

# Shakespeare and Tyranny



Shakespeare and Tyranny:  
Regimes of Reading in Europe and Beyond

Edited by

Keith Gregor

**CAMBRIDGE**  
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**P U B L I S H I N G**

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# CONTENTS

Introduction .....	1
Keith Gregor	
Chapter One.....	19
Tyranny in Shakespeare's Romances with Special Reference to <i>Coriolanus</i> and <i>Timor of Athens</i>	
Mário Vítor Bastos	
Chapter Two.....	37
<i>Cymbeline</i> and the Display of Empire	
Hywel Dix	
Chapter Three.....	57
When the Tyrant is a Despot: Jean-François Ducis's Adaptations of Shakespeare	
Keith Gregor	
Chapter Four.....	77
<i>The Merchant of Venice</i> in Pest and Cluj (Koložsvár) during the Habsburg Neo-absolutism	
Katalin Ágnes Bartha	
Chapter Five.....	105
Crossing the Rubicon in Fascist Italy: Mussolini and Theatrical Caesarism from Shakespeare's <i>Julius Caesar</i>	
Michele De Benedictis	
Chapter Six.....	127
From the Snares of Watchful Tyranny to Post-human Dictators: <i>Macbeth</i> under the Portuguese Dictatorship and in Democracy	
Francesca Rayner	
Chapter Seven.....	145
(Do) <i>What You Will</i> in Late Francoist Spain	
Elena Bandín	

Chapter Eight.....	165
Writing between the Lines: Reviewing Shakespeare Productions in Socialist Hungary Veronika Schandl	
Chapter Nine.....	181
Analyzing Shakespearean Models of Tyranny in a Communist Regime: Some Examples from the Slovene Theatre in the Period 1945-1983 Denis Poniž	
Chapter Ten.....	203
Wajda's <i>Hamlet IV</i> : A Post-political Production? Jacek Fabiszak	
Chapter Eleven.....	223
<i>Hamlet</i> or the Skeletons in the Cupboard Nicoleta Cinpoes	
Chapter Twelve.....	241
Shakespeare and the Political Awakening in the Arab World: An Analysis of Some Arab Adaptations of the English Bard Rafik Darragi	
Chapter Thirteen.....	259
Transcontinental Shakespeare: <i>Macbeth</i> and Tyranny in Glauber Rocha's <i>Severed Heads</i> Francisco Fuentes and Noemí Vera	
Notes on Contributors.....	277

# INTRODUCTION

KEITH GREGOR

## Shakespeare on...

Tyranny is not an issue with which, until of late, Shakespeare scholars have been overly concerned. For decades the prevailing *doxa* on the issue is best represented by L. C. Knights's assertion in his 1957 Shakespeare Lecture to the British Academy: "Shakespeare, like the great majority of his fellow-countrymen, 'had no politics'" (Knights 1979, 152). In the place of a predetermined, fully worked-out political philosophy, his work at most expresses a general preference for what Knights calls those "wholesome political order[s]" that are the spontaneous expression of "relationships between particular persons within an organic society" (162-3). In the case of tyranny, and the equally pernicious effects of anarchy, both extremes painted in the tragedy *Macbeth*, the "concord" that Shakespeare invokes as the alternative [...] has this depth of meaning behind it". We shall return to *Macbeth* below. For the moment, it is worth pointing out that, whether or not Shakespeare *had* fully thought through the implications of tyranny and did indeed have a "wholesome" alternative to it, the term recurs almost obsessively in his work. A basic concordance search for "tyranny" and its various grammatical variants ("tyrant", "tyrannous", "tyrannize") produces over 130 occurrences; and though a number of these are purely figurative ("the *tyranny* of her sorrows" in *All's Well that Ends Well*; "time's *tyranny*" in Sonnet 115; "there is... an eyrie of children, little eyases, that cry out on the top of question and are most *tyrannically* clapp'd for't" in *Hamlet*), the immense majority are used in their literal, political sense. It was the Indian critic V. Aravindakshan who was one of the first to reflect on an abiding and, at times, implacably realistic concern in Shakespeare with the nature and consequences of tyranny:

From the beginning to the end there is the same preoccupation with the nightmarish doings in the "cunning passages and contrived corridors" in high places: the same story of dethronements, usurpations, banishments

and assassinations. In comedies, tragedies and histories, and in all the phases or stages of his career, Shakespeare points his finger at the struggle for power. In some of the more important works he strips this struggle of all mythology and shows it in its pure state. (1976, 39)

Behind this finger-pointing is what, more recently, Mary Ann McGrail suggests was Shakespeare's assimilation of the ideas of thinkers like Aristotle for whom "tyranny is the worst of all possible regimes", but also, contradictorily, like Machiavelli who claimed that "a disguised tyranny [is] potentially the best possible regime" (2002, 1). In plays such as *Macbeth*, *Richard III*, *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest*, she argues, the author seems to be deliberately dramatizing these ideas to produce (his chief concern) a psychological photofit of their tyrannical protagonists. "What tyranny does to the state qua state is not important," Shakespeare seems to say, "but is best understood by looking within the disordered mind and passions of the tyrant himself" (13). According to this account, which equates Shakespeare more, say, with the García Márquez of *The Autumn of the Patriarch* than with the novelists McGrail actually cites, Orwell and Solzhenitsyn, being steeped in the discourses then circulating the playwright purposefully used the drama to gauge their validity as explanations of human conduct.

With the political "turn" to early modern studies in the UK and US in the early 1980s, one of the consequences with regard to our perception of Shakespeare was a greater attention to the material circumstances concurring in the production and reception of his work, work seen now as not merely *reflecting* existing political dogmas but as a form of political *intervention* in its own right. The staging of a version of *Richard II* to whip up support for the Earl of Essex-orchestrated rising of 1601 is often cited as an extreme instance, though as Jonathan Dollimore points out in his introduction to *Political Shakespeare*, such "appropriations" were natural to audiences whose conception of literature was tainted by none of the "mythologies" mentioned by Aravindakshan and so vigorously defended by Knights: "This," Dollimore argues,

applies especially to tragedy, that genre traditionally thought to be most capable of transcending the historical moment of inception and of representing universal truths. Contemporary formulations of the tragic certainly made reference to universals but they were also resolutely political, especially those which defined it as a representation of *tyranny*. Such accounts, and of course the plays themselves, were appropriated as both defences of *and* challenges to authority. (1985, 9)



“Where and when did Shakespeare hear the tyrant’s cruel laugh? And if he did not hear it, how did he have a presentiment of it?” Jan Kott famously asked in *Shakespeare Our Contemporary* (1983, 21). From the perspective of cultural materialism and its mainly US-based version, new historicism, these questions are ultimately unanswerable, not just because of the mist which doggedly enshrouds Shakespeare’s biography but, more importantly, because texts such as Shakespeare’s are inevitably permeated by the highly “pragmatic” view that literature is inseparable from the context in which it is written and received. In the case of tragedy, that “context” is, ineludibly, the discourses on dramatic poesy (Dollimore cites poeticians like Elyot, Sidney, Puttenham, etc.) then circulating, discourses which stressed tyranny as the chief concern of the tragic and which plays like *Richard II* were interpreted as applying to present political structures, challenging at the same time as they appeared to confirm the principles on which those structures were based. Now, although the (at times) outspokenly robust approach of new historicists and materialists to early modern drama has tended to alienate critics with a more generalizing, universalist perception of the plays’ potential for meaning,<sup>1</sup> the attribution to the plays of some form of political motivation, either for or against the ruling Tudor or Stuart myths, or subtly enacting both positions at once, has become an increasingly conspicuous strategy of turn-of-the-century critical practice. In terms of tyranny and its contemporary manifestations (absolutism, despotism, autarchy, etc.), it is now largely taken for granted that the plays do indeed position themselves critically with respect to the historical material they dramatize and that, while they may well have been under

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<sup>1</sup> See, notably, Alexander Leggatt’s reservations in *Shakespeare’s Political Drama*. Defending the continuing relevance of the “mythical” approach of Knights and others to Shakespeare’s more “political” plays, Leggatt is wary of the “current tendency” to see “society as a structure of oppression and exploitation, and to read Shakespeare accordingly”. Shakespeare, he argues, “examines power and its implications realistically, and beside the official view that order is a good thing and that God is watching over England there are always *minority reports*”. That said, the author of the history and Roman plays (the tragedies are not even classed as “political”), “allows us to feel the excitement, even the longing, that *the dream of good order* produces, for that too is part of our political life: no fully realistic view can leave it out of account, and no fully responsible view can dismiss it as mere illusion. We may not agree that the good life can be made, Tudor-fashion, by a strong central power. But if we stop believing that it can be made at all *we are lost*” (1988, x; my emphasis). The exclusion of subversion as a “minority report” and the nostalgia or “dream of good order” as an antidote to becoming “lost” are, arguably, themselves expressions of a power structure Leggatt finds lacking in the plays he discusses.

some kind of “obligation” to “naturalize” or to “mythologize”, say, Tudor claims to divine rule, there are many instances in which they seem designed to expose those same claims as untenable and ultimately bogus.<sup>2</sup>

As well as tyranny *in* and *around* Shakespeare (i.e. as the concept was understood and deployed *by* him and/or the effect this had on contemporary audiences), what the political turn in Shakespeare studies has also promoted is an attention to the circumstances in which his work is received in formations other than those for which it was initially intended. John Frow (2002) uses the term “regimes of reading” to refer to the shared competencies, norms, and values that govern how we read and the kinds of value we attach to texts such as Shakespeare’s. Taking “reading” to imply not just *interpretation* in the strict literary-critical sense (equivalent to Stanley Fish’s “interpretative communities”), but *reproduction* in translation, adaptation and the theatre, it goes without saying that such “regimes”, like the definition of who “we” are, will vary greatly from one historical moment to another, as well as from one cultural formation to another. At the same time, and despite the existence of movements or “schools” such as neoclassicism, which pressed the merits of the same compositional “rules” over a remarkably extended time-frame and across various national and even continental boundaries, the Gramscian model of society as divided into the vying forces of dominant, residual and emergent can be seen to apply equally to contemporaneous and intra-cultural communities competing, at times violently, over conflicting versions of who “*unser* Shakespeare” is. As Hugh Grady and Terence Hawkes have argued in a recent volume, a certain “presentism” (Shakespeare here *and* now) lurks behind all post-Renaissance engagements with the Bard:

Facts...do not speak for themselves. Nor do texts. This doesn’t mean that facts or texts don’t exist. It does mean that all of them are capable of genuinely contradictory meanings, none of which has any independent, “given”, undeniable, or self-evident status. Indeed, they don’t speak at all unless and until they are inserted into and perceived as part of specific discourses which impose on them their own shaping requirements and agendas. *We* choose the facts. *We* choose the texts. *We* do the inserting. *We* do the perceiving. *We* order the priorities which govern everything. Facts and texts, that is to say, don’t simply speak, don’t merely mean. *We* speak, *we* mean, *by* them. (Grady & Hawkes 2009, 3)

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<sup>2</sup> Explaining, for example, how A. D. Nuttall in *Shakespeare the Thinker* can present *Richard II* as simultaneously a “spin” on the newly adopted Tudor concept of the divine authority of kings and, in the light of Elizabeth I’s own response to the drama (“I am Richard II, know ye not that?”), a play that shows “a monarch can be deposed, predictably used by subversives” (2007, 143).

It is the acknowledgement of the *necessity* of such mediations and of the contingency or “situatedness” of different “requirements and agendas”, in short of different *regimes* of reading, that has distinguished recent Shakespeare criticism from previous interventions.

This is very much the focus of the present volume which, as well as addressing what Shakespeare has to say *about* or *on* tyranny, provides a glimpse of how his work has been received *under* regimes themselves considered tyrannical. In a paper for the *American Philosophical Society* Roland Mushat Frye confessed that if a lifetime devoted to the study of Shakespeare had convinced him of anything, it was that “if the Bard has seriously considered a problem that is of interest to us (in this instance the mystery of tyrannical evil), we should avail ourselves of what he has had to say” (1998, 84). The “interest” in “our” case is, according to Frye, an explanation for how tyrants in 20<sup>th</sup>-century Germany and Russia were allowed to rise in the first place and, especially in the case of Stalin, to remain in power for so long. A possible answer, he offers, is to be found in *Macbeth*, a play which reveals how by playacting and deceit on the one hand, and the infliction or mere threat of genocidal terror on the other, a whole nation can be subjugated to the tyrant’s will. There are, of course, problems with this view. On the one hand, there is the awkward exchange between Malcolm and Macduff in the last scene of Act 4, where Malcolm pretends to reject the “king-becoming graces” of justice, verity, temperance, etc., only to admit that he has been lying in order to put the other’s loyalty to the test. As Andrew Hadfield argues (2004, 80-85), Macduff’s dumbfounded response (“Such welcome and unwelcome things at once/’Tis hard to reconcile”), coming as it does just before the Doctor’s report of the “sundry blessings [that] hang about” the English throne as a result of its occupier’s ability to cure his subjects of the “king’s evil”, scrofula, suggests a far more equivocal attitude to kingship in a play where neither absolute tyranny nor misguided benignity are presented as viable forms of government. On the other hand, though the play can in certain respects be said to espouse James I’s own views on tyranny as put forward in the *Basilikon Doron* and *The True Law of Free Monarchies*, where the kind of violent coercion engaged in by the superstitious, paranoid Macbeth would be the negative of the “legitimate” *state* violence which later removes him from office, Shakespeare might reasonably be argued to present a different case: following the Scotsman George Buchanan in *De jure regni* or *History of Scotland*, Macduff’s “legitimate” assassination of Macbeth alerts us to what Alan Sinfield calls “the fundamental instability of power relations during the [Jacobean] transition to Absolutism, and consequently to the uncertain validity of the claim of the State to the

legitimate use of violence”. From this perspective, Macbeth may indeed be regarded as a murderer and an oppressive prince, “but he is one version of the Absolutist ruler, not the polar opposite” (1984, 70).

But there is also, crucially for this volume, the question of *Macbeth*’s reception in post-Jacobean and mainly non-English cultures. If, as now seems clear, the play is a not an unambiguous reflection on contemporary notions of tyranny and their relation to James’s own conception of absolute rule, what might its significance be for subsequent tyrannies in other parts of the globe? Would it have the same impact? Could it be performed at all under such regimes? The case of Francoist Spain may prove illustrative here. In 1941 the newly “nationalized” Teatro Español in Madrid (Spain) staged a spectacular production of *Macbeth*. Directed by Cayetano Luca de Tena, the production took as its play text a specially commissioned rendering by Nicolás González Ruiz, a writer known and trusted for his sympathies towards the new pro-fascist regime headed by *generalísimo* Francisco Franco. Contemporary praise for the translation, which matched that for the performance, conveniently occluded the fact that certain passages of Shakespeare’s text had simply *not* been translated, while others had been re-written to strike a more congenial note with Franco’s ever-vigilant censorship boards. Amongst the more problematic passages was the new king Malcolm’s last speech to the assembled armies of Scotland and England. Most critics now assume the speech to be one of many Shakespearean nods in the direction of the new monarch James, whose accession to the English throne in 1603 is (not very subtly perhaps) being celebrated as an end to age-old divisions and as providing a splendid opportunity for Anglo-Scottish political and religious unity.<sup>3</sup> In the copy of the Cambridge edition the translator was using as his source-text,<sup>4</sup> certain lines of the Malcolm speech are, like other key passages in the play, the object of some pointed underlining:

What’s more to do,  
Which would be planted newly with the time,  
As calling home our exil’d Friends abroad,  
That fled the Snares of watchfull Tyranny,  
Producing forth the cruell Ministers  
Of this dead Butcher, and his Fiend-like Queene...

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<sup>3</sup> To the reading of *Macbeth* as very much “King James’s play”, to cite the subtitle of an essay by George Walton Williams (1982), considerable historicist muscle has been added in Kinney (1991) and, more recently, Alker & Nelson (2007).

<sup>4</sup> I am indebted to the Centro de Documentación Teatral in Madrid for allowing me to peruse this most valuable document.

Coming just two years after the end of a civil war which had caused some 500,000 deaths and an indeterminate number of injuries, forced migrations and exiles; which had introduced mechanisms of surveillance and restriction of freedom not seen since the days of the Inquisition, the references to “exil’d Friends”, “watchfull Tyranny”, “cruell Ministers” and “dead Butcher[s]” were, it was felt, safer removed. “Exil’d Friends” would seem innocuous enough, were it not for the fact that exile (as well as execution) was generally the fate of Franco’s enemies, and so the translator settled for the less offensive “*nuestros soldados fugativos*” (“our fleeing soldiers”), preferring the hint of cowardice to an evocation of mass expatriation. The self-censorship in this passage thus retains the “allegorical” sense of the Shakespeare original (Malcolm’s enthronement re-presenting the Jamesian/Francoist restoration of order and national unity), while defusing the threat of accidental or subliminal identifications between Franco’s Spain and Macbeth’s Scotland.

### **...and under Tyranny**

The majority of the essays in this volume grew out of papers presented at a symposium on the topic of Shakespeare and Tyranny held at the University of Murcia (Spain) in January 2012. What inspired the original symposium was the perception that work on the reception of Shakespeare under different types of tyrannical government (absolutist, dictatorial, etc.) seemed to be drawing remarkably similar conclusions as to the *nature* of that reception. Carefully regulated attitudes to, and practices in, Shakespeare criticism, performance, translation and adaptation, and of course the aesthetico-ideological structures of centralized, all-seeing state apparatuses, appeared to follow analogous patterns and to pursue similar, if frequently unattainable, ends. Amongst the aspects the organizers of the symposium asked participants to reflect upon were the institutional controls on the dissemination and publication of Shakespeare’s work; the assumptions and techniques applied to the staging of Shakespeare’s plays; state intervention in the elaboration of a Shakespeare “canon”; the role of Shakespeare in the construction of national identities under tyranny, and the various means by which the subversion/containment paradigm had or might be practically resolved in such conditions. Inevitably, other key issues, unforeseen by the organizers, also emerged, not least the fact that the heavily reader-oriented focus of these questions (Shakespeare *under* tyranny) tended to occlude the potential of the plays themselves to *anticipate* the problems confronting successive reading regimes and so to *necessitate* the kind of interpretative mechanisms alluded to above.

This, as Mário Vítor Bastos's opening essay argues, would seem especially to be the case of the later plays in which the *theme* of tyranny is quite obviously being foregrounded. Great Shakespearean characters are themselves dictators or deal directly with the problem of political tyranny. Though the world has changed substantially since Shakespeare's time, it is nonetheless true that many of his political insights remain alive and continue to make sense, not only in dramatic terms. It is thus easy to conclude that Shakespeare's handling of tyranny is not a thing of the past, and that his notions of "good government" are as essential and important to the impact of his plays today as they were in his own times. In Shakespeare we find examples of "good" and "bad" tyrants. But are there "good tyrants" today? Or does this concept make any sense? Is Kant's notion of the "enlightened aristocratic ruler", the bastion of freedom, close to Shakespeare's "good" kings? Shakespeare's life and works may seem light years from any modern notion of democracy, yet the Americanization of culture and the rise of modern media have helped to adapt the Bard's use of "tyranny" (amongst other issues) to our own "horizontal", democratic, if at times chaotic, times. Bastos's essay addresses various aspects of this complex question. Taking Shakespeare's late plays and the use they make of "tyrants" as points of departure, and with special reference to adaptations of his work (on stage, in film, dance, music and the plastic arts) in countries with political traditions as diverse as England, America, Japan and Russia, the essay ultimately aims to provide an answer to the question of Shakespeare's distance from, or proximity to, modern theories of democracy.

Two of the major developments in British cultural theory over the last twenty-five years have, as suggested above, been the advent of new historicism and of cultural materialism. Each approach focuses analytic attention on the historical, cultural and political contexts in which literary works were produced, especially during the Renaissance. These kinds of analysis have, as Hywel Dix argues in his contribution, directed attention towards different subject positions, notably those of race, gender, class, dissident sexuality and alternative nationalisms in Scotland and Wales, which placed the imagined unity of the British state in symbolic jeopardy. It is no coincidence that these approaches have coincided with the period since the publication of Tom Nairn's *The Break-up of Britain* in 1974, a period which has been characterized by the break-up of consensus in Britain's public cultural and political affairs. That contemporary environment inevitably impacts on the nature of work produced within the literary academy, so that questions of state, nationhood and citizenship have been retroactively applied to readings of canonical texts such as

Shakespeare's *Henry V*, *King Lear* and *Macbeth*. Less successfully analyzed in critical work of this kind is, Dix suggests, *Cymbeline*, a play in which Celtic difference poses a symbolic threat to the ideal unity of the British monarchic state. *Cymbeline* is composed in the form of a *tableau*, where the drama overcomes the threat posed by Celtic otherness to an idealized British whole and drives towards the final presentation, where the flags of Rome are displayed conspicuously alongside those of the nascent British Empire. In other words, the play cultivates a strong imaginative association between imperial Rome and the new British Empire at the historical moment of the latter's inception. It does this specifically by subsuming Welsh difference. To read alterity back into this display of power is to refuse the appeal to emotional loyalty and unity demanded by the play's conclusion and hence to open up the very questions of empire, state and citizenship that appear to be foreclosed by the play's conclusion. In this sense, Dix's analysis of *Cymbeline* could be said to add to current new historicist and cultural materialist scholarship by exploring how questions of burgeoning imperial ideology impact upon our understanding of how the nation state interpolates between the individual subject and society.

From early imperial England the collection moves to Bonapartian France where, as Keith Gregor shows, the adaptation of a selection of Shakespeare's plays by Jean-François Ducis gave rise to a series of texts considered to be amongst the landmarks of Shakespeare's acculturation to the tenets of European taste. Initially destined to be consumed by a bourgeois French theatre public seeking "classical" tragic confirmation of some of its own most cherished values, the adaptations soon spread to various continental locations, becoming for a time Europe's chief mode of access to the Shakespearean "originals" from which they sprang. The essay examines the reasons for that spread and especially the political circumstances in which Ducis's work was produced and consumed. In this respect, there is a noticeable shift in the overt ideology of the adaptations, the condemnation of tyranny and concern with political "legitimacy" intensifying in the period immediately after the French Revolution of 1789 and, even more so, with Napoleon's coronation as emperor in 1804. Gregor's essay charts the development of that ideology in Ducis's own multiple revisions of his adaptation of *Hamlet*. To the stage-worthiness of this admittedly minor piece can be added an explicit political agenda which evidently struck a chord with audiences in other countries that fell under the French sway—especially neighbouring Spain, where not only did the theatrical influence of France continue to be strong but the

continued threat of tyranny was, as the Bonaparte-aided Bourbon restoration was to prove, a very real one.

A similar context, in this case neo-absolutist Hungary, is the focus of Katalin Ágnes Bartha's contribution. In contrast to France, however, coercion and oppression led there to what she shows to have been an under-representation of classical drama in local theatre repertoires. The structure of Hungarian theatre would disintegrate and change substantially after the breakdown of the 1848-49 Revolution, while German acting gained territory once again. The so-called *Theaterordnung* (Decree on theatre) which came into force on 25 November 1850, was quite severe; accordingly, every theatrical performance or act was banned if it was construed as endangering public order or the monarchy itself, or if it was likely to cause a protest or set different nationalities, social classes or religions against each other. The plays which had already been put on stage in Vienna constituted an exception in this regard. Still, the Shakespeare canon survived the period. Drawing on the promptbooks, playbills, reviews and recollections of the *Merchant of Venice* productions in Budapest (1852) and Cluj-Napoca (1853), Bartha's essay reveals the contradictory nature of censorship practices, the cultural politics of the Hungarian theatre management, which favoured plays about the Hungarian nation and history but signally disregarded the disruptive potentials of Shakespeare's work

A similar ambivalence affects stagings in 20<sup>th</sup>-century fascist states in countries like Italy, Portugal and Spain. In the first case, there was what Michele de Benedictis reveals to have been an unprecedented popularity for theatrical productions and new translations of the previously disregarded Shakespearean play, *Julius Caesar*. The rhetorical reinterpretation of Rome's glorious past, once transposed—and revised—in media other than propagandistic historiography, seemed inevitably to empower even the Bard as instrumental co-partner for Mussolini's ideological appropriation of the Caesar myth. The essay discusses the ways these new readings of Shakespeare's Roman tragedy were not simply part of an extemporary dramatic agenda to be officially imposed by a totalitarian regime. Apart from contributing to an emphasis on the importance of national identity within an autarchic government, Mussolini himself appears to have found in Shakespeare's solemn lines a means of re-articulating his personal figure before the "theatre" of national (and international) politics. Mussolini declaredly acknowledged *Julius Caesar* as offering "a great school for rulers", an inspiring pre-textual pattern to rehearse or quote from, thus showing his mastery of the English language but, above all, providing an illustrious model of identification to legitimize



his despotic heroism for the “benefit” of Italy’s citizens. How far did Shakespeare’s theatrical portrayal of the Roman consul affect Mussolini’s perception of the real, historical Caesar? Conversely, how far did Mussolini’s interpretation swerve from the original Elizabethan character, manipulated here to cope with his contingent exigencies? Was Caesar’s gory demise envisioned as a necessary—as well as prophetic—sacrifice for the sake of order? It is, as De Benedictis argues, no coincidence that, on the other side of the Atlantic, Orson Welles’ 1937 production of the play, subtitled *The Death of a Dictator*, seemed figuratively to satisfy Mussolini’s militant enthusiasm for self-identification, albeit with a view to counteracting it and so to prefiguring the collapse of the dictatorship through intestine subversion, by associating a decadent and tyrannical Caesar with the titanic historical ego of the Italian Duce.

As in Mussolini’s Italy, staging a play about the rise and eventual destruction of a tyrant under a dictatorial regime might, as Fran Rayner suggests, seem something of a risky venture. Yet none of the three performances of *Macbeth* under the Portuguese dictatorship (1926-1974) appears to have incurred the wrath of the regime’s censors. Even the most radical of these, a somewhat shambolic version entitled *Macbeth, What’s Going on in Your Head?*, directed by the Argentinian exile Adolfo Gutkin for the Coimbra University Theatre Group (CITAC) only attracted the attention of the Secret Police (PIDE) when some of the students insulted pilgrims travelling to the religious shrine of Fátima on a train. Did, Rayner wonders, the regime simply misrecognize itself in the play or are other factors at work in explaining the apparent equanimity with which it regarded the play? Her essay explores how potentially inflammatory dramatic material intersected with notions of Shakespeare’s national and international cultural currency in these three performances. It also challenges what she shows to have been an absolute separation between the main national theatre, the D. Maria II, as a theatre of the regime, and the oppositional experimental theatres, by pointing to a degree of theatrical transit between them during this period. The actor João Guedes, for instance, played Macbeth in both the 1956 Teatro Experimental do Porto performances and the 1964 D. Maria performances. However, if this would seem to negate any radical charge in performances of the play, Rayner also illustrates how both theatrical contexts created an oppositional space where questions of the abuse of power and eventual regime change could be debated, and which led to an emphasis on the play as one of the most political of Shakespeare’s dramas in the post-revolutionary period.

The focus of Elena Bandín’s contribution is 1960s Francoist Spain, a period reputedly of political and cultural openness that came to an end at

the beginning of the seventies when, in view of the changes Spanish society was then experiencing, the old guard took charge of the government in an attempt to recover the values of the National Movement. In 1969 the Ministry of Information and Tourism, responsible for the Censorship Office, and which had previously been headed by the “moderate” Fraga Iribarne, was now in the hands of Alfredo Sánchez Bella, a veteran diplomat of ultra-right-wing Catholic leanings who was imposed personally by Franco. Bandín’s essay explores how this turn to repression becomes evident, by examining the censorship file of a new production of the Teatro Experimental Independiente (TEI) of Madrid directed by José Carlos Plaza: *Haz lo que te dé la gana* (Do What You Will), an adaptation of the rock-style musical comedy by Hal Hester and Danny Apolinar from the book adaptation by Donald Driver, loosely based on Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night*. Although tolerance towards Shakespeare’s plays was a norm of behaviour on the part of the censors, the script submitted to the censorship office on 16 April 1971 was thoroughly examined. The censorship report authorized the performance for an audience of 18 or over, with suppressions and conditional on a viewing of the dress rehearsal. Citing the textual marks present on the theatre script regarding the main taboo topics of the period—sexual morals, religion, politics and improper language—, Bandín shows how, as in the period immediately after the Civil War, the repressive force of official censorship was exerted in a misguided attempt to protect the morals of Spaniards.

At the other end of the ideological spectrum, socialist Hungary, Veronika Schandl turns her attention to different trends in contemporary reviewing, considering the question of what we can use as historical sources or data for possible performance reconstruction and how we can use it, or whether contemporary reviews only serve as an example when wishing to analyze the discourse, as well as the (self)censoring practices, of dictatorial regimes. Addressing and discussing Shakespeare productions from Stalinist, as well as from later Kádár-regime, Hungary, especially their changing representations throughout the past few decades, her essay offers certain strategies for discussing these reviews, as well as outlining further topics for debate. Besides investigating Shakespeare’s reception under socialism, the essay sheds valuable light on some lingering tendencies, still conspicuous in contemporary Hungarian theatre reviews.

Socialist Shakespeare is taken up again in Denis Poniž’s account of productions in communist and also post-communist Slovenia. Although, as Poniž contends, Shakespeare was in spirit and body very much a man of the Renaissance, the echoes of the Middle Ages could still be heard

throughout his creative life. Many sorts of cruelty and superstition, black magic and other kinds of repression had determined the collective medieval mind and its treatment of human life and integrity. A dark Middle Ages was in reality a period of abstract and practical collective tyranny against individuals, especially those who stepped outside the tolerated frames of the communal mind. Many of those ideas passed down to the more liberal Renaissance, and Shakespeare used them to theatrically describe the dichotomy between the open-minded thinking of his own era and contrary views, in which the state of tyranny was conceived not only in terms of political power but as a practical tool for the ruling ideologies. A great number of the tragedies and histories (but also the comedies) are full of supernatural phenomena (witches, ghosts, etc.), with one aim in mind: to show the insignificance of a single human life and how important it is to obey the dominant ideology. Resistance to the collective mind was always punished, and punishment was a constituent part of tyranny against rebels of all kinds. An identical social model was, Poniž suggests, adopted in communist-ruled states like Slovenia. The Renaissance model for the theatrical expression of tyranny is revealed to be behind a number of Shakespearean productions in Slovene theatres between 1945 and 1990, i.e. in the period of communist totalitarian rule. Certain of these productions use Shakespeare's expressions of tyranny to allude to the contemporary situation in a number of different ways: from highly covert theatrical metaphors to more open and provocative ones, showing that there is no great difference between the tyranny of the Renaissance and that of the period in question.

From the totalitarian period in Slovenia the volume moves forward slightly to the fall of communism in Poland and to a discussion of Andrzej Wajda's *Hamlet IV* (1989), addressing significant issues of censorship at the time. The production, argues Jacek Fabiszak, was staged at a most sensitive moment in Poland's history: June 1989, in the wake of the establishment of the first non-communist government after 1945, following the 4 June semi-democratic elections. Wajda worked on his fourth version of *Hamlet*, perhaps the most politically exploited play in the communist regime, aware of the significant political changes that were taking place in the first half of 1989, especially the so-called Round Table talks which eventually led to the elections. As one may suppose, censorship at that time was slacker than before; furthermore, it is generally assumed that of all the communist countries in Europe, Polish censorship could not be, and indeed was not, as strict as elsewhere, for a number of reasons the essay explores. The essay thus focuses on the image of censorship in 1989, as well as on the ways to get round it at a time when

power was allegedly slipping out of the hands of a regime which—at the same time— needed to secure a future for itself. The question whether the director compromised with the old system (having been one of the most celebrated Polish film artists since the 1950s) or boldly revealed the system's evil and wrongdoing, albeit in a veiled manner, is thus of the utmost importance.

The post-communist time-frame for Fabiszak's essay is expanded in Nicoleta Cinpoeș's, which takes as its starting-point the London National Theatre production of *Hamlet* directed by Nicholas Hyntner (2010) and its striking allusions to former Eastern bloc Romania: the communist hymn theme-tune, playing up the difficulties of leaving the country, the persecution of the actors for critiquing the regime. These productive references clash with what Cinpoeș presents as a dearth of stagings of *Hamlet* in post-Ceaușescu Romania, the few exceptions (Gabor Tompa's in 1997, Ioan Sapdaru's in 1998, Liviu Ciulei's in 2000, Vlad Mugur's in 2001, Radu Alexandru Nica's in 2008 and László Bocsárdi's in 2009) tending to stress either the play's global implications, its freedom from associations with the pre-1989 state of affairs, its repositioning in an earlier pre-communist era (Bismarckian Germany), a delocalized site under construction, a critique of the tyranny of the text or, most recently, an exercise in post-drama. Rather than as a victim of political conspiracy, what these post-1989 productions dramatize is Hamlet's status as a victim of societal indifference, as well as the tyranny of a text which continues to hinder any meaningful engagements with Romania's troubled past.

If continental Europe is the focus of all of these contributions, the last two essays in the volume provide a space for assessing Shakespeare's reception in other parts of the globe, in particular the still largely uncharted target cultures of North Africa and South America. Theatrical tradition in the Arab countries is, as Rafik Darragi explains, generally considered a foreign artefact, with no relation whatsoever to their past. By the end of the 19th century, the appearance of this type of Western art in the Arab world was a simple form of entertainment for an elitist fraction of the population, with very little reflection on/of the social and popular preoccupations of the period. With the First World War and the English mandate over Egypt, however, the Arab intelligentsia as a whole came to realize the powerful role of the theatre in the political awakening of the people. The best example of this political awakening is, Darragi contends, Ahmed Shawky's *Masra' Cleopatra* (The Death of Cleopatra). Appearing in 1927, at a crucial period in Egyptian history, this play carried numerous barbs against the British occupation of Egypt. In addition to this important work in Arab literature, Darragi examines some modern

adaptations of Shakespeare by outstanding Arab producers who, each in his own way, marked a determination not to follow the English Bard literally but rather to appropriate him for clear-cut, well-defined political or religious aims. Focusing particularly on two works, *Richard III* by the Tunisian Mohamed Kouka and *Richard III: an Arab Tragedy* by the English-Kuwaiti Soulayman Al-Bassam, Darragi shows how these two contemporary Arab theatrical figures have forged a new model of what to expect from a great Shakespearean classic on tyranny, one that includes high-profile interpretations and provocative speeches. Their respective works are remarkable, powerful signs that they are intent on speaking their minds on off-limits issues. They both show clearly that the stage may be viewed as an indirect critique of this period, from which valuable conclusions can be drawn. The Arab directors who dared to adapt Shakespeare, that iconic Western literary figure, are, he suggests, certainly endowed with a highly original sense of creativity and emancipation. Their respective works did not appear by chance; rather, they were the bubbling up of an open-minded, liberal undercurrent which is, in fact, increasingly evident in Arab societies, as witnessed in the recent democratic upsurge.

Though Shakespeare may be regarded as moderate or prudent in politics, his different afterlives are far from being neutral. The playwright has been used in favour of different kinds of tyrannical governments but has also become the vehicle for criticizing them. This, as Noemí Vera and Francisco Fuentes argue, is the case of *Severed Heads* (1970), a joint Spanish-Brazilian adaptation of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. Directed by Brazilian Glauber Rocha, the film portrays the downfall of a despotic ruler who, in Rocha's words, "might be the apocalyptic encounter of Perón and Franco amidst the ruins of Latin-American civilization". The essay studies the reception and role of Shakespeare in a tyrannical context through the eyes of Glauber Rocha, a witness to the censorial character of Brazil's military junta, who went into exile to Spain in 1970. It also aims to show how the filmmaker positioned himself against tyrannies, particularly the ruling mechanisms of dictatorship, appropriating Shakespeare to express his views concerning the political situation of both South America and Spain at the end of the 1960s. In this plea against dictatorships, Rocha resorts to metaphor and allegory, typical characteristics of the *Cinema Novo* movement, to which the director himself belonged. *Severed Heads* also echoes other Shakespearean plays such as *Richard III* or *King Lear* to reveal the possible consequences of tyrannical rule. The focus of Rocha's *Severed Heads* is the main character's fear that the people might want to avenge themselves on him, exploring his madness when he realizes that his power has deserted him.

It remains for me as editor to thank all of the contributors to this volume, as well as everyone who took part in the originary “Shakespeare and Tyranny” symposium in Murcia and made it such an interesting and productive event. Amongst the latter I would especially like to thank my fellow-organizers, Ángel Luis Pujante, Laura Campillo and Juan Francisco Cerdá. A special debt of gratitude must go to Cambridge Scholars Publishing for their patience in overseeing this volume. There is also, for my part, an obligatory indebtedness to the Spanish Ministry of the Economy for sponsoring the project which has allowed me and the rest of the “Shakespeare in Spain” team to meet the people who have, in different ways, helped bring this book to fruition.

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CHAPTER ONE

TYRANNY IN SHAKESPEARE'S ROMANCES  
WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE  
TO *CORIOLANUS* AND *TIMON OF ATHENS*

MÁRIO VÍTOR BASTOS

Revenge tragedy was a highly popular dramatic genre in London during the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods: all sorts of theatregoers of the time were fascinated with forms of depicting absolute power and tyranny in action, and also with the individual and collective “mechanisms” leading to this type of political government. Yet, as to the taste for repressive and violent themes, theatre and cinemagoers of today have not changed.<sup>1</sup> Even if we get more and more numb as to the pain of others as civilization moves forward (Sontag 2003), Coriolanus and Timon as characters are sufferers that deliberately ask from us a response, whether positive or negative, to their pains. Observing the pain of others is one of the oldest human pleasures linked to the origins of theatre, of tragedy and comedy, and that Shakespeare knew well how to codify. Pain in his writings is often the consequence of tyrannical psychological forces and passions, including political tyranny. In aristocratic ages, such as the Elizabethan and Jacobean, there were of course no perfect tyrants or good rulers, but the typical unbalanced mixture of both, incarnated in the figure of the monarch in power, a blending full of tragic possibilities. The word “politician” itself was, for Elizabethans and Jacobeans alike, a term sometimes rather offensive, often synonymous with “intriguer” and “false person”, and denoting, at its worst, directly the idea of “villain” and “tyrant”. The “politician” is a “crafty intriguer” as in *King Lear* (4.6.171), or a “scurvy” entity in 1 *Henry 4* (1.3.241) and in *The Tempest* (3.2.32).

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<sup>1</sup> To theatre and cinema one could also add digital games, internet content and even sports.

Unpopular and anti-popular social models and government practices and their agents gave birth to a highly popular dramatic and theatrical form that was to function, in certain historical periods and contexts, as an artistic counterpoint to the individual and social realities they mirrored and which inspired them. Revenge tragedy would not have been possible without long experience of public and private forms of despotism and the slow accompanying process of dramatic recreation and performance of myth, legend and historical narrative, offering a thoughtful and fictive illustration for events of both individual and social daily life. Shakespeare had only to take revenge tragedy to new levels of sophistication and universality, a task, however, which was far from being small and simple.

The relation between tyranny and theatre is old and complex. It may help in explaining, during Shakespeare's times, the deaths of fellow playwrights Christopher Marlowe and Thomas Kyd, amongst many other victims; and it may suggest later the sudden disappearance of the Bard from London and the uncanny fire which destroyed his theatre, the Globe (1613), when he was also working as a personal playwright for King James I in the last phase of his active life. It is also possible that tyranny has helped to nurture the mystery surrounding the man and the theories about Shakespeare as a pen name. Within this context, the making of an almost fictional character with a life, masks and different personalities may also have been influenced by the personal experience of despotic passions and political tyranny. Shakespeare's times were dominated by the Elizabethan and Jacobean aristocracy, that is, by the heirs of the families of former warlords, knights and feudal lords, the noble stock that emerged during the Dark Ages to rule over Europe after the fall of the Roman Empire. This large time-span and its legendary and mythical historical characters form the imaginary time-space where most Shakespearean drama evolves and allegorize the present as lived under Tudors and Stuarts. Another historical time much favoured by Shakespeare was Antiquity, in particular famous episodes taken from the history of Rome and Greece. Not far from the examples taken from ancient history, the Elizabethan and Jacobean political and military nobles became dependent on large sums of money (or commodities), much of it lent by merchants and bankers, so as to keep and expand their power. It was a time in many aspects still "old", "vertical" in its rigid hierarchic symbolism, albeit within a historical process of rapid social and cultural change, as may be noticed in such an unexpected play as *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (c.1601), a comedy that brings that major anti-tyrannical bourgeois character, Falstaff, back from the 15<sup>th</sup> century, though here in a somewhat cartoon version of himself.

In the late medieval-Renaissance political framework, abstracted and depicted by Shakespeare, the tyrant (the bad ruler) and the king (the good, just, and rightful ruler, the one "anointed by God") are logical antagonists, and the two compete for the leadership of the "body politic".<sup>2</sup> From Antiquity European political thought has stressed the traditional old idea that in government the king/ruler should have good and loyal counsellors, in order to avoid unruliness or tyranny.<sup>3</sup> The Renaissance brought the rediscovery of Plato's and Aristotle's political ideas, which inspired new political texts throughout Western Europe: Thomas More (later a victim of political tyranny) had already written his *Utopia* in 1516,<sup>4</sup> and Machiavelli's *The Prince* appeared in 1532. The stories in verse of the various editions of *The Mirror for Magistrates* synthesize old and new English political thought after 1559, by making justice and ethics the touchstones for the "true" or most appropriate political practice,<sup>5</sup> and providing Shakespeare or Marlowe with important historical models. With powerful and varied sources for political ideas and characters like these, the possibilities opened by Italian Renaissance drama and literature and the rediscovery of the classics, Shakespeare re-invented the politics of his time, as well as of former times, in order to "perfect" his own version of the stage as a "political mirror", where his contemporaries could view and reflect on their thinking and behaviour, and to pass it on to future generations. In Shakespeare's "world stage" are depicted some of the most atrocious acts, perpetrated by *dramatis personae* under the effects of different psychological forms of tyrannical thought and behaviour, generally associated with processes of power concentration, obsessive instincts and "blind, irrational ideas".<sup>6</sup>

In Shakespeare "tyranny" is always social (political, economic, cultural) and natural (biological and psychological), and the two usually go together. We find "emotional tyranny", the tyranny of the passions, in the

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<sup>2</sup> It is worth recalling that the word *tyrant* comes from the ancient Greek *Turanos*, which can be translated both in a positive and in a negative sense, as either the just monarch or the despot.

<sup>3</sup> Even in the small and remote kingdom of Portugal, King Edward (D. Duarte) (1391-1438) was aware of European political theory, as revealed by the items of his personal library and the small treatise he wrote on the matter, *O Leal Conselheiro*, "The Loyal Counsellor" (after 1422).

<sup>4</sup> *Utopia* was published for the first time in 1516 in Latin. The English version was only published in 1551.

<sup>5</sup> The number of works and authors was of course much vaster. For a brief catalogue of them see McGrail (2002, 1-17).

<sup>6</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche understood the "will for power" (*Der Wille zur Macht*) as a basic human feature, part of his animal apparatus.

personal sphere of his major characters. In his later Jacobean romances, such as *Pericles* (1608-10), the protagonist is victimized and persecuted by an incestuous sadistic tyrant; in *Coriolanus* family relations are mixed with the struggle for power between the protagonist and Volumnia, son and mother, or in *Cymbeline* (1608-10) between the protagonist and Imogen, father and daughter. In a more subtle way, this “emotional tyranny” also occurs between Prospero and Miranda, in *The Tempest* (1811) between father and daughter. King Lear would not have ended up both a tyrant and a victim of tyranny without his own irrational, obsessive, foolish and disastrous acts. A king, powerful as he is, may turn into a fool and irrational tyrant (King Lear) and be dethroned, tragically losing his power to other tyrants. He may even turn himself into an austere tyrant in the wake of a long, paranoid, destructive crisis of jealousy, such as Leontes in the romance *The Winter’s Tale*. Leontes, who had been a former model of justice, love and friendship, develops into a depressive under the irrational effect of an emotional trauma, and therefore into a bad ruler. Not to mention the puritanical tyranny of Angelo over Vienna in *Measure for Measure* (1604-5). This sort of intrigue, usually taking the form of a family romance, is part of a narrative tradition, marked by sharp antagonisms which reappear, for example, in *La Vida Es Sueño* (1636) by Pedro Calderón de la Barca, in the tyrannical relation between father and son, and in direct opposition to what happens in *Hamlet*.<sup>7</sup>

Tyranny as an apparently irrational phenomenon (natural, individual or social) is opposed to *rational authority* (individual or collective), a tension stressed by Shakespeare at the end of many of his plays. Typically, the Shakespearean tyrant is a powerful but selfish being who aims at absolute power, at more power than he has or could have, at the expense of the majority. The most famous example is Richard III, who draws upon his great intellectual gifts to reach absolute power, which he nonetheless attains by means of extreme violence, cruelty and sadism, while pretending to be the epitome of (Machiavellian) *virtù* to the nobles and the people. A case study for neuroscientists, Richard III is a clever character who knows how to use his “reptilian” nature to achieve elaborate ends. This feature fits with the fact that this natural born “politician” is also a direct heir to the medieval character of the devil, the scourge of God (*Flagellum Dei*) and a cartoon version of the Aristotelian “political animal”, as Coriolanus also is to a certain extent. Against these negative aspects the only defence rests in the hope that rational authority (in this

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<sup>7</sup> For the interesting hypothesis of Calderón having known the writings of Shakespeare see Ciriaco Morón (1991, 17). The hypothesis is raised but not explored.

case the longing for a new king) may turn into effective power, capable of erasing a tyrant who, like a gangster in a modern context, is a “professional” of evil, a personification of disruptive destructive forces.

Generally, in Shakespeare's plays the action and theme develop through the search for a solution to tyrannical and passionate conflicts that usually appear entangled. The idea and practice of tyranny accompany and trigger action and plot, and are responsible for all major Shakespearean dramas and characters, from Falstaff—the most famous parody of a tyrant and an example of “friendship”, “friendly love” and individual liberation, as opposed to the tyrant's basic and blind instinctive longing for power—to Hamlet, perhaps the most famous victim of passionate tyranny, both political and psychological, inflicted on a character. King Lear or Macbeth are major victims (or slaves) of tyranny as “passion”, which “survives” beyond Shakespeare's texts. And this is as true for the early ultra-violence of *Titus Andronicus* as it is for its presence in the coda-romance like *Henry VIII* (1613), with a tyrant oddly disguised and “embellished”, seemingly to “serve” the taste of a Stuart King, at least by not offending the memory of Elizabeth I in court. In fact, *Henry VIII* functions as a legitimizing glorification of the former Queen.<sup>8</sup>

The political Shakespearean hero is often divided in his choice (or deterministic attitude) between tyranny, slavery (political, economic, emotional, etc.) and proper government or social behaviour. Shakespeare also shows tyranny in action, including in his dramatic texts moments of meta-reflexion on the theme. Without his double-edged “tyranny”, Shakespeare's dramatic universe would not be possible, or at least it would be much poorer. That is why it is impossible to circumscribe tyranny (political or emotional-instinctive) in Shakespeare to a certain set of plays, as it permeates as a driving force all his dramatic works, whether they be tragic, comic, or tragicomic. Each play of Shakespeare's metamorphoses “tyranny” (in its broader sense, by what rhetoric calls *catachresis*) into living action. Yet, what he shows and tells in most of his political plays is far from being an apology or a defence of tyranny, sometimes anticipating modern ideas on current democratic practices.<sup>9</sup> He, too, on another “front”, that of theatre and drama, was an unconscious liberator from the “enslaving

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<sup>8</sup> This situation, which is rather unusual in Shakespeare, strengthens the traditional theory that John Fletcher, the most famous of Shakespeare's disciples, wrote half of *Henry VIII*.

<sup>9</sup> Since Jefferson, the educators and political theorists of the young and democratic republic of the United States never forgot to recommend and quote the Bible in English, together with the works of Shakespeare (Frost and Sikkenga 2003, 17; 383; 482; 507).

tyranny”, whether by catharsis or by cleverly overcoming the strict neo-classical Renaissance conventions. His creativity, invention and the freedom it emanates were advanced for the time, often disrupting convention and decorum and exposing him to the criticisms of one of his first great French interpreters, the neo-classicist Voltaire, ironically a reference-point for modern democratic and anti-tyrannical political thought, but who frequently took exception to Shakespeare’s dramatic style.

“Egalitarian horizontal” democracy, as we know it today, had not yet been born, and a “natural” hierarchy prevailed in Elizabethan-Jacobean society. Nevertheless, the society of Shakespeare was also beginning to go “out of joint”, become broken up, but not yet eased or deluded by ideas of new political egalitarian social utopias. Gonzalo, the good-hearted and benevolent counsellor of Prospero, exposes in *The Tempest* his famous social utopia based on a return to origins, induced by the beauty of the island where he is kept prisoner, while being ridiculed and subverted by a tyrant, Alonso, and a tyrant-candidate, his brother Sebastian (*The Tempest*, 2.1.135-164). Alonso and Sebastian have their feet in crude reality and are incapable of daydreaming or thinking about such a serious issue as the government of the “body politic”, as Gonzalo does, when he explains his famous view of a “happy ideal primitive society” (*The Tempest*, 2.1.143-162), that is a society without money, the utopian world where perhaps Timon would be happy. In fact, it seems to me that *The Tempest* would not be possible without the previous experiences of *Coriolanus* and *Timon of Athens*.

Where is the modern individual, the citizen, in this context? Does he “exist” in this fictional universe, and is he depicted mirror-like by a “noble, aristocratic and high class” crammed with heroes and villains? Even if Shakespeare was a poet and a playwright, an artist of his time and not a politician (he had to be naturally cautious in his political views or lack of them), we can discern in all of his work, in particular in the plays, the political practice and theory of his (and our) time, as well as a criticism of them. It is remarkable how the Shakespearean textual dynamics is capable of depicting and also adapting its structures to different historical and social contexts, without excluding our volatile, ever-changing, political and cultural present. The politics of Shakespeare included in his texts are, from their very inception, in a process of reinvention for every historical age.<sup>10</sup> Reading, listening to or seeing Shakespeare is a game

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<sup>10</sup> The system of the “Great Chain of Being” is important in clarifying aspects of the culture of the times, but Shakespeare’s literary and cultural universe is not final or closed, as suggested by that static medieval model and defended by much