VI

Jonson wrote *Sejanus His Fall* at a time of widespread political discontent and acute anxiety about the succession. Beyond these general concerns, critics have debated whether Jonson’s action and characters corresponded to contemporary events and personalities. Matthew Wikander makes an intriguing argument for multiple resonances rather than exact correspondences. The loyal and popular Germanicus, sent off to a distant command, resembles the Earl of Essex as his friends see him, while the ambitious favorite Sejanus, who makes his troops dependent on him, resembles Essex in the eyes of

¹⁴ Boccalini was apparently parodying obligatory disclaimers such as that of Marc Antoine Muret in his 1580 lecture on Tacitus: “Although, thanks be to God, our age has no Tiberiuses, Caligulas, or Neros, it is good to know that, even under them, good and prudent men were able to live . . .” (qtd. in Schellhase 121).

his enemies (Wikander 351-54). Again, the trial of Silius may recall that of Essex, with Francis Bacon corresponding to Macro, but it may equally recall Sir Edward Coke's savage attack on Sir Walter Raleigh at the latter's trial for treason in 1603 (Wikander 355). Cordus' trial evokes the imprisonment of John Hayward for his 1599 *History of Henry IV*, dedicated to Essex (Wikander 354), though the concern about free speech is generally considered self-referential for Jonson (e.g., Lake 129-30), as it must have been for Tacitus. Wikander thinks that these multiple resonances point to larger patterns rather than particular events and individuals; for example, Macro "comes to represent the whole class of professional civil servants who stood to gain most by Essex's fall" (355).¹⁵ In a different vein, Peter Lake interprets *Sejanus* as an indictment of late-Elizabethan persecution of Roman Catholics (137-58), with Mary Stuart figured by Agrippina (149).

In the absence of clear, specific evidence that Jonson intended any of these meanings or that readers and audiences perceived them, all are potentially valid, and all are subjective. For Jonson followed Tacitus' comprehensive analysis of imperial tyranny closely enough that audiences and readers could find different meanings in *Sejanus his Fall* at different times. Some things had not changed very much from the time of Tiberius to the late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries. Prominent statesmen and generals could still be brought to trial, and almost certainly found guilty, on trumped-up charges; writers could still be imprisoned, or worse, if the monarch or her agents deemed a work seditious; government was still personal enough that favorites, and some other court officials, dispensed titles, estates, and offices to their friends and relatives, made free with the public treasury, and persecuted their enemies. *Sejanus* and Tiberius, in the

¹⁵ I am sympathetic to the general argument about larger patterns but dubious about this interpretation of Macro.

early seventeenth century, became potent images for rulers and favorites who perpetrated these injustices.

Thus it was that George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham, who had not yet entered public life at the time of the first performance of *Sejanus His Fall* in 1603, was (justly) compared to Sejanus in a 1621 libel, “When Charles hath got the Spanish Gearle”:

They say Sejanus doth bestowe
 what ever offices doe fall
 but tis well knowne it is not so
 for he is soundly payed for all. (lines 60-64)

In 1626, several of the articles of impeachment that the House of Commons brought against Buckingham were indeed reminiscent of Sejanus’ practices: the excessive concentration of power, diminishing the roles of both the nobility and the king; the buying and selling of offices; the abuse of power (in Buckingham’s case, for extortion and confiscation; in Sejanus’ case, for the persecution of his enemies); and even a possible contributory role in the death of King James.¹⁶ Sir John Eliot, summarizing the case against Buckingham, in true Tacitean fashion looked for a historical figure to whom to compare him, in order to predict his future actions. “I can hardly find him a Match or Parallel in all Presidents [precedents],” said Eliot, “none so like him as *Sejanus*.” Eliot quoted Tacitus directly in Latin for Sejanus’ character: he was daring, quick to accuse others and protect himself, a flatterer to those above him, proud and oppressive to those below him. He bestowed provinces on his clients, and he was a partner in the labors of

¹⁶ This paragraph is based on John Rushworth, “Historical Collections: The impeachment of Buckingham (1626),” from which all quotations are taken. The accusation relating to the death of James appears absurd and paranoid now but was taken seriously at the time.

the Emperor, a phrase that Tiberius had used in commendation of Sejanus but that Eliot interpreted pejoratively, as mixing his personal interests and actions with royal policy and administration. In addition, Eliot said, “He neglected all Council.” This in particular would have raised a red flag; the exclusion of Parliament from real participation in governance would be tantamount to the establishment of tyranny.

When the Commons impeached Thomas Wentworth, Earl of Strafford, in 1640, alleging that he had advised the king to use an Irish army against his English subjects, he, too, was compared to Sejanus, this time by the anonymous author of a tract urging his execution: “[H]e is as subtle as *Lewis the Eleventh*, libidinous as *Tiberius*, cruell as *Nero*, covetous as rich *Cressus*, as terrible as *Phalaris*, and mischievous as *Sejanus*, and at the same end may he arrive.”¹⁷ Sejanus occupies the climactic position in this hyperbolic set of similes, and reappears a page later: “[H]is ambitious mind hath caused him to oppresse Ireland, as *Sejanus* the Roman monarchie, who received his demerits, a shamefull death . . .” The writer may favor the Sejanus comparison because as Lord Deputy of Ireland, Strafford, like Sejanus, was a subject who ruled like a king.

The comparisons of Buckingham and Strafford to Sejanus cannot be traced with any certainty to Jonson’s *Sejanus His Fall*. Educated people would likely have read Tacitus—Eliot quoted Tacitus in Latin—and two books about Sejanus were translated into English in the first half of the seventeenth century: Pierre Matthieu’s *The Powerful Favorite* (1628; reprinted as *Vnhappy Prosperitie* in 1632 and 1639) and Giovanni Battista Manzini’s *Politicall Observations upon the Fall of Seianus* (1634, 1638, 1639). Perhaps in part due to Jonson’s play, Sejanus was well known and often mentioned in

¹⁷ *A Declaration, shewing the Necessity of the Earle of Strafford’s Suffering* (unpaginated).

early-seventeenth-century writings as an object lesson in mutability, an example of treachery and ingratitude, a flatterer, or a prototype of wicked courtiers. In the Civil War years, royalists compared “rebels” to Sejanus, as well as to Tarquin.

Apart from quotations in later plays, I have found two instances of the use of Jonson’s *Sejanus* to make political points. One is the radical newsbook writer John Harris, who seems to have liked quoting Jonson even more than he liked quoting Shakespeare. In October 1648, Harris argues that Parliament should stop negotiating with the king and instead bring him to justice; he maintains that it is foolish and cowardly to yield power to a defeated enemy. Adapting from *Sejanus* I.33-35 a description of the servility of clients to their patrons, he writes that if the king is allowed to come to London, “most of the Members, through fear or hopes, will become his Apes, and shall laugh and weep, be hot and cold, change every garb, mode and habit as he varies” (*Mercurius Militaris* 12). When he prints a letter reproaching the English for being ready to give up their liberty, Harris bends Arruntius’ reproach of his fellow Romans in *Sejanus* (I.86-87, 93-96) to his purpose (and his rhyme):

How times and men are changed? Are all so base?
 Cannot this Land produce one English face?
 Not one brave soul to our great Fathers like?
 Or like to gallant Brutus, that did strike
 So brave a blow into the Monsters heart,
 Who sought his Country, to Captive by Art. (15)

Finally, he warns his readers to forestall any effort by the king to regain power:

If He recover, you are lost; yea All
 The weight of Preparations to his fall
 Will turn on You, to crush You; therefore strike
 Before he settles, to prevent the like
 Upon your selves; he doth his Vantage know,
 That makes it home, and gives the foremost blow. (18)

Here Harris seems to have the book open before him (IV.87-92); he changes only “thee” to “you” and “thyself” to “your selves.” But strangely, in what he believes to be a just cause, he is quoting the villainous Macro, who, like Sejanus, operates on “reason of state” principles. Apparently Harris does not care. If the words can be applied to the situation and lend piquancy and authority to his appeal, he appropriates them with alacrity.

Six years later, a supporter of the Lord Protector Oliver Cromwell quotes much more sparingly from Jonson’s *Sejanus*. “John Price, Citizen of London,” in a tract distinguishing between “tyrants and protectors,” or “good and bad magistrates,” roundly condemns the lascivious habits of courtiers, “wasting their precious times in Plays, Pastimes, Masks, and such fool[...]ies” (16). Yet, when he wants an example (admittedly, one of many) of tyrannical pride and lack of accountability, he quotes as follows:

My roof receives me not, ‘tis ayre I tread,
 At every step I feel my advanc'd head
 Knock out a Star in Heaven, ---said Sejanus. (10)

This is not what any historian reports Sejanus as saying; it is a nearly exact quotation from Jonson’s *Sejanus*, V.7-9, based not on Tacitus but on Seneca’s *Thyestes* (885-88) and Horace’s *Odes* (I.i.35) (Ayres 208). Price may have had the book of the play open

before him or may have obtained the passage from a source (such as a commonplace book) quoting the play. Perhaps he was unaware that he was quoting a fiction. He was, to his understanding, adducing the example of Sejanus to oppose tyranny, as were Sir John Eliot and the author of the tract against Strafford. John Harris was using the play's pronouncements on servility, valor, and seizing opportunity for the same purpose.

Perhaps Jonson would have been horrified at the impeachment of Strafford and the mid-century English revolution. But not his character Arruntius, who appears to believe in a right of resistance. As *Sejanus His Fall* was read and, perhaps, performed in the first half of the seventeenth century, the play, or the history it staged, was occasionally cited for oppositional and republican purposes. Those who wished to advocate monarchy and unquestioning obedience to authority had better sources at hand. But there was hardly a play that better conveyed the desperate plight of subjects under tyranny. *Sejanus* may thus have been considered a dystopian work, a warning of what could happen if the power of favorites remained unchecked, and the slide toward arbitrary government was allowed to continue. While the Germanicans could not hope to abolish tyranny and restore liberty in the world of the play, there was still hope for England, if its "brave souls" seized the initiative. Despite the play's apparent quietism, then, it could have been used as a call to action. That is precisely what John Harris did, appropriating the savvy of the unscrupulous imperial favorite Macro in the service of the republican cause. In thus remixing the elements of the play, he was drawing practical lessons from history just as much as the Elizabethan statesmen who read Livy with Gabriel Harvey. For Harris, for the playwrights who patterned their own Roman tyrant

plays after Jonson's, and likely for others, *Sejanus* offered political insight and heightened the appeal of the Roman republican tradition.

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