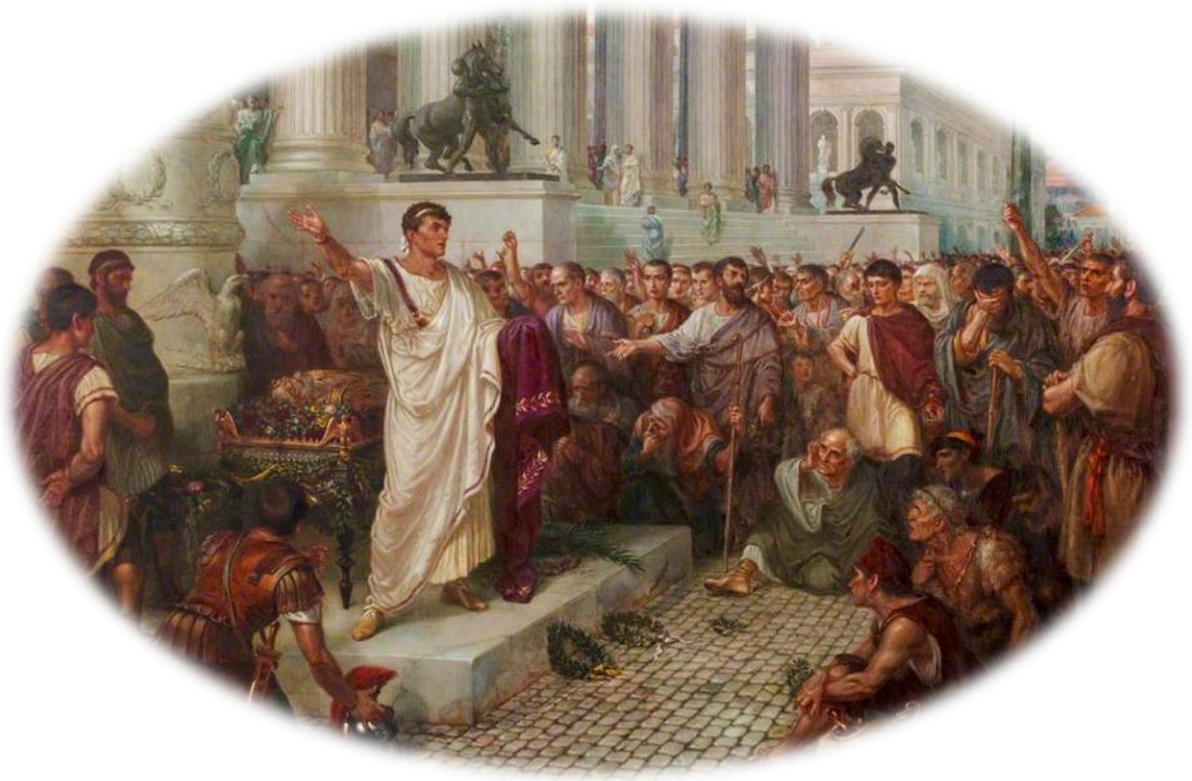


Liberty, freedom and enfranchisement: Shakespeare & Republican Thought

Erik Smulders
3700747
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MA Thesis, Medieval & Renaissance Studies
Utrecht University
Supervisors: Paul Franssen
Ton Hoenselaars
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1. Introduction

England, in the general conception, is not usually associated with anti-monarchical, even revolutionary thought. Indeed, the endurance of the monarchy to this day (as well as its enduring popularity among its citizens) has caused a tendency to view England as one of the more traditional among European countries. And yet, the English Revolution around 1642 (often called the English Civil War) was one of the first conflicts in European history that was fought between a king and parliament as well as one that resulted in the execution of Great Britain's legitimate monarch, King Charles I, and the brief establishment of Britain as a republic. During the Interregnum from 1649 to 1660, the country was a republic or 'Commonwealth' (in name if not always in practice) and was governed in various forms: first by the Council of State until 1653 and then by Oliver Cromwell (the pre-eminent general during the conflict on the parliamentary side), as Lord Protector from 1653 onwards. Clearly, the British experiment that transformed the country into a genuine republic with some form of democratic government following the English Revolution did not last long. However, it should be noted that the same was true of France following the French Revolution. The revolution that had been centered around democracy, republican values and 'Liberty, Equality and Fraternity' was quickly returned to a new form of tyranny under Napoleon Bonaparte and (much like England over a 100 years earlier) the downfall of his new regime simply led to a return of the old. Yet the relevance of the French Revolution and its ideals to European history are undisputed. I would argue that the English Revolution is similarly significant. However, the ideology driving such a radical, revolutionary force does not usually form in a vacuum: when building a new society, it can take many decades before a sufficiently developed framework has arisen and for that to be accepted to some degree by the population for there to be any support for such a massive change. To gain a better understanding, then, of how this anti-monarchical and republican sentiment arose in 17th-

century Britain, I would like to focus on how these ideas started manifesting themselves a few decades earlier in what may have been one of the principal breeding grounds for popular revolutionary thought that led to easy dissemination among the people: the English theatre, particularly that of William Shakespeare.

Placing such a prominent focus on the English theatre for the rise in revolutionary thought may seem inappropriate at first, but it is not such a controversial position to take either. Over the years, scholars have been split between two groups on this topic. Some believe the authorities in England saw the theatre as a potentially dangerous form of entertainment that could be too critical of those in power and could inspire resistance against them. Others maintain that the authorities were mostly unconcerned. According to Janet Clare, “[t]here is a tendency in studies of the politics of Renaissance drama either to dismiss censorship as lenient and posing no serious threat, or to view it as consistently repressive and menacing”, while it is actually more likely that “fluctuations in the intensity of censorship and in the issues deemed censorable occurred not only between but during the reign of the two monarchs [Elizabeth I and James I]” (Clare, p. viii). Examples of times when the English authorities appear to have viewed the theatre as a threat include several cases of when the theatres were closed down: one instance of this was when Queen Elizabeth I forbade any plays to be performed for the summer in 1597 following the authorities’ censorship of Thomas Nashe and Ben Jonson’s play, *The Isle of Dogs*, which was very likely to have been critical of her Privy Council. Another case was the censorship of Shakespeare’s own play *Richard II*, which was initially performed without the scene of King Richard’s deposition, a critical scene in a play that is indisputably about the inappropriate use of power by a tyrannical monarch. This is without even mentioning the fact that *Richard II* was performed on the eve of the Essex rising, a rebellion against Elizabeth I by Robert Devereux, the second Earl of Essex, in 1601. Although it is true that “there is no evidence that the performance of

Shakespeare's play was used as a spur to immediate action against Elizabeth or her advisors" (Lemon, p. 245), it is absolutely a play concerned with the abuse of royal power and the fact that it was performed on the eve of Essex's Rebellion is still an indication that supporters of Essex saw themselves as resisting a flawed government, just as Henry Bolingbroke resists King Richard's.

The other critics argue that the theatre was hardly seen as a threat and was permitted by the authorities because of its function as "a safety valve for excess emotion" (Hadfield, p. 5). I would argue that both sides of this debate complement each other, rather than contradict themselves. It is precisely because the theatre and its ability to criticise the establishment was a natural and necessary component of society that the authorities had an ambiguous relationship to it: they were aware that curtailing the theatre would not be a popular choice among the common people, but they felt obliged to whenever there was a risk that a play was being too critical of them. It is almost beyond dispute that the theatre was seen as a place where controversial ideas (even if they did not have their origins in the theatre) could potentially be spread among the people. In addition to the evidence above, Hadfield raises another fine point when he cites Barbara Freedman: "Barbara Freedman has argued [...] that apprentices would often meet in the theatre, energetic and aggressive young men, conscious of their relative poverty and economic exploitation" (Hadfield, p. 5). While they actually might not have necessarily come to the theatre to watch plays (activities such as bear-baiting also took place in the English theatre), the theatre had a clear function in early 17th-century England as a meeting place: even if they did not only come for the plays, many people could be exposed to alternative, potentially revolutionary ideas and, as Barbara Freedman points out, the theatres may have been filled with the kind of crowds that would be open to this message. It would be these viewers who would take those ideas home with them, consider them, put the subject matters of the plays they watched in perspective in regards to their own

lives and their own society and speak to others about them. It is not very surprising that this is how new ideas begin to spread and take shape in society and help form the long-term foundation of a revolutionary movement. Studying the role that anti-monarchical and republican ideas play in the theatre in early 17th-century England therefore seems a valid and important way to understand their rise in English society at the time.

There are several reasons why I would like to focus my analysis on republican thought in Shakespeare's works in particular. First, there seems to be a lack of focus on political thought in his plays in this manner, particularly when it comes to republican thought. Secondly (or to carry this first point further), rarely are the political aspects of Shakespeare's plays discussed in their proper context: to acknowledge what Shakespeare wrote is also to acknowledge that it was written within a certain time and place. Shakespeare wrote in a time in which English society was collectively pre-occupied with certain issues, struggles, topics and ideas that it might not have been interested in as strongly at other times. In other words, Shakespeare was not just a solitary genius, but a part of that society, as much as it was part of him: its dominant ideas (whether he agreed or disagreed with them) shaped his views and his works, just as Shakespeare influences society to this day. This is not to argue that every single one of his plays engaged in a certain (political) dialogue. However, a valuable way to analyse Shakespeare that is not used as often is to investigate how he participates in a discussion of ideas that were prevalent in the time and place in which he wrote. One of those discussions throughout all of Europe at this time absolutely centered around the way society should be governed. They concerned how a monarch could use power appropriately, when a tyrannical monarch could be resisted and what the most effective form of government for society should look like. In addition to earlier texts of the 16th century that still had a great effect on political thought such as Nicolò Machiavelli's *The Prince*, a few notable examples of texts engaging in this discussion are *Vindiciae, Contra Tyrannos* (by Stephanus Junius

Brutus), *De Jure Regni Apud Scotis* (George Buchanan), *The Trew Law of Free Monarchies* (King James VI of Scotland) and *The Commonwealth and Government of Venice* (Lewis Lewkenor). Another reason to study Shakespeare's works in particular, in addition to the fact that he is the pre-eminent author of late 16th- and early 17th-century Britain, is because Shakespeare also actively participates in this stratum of political thought: in my opinion, Shakespeare may not explicitly favour the anti-monarchical or republican side in this debate, but he does participate within this debate and carefully considers each perspective. He has also written a large number of plays that take part in this discourse. The history plays (particularly *Richard II*) may not be republican in nature, but they clearly participate in the discussion of ideas mentioned above. It is a play that attempts to address questions such as, what makes a good king and, when can a legitimate monarch be deposed? There are several Roman plays that are not only set in the time of the Roman Republic (rather than the Empire), but also openly discuss the idea of republican rule versus monarchy, ranging from the beginnings of the Roman Republic (*The Rape of Lucrece*), its continuation (*Coriolanus*) and its end (*Julius Caesar* and, to some degree, *Antony and Cleopatra*). Andrew Hadfield would go even further: "Shakespeare produced literary works of republican significance at key points in his career: the *Henry VI* plays (late 1580s, early 1590s); *The Rape of Lucrece* (1593); *Titus Andronicus* (1594); *Julius Caesar* (1599); *Hamlet* (1601); *Othello* (1602?); and *Measure for Measure* (1603) to name only the most obvious examples" (Hadfield, p. 1). In short, he has left a large number of works that engage in republican thought in some way and may be worth analysing further.

Before we go any further, however, it is important to define a republic exactly and what I mean by republicanism. In the modern conception, a republic is often used to refer to states without a monarchy, in which members of several political bodies of the government are elected democratically by the people of that state, in which every adult citizen has the

right to vote; it is important to mark that this is likely not how the idea of a republic would have been perceived in the past, even in Shakespeare's day. Given that full suffrage in states around the world has been an issue up until the 20th century at least, it is not so surprising that the idea of giving everyone the right to vote would have been utterly inconceivable in the 17th. More importantly, not only would not all adult citizens be allowed to vote, but not everyone would have been permitted to hold public office. The Roman Republic (which was still the most well-known model for a republic) was closer to an oligarchical structure, in which the people (divided into the plebeians, or common people, and the patricians, the aristocracy) could elect magistrates, who would then later serve in the Senate. Another important model was the Venetian republic, in which only members of certain noble families could be elected to the Great Council, but "[a]ll citizens had the right to vote in secret and elected a great assembly which [William Thomas, writer of the *Historie of Italie* (1549)] argued was the equivalent of the English parliament" (Hadfield, p. 40). Keeping this information in mind, we can define the republicanism of Shakespeare's day as a government that was not monarchical, in which some form of political body ruled instead of a sovereign, its members usually chosen from a limited set of people, but voted upon by adult, male citizens of the state.

This thesis aims to gain a better understanding of republican (and, to a lesser degree, anti-monarchical) thought in Shakespeare's works and will attempt to do so over the course of the following chapters: the first chapter will try to put Shakespeare's works into context by exploring republican texts and republican thought in general across England and Europe in the 16th and early 17th century; the second chapter will essentially converge on England and Shakespeare by discussing republican and anti-monarchical thought in his works in general; finally, the third and fourth chapters will focus on two specific plays themselves, namely *Coriolanus* and *Julius Caesar*. These two works were chosen because they, among the works

that Shakespeare has produced, perhaps most overtly take part in this republican discourse, dealing with the questions of how a society should be governed, the positive and negative aspects of a republican form of government, how far one should go to protect a society from tyranny and what ultimately makes a good ruler.

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2. Republican Thought in 16th- and 17th- Century Europe

This chapter will provide an overview of the wider context of republican thought in Europe and particularly in England around the time preceding and contemporary with that of Shakespeare. It does so by examining several important texts of this period and the topics and themes most relevant to this discussion, namely: the nature of power and governance in *The Prince* (Nicolò Machiavelli, 1532); freedom and republican thought in *Vindiciae, Contra Tyrannos* (Stephanus Junius Brutus/Philippe de Plessis Mornay, 1579) and the example set by Italian city states as discussed in *The Commonwealth and Government of Venice* (Lewis Lewkenor, 1599). As we shall see, while not the only texts in circulation (other relevant works on either side of the debate include George Buchanan's *De Jure Regni* and *The True Law of Free Monarchies* and *Basilikon Doron* by King James VI of Scotland, who would later become King James I of England), each of these texts was influential in shaping the way English society perceived the monarchy and the forms that government in Britain could take and could, in turn, possibly influence Shakespeare's writings as well.

2.1 The Development of Republicanism in Europe

Turning to these texts, it is important to discuss the general development of society and republican thought prior to this point. I would argue that the 14th and 15th centuries were important turning points in the history of Europe: the end of the 14th century marked the beginning of the end for the feudal societies that practically all European countries had become since the collapse of the Western-Roman Empire around 450 AD. Throughout the 16th and 17th centuries, these societies slowly continued to change and evolve and ideas of how to govern that society changed with them. It is a generally accepted truth among historians now that the Black Plague that devastated Europe around the middle of the 14th century had massive effects that would continue to spread ripples across the ages, most notably by causing a labour-shortage. As Samuel Cohn explains: “Most historians today argue that the plague did result in labour shortages across occupations and over the long duration from 1348 to at least the last decades of the fifteenth century, with a consequential rise in both nominal and real wages” (Cohn, p. 465). In addition, citing David Herlihy in his book *Medieval and Renaissance Pistoia*, Cohn states that “even in the inflationary years following the Black Death, wages ‘were increasing by a much larger multiplier, by three and one half or even four times’ (as opposed to two and one-half times of prices, p. 152)”. This necessitated Europe’s many feudal overlords to better compensate the peasants that worked their lands in order to head off rivals that promised those peasants the same. The result was an increase in wealth among the populations in Europe that facilitated the rise of a merchant-class, who could afford a finer education for their children, an education that included the study of Classical history, such as that of the Roman Republic and Athenian democracy. The rise in knowledge of these ideas alone is a very important one to keep in mind while reading works from this era. Thomas Hobbes was an early thinker who believed that knowledge of Classical history directly contributed to the English Civil War:

And as to Rebellion in particular against Monarchy; one of the most frequent causes of it, is the Reading of the Books of Policy, and Histories of the ancient Greeks, and Romans; from which, young men [...] receive withall a pleasing Idea, [...] and imagine that great prosperity, not to have proceeded from the aemulation of particular men, but from the vertue of their popular forme of government: Not considering the frequent Seditions, and civill warres, produced by the imperfection of their Policy. (Hobbes, p. 369)

In other words, Hobbes believed that people (particularly young men) were easily attracted to the idea of rebellion in the name of republican values, while being incapable of perceiving the flaws that were still present in this alternative system of government. He also acknowledged that these ideals were often inspired by the positive examples that young men learned from the history of the Greeks and the Romans.

Other factors to consider when it comes to the increasing popularity of republican ideas around this time were changes in European society that initially seem to have little to do with republicanism: namely, the increasing centralisation of the state under a monarch. There are several theories as to why this began to occur, particularly from around the 15th century onwards: one of them is that a gradual, informal alliance developed between the monarch of a nation and the people against the lesser nobility, as both benefited from curbing the nobles' power; another is that, in the wake of the Black Plague, the rising influence of peasants weakened the nobility in general and the monarchy stepped in to fill this vacuum of power or even that the nobility was forced to turn towards the monarch of their nation and a centralised state to maintain power. Or, as Richard Lachmann puts it: "peasant challenges to feudal exploitation forced the nobility to reorganize their coercive power within organs of a centralized state" (Lachmann, p. 142). But whatever the case, this development towards

absolutism is significant by itself: it is a fact that the influence of the nobility in Europe decreased over the centuries and if one lord's rule over the common man was beginning to weaken, or was ended entirely, the people might begin to wonder why the same could not be done to the monarchy itself. As kings and queens began to increasingly assert that their right to rule was divine, the people instead considered why it would not be possible to restrain their power by law or depose them entirely. What better country for these ideas to take root in than the land that had long ago instituted the Magna Carta to try and curb the excesses of royal power? In other words, an increasing number of people (particularly of a rising merchant-class) having been influenced by Classical ideas, the people helped bring about the end of one class' rule over another, thereby precipitating the end of the power of the monarchy entirely. It is also a distinct possibility that the English nobles themselves would have been open to the idea of a republican government as opposed to a monarchical system, particularly if it meant removing a sovereign that was opposed to their interests or whose rule was perceived to be particularly harmful to the country (as would later happen with Charles I), as long as it was only the nobility that was eligible to be part of this government (a system like this existed in the influential city-state of Venice at the time, as will be described later).

Finally, another aspect of the changing society in Late-Medieval Europe that should be taken into account is the influence of the Reformation: since the days of Martin Luther, Christians all over Europe were beginning to resist the traditional authority of the Catholic Church; it is likely that this also made people more open to the idea of breaking free from the royal authority that was often in league with the Catholic Church or even breaking free from the monarchy altogether (as actually occurred in the Low Countries). Taking all these factors into consideration, the fact that there was a rise in republican and anti-monarchical ideas in England in the 16th and 17th centuries is not only understandable, but also logical and even inevitable. As such, a rise in the political discussion of these ideas through certain texts is

equally unsurprising. Some of the most important of these will be discussed in more detail below.

2.2 Influential Political Tracts in Europe and Britain

The first text to be examined is *The Prince*: it may seem somewhat contradictory to place our focus primarily on republicanism in England and start with an Italian text, but considering its importance to political theory across Europe, I believe it is worth doing so. *The Prince*, finished in 1532, written by Nicolò Machiavelli and dedicated to Lorenzo de' Medici, also does not seem to be very relevant to republican thought at first glance. It is, after all, a work that has become associated with what could be considered to be the antithesis of republican thought: whereas the republican ideal is a government that is chosen by the people (although those among the people who should be given the right to vote varied considerably over the ages), to rule the people responsibly, *The Prince* is a work that details the way any ruler could best acquire power and keep it, regardless of the morally questionable acts that may be involved in that pursuit. Even the word "Machiavellian" has become associated with the cunning involved in maintaining power. Nonetheless, the work was a very important one in influencing political discourse and ideas in this era and for centuries to come. More importantly, there are indeed links to republican ideals and the text therefore deserves some scrutiny. The most obvious of these is the fact that Machiavelli himself served in a republican government, the free Republic of Florence: "After serving four years in one of the public offices [Machiavelli] was appointed Chancellor and Secretary to the Second Chancery, the Ten of Liberty and Peace" and "took a leading part in the affairs of the Republic" (Bickers). A more crucial connection is not found in *The Prince* itself (where even the word 'republic' is only found 21 times), but in another of Machiavelli's writings, *The Discourses on the First Ten Books of Titus Livius*. Here "Machiavelli defends the ideals of republican government by arguing on historical grounds that the most stable, solid and humane states have been founded on social equality, political liberty, rule of law, popular elections, and mixed constitutions embodying a system of checks and balances" (Langton, p. 1277). In light of this, it is worth

briefly examining how it is then possible for Machiavelli to be in favour of republicanism while simultaneously encouraging sometimes ruthless actions out of political expediency to allow princes to gain or maintain power at all costs. Several theories have been proposed for this seeming contradiction. One long-standing theory casts doubt on the intent Machiavelli had for writing *The Prince* and whether it could have been meant as political satire. A second possibility is that he simply intended to write something that would please the person he dedicated the work to (Lorenzo de Medici) in an attempt to gain the favour of the Medici. Others, like scholars such as Mary Dietz, have put forward another theory: John Langton recounts that “she advances the contention that *The Prince* is actually a ‘political act’, ‘an act of deception’, a ‘piece of duplicitous advice,’ designed to restore a republic in Florence by tricking a ‘gullible and vainglorious prince’, Lorenzo de Medici, into implementing policies that would ‘jeopardize his power and bring his demise’” (p. 781) (Langton, p. 1277). I would agree with Langton’s analysis that this is probably not the case, but neither do I fully accept his own argument that “the national unification, security, and glory were among Machiavelli’s most cherished values” (Langton, p. 1282) and that Machiavelli’s concern for the unification of Italy was stronger than his love of the republic. I would propose a different theory: namely that Machiavelli, while he does have a personal preference for a republican form of government (as stated in *The Discourses*), is more concerned with capable rule regardless of the form of government. Having been witness to both the rise and fall of differing forms of government and knowing that either system would likely continue to exist for the foreseeable future, Machiavelli would understand the importance of strong, successful rule to prevent unnecessary chaos. This would also explain the reason behind Machiavelli’s call for a capable prince to rise up, unify and renew Italy at the end of Chapter XXVI while still maintaining a preference for republican rule when possible. It is also possible that the divide between republican and democratic values and authoritarian, monarchical systems was

not as pronounced at this time compared to today: there may have been more emphasis on the capability of the ruler(s) than the methods and manners by which they ruled. Nonetheless, by placing this emphasis on the capability of rulers rather than legitimacy and divine right, Machiavelli already helps to demystify kingship and shifts the political discussion towards a more secular and republican view on rulership. Finally, while this chapter is not the place to put too much emphasis on Shakespeare just yet (it is primarily meant to analyse some of the texts that helped fuel the rise in republican thought), the link between Shakespeare and Machiavelli's work is unquestionably a strong one: the ruthless expediency necessary to hold on to power is a consistently recurring element in Shakespeare's work. In fact, Machiavellianism is so prominent not only in Shakespeare's plays, but in the works of other playwrights of the time that Hugh Grady argues that "Machiavellian ideas were a prime ingredient in the Elizabethan theater, particularly for Marlowe and Shakespeare" (Grady, p. 120). It is therefore important not to underestimate the influence of a text like *The Prince* when discussing plays written in this time period.

The next text to be discussed is one that is not as (in)famous as *The Prince* by Nicolò Machiavelli and likely not as influential either, but it is particularly relevant when discussing the rise of republican thought in Europe. This is the work called *Vindiciae, Contra Tyrannos*, a text that is essentially a republican treatise which investigates whether the people have the right to resist and even assassinate a king, should that king's rule be harmful to the people, against their will and the will of God. Although the year it was published and where are quite certain, its authorship is not: it was published in Basel in 1579, but the author only identifies himself as 'Stephanus Junius Brutus, the Celt'. What is certain is that it is a Huguenot text, having been written in the wake of the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre in 1572 and some likely candidates for its authorship that have been identified are Hubert Languet and Philippe du Plessis Mornay. If true, this would give the text an even stronger English connection: not

only is it certain that the text was circulating in England (a translation of the final part was published in London in 1588), but Hubert Languet was also “Sir Philip Sidney’s correspondent and mentor” (Hadfield, p. 33). But what kind of text is *Vindiciae, Contra Tyrannos* exactly? Its full title is *Vindiciae, Contra Tyrannos, or, concerning the legitimate power of a prince over the people, and of the people over a prince* and the Latin translates roughly to “A Defence of Liberty against Tyrants”. In short, its contents can be summarised by the four questions that the author poses and explores across four chapters: (1) Are subjects bound to obey princes, if they command that which is against the law of God, (2) is it lawful to resist a prince if they infringe on the law of God or the Church, (3) whether it is lawful to resist a prince that ruins their state and to what extent this can be done and (4) are neighbouring princes obligated to overthrow a prince that oppresses the people. The author concludes that the people are indeed allowed to resist and, if necessary, kill their king, or are perhaps even obligated to do so, but what is particularly of interest is the manner in which this is argued. The study of republicanism has a tendency to connect it exclusively to Classical thought and the example set by ancient Greece and Rome; in the *Vindiciae*, however, it is actually a great many Biblical examples that are used to bolster the case for republicanism. A particularly insightful study by Anne McLaren of the *Vindiciae* has revealed that “[s]criptural citations outweigh all other kinds *combined* in a ratio of roughly 5 to 1” (McLaren, p. 32) [emphasis her own]. An example of this is when the author uses the example of ancient Israel to argue in favour of an elective monarchy. What we can see in a text like the *Vindiciae*, is that Christian radical thought (such as Puritanism) and republican sentiments that would later lead to the overthrow of King Charles I and the rule of the Council of State and Lord Protector Oliver Cromwell are not contradictory, but in fact complementary. Anne McLaren effectively summarises the *Vindiciae*’s importance here: “Reading the *Vindiciae* in context reveals it as a work whose radicalism lies, not in its

engagement with the Roman law tradition, but in its express conviction that each and every individual is responsible for maintaining a covenanted relation with God” (McLaren, p. 23). This implies that they are all therefore obligated to rise up against tyrants, especially if those tyrants are acting contrary to the will of God, or to put it differently: “[A]ll citizens are free because they are subject only to God, and they are equal in that subjection” (McLaren, p. 51). This explains a great deal about the form of republicanism that was rising in the 16th and 17th centuries and serves to connect many republican authors around this time, from George Buchanan to John Milton, in a single, quite consistent ideology.

The final text that I would like to briefly focus on is *The Commonwealth and Government of Venice*. This text, written by Lewis Lewkenor and published in 1599, was actually a translation of Gaspar Contarini’s *De Magistratibus et Republica Venetorum* from 1543, serving almost as a kind of field-guide to the city of Venice. The importance of the free city-state of Venice in Shakespeare’s works will be discussed at greater length in the next chapter, but suffice it to say, English playwrights such as Shakespeare and Ben Jonson had a certain fascination with some of the major Italian city-states such as Venice, and this may have reflected a certain interest in these places by English society as a whole. Places like Venice are depicted as both more free and democratic than a society such as that of England, but in some ways, more dangerous and corrupt as well. Lewkenor and Contarini’s texts place a great deal of focus, however, on the manner in which Venice is ruled and suggest that it may have the most ideal (a more republican form of) government. As Hadfield recounts, because, in Contarini’s eyes, “Venice is the perfect ‘mixed’ constitution, having the correct balance of monarchy, aristocracy and popular assembly” (Hadfield, pp. 41-42), it helps the citizens to become more virtuous, “an ‘artificial angel’, that enables them to make the best of themselves and preserve the stability that the Roman republic almost managed” (Hadfield, p. 41). This text’s existence alone is not definitive proof of a yearning of the English people for

a governmental system different from the monarchy they were accustomed to, but its popularity may be: there is evidence that Sir Philip Sidney read it, “Edmund Spenser wrote one of the dedicatory sonnets to Lewkenor’s translation” (Hadfield, p. 43) and there is even evidence that Jonson and Shakespeare used the text as a guide when writing some of their plays where the plot (partially) takes place in Venice. This may still be an indication of a growing interest in Venice and in a more republican system of rule.

What we can conclude from the general evolution of the political system in Europe and England from the 14th to the 17th centuries is that, through various factors, the power of the traditional nobility was being undermined and changes in society paved the way for a wealthier, better educated citizenry, whose study of Classical history and other works sparked an interest in a republican system of government, putting them at odds with the increasingly centralised power of the monarch and the state. These citizens’ ideas were both influenced by the traditions of Roman law and Classical republicanism as well as Biblical examples that possibly justified resisting an unjust ruler. Some examples of influential texts in the debate between republican and monarchical ideas, include Machiavelli’s *The Prince*, *Vindiciae, Contra Tyrannos* and *The Commonwealth and Government of Venice*.

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3. Republican Ideas in Shakespeare's Works

This thesis so far has demonstrated numerous aspects about republicanism and anti-monarchical thought in England and Europe. Of these, there are two important points in particular that should be kept in mind as we now begin to turn towards an analysis of Shakespeare's works. The first of these points is that there were a number of social, economic and political factors across England and the continent that precipitated a wider movement towards the idea of establishing a republic, republican values or, at the very least, restraining the powers of a monarch or even removing a monarch from power entirely, especially those that were deemed tyrants. Far from this emerging republican ideology being inconsistent with Christian thought and solely rooted in the more secular, Classical republicanism of Rome and Greece, it co-existed with a radical Christian Protestant ideology that argued that turning against royalty was justified should rulers act inconsistently with God's will. Secondly, the popularity of texts discussing these ideas in England is an indicator that these were issues that resonated with the people, who may have found plays whose themes revolved around them interesting. As a consequence, it is not at all strange to examine Shakespeare's plays and to try and see if any of them fit in this republican tradition. As stated before, the most prominent of his works as far as the discussion of republican ideas is concerned appear to be *Coriolanus* and *Julius Caesar*; these two plays will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapters. This chapter, however, will take a brief look at some of Shakespeare's other works. It will do so in a chronological order. The texts to be further analysed where these issues arise most prominently are: the *Henry VI* trilogy (1590-92), *Titus Andronicus* (1592) and *The Rape of Lucrece* (1593-94). As Hadfield recounts: "*Titus* is not simply a play about the decline of the Roman republic, but deals explicitly with the political issues and choices raised by the history of Rome", while "[2 *Henry VI*] is a play inspired by Lucan's *Pharsalia*, showing the terrible effects of the civil war of powerful factions on the innocent populace, with the

implication that a better way of governing must surely be possible” and “*The Rape of Lucrece* is the story of the foundation of the Roman republic” (Hadfield, p. 100).

3.1 Artificial Angel – Shakespeare and the Venetian Republic

Before focusing on these works in full, however, I will attempt further to elucidate the connection between Shakespeare and Venice. As explained earlier, there definitely appears to have been a strong interest in the Italian city-states and Venice in particular among the English people around Shakespeare's time, certainly in Shakespeare's literary circle. Given that Venice, as a republic with a rather complicated system of government and checks and balances, was venerated as an example of liberty and tolerance and as having the most ideal form of government, perhaps it is worth briefly examining this republican system and how Venice is portrayed by Shakespeare. Venice had existed as a republic for many hundreds of years, although it was not truly a republic until approximately the year 1172 AD. It was in this year that many important reforms were carried out. Around this time, the Great Council of Venice (Maggior Consiglio) was established as a sovereign assembly from which all power was derived: "[t]he functions of this new Assembly were to appoint all officers of State and to prepare business to be submitted to the General Assembly. This is virtually the germ of the Maggior Consiglio (the Great Council)" (Ward, pp. 271-272). Furthermore, "[a]ll citizens had the right to vote in secret" (Hadfield, p. 40), although the eligible candidates were restricted to the nobility. Also, from this year onward, the Doge (the traditional ruler of Venice), while still usually ruling for life, was elected by vote among the members of the Great Council in a very intricate and laborious process, and his powers were restricted by six Signori, who were meant to advise him; three of these Signori held greater power than the Doge and could therefore keep his power in check: "[W]ith a view to restricting the Doge's authority, four Councillors were added to the two already existing. Their duty was to check any personal aggrandisement on the part of the Doge" (Ward, p. 272). These six Signori were also elected by the Great Council.

While none of Shakespeare's plays delve into the politics of Venice to such a degree, we do know that "Shakespeare used Lewkenor's translation of Contarini [*The Commonwealth and Government of Venice*] extensively when he wrote *Othello*" (Hadfield, p. 214) and that he would have learned a great deal about the city and its republican form of government from this. There is additional evidence in *Othello* that Shakespeare had done his research before writing the play: "Other common terms in the text show the author's general familiarity with Venetian polity and society. *Othello* refers to the Venetian government by its correct name, 'the Signiory' (1.2.18); and Brabantio is called a 'magnifico' (1.2.12), originally a term for a Venetian aristocrat" (McPherson, p.70). We also know that the central idea behind the city-state (the idea of a republic with elected representatives and rulers) had a strong appeal to the people of Britain: it was seen as an "artificial angel" (Hadfield, p. 214) that encouraged virtue in its citizens, because of its very nature. It was not that the people of Venice were necessarily more virtuous than anyone else, but that the more egalitarian society that a republic created (with power over the city-state divided over a great many people and all adult male citizens given the right to vote for their representatives) gave a certain level of responsibility to all citizens. Unlike the strict hierarchy that resulted from the feudal system that still persisted in most of Europe, where the ruling classes still decided the direction that the nation would take for good or ill, it was believed that a republican system such as that of Venice gave a duty to its citizens to make the best choices for their city-state, thereby encouraging virtue: because none of the offices you could be elected to was tenable for life, "[a]s a result, public service, the preservation of individual and collective liberty, and the promotion of virtue were always political values that all Venetians believed in and were able to enjoy" (Hadfield, pp. 40-41). However, Graham Hammill also raises a good point when he reminds us of the darker side of Venetian society that Shakespeare appears to paint in his plays: "Shakespeare [...] imagined Venice to be a political order in which the rule of law

shelters and unleashes perverse enjoyment, cruel pleasures, and aggressive drives” (Hammill, p. 234). In light of this, it is necessary to ask ourselves how it is possible to reconcile this aspect of virtue in the city of Venice as well as its complete opposite. The answer lies in the greater freedom that a republic like Venice provides: while virtue is promoted, there is also more room for those who would abuse their freedom. Taking all this into consideration, particularly the association of republicanism with virtue, there is an element of republicanism that definitely appears to have been incorporated into a play like *Othello*. Here, the entire story is built around the setting of a more tolerant and meritocratic society that a republic is more likely to provide than a monarchy: it is unlikely that a Moor like Othello would have been able to rise as high as he does in almost any other European country at the time. Nor would he have been able to marry a (white) nobleman’s daughter. It is these factors, along with Iago’s antipathy towards Othello, that put the entire plot of the play into motion. Moreover, it is a story that is centered around the critical issue of virtue: it is Othello’s virtue that allows him to come as far as he does and it is Iago’s abuse of virtue that helps him undermine his opponents. Not only that, but of particular significance is the fact that this makes Othello and Iago opposite types of citizens in this republic, one being the ideal, the other the antithesis: Othello is promoted on the basis of his virtue and skill and what he contributes to society; Iago abuses his freedom, takes advantage of others to suit his own needs and to settle personal, petty grievances. A particularly astute find by Andrew Hadfield is when he comments on Roderigo’s reaction to his and Iago’s failure to separate Othello and Desdemona and how Iago responds:

RODERIGO: What should I do? I confess it is my shame to be so fond, but it is not in my virtue to amend it.

IAGO: Virtue? A fig! 'Tis in ourselves that we are thus or thus. Our bodies are gardens, to the which our wills are gardeners; so that if we will plant nettles or sow lettuce, set hyssop and weed up thyme, supply with one gender of herbs or distract it with many, either to have it sterile with idleness or manured with industry, why, the power and corrigible authority of this lies in our wills.

(*Othello*, 1.3.317-327)

Consequently, Hadfield notes that:

Iago's logic and perception of nature can be seen to invert the language of republicanism as reproduced in Contarini's text. There, nature and the good society are in harmony, whereas Iago sets the one against the other. For Contarini, virtue is the highest ideal of nature: for Iago, it is a delusive ideology imposed on citizens to make them conform. For Contarini, the state is the object of comparison, the good state being a natural form; for Iago, the self is the individual's own garden to cultivate as he or she wishes. (Hadfield, p. 218)

What this ultimately means is that *Othello* is not simply a story of a man tricking another man into killing his wife: it is also a story of the ideal of republicanism, a system believed to be better suited to promoting virtue among all its citizens, and how it can be undermined. By this logic, *Othello* (while not the most important play of Shakespeare's oeuvre when it comes to republicanism) is absolutely part of a larger republican discourse, not just because of its connection to the city of Venice. This is in contrast to *The Merchant of Venice* where these central republican issues do not appear to play any significant role.

3.2 Civil War – *The Republic, the Henriad and Titus Andronicus*

Putting the connection to Venice and republicanism aside, I shall now further analyse how these issues have emerged in some of Shakespeare's other plays over the course of his career. Going through them chronologically is relevant to try and discover not only if there is any indication that he may have altered his positions on republicanism at all over the years, but also to put the plays into context with his career. A series of these plays that therefore should be considered next is the *Henry VI* tetralogy, comprising the three separate plays of *Henry VI* as well as *Richard III*. Unlike *Othello*, which was written around the middle point of Shakespeare's career (around 1603-1604), the *Henry VI* trilogy contains some of his earliest works, appearing from 1590 to 1592; *Richard III* was first performed around 1593. It is somewhat significant that such politically charged works start appearing so early in his career, beginning after only *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* and *The Taming of the Shrew*. There is some debate whether, of Shakespeare's History Plays, the Henriad (as the series is often called) should be considered a single, overarching narrative that spans the entire story of the fall of the Plantagenets, the Wars of the Roses and the rise of the Tudor dynasty to the throne of England (the Tudor myth) or whether the plays should be seen as two separate tetralogies (one consisting of *1 Henry VI*, *2* and *3* and *Richard III*, the other of *Richard II*, *1* and *2 Henry IV*, and *Henry V*). Nonetheless, there seems to be little doubt that the Henriad consists of these two series of four plays, with the end of each series echoing the other, as Sherman Hawkins argues:

[I]nstead of a single series of eight plays stretching chronologically from *Richard II* to *Richard III*, we have two blocks of four plays, each dealing with a continuous but disjunct historic period and culminating in the contrasted portraits of Richard III and Henry V.

The ending of each drama in these series looks forward to the beginning of the next; only

the last play in each tetralogy concludes with a finality marked by the union of former foes, a prayer for peace, and an echoing “Amen.” (Hawkins, p. 17)

Keeping this in mind, what are some of the most important aspects of the *Henry VI*-plays and *Richard III* that tie them all to each other, how do they connect to the other tetralogy in turn and how are they related to republicanism? Fundamentally, the central focus of the story of Henry VI appears to be the question of who has the right to rule and what the consequences can be when this question begins to consume the whole country: the contentious issue is that Richard, Duke of York, argues that he has the rightful claim to the throne (being the closest legal heir to the overthrown King Richard II), gathers support and has increasing success in his ambition and, eventually, Henry VI even admits that Richard has the stronger claim and makes him his legal heir in place of his own son. The failure of Henry VI to stand up properly to Richard eventually causes a complete collapse of government and order in English society that spirals into a civil war. Both royal families lose members, father slays son and people like Jack Cade rise up to cause further confusion.

In all this, a connection can be drawn to another orderly society in which those who rule lose sight of what it is that their power is meant to serve, resulting in conflict that, in turn, leads to tyranny: Republican Rome. There are numerous parallels that can be drawn between the fall of Rome and the England of the War of the Roses, as well as possibly the future of England in Shakespeare’s time should Queen Elizabeth die without having selected a clear heir. This matter of the succession was an issue that, according to Rebeca Lemon, “[b]y the 1590’s had become, despite Elizabeth’s efforts to the contrary, *the* dominant political topic” (Lemon, p. 246). Here, too, the issue is, who has the right to rule, and English audiences would know how this had been resolved in the past. As Hadfield puts it: “Caesar triumphs through merit, what the republic was supposed to value and promote, but ends the

republic in doing so, hurtling Rome into a brave new political world” (Hadfield, p. 108) and “Caesar becomes dictator because his abilities enable him to triumph over his enemies. York’s success is built on the same principles” (Hadfield, p. 124). In addition, just like in the Roman Republic, even the destruction of those who initially upset the balance of power (Julius Caesar and York, respectively) is not enough to bring order, stability and peace back to society, but results in even more chaos where only tyrants flourish. This is where Shakespeare’s depiction of Richard III appears on the stage: a man that becomes king, not by any nobility of character, popular support or rightful claim, but by viciously dispatching all his enemies (worst of all, his own nephews, the Princes in the Tower). He is depicted as a tyrant in a similar mold as the Roman emperors that initially followed Augustus, namely Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius and Nero. Viewed in this light, regardless of whether the *Henriad* should be seen as two tetralogies or one continuous whole, the initially happy ending of *Henry V* (the marriage sealing the peace between England and France) becomes an ironic scene, meant to contrast the success of England and the wholesome national order under Henry V with the terribly chaotic future of the Wars of the Roses that would plague Henry’s son as well as those who would take his throne. This is something that every Englishman in the audience would be aware of, especially those who had seen Shakespeare’s earlier plays. This connection between the history plays and the Roman Republic is further underlined by the comparison between Julius Caesar and Henry V in the eponymous play:

Like to the senators of th’antique Rome
 With the plebeians swarming at their heels,
 Go forth and fetch their conqu’ring Caesar in [...]
 Did they this Harry. (Shakespeare, 5.0.27-35)

Julius Caesar, Henry V and Richard, Duke of York, all represent the potential for a rebirth of national harmony, united under one capable leader (even if their methods to gain power and maintain it can sometimes be unscrupulous). Their rise to power destroys the old, crumbling order: this applies to the failing Roman Republic for Caesar, the old Plantagenet dynasty for Henry IV and Henry V and the incapable rule of Henry VI for the Duke of York. Of all of these characters, only the Duke of York never actually rules, but his son (Edward IV) still succeeds to carry on his father's legacy. However, once each of these rulers fall (whether by assassination or disease), an opportunity emerges for new rulers to take power who may be far worse. So a cycle is created where a new national order under a monarch rises (whether the title they hold is that of consul, dictator, emperor or king), crumbles, is renewed and is finally utterly destroyed by a tyrant, whose actions destroy the nation and himself. From these ashes, the cycle of kingship begins again, whether in Rome or London. By pointing out this cycle in the *Henriad*, Shakespeare raises the possibility that the nation will take a turn towards chaos once more, should the confusion over the succession of Queen Elizabeth persist. He could even be suggesting that this cycle, that frequently results in chaos, is inherently flawed and that it may be necessary to find a better system of government.

Finally, there are a number of other facts to consider that may link the *Henriad* to the Roman Republic. The Roman writer Lucan, who wrote extensively of the civil wars between Caesar and Pompey and the end of the republic, "was very much in vogue in the early 1590s" (Hadfield, p. 107). It is also quite certain that "Shakespeare read *The Civil Wars* [a translation of Lucan's work] when writing his play [*Richard II*]" (Hadfield, p. 107). In this light, it does not seem implausible at all that the *Henry VI* tetralogy is also part of a broader republican discourse in England at the time. It is absolutely possible that Shakespeare uses *Henry VI* to raise the spectre of civil war in England, should there be confusion over the succession of Elizabeth I. It is not so much a series of plays about overtly republican values, but one that

discusses the issue of who has the right to rule and what could happen when more focus is placed on personal lust for power than responsible governance to the benefit of all.

This theory on the *Henry VI*-series is made more potent when considering that there was another play written by Shakespeare that was performed in 1592 that shows a great deal of similarities when viewed from this same perspective: *Titus Andronicus*. Here, too, we have a play that is not only set directly in a fictional Roman time (though likely meant to take place towards the end of the Western-Roman Empire), but also deals with many of the same themes. Here, too, the essential issue that drives the narrative is the matter of who is more fit to wield power: the story may largely be about the main character, Titus Andronicus, but a large part of the actual conflict stems from the succession of the Emperor of Rome. The choice revolves around the former emperor's eldest but unscrupulous son, Saturninus, and the younger, more noble son, Bassianus, as well as a renowned Roman general, recently victorious against the Goths and the most popular choice, Titus Andronicus. Here, too, this issue of the succession eventually leads to conflict that results in a terrible breakdown of normal society, leading to a cycle of revenge (not too dissimilar from that between the Houses of Lancaster and York in *Henry VI*), which ultimately, Bassianus, Saturninus and Titus Andronicus do not survive. Ultimately, Titus's son, Lucius, becomes Emperor of Rome and puts an end to the crisis, restoring a modicum of order and stability to society, much like how Edward IV and Henry Tudor do at the end of *3 Henry VI* and *Richard III* respectively. Here, too, the cycle of kingship returns. There is another addition to *Titus Andronicus* that does link it more strongly to the problems and fears facing English citizens of Shakespeare's time in the form that the Goths play in the piece: they are the neighbouring other, both an enemy and sometime ally, both a source of misery (particularly in the form of the character of Tamora) and of aid (as Lucius raises an army among the Goths to restore stability to Rome).

Rebecca Ann Bach links the Goths in the play to how the Scots were perceived by the English at the time:

Like the Scots in the English imaginary as displayed in parliamentary rhetoric over the succession, the Goths occupy a borderland in this play, alternatively demonized and embraced in order to demonize specific personalities. The Goths occupy the place in the play's imaginary that the Scots do in England's; the presence or invocation of a borderland is necessary in an Elizabethan text about succession. (Bach, p. 14)

All of this makes *Titus Andronicus* a very similar play to the *Henry VI*-series: Titus could have chosen to become Emperor of Rome, but instead supports Saturninus out of a belief in primogeniture, without considering which of the candidates truly holds Rome's best interests at heart and which desires power for himself (Saturninus), which eventually leads to a terrible breakdown in Roman civil society. Just like in *Henry VI*, the failure of any of the characters to consider what is right for the country ends up causing unnecessary destruction. Throughout all this, Shakespeare once again paints a grim picture of what could happen to England in the future: could there be a second War of the Roses? Will the Scots play a role in this, in the form of King James VI? Could it lead to the collapse of the monarchy altogether? These are the questions that Shakespeare raises to the audience. Again, Shakespeare does not argue in favour of either monarchy or republic, but he does question who should rule, why they should rule, how they should rule (or not) and what happens if these questions are not resolved in a peaceful manner.

3.3 Rise of the Republic – The Rape of Lucrece

The last of Shakespeare's works set in Roman times to be discussed in this chapter is not a play at all, but a narrative poem: *The Rape of Lucrece*. Here, the subject matter is actually explicitly republican as it covers the fall of the Roman monarchy and leads to the establishment of Rome as a republic: in summary, Sextus Tarquinius, son of the King of Rome, becomes enamoured with Lucrece, the wife of a Roman nobleman and, when she spurns him, rapes her; Lucrece, unable to live with the shame, commits suicide, which leads to a popular revolt against the kings of Rome (led by Lucius Junius Brutus), after which they are banished and Rome is transformed into a republic. In this sense, *The Rape of Lucrece* is rather straightforward as a republican text and there is little to discuss without going into too much detail, although (to name one example) it also seems that Shakespeare presents Lucrece as a representation of the body politic throughout the poem, as Lucrece also attempts to dissuade Tarquin from this horrific act because of how he would debase the royalty of Rome. As Hadfield puts it:

More startling is the argument [from lines 652-55] that Tarquin will corrupt the bloodline of the Roman kings if he carries out the tyrannous act of rape. A bloodline attainted by treason risked losing its nobility unless the monarch intervened, arguments that were used to disbar Mary Stuart from the English throne for plotting against Elizabeth, while preserving the claim of her son. (Hadfield, pp. 144-145)

To conclude, there are numerous examples from Shakespeare's works that demonstrate, at the very least, an interest in republican subject material, particularly the issue of the fall of the Roman Republic and the civil wars and chaos that preceded it, which allowed Julius Caesar the opportunity to seize control of Rome. This interest, either of Shakespeare himself or

perhaps of the public he was writing for, also seems to intersect with worries that existed over who would succeed Queen Elizabeth I as ruler of England and fears that, without a clear successor, the country would devolve into civil war once again or a foreign monarch could seize the throne. It is possible that the English were particularly interested in the fall of the Roman Republic because of their interest in a republican society (such as Venice) as well: perhaps wondering how even a republican society (possibly seen as superior to a monarchy) could fall, they anxiously wondered whether the future of England could lead to chaos and tyranny.

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4. Preserving the Republic – Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*

Having discussed some of Shakespeare's plays in which republicanism and its link to issues facing England around this time plays a certain role, it is now time to turn towards the works in which these themes and topics become far more overt: *Coriolanus* and *Julius Caesar*. *The Tragedy of Coriolanus* was likely written around 1608, making it one of Shakespeare's later works and certainly his last Roman play; even though *Julius Caesar* was written a number of years earlier, it seems more appropriate to focus attention on *Coriolanus* first, given that it is a work that, like *The Rape of Lucrece*, focuses on the beginnings of the Roman Republic, while *Julius Caesar* is more concerned with its end. Nonetheless, it is also a play that highlights some of the failings of the republic and republicanism in general and possibly foreshadows its eventual fall through the character of Coriolanus, who shall be discussed in detail later. Crucially, *Coriolanus* is a story where the political and personal intertwine. Based on Roman history, "as told by Plutarch and translated by Sir Thomas North in the *Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans* published in 1579" (Shakespeare), Shakespeare's play is set several hundred years BC, shortly after the expulsion of the Tarquins as Kings of Rome, and chronicles the efforts of the Roman general Caius Martius to defeat one of Rome's earliest enemies, the Volsci. After successfully capturing their city Corioli in battle, Martius is given the cognomen Coriolanus and is made consul of Rome, only to be removed from power and banished for the disdain he repeatedly shows the common people of the city. Joining with the Volsci and his rival Tullus Aufidius, Coriolanus then leads a nearly successful assault on his own country, which ends in peace when Coriolanus decides not to sack Rome when his family begs him to show mercy. As a consequence, Rome is saved, but Coriolanus is killed by Aufidius, both for his betrayal and because of the hatred that Aufidius had for his rival from the start. Although there appears to be a general consensus among Shakespeare scholars that there are republican elements in *Coriolanus*, it does not seem to have been analysed in

great detail in this light either, as evidenced by the striking omission of any considerable discussion of the play in Andrew Hadfield's otherwise very comprehensive book, *Shakespeare and Republicanism*. Even in Anthony DiMatteo's review essay "Was Shakespeare a Republican?", in which the author examines several broader analyses of republicanism in Shakespeare, by several authors, not even a mention is made of *Coriolanus*. This seems unusual, as *Coriolanus* seems far more focused on the ideas behind a republican society than many other of Shakespeare's plays: not only does the play start with the citizens revolting against their leaders to ensure fairer corn prices, but arguably the central event that the story revolves around is Coriolanus' election as consul by the people of Rome, only for him to be removed from office because of his tendency to trample on their rights. As such, there are three aspects of *Coriolanus* in particular that clearly mark it as a work that actively participates in the republican discourse that we have been discussing: first of all, one aspect is the consistently important role of the people throughout the play; secondly, there is the contradictory role that Coriolanus has in the story and finally, there is the surprising amount of emphasis that Shakespeare places on the voting process.

4.1 The Fable of the Belly – The Common People in Coriolanus

One of the strongest pieces of evidence for *Coriolanus* being a play about republicanism (at least in the sense that the play engages in the republican discourse) is the prominent role that the will of the people plays in the story, not only as shown by the people's role in Rome's rejection of Coriolanus as consul (the public being shown as free to both choose the leader of their government and cast him down as well), but also in their notable rebellion against political authority in the bread riots. It is rather significant that in a play where the question of who should be chosen to rule and how his rule should be conducted plays such a central part, Shakespeare elects to open the play's very first scene with the people of Rome banding together to demand that the authorities address the complaints they have against them and improve their lives. Even the manner in which Shakespeare decides to depict the mob in this opening scene seems designed to cast them as a kind of proto-democratic society. They are no chaotic mob, united under one cunning leader (like the character of Jack Cade in *2 Henry VI*), but debate and decide their options amongst themselves: they decide together how to proceed and then debate to assess the character of Coriolanus. This may seem somewhat unlikely, but their choice of words is also reminiscent of a discussion in parliament. Consider these lines:

FIRST CITIZEN: You are all resolved rather to die than to famish?

ALL: Resolved, resolved. (Shakespeare, 1.1.4-6)

Furthermore, they are not unanimous in their assessment of the one they consider to be the greatest adversary to the common people, Coriolanus, and rather than silencing dissent, the mob discusses his merits or lack of them:

FOURTH CITIZEN: He's [Coriolanus] a very dog to the commonalty.

SECOND CITIZEN: Consider you what services he has done for his country?

FIRST CITIZEN: Very well, and could be content to give him good report for't, but that he pays himself with being proud.

FIFTH CITIZEN: Nay, but speak not maliciously. (Shakespeare, 1.1.27-33)

On the other hand, there is no question that the group is also in favour of decidedly undemocratic measures to attain their goals:

FIRST CITIZEN: Let us kill him [Coriolanus], and we'll have corn at our own price. Is't a verdict?

ALL: No more talking on't, let it be done. Away, away. (Shakespeare, 1.1.10-12)

Shakespeare does not appear to depict the citizenry in any particularly negative or positive manner: they are no vulgar rabble, but neither are they proper representatives that are merely acting for the common good of all; their cause may be justified, but not the actions they plan to take. More importantly, however, there is the citizens' interaction with the old senator Menenius and his attempt to persuade them to end their rebellion with his fable of the belly. With this fable, Menenius likens the citizenry to rebellious parts of the human body and the senators of Rome to the belly, essentially arguing that, just as the belly must distribute the nourishing energy of food to the rest of the human body, so too must the citizenry acquiesce to the current situation, even if they are starving, while the senators still have ample stores of corn. There is a certain ambiguity as to whether the famine among the populace is caused by hoarding and usury (which has driven up the price of food at a time of great scarcity) or

simply by bad weather. Nonetheless, the actual unjust nature of the situation still stands and the citizens have some right to act. Menenius' fable rings hollow and it is significant that the citizens are given very little chance to speak afterwards. Instead, Coriolanus appears and successfully disperses the group by demeaning them and criticising them for their weakness and fickle nature, while the citizens are given no chance to argue against it: as Coriolanus argues later in the play, all he sees of the common people are those either too weak or unwilling to stand up for Rome, but will take whatever they can get and demean those standing above them; of course, it is very easy for Coriolanus to argue as much and for Menenius to criticise the people's rebellion when they are not the ones actually starving. The actual cause of the people's complaint is never truly addressed by Coriolanus or Menenius: at best, it implies that the side of Menenius and Coriolanus believe that no direct action like this by the people is justified (and they must continue to work within the republican system that they have); at worst, it makes their side appear authoritarian, firmly on the side of the aristocracy that was so influential in the Roman Republic and certainly not part of a system of government that rules on behalf of the people (despite the very word "republic" coming from the Latin 'res publica', meaning 'of the people'). It is this same arrogance that later leads to Coriolanus being removed as consul and being banished by the citizens in act 3. As Annabel Patterson and James Kuzner argue, Shakespeare has the citizens "discuss the political economy ... not without considerable social perspective" (Patterson, p. 133), thereby "rising above the supposedly irrational corporeality that might justify their subjection" (Kuzner, p. 178), "they hold the authorities accountable, refusing the false community of Menenius' monarchical fable, wresting themselves from that fiction of the body politic in hopes of a life in which their own bodies would be truly, properly protected" (Kuzner, p. 178). While it is less certain that *Coriolanus* is a strictly republican play (a story explicitly advocating a strong, republican system of government, accountable to the people), it does seem very likely

that *Coriolanus*, through its ambiguous depiction of the common people, directly participates in the republican discourse.

4.2 Coriolanus – Champion of Rome, Enemy of the People

A second indication of the republican aspects of *Coriolanus* is centered on the title character himself. To put it at its most succinct, *Coriolanus* is a story ultimately about a man whose strengths allow him to overcome almost any obstacle, but who is so disdainful of the people he is supposed to rule and so incapable of compromise that his rule is doomed almost from the start. In addition, with all the irony of a Greek tragedy, the one time that Coriolanus finally relents (having been confronted with the pleas of his mother, his wife, his son and his mentor to spare Rome) is the moment he, knowingly, dooms himself. Through *Coriolanus*, Shakespeare presents an interesting take on values that are usually admired: Shakespeare highlights the contradiction of Coriolanus' greatness (his warrior-mentality, his will-power and his honest, unyielding nature) being all the values that make him unsuited to lead the republic. Coriolanus is uniquely unsuited to republican politics, because his very nature as a warrior precludes him from being ruled by anyone: war requires domination; republican politics require you to be a representative of your citizens, citizens that Coriolanus only perceives as weaklings who are unworthy of his own consideration or the consideration of any ruler. His strength of character allows him to be a champion for Rome, but not for its actual people. Nonetheless, he is elected by the citizens precisely because of the great deeds that his unyielding nature allows him to perform, placing him in an exceedingly complex political position in the plot. The character of Coriolanus also foreshadows the eventual fate of the Roman Republic through Julius Caesar, much like how Shakespeare's later tetralogy (*Richard II*, *1 and 2 Henry IV* and *Henry V*) hints at the foreboding future of the Wars of the Roses in England. Given his authoritarian nature, Coriolanus (for all his heroism) would have likely become a tyrant to Rome if he were to have been allowed to remain consul and would have thereby brought about the death of the republic in the process; meanwhile, the means to his ascent was granted to him by the people of Rome themselves. In these aspects, he mirrors

Julius Caesar, the only difference being that Caesar uses his popularity with the people to solidify his authority and is brought down by a conspiracy by the senators of Rome, while Coriolanus attains his power despite the animosity between himself and the citizens. Taking all this into consideration, it can be argued that Shakespeare, in the politics of *Coriolanus*, highlights the importance of the people to any ruler, as well as the fact that the republic (a form of government believed in Shakespeare's time to be a system that promoted virtue) brings forth its own destruction and the death of those ideals, through potential tyrants like Coriolanus and Caesar. Essentially, by promoting virtue and service to the republic, a republic ends up giving birth to political figures whose strength of personality brings an end to the republic. In all these aspects, it seems quite clear that Shakespeare, while not necessarily arguing in favour of one system of rule over another, is clearly engaging in this debate, showing some of the strengths and the weaknesses of republican and monarchical forms of government.

4.3 Power to the People?

Finally, it is also worth highlighting how much emphasis is spent not only on the active participation of the people of Rome in politics, but also on the minutiae of the voting process itself. The end of act 2, in which Coriolanus is elected consul, takes a considerable number of lines to highlight a simple procedure. Although it is possible that Shakespeare kept the scene as long as it is for laughs (the scene of Coriolanus asking for the tribunes' votes even as he subtly insults them to their face is rather humorous) it is also possible that he is making reference to some of the election procedures he had witnessed in his life. For what little that Hadfield has written on *Coriolanus*, he does believe that "Shakespeare meticulously analyses the electoral process in Rome in *Coriolanus*, relating the Roman constitution to voting practices he may well have observed in London" (Hadfield, p. 58). This is absolutely possible, especially since Cathy Shrank and other scholars have pointed out that there was actually a relatively large amount of autonomy in a city like London: "These corporate towns and cities enjoyed a degree of legislative autonomy and civic jurisdiction, and many had the right to elect parliamentary representatives" (Shrank, p. 407). Furthermore: "the Venetian ambassador Giovanni Micheli [...] compares the English municipalities to 'republics'"; Micheli's comments on London further reveal that, to all intents and purposes, the city appeared to be "governed without the interference of either the monarch or his ministers" (Shrank, p. 407-8). As such, it is not at all unlikely that Shakespeare was inspired by the forms of democracy he witnessed himself and wished to write a play that participated in a larger discussion of these issues as well. More importantly, despite the serious role in the plot that the citizens play, Shakespeare also repeatedly pokes fun at them as well, not only with Coriolanus' election as consul, but also in their behaviour in act 4:

FIRST CITIZEN: For mine own part, when I said 'banish him' I said 'twas pity.

SECOND CITIZEN: And so did I.

THIRD CITIZEN: And so did I, and to say the truth, so did very many of us. That we did, we did for the best, and though we willingly consented to his banishment, yet it was against our will. (4.6.93-99)

At the very least, Shakespeare points out that Coriolanus may not be entirely wrong when he calls the people fickle as well: Shakespeare is showing that, despite the superior nature of a republican system at preventing tyrannical rule, a system in which the people can have such a strong say in the state's affairs can itself be flawed, especially if the common people are uninformed, do not think their decisions through or can be manipulated by politicians (such as Sicinius and Brutus in *Coriolanus*).

To conclude, *Coriolanus* is absolutely a play that participates in the discussion of republicanism of Shakespeare's time, as highlighted by the important role that the citizens play throughout the story, the complicated nature of Coriolanus as a leader in a republican society and the voting practices that Shakespeare delves into.

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5. Fall of the Republic – Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*

The last of William Shakespeare's works to be analysed on its ties to republicanism is the most quintessential of all his Roman plays: *Julius Caesar*. *The Tragedy of Julius Caesar* was written around 1599 and, unlike *Coriolanus*, the play so overtly participates in the republican discourse described throughout this thesis, there appears to be very little doubt about this political connection among scholars: it is, after all, Shakespeare's re-telling of one of the most important moments (if not the most important) of the Roman Republic, one that had massive implications for the entire history of Europe, as many would have been aware, even in Shakespeare's day. However, when studying the play, this connection is not always taken far enough. As Hadfield puts it: "[*Julius Caesar*] has also been read as a play of studied balance, exposing the limitations of creeping tyranny and the republican argument for selective political assassination" (Hadfield, p. 167), but "the play appears in a different light if we read it as a work designed to intervene in the political debates of a culture that has a keen interest in republican history, issues and questions, an ambition that its first staging clearly signals" (Hadfield, p. 167). Like *Coriolanus*, *Julius Caesar* is a play that does not necessarily advocate republicanism or speaks out against it, but grapples, in a very nuanced manner, with such issues as whether it is justified to slay a tyrant to preserve a republic. In *Julius Caesar* in particular, Shakespeare demonstrates that he is highly aware of the moral and political complexities when it comes to the conflict between choosing a republican or monarchical system of government, for a number of reasons. First of all, one piece of evidence for this is the fact that Shakespeare does not appear to depict either of the two opposing sides (Julius Caesar and his allies on the one hand and the conspirators and other senators turning against Caesar on the other) in a particularly negative or positive way: Caesar, despite being likely to become a tyrant, is also given positive traits, while the conspirators (even though they are trying to save the republic) are not always shown as

having noble motives. Secondly, not only are some of the conspirators (such as Cassius) motivated by personal reasons to assassinate Caesar rather than acting on behalf of the Roman Republic as they claim, but their argument to murder Caesar is itself quite flawed, given that the conspirators base themselves on what Caesar may do in the future, rather than what he has actually done already. Furthermore, another indication of how *Julius Caesar* participates in the republican discourse is the way that Brutus is depicted: given the level of secrecy involved in murdering Caesar, Brutus' actions almost become a parody of his ancestor openly leading a revolt against the Tarquins. Finally, much like in *Coriolanus*, while the (potential) tyranny of a man like Caesar seems to be opposed, the merits of considering the will of the people and republicanism itself are cast in an ambiguous light as well throughout *Julius Caesar*, particularly when one considers the reaction of the people of Rome to both Brutus and Marc Antony's speeches over Caesar's body.

5.1 Power, Principles, Politics – Julius Caesar, the Conspirators and Marc Antony

The first real sign that Shakespeare takes part in the republican discourse in *Julius Caesar* without making it an explicitly republican piece is the morally grey manner in which he chooses to depict Julius Caesar as well as the conspirators on the side of the republic. Rather than unambiguously favouring the conspirators' side of killing Caesar to prevent tyranny (just as the conspirators themselves imagine history will favour their actions in 3.1.112-114) or staying without question on the side of the monarchy by depicting Caesar as a righteous and noble future king that was unjustly slain, the picture that Shakespeare paints of the politics in Rome is not at all done in black and white. There is no question that, on the one hand, Julius Caesar is depicted as a tyrant or, at the very least, a powerful ruler who is in the process of becoming one. Some of the examples of this are the fact that, early in the play, Caesar has "put to silence" (1.2.286) the tribunes Flavius and Murellus for removing celebratory scarves from statues of him. Also noteworthy, and very likely to be a contributing factor to their "silencing", is how Flavius and Murellus in the very first scene of the play rebuke the people for celebrating Caesar's victory in the civil war since it meant the death of Pompey. Another example is Caesar's enormous pride, asserting in Act 3, scene 1 (moments before his death), that he is as unmoveable as the North Star and superior to other men, when he is very much a mortal man (as Cassius makes clear when he describes Caesar falling ill), but also when he is convinced to go to what Caesar calls "his Senate" (3.1.32) after he had initially determined not to come. As Robert Miola explains, Caesar's initial explanation of why he would not come is unsatisfactory; furthermore, "[s]uch nonchalant substitution of personal caprice for just cause and law marks the tyrant in question" (Miola, p. 280). Nonetheless, Caesar is also shown to possess positive traits: he is a great leader and has enormous popularity among the people; he maintains mostly positive relationships with Antony and many of his fellow

senators (even if some of them fear he is growing too powerful) and, while Caesar suspects Cassius may take action against him, he nevertheless does not become fearful or authoritarian enough to eliminate him or Brutus and ends up boldly choosing to risk his own death. Even if Caesar is unaware of the conspiracy, his hesitation to go to the Senate at all demonstrates that he takes the warnings of the Soothsayer and his wife quite seriously.

At the same time, the conspirators, while possibly having justice on their side in their attempt to bring down Caesar, are not at all lionized as the republican heroes they later claim themselves to be. Instead, it is quite obvious that many of them have clear, selfish motivations for opposing Caesar. Above all, Cassius is shown to be a very cunning intriguer, who not only seems to be the most purely driven by jealousy of Caesar's power and prestige rather than any genuine concern over the Roman Republic, but demonstrates a propensity for very underhanded tactics when he manipulates his 'friend' Brutus into siding with the conspirators: Cassius throws messages through Brutus' window subtly urging him to take action against Caesar while pretending they are from the people of Rome. Of all the conspirators, Brutus alone is singled out as the only one who did not act out of any dislike for Caesar but out of concern for Rome:

ANTONY: This was the noblest Roman of them all.
 All the conspirators save only he
 Did that they did in envy of great Caesar.
 He only in a general honest thought
 And common good to all made one of them. (Shakespeare, 5.5.67-71)

However, despite this and even though Brutus is shown to be a great warrior and leader in his own right (and even though he was partially tricked by Cassius into joining the conspiracy),

he still willingly chooses to betray and murder his friend, Caesar. Despite the danger that Caesar poses to the republic, not even Brutus is made out to be that noble. In the end, the only real victor in the play is actually Marc Antony (along with Octavius, the future Emperor Augustus): Antony succeeds simply through his expert political manipulation and sheer power, possibly signifying that in the end, neither the lofty ideals that Brutus espouses nor the great will and commanding personality of Caesar hold any real sway and that it is simply the one with the greatest political skill that succeeds in outwitting all his enemies. Brutus and the conspirators fail to protect the republic precisely because of their terrible judgment of how their murder of Caesar will be perceived by the people of Rome, a weakness that Antony uses to his advantage.

5.2 Death to All Tyrants – The Conspirators’ Flawed Reasoning

Another sign that the matter of Caesar’s death is handled with great complexity is the fact that, although the conspirators are probably correct in their fear that Caesar will destroy the republic, not only are their motives for killing him rather dubious (it is a very telling detail, unquestionably a conscious choice by Shakespeare, that the conspirators never even mention the word liberty until they use it to justify their murder to the public after the deed is already done), but it is questionable whether they even have very strong grounds to stand on to begin with. Even if texts like the *Vindiciae Contra Tyrannos* hold that sometimes, it can be lawful to slay a tyrant, usually, it would have to be beyond any doubt that the ruler is, in fact, one. As described above, this is not always clear with Caesar and as Miola states, “the hints and half-guesses of tyranny in [*Julius Caesar*] look slight and insubstantial next to the lurid obscenities of Shakespeare’s other tyrants, of Richard III and Macbeth, for example” (Miola, p. 284). Furthermore, it can be argued that Caesar’s great popularity with the people, who remain on Caesar’s side despite his increasingly overt intentions to become the undisputed ruler of Rome, makes it a decidedly illiberal and un-republican act to kill him. Caesar is not the prototypical, universally reviled tyrant; he is not at all the Tarquins, even if the same tyrannical danger looms under his rule. By murdering Caesar, the conspirators enforce their own will on society, just as Caesar enforces his. Most damning of all, the justification that the murderers of Caesar use for their act rests on the idea of what Caesar may become in the future; as Brutus claims, he slew his friend for his ambition. While it is likely that Caesar would have become a tyrant, there is no guarantee of what may happen in the future; therefore, it becomes an extremely flawed argument. The conspirators murdering Caesar for what he ‘may’ do in the future makes the murderers’ actions unjust, even if their cause was a righteous one, a weakness that Marc Antony subsequently exploits (especially when he points out to the people that Caesar had refused an offer of the crown) to successfully turn the people

of Rome against them. This eventually results in the downfall of Cassius, Brutus and the senators that stood against Julius Caesar and the danger he posed. The conspirators' actions and their flawed reasoning to justify them become their undoing, leading to the end of the republic and the rise of the Roman Empire, regardless of what the conspirators' actual intentions were or whether they were justified in their actions or not.

5.3 Brutus – Defender of the Republic?

Keeping this argument in mind, it becomes clear that, at a bare minimum, the conspirators' is a very flawed defense of liberty and republicanism. This ties in with the fact that, upon further examination, Brutus' actions almost appear to be depicted as a parody of those of his famous ancestor who helped overthrow the Tarquins and save Rome from tyranny in *The Rape of Lucrece*. Cassius alludes to Brutus' special ancestry and uses it as an argument to sway him to his side:

CASSIUS: O, you and I have heard our fathers say
 There was a Brutus once that would have brooked
 Th'eternal devil to keep his state in Rome
 As easily as a king. (Shakespeare, 1.2.159-62)

Marcus Brutus, as the only conspirator that has pure motives for killing Caesar, has a critical position in the story. However, despite his genuine wish to preserve Rome's freedom, he almost seems to parrot the actions of his ancestor, Lucius Brutus, rather than truly emulate him: his deeds become a flawed imitation, rather than a true echo of his forebear's. Unlike Lucius' clear response to the unquestionable tyranny of the Kings of Rome, Marcus doubts considerably about what his own response should be to the dangers of Caesar and ultimately has to be tricked into joining forces with the other conspirators. Rather than nobly taking up arms against an unjust ruler and helping to institute a fairer system to govern Rome by means of a popular revolt like Lucius, Marcus goes along with a cloak-and-dagger conspiracy (the opposite of his own bold, military nature) to murder his own friend, even if there are many among the people of Rome who may not wish Caesar dead at all. Furthermore, while Marcus Brutus allowing Antony to speak over Caesar's body may simply be a case of

underestimating the danger that Antony presents, his suggestion of bathing their arms in Caesar's blood after murdering him shows an incredible naiveté, as if playing a hero will instantly make him one. Robert Miola makes another good observation when he points out that this affectation of resistance to tyranny, rather than true nobility, is a consistent aspect of Brutus' character:

Persistent concern about the appearance of virtue, not the substance, and about the manipulation of appearances for "the common eyes" (II.i.179) raises doubts about Brutus' conception of himself and the assassination. Brutus encourages the conspirators to comport themselves like "Roman actors" (II.i.226) and to let their hearts "as subtle masters do / Stir up their servants to an act of rage / And after seem to chide them" (II.i.175-77). (Miola, p. 286)

At the very least, this shows that Marcus Brutus' intentions may not be as noble as they appear to be at first glance, nor are they anywhere near as noble as he believes them to be.

5.4 Power over the People

Lastly, the role of the common people in *Julius Caesar* is also not entirely clear-cut. It is quite similar to *Coriolanus* in this regard, as here, too, Shakespeare demonstrates that governing based on lofty ideals and taking into account the will of the people is not at all simple. There are two moments in particular that are quite revealing. The first of these are the two very opposite reactions to the speeches given by Brutus and Antony over Caesar's body: just like the fickle way that the people of Rome occasionally behave in *Coriolanus*, the fact that the people of Rome first side with Brutus and then swing entirely over to Antony's side after he has spoken is either testimony to how easily they can potentially be manipulated by the right speaker or the incredible power of Antony's rhetoric. According to Stanley Wells, for *Julius Caesar*, Shakespeare most likely "made extensive use (for the first time in this play) of Sir Thomas North's great translation [...] of *Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans* by the Greek historian Plutarch" (Shakespeare, p. 627) and in Plutarch's work, no mention is made of Antony cleverly stirring up the common people to enrage them over the death of Caesar. Instead, the citizens are initially at peace with the explanation that Brutus offers and it is only when they learn of the will that they turn against him and the conspirators:

But when Caesar's will was opened, and it was found that he had left a considerable legacy to each one of the Roman citizens, and when his body was seen carried through the market-place all mangled with wounds, the multitude could no longer contain themselves within the bounds of tranquillity and order (Plutarch, chapter 48)

Afterwards, "they took brands from the pile, and ran some to fire the houses of the conspirators, others up and down the city, to find out the men [the conspirators] and tear them

to pieces” (Plutarch, chapter 48). The fact that Shakespeare chooses to depict this scene in the way that he does indicates what he wants the viewer or reader to focus on. The fury over Caesar’s death does not immediately erupt, so the play is not just about a group of senators whose failure to take into account the love that the people bore Caesar causes them to fail in protecting the republic; it is also a story of how mercurial the will of the people is and how others can take advantage of this, altering the entire course of history in the process. The conspirators then fail not because their cause was unjust or they lacked power; they failed simply because they were not as skilled at shaping public opinion the way Marc Antony was. The second moment that reveals a more troubling aspect of the common people in the play is the death of Cinna: the fact that the people, once stirred up by Antony, kill Cinna the poet in their frenzy, rather than the conspirator, at the end of act 3, demonstrates how dangerous and how misdirected acting in fury truly can be, even if it may be a righteous fury. The manner of Cinna’s death highlights the complete disintegration of any kind of orderly society, paving the way for those who want to seize power to do so: a republic, in which consensual, virtuous rule was possible, has now opened the way for the emergence of empire, in which the need to restore order is of the greatest necessity and power is the only currency.

In conclusion, it is abundantly clear that Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar* does not only clearly take part in the republican discourse, but that it does so in a way in which neither republican nor monarchical rule is praised over the other. Instead, the personal and the political intertwine with the ideological to craft a morally highly complex play, in which tyrants can still seem noble and liberators vile.

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6. Conclusion

Throughout this thesis, the nature of republicanism in William Shakespeare's works has been thoroughly examined. One of the questions that was posed early on was whether this republican and anti-monarchical discourse featured in Shakespeare's plays bears any relevance to the eventual emergence of the English Revolution approximately 40 years later and the overthrow of the royal family in favour of a more republican system. I think it can be concluded that the answer is 'yes'. They are not an outright republican manifesto, but they do participate in a growing discourse throughout the 16th and 17th centuries in Europe that actively engaged in such questions as 'at what point can a legitimate monarch be resisted by the people'? When can they be deposed in favour of a leader (or leaders) that has the interests of the people (and Christian virtues) more at heart? What is the most successful form of government to rule a country? How should political power be wielded at all? All this does not actually mean that Shakespeare himself was necessarily favourably disposed towards a republican system of government for Britain (though I do believe that he was open to the idea), but rather, it indicates that several of Shakespeare's works are positively permeated by republican themes and topics and he discusses these ideas with considerable detail and nuance. The plays in which these republican aspects are most pronounced are *Julius Caesar* and *Coriolanus*, but they are far from the only ones; other examples include *Othello*, *Titus Andronicus* and the Henriad cycle of history plays.

One of the questions that should now be possible to answer adequately after some of these plays have been subjected to this analysis is this: what was the nature of republicanism in Shakespeare's time and what role did it end up playing in his works? The republicanism of Shakespeare's day (as I see it) was a response in English society towards a combination of long-term and short-term changes and challenges that were emerging in Europe in general and Britain in particular. The long-term changes included 1), most importantly, the gradual

decline of feudalism, 2) the rise of a more economically and politically powerful, independent and better educated merchant class and 3) a proliferation of knowledge and ideas about how society should be governed that harkened back to the Classical ideas of the Roman Republic and democracies in Greece, as well as Biblical texts. The short-term challenges that encouraged the rise of republican thought was the broader breakdown of the old systems of authority that came with the Reformation in Europe and, in Britain specifically, the concern that was felt among many about the succession of the English crown towards the end of the reign of Queen Elizabeth I; there was no certainty at all as to who would ultimately succeed Elizabeth, fuelling fears of a usurpation of the throne by a foreign monarch, such as Philip II of Spain, or at least the beginning of a protracted conflict over the throne, as had occurred during the Wars of the Roses. Ideas of republicanism, inspired by the positive examples of the Roman Republic of the past and the successful cases of functioning republics of the time (such as Venice and the Dutch Republic), emerged to potentially help fill the void of power that many feared could be left in the case of such a conflict or to oppose an illegitimate monarch. Taking this into account, we can see how Shakespeare was pre-occupied with some of these issues when writing several of his plays: the virtues that many believed were encouraged under a republican system of government are delved into in *Othello*, the breakdown of society (possibly leading to tyranny) that England feared is featured throughout the Henriad cycle as well as *Titus Andronicus*, while *Coriolanus* and *Julius Caesar* thoroughly examine the advantages and disadvantages of a republic.

All this does not, however, reveal anything meaningful on where William Shakespeare himself stood politically. Many scholars have wondered whether Shakespeare himself was a republican, someone opposed to the established monarchy, or one who was quite comfortable with the royal power structure as it stood in his lifetime. On that topic, this analysis is not particularly helpful, nor was it intended to be. All that is certain is that

Shakespeare was drawn to the topics concerning republicanism (whether out of a personal interest in this subject matter or a commercial one; it was probably both) and they are an integral part of a number of his (more political) plays. At the very least, Shakespeare's sharp analysis of various rulers throughout his works and the way he demonstrates how rulers acquire and maintain their power (such as the Machiavellian methods that Henry V employs) as well as the cycle of kingship (in which inevitably the old order crumbles to make way for a new one, usually accompanied by great chaos and bloodshed) shows he is acutely aware of some of the problems with a monarchical system of rule and is at least open to the idea of a republic, not necessarily always arguing in favour of establishing one. More importantly, Shakespeare appears more concerned with what a ruler (whether born of a royal line and inheriting power or one elected by the votes of representatives) should do with their power, how they should manoeuvre in the face of challenges and the disastrous consequences for the country if they fail.

That said, regardless of whether Shakespeare himself was a republican or not and whether he argues in favour of a republican system or a monarchical one, the plays that he has written that deal with these issues are still relevant: the way that Shakespeare explores republicanism and the popularity of these plays (showing there was a demand for them among the English public) demonstrate a growing shift in English society from one that accepted the monarchical system in place, to one that was seriously questioning at which point the will of a king or queen could be resisted, whether they could be deposed or even executed and even if the current system of government should not be replaced by a different one altogether. Shakespeare's works are absolutely a part of the broader republican discourse in English society. In that sense, they are also of value when charting the development of England from a country in which the monarchy played such a central, pivotal role, to one that ultimately elected to behead one of its legitimate rulers (Charles I) and turn the kingdom into

a commonwealth, however briefly it lasted. Therefore, while he is not always perceived as such, I would say that Shakespeare definitely fits into a longer republican tradition that continues all the way to John Milton, the English Revolution and beyond.

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Naam: *Erik Smulders*
Studentnummer: *3700747*

Plaats: *Vlaardingenveld*
Datum: *9-6-2016*

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