

# SHAKESPEARE AS POLITICAL THINKER

## INTRODUCTION

Shakespeare owes his pre-eminence among poets to the power that allows his art to charm spectators but equally to the comprehensiveness of his wisdom regarding human things, a wisdom which invites and sustains inquiries into its grounds. The essays here collected presuppose that the charm exists for the sake of the wisdom. The contributors presume that Shakespearean poetry affords something more determinate and responsible than the personalized fabrication of an imagined world answerable only to the requirements of self-coherence. If Shakespeare composes a supreme fiction, its supremacy rests upon its singular comprehensiveness as an image of truth. The poems and plays propose a series of vantages upon the one preconstituted world to which all men share access according to the varying capacities of their intelligence and heart. Shakespeare's acknowledgment that his images subserve truth—"minding true things by what their mock'ries be"—opens his art to interpretation while imposing the office of critical judgment. Because we know something about the same world he knows, we can interpret his poems and make discriminations between the various claimants to knowledge depicted in his poems. Because we evidently know appreciably less than he knows, the task of interpretation and judgment must proceed under his guidance. Criticism develops as an inquiry, a conversation of non-catechetical query and reply wherein the questioner seeks instruction from his superior even as regards the questions he should ask. For the peculiarly unequal character of this conversation requires that the questioner learn from the poem what questions he should set it to answer. Here too Shakespeare provides guidance.

From the pointed comments which obtrude from time to time in his Prologues, as well as from the remarks regarding dramatic poetry contained in *Hamlet* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, one may gather that Shakespeare anticipates two distinct audiences for his work.<sup>1</sup> The distinction seems to amount to rather more than the familiar matter of the disparity between jostling base mechanics and place-keeping gentry. A quibble in one late prologue appears to hold out the hope of a rare "understanding friend" silent among the impecunious clustered at the lip of the stage.<sup>2</sup> Committing the company's playbooks to print ensures that the plays can be ruminated under circumstances that permit leisured reflection, even among those not of the leisured class. Yet the availability of printed texts does not remove another sort of distinction between attentive auditors and oblivious groundlings. Experience attests that readers can consume years in blar-eyed confrontation with folio facsimile and concordance without relinquishing their naïvété as mere spectators. The serious student of Shakespeare's poetry has occasion to reflect upon his own naïvété each time he returns to a play he once may have thought he had grasped. A difference in the reach and depth of attentiveness distinguishes those who are merely spectators from those capable of entering into conversation with the dramatist.

Shakespeare's chances of acquiring understanding friends are made better by print only to the extent that his readers possess those virtues of the art of reading that are identical with those recognized for the art of close conversation. The enabling virtue for conversation would seem to be the concern on the part of the listener to understand what the poet is concerned to understand. Shakespeare

indicates the more important concerns by giving prominence throughout his poetry to certain recurrent topics.

One of the foremost of these topics is politics. The plays offer a political surface inasmuch as their action is public action. Shakespeare's stage supports only enactments which have a public extension. To first discern the prominence of politics, it suffices to note the arrangements of *dramatis personae* by reference to social station. We know that the bulk of the characters are public men before we know anything else about them, and we know that their numbers will be ample enough to convey a sense of the richness of public affairs. The surface of action bears out the surface of characterization. The plot of a Shakespearean play usually turns upon a changeover among those who exercise political power (the tragedies and histories) or upon complications arising from political exile or from problematic enforcement of a law (the comedies). Since dramatic poetry almost necessarily requires public settings and social activities, the bald fact that the surface of the plays is political does not carry us far toward conclusions regarding Shakespeare's understanding of politics. However, our flat-footed observation is not without significance. Modern audiences are familiar with dramas which attempt to confine their subject to the inwardly turned experience of individuals or which restrict their scope to a portrayal of relationships within one family. Shakespearean drama passes beyond the private lives of particular men and beyond the incompletely public life of families. Every Shakespearean character lives within a political regime governed by laws and shaped by distinctive institutions. How a character acts and how he perceives his deeds is

affected, sometimes crucially affected, by his participation in the corporate life of a city or a realm. We might infer from his political focus that Shakespeare conceives the political context as a necessary condition for displaying, and hence also for understanding, human nature. Quite apart from the instinct of sexual love that brings man to woman or the need to exchange affection that keeps men and women together and extends to kindred, and perhaps apart from the innate sociability that causes men to congregate on any terms, Shakespeare presents human beings seeking their completion within associations that maintain community by combining affection and compulsion. Shakespeare provokes his serious readers to consider in what sense this propensity to live in political community is natural to human beings. Is it natural merely in the sense of instinctual, habitual, or given; or is it natural in the sense of proper to the realization of the essential? The omnipresent political bearings of the plays invite, one may say, this first question of political philosophy. To pursue it at all satisfactorily, one is obliged to consider other questions relating to the view of human nature that appears to underlie the poetry. Politics does not exhaust Shakespeare's subject. We see political life transacted within horizons that enfold other human activities; principal among these are sexual love, friendship, divine worship, the interactions of kinsmen, personal combat, and, in rare instances, the pursuit of private contemplation. We may discern the place of the political theme within Shakespeare's subject by gauging the weight of politics in relation to the other ends the dramatist allots to his characters. The estimate depends upon an

assessment of what for Shakespeare constitutes a human life. Do his plays and poems imply a view of what essentially defines human beings?

The subject which for Shakespeare subsumes all others and which appears to be the distinctively human province is the activity of making choices. His characters deliberate toward choice, implement their decisions, and reflect upon the consequences of having chosen one possibility in preference to another. Every play builds toward, then moves from, an important act of choice which stands as a fulcrum transferring momentum of complication to momentum of resolution. The same holds true for the non-dramatic works. *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece* center upon moments of decision; the sonnet sequence imparts a sense of dramatic urgency by reflecting upon the eligibility of alternate courses of action. Will the young man marry or guard his bachelor autonomy? Can the poet-lover resolve the division of his affection and liberate himself from his dark lady? It appears that for Shakespeare the distinctively human mode of being—though not necessarily man's highest mode of being—reveals itself in acts of choice. Men are what they elect to do.

Election "makes not up," as Burgundy reminds us, upon just any conditions. If they are not predetermined, Shakespearean characters are yet predisposed to certain choices by the bent of their personalities and by the influence of circumstances. Their decisions never occur in a void but always within a world partly of their own making, partly not. With his first appearance a Shakespearean personage bespeaks an ordination to a certain purchase upon life compounded of his individual proclivities modified by sexual identity, blood

heritage, and circumstances of social station. He also finds himself born into an order of authoritative opinion supported by political power. His neighbors share a public creed, declaring themselves hospitable to a given view of human and divine affairs and unfriendly to others. Prior to any volition, therefore, Shakespeare's characters are men or women; are attached by birth to a set of kinsmen; are born Englishmen, Italians, Romans, Greeks, or Danes; possess as their birthright a station and occupation; are pagan, Christian, or Jew. Every character thus shares a public world with other citizens or subjects, even though he takes his place within the particular sector of that world claimed by his individuality. A Shakespearean character can be seen as a gathering of motives, feelings, and thoughts which by their dual origin constitute a meeting ground where individual personality conjoins with political formation.

Considering that the era during which the plays were conceived was a time when fundamentally opposed conceptions of civil society contended for dominance, we should not be surprised to discover that Shakespeare's poetry conducts an inquiry into issues connected with political formation—an inquiry commensurate in scope with that pursued by political philosophers. If we take note of the principal alternative views upon this theme available to an educated man of the Renaissance, we may suppose that Shakespeare found himself confronted with a choice between three rival teachings. We can imagine him standing at a juncture from whence three roads diverge. One way leads back to classical antiquity and the foundations of political philosophy in the thought of the Greeks. The route terminates in Athens, but to arrive there one goes via Rome.

Another way would take the poet to Jerusalem (Davidic or Christian) and a view of the city conceived under the auspices of scriptural religion. The third fork leads to a state shortly to be named, in one of its imagined versions, New Atlantis, a novel regime built on a conception of political community avowedly modern and opposed to classical and Judaeo-Christian traditions by a purpose that envisions the relaxation of the moral standards upheld by classical and scriptural education for the sake of releasing energies required for the effort of liberating human beings from such naturally imposed limitations as scarcity, insecurity, and bodily ills.

A review of the intellectual sources evident in the plays or readily accessible to the playwright allows us to extend the figure. We may imagine several guides posted on the three roads to solicit travelers. Stationed about midway, we should say, on the route to Athens, Virgil invites traffic towards Rome, and somewhat beyond, Plutarch urges the traveler who has toured the Roman Republic to continue his journey on to Greece. Further on the peregrine dramatist can discern Aristotle and, vague in the distance near the vanishing point, he can just distinguish Plato. Commanding intellectual authorities also mark the route to the Holy City. Close to the crossroads Hooker, Fortescue, More, and John of Salisbury might be posted, in the distance Aquinas and various schoolmen, then Augustine. At a further distance Paul and the Evangelists would beckon, while most remote, like Plato poised at the horizon, there might stand the austere figure of Moses, author of the Pentateuch. The third road is under construction. A knot of unrecognizable workers set paving

stone for the thoroughfare that will carry men to the modern city. They move to the orders of two master engineers who are known to the traveler. Machiavelli and Bacon urge him to join in the direction of the highway project.

Shakespeare could know these political guides through their writings. He incorporates Plutarch verbatim in his Roman plays, constantly alludes to Virgil's *Aeneid*, quotes Paul and the Evangelists, refers to Aristotle and Plato, and appears to adapt a portion of one of Plato's dialogues.<sup>3</sup> Concerning his knowledge of the later Christian writers we know little, but scholars think he collaborated on a play about More (he mentions More in *Henry VIII*) and there is some evidence that Shakespeare knew John of Salisbury's chief political work, the *Policraticus*.<sup>4</sup> In any event he would know something of the principles that inform the writings of these thinkers from sermons or from the retail work of Elizabethan literary middlemen. Concerning his acquaintance with the early architects of modernity we can hardly be certain, but there are three references to Machiavelli by name, and, if Shakespeare was not Bacon, he presumably knew something of Bacon's early thought. Just how much Shakespeare may have read in authors other than Plutarch is a matter of conjecture. However, one does not require a listing of his personal library to sense a kinship of the philosophical themes evident in the plays with the concerns of the writers in these three rival traditions. The themes are decisively political. They turn upon the questions that motivate all political thought: what is the best life for man and what public arrangements are most conducive to this life? We might reasonably hope to find in Shakespeare's plays some guidance for our own inquiries into the

three traditions and hence some direction for our own attempts to reflect on this perennial question. Yet one does not find direction if one does not seek it, and few contemporary authorities on Shakespeare seek political guidance from his writings.<sup>5</sup> Literary critics who attribute wisdom to Shakespeare's art—a group by no means co-extensive with those who ascribe excellence—are rather inclined to say that his wisdom “transcends” politics altogether. Their opinion is misfounded, I think, but perhaps not inexplicable.

It may be that the political inquiry which animates Shakespeare's plays can capture the interest of only those modern readers who, after a conscious effort of self-displacement, can think themselves back to the juncture of the three roads. For most readers of Shakespeare the rivalry between the three traditions is no longer alive. If they know of it at all, they think of it as a past controversy which has been settled in favor of modernity. But if they know the rivalry merely as something past, we may suspect they do not really know it. I do not mean to say that every member of the contemporary audience considers himself a partisan of the project begun by Machiavelli and Bacon and completed, at least in principle, in the modern technological state. Yet in one disabling respect modern readers of Shakespeare come to his plays as more or less unwitting captives of a technological regime which encourages a view of politics essentially technological in its conception of ends.

A thinker distinguished for his protracted inquiry into the grounds underlying modernity finds the distinctive character of machine technology in its “challenging” or “setting upon” nature. To the challenger bent on setting upon its

resources, the physical world reveals itself as a “standing-reserve” awaiting the challenger’s demands.<sup>6</sup> Presently regnant doctrines of political order comport with the peremptory bearing of technology. Modern politics envisions the state as an engine for exploiting the standing-reserve of nature and distributing the gains thereof. This conception of political life as an enterprise in human mastery directed against a grudging but indefinitely malleable cosmos once had to earn a hearing in opposition to the teaching of classical philosophy and scriptural religion, a teaching which located the end of civil society in the cultivation of character. The success of the modern premise in securing custodianship over public education has caused modern readers to be put at an unsympathetic distance from older poets whose political understanding was formed by the classical or scriptural traditions. Ancient, medieval, and Christian-humanist moralists were aware of the powers of moral suasion possessed by poets generally, and especially by dramatists. They could see that every dramatic performance was a political event inasmuch as every play disposes its audience to share its author’s view of human character and human ends. By virtue of its influence over the moral education of the citizen, dramatic art was once considered to be subject to the comprehensive educative art of the legislator.<sup>7</sup> Its potential of co-operating with or, for that matter, of subverting the shaping effect of the laws was once thought inseparable from its essence: its making of compelling images of human beings enacting moral choices. Men are disposed to imitate what the artist disposes men to admire. Of necessity, then, the charming images presented in plays compete with the imperative voices of the

laws. Even if it should aim at encouraging law-abidingness, each work of the dramatic poet conveys through its imagined life possibilities of conduct which offer alternatives to the regime the audience has come to know through the laws. Within the understanding of politics that prevailed prior to modernity, poetry is in principle political because it pursues indirectly the end of character formation which political constitutions pursue directly through their legislative instruments.

Modernity leaves unchanged the educative property of drama. The modern reader can sense that Shakespeare's plays move their audiences to respond with love or disgust to the actions wrought on the stage. He can guess that the habits of moral discrimination promoted by Shakespeare's guided spectacles may cohere to provide a sort of wisdom. However, because modern readers tend uncritically to accept the moral confinement of modern politics, they incline to think of this wisdom as having nothing to do with politics and are therefore predisposed to overlook the centrality of politics, in its ancient sense, to Shakespeare's subject.

To perceive the political character of Shakespeare's plays, one may be compelled to recover a vantage upon political things that sees the essential political act less in terms of power and more in terms of education, manners, morals, religion, and ethics.<sup>8</sup> Such a recovery might begin by reviving the ancient and Socratic understanding of regimes as images of certain dominant types of the soul. According to this conception, particular cities encourage the development of distinct human characters and reflect in their institutions, laws, educative customs, and arts their sponsorship of a particular view of human

nature and of the best life. A reading of the dramas informed by this pre-modern view of the political can better understand the oligarchic excesses of Shakespeare's Venice, the timocratic drive of Shakespeare's Rome, and the shaping effects of royal rule upon the character of life in Shakespeare's England. The recidivist critic must soon realize, however, that the Socratic and Aristotelian analysis of regimes is not altogether sufficient as a model by which one may approach Shakespeare's thought on man and the city. The view underlying the ancient classification of regimes comports well enough with the plays' emphasis upon varieties of ways of life, but in at least one important respect the classical types do not fit the world portrayed in the plays. The distance between Christian Venice and pagan Rome cannot be accounted for simply by referring to the differences Aristotle noted between oligarchic and timocratic constitutions. Shakespeare also depicts a kind of *politeia* which Aristotle does not envision at all. Duke Theseus and Richard II are both autocrats, yet classical notions of monarchy will not prepare us for the most important difference between a Theseus who governs by natural virtue and a Richard who rules by appeal to his people's endorsement of a special political theology thought to derive from scriptural religion. One must supplement the ancient classification of constitutions with an understanding of the way regimes derive their form from communal opinions concerning divinity and divine law. In the plays set before the advent of Christianity, human lives take shape from individual propensities responding to the laws of cities. In the plays set within Christian times, Shakespeare's characters consult not only their native inclinations and the laws of their state,

but, concurrently, certain transcendent prescriptions decreed by the scriptural God. To follow Shakespeare's reflections upon human beings and citizens, one must reflect upon the political consequences of Christian belief. The political subject necessarily embraces the religious subject.

A reader who comes to the plays equipped with some awareness of the pre-modern horizons of politics will likely find more significance in the dramatic settings than an audience which does not relate politics to character formation. One who has retrieved an older understanding of the varieties of regimes may see in the diversity of settings an indication of Shakespeare's attempt to explore the alternative conceptions of the best civil life offered, respectively, by classical antiquity, Christianity, and modernity. For example, the classical method of distinguishing regimes by reference to the ethical type that a regime fosters may provide a rationale for the sequence of plays set in Greece. The Grecian dramas appear to rehearse the range of forms one encounters in the Platonic-Aristotelian classifications of constitutions. *Troilus and Cressida* presents a heroic timocracy, *Timon* an ancient oligarchy, *Pericles* ancient monarchy and tyranny, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* monarchy and the origins of antique democracy.<sup>9</sup> From the same vantage the Roman plays and *The Rape of Lucrece* appear to coalesce in another sequence wherein Shakespeare considers in Republican and Imperial versions a regime animated by the conviction that the best life equates with the attainment of superlative public honors. The Roman poems seem also to present a community that seeks to arrange its affairs virtually without reference to the divine. The absence of gods serves to intensify the

Romans' dependence upon securing the approval of other men.<sup>10</sup> By relating setting to the understanding of the regime as a way of life, we may get a new purchase upon the dramas Shakespeare assigns to his Englishmen and Renaissance Italians. England and Venice appear to serve as locales for inquiries into the problems specific to Christian societies and, at the same time, to offer public situations appropriate for confronting some of the issues posed by modern politics. The ten dramas set in England and, especially, the continuous action of the two tetralogies, depict the transition from a Christian monarchy based on assumptions of divine providence to a more modernly conceived sovereign for whom authority depends exclusively upon the ability of the prince to cultivate a reputation for piety while finding his final guidance in principles consistent with the anti-Christian statecraft of a Machiavelli. Richard II stands at the beginning of this transition, Richard III at its completion. Henry V is the necessary bridge between the Christian Richard II and the imperfect Machiavellian, Richard III. In its corporate deeds and standards the English people reflect the change evident in their rulers. The last of Shakespeare's English plays, *Henry VIII*, resolves a problem central to the first, *King John*, and marks the appropriate culmination in the development implicit in the entire sequence. With Henry VIII the Christian church becomes formally subordinate to the English king. Shakespeare's England comes to resemble Shakespeare's Rome, with the addition of a queasy conscience.

Venice offers the most distinctively modern setting. The mercantile Venetian republic represents modernity in three respects. It dedicates itself to

capital venture (distinguished from the capital consumption of Timon's Athens); it encourages the mingling of races and religions; it seeks to promote the utmost liberty compatible with laws promoting speculative commerce. More than any other Shakespearean regime, Venice depends upon luck. Venetian tragedy (*Othello*) turns upon a moment of extraordinary bad luck, whereas Venetian comedy (*The Merchant of Venice*) finds its resolution through a number of instances of wondrous good luck. Venice appears to be extraordinarily dependent upon chance because it lacks corporate means for resolving conflicts bred by its three dominant civic attributes. The city is incompletely modern to the degree that its technical resources are rudimentary compared with the science and inventions enjoyed by subsequent modern commercial regimes. Yet, with respect to achieving a providence over human affairs it is difficult to see that a more competent technology should lessen rather than increase the Venetian dependence upon fortune.

An often repeated half-truth has it that Shakespeare portrays all his dramatic personages, whatever their nominal differences of country, as Elizabethan Englishmen.<sup>11</sup> The truth tacit in this observation is that Shakespeare presents perennial modes of the soul which appear virtually the same in all ages and express their typicality in a perennial idiom. Athenian craftsmen share a common manner of speech with Roman shoemakers and London workingmen. Similarly, men who exercise authority will settle into styles of thought, gesture, and diction appropriate to persons of consequence and therefore can be expected to manifest common traits regardless of their local habitations as

Athenian notables, Roman senators, or English dukes. An inordinate preoccupation with exactitude would dwell upon pedantic historicity at the expense of obscuring these continuities of human nature. Yet Shakespeare does make discriminations of essence between regimes. His Romans may wear hats and refer to clocks, but they do not bare their heads for a king, nor do they measure time by reference to the birth of Christ. The distance between the Roman republic and the English monarchy becomes evident from a comparison of the Roman plays with the English histories and proves demonstrably consequential for Shakespeare's portrayal of two distinct ways of life. When we pass from Rome to Britain we perceive a difference in the terms of public existence which coincides with differences in the conception of the supernatural, of death and the afterlife, of the grounds of moral and political obligation, of the ends of ethics, and of the hierarchy of human virtues. Shakespearean characterization thus seems to proceed from an understanding of human being as manifested in perennial types accommodated to the usages of regimes and further specified by personality.

Shakespeare's depiction of a variety of constitutions invites us to inquire into the problem of their comparative rank. From observing the diversity in the ways men conduct their public affairs, we are led to think about what political arrangement best consists with the requirements proper to man's essence. The plays' parallel emphasis upon the continuity of human types across national boundaries and historical epochs may provide bearings for an approach to the question of the

best regime. According to a venerable teaching of traditional political philosophy, the city writes in larger characters the logos of the individual soul, and the proper constitution of the individual soul establishes a standard for judging the constitutions of regimes. Shakespeare's dramas appear to develop an elaborately detailed rendition of this ancient theme. We may apprehend something of the standard in regard to which the various regimes can be ranked by considering Shakespeare's portrayal of the range of human types and, within that range, those models which seem to constitute his version of the complete soul. Each of his general types distinguishes itself from the others by its emphasis upon one aspect or possible disposition of the soul. The political subject of the plays and their implied standard for political well-being begins to emerge when we take into account the types of the soul that figure most centrally and consider the hierarchy that seems to obtain among them.

Shakespeare's commoners emphasize the embodied character of human being. Although they resemble blocks and stones only from the partisan viewpoint of ambitious men who fail to capture their will (a Marullus or a Buckingham), they do confine themselves, for the most part, to confronting the world on grounds dictated by bodily necessities and localized affections. Their speech moves purposefully when it employs fleshly expressions but staggers when it attempts abstractions. They are unreflective; general ideas come upon them with the jolt of novelty. Their desires also bespeak a short tether. Left to their own initiatives they display few aspirations, preferring, usually, to rest secure in possession of modest and homely gratifications. Shakespeare's

common men do not ordinarily desire to rule simply for the sake of ruling, although they may invoke the power of their numbers to come by the means of subsistence or safety. They tend to be more aware of their obligations than their rights. The commoner is the creature of his generally benign but ever transitory emotions. He values warm fellowship over austere singularity and holds ingratitude the worst of crimes. Consistent with their closeness to the body, Shakespeare's ordinary men are not far-sighted, although they can be shrewd. Consequently, they are fairly immune to visionary schemes, yet prove vulnerable to rhetoricians who may appeal to their passions and immediate interests. Demagogues can capture their will but fail to hold it for any dependable duration. Whether pagan or Christian, Shakespeare's populace inclines towards the sentiments favored by Christian teaching. Pity, kindness, humility, forbearance, mercy, patience, ingenuousness comport easily with the native temperament of these bodily men. The same qualities make the populace remarkably deliquescent. Because their virtues grow from feelings rather than from settled convictions they give way to opposed vices under the pressure of opposite emotions. Within rather extensive limits the commoners allow their affections to be directed by emotional provocations deployed by patricians or lords.

Shakespeare's plebs, servants, and citizens display the liveliness of vigorous senses rather than the spirited dispositions of men who live for honor. Spiritedness requires the persistent self-awareness that dominates the consciousness of minds who enjoy or aspire to privileges of rank. Shakespeare's nobles constitute a second order of human character distributed across the lines

demarking specific political arrangements, a perennial estate of the soul composed of men and women whose conduct brings to prominence the soul in its spirited, we may say, its self-determined aspect. If the commoner inhabits a world of immediate satisfactions, the Shakespearean notable lives by and for his aspirations. He desires more amply than the commoner, and the good he most intensely desires is almost beyond the comprehension, certainly beyond the reach, of the populace. The aristocratic soul receives definitive expression in characters such as Coriolanus, Hotspur, and Henry Monmouth, men who consider bodily enjoyments and security insipid compared with the all-sufficing delights afforded by public recognition. English lords, Italian grandees, and optimates of Greece and Rome contend with their fellow noblemen for public attention, while their ladies compete for titles in husbands and sons.

In his quest for honor the spirited man will espouse virtually any means to win admiration. The usual paths to celebrity are conspicuous wealth, birth, position, beauty, valor, or services rendered to the state. These may be combined with more peculiar claims to distinction; a noble may want to be known as a lover, a subtle diplomat, a mirror of fashion and manners. Whatever their accomplishments, Shakespeare's nobles expect that virtue will be ratified by fame. The fallen Wolsey can even announce his desire to become renowned for scorning renown. But the most favored proof of honor is the ability to check and overbear the will of someone else. Hence the aggressive baiting and high-stomached irascibility that mark men of birth. A meeting between Shakespeare's aristocrats signals a commencement of hostilities between the meeting parties or

leads to their alliance against some other noble. English peers vie for court positions, wealth, warriorly supremacy, the favors of ladies, the ear of the king; Roman patricians quarrel with plebeians if they lack matter for controversy among themselves. Their ingenuity in discovering causes for factional agitation recalls the famous maxim propounded by Madison: "so strong is this propensity of mankind to fall into mutual animosities, that where no substantial occasion presents itself, the most frivolous and fanciful distinctions have been sufficient to kindle their unfriendly passions...."<sup>12</sup> The inclination toward virulent factionalism that Madison ascribes to mankind at large Shakespeare confines to the higher classes wherein considerations of prestige are the first concern. Spiritedness overlaps national boundaries but takes on a specific political character when channeled into particular politically sanctioned activities. Every Shakespearean regime features a range of spirited men, but regimes differ in the avenues to honor which each publicly encourages.

A third dimension of the soul becomes evident when we consider a grouping of figures who strive primarily neither for the bodily ends of the commoner nor for the honor desired by the aristocrat. Characters such as the Princess of Aquitaine, Theseus, Edgar, Kent, Cordelia and the chastened Lear, Duke Vincentio, Belmont's Portia, Viola, Hermione, and Prospero all appear to live for the sake of guiding others to conduct consistent with an elevated understanding of human nature which only the guides themselves possess. Most of these sponsors of the commonweal voice convictions concerning the ultimate character of human being. They seem to be more reflective than Shakespeare's

other personages. Whether they possess official political power or not, these prudent men and women suggest Shakespeare's view of the statesman. They represent the soul in its activity as an ordering principle embodying the powers of speculative and practical intelligence which offer at least the possibility of governing the soul in its two other aspects of unreflective sentiment and self-conscious but insufficiently reflective spiritedness. The superior person understands the other orders and possesses an impressive degree of self-knowledge, whereas the other orders understand neither him nor themselves. Because these natural aristocrats of the spirit are depicted always in their relatedness to others as lovers, children, parents, liegemen, or rulers, one hesitates to identify their common excellence simply with contemplative intelligence. Hamlet, Prospero, and Vincentio give themselves on occasion to solitary study, but from the difference in their plight it appears that statesmanship requires putting speculative virtue in the service of practical ends. Hamlet is tragic precisely because he cannot make this transit, whereas the comic Prospero and Vincentio *are* comically fortunate because they successfully accommodate the contemplative to the practical life. Speculative virtue of itself does not seem sufficient to encompass wisdom regarding human things and, as the examples of Hamlet and Prospero suggest, the withdrawal that accompanies the speculative life may even work at odds with the intelligence required to order human affairs. The sort of intellectual excellence Shakespeare attributes to the superior human being consists of a blending of theoretical principle with intuitive tact responding to particulars.<sup>13</sup> The plays do make us aware of a more

exclusively contemplative possibility available to the speculative poet, but this awareness is conveyed by reminders of the presence of the dramatist overseeing his creations rather than embodied in any of the staged characters. The consequence of seeing the limits of politics by reference to this fourth estate of the soul may be felt in many of the plays.

Our survey of Shakespeare's range of perennial types should note two other human dispositions which fall outside the array of bodily, spirited, and prudent men. Besides these three orders, Shakespeare depicts lovers and saintly characters. The lovers appear everywhere except in Republican Rome. All other regimes afford the possibility of a private enclave within the public life reserved for men and women who desire to cultivate erotic friendship with a particular beloved while oblivious to the wide world. Erotic love in Shakespeare embraces all the colors of passion ascending from feral lust (Goneril, Regan, Tarquin, Angelo, Demetrius and Chiron) to romantic vertigo (Hermia and Lysander, Helena of *All's Well*, Viola, Bassanio, Orlando, Valentine and Proteus, Desdemona, Romeo and Juliet) to glamorous exaltation (Antony and Cleopatra), to high courtesy and spiritual mutuality (Berowne and the Princess of Aquitaine, Benedick and Beatrice, Ferdinand and Miranda, Theseus and Hippolyta, Florizel and Perdita). Whatever its species, love can present a special problem for the polity because it points up one of the limits of politics: the city, as city, cannot satisfy the lover. The most the city can hope for is that it may harmonize erotic attachments with citizenship by encouraging marriage. Marriage gives love a public character and provides lovers with public interests which suffice to tame

somewhat the uncivil privateness of erotic energy. Shakespearean comedies end in marriage for the sake of the community as much as for the happiness of the lovers. Desire and romantic hyperbole diminish by several gradations with the domestic contract. Once marriage prospects seem firm, the Princess can set Berowne his task of emptying bedpans; once Ferdinand is publicly espoused to Miranda, he can begin to cheat her at chess.

Two other dispositions have the effect, like erotic love, of making the city seem contemptible and altogether insufficient as a guide to the most eligible purposes of life. The ontological disgust of a Timon, Thersites, or Hamlet cannot keep company with a city that falls short of an association composed of human beings incapable of ingratitude, pretense, or frailty. Hence the type of the soul exemplified by these misanthropes appears unsuited for life in any human city. It is difficult to see these men as other than nihilists since they envision no positive purpose for themselves. While rejecting the corporate ends pursued by other men they can offer no alternative focus that might sustain spiritual integrity. Thus, they tend, like Hamlet, to identify felicity with death, finding their completion only in the most definitive negation. The malcontent affords a contrast with Shakespeare's other apolitical type, the saint, who does embrace a positive alternative to public life. Shakespeare's pious human beings—notably Henry VI, Vienna's Isabella, and (possibly) Katharine of Aragon—seek their end in a sanctity which imposes public obligations but which cannot be fulfilled by any arrangement of the public order. Given his otherworldliness, Henry VI presumably cannot find his happiness in kingship even were his temperament

more spirited. Pious men and women fix their attention upon another world which promises felicity through intimate relatedness to a personal God. Only Christians are pious in this sense; Shakespeare's pagans know nothing of an afterlife or of communing with their gods in this existence. The possibility receives dramatic treatment only in the touchingly comic episode of Bottom's enchantment which, although comic, apparently disturbs Theseus to such a degree that he manages to exclude Peter Quince's ballad of "Bottom's Dream" from the court masque. Bottom "discourses wonders" but precisely on that account is "no true Athenian" (IV.ii.26-27). Religion in Shakespeare's pagan world is either inertly nominal (in Rome) or a constituent ingredient of the *politeia* (Athens). In the Christian regimes of Venice, Vienna, England, Denmark, and the Italian cities, religion may be in tension with politics and, thus, may offer an alternative to political life. An important theme of the histories is the attempt of the English monarchy to make Christian piety amenable to political purposes. The failure of this attempt is a major cause of the disorder that plagues England, whereas the partial successes of Henry V and Henry VIII appear to secure an imperfect harmony though probably at the expense of justice. The histories may suggest that the problem of subordinating Christian piety to political authority is insoluble in England and, perhaps, anywhere.

From his portrayal of the scale of human types we may gather some intimation of Shakespeare's understanding of the best life available to man. If the characters possessed of prudential wisdom and care for the commonweal constitute for Shakespeare authoritative models of excellence, then we may

suggest an answer to the question of the best regime as well as a resolution of the problem of political power. The best regime would be that order of public affairs which produces this highest sort of character; power and authority would belong by natural right to those who can make best use of it. If the superior soul includes as a dimension of his excellence the kind of virtue that comports with the exercise of political power, then that soul ought to rule. This appeal to theoretical right bears out the cumulative argument of the plays. At the same time, the histories and tragedies record the usual adjustments of natural rights to be expected from a world which offers resistance to any theoretical standard.

Shakespeare seems to acknowledge this tension between sound principle and the limits imposed upon its application by confining his portrayals of the best regimes to the comedies. One way of defining the difference between the comedies, on the one hand, and the histories and tragedies, on the other, is by reference to the relaxation of limiting conditions upon natural right which obtains in the comic actions. We can appreciate the political significance of this relaxation if we consider the plight of the naturally superior man when he must work within a tragic context. Edgar may enjoy a *de jure* claim to authority equal to the claims of Theseus, Duke Vincentio, Portia, and Prospero; but chance favors the comic group. Edgar does not possess the power *de facto* which the members of the comic group possess by happenstance or by preternatural art. Moreover, several other limitations upon success are artfully ignored in the comedies. Men do not die and time seems never to run out, although both death and insufficient allowances of time would destroy the complicated web spun by the comic

architects. By making artifice conspicuous in the comedies Shakespeare appears to limit their connection with the given world. Finally, even with the benefit of their artfully liberated premises we may feel that the resolutions achieved in the comedies are still decidedly provisional. The good government of Theseus lays down no foundations whereby good government may continue after he is gone, yet it has undermined one of the important laws of the city. His is a victory for youth, but in a real world there would remain accounts to be settled with Egeus and the other fathers who may think the prerogatives of age have been rather presumptuously dismissed. The providence of fairies does not seem to offer a trustworthy court of appeal for resolving public problems. The massive artifice paraded in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* serves to remind the audience of the play that real political resolutions require an art similar, it may be, in its purposes but necessarily different in detail and execution. Prudential tact enables such a recognition. Shakespeare assumes this capacity in his understanding friends and nurtures the virtue by presenting comedies which require delicate adjustments of perspective to be grasped. We begin to understand the comedies after we learn how and when to say hold, enough!

Theseus, Vincentio, Portia, and Prospero stand for the highest reach of excellence that is ordinarily available to human beings. Their excellence has a political character in that they are pre-eminently suited to the task of harmonizing diverse human beings through the arts of speech, law, and deliberation. Because they understand human nature they are capable of guiding others in such a way as to realize what is best in their characters, to moderate (though they cannot

and do not seem to transform) what is worst, and to provide for their incorporation in a decent polity. The comic heroes take cognizance of the laws, institutions, and customs that prevail in the countries of their habitation but do not take their bearings from the usages of a particular regime. Rather, they seem to locate their ways and aims by reference to standards known through natural reason. Neither do they appear to be religious souls, although they take care not to offend against the pieties of their fellow citizens. They apparently regard religion as they regard political institutions, making intelligent use of pious beliefs by putting these in the service of ends they have determined on the grounds of the naturally just and reasonable. Shakespeare's superior men are political but not simply the products of their cities. We see them finally as superior human beings, not as good Athenians, good Viennese, good Italians, good Venetians. If they are fundamentally reverent towards some higher Being (and this I think is not certain) they are not adherents of a distinctly pagan nor of a distinctly Christian view of divinity. In principle these characters point to the fulfillment of human beings within the limits of politics. Their lives *are* the fulfillment, and their political activities show the way men should be ruled. However, the limits of politics, as such, begin to emerge when we take account of the special character of their achievement and when we begin to appreciate how difficult, if not impossible, would be the extension of their achievement to historical regimes.

The comic statesmen do not found utopias. Prospero enjoys the disposal of an impressive *techne* which, presumably, he could employ for such a purpose. But if Gonzalo's idea of establishing the perfect commonwealth occurs at all to

Prospero, he chooses not to pursue the project.<sup>14</sup> Just barely and by prodigious efforts, he does manage to arrange conditions that could promise a decent public life for Milan and Naples (if, that is, we leave out of account the fact that the two cities are separated by a distance comparable to the distance separating either place from Prospero's isle). By similarly remarkable and presumably unrepeatable efforts, Theseus and Vincentio secure moderate expectations of decency for their cities. It is not clear that Portia's modestly benign association of wealthy friends can extend its sway from Belmont to Venice. Not only do the exemplars of statesmanship found no ideal polity; it could be said that, allowing a doubtful exception in Theseus, they found nothing we could properly call a complete and actual political entity. They introduce no comprehensive public modes and orders as a Moses, Cyrus, David, Romulus, or Theseus (Plutarch's or Machiavelli's) would. They invent no constitutions, nor do they introduce new religions. They do not shape a distinctive way of life for a people, nor do they work toward installing a new national purpose. Shakespeare comes close to depicting a national founding in his portrayals of Henry V and Henry VIII, but these political creators seem not to possess a wisdom commensurate with the epic scope of their enterprise. We may doubt that the English kings understand as deeply as the comic statesmen do. That the architects of communal decency in the comedies disavow utopian projects further commends their prudence and suggests that Shakespeare casts a cold eye on schemes that would promise from political contrivances something on the order of salvation.

Yet at one remove from actuality, the comedies do suggest a special sort of political founding. We may say they present us with a distilled image of the political act, an image which offers a paradigm through which we can grasp the essential character of political virtue and in terms of which we may evaluate the fully articulated regimes embodied in the non-comic plays. Insofar as they offer a touchstone for assessing the health of political constitutions the comic societies resemble the paradigms of the best city worked out discursively in such works of political philosophy as Plato's *Republic*, More's *Utopia*, John of Salisbury's *Policraticus*. Shakespeare's model differs from those offered by the treatises in that it aims at a more modest reconstruction of the given in accord with an end which, in comparison with, say, Socrates' project for setting philosophers over the city, is also much more modest. Shakespeare's paradigmatic regime requires only that those who possess authority also possess a high degree of practical wisdom and devotion to promoting the public good.

We may doubt that Shakespeare envisions the likelihood of discovering even these relatively modest conditions realized in actual historical regimes. Beyond the little group of Theseus, Vincentio, and Prospero we are hard put to think of any prominent character dedicated to fostering the good of the polity in preference to any other end. I have earlier mentioned Edgar as an example of such a will, and one might add Cominius and Henry IV. Edgar has the will and prudence but lacks the authority; Cominius has the will but insufficient authority and, in view of his support of Coriolanus for consul, may be doubted to possess the requisite prudence; Henry, once crowned, possesses some authority but not

enough, and his prudence, if not his will, is doubtful.<sup>15</sup> The intriguing but obscure images of potential statesmen such as Alcibiades and Richmond are—intriguing but obscure.<sup>16</sup> Shakespeare elects not to portray the reign of Richmond as Henry VII, although the first Tudor appears propitiously at the end of *Richard III*, and enjoys an honored memory in *Henry VIII*. Both Caesars are rendered enigmatic but unprepossessing; Elizabeth receives occasional tributes but not a dramatic presentation that might make intelligible the high portentousness which attends the announcement of her birth in the last of the histories. Both Rome and England, the most carefully articulated of Shakespeare's historical regimes, seem to fail in the attempt to produce a decent political life, if by decency we understand the lively concords and just arrangements of diverse souls and of the various social orders achieved at the conclusion of some of the comedies. It may not be merely adventitious, therefore, that no Shakespearean comedy of the political sort is set in England<sup>17</sup> and no comedy of any sort in Rome. We may wonder whether it be not a principal of Shakespeare's political understanding that the very enlargement of the scope of politics in England and Rome precludes a complete political life and imposes austere limits upon statesmanship. The complete public life and fully competent statesmanship may be possible only within communities small enough to allow for face-to-face contact between rulers and ruled.

The differences between the various historically certifiable regimes reduce to different conceptions of what should be honored. Shakespeare appears to share Aristotle's view that "roughly speaking, honor is what politics is concerned

with.”<sup>18</sup> In the absence of prudent men endowed with official authority, the crucial political consideration turns upon the relationship between the numerous bodily men and the relatively few but powerful spirited souls. The decisive issue seems to be the disposition of the spirited class. Men of spirit will, in any event, seek honor; but a society takes its distinct form by promoting a certain path to honor in preference to others. It thereby provides for a national character and, at the same time, brings upon itself a distinct set of problems. Because Rome believes that “valor is the chiefest virtue” and identifies nobility with the manliness exhibited, first, in war, and, analogously, in contention of any sort, the republic finds itself vexed by continual intramural battles between patricians and plebeians. The two orders recognize their community only when they must come together in the face of an external threat. For Shakespeare, Rome ceases to be as a distinct ethos when Octavian’s epoch of “universal peace” calms the world.<sup>19</sup> Because the Venetian republic honors opulence generated by mercantile venture it promotes the freedom and cosmopolitanism that enable a wide-ranging and vigorous commerce. The city then discovers that to defend itself it must engage foreigners who value courage and generalship more than wealth, or that to meet its need for capital to support their ventures the citizens must accommodate men who do not share their religion.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, the habits required for successful commercial venture do not keep good company with Christian benevolence. Either charity suffers from the exigencies of commercial calculation or commerce suffers from charity.

The principle that underlies the British ethos is more difficult to formulate. Shakespeare's Englishmen yearn for distinction as fervently as do his Romans, Athenians, and Venetians; but it is not so clear what they commonly hold to be deserving of honor. When we attempt to say what Englishmen revere, we may note first their attachment to their own. They revere their island. The soil of England is dearer to the Englishman than the soil of Rome or Athens to Romans or Athenians (it sounds anomalous to speak of the soil of Venice). The sense of esteeming what is properly one's own extends to language. Only Englishmen love their native tongue, whereas no Shakespearean Athenian speaks of his reverence for Greek, no Roman of his devotion to Latin, no Venetian of his delight in Italian. The affectionate consciousness of place and racial identity evident in the Englishman is only faintly echoed by Shakespeare's Romans and Frenchmen and hardly at all by anyone else. This sense of belonging to a place can be detected in the pagan Britishers of *Cymbeline* and *Lear* but seems more pronounced in the England of the Christian era. Shakespeare's Englishmen espouse Christian doctrine, yet they seem to conceive of themselves as constituting an enclave of pagan nobility within Christendom. In his famous patriotic testament Gaunt does not clearly distinguish "Christian service" from a manly valor that recalls pagan Rome. Shakespeare's greatest Englishman can admit (or boast?) that if it be a sin to covet honor he is the most sinful of souls. From the teachings of Christianity it would seem to be a grave sin not only to covet but even to desire earthly glory, not to speak of making aggressive war for the sake of honor. Yet Henry Monmouth's English soldiers are edified rather than

shocked by their king's honest battle speech. They are not shocked, perhaps, because, as it seems to be with all Englishmen, they cannot believe that Christianity truly interdicts the life of conspicuous outdoing cherished by every English gentleman. Intermittently, however, and usually after setbacks have diminished their chances for gaining greater worldly prestige, they experience doubts. A Shakespearean Englishman is compounded of native spiritedness troubled but rarely controlled by an imperfect Christian conscience. He lives chiefly to enhance his position within a social hierarchy determined by secular considerations of blood, landholding, valor, and royal favor while, in the interstices of this fevered court life, in moments of disgrace or near death, he hopes for heaven. Shakespeare's England does not suffer so intensely as his Rome from conflicts between the few and the many. Its equally grave public disorder proceeds rather from the opposition of nobles to king and king to Church. Beneath these institutional conflicts one may sense the remote source of the social unease in the moral fissure caused by the rivalry of two incompatible views of human purpose and human excellence. Christian conscience undermines Anglo-Saxon resolve to dominate, whereas the native will to power constantly erodes integrity of conscience. The English soul wars against itself to no conclusion while the natural virtues of prudence and justice become the principal casualties of the national psychomachia. We are reminded of C.S. Lewis's conclusion regarding the tragic predicament of Arthur's Camelot: the effort to found a decent earthly city is caught between the upper millstone of Galahad and the nether of Mordred.

Shakespeare's apparent skepticism regarding the possibility of realizing his model of the decent regime should not be interpreted as an indifference to the task of understanding the diverse characters of imperfect historical constitutions. If happy polities are all alike, each unhappy regime is unhappy in its own particular way, and it is important to grasp the particular causes of a particular defect. More positively, even defective regimes offer some access to the good life, if only by emphasizing unduly one necessary dimension of the soul. They exhibit the virtues of their defects. Oligarchic Venice and Athens promote beauty and leisure as the by-products of their love of wealth; timocratic Rome produces noble instances of courage from its cultivation of war and general belligerence; England torn by a divided allegiance to counsels of Christian perfection contending with recipes for secular success breeds men who are aware, however imperfectly, of transcendent standards. The dramatist can maintain a reverent care for his images of human imperfection because he sees in the most imperfect of them some qualities which could be incorporated in an image of the whole. Shakespeare's portrayals of incomplete polities resemble Aristotle's accounts of partisan regimes. Aristotle's oligarchs, democrats, and aristocrats are partisans in the negative sense that they unjustly equate a part of political good with the whole, but also in the positive sense that they do recognize a constituent dimension of the natural whole. Somewhat similarly, Shakespeare's readers may come to understand the natural whole of politics—the best practicable or least indecent regime—by working through the sequence of partisan regimes that takes shape over the entire course of the Shakespearean

canon. The essays presented in this volume suggest some ways for beginning such an inquiry.

Considered in terms of its capacity for fulfilling human nature, politics, as such, reveals a further limitation. All Shakespearean personages are political in the sense that they live out the consequences of having been born into and nurtured by a particular regime. In a different sense, few characters are political. Most do not rise to the life of political endeavor, electing instead to serve ends which cannot in and of themselves produce the public weal but only, at best, contribute to it if directed to that purpose by superior men who do espouse politics as their existential justification. Still other characters live outside politics (the great nay-sayers) or claim to live *beyond* the political (the otherworldly Christians and the early Prospero). We wonder how it stands with the creator of these dramatic personages. Where does Shakespeare, as poet, locate his own activity with respect to politics?<sup>21</sup> Is Shakespearean wisdom and Shakespearean art a political thing or something beyond politics?

The ending of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* suggests a movement from the play's world to the real world of the audience, as though the wedding of Theseus and Hippolyta were one with an actual wedding party.<sup>22</sup> The concluding plaudite of *The Tempest* announces a similar blending of the fictive with the actual wherein Prospero seems to embrace the audience in his design for achieving modest civil concord. His plea for indulgence and prayer may encourage the audience to feel capable of entering into partnership with Prospero and perhaps with the dramatist who has been so closely associated, if

not identified, with the magus. These post-dramatic flourishes make emphatic a possibility of interchange between art and life which one may sense in the performances of all Shakespearean plays. The plays invite their audiences (in theaters or studies) to continue the action of the plays by applying the moral principles affirmed in the fiction to their own existence. Insofar as these principles are political, Shakespearean drama performs a political function. Somewhat like Prospero, Vincentio, and Theseus, the dramatist arranges spectacles that may have a beneficial effect upon the public life. However, although the art is political in content and in effect, the wisdom which informs the art may suggest a life beyond politics. Shakespeare's wisdom certainly does not appear to owe its final character to the fact that he is an Englishman. Although his plays do encourage patriotism in Englishmen, he does not encourage his understanding friends to revere England as the best conceivable nor even, it seems, as the best practicable ordering of human affairs. Shakespeare's wisdom includes but goes beyond the wisdom available to any citizen as citizen. We may doubt that Shakespeare's wisdom exists, like Prospero's, for the sake of a political end or indeed for the sake of any end beyond itself. Reflection upon the character of the soul's seeking simply to know may lead us conclude that a life devoted to that end is truly a life beyond politics. To know what extends beyond politics, it helps to know the full scope of the political realm. Shakespeare's poetry assists us in understanding what surpasses politics by allowing us to grasp how far politics extends in the determination of human lives.

## **Notes**

1. Compare *Hamlet* II.ii.423-514, and III.ii.1-43; *A Midsummer Night's Dream* I.ii.1-97, and V.i; the Induction to *The Taming of the Shrew*, especially ii.12-138; the "Preface" to *Troilus and Cressida* and Prologue 22-25; *Henry V* II.31-32, 39-40, III.34-35, IV.46-53, V.1-6, and Epilogue; Epigraph to *Venus and Adonis*; the Induction to *2 Henry IV* 1-22; and the Prologue to *Henry VIII*. All references to the plays are to the Penguin *Complete Works* (New York: Viking, 1969), Alfred Harbage, general editor.

2. *Henry VIII*, Prologue, 22. Editors generally gloss the "understanding" as a jibe at the expense of the "understanders" or groundlings, but the context allows a serious twist to the trite jest.

3. The exchange between Brutus and Cassius that turns upon the phrase "the eye sees not itself" (*Julius Caesar* I.ii) seems to be modeled upon Socrates' conversation with Alcibiades in Plato's *First Alcibiades*. The same dialogue provides the reference for Ulysses' allusion to a "book" written by "a strange fellow" in *Troilus and Cressida* (III.iii.95-111). Aristotle is mentioned by name in *Troilus and Cressida* (II.ii.166) and in *The Taming of the Shrew* (I.i.32).

4. Roy Battenhouse, *Shakespearean Tragedy: Its Art and Its Christian Premises* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1971), pp. 345-348, has argued rather convincingly that Menenius's belly fable in *Coriolanus* depends upon the elaboration of the body-city analogy worked out in the *Policraticus* V.2.

5. Among those who have contributed to the study of the political implications of the plays are Allan Bloom with Harry V. Jaffa, *Shakespeare's Politics* (New York: Basic Books, 1964); Michael Platt, *Rome and Romans According to*

*Shakespeare* (1976; 2d ed., Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1982); Howard B. White, *Copp'd Hills Toward Heaven: Shakespeare and the Classical Polity* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1970); George Anastaplo, "Prudence and Mortality in Shakespeare's Tragedies," I *University of Pittsburgh Law Review*, 40 (Summer 1979), 730-745, and *The Artist as Thinker: From Shakespeare to Joyce* (Chicago: Swallow Press, 1981). The publication in *American Political Science Review (APSR)* of an essay by Bloom on *Othello* and Jaffa's interpretation of *Lear* touched off something of a controversy in which the literary critic Sigurd Burckhardt quarreled with Bloom through the next issues of *APSR* (see Burckhardt, "English Bards and *APSR* Reviewers," 54 [1960], 158-166; Bloom, "Political Philosophy and Poetry," 54 [1960], 457-464; Burckhardt, "On Reading Ordinary Prose: A Reply to Allan Bloom," 54 [1960], 471-473). Burckhardt attacked some of the particular readings proposed by Bloom and Jaffa, but Bloom's complaint notwithstanding, I cannot see that Burckhardt questions the validity of an approach that emphasizes political implications. In any event, Burckhardt's book *Shakespearean Meanings* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968) offers valuable interpretations of political themes in Shakespeare. Other works which bear on Shakespeare's politics without taking the subject as their formal focus are J.F. Danby, *Shakespeare's Doctrine of Nature: A Study of King Lear* (London: Faber and Faber, 1954); Robert B. Heilman, *Magic in the Web: Action and Language in "Othello"* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1956) and *This Great Stage: Image and Structure in "King Lear"* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1948); Northrop Frye, *Fools of Time: Studies in*

*Shakespearean Tragedy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967); Reuben Brower, *Hero and Saint: Shakespeare and the Graeco-Roman Heroic Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971); J.L. Simmons, *Shakespeare's Pagan World: The Roman Tragedies* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1973); L.C. Knights, *Some Shakespearean Themes* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1959); J. Leeds Barroll, *Artificial Persons: The Formation of Character in the Tragedies of Shakespeare* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1974).

Subsequent to the first edition of *Shakespeare as Political Thinker* in 1981, several studies of Shakespeare's politics have appeared, notably: Jan H. Blits, *The End of the Ancient Republic: Essays on Julius Caesar* (Durham, N.C.: Carolina Academic Press, 1982), and his *The Insufficiency of Virtue: Macbeth and the Natural Order* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1996); Larry Peterman, "The Failure of Henry V," in Thomas B. Silver and Peter W. Schramm, ed., *Natural Right and Political Right: Essays in Honor of Harry V. Jaffa* (Durham, N.C.: Carolina Academic Press, 1984), pp. 83-102; George Anastaplo, *The Constitution of 1787: A Commentary* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989); John E. Alvis, *Shakespeare's Understanding of Honor* (Durham, N.C.: Carolina Academic Press, 1990); Allan Bloom, *Love and Friendship* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994); Joseph Alulis and Vickie Sullivan, ed., *Shakespeare's Political Pageant: Essays in Literature and Politics* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1996); David Lowenthal, *Shakespeare and the Good Life: Ethics and Politics in Dramatic Form* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997).

*Interpretation: A Journal of Political Philosophy*, edited by Hilail Gildin, regularly publishes articles bearing upon political issues in the plays. See further the publications of Paul Cantor and Michael Platt cited in "The Editors and the Authors," in this volume.

6. Martin Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), pp. 297-298.

7. The classic arguments in support of this view are developed in Plato's *Republic* and *Laws*, Aristophanes' *Frogs*, Augustine's *City of God*, and Rousseau's *Letter to d'Alembert on the Theater*. Compare Milton's *Areopagitica* (especially the section dealing with Plato) and Goethe's *Faust* (33-242).

8. See Bloom, *Shakespeare's Politics*, pp. 10-12.

9. See White, *Copp'd Hills*, especially pp. 25-64.

10. Perhaps Shakespeare's most notable departure from his sources in Plutarch's *Lives* consists in his elimination of Plutarch's numerous examples of Roman piety. He declines to give dramatic treatment to supernatural marvels that Plutarch attests on his own authority and passes over those instances in which, according to Plutarch, Romans allowed their political fortunes to be determined by their piety. Compare, for example, Plutarch's and Shakespeare's accounts of the circumstances that precede the banished Coriolanus's attack upon Rome and the details of the embassy scene.

11. T.J.B. Spencer, "Shakespeare and the Elizabethan Romans," *Shakespeare Survey*, 10 (1957), 27-38, makes some sensible observations regarding the

neglect of Shakespeare's fidelity to Roman history occasioned by this popular view.

12. *The Federalist Papers*, No. 10, p. 59, Cooke edition. As documentation for his remarks, Madison could have cited the Temple Garden scene of *1 Henry VI*, where the factions of York and Lancaster grow out of a school dispute over an unspecified legal quiddity.

13. Compare Aristotle's discussion of *phronesis* in the sixth book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

14. Howard White carefully distinguishes Prospero's government from traditional island utopias and from Bacon's version of Atlantis in his *Peace Among the Willows: The Political Philosophy of Francis Bacon* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1968), pp. 93-107. See also Paul Cantor's chapter on *The Tempest*, below.

15. Dain Trafton also questions Bolingbroke's good will. See his essay in this volume.

16. On the political qualifications of Alcibiades, see the remarks of Leo Paul de Alvarez in his chapter on *Timon of Athens*, below.

17. *The Merry Wives of Windsor* does afford a singular demonstration of middle-class domestic competency. However, the winning shrewdness of Ford, his wife, and Mrs. Page neither achieves nor is meant to achieve a political end.

Nevertheless, we may wonder whether the play does not glance at an important dimension of England's public life in its suggestion that tightly knit local communities continue to achieve justice in their casual way, despite the turmoils that beset the monarchy and court.

18. *Politics*, 1095b.

19. The Rome of *Titus Andronicus* can readily accommodate Goths and Moors because it has ceased to think of citizenship in terms of a choice of a distinct way of life. Whereas Coriolanus cannot bring himself to lead a foreign force into Rome, Titus's son does not hesitate to install himself Emperor on the strength of his support from the Goths. In fact, Titus himself—the last of the Romans—commands Lucius to raise an army among his former Gothic enemies to revenge himself upon his native city.

20. See Bloom's comments on Othello, Shylock, and Venice in *Shakespeare's Politics*, pp. 14-74.

21. Michael Platt considers Shakespeare's understanding of his own activity as dramatic poet in his analysis of Sonnet 94, below.

22. See James L. Claderwood, *Shakespearean Metadrama* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1978), pp. 127-148.