



## *Introduction*

# **Shakespeare and the Ethics of War**

Honour at the Stake

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My first memory of any kind of political event was the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. I was eleven years old, and I failed to grasp its importance. I could not understand why the teacher had stopped class simply to watch people on TV tear down chunks of grey, graffiti-spattered concrete and cheer. As I was about to graduate from high school, however, seven years later, I thought I had understood it. The 'Evil Empire' had collapsed; in the words of Francis Fukuyama, we had arrived at 'the end of history'. For several generations, the men in my family had served in the military, and I assumed I would do the same. I would join the Marines; I knew that they would cover the costs of a college education, and I imagined that running around playing soldier would be harmless, even fun. I had not been keeping track of events in the Balkans; the only warfare I had really registered in my own lifetime was the first Gulf War, a short-lived, triumphant joyride across Mesopotamia, supported by a near-unanimous global

Notes for this section begin on page 22.

alliance. ‘What could go wrong?’, I thought. Communism lies in ruins. The time for war is over. Being a Marine would be a bit of a lark, like an extended Boy Scout camping trip. The worst that could happen would be some sort of clean-up operation, with yours truly as one of the good guys, the sheriff in the white cowboy hat (metaphorically speaking). To my surprise, however, as I was trying to figure out how to enlist, I was awarded a generous scholarship to attend Chapel Hill, one that I could not combine with the ROTC (Reserve Officers’ Training Corps). The offer was too good to pass up. Plus, I figured I could go to OCS (Officer Candidate School) after I graduated, if shooting rifles and so on still seemed enticing at that point.

Once I actually got to college, my interests changed. Shakespeare began to consume my attention. Even so, I thought I might begin with this anecdote – a story of my own ‘road not taken’ – as a preamble to reintroducing some of the unforeseen events of the past two decades. Over time, these conflicts have begun to feel familiar. Yet they represent an ongoing and perhaps insurmountable challenge to what were once commonly held expectations about international relations. Progressive accounts of history have come under duress; in the wake of 9/11, Iraq, Afghanistan, the Ukraine, Syria and North Korea, not to mention Brexit, as well as the election of Donald Trump, the hypothetical ‘arc of the moral universe’ towards global peace, prosperity and justice no longer seems as plausible as it once did, in the years immediately following the end of the Cold War. I want to recover our initial reactions of incredulity, shock and lingering confusion, as that dream-vision began to dissipate, the sense of surreal disorientation that continues, still today. Looking back now more than twenty years, I feel an eerie chill when I think how casually I assumed at the age of eighteen, never even once having travelled overseas, that the world was well on its way to Kant’s ‘perpetual peace’, that joining the military, once the USSR had been defeated, would not be likely to involve any actual combat. Yet I was hardly the only one caught off-guard.

In the academy, as in the world at large, the turning point seems to have been the September 11 terrorist attacks in 2001.<sup>1</sup> In the 1980s and 1990s, Shakespeare studies in the United States had been dominated by the aims, assumptions and methods of New Historicism. From an American perspective, these decades were a time of relative peace; perhaps for this reason, as Nick de Somogyi observes, ‘despite its obsession with violence and power’, New Historicism

'neglected the subject of early modern war'.<sup>2</sup> The omission was perhaps inevitable, given the premises of this school of thought. A predetermined narrative in which the existing hegemon always triumphs is easier to reconcile to a seemingly unipolar world such as the one the so-called 'Pax Americana' provided at the time, as the Soviet Union began to come unglued, than it is to a shifting, multipolar balance of powers such as seems to be emerging at the moment, still less a 'hot' or 'shooting' war with an uncertain outcome, such as we saw in WWI and WWII, and now again in places such as Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria. Likewise, the New Historicist template is easier to apply to desultory political unrest or doomed, disorganized uprisings such as Jack Cade's rebellion than it is to cataclysmic civil wars such those which overturned the Roman Republic. The Cultural Materialism that sprang up in the United Kingdom in the same decades, the close of the twentieth century, is more accommodating in this respect, insofar as it leaves the trajectory of political change an open-ended question.

Part of the attraction of New Historicism has always been that by accepting the determinism latent within French antihumanism, especially the claims of Foucault, its theoretical underpinning provides a consoling explanation for the perceived failure of various earnest, radical, sometimes violent attempts in the 1960s and 1970s to reshape society into a kind of secular paradise.<sup>3</sup> What is to be done, when there turns out not to be a beach beneath the pavement? At what point does it become acceptable for a would-be rebel to give up and sell out? The utopian, Hegelian version of Marxism proposed by Henri Lefebvre and enacted, even if only briefly, by his students in the riots in Paris in May 1968 proved unsustainable, or at least much more difficult to believe in, over time, than had been supposed.<sup>4</sup> So, it was exchanged for the more sinister, Stalinist Marxism of Louis Althusser, together with what Lee Patterson aptly describes as Foucault's 'nightmare': a 'totalizing vision of an entrapping world organized not primarily but exclusively by structures of domination and submission'.<sup>5</sup> It was not anyone's fault that the revolution did not succeed; it never could have in the first place. The powers-that-be always win; subversion is always contained. Precisely in those assumptions that distinguish it from other types of historicism, New Historicism is curiously, conveniently hopeless. As such, it always struck me, even at its height, back when I was an undergraduate, as a form of what Sartre would call 'bad faith'. New Historicism styles

itself as an act of courage, peering past the veil of 'ideology' into the Nietzschean 'abyss'. But it always seemed to me more like self-exculpatory therapy. Like other forms of antihumanist 'critique', it is the comfortable, default interpretive mode of what Nietzsche calls 'the last man', reconciling himself to the modern state.

As it happens, probably the best-known example of a New Historicist approach to Shakespeare's plays does touch upon war, if only indirectly. In his essay 'Invisible Bullets', Stephen Greenblatt undercuts critics such as William Hazlitt who see *Henry V* as 'ironic', as well as those such as Norman Rabkin who see the play as 'radically ambiguous'. The problem with the play's 'apparent subversion of the monarch's glorification', Greenblatt argues, is that 'the very doubts that Shakespeare raises serve not to rob the king of his charisma but to heighten it'.<sup>6</sup> 'Actions that should have the effect of radically undermining authority turn out to be the props of that authority.'<sup>7</sup> In *Shakespeare Recycled*, Graham Holderness pushes back against this alignment of Shakespeare with Foucault. Tracing changes in interpretation and performance of Shakespeare's English history plays from WWII up through the Falklands War and after, from Olivier's *Henry V* to Branagh's, Holderness demonstrates that these plays 'make themselves available for reactionary or progressive reproduction'.<sup>8</sup> 'Discrete and alternative positions of intelligibility' reflect 'forces of liberty' as well as 'forces of oppression'.<sup>9</sup>

Taking up and elaborating upon Holderness's approach, research on the wartime reception of Shakespeare has become increasingly international in scope. The collection *Shakespeare and War*, edited by Ros King and Paul Franssen, includes sections on 'translation and adaptation', as well as 'wartime interpretation', focused on the effects of twentieth-century conflicts.<sup>10</sup> In their collection of essays, *Shakespeare and the Second World War*, editors Irena Makaryk and Marissa McHugh and other contributors consider the impact of WWII on productions of Shakespeare's plays in Germany, Italy, Palestine, Greece, Poland, Russia, Japan, China, Britain, the United States and Canada.<sup>11</sup> In a special issue of *Shakespeare*, 'Shakespeare and the Great War', editor Monika Smialkowska and other contributors examine the 'cultural mobilization' of Shakespeare for nationalist and imperialist purposes during WWI, as well as 'challenges to such appropriations'.<sup>12</sup>

In her chapter for this volume, 'Shakespeare in Sarajevo: Theatrical and Cinematic Encounters with the Balkans War', Sara Soncini

looks closely at three productions that draw upon Shakespeare as a framing device for representation of the ethnic violence that broke out in the Balkans War: Katie Mitchell's staging of *3 Henry VI* (1994), Sarah Kane's play *Blasted* (1995) and Mario Martone's film *Rehearsal for War* (1998). As Soncini points out, none of these works actually show the Balkans War directly on stage or screen. Yet they each use Shakespeare's plays as a 'powerful conceptual aid to universalize the conflict', as well as to address 'their discursive positioning as outsiders and its problematic implications'. Mitchell's staging of *3 Henry VI* deliberately reduces the Wars of the Roses to a 'matter of personal vendettas', an 'unheroic turf war', akin to a present-day 'low-intensity conflict'. By aligning her British 'audience's "here"' with 'the Balkan "elsewhere"', Mitchell undercuts 'Balkanism': 'the systematic process of othering whereby, following the end of the Cold War, the Balkan region was constructed as an antitype of civilization'. Inspired by Shakespeare's depiction of pagan England in *King Lear*, Sarah Kane, too, tries to 'shatter' British 'political complacency': 'the belief that the "tribal" bloodshed of ethnic conflict could never happen in a civilized country'. Martone's documentary-style film, *Rehearsal for War*, is more metafictional; Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew* serves as a foil to Aeschylus's *Seven Against Thebes* in a symbolic reflection on the practicality and ethics of responding to crises such as the Balkans War artistically from afar, as Martone himself, like Mitchell and Kane, hopes might be possible, despite the attractions of escapism.

As Holderness argues in *Shakespeare Recycled*, changes in the adaptation and appropriation of Shakespeare's plays over time help to reveal the variety of perspectives latent within their structure. Understanding those 'potentialities', however, requires some familiarity with their original context. Reception history cannot be separated from 'the originating moment of a text's production'. 'Those formal and ideological characteristics and capacities inserted into it by the specific determinations and liberties bearing on its initial construction, are all that the activity of reproduction has to work on.'<sup>13</sup> Insofar as we know, Shakespeare himself never went off to war. So, what were his sources? How does his depiction of warfare compare to the military theory and practice of his contemporaries? Paul A. Jorgensen wrote a pioneering book in the 1950s, *Shakespeare's Military World*, which sought to juxtapose Shakespeare's 'concept of war' with the 'military treatises and newsbooks' published in England during his own lifetime.<sup>14</sup> During the Cold War, nonetheless, this

field of inquiry fell fallow. Starting in the late 1990s, however, with the Balkans War, and with increasing frequency since 9/11, historicist critics have returned to the question. How did warfare in Shakespeare's own immediate context affect his representation of it on stage?

Like Jorgensen several decades earlier, in *Shakespeare's Theatre of War*, Nick de Somogyi's 'chief aim', as he says, is 'to allow a series of the period's non-"literary" texts both generally and in detail to further the interpretation of its drama'.<sup>15</sup> As Patricia Cahill observes, 'Between 1575 and 1600, some fifty military treatises, both original works and translations of classical and Continental texts, were published in London, and several went through multiple editions'.<sup>16</sup> Given, as he explains, that 'Shakespeare's was an era of siege warfare rather than mobile warfare', de Somogyi is particularly interested in analogies between military practices and stagecraft, real and fictional 'theatres of war'.<sup>17</sup> Nina Taunton's *1590s Drama and Militarism* is more tightly focused; Taunton considers the actions of the earls of Essex and Northumberland at the time in light of theoretical debates about the 'ideal general' in manuals on the 'art of war', as well as contemporary military correspondence, then turns to Marlowe's Tamburlaine, Shakespeare's Henry V, and Chapman's Henri IV. Their inadequacies, she argues, reveal 'hunger for a national military hero, a lion who would lead his army to glorious deeds and victory'.<sup>18</sup> She draws analogies between 'erosions of the masculine self' on stage and 'anxieties' about 'the erosion of national boundaries'.<sup>19</sup>

Since the 1950s, historians of early modern Europe have debated the nature and scope of what Michael Roberts in a seminal article describes as 'The Military Revolution, 1560–1660', a paradigm shift driven, he argues, by the introduction of portable firearms.<sup>20</sup> As Andrew Hiscock explains in his recent review essay, 'central areas of discussion' within this ongoing and contentious field of research include 'the increasing centralization of European states and the growth in their schemes of military expenditure; changing practices of recruitment, organization, and training of large-scale armies; proliferation in publications and manuals devoted to military practice; and, especially importantly, technological advances in firearms, fortifications, and logistics in this period'.<sup>21</sup> One index of Shakespeare's sense of this historical sea-change is his depiction of old-fashioned warriors such as Coriolanus, Mark Antony, Hamlet Senior, Hotspur and Talbot. Their reckless, straightforward pursuit of individual

martial honour is depicted as glamorous but obsolescent and at times more than a little pig-headed, leading to predictable, sometimes outright foolish self-destruction. The political order that these 'alpha males' represent is seen as on the wane: they and their kind are being replaced, slowly but surely, by cunning, cautious, slightly contemptible courtiers, as well as monarchical masterminds.

Drawing on the same kinds of sources as Jorgensen, de Somogyi and Taunton, and in keeping with the concept of an early modern 'military revolution', Patricia Cahill in *Unto the Breach* traces the emergence of 'military science' as a 'modern discipline' in early modern England. 'By exploiting the power of the stage to shape the cultural imaginary', plays such as Shakespeare's English history plays, Cahill maintains, 'helped to produce and circulate new regimes of rationality and abstraction'; 'new military rationalities' regarding 'the ordering of space, the disciplining of bodies, and the regulation of populations' led to 'new understandings of personhood and of the body politic', anticipating 'nineteenth-century efforts to standardize, quantify, and appropriate the productive energies of workers'.<sup>22</sup> Yet the stage, Cahill goes on, also registered 'profound cultural ambivalence toward this new way of knowing the world'.<sup>23</sup> Drawing on theorists such as Cathy Caruth and Dominick LaCapra, Cahill argues that the late Elizabethan experience of militarization was traumatic and that the theatre provided a reprieve, 'a public space for the collective re-enacting of the incomprehensible and, with that, the possibility of a cultural "working through" of what might otherwise resist psychic assimilation'.<sup>24</sup>

In an article on *Henry IV*, Tom McAlindon connects the fifteenth-century rebellions it depicts to the Northern Rebellion of 1569–70, as well as the earlier Pilgrimage of Grace (1536). As McAlindon explains, 'the Pilgrims were defeated in a notorious piece of treachery', carried out by a trusted, temporizing deputy of the king; following the suggestion of historian Penry Williams, McAlindon sees an allusion to this incident in Shakespeare's depiction of Prince John's treatment of the rebels at the end of *2 Henry IV*.<sup>25</sup> In her chapter for this volume, 'Prince John's Negotiation with the Rebels in *2 Henry IV*: Fifteenth-Century Northern England as Sixteenth-Century Ireland', Jane Yeang Chui Wong discerns another such analogy, this time more immediate. Prince John's violation of his promise to the rebels is a shocking episode, which Wong argues is best understood as 'part of Shakespeare's exploration of an immensely delicate system of exchanges between ruler and ruled'. More specifically, John's

double-dealing demonstrates the precariousness of the relationship between the king and his more distant subjects, given the long distances that separated more far-flung regions from the central government in London. Wong contends that English kings worked to destabilize local lords in order to consolidate their own authority. As an illustration, she looks closely at English efforts to undermine kinship ties between Irish chieftains, and in particular the fraught negotiations between Irish rebel Hugh O'Neill and representatives of Queen Elizabeth. As in *2 Henry IV*, the royal emissaries argue that because the rebels broke their oaths of allegiance, they are not required to deal with them in good faith. The separation between royal seat and distant representatives allows them to break their word without impugning the honour of the monarch.

Turning to the legalities of war in Shakespeare's plays, the scholar who has written the most on the subject, Theodor Meron, brings to bear unrivalled and indeed rather astonishing professional expertise. In addition to his side-line as a Shakespeare enthusiast, Meron is Professor of International Law at New York University, Counselor on International Law to the US Department of State and Israeli Foreign Ministry, former President of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, Presiding Judge of the Appeals Chambers of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, and current President of the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals of the UN General Assembly. In his first book on Shakespeare, *Henry's Wars and Shakespeare's Laws*, Meron uses *Henry V* as 'a vehicle to analyse the issues of war that governed, or should have governed, that conflict [the Hundred Years War] and to develop an intertemporal, historical perspective on the law of war and its evolution'.<sup>26</sup> In his second book, *Bloody Constraint*, subtitled *War and Chivalry in Shakespeare*, Meron explores the medieval development of a chivalric code that would in theory govern knightly behaviour, featuring ideals such as 'honour, loyalty, courage, mercy, commitment to the community, and the avoidance of shame and dishonour'.<sup>27</sup> He also acknowledges with dismay how these values were often violated in practice. Turning to Shakespeare's plays more specifically, he concludes with the contentious claim that Shakespeare himself was a pacifist.

In keeping with most international law regarding war today, Meron draws heavily on just war theory, as it emerged in the Middle Ages out of scholastic reflections on St. Augustine's *City of God*, as well as Cicero's account of Roman law regarding warfare in his treatise *On Duties*. Paola Pugliatti explains this tradition and builds on



Meron's legal analysis of Shakespeare's *Henry V*, turning to a myriad of other plays as well, in *Shakespeare and Just War Tradition*, as does Franziska Quabeck in *Just and Unjust Wars in Shakespeare*.<sup>28</sup> In her chapter for this volume, 'Shakespeare's Unjust Wars', Quabeck calls into question critics such as Steven Marx and R. S. White who present Shakespeare as a thoroughgoing pacifist, as well as those such as Norman Rabkin who see his opinions about war as 'undecidable'.<sup>29</sup> Instead, she argues, just war theory provides Shakespeare with 'a general framework for evaluating the ethics of war case by case'. What constitutes a worthy cause for declaring war (*jus ad bellum*)? What determines, morally speaking, how a war should be conducted (*jus in bello*)? Should a military response, for example, necessarily be proportional to its cause? Quabeck gives particular attention here to the problem of proportionality in *Troilus and Cressida*, as addressed in the debate between Hector, Diomedes and Troilus. Seen through the lens of just war theory, Quabeck explains, almost all of the wars Shakespeare depicts are 'unjust', in one sense or another, with the notable exception of Richmond's deposition of Richard III, as well as Malcolm's of Macbeth.

In his chapter, '*Sine Dolor*: Relative Painlessness in Shakespeare's Laughter at War', Daniel Derrin considers the problem just war theory is designed to address – the tension between Christian moral precepts and self-defence – but from the perspective of psychology, rather than legality. 'How does a Christian society balance the need and means for war against a duty neither to exult in it nor to enjoy constructing an "honourable" selfhood through the destruction of others?' The Christian soldier's dilemma, as Derrin points out, is that he must somehow bravely engage in war without at the same time stooping to take satisfaction in 'the pleasures of self-definition that military "honour" can afford'. Derrin sees Shakespeare as working towards this balance through 'criticizing laughter', a form of poking fun that allows an emotional distance from what might otherwise prove troubling, even horrifying. Derrin locates the laughable in a moral deformity or deviation from 'nature' that exists *sine dolore*, because it is without any serious consequence. The butt of the joke demonstrates 'wilful ignorance of what is commonly known and recognized', in this case in terms of moral norms. Comic distortions of the ideal balance between martial efficacy and Christian scruple, taken as normative, reveal by contrast how a Christian soldier should behave. As examples of various kinds of misjudgement, Derrin juxtaposes Coriolanus's slaughter of enemy soldiers with his son's killing

of a butterfly; Hotspur's insatiable desire for honour with Falstaff's cowardice; and Parolles' betrayal of his comrades-in-arms with Bertram's infidelity to his wife. In each case, what prompts laughter is the disparity between the moral ignorance of the character in question and the audience's common-sense awareness. Using foils drawn from opposite ends of the spectrum of deviation from the norm, Shakespeare implies a viable, admirable middle ground between Christian compassion and the demands of martial honour, in keeping with Aristotle's doctrine of virtue as a mean between extremes, as well as St. Augustine's compromise concept of the 'just war'.

Is Henry V an ideal king? Or is he, as Hazlitt says, an 'amiable monster'?<sup>30</sup> One way to make sense of his ethical ambiguity is to see him as attempting to navigate between the incongruent claims of two rival ethical systems, on the one hand Christianity, on the other a political order driven by imperatives of honour. 'If it be a sin to covet honour', he confesses, 'I am the most offending soul alive' (4.3.28–29). The fascinating word in that admission is 'if'. Can the nobleman's traditional pride in force of arms be reconciled to Christ's admonition to turn the other cheek? Perhaps not. If a soldier takes no satisfaction, however, from success on the battlefield, how effective, if at all, is he likely to be, if he should find himself, willy-nilly, face to face with a determined enemy? Falstaff is good for a laugh, but a worse than incompetent commander; his indifference to achieving any kind of victory with the soldiers who serve under his command proves just as deadly to them, in the end, as Hotspur's recklessness would have been. Too little desire for honour is just as dangerous as too much.

Like most of us today, Shakespeare seems to be deeply suspicious of the notion that the pursuit of martial honour in and of itself could ever be considered adequate grounds for taking any kind of military action. Men like Homer's Achilles raid and plunder without pretext or compunction. To conquer is glorious, without further complication. For Shakespeare, however, as for Virgil, any honour that accrues to those victorious in battle must be weighed against the suffering which made that triumph possible.<sup>31</sup> There must have been some sort of injury, or at least some sort of threat, what in just war theory would be called a *casus belli*. Whether or not an effort to regain lost territory qualifies as such is debatable; the scene in *Henry V*, in particular, in which the Archbishop of Canterbury tries to convince Henry V that his claim to France is legitimate is often played for laughs. But I often wonder if we are today too quick to dismiss his argument. Queen Elizabeth's legitimacy depended, in part, on the

same kind of discrediting of misgivings about women inheriting the throne that the French Salic law represents.

In any case, it is possible to imagine other, more obviously worthy causes, at least from the perspective of an early modern Christian. In *King John*, Salisbury grieves to find himself taking up arms with the French against an English king, even for a cause – the restoration of papal authority – that he sees as just. ‘O nation, that thou couldst remove’, he cries, ‘unto a pagan shore, / Where these two Christian armies might combine / The blood of malice in a vein of league, / And not spend it so unneighborly!’ (5.2.33, 36–39). Even Erasmus, for instance, who is for the most part an outspoken pacifist, makes an exception for armed resistance to Ottoman expansion. Henry points up this possibility in his marriage proposal to Katherine. ‘Shall not thou and I’, he says, ‘compound a boy, half French, half English, that shall go to Constantinople and take the Turk by the beard?’ (5.2.203–6). As in the case of the Crusades which Henry’s father, Henry IV, hopes in vain to join, many of Shakespeare’s countrymen, as well as, perhaps, even Shakespeare himself, would have considered the restoration of greater Christendom in the Holy Land, if it could be done, a paradigmatic example of a legitimate justification for military action. Honour itself, however, especially at the cost of other Christians, was suspect.

Shakespeare’s clearest attack on the intrinsic value of honour as a cue for war appears in *Troilus and Cressida*. Hector argues with considerable force that the Trojans should not support Paris’s adultery, then abruptly resolves, nonetheless, ‘to keep Helen still’ for the sake of ‘our joint and several dignities’ (2.1.191–93). Troilus agrees. ‘I would not wish a drop of Trojan blood / Spent more in her defence’ (2.1.197–98). ‘But’, he goes on, ‘she is a theme of honour and renown’ (2.1.198–99). The volte-face in their reasoning is meant to be dubious; it is the same kind of self-deceptive casuistry Shakespeare often explores in his soliloquies.<sup>32</sup> Shakespeare’s own perspective can be discerned in the ironic prologue, as well as the general tone of the play, undercutting and de-glamorizing the legend of the Trojan War at every conceivable turn. ‘The princes orgulous’, the prologue proclaims, ‘their high blood chafed’ (2); ‘orgulous’ is deliberately over-the-top diction, setting up the anti-climax of ‘chafed’. The same pattern of deflation holds throughout. ‘The ravished Helen, Menelaus’ queen, / With wanton Paris sleeps, and that’s the quarrel’ (9–10). ‘Quarrel’ is a bathetic punchline; the end in this case, Shakespeare suggests, does not measure up to the means.

Shakespeare's most extensive criticism of violence in the name of honour can be found, however, in his depiction of ancient Rome. In *Coriolanus* and *Titus Andronicus*, the imperatives of honour lead to ongoing conflict between Rome and its neighbours, the Volscians and the Goths. In *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra*, as well as *Coriolanus*, dissatisfaction with anything less than absolute *imperium*, absolute individual command, leads to civil war within Rome itself. Enobarbus, for example, simply dismisses out of hand the very idea that Antony and Octavian might peacefully coexist. After Lepidus, a would-be peacemaker, fails and is disposed of, Enobarbus dryly remarks, 'World, thou hast a pair of chaps, no more; / And throw between them all the food thou hast, / They'll grind the one the other' (3.4.13–15). In like vein, St. Augustine uses Rome's founders, Romulus and Remus, as a paradigmatic example of the 'fratricide' which he sees at the heart of what he calls 'the earthly city'. 'Both desired to have the glory of founding the Roman republic, but both could not have as much glory as if only one claimed it; for he who wished to have the glory of ruling would certainly rule less if his power were shared' (15.5).

In his depiction of ancient Rome, Shakespeare echoes St. Augustine's critique of the Romans in his *City of God*, which itself draws on the more secular Roman history of Sallust. At the beginning of this account of the war with Catiline, Sallust claims that ambition first entered the world with the Persians, Athenians and Spartans. These empires, he says, were the first 'to subdue cities and nations, to make the lust for dominion [*libido dominandi*] a pretext for war, [and] to consider the greatest empire the greatest glory' (2.2). Citing this passage (3.14), St. Augustine seizes on Sallust's concept of *libido dominandi* and recasts it as the defining feature of the Roman character. It is this quality, he argues, not Christianity, that was the cause of Rome's inevitable self-immolation, as well as its initial, dazzling success. Elaborating on Sallust's history, St. Augustine proposes that 'the state [of Rome] grew with amazing rapidity' on account of its 'desire for glory' and love of 'domination' (5.12). Eventually this 'vice', however, led Rome into interminable civil wars (3.14). 'This craving for sovereignty [*libido ista dominandi*]', he concludes, 'disturbs and consumes the human race with frightful ills'. 'How shall I speak in detail of the same wars, so often renewed in subsequent reigns, though they seemed to have been finished by great victories; and of wars that time after time were brought to an end by great slaughters,

and which yet time after time were renewed by the posterity of those who had made peace and struck treaties?’ (3.14; cp. 19.7; cp. 15.4).

In his retelling of the history of medieval England, as well as ancient Rome, Shakespeare presents something very like the problem of recurrent civil war which St. Augustine emphasizes in his *City of God*. Secular civilization as St. Augustine describes it there is by nature trapped in an incessant cycle of violence: ‘the earthly city is divided against itself’ (15.5). As Freud says in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, *homo homini lupus*: man is a wolf to man. A slightly more hopeful perspective can be found, surprisingly, in Thomas Hobbes’ early treatise, *On the Citizen*: ‘There are two maxims which are surely both true: *Man is a God to man* and *Man is a wolf to man*. The former is true of the relations of citizens with each other, the latter of relations between commonwealths.’<sup>33</sup> The development of international law in the wake of WWII was intended to repair this incongruity; the record since then of deific international cooperation, however, has been mixed, at best. The phrase ‘forever war’ first came to prominence in the 1970s, in connection with America’s involvement in Vietnam.<sup>34</sup> The ongoing conflict in Afghanistan, however, has proved even longer in duration, long enough for two generations of soldiers, perhaps in time even a third, now that President Trump has decided to maintain an American military presence in the region. A recent headline from *The Onion*, a satirical newspaper: ‘Soldier excited to take over father’s old Afghanistan patrol route.’<sup>35</sup> A recent headline (not a joke) from the US military newspaper, *Stars and Stripes*: ‘After years apart, military father and son catch up in Afghanistan.’<sup>36</sup>

St. Augustine would not be surprised. In our postlapsarian condition, he would say, peace is a rare and precarious state, constantly reverting back to internecine conflict. War is the norm, not peace, here in the City of Man. Shakespeare would probably agree. As Paul Jorgensen explains, ‘In Shakespeare’s usage peace tends to describe a political condition, a social atmosphere, more troubling and more provocative of human drama than its customary associations of concord and tranquillity’. Peace ‘tends to prevail as the play opens’, usually in ‘a decadent or unsound form’. War, in contrast, ‘comes almost always late in the play, and comes as an agent of resolution rather than unrest’.<sup>37</sup> Working through a wide variety of contemporary sources, Jorgensen shows that this perspective on the relative merits of peace and war was far from exceptional. ‘In thus giving peace a frequently ominous or unwholesome connotation, Shakespeare was

but sharing with his countrymen a pessimism induced by current political writings and events'. Like 'most Elizabethans', Jorgensen hastens to add, Shakespeare 'did not like war'.<sup>38</sup> His point is, rather, that Shakespeare's fundamental vision of history is more Augustinian than utopian. To put it in present-day parlance, Shakespeare is on the side of John Gray, rather than Steven Pinker.<sup>39</sup> *Pace* the Beatles, as well as the Whigs, everything is not getting better all the time. As Gray writes, 'Liberal civilization is not the emerging meaning of the modern world but a historical singularity that is inherently fragile'.<sup>40</sup>

Gray's unspoken target in this case is most immediately Francis Fukuyama. 'Civilization', Gray insists, 'is not the endpoint of modern history, but a succession of interludes in recurring spasms of barbarism'.<sup>41</sup> In a hugely influential, still-controversial essay in *The National Interest*, written in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union, then later reworked into a book, *The End of History and the Last Man*, Fukuyama argues that we are approaching the 'end of history', in which liberal democracy is the only intellectual option that appears legitimate, having triumphed over erstwhile rivals such as hereditary monarchy, fascism and communism. Since then, the rise of radical Islam, including the suppression of the Green Revolution in Iran, the general failure of the Arab Spring, and the ongoing antidemocratic, Islamist turn in Turkish politics has, to say the least, made things more difficult for those who would defend Fukuyama's thesis. Nevertheless, his more general sense of how history works, one that he derives from Hegel, does provide some useful insights into Shakespeare's keen awareness of the connection between war and concepts of 'honour'.

In brief, Fukuyama helpfully aligns three different ways of talking about more or less the same emotion. The part of Henry V that, as he says, leads him to 'covet honour' is the same faculty of the soul that Plato describes as *thymos* and which he personifies in his *Republic* as a dedicated military caste. Fukuyama defines it as 'man's sense of self-worth and the demand that he be recognized'.<sup>42</sup> That last word, 'recognized', is especially important; it reflects Fukuyama's sense that what Shakespeare calls honour is a desire for what Hegel would call 'recognition' (*Anerkennung*). In keeping with Hegel, as well as other, latter-day Hegelians such as Charles Taylor and Axel Honneth, Fukuyama sees our desire to have our sense of ourselves acknowledged by other people as an innate, ineluctable and very powerful human drive.<sup>43</sup> Our effort to validate our own self-esteem is nothing less

than ‘the motor of history’.<sup>44</sup> What Axel Honneth calls the ‘struggle for recognition’ is more important, in particular, than the social and economic conditions Marx calls ‘relations of production’.<sup>45</sup> What people want most, more than any material sustenance, more than what Agamben calls ‘bare life’, is to feel respected; this desire for ‘recognition’ (*Anerkennung*) is or should be the bedrock, the most fundamental ground, of all historicist explanation of human conflict.

In his chapter for this volume, ‘The Better Part of Stolen Valour: Counterfeits, Comedy and the Supreme Court’, David Currell focuses on the ‘counterfeiting of military identity by an imposter who misappropriates the honour due to the valourous’. In the case of *United States vs. Alvarez*, Currell finds a modern counterpart to Shakespeare’s Falstaff or Pistol, who themselves reprise the classical figure of the *miles gloriosus* (braggart soldier). Within the United States, the Stolen Valor Act of 2005 had criminalized falsely claiming to have been awarded US military honours. In 2012, however, the US Supreme Court struck down on the Act on the grounds that it violated the defendant’s right to free speech, in keeping with the First Amendment to the US Bill of Rights. Currell takes the opinions of the justices as a starting point to consider how honour is defined in Shakespeare’s plays, as well as classical sources such as Homer’s *Iliad*, Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* and Plautus’s *Miles Gloriosus*. In the ancient world, honour ‘cannot be shared without division’. Martial glory is a zero-sum accolade; one wins it at the cost of someone else. Community recognition of military accomplishment, understood in this light, leads to proportional material as well as emotional rewards. Fraudulent claims jeopardize the delicate balance of this system, which the state must maintain, in some guise or other, in order to keep its military motivated. Honour is a valuable form of social capital; early modern England protected and policed its allocation through shaming, as we see in Shakespeare’s comic treatment of figures such as Parolles and Falstaff. In the case of the United States, after the Stolen Valor Act was struck down as unconstitutional, it was amended to allow false claims to military honours and instead criminalize gaining any kind of tangible benefit from such imposture. In effect, Currell concludes, ‘the dissenting and majority opinions in *United States vs. Alvarez* contest the question of whether the civil repercussions of US militarism belong to epic or comedy’.

As Hegel observes, the desire for recognition cannot be eradicated from the human psyche. No-one can be self-sufficient in that sense,

not even Shakespeare's Coriolanus, despite his strenuous efforts to escape his own need for validation. We all want honour of one kind or another.<sup>46</sup> The key problem of politics, then, as Fukuyama suggests, is not to get rid of what Plato calls *thymos* altogether, but instead to channel it in a direction that is as conducive as possible to peace. To help explain what he means, Fukuyama invents two terms. *Isothymia* is the desire to be recognized as equal and is compatible with peaceful coexistence. *Megalothymia* is the desire to be recognized as superior, and eventually, inevitably leads to violence. For Fukuyama's former supervisor, Samuel Huntington, the paradigmatic example of what Fukuyama would call a megalothymotic society in our own time is the Muslim world. As Huntington notoriously notes, 'Islam has bloody borders'.<sup>47</sup> For Shakespeare, in contrast, as for St. Augustine, the paradigmatic example of what Fukuyama would call a megalothymotic society is ancient Rome. Fukuyama's neologism, *megalothymia*, is essentially interchangeable with St. Augustine's concept of *libido dominandi*, as well as perhaps Nietzsche's not-unrelated concept of 'the will to power'.

In his *City of God*, St. Augustine defends Christianity against pagan accusations that it was the reason for the ongoing, alarming collapse of the Roman Empire. As St. Augustine sees that decline, Rome fell prey to its own unreconstructed will to power, torn apart and fatally weakened by internecine civil wars. In the Enlightenment, however, Edward Gibbon took up the pagan charge anew. By discouraging Romans' traditional valour and ruthlessness, he argues, Christianity left them unable to resist the onslaught of various German tribes. Christian doctrines of 'pusillanimity' led the once-indomitable Romans to become, as he says, 'indolent' and 'effeminate'. In his depiction of the Wars of the Roses, Shakespeare seems to set up a similar clash of possible interpretations. Why did England descend into civil war?

One answer can be found in the contrast between Henry V and his son, Henry VI, the two kings at the centre of Shakespeare's two tetralogies of English history plays. Of the two, Henry V tends to draw more attention. For the last several decades, stage productions of *Henry V* have tended to use the play as an occasion to agitate against Western military involvement overseas, casting Henry in an unflattering light. If we want to understand Shakespeare's own perspective, however, I would suggest that we hold off on criticism of Henry, unless we also address the manifest failure of his son, Henry VI, as well as the various fatal mistakes of another peace-loving,



pious royal heir: Hamlet. Otherwise, we run the risk of blaming Henry V personally and perhaps excessively for what Shakespeare himself might well see instead as the imperfect, fallen nature of the world itself: to read the context of Henry V, the political arena in which he exists, as if its evils were somehow products of his own particular character.

Within the Christian tradition, it is not an exaggeration to say that secular government is sometimes represented as the special province of the devil. When Christ is tempted in the wilderness, Satan offers him, as if they were his own to give, 'all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them' (Matt. 4:8). In keeping with this vision of 'the earthly city', for St. Augustine, any postlapsarian political order inevitably will fall short of the kingdom of heaven. Even at its best, for it to function at all, for it simply to exist, a secular state will require incessant, off-putting moral compromise. The measure to keep in mind is up from anarchy, Hobbes's *bellum omnia contra omnes*, rather than down from Kant's 'perpetual peace'. In light of this pessimistic, Augustinian view of secular politics, as opposed to present-day progressive optimism, Henry VI's efforts at diplomacy seem quixotic, and his abstemious aversion to any kind of violence comes across as short-sighted, inadequate to the task of maintaining a viable peace. As Lord Clifford is dying, he lays the blame for England's civil war squarely on its child-like, mild-mannered king.

Henry, hadst thou swayed as kings should do,  
Or as thy father and his father did,  
Giving no ground unto the house of York,  
They never had then sprung like summer flies!  
I and ten thousand in this luckless realm  
Had left no mourning widows for our death. (3 Henry VI, 2.6.14–19)

Shakespeare depicts the reign of Henry VI, in other words, in much the same way that unsympathetic historians of American foreign policy now tend to describe the presidency of Jimmy Carter, back in the 1970s, and perhaps in time may come to describe the more recent presidency of Barack Obama. Pious progressive naïveté about human rights and international norms, emerging out of an over-optimistic secularization of Christian principles, found itself caught off-guard, in the end, by ruthless Russian and Iranian *Realpolitik*.<sup>48</sup> Henry VI, like Jimmy Carter, makes a category error: he treats the City of Man as if it were the City of God, and it blows up in his face.

In his *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Gibbon describes 'the contempt and reproaches of the Pagans', who, he explains,

confronted by the rise of Christianity, ‘very frequently asked, what must be the fate of the empire, attacked on every side by barbarians, if all mankind should adopt the pusillanimous sentiments of this new sect?’ (1.15). We today tend to be concerned about the danger of what Fukuyama calls *megalothymia*, which we see writ large in the figure of Shakespeare’s Henry V. It is also possible, however, to see cause for concern in the political implications of its polar opposite, a timid and retiring *microthymia*. What happens if an individual, or a nation, lacks the *thymos* necessary for effective self-defence? ‘I am pigeon-livered’, Hamlet complains, ‘and lack gall / To make oppression bitter’ (2.2.512–13). In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle criticizes what he calls *micropsychia* (‘smallness of soul’, ‘undue self-denigration’). In his *Moralia*, Plutarch introduces a parallel concept, *dysōpia* (lit., ‘lack of [inner] resources’).<sup>49</sup> We might call it ‘fecklessness’. It denotes an inability to stand up for oneself; to resist importunity; to fight rather than concede. In his *Life of Brutus*, for instance, Plutarch complains that some men ‘dare deny nothing’.

This charge of *dysōpia*, ‘fecklessness’, seems fitting for Henry VI, and it is perhaps just as dangerous, if not more so, in its own more indirect fashion, as Henry V’s war to win back English territory in France. At least, Shakespeare seems to think so. A refusal to engage in power politics creates a power vacuum which is not necessarily an improvement; we might look, for instance, to present-day Iraq, Syria and Libya. In Shakespeare’s first tetralogy, the chaos which Henry VI allows to consume the nation leads in time, and not by chance, to the rise of less-scrupulous, genuinely frightening figures such as Richard III. For all his talk of the ‘end of history’, Fukuyama for his part does worry, as his argument draws to a close, that efforts to excise all interest in military engagement from the moral universe of liberal democracies will leave them defenceless, in the end, against abiding enemies. The ‘last men of history’, he warns, will not survive if they allow themselves to become ‘men without chests’. As explanation, he cites Nietzsche’s Zarathustra: ‘For thus you speak: “Real we are entirely, and without belief or superstition”. Thus you stick out your chests – but alas, they are hollow!’<sup>50</sup>

With this problem of *thymos* in mind, it was fascinating to me to see how frequently former US President Barack Obama was compared to Hamlet, when he was in office, as a way of criticizing his approach to foreign policy.<sup>51</sup> The analogy could be found across the entire spectrum of opinion, left to right, foreign and domestic: Mitt Romney (‘This is not the time for Hamlet in the White House’),<sup>52</sup>

*The Guardian*,<sup>53</sup> *The Huffington Post*,<sup>54</sup> *National Review*,<sup>55</sup> *The Weekly Standard*,<sup>56</sup> *Commentary*,<sup>57</sup> *Russia Today*,<sup>58</sup> *The Times of Israel*,<sup>59</sup> *Al Arabiya*<sup>60</sup> and so on. In his chapter for this volume, 'Hamletism in the Spanish Civil War, 1936–39', Jesús Tronch considers a similar case of political appropriation. During the Spanish Civil War, in newspaper articles, theatrical productions and a novel by Paulino Masip, *The Diary of Hamlet Garcia*, Republican provocateurs sought to counter the perceived 'Hamletism' of intellectuals: 'ineffectuality, vacillation, or irresolution in social and political commitment'. The newspaper *La Vanguardia*, edited by Masip, sought to 'stir the "inertia" of some citizens' and to 'dispel the moral qualms and problems of conscience which the "revolution" posed to them'. José Bergamín in *Hora de España* tried to persuade them that 'the essence of intelligence is in the faculty of deciding rather than hesitating'. A production of *Hamlet* in Valencia in 1937 tried to 'hold the mirror' up to its own audience, critiquing them for their neglect of 'urgent affairs'. Finally, in his novel *The Diary of Hamlet Garcia*, written in retrospect from exile in Mexico, Masip reflects upon the defeat of the Republican cause, brought about in part, he suggests, by intellectuals like his protagonist opting out of political engagement.

The accusations, like Masip's, brought against President Obama that he was too akin to Shakespeare's Hamlet are all the more interesting when weighed against the equally pervasive tendency to compare his predecessor, President George W. Bush, to Hamlet's polar opposite, Henry V.<sup>61</sup> What journalists criticized Obama for was not simply indecision, but more specifically a lack of 'fire' or 'passion' – I would say, a lack of *thymos*. They wanted, that is, the same kind of flashing-eye, fire-in-the-belly, impulsive, even reckless emotional engagement that they had criticized, not long before, in President Bush. Perhaps they were right on both counts. In any case, it is interesting to observe their ambivalence about the role of indignation in foreign policy, as well as their use of Shakespeare's characters as a kind of shorthand. Given the change Fukuyama describes – the tendency of liberal democracies to attempt to tame or even eradicate *thymos* – we no longer have a shared framework for thinking clearly and explicitly about the role of honour in international relations.<sup>62</sup> Journalists turn, therefore, to Shakespeare, and to an age in which it was more acceptable to talk about honour openly. Shakespeare's kings, like the US presidents themselves, serve as helpful personifications of different approaches to managing, reconciling and stabilizing our collective human desire for recognition.

In her chapter for this volume, 'Where Character is King: Gregory Doran's *Henriad*', Alice Dailey reflects on her experience of attending the Royal Shakespeare Company's recent 'mega-event', 'King and Country: Shakespeare's Great Cycle of Kings', a production of all four plays of the second tetralogy in Stratford, London, China and New York, directed by Gregory Doran and headlined by David Tennant in the role of Richard II. Dailey finds the productions surprisingly 'modest, intimate', 'less interested in a conceptual engagement with politics or monarchy than in an exploration of character'. The Histories Cycle directed by Doran's predecessor at the RSC, Michael Boyd, a decade earlier, which included both tetralogies, 'made elaborate use of conceptual casting, stylized battle scenes, trapeze, prop recycling and ghostly reappearance to create thematic coherence'. Doran, in contrast, eschewed 'design-driven staging' and 'conceptual intervention' in favour of an emphasis on 'subtle characterization' and 'ensemble acting'. This decision, Dailey observes, helps to clarify 'the inadequacy of conventional literary-critical hermeneutics for describing theatrical performance', in keeping with the concerns of performance scholars W. B. Worthen and Andrew James Hartley, as well as Rebecca Schneider's sense of the limitations of archival evidence, which inevitably tend to foreground 'design or concept'. In the case of 'the Richard-Aumerle kiss scene' in Doran's *Richard II*, for example, 'the ephemeral, emotive present' is 'the essential content of the production', a form of 'subtle character work' which it is difficult, perhaps impossible, to record on video or in still photos.

Other choices about characterization, however, Dailey argues, proved less effective. Dailey questions young actor Alex Hassel's 'nice-guy portrayal of Henry V' as 'figuring out his warrior-king role on the fly', especially his performance of the 'I know you all' speech from *1 Henry IV* as an 'epiphany', as well as his representation of Henry's dismissal of Falstaff as an anxious, hurried, reluctant recitation of a set speech the king has learned by rote. Dailey sees this interpretation as too incongruent with her own sense from the text itself of Prince Hal as calculating, cold-hearted and cynical. 'By suggesting Henry's spontaneous discovery of his role, the production attempted to sanitize the character of premeditation or strategy.' In light of this perceived 'dissonance' between text and performance, Dailey sees some limitations to Doran's approach. 'What hampered the cycle's presentation of Henry was its prioritization of emotional immediacy over the production script's built-in formal mechanisms

for constituting character, such as typology, structural juxtaposition, and the diachronic accretion of habitual action’.

Is Henry V a ‘good guy’ or a ‘bad guy’? The debate has become in practice a synecdoche for a larger question: was Shakespeare a pacifist? More broadly speaking, was Shakespeare a progressive? Steven Marx argues that Shakespeare changes his mind; he starts out pro-war in his early plays and ends up anti-war in his late plays. Like Quabeck, however, I think it is possible to discern a fairly consistent compromise position on the ethics of war running throughout all of his plays, akin to and perhaps informed by the positions typical of contemporary just war theory: a reconciliation of the real and the ideal grounded in the Christian doctrine of the Fall of Man, as well as Aristotle’s sense of ethics as inherently and at best only approximate and circumstantial.<sup>63</sup> According to this perspective, which in Shakespeare’s context would have been the norm, war is at times a necessary evil. War is on occasion the least-worst solution, given the fallenness of human nature.

To use the technical language of law, as well as theology, the ethics of war as Shakespeare sees it is an ethics of equity. Calvin develops this concept in his early commentary on Seneca’s *De Clementia*, in which he distinguishes equity, the individual application of a law, from *summum ius*, the fullness or strict letter of law. Christian theology does tend to present pacifism as an ethical ideal. In keeping with the principle of equity, however, Christian theologians also grant that violence is sometimes acceptable, even necessary; magistrates have a responsibility to protect the innocent from injury. In his *Institutes*, for example, Calvin writes, ‘both natural equity [*naturalis aequitas*] and the nature of the office dictate that princes must be armed not only to restrain the misdeeds of private individuals, but also to defend by war the domains entrusted to their safekeeping, if at any time they are under attack’ (4.20.11).

As St. Augustine explains in his *City of God*, ‘the wise man will wage just wars’; ‘wrongdoing of the other party’ sometimes compels him to do so. Nevertheless, he will ‘lament’ the ‘necessity’ of any violence he brings to bear (19.7). Wars bring the Christian soldier grief, insofar as they are a manifestation of man’s persistent wickedness, his more general propensity for sin. This perspective casts Shakespeare’s Henry V in a different light. As Peter Phialas writes, ‘the king is not the ruthless Machiavellian that some critics take him to be’. Henry ‘has no choice in the rejection of Falstaff or the execution of the traitor’. ‘It does not follow’, therefore, that he ‘fails

to experience real pain in passing judgment'. 'Actions on the king's part are made to underscore the tragic element in Shakespeare's – and King Henry's – conception of the royal dilemma'.<sup>64</sup> Seen from this Augustinian perspective, Shakespeare's Henry V, like his father before him, ends up isolated and sad, not because he is evil, but because Shakespeare sees politics as inherently tragic. There is no hidden, progressive solution; no better alternative that Henry somehow missed; no escaping from the grim necessity of moral compromise. We today tend to want to believe otherwise. But I am not sure Shakespeare would share our optimism.

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## Notes

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9. *Ibid.*, 228–29.
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16. Patricia A. Cahill, *Unto the Breach: Martial Formations, Historical Trauma, and the Early Modern Stage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 16.
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19. *Ibid.*, 16.
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23. *Ibid.*, 73.
24. *Ibid.*, 139.
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41. *Ibid.*
42. Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2006), 181.
43. Cp. Charles Taylor, 'The Politics of Recognition', in *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 25–73.
44. Fukuyama, *End of History*, xix.
45. Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, trans. Joel Anderson (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995).
46. For more detailed analysis of doomed attempts at autonomy in Shakespeare's Roman plays, see Patrick Gray, *Shakespeare and the Fall of the Roman Republic: Selfhood, Stoicism, and Civil War* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, forthcoming).
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