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Shakespeare's Politics:  
Politicising Shakespeare

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## INTRODUCTION

LUKAS LAMMERS AND KIRSTEN SANDROCK

### Shakespeare's Politics – Politicising Shakespeare

In Roland Emmerich's *Anonymous*, the playwriting Earl of Oxford looks on from the galleries of the Globe as a performance of his/Shakespeare's *Henry V* whips up a large crowd of groundlings, just as the Earl had intended it. Earlier, Oxford had already enthused over a match of tennis about the possibilities of theatre: "That's power," he smirked. While the film imagines the theatre as a powerful but passive outlet controlled by the agenda of the famed Earl, there is of course much evidence to suggest that early modern theatre and the many commercial playwrights writing for it, despite censorship, had significant freedom to present a wide range of political positions. The articles in this edition of the *Shakespeare Seminar Online* explore ways in which Shakespeare, his works, and early modern culture as well as later performances of his works are political or have been politicised. To what extent can his plays be seen to endorse certain power politics? Are politics in Shakespeare ultimately a question of genre? What impact did the transition from Elizabethan to Stuart rule have on 'Shakespeare's politics'? As Elizabeth Frazer notes, Shakespeare's works feature "numerous styles of political action and role, from statesmanship and the competition for state office or for sovereignty, to the everyday relations of kinship and friendship that interact with state government and law" (2016: 503).

Widening the perspective beyond the early modern context, one might ask how Shakespeare – the icon and his plays – has been used for political purposes in contexts that often seem to be far removed from the political realities of Tudor or Stuart England. John J. Joughin observes that "over the last four hundred years the playwright has been adopted by almost every faith, political hue and persuasion," including "neo-Conservative, Protestant, Catholic, Republican, Liberal, Tory, Marxist, high Anglican, and so on" ("Shakespeare and Politics" 1). When groups 'adopt' the playwright as an advocate of their politics, they often adapt and appropriate his plays in ways that are far from obvious. Thus, Linda Hutcheon has argued that "the politics of transcultural adaptations can shift in unpredictable directions" (*A Theory of Adaptation* 148). It is this inclusive view on Shakespeare's 'politics' that this issue of the *Shakespeare Seminar* seeks to adopt.

The papers selected for this issue consider the two sides of the theme with, on the one hand, a focus on early modern religious politics and political philosophy and, on the other hand, Shakespearean politics and new nationalism in the wake of Brexit. In his paper on "Shakespeare's Augustinian Machiavellianism" Fernando Martinez-Periset offers a thorough reconsideration of the apparent contradiction between allegedly secular power politics and early modern religious thinking. He argues that unearthing how theological notions implicitly inform political discourses of the time can provide a way of understanding the interdiscursive

intellectual affinities common to both Shakespeare and Machiavelli. Discussing a range of Shakespearean histories and tragedies, he shows that Shakespeare's kings tend to fail whenever they fail to grasp the necessity of Machiavellianism. Martinez-Periset frames his discussion with a wider consideration of theories of human nature, and especially, the widespread doctrine of the Fall and its implications as formulated by the Augustinian tradition.

Katrin Bauer's paper on "Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*, Brexit, and British National Identity" takes its cue from the notable peak in performances of Shakespeare's notoriously defamed play in the wake of the UK's exit from the EU. Starting with a consideration of the significance of Roman Britain for early Jacobean England, the article reads *Cymbeline* and its recent performances as a struggle about British identity. Bauer argues that, above all, *Cymbeline* feels so relevant in 2016 because "it has at its core precisely those two fundamental questions that were also at the heart of the debates surrounding the Brexit referendum: What does it mean to be British? And what role should Britain play in an increasingly globalised world?" (21).

### Works Cited

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# SHAKESPEARE'S AUGUSTINIAN MACHIAVELLIANISM: THE POLITICS OF *MACBETH* AND *HENRY V*

by

FERNANDO MARTINEZ-PERISSET<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

Within the evident heterogeneity that characterises Shakespeare studies, there has been a persistent and underlying tendency to understand Shakespearean drama removed from the influence of Christian thought. Brian Cummings confidently affirms that “for almost all of the twentieth century” Shakespeare has been “idolised as a secular author, so that attempts to place him within a religious framework were marginalized and often seen as maverick or bizarre” (14). The traditional association between Shakespeare and secularism can be traced back to the seminal work of A. C. Bradley, who wrote that “Elizabethan drama was almost wholly secular; and while Shakespeare was writing he practically confined his view to the world of non-theological observation and thought” (25). Along similar lines, David Gwilym James contended that “Renaissance drama was, by and large, created and sustained by men whose imaginations [...] were free of any religious prepossessions” (91). In his peculiar Romantic vein, Harold Bloom sees Shakespeare cut off from history and ideology: “Shakespeare’s politics, like his religion, forever will be unknown to us. I suspect he had no politics, and no religion, only a vision of the human, or the more human” (113).

Early twenty-first century scholarly approaches to Shakespeare have shown at least some resistance to this prominent trend and, in some cases, have even radically contradicted it. Despite Queen Elizabeth’s ban on the explicit representation of matters of religion and the state on stage, recent research has highlighted the most salient religious elements in Shakespeare and his historical context, with special emphasis on Shakespeare’s uses of language. More precisely, Hannibal Hamlin has explored Shakespeare’s “frequent, deliberate, and significant” allusions to the Bible on the grounds that Shakespeare’s “culture as a whole was profoundly and thoroughly biblical” (1). Similarly, Alison Shell has presented a Shakespeare “whose language is saturated in religious discourse and whose dramaturgy is highly attentive to religious precedent” (3). In a review essay, these critical developments have been broadly conceptualised as the “turn to religion in Early Modern English studies” (Jackson and Marotti 167-190), and this body of literature continues to grow. In keeping with big-picture perspectives

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to use this space to honour the memory of literary critic Paul A. Cantor (1945-2022), even though he would have probably disagreed with this paper’s conclusions with his characteristic wit and insight. I have long admired his original writings on Shakespeare and politics for their accessibility, intellectual clarity and scholarly rigour. Although I sadly never had a chance to meet him in person, I feel fortunate to have exchanged some emails with him, and he was always kind and generous. I am sure he will be sorely missed by his students and colleagues at the University of Virginia.

as well as with the relation between literature and philosophy, Julia Reinhard Lupton sees these new interpretative lenses as fruitful opportunities to “return to theory, to concepts, concerns and modes of reading that found worlds and cross contexts, born out of specific historical situations, traumas and debates, but not reducible to them” (146). In short, the evidence suggests that the long-standing secularisation thesis is no longer universally regarded as unproblematic.

Meanwhile, critical accounts of Shakespeare's response to Italy's most notorious political theorist, Niccolò Machiavelli, have generally considered Shakespeare's direct familiarity with Machiavelli's own work. ‘The end justifies the means’, one instinctively thinks as soon as one hears the name ‘Machiavelli’. Machiavelli's customary associations with a sinister reputation of infamy, impiety and deceit were indeed popularised in the Elizabethan period by the translation of Innocent Gentillet's polemic text *Contre-Machiavel*, originally written in French. The widespread circulation of this treatise in English gave rise to the critical stance that Shakespeare's world could only access biased, simplistic and cartoonish descriptions of Machiavelli's thought. E. M. W. Tillyard claimed that “in trying to picture how the ordinary educated contemporary of Shakespeare looked on history in the gross we do not need to give much heed to Machiavelli. His day had not yet come” (30). Similarly, T. S. Eliot describes the “real Machiavelli” as “a person whom Elizabethan England was as incapable of understanding as Georgian England, or any England, is” (128).

But this account can be contested. Research by Hardin Craig and Irving Ribner suggests that relatively readable copies of Machiavelli's original works were indeed available and discussed in literary and academic circles (Scott 151). Unfortunately, the next difficulty that immediately emerges is that these findings do not allow one to unequivocally ascertain whether Shakespeare himself was acquainted with Machiavellianism, nor have they been able to decisively rule out alternative sources of inspiration. Although much ink has been spilled in trying to solve this problem, the accepted view seems to be that the results have been questionable at best or sometimes simply vague and inconclusive. This is especially true when it comes to identifying close parallels between Shakespeare and Machiavelli's *The Prince* (Cox 112). There is not enough information to determine anything for sure.

Yet, one should not abandon the enterprise altogether. It is not necessary to detect direct links in order to study the similarities and/or differences between two authors. Even assuming it were clearly possible to establish explicit points of contact between Shakespeare and Machiavelli beyond reasonable doubt, those echoes could potentially have relatively limited explanatory power: verbal reliance, borrowings or parallels do not automatically constitute unmistakable evidence of intellectual or philosophical commonalities. Rather than asking how and in what form Machiavelli may have reached Shakespeare, it is probably more productive to consider how these two authors living in different countries could have responded to a similar interdiscursive cluster of preoccupations, so as to bring them into dialogue with each other regardless of whether or not Shakespeare actually read Machiavelli. This approach does not intend to discredit the usefulness of source-study tactics, but merely to acknowledge that, given the paucity of the evidence in this specific case, the study of allusions is problematic and other forms of enquiry are arguably preferable.

With an emphasis on the intellectual synchronic affinities between Shakespeare and Machiavelli, the main thesis of this paper is that Shakespeare exhibits an ‘Augustinian Machiavellianism’, a vision of kingship in which, for better or worse, successful rule requires the inescapable costs of moral compromise. At one point in *The Prince* Machiavelli makes a distinction between two kinds of military campaigns: the conquest of territories that share the conqueror’s traditions and values, and the conquest of culturally different lands (7-16). Although I will briefly refer to several plays to support my claims, I have chosen to focus primarily on *Macbeth* and *Henry V* because together they reflect the polarities proposed by Machiavelli. The fight for Scotland is the struggle for a kingdom familiar to both Macbeth and his rivals. Conversely, in his campaign against France, Henry V undertakes the more challenging task to control a country where people do not speak his language, and so he relies on cultural assimilation and soft power as much as on physical force.

Most examinations of the connection between both figures have not frequently adopted a Christian standpoint. Hugh Grady, for instance, argues that the history plays “take for granted a secular, realpolitik understanding of political power as a force for good and evil” associated with Machiavelli (26). The present article sets out to broadly situate Shakespeare within Renaissance political thought and to present him as a political theorist in his own right. When it comes to the Shakespeare/Machiavelli problem, unearthing specific elements from their Christian ideological context can offer a way forward.

### **“No tyrant, but a Christian king”**

Federico Trillo sees an unsurmountable abyss between Christianity and Machiavelli’s teachings. It should be granted that, initially, this position is sound. In his *Discourses on Livy*, Machiavelli introduces a hierarchy of religions based on their usefulness in political life. He shows hostility towards Christianity when compared to classical ethics. He complains that Christianity has enfeebled human beings: “our religion has glorified humble and contemplative more than active men. It has then placed the highest good in humility, abjectness, and contempt of things human; the other placed it in greatness of spirit, strength of body, and all other things capable of making men very strong” (131). Chapter XXI of *The Prince* continues this apparent attack on religion. Machiavelli celebrates rather than deplores Ferdinand of Aragon’s use of religion as a mere pretence to consolidate his power (87-91). In light of this, Trillo denies any fundamental grounds of agreement between Shakespeare and Machiavelli: “Shakespeare’s plays reflect the most typical thought of Christian humanism of Erasmist origin and [...] their rejection of Machiavelli and Machiavellianism is explicit and decisive” (358).<sup>2</sup> He alleges that Shakespeare displaces Machiavellian methods onto villainous characters who are defeated and diminished towards the end of the plays, hence casting Machiavellianism in an unfavourable light. Further, he claims that “one should not forget that the second major axis that negatively complements this political vision—the treatment and condemnation of tyranny—is also present in Shakespeare’s work” (362).

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<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise specified, translations into English are my own.

The chief problem with this argument, however, is that it does not provide a reliable outline of Machiavelli's thought. It only describes accurately what the Elizabethans would call the 'stage Machiavel' *topos*, which, outside the Shakespearean corpus, would be best exemplified by Lorenzo in Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*. The critique of tyranny is not an adequate distinction between Shakespeare and Machiavelli because Machiavelli himself condemns abuses of power. Chapter VIII of *The Prince* is devoted to those who obtained power by wicked means. Machiavelli discusses Agathocles, a tyrannical Syracusan leader, and does not regard his deeds as praiseworthy. Although Machiavelli concedes that Agathocles rose to power from humble origins using his cunning, he frequently resorted to gratuitous displays of violence:

Yet one cannot call it virtue to kill one's citizen, betray one's friends, to be without faith, without mercy, without religion; these modes can enable one to acquire empire, but not glory [...] [H]is savage cruelty and inhumanity, together with his infinite crimes, do not permit him to be celebrated among the most excellent men (35).

Rather than being an isolated instance, the condemnation of Agathocles is a recurring theme in Machiavelli's thinking. Throughout his work he repudiates Agathocles-like characters such as Julius Caesar and Pompey, who, from his point of view, "gained fame but not glory, whereas subsequent Roman generals gained glory because they did not plunder, usurp, and tyrannize over their native land" (Kahn 564). Contrary to the popular caricature promoted partly by his detractors, Machiavelli is not an uncritical advocate of tyranny for its own sake. He is concerned with the contingencies of circumstances and necessity, which sometimes require the ruler to break preestablished moral laws, but only upon sheer compulsion. Shakespeare undoubtedly criticises the 'stage Machiavel', but so does Machiavelli.

"We are no tyrant, but a Christian king" (1.2.242), Henry V announces before his court. The Christian response to Machiavelli is more complex than what Trillo seems to have in mind. There is a profound tension at the heart of Christian conceptions of war. The main theological problem was: how was it possible to reconcile the ethical dictates to turn the other cheek and live a life of meekness, charity and humility prescribed with such admirable moral clarity by the commandments—especially the fifth commandment—with the grim and horrible prospect of engaging in military campaigns? Despite the existence of pacifist answers to the question, Christian calls for political realism and variations on the notion of 'just war theory' would have been more widely adopted in Shakespeare's context (Pugliatti 9-52). Shakespeare's engagement with the just war tradition has been noted in *Henry V* (Mattox 30-53). In a more recent examination of this topic, Nathan Gilmour draws attention to the practice of confession and observes that "[a]s the king frames things, the war is not an ethical act but a mere happening in the world; whether a soldier sins during a war or not has little to do with a sin's commission as does the day of the week" (19).

The best-known formulation of this approach is found in Augustine himself. Possibly influenced by the Aristotelian notion of equity (*epieikeia*), Augustine muses that "it is the iniquity of the opposing side that imposes upon the wise man the duty of waging wars; and every man certainly ought to deplore this iniquity since, even if no necessity of war should arise from it, it is still the iniquity of men" (929). Just wars are waged in

defence of peace. Violence, when used, must be calculated. In typical scholastic fashion, Thomas Aquinas continues this tradition: “Those who wage war justly aim at peace, and so they are not opposed to peace, except to the evil peace”. Closer to Shakespeare’s time, Francisco de Vitoria, Luis de Molina and Francisco Suárez would be other exponents of the tradition. Furthermore, in *The Trumpet of War* Stephen Gosson provides a justification of war: “It may be just and necessary in two ways, the one is in defence of the innocent, the other is in revenge of injuries” (30). All these thinkers acknowledge that, although war in itself should be avoided because it is one of the worst possible evils that can afflict human beings, it should be pursued only if there are no other viable options. But why, in the first place, is it *necessary to fight for peace*?

It is sometimes thought that Machiavelli radically divorces politics from morality. But Quentin Skinner offers a corrective to this view. He explains that what sets Machiavelli apart from his contemporaries is not an intrinsic disagreement over which goals the prince should pursue, but rather a matter of the most appropriate means to pursue them: “He agrees that the proper goals for a prince to aim at are those of honour, glory and fame. But he rejects with great vehemence the prevailing belief that the surest way of attaining these ends is always to act in a conventionally virtuous way” (*Foundations* 131). In addition, Skinner clarifies that, after his first-hand experiences as a diplomat, Machiavelli concluded that the “basic weakness” different political leaders shared “was a fatal inflexibility in the face of changing circumstances” (*Machiavelli* 15). Though never explicitly defined, *virtù* is a situation-dependant notion that refers to the ability to adapt oneself to contingent states of affairs and make the most appropriate decisions that spring out of necessity. A political pragmatist, Machiavelli is mainly concerned with political efficiency. Adherence to any other commitment should be subordinated to adaptability, as otherwise the ruler risks compromising public safety by angering the citizens. “He is happy”, Machiavelli writes, “who adapts his mode of proceeding to the qualities of the times; and similarly, he is unhappy whose procedure is in disaccord with the times” (*Prince* 99). This preoccupation stems from the pessimism about the human condition he shares with the abovementioned Christian authors. John Roe remarks that Machiavelli finds verbal twists to make some of his theorisations compatible with Christian discourse. For Machiavelli, “the model prince behaves well overall, and that his occasional departure from good is just that—occasional: far from undermining the good effect, such departures indeed contribute to it”; he concludes, “*Virtù*, with its pagan emphasis on ‘strength’, is not so far removed from the Christian meaning of virtue that the two cannot remain aligned” (57).

Throughout his works, Shakespeare depicts inflexibility as a vice that usually leads to disastrous states of affairs and, ultimately, proves to be unsustainable. Steadfast Coriolanus, whose commitments to unbreakable self-sufficiency and completeness—‘to stand as if a man were author of himself’ (5.3.36)—encourage him to purge himself from any emotion that may interfere with his intention to destroy Rome, finally gives in to tears. Julius Caesar ironically claims to be ‘constant as the northern star’ (3.1.60) just before being murdered. Tarquin’s uncontrollable lust together with his inability to yield to Lucrece’s lamentations—‘O, if no harder than a stone thou art, / Melt at my tears, and be compassionate’ (594-595)—leads to a public revolt against his family and to the inception of the Republic. Richard II’s downfall is partly caused by his incapacity to

adopt fully Machiavellian attitudes and, more specifically, by his inability to change his reckless tendency to waste economic resources. He admits that his coffers “with too great a court / And liberal largess, are grown somewhat light” (1.4.44-45). He launches an unsuccessful Irish campaign and surrounds himself with flatterers. Machiavelli warns the prince against the insincerity of his advisors—he calls flattery a “plague” (*Prince* 93)—and sees prodigality as a potentially dangerous and destabilising quality: “In the end it will be necessary, if he wants to maintain a name for liberality, to burden the people extraordinarily” (*Prince* 63). In the long-run, parsimony and austerity are greater manifestation of charity than lavish expenditure. With his unrestrained prodigality and political short-sightedness, Richard fails both requirements, and suffers the consequences of his actions: “I wasted time and now doth Time waste me” (5.5.49).

The reason why Shakespeare and Machiavelli show a scepticism towards the practicality of rigidity is because they perceive the world itself in flux: human beings are endlessly variable, and instability is one of the features that presides over our condition. Machiavelli pessimistically thinks that good deeds can lead to collective harm “when that community of which you judge you have need to maintain yourself is corrupt” (*Prince* 77). Although he surely argues that the ruler must learn how and when not to be kind, Machiavelli, like the Christian thinkers before him, regrets that this should be the case. Augustine similarly concedes that “if [the wise man] remembers that he is a human being, he will be much readier to deplore the fact that he is under the necessity of waging even just wars” (929). There is a surprising selflessness in the Machiavellian prince, which stems from his commitment to the preservation of political order and stability, and from the need to avoid public revolts: “Those [evil deeds] can be called well used (if it is possible to speak well of evil) that are done at a stroke, out of necessity to secure oneself, and then are not persisted in but are turned to as much utility for the subjects as one can” (*Prince* 37-38).

William Bouwsma presents Augustinianism as one of the dominant discourses in Renaissance intellectual history. By understanding human nature as fallen due to original sin, Augustinianism opposed other philosophical theories that optimistically regarded the universe as rational and divine, and human society as perfectible according to destiny: “Against all this, Augustinianism, though by no means denying in principle the ultimate order of the universe, rejected its intelligibility and thus its coherence and its practical significance for man” (27). Within Augustinian thinking, human nature is historical and contingent (Gilson 192-193). For Augustine, any definition of human nature depends on what human nature has become. Our unstable historical position towards the divine is informed by the biblical account of man's corruption. The Fall produced an abrupt change in human nature that cuts us off from our original goal and state of bliss.

As usual, Shakespeare scholarship is diverse. Some commentators have simply denied the equivalence between Henry V and Machiavellian thinking altogether. Jerry Herbel, for example, believes that “Shakespeare's Henry V actually has very little in common with the quintessential Machiavellian prince” (266). By contrast, other critics have indeed detected a spark of Machiavellianism in Henry, but have denied its favourable depiction. It has been suggested that the play discloses the duplicities of this model of kingship and that we, as an audience, are meant to perceive a certain

shallowness in Henry which renders him an unsympathetic monarch. Gerald Gould argues that the play as a whole is ironic and should be understood primarily as “a satire on monarchical government” (83). Analysing the connection between ethics and authority, Stephen Greenblatt mentions that Henry “cynically” launches a military campaign “on the flimsiest of pretexts” (*Shakespeare’s Freedom* 79). Vickie Sullivan provides a systematic examination of the uses of deception and appearance, but her reading “contravenes the view that Henry V is himself that Christian king” (‘Princes’ 142).

Shakespeare departs from his sources in his characterisation of Henry V in order to stress his most Machiavellian dimension. In Holinshed, the members of the Church are responsible for the claim to France. The order to execute the prisoners of war is given “contrary to his accustomed gentleness” (81). The *Gesta Henrici Quinti* adds that, during the siege of Harfleur, Henry gave his enemies several opportunities to surrender, offering first “peace to the besieged if, freely and without coercion, they would open their gates to him” (35), and then, seeing their reluctance, launched a “mild attack” (37). But Shakespeare’s Henry is a master of the art of transferring responsibility, and this pattern can be detected in several of the play’s key scenes (Cantor ‘Henry V’ 11-32): he himself orchestrates the campaign, induces the clergy to support his plan and then presents the episode of the tennis balls as the trigger to shift the blame onto the Dauphin; he explicitly commands to kill the war prisoners; he violently threatens Harfleur; and he knows Catherine shall marry him before he even courts her. He is essentially a shape-shifter. John Alvis claims that Henry “will exercise his virtue only when to do so will most redound to his glory” (113). Appearances and circumstantial adaptability are what matter. He tells his soldiers: “In peace, there’s nothing so becomes a man, / As modest stillness, and humility: / But when the blast of war blows in our ears, / Then imitate the action of the tiger” (3.1.3-6). The prince should “not depart from good, when possible, but know how to enter into evil, when forced by necessity” (*Prince* 70)

To illustrate these practices at work, at one point Henry knows that the Earl of Cambridge is plotting against him but pretends to be unaware. To the surprise—and possible satisfaction—of the conspirators, Henry subsequently pardons a man who insulted him the previous day and attributes his offense to “excess of wine” (2.2.42). When their plot is exposed, the conspirators beg for the same mercy Henry has shown, but Henry grants them none: “your own reasons turn into your bosoms, / As dogs upon their masters” (2.2.82-83). Because of his juvenile years with Falstaff, Henry has projected onto others an image of himself as a rash and ill-disciplined prince, but this perception is part of a deliberate stratagem to make his enemies underestimate his abilities.

The Earl of Cambridge consequently makes the same misjudgement about Henry’s character as the Dauphin, who criticises Henry’s “wilder days, / Not measuring what use we made of them” (1.2.268-269). Henry indeed learned something valuable while frequenting Falstaff, a pedagogic lesson that his father, Henry IV, failed to learn at the time. Life at court underestimates the plebeian aspects of life that ensure Henry’s success and allow him to accommodate himself to multiple situations, which, due to the sheer contingency of the present life, differ from each other both contextually and in terms of intentions and content. Having had his own experiences with the common people, he

can immediately distinguish between a trivial comment made spontaneously by someone in a tavern from a real attempt on his life. Henry here follows Machiavelli's prescription that a ruler "needs to have a spirit disposed to change as the winds of fortune and variations of things command him" (*Prince* 70).

In pointed contrast to Tillyard's denial of the relevance of Machiavelli in England, Michael Manheim interprets both sequences of history plays as the product of broader changes in Elizabethan culture. Manheim argues that Shakespeare initially exhibits a strong dislike for Machiavellianism which gradually evolves into an acceptance of the need of political realism. Manheim understands Henry V as a more favourable exponent of the same model of kingship exemplified by Richard III, but he does not emphasise any crucial moral difference between them: "What was in Richard III an image of horror and malignancy bent on power by any means possible has become an image of practical politics cast in a beautiful, heroic mould" (167). In somewhat similar terms, using the model of subversion and containment, Greenblatt claims that "the very doubts that Shakespeare raises serve not to rob the king of his charisma but to heighten it" (*Shakespearean Negotiations* 63). But R. A. Foakes has questioned this influential interpretation, fearing it may apply modern sensibilities to Shakespeare's own perspective. Foakes describes Greenblatt's argument as "an understandably jaundiced late twentieth-century reading of a play for an age that equates politics with hypocrisy and bad faith, and is anxious about the containment of subversive elements. But it is not Shakespeare's vision that Henry's rule depends on 'demonic violence'" (103).

The case of Richard III does not obviously provide evidence for the fragmentary presentation of Machiavellianism in Shakespeare, but rather evidence for its consistency. There are fundamental differences between Henry V and Richard III. Richard's murderous obsession with the pursuit of individual power aligns him with the 'stage Machiavel', but it also disqualifies him as an appropriate Machiavellian. Skinner notes that Machiavelli places the good, safety and liberty of the community above all other considerations, including not only conventional morality but also the leader's own private interests (*Machiavelli* 54-55). Henry V's understanding of the crown radically contradicts Richard's self-interestedness. In *Henry IV Part I* he acknowledges that the crown entails the duty to "pay the debt I never promised" (1.2.216). On the eve of the battle of Agincourt, he denigrates himself; he mentions that he "would not be ransomed" (4.1.187) if they lose. Moreover, he does not interpret Cambridge's foiled conspiracy personally and does not seek personal revenge. Instead he clarifies that his concern is with the public good: "we our kingdom's safety must so tender, / Whose ruin you have sought, that to her laws / We do deliver you" (2.2.175-177). He justifies his order to execute the conspirators because he sees it as a necessary evil for the preservation of political stability. Contrary to Richard III, Henry V is, like Machiavelli, interested in the common good.

The play, however, closes with the promise that despite Henry's success, prosperity will be short-lived and the kingdom will revert back to spirals of violence. Jan Kott argued that the sense of history in Shakespeare reveals the workings of a 'Grand Mechanism' in which history mercilessly repeats itself, shapes human beings and challenges their agency: "Every step upwards is marked by murder, perfidy, treachery. Every step brings the throne nearer. Another step and the crown will fall" (10). This

theory of the cyclical movement of history is compatible with the Augustinian discourse. Augustine argues that in the postlapsarian world, human society fails to provide teleological or progressive developments: “the earthly city is often divided against itself by lawsuits, wars and strife, and by victories which either bring death or are themselves short-lived” (638). Mutability is a brute fact of our condition, and perhaps the clearest example of mutability is the constant presence of war.

Peter Saccio observes that Shakespeare diverts from historical reality and intensifies the scale of the devastation insofar the tetralogies convey the idea that 15th-century England was immersed in a series of catastrophic events, whereas, in fact, peasant revolts were rare and relatively little time was spent in military campaigns (154). The reason why Henry V’s descendant, Henry VI, is a failed king who “made his England bleed” (Epilogue.12) is because of his exaggeratedly optimistic view of human existence. He fails politically because he has the wrong theological notions in mind, and so he fails to recognise the necessity of Machiavellianism. Despite his good nature, his policies come across as tragically misguided and counterproductive because he believes problems can be easily solved through transparent diplomatic efforts. As Greenblatt puts it, “he sounds more like a sententious moralist than a king. Henry does not have whatever it would take—charisma, cunning, or ruthlessness—to quell the bitterly feuding factions” (*Tyrant* 28). He mistakenly thinks too well of everyone around him and is unable to see through their layers of deceit. Henry VI confuses the disturbing reality of life in the present state with an idealised Edenic vision; he wishes to upgrade the human to a level of perfection that repeatedly eludes the human itself, at least in its current condition. His father, by contrast, carefully distinguishes between both phases, and this ontological distinction consolidates his political victories.

Even in times of peace, war must remain an ever-present possibility painfully inscribed in the minds of citizens. Machiavelli warns that monarchs should never neglect the thought of war, for those who thought more of ease than of war often lost their states (*Prince* 58-60). Michael Moriarty succinctly describes Augustinianism as “a view of human nature where weakness and subjugation by passion are the dominant features, and free will highly circumscribed” (30). There is a strong ontological pessimism in the Augustinian tradition which serves as the basis of the political stakes of just war theory. The fallen world is, by its very nature, a vale of tears, an irremediably tragic world in which justice is not always clearly served, hence the ‘need’ to ‘fight’ for ‘peace’. Contrariwise, it has been suggested that our society is nowadays becoming increasingly less violent (Pinker; Harari 1-34), but no such faith in collective improvement through exclusively human means seems dominant in Shakespeare. Shakespeare would have probably had our present-day loyalties inverted: war would have been seen as the norm rather than the exception. Paul Jorgensen remarks that “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” (320).

From the Augustinian perspective, the perpetual presence of violence is, regrettably, a crude fact of our existence, and, more importantly, a powerful reminder of our intrinsic weakness and a proof of our need for redemption. To adapt a celebrated line from Thomas Hobbes, life in the earthly city is nasty, brutish and short. Peter Phialas situates

Henry V in an irrevocably tragic situation, a “conflict between the impersonal necessities of the king’s public function and the multiple needs of Henry the man” (168), which explains the feelings of melancholy and waste—read by some critics as evidences of satire—that accompany some of the decisions he is forced to make, such as the rejection of Falstaff. The king is aware that the grim realities of this postlapsarian state of affairs sometimes require him to get his hands dirty, even when he may be inclined to perform certain actions unwillingly. From this angle, Machiavelli’s qualms about the usefulness of Christianity could, somewhat paradoxically, be framed in terms of an Augustinian conviction. In the city of man, in this world filled with sorrow and governed by self-love, the consequences of original sin on human history have created a reality where people actively turn on each other, men cannot be trusted, and peace is merely fleeting and momentary. As desirable as it may be in an ideal universe, peace is only a residue of the state from which we fell. It is not a durable condition in the here and now.

The question Henry confronts is not whether to have peace or wage war. Following the advice his father gives to him on his deathbed, he must choose between two kinds of war: another destructive civil war in England or a campaign against France that would unify all of England against a common enemy. He opts for the latter not as an ideal option, but as the lesser of two evils. While wooing Catherine, he extends this reasoning onto the hypothetical unification of all the kingdoms in Christendom in a possible crusade against what he would regard as another common enemy: “shall not thou and I, between Saint Dennis and Saint George, compound a boy, half French half English, that shall go to Constantinople, and take the Turk by the beard?” (5.2.207-210). The promise will not come to fruition. Henry V comes close to perfection, but he is cautious enough to know that, despite his best efforts, it would be dangerous to soar too high.

### **“All that may become a man”**

In keeping with Patrick Gray’s proposition that one can “discern a fairly consistent” view on “the ethics of war” running through Shakespeare’s plays “akin to and perhaps informed by the positions typical of contemporary just war theory” (21), and building on my previous conclusions on the limits of human possibilities according to Augustinian thought, I turn to *Macbeth* for an account of how Shakespeare represents Machiavellian motifs in a modality of warfare that involves the reconquest of a familiar territory, even though as a play, *Macbeth* is catered to an English, rather than a Scottish audience, so there is a subterranean process of intercultural mediation involved.

Paul Cantor suggests that dictatorships often strive to recreate a form of Heaven on Earth. Macbeth aspires “to gain here in this life what Christianity promises to believers in the afterlife, a kind of absolute perfection, an infinite satisfaction” (‘Macbeth’ 329). Macbeth is continuously looking for a murder that will solve all murders, but feels disillusioned and hollow in the process. Like Richard III, when he becomes king, Macbeth learns that the throne brings him no happiness: “To be thus is nothing, but to be safely thus” (3.1.47). Separated from God, man living in the earthly city attempts to live according to himself by his own means. Wanting to become a supreme, omnipotent god on Earth is a cardinal sin emblematic of a desire to pervert the divinely structured order of being. Macbeth’s ambition leads him to try to transcend the constraints of the

human. Henry V, by contrast, knows that this is never an option for him. Ontologically speaking, Macbeth wishes to overcome the limits of the possible. Macbeth's story is a progressive and degenerative descent into personal and collective chaos, into a realm of experience governed by nightmarish mental scorpions (3.2.36) that make this moral descent both inhuman and subhuman. Contradicting his original promise to Lady Macbeth, he eventually dares do more than may become a man (1.7.46). He fails and becomes less of a man for it.

George Watson, like Trillo, sees no sympathetic depiction of Machiavelli's thought on Shakespeare's part, calling the Scottish play "the widest study of Machiavellianism in English Renaissance drama and its most penetrating critique" (647). As in previous examples, the problem is not that Macbeth *is* a Machiavellian, but that he is *not* a good Machiavellian. In his unrelenting pursuit of ideal perfection, his model of selfhood seeks to become autonomous and unfettered. He wants to mould the world as he pleases, to shape it according to his own sense of self, but he does not recognise that it is his being in the world that should shape him, not vice versa. Therefore, he fails to adapt his behaviour to shifting circumstances. When presenting the dichotomy between being feared or loved, Machiavelli introduces a further distinction between being feared and being hated. Fear is a healthy disposition that commands respect and resolve. But being hated by the people can put both the king's throne and the state in jeopardy, so it defeats the purpose of *virtù*. He illustrates this point with the example of Maximinus, who rapidly lost power because he was despised due to his cruelties, so "the whole world was excited by indignation at the baseness of his blood" (*Prince* 81). Machiavelli's republicanism partly stems from his belief in the incompatibility between tyranny and prosperity insofar as tyranny leads to collective regress. Building on the view of Machiavelli as a defender of liberty, Vickie Sullivan argues that Machiavelli re-evaluates Ancient and Christian responses to politics but he is dissatisfied with both when considered separately, and he finally proposes an amalgamation of both worldviews. "Machiavelli", Sullivan writes, "appeals to certain Christian doctrines to support his vision of an earthly discipline that exercises the strength that he views as essential to sustain political life" (*Three Romes* 9). Engaging with the 'democratic turn' in Machiavelli studies, it has been recently argued that concerns with political freedom and the popular voice are central to the overall coherence of Machiavelli's oeuvre, including not only his theoretical works but also his often understudied literary production (Zuckert 41-275). The root cause of Macbeth's downfall is that he incurs public scorn and contempt. He is disconnected from the needs of his subjects. Lennox asks stability to return to "our suffering country / Under a hand accurs'd!" (3.6.48-49). Macbeth's soldiers have no direct loyalty towards him: "Those he commands move only in command, / Nothing in love" (5.2.19-20). MacDuff complains "Not in the legions / Of horrid Hell can come a devil more damn'd / In evils to top Macbeth" (4.3.54-56). Tyranny breeds collective disillusionment and the constant threat of popular uprisings, which is precisely what Machiavelli wishes to avoid. Macbeth becomes a failed Machiavellian.

Although some critics have attributed "otherworldly longings" to Christianity that keep Christian doctrine away from successful political activity (Cantor *Shakespeare's Roman Trilogy* 207), there is room within Augustinian thought to suggest that an

inadequate or excessively passive engagement with the realities of the fallen world can be problematic. Daniel Derrin explains, “[f]rom an Augustinian perspective, a Christian is never justified in using the opportunity of war to exult in the pleasures of self-definition that military ‘honour’ can afford, as Shakespeare’s Hotspur, Bertram, Antony, Coriolanus (and family) do, yet must bravely engage in war when the need arises, as Shakespeare’s Paroles and Falstaff do not” (82). In *Macbeth*, Duncan’s tendency to think too well of his thanes leads him to a moral blindness similar to the one that afflicts Henry VI. Duncan, an aged king of “gentle senses” (1.6.3), acknowledges that he misjudged the character of the previous thane of Cawdor, who eventually rebelled against him: “He was a gentleman on whom I built / An absolute trust” (1.4.13-14). He will immediately replicate this mistake with the person to whom he reassigns the title of Cawdor, and the result will be his murder and the political exile of his sons. By contrast, Lady MacDuff voices a darker understanding of human life. She reformulates the Augustinian conception of fallenness in terms that eerily resemble Machiavelli’s understanding of why evil prospers and why kindness and goodness in the conventional sense can be counterproductive: “I am in this earthly world, where, to do harm / Is often laudable; to do good sometime / Accounted dangerous folly” (4.2.74-76). The first city of human civilisation—and with it, the origins of human society as a whole—was, according to Augustine, founded by the first fratricide. We live in the world of Cain.

If we are looking for genuine Machiavellians in *Macbeth*, Malcolm is the most likely candidate, despite being a relatively minor figure. If Macbeth resembles Richard III with his self-interested mindset, and Duncan resembles Henry VI with his unrealistic worldview, Malcolm is the Henry V of this play. Malcolm learns the lesson his father failed to learn: how not to be gullible: “modest wisdom plucks me / From over-credulous haste” (4.3.119-120). For this reason, Malcolm is prone to suspecting the potentially dubious intentions of his thanes. Harvey Mansfield argues that the Machiavellian prince “mixes some deliberate but unexpected actions of injustice with his justice” (17) so that obedience, gratitude and loyalty are ensured by reminding the subjects of the fragility of princely clemency. These considerations explain Malcolm’s attitude in his conversation with MacDuff.

Malcolm consciously crafts a three-phase strategy of dissimulation to guarantee MacDuff’s fidelity. He initially criticises MacDuff for his decision to leave his defenceless family, and tests where his loyalties lie. Whenever he feels he may have offended him, he convinces him to stay and continues his examination. Secondly, he unexpectedly portrays himself as a man of “confineless harms” (4.3.55) even worse than Macbeth, and cites a list of dreadful vices. This reaction soon prompts a selfless patriotic preoccupation on MacDuff’s part, who becomes increasingly worried with the fate of his country. But, like Henry V, Malcolm is pointedly generating a false narrative of his true self. Malcolm lies and then *un-lies* about himself. We quickly discover that, with this self-deprecation, Malcolm was giving MacDuff a chance to demonstrate the extent of his determination to defeat Macbeth and to prove himself an honourable “Child of integrity” (4.3.115). Thirdly, upon hearing of the murder of MacDuff’s family, Malcolm profits from MacDuff’s sorrow for political ends. Although his method is clearly painful—even unjust—Malcolm uses MacDuff’s suffering to redirect his hatred against his rival Macbeth. Only the promise of vengeance becomes an appropriate incentive to

serve the cause of justice: “Let’s make us med’cines of our great revenge / To cure this deadly grief” (4.3.214-215). He adds: “let grief / Convert to anger; blunt not the heart, enrage it” (4.3.228-229). The good ruler should not only show allegiance to *virtù*, but also foment *virtù*—with its implicit concerns for the common good—among his subjects, and that is what Malcolm accomplishes here.

Shakespeare and Machiavelli lived in times of socio-political upheaval. They share an interest in how to avoid the frightening prospect of civil war and how to maintain political order in a world that tends to degenerate into social chaos. Despite their occasionally harmful and fraught practices, as political leaders, Henry V and Malcolm simply cannot do any better. They embody whatever it means to be politically skilled here, as defined by man, not by God, with all of man’s inherent limitations. Although surely by no direct fault of theirs, there is no course of action that they somehow missed and which could have improved the overall outcomes. Political life is depicted as tragic and only partially ideal. There is no irony involved, no satirical exposure of the hypocritical duplicity of political practices in either *Macbeth* or *Henry V*, just an exploration of human frailty in all of its forms and a meditation on the inherent finitude, difficulties and contradictory policies that must be adopted in a postlapsarian world, a world where the only things that last forever are uncertainty, dependency, contingency and change. No grand culmination of history is available within the confines of human history.

### Shakespearean wisdom for our times?

Unlike Manheim, I have argued that these plays show a favourable and roughly coherent presentation of Machiavellian policies. Shakespeare may have never read Machiavelli, but I think it is no exaggeration to suggest that Shakespeare, who devoted a lifetime to the stage, learned the value of political adaptability thanks to the theatre. Shakespeare, not incidentally, inserts a theatrical scene of role-playing in a tavern between Hal and Falstaff at the centre of *Henry IV Part 1*, the play of the making of the star of England. What characterises Henry V is precisely a capacity to put on a dramatic performance, to pretend, to enact multiple roles. Henry can reinvent himself. He is the only monarch who can disguise himself as a soldier and listen to his troops at night. Maybe Shakespeare’s distinctive contribution to political thought is the realisation that the kingly hero must become a mimetic artist: an *actor*.

Cyndia Susan Clegg identifies a similarity between the political and the religious elements in Shakespeare, but also an imbalance in the level of critical attention each issue has received separately. Political readings of the plays have provided insights into how politics appeared on stage without radically transgressing the law, but “we should not ignore the ways in which Shakespeare may have engaged contemporary religious issues simply because we think he could not do so. We should look instead for the imaginative ways in which he did” (610). One of the questions raised by the religious turn is whether some of our most seemingly secular attitudes or critical tools may be secretly more indebted to religious ideas than we may be willing to concede. I do not intend to radically equate Shakespeare with Augustine and with Machiavelli, especially since there are profound differences among them. I have tried to sketch what studying

them together might bring to critical discussions of political philosophy. What emerges is that, when the term 'Augustinianism' is—as Bouwsma uses it—applied as a conceptual label that designates pessimistic theories of human nature informed by but not exclusively restricted to the religious sphere, ontological and theological theories about the meaning of human beings and their place in the world are weaved into the mechanisms that dictate the success or failure of political rulers in civic life.

Although Shakespeare's politics may be historically removed from present-day horizons, the abrupt global events we have witnessed over the past two years—a pandemic, refugee crises, growing inequalities, ecological issues, threats to democracy, the eruption of war in Europe and the leadership of a former actor turned politician—remind us of our inherent fragility. On a deeper level, these circumstances encourage us to contemplate what we may stand to gain, both conceptually and with regards to our own political sensibilities, if we are willing to listen to voices from the past.

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## **Zusammenfassung**

Der 'religious turn' in den Early Modern Studies hat zunehmend die weitverbreitete Annahme von einer 'säkularen Frühen Neuzeit' und der ausschließlich säkularen Ausrichtung von Shakespeares' Werk in Frage gestellt. Eine historische Kontextualisierung kann zeigen, dass vermeintlich säkulare, politische Diskurse vielfach auf religiösen Fundamenten ruhen. So lassen sich auch Gemeinsamkeiten zwischen Machiavellis und Shakespeares Werk als interdiskursive Phänomene begreifen. Mit einem Fokus auf die Kohärenz von Shakespeares Dramen argumentiert dieser Aufsatz, dass Shakespeares Könige stets dann zum Scheitern neigen, wenn sie die Notwendigkeit von Machiavellis Lehre nicht begreifen, während erfolgreiche Könige, die tragische Notwendigkeit moralischer Kompromisse im politischen Leben akzeptieren. Theorien über die menschliche Natur und insbesondere die weit verbreitete Lehre vom Sündenfall und seiner Auswirkung, wie sie von der augustinischen Tradition dargestellt wurde, stützen eine Ethik des Krieges, die unsere ebenso wie Shakespeares Gegenwart ansprechen und gleichzeitig herausfordern.

# SHAKESPEARE'S *CYMBELINE*, BREXIT, AND BRITISH NATIONAL IDENTITY

by

KATRIN BAUER

## Introduction

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of June 2016, the government of the United Kingdom asked its citizens whether they wanted to remain in or leave the European Union. In the months leading up to the referendum, the question was fiercely debated by people from all across the political spectrum with one side highlighting the manifold ties between the UK and the EU and the other side focusing on reclaiming control over various political areas. That same year saw three major theatre companies in London and Stratford putting on stage their productions of William Shakespeare's late romance *Cymbeline* – a play that remains one of Shakespeare's lesser-known and rarely performed plays. Historically, the play's relative unpopularity has been well documented: ranging from Dr Johnson who criticized "its 'unresisting imbecility'" and George Bernard Shaw who famously called it "stagey trash of the lowest melodramatic order" (both cited in Billington n.p.), critics of the play have often admonished that the play contains several convoluted plot threads full of irrational twists with "some thirty denouements in the final scene, except that they are not revelations for the audience, who know all but one of them already" (King 1) and a conclusion that only seems possible through a literal deus-ex-machina (cf. *Cym* 5.3.156 SD). And yet, in 2016, the *Sam Wanamaker Theatre*, *Shakespeare's Globe* and the *Royal Shakespeare Company* all put on productions of this otherwise rather neglected play.

The reason behind this renaissance of *Cymbeline* lies at least to some extent with the Brexit referendum. The play and its central issues seem remarkably fitting to address precisely the political situation in which the UK found itself in 2016:

In the wake of Brexit, Shakespeare's histories are being ransacked for evidence of the roots and fruits of an earlier breach with Europe. [...] the 2016 anti-Brexit *Cymbeline* at Stratford is an example of harnessing Shakespeare in the interests of European union, and that particular play is itself a classic instance of history as allegory, revisiting the past in order to address the present (Maley n.p.).

The production directed by Melly Still for the *Royal Shakespeare Company* ran from February to August 2016 at the *Royal Shakespeare Theatre* in Stratford-upon-Avon – thereby spanning the months leading up to the referendum as well as its immediate aftermath – and explicitly addressed the heated discussions surrounding the vote on the UK's future relationship with the EU. Carole Sauvageot writes in her review of the production:

A potential Brexit was on everyone's mind as the play unfolded, revealing its deep political implications through an exploration of identity as the nodal point of family, clan, country, gender and nationality. This Britain seemed poised at the edge of disaster (echoing the tense debates between Remainers and Brexiteers), mired in the queen's despair and awaiting the consequences of her decision to break away from Roman rule (Sauvageot 125).

Michael Billington, too, picks up on these parallels when he writes that Cloten's assertion of British independence when he proclaims that "Britain's / A world by itself, and we will nothing pay / For wearing our own noses" (*Cym* 3.1.12-14) "sounds uncannily like Boris Johnson" (Billington n.p.).

This connection between the play's plot and the production's contemporary political context, where Roman Britain and the Roman Empire symbolically stand in for the UK and the EU, is also made explicit in the programme of the production.<sup>1</sup> Director Melly Still draws attention to the parallels between Shakespeare's 17<sup>th</sup>-century play and the debates surrounding the Brexit referendum:

In the play, Britain is undergoing a kind of identity crisis. It doesn't know whether to be part of a bigger empire, or to assert its island status and let the sea dictate its own independence. That sounds like 2016 to me (Still n.p.).

In what seems eerily prescient now, Still and designer Anna Fleischle go on to describe the setting of their *Cymbeline* as a "dystopian Britain some time in the not too distant future where the country's belligerent independence and insularity have taken root", where "fuel is scarce" and "resources have run out" (Still n.p.).

It is not only for these similarities that *Cymbeline* feels so relevant for 2016 but more so because it has at its core precisely those two fundamental questions that were also at the heart of the debates surrounding the Brexit referendum: What does it mean to be British? And what role should Britain play in an increasingly globalised world?

In this paper, I want to take a closer look at how these two questions are negotiated in Shakespeare's play and how they resonate both in its historical context of early modern England and in the context of its renewed topicality surrounding the Brexit referendum in 2016. In order to do that, I will first briefly outline the significance of Roman Britain for early Jacobean England. In a second step, I will then explore several examples from the play of how it negotiates questions of national identity and international relationships, before coming back to the context of the Brexit referendum for my conclusion.

### **Roman Britain and Early Jacobean England**

Roman Britain became topical in a variety of ways during the early years of the reign of James I. With his ascension to the English throne in 1603 after the death of Elizabeth I, he became king of both England and Scotland. We can already see from his first speech to parliament in March 1604 that he was very interested in creating a formal union of the two nations:

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<sup>1</sup> My thanks go to the *Shakespeare Centre Library and Archive* who have generously provided me with a copy of the programme.

These two Countries being separated neither by Sea, nor great Riuer, Mountaine, nor other strength of nature, but onely by little small brookes, or demolished little walles, so as rather they were diuided in apprehension, then in effect; And now in the end and fulnesse of time vnited, the right and title of both in my Person, alike lineally descended of both the Crownes, whereby it is now become like a little World within it selfe, being intrenched and fortified round about with a naturall, and yet admirable strong pond or ditch, whereby all the former feares of this Nation are now quite cut off (James I 135f).

While the formal union James had envisioned did not become a political reality until a century later with the *Acts of Union* of 1707, works like Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles* still promoted this idea and were looking at Roman Britain "in order to project both the current attempts to unify England, Scotland, and Wales and also the growing imperial ambitions of Great Britain overseas" (Hingley 18).

This context of early Jacobean imperialism makes Roman Britain particularly interesting as a setting for *Cymbeline*. After several failed attempts at establishing settlements in America, James's reign saw a renewed interest in the so-called 'New World'. In 1606, James I granted a charter to the Virginia Company, allowing them to colonise parts of the eastern coast of North America. In 1608, the first permanent and lasting English settlement on American soil was established in Jamestown, named after James I, in Virginia, which received its name in honour of his predecessor Elizabeth I. This, James argues in his speech to Parliament mentioned above, has become possible because his ascension to the English throne has brought with it freedom from the historically justified fear of foreign attacks which had usually been aided in some form by the Scots. Britain, now finally united under him, he claims, is now able to focus on "their many famous and glorious conquests abroad" (James I 136). It was the Roman Empire that provided James's imperial ambitions with an example to emulate where he and his supporters saw themselves as the successors of that Empire in the sense of the *translatio imperii*.

At the same time, however, the Britons, as their actual historical predecessors so to speak, figured in the sources of the Roman Empire only as a colonised Other. Sources like Caesar's *De Bello Gallico* and Tacitus's *Agricola* paint a rather unfavourable picture of the Britons. They describe them as uncivilised and untrustworthy barbarians who only managed to avoid being conquered by the Romans for as long as they did because the Romans did not know much about them, because of the geographical and natural obstacles of getting an army to Britain, and because of the dishonourable behaviour of the Britons who would always go back on their word and break treaties if they believed they had a chance to get away with it. Eventually, however, these sources suggest, the Britons had to submit to the undeniably superior Roman Empire (cf. *Tac. Agr.* 1.36-38).

This aspect complicates the usage of the Roman Empire as a model for James's united Britain and its imperial aspirations. The reversed perspective of the Romans as the colonisers and the Britons as the colonised prohibits any straightforward analogy as Claire Jowitt points out in her analysis of John Fletcher's *Bonduca*:

On one level, [the Britons] represent indigenous inhabitants in a colonial terrain inevitably succumbing to the power and control of a more advanced civilization. At the same time, [...] the attitudes of individual Britons to invasion and processes of Romanization, all act as ways of measuring the success or failure of the colonial policies and leadership of the current monarch

and his immediate predecessor. The Romans represent an alien and hostile conquering force finally overcoming the Britons' independence but, at the same time, they also imaginatively stand in for the British in contemporary Virginia (Jowitt 475-476).

This same assessment also holds true for the Romans and the Britons in Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*. Similar to *Bonduca*, the play evokes and complicates changing ideas about English (and British) identity and the context of colonial ventures in America by moving the locus of the intercultural encounters between Romans and Britons from the centre of power to its periphery into the realm of the Other during a conflict between the colonisers and the colonised. The Britons in *Cymbeline* fulfil the role of the colonised Other suppressed and fighting back against the Roman colonisers while Shakespeare's early modern audiences would have been well aware of the aforementioned idea of the *translatio imperii*. In doing so, the play combines influences from Roman historiographies, medieval myths, and contemporary political discourse.

### ***Cymbeline* and British National Identity**

The conflict between the Roman colonisers and colonised Britons openly culminates for the first time in the play's peripeteia in Act 3. The Roman ambassador Caius Lucius arrives at Cymbeline's court and demands the outstanding "three thousand pounds" (*Cym* 3.1.9) of tribute that Britain has to pay as a result of their defeat by Julius Caesar. Should Cymbeline refuse, Lucius threatens him with military action. Surprisingly, given the gravitas of these potential consequences, it is not Cymbeline himself who responds to the Romans' demand. Instead, the Queen and Cloten assert the Britons' independence from Rome by insulting and ridiculing Caesar who stands symbolically for Rome's imperial ambitions.

The Queen and Cloten both portray Britain as an island that is independent of and impenetrable by outside forces, or as Cloten exclaims, "A world by itself" (*Cym* 3.1.13). This echoes almost verbatim James I's claim from his first speech to Parliament in 1604 discussed above. The Queen's following monologue further highlights Britain's special status and superiority in relation to the other peoples conquered by the Romans as well as to the Roman Empire itself:

Remember, sir, my liege,  
 The kings your ancestors, together with  
 The natural bravery of your isle, which stands  
 As Neptune's park, ribbed and paled in  
 With oaks unscalable and roaring waters,  
 With sands that will not bear your enemies' boats,  
 But suck them up to th' topmast. A kind of conquest  
 Caesar made here, but made not here his brag  
 Of 'Came, and saw, and overcame'. With shame –  
 The first that ever touched him – he was carried  
 From off our coast, twice beaten; and his shipping,  
 Poor ignorant baubles, on our terrible seas  
 Like eggshells moved upon their surges, cracked  
 As easily 'gainst our rocks (*Cym* 3.1.16-28).

In this monologue, the Queen focuses on two central ideas, namely Britain's exceptionalism and Rome's inability to defeat the Britons. In doing so, she follows the tradition that we can also see in several English sources like Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles* which was heavily influenced by Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia*. In contrast to the Roman accounts that we have for Roman Britain like Caesar's *De Bello Gallico* or Tacitus's *Agricola*, the English chronicles in this tradition portray the Britons in a distinctly positive and heroic way. Accordingly, Monmouth's Caesar for example is less of a strategic genius and more of a greedy and selfish tyrant trying to subdue the world for his own gain and glory (cf. *Mon. Hist.* 4.1). Monmouth also refrains from mentioning any of the natural and geographical obstacles in Caesar's path to Britain that are blamed for the slow progress in Caesar's *De Bello Gallico* (cf. *BG* 4.20-26). Instead, he focuses at length on the decisive battle which ends with a victory by the Britons (cf. *Mon. Hist.* 4.3). His Britons, too, are not the barbaric and untrustworthy oath breakers Caesar and Tacitus describe but are depicted as exceptionally brave, determined to defend their freedom, and as equals to the Romans (cf. *Mon. Hist.* 4.2). In her monologue, the Queen employs a similar strategy when she degrades Caesar's famous exclamation of "came, and saw and overcame" into a mere "brag" (*Cym* 3.1.23-24) and reduces the Roman Empire's fleet to "poor ignorant baubles" that are "cracked as easily" as "eggshells" "'gainst our rocks" (*Cym* 3.1.26-28).

Her speech is also strongly reminiscent of John of Gaunt's "sceptred isle" monologue from *Richard II*:

This royal throne of kings, this scepter'd isle,  
 This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars,  
 [...] This fortress built by Nature for herself  
 [...] This happy breed of men, this little world,  
 This precious stone set in the silver sea,  
 Which serves it in the office of a wall,  
 Or as a moat defensive to a house,  
 [...] This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England,  
 [...] Fear'd by their breed and famous by their birth,  
 Renowned for their deeds as far from home,  
 [...] England, bound in with the triumphant sea  
 Whose rocky shore beats back the envious siege  
 Of watery Neptune, [...]  
 That England, that was wont to conquer others [...] (*R2* 2.1.40-65).

Both speeches highlight Britain's exceptional position as an island surrounded by dangerous waters and take up the idea that nature itself created Britain as an impenetrable fortress.

They both also invoke Britain's glorious past in what Jodi Mikalachki has called "the restitutive drive of early modern English nationalism" (Mikalachki 304). By evoking England's glorious past, they attempt to establish a long and continuous tradition to compensate for "the absence of a native classical past on which to found the glories of the modern nation" (Mikalachki 302). When Cymbeline eventually addresses the Roman ambassador after the passionate and emphatically nationalist appeals by the Queen and Cloten, his response takes up their ideas and further elaborates on them: he

traces his lineage back to Mulmutius and in doing so, “reclaims the past for his nation, allowing Britain to compete with Roman antiquity” (Escobedo 68). Repeatedly using the determiner *our* in “our ancestor” (*Cym* 3.1.52), “our laws” (*Cym* 3.1.53 and 3.1.58) and “our good deed” (*Cym* 3.1.57), he further emphasises this distinctly British identity as a “warlike people” (*Cym* 3.1.50). Cymbeline is here creating a mythological British past independent from the Roman Empire in order to emancipate the Britons from their portrayal as uncivilised barbarians in classical sources. In doing so, he is following a literary tradition which claims that “Britain was more than an outlying colony of Rome, with an independent identity reaching back into time immemorial” (Butler 37).

Despite that, the play eventually ends with Cymbeline, “[a]lthough the victor”, submitting “to Caesar / and to the Roman empire, promising / To pay our wonted tribute” (*Cym* 5.4.457-459). He blames his “wicked queen” for dissuading him from paying the tribute in the first place. With that, the conflict is finally over and the play can end with peace and harmony restored as “[a] Roman and a British ensign wave / [f]riendly together” (*Cym* 5.4.478-479). But while blaming the Queen undeniably offers Cymbeline the possibility to submit to Rome by paying the outstanding tribute from a position of strength and honour, it does not reflect the whole matter. Throughout most of the last act, Cymbeline has shown no signs that he wants to reconcile with Rome. Even after the Queen’s death and the revelation that she was trying to kill him, he is intent on executing Lucius and the other Roman captives:

Thou com’st not, Caius, now for tribute. That  
 The Britons have razed out, though with the loss  
 Of many a bold one, whose kinsmen have made suit  
 That their good souls may be appeased with slaughter  
 Of you their captives, which ourself have granted. (*Cym* 5.4.69-73)

This scene is harking back to the opening scene of *Titus Andronicus* where Titus tells Tamora that the dead “ask a sacrifice [...] / [t]’appease their groaning shadows that are gone” (*Tit* 1.1.127-129). It is noteworthy that the sacrifice in *Titus Andronicus* signifies that “the city is becoming barbaric in its practices” since “Rome prided itself on not allowing human sacrifice” (*Tit* 1.1.127 FN). Even after the Queen’s machinations have been revealed to him, Cymbeline sanctions a practice deemed “barbaric” by the Romans. In doing so, he is ironically conforming to the depiction of the barbarians in classical Roman sources that focus on their “overall savage nature [...], their ferocity, bestiality, and cruelty in its various forms (including human sacrifice)” (Schmidt 57). It is only after his reunion with his children and the several revelations that Cymbeline is willing to pardon the captives (cf. *Cym* 5.4.401-403) and does so mostly because of Innogen and Posthumus (cf. *Cym* 5.4.403-404 and 5.4.417-422). His literal last-minute decision to pay the tribute only comes after the soothsayer interprets Jupiter’s tablet (*Cym* 5.4.459-463).

Laying the blame for the fallout with Rome entirely on the Queen, therefore, is neither fair nor accurate. The Queen may have been one of the most vocal proponents of British independence from Rome but Cymbeline, too, has voiced similar ideas throughout the play. But scapegoating the Queen allows him to metaphorically denounce the “unruly women who challenge patriarchal order of early modern England” and the “rebellious females in native historiography [who] threatened the establishment of a stable,

masculine identity for the early modern nation” (Mikalachki 302-303) that she represents. Her death and the revelation of her wickedness, therefore, make her a convenient scapegoat for Cymbeline who can simply blame her for the “disruption of the masculine network of kinship, promises, and honor that binds [him] to Rome” (Mikalachki 305). In doing so, Cymbeline is able to re-establish his patriarchal authority that has been under threat from the beginning of the play.

While Cymbeline blaming the Queen for his conflict with Rome, therefore, is mostly disingenuous and inspired by ulterior motives, it does draw our attention to an important aspect of the play’s engagement with issues of national identity and the nation’s role within the wider world around it. As one of the play’s main antagonists, the Queen does not work as a convincing voice for any positive British national identity. This is also why her assertion of British independence fails to produce the patriotic effect that John of Gaunt’s speech does in *Richard II*. This is not because her words are any less convincing or less appealing than his – after all her speech is undeniably “one of the great nationalist speeches in Shakespeare” (Mikalachki 305). Her words fall comparatively flat because the play constantly undermines her credibility. We can see this from her first appearance on stage when she is professing her sympathy for Innogen and Posthumus, claiming that she is not “[a]fter the slander of most stepmothers, / Evil-eyed unto [Innogen]” (*Cym* 1.1.71-72) and pretending to “pity[...] / The pangs of barred affections” (*Cym* 1.1.81-82), while actively working against them (cf. *Cym* 1.1.103-106). Throughout the play, she openly admits her motives to the audience in several asides, and the physician Cornelius even directly describes her as malicious and untrustworthy:

I do suspect you, madam [...]  
 [...] I do know her spirit,  
 And will not trust one of her malice with  
 A drug of such damned nature (*Cym* 1.5.31-36).

More importantly, her claims and predictions are repeatedly contradicted by the action of the play. As the play shows time and time again, Cymbeline’s Britain does not exist independently from Rome and is in fact always already “Romanized” (Escobedo 70). The Britons proclaiming this independence the loudest, it turns out, are themselves fully aware of how much Britain is influenced by the Roman Empire.

Throughout the play, it is Rome that provides validation to British honour: Cymbeline himself acknowledges as much when he admits to the close ties between himself and the Roman Empire: “Thy Caesar knighted me; my youth I spent / Much under him; of him I gathered honour” (*Cym* 3.1.67-68). Another example can be found during the exposition where the victory of Posthumus’s father “[a]gainst the Romans with Cassibelan” (*Cym* 1.1.30) is not only the first thing we learn about Posthumus but also forms the basis for his claim of genteel status rather than a noble heritage (cf. *Cym* 1.1.29 FN). Even the decisive victory of the Britons against the Romans is heavily indebted to Roman models of honour as it is inspired by Livy’s famous account of the legendary battle at the Sublician bridge where Horatio Cocles and two others are fighting with “miraculous audacity [which] stupefied the enemies” (*Liv.* 2.10, *my translation*).<sup>2</sup> They

<sup>2</sup> The original reads “ipso miraculo audaciae obstupescit hostis”.

are the only ones fighting against an invading army while their compatriots are fleeing in fear (cf. *Liv.* 2.10). Despite the superior numbers of their enemy, these three men successfully manage to use the advantage of the narrow bridge to drive the invaders back, saving the city (cf. *Liv.* 2.10). In *Cymbeline*, we see Posthumus, Belarius, and the Princes fulfil the role of Horatius and his compatriots. Similarly outnumbered, this small group of Britons is able to fend off the Roman army in “a narrow lane” (*Cym* 5.3.52) and, according to Posthumus’s account, have “work / More plentiful than tools to do’t” (*Cym* 5.3.9-10). Thus, even the play’s culminating moment of Britain’s struggle for independence from the Roman Empire cannot escape the fact that, as Coppélia Kahn points out, British “independence from Rome is always already compromised by a kind of co-dependence on Rome for the validation of manly virtue” (Kahn 161).

The Roman influence also extends beyond the sphere of warfare and honour into the civic and day-to-day lives of the Britons: a surprisingly large number of Shakespeare’s Britons like the royal doctor, Cymbeline’s sons, and Posthumus all bear Latin names. Innogen at first seems to be one of the very few notable exceptions to this. Her name evokes the context of Britain’s mythical past through its connection to its founder Brutus (cf. *Hol. Chron.* 2.2). But even she adopts a Latin name when she dresses up as a young man and changes it to Fidele, which is based on the Latin *fidelis* meaning ‘faithful’ and ‘loyal’.<sup>3</sup>

Similarly, the Britons do not worship Celtic or Germanic deities but the Roman pantheon. The Queen herself acknowledges this even while actively propagating a separation from Rome when she evokes Neptune, the Roman god of the sea, as Britain’s protector (cf. *Cym* 3.1.19). Correspondingly, Jupiter, the head of the Roman pantheon, is referred to frequently by various Britons (cf. *Cym* 2.3.118, 2.4.98, 3.3.88, 3.5.84, 3.6.6, 3.6.42, 4.2.206, 5.3.84). There is also a temple dedicated to him in Cymbeline’s capital and centre of power (cf. *Cym* 5.4.480). He even makes an onstage appearance as a literal deus-ex-machina and facilitates the reconciliatory conclusion (cf. *Cym* 5.3.156-177).

Yet, it takes until almost the end of the play for Cymbeline to acknowledge Britain’s interconnectedness with the Roman Empire when he agrees to pay the outstanding tribute. The reality of Cymbeline’s Britain for most of the play, therefore, is not accurately described by the Queen’s monologue and its claim of national independence. The more accurate account comes from Innogen who “presents and experiences Britain, wandering through it, calling up its place names, and describing its natural situation” (Mikalachki 317). When Pisanio suggests that Innogen should leave Britain (cf. *Cym* 3.4.133-134), her questions first seem to suggest that she too regards Britain as exceptional: “Where then? / Hath Britain all the sun that shines? Day, night, / Are they not but in Britain?” (*Cym* 3.4.134-136). Yet, unlike Cymbeline, Cloten, and the Queen, Innogen ends up interpreting Britain’s extraordinary position not as a sign of honour and strength but as a weakness:

I’ the world’s volume

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<sup>3</sup> Another interesting name in this regard is Euriphile, the princes’ nurse, which literally translates to “Lover of Europe” (3.3.103 FN) which again highlights Britain’s connection to the continent (cf. Boling 64).

Our Britain seems as of it, but not in't;  
 In a great pool a swan's nest. [...]  
 There's livers out of Britain (*Cym* 3.4.136-139).

In contrast to the Queen's "unscalable and roaring waters" (*Cym* 3.1.20), Innogen's metaphor of the swan's nest reveals "Britain's isolation from Europe [...] [as] more of a shortcoming" (*Cym* 3.4.138 FN). Unlike the other characters who champion Britain's "natural bravery" (*Cym* 3.1.18), Innogen is able to "register the costs as well as the achievements of [...] Britain's isolation [which] looks protective but means exile to the global periphery" (Butler 44). As long as Britain's independence comes at the price of severing its connections to the Roman Empire, it cannot live up to its full potential.

Tellingly, none of the Britons are able to reach Milford Haven, even though most of them explicitly name it as their destination. This place carries an enormous symbolic significance as "the sacred spot of Tudor nationalism" (Butler 44), as the landing place of Henry Tudor's army in 1485 to take the English throne from Richard III and thus the beginning of the Tudor dynasty. This makes Milford Haven an apt metaphor for a fully realised British national identity that remains out of reach for the characters in the play precisely because Cymbeline's Britain is not yet prepared to acknowledge its place in the wider world around it. Once Cymbeline agrees to "submit to Caesar / And to the Roman Empire" (*Cym* 5.4.458-459), he finally acknowledges his already *Romanized* Britain, a Britain that is fully aware and thriving because of its place within the Roman Empire.

*Cymbeline's* depiction of Britain and its relationship with the Roman Empire ultimately blurs the distinction between the colonising Romans and the colonised Britons because they are always already both at the same time: "the Britons are Romanized, the Romans are Britonized" (Escobedo 70). The decision to have the intercultural encounter take place at the periphery (unlike in earlier plays like *A Midsummer Night's Dream* or *Titus Andronicus* where those encounters take place at the centre of power)<sup>4</sup> in the realm of the colonised Britons draws heavily on both the contexts and sources of Roman Britain and early modern imperialism and nationalism. In doing so, it complicates the questions of national identity and the nation's role in an increasingly globalised world at its core.<sup>5</sup> It further creates an ambivalence in Britain's emulation of Rome as well as in the assertion of nationalist independence as championed by the Queen, Cloten, and Cymbeline (at least up until the last scene of the play) which gives way to an acknowledgement of a shared community and equality.

We can see this clearly in the difference between the two interpretations the Soothsayer gives of the vision he had received before the decisive battle between the Romans and the Britons:

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<sup>4</sup> For a detailed analysis of how the portrayal of intercultural encounters evolves throughout Shakespeare's career as a playwright, see Bauer.

<sup>5</sup> As Flynn and Giráldez argue, the early modern period can be seen as the first era where we can speak of globalisation in the modern sense of the word: "globalization occurred when all heavily populated land masses began sustained interaction in a manner that deeply linked them all through global trade" (235). This 'global trade' in a sustained manner began when the Spanish founded their trading outpost in Manila in 1571.

Last night the very gods showed me a vision –  
 I fast and prayed for their intelligence – thus:  
 I saw Jove’s bird, the Roman eagle, winged  
 From the spongy south to this part of the west,  
 There vanished in the sunbeams; which portends,  
 Unless my sins abuse my divination,  
 Success to th’Roman host (*Cym* 4.2.245-351).

As Heather James points out, this first reading of the vision “prefigures the extension of Augustus’ power over Britain” (James 153) but is not what happens in the play. Instead of the foretold Roman victory, the Britons manage to win the decisive battle because Belarius, the Princes, and Posthumus are able to use the natural geography of the narrow lane to their advantage and fight off the Romans with the British bravery also highlighted in the British sources discussed earlier (cf. *Cym* 5.2.1-5.3.63).

In his second interpretation of the vision, the Soothsayer adapts to this new circumstance by modifying his interpretation of what a Roman victory would look like:

The fingers of the powers above do tune  
 The harmony of this peace. The vision  
 Which I made known to Lucius ere the stroke  
 Of this yet scare-cold battle, at this instant  
 Is full accomplished. For the Roman eagle,  
 From south to west on wing soaring aloft,  
 Lessened herself, and in the beams o’th’sun  
 So vanished; which foreshadowed our princely eagle,  
 Th’imperial Caesar, should again unite  
 His favour with the radiant Cymbeline,  
 Which shines here in the west (*Cym* 5.4.464-474).

This time, the Roman victory is portrayed as a reconciliation with “the radiant Cymbeline” (*Cym* 5.4.473). This second reading subtly contradicts both British and Roman claims by foregrounding the mutual influence mentioned earlier: “If the Britons are Romanized, the Romans are Britonized” (Escobedo 70). This fact is epitomised by how easy it is for Posthumus to change sides during the decisive battle. The differences between Romans and Britons are merely superficial: Posthumus, an exiled Briton, arriving as part of the Roman army, “disrobe[s] [...] / Of these Italian weeds, and suit[s] [himself] / As does a Briton peasant” (*Cym* 5.1.22-24) and manages to turn the tide of the battle in favour of the Britons only to change back into his “Roman costume” (*Cym* 5.3.74 SD) after the victory.

The play overcomes the harmful insistence on an isolationist British national identity that exists separate from Roman influence that is at the root of the play’s central political conflict. Instead, the play ends with an endorsement of a shared community that ultimately allows for the play to end on the hopeful promise of peace and celebrations:

Set we forward: let  
 A Roman and a British ensign wave  
 Friendly together: so through Lud’s town march:  
 And in the temple of great Jupiter  
 Our peace we’ll ratify; seal it with feasts.

[...] Never was a war did cease,  
Ere bloody hands were wash'd, with such a peace (*Cym* 5.4.477-483).

### Conclusion

This brings me back to my initial point about *Cymbeline's* topicality in the context of the 2016 Brexit referendum. Just as the conflict between Britons and Romans in *Cymbeline* has much more to do with how the Britons perceive themselves and their role within the Roman Empire than with the outstanding three-thousand-pound tribute, the Brexit referendum was not just about whether the UK should remain a part of the EU to which it is connected through manifold political, social, and cultural ties or whether it should 'take back control' over how it is spending its money and over its borders, as the Leave campaign proclaimed in its central slogan. As Daniel Carey writes, the referendum "remains ultimately a conflict over identity" where "the larger confrontation is with the UK's image of itself" (Carey 52). Just as the issue of British independence from the Roman Empire can be read both as a nationalist show of strength in *Cymbeline* in the Queen's monologue and as an acknowledgement of detrimental isolation in Innogen's "swan's nest" speech, the central questions in the debates before and after Brexit allow for both narratives of "weakness or strength, reasserted sovereignty or isolation in an interconnected world" (Carey 52).

*Cymbeline* ultimately focuses on a shared community that acknowledges its intercultural connections and that therefore has the potential for a peaceful co-existence. It might spark some hope that even among the "postapocalyptic wasteland, standing in stark contrast to a vibrant, multicultural [Europe]" (Clark 137) as which Still's explicitly anti-Brexit production portrays *Cymbeline's* Britain, there is still the potential for "a place where influences, cultures and languages could merge to create something new, subtle and perhaps even beautiful" (Sauvageot 127). Only time will tell what this could look like for the UK's future relationship with their European neighbours.

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### Zusammenfassung

Der vorliegende Beitrag untersucht die zentralen interkulturellen Begegnungen zwischen Römern und Briten in Shakespeares *Cymbeline*. Im Zuge des Brexit-Referendums erlebte dieses sonst eher selten aufgeführte Stück eine Art Renaissance: *Cymbeline*, so zeigte vor allem Melly Stills Inszenierung für die Royal Shakespeare Company, traf den Nerv einer durch heftig geführte Brexit-Debatten gespaltenen Gesellschaft, weil das Stück Fragen über die eigene nationale Identität und die Rolle der Nation in einer zunehmend globalisierten Welt aufwirft, die heute genauso aktuell sind wie im jakobinischen England. *Cymbeline* tut dies, so die These dieses Aufsatzes, indem es die Beziehung zwischen dem Selbst und dem Anderen in traditionellen interkulturellen Begegnungen umkehrt und verkompliziert.

**CALL FOR STATEMENTS – SHAKESPEARE SEMINAR 2022**

**Shakespeare's Odysseys**

In Episode 9 of James Joyce's *Ulysses*, “Scylla and Charybdis,” Stephen Dedalus develops a theory about the origins of Shakespeare’s works that is both original and controversial. It is in the National Library of Ireland that Dedalus, in a wild and winding conversation, develops his ‘Hamlet theory’. The episode stages the strong and sometimes comic appeal of a biographical approach to Shakespeare’s works and, at the same time, casts Dedalus – Joyce’s alter ego – variously as Hamlet, Hamlet’s father, Shakespeare, and as a modern-day Ulysses. In contrast to Homer’s Ulysses, Joyce’s Dedalus is not faced with a choice between two fantastical dangers – the six-headed monster Scylla or the deadly whirlpool Charybdis – but with a battle between two artistic dogmas: Aristotelian rhetoric and Platonic dialectic. Navigating these waters, *Ulysses* not only firmly establishes a connection between Joyce and Shakespeare, it also raises questions regarding the relationship between artist and artwork, text and intertext(s), modernism and gender, narrative and drama and many more.

This year’s Shakespeare-Seminar seeks to explore the various connections between Shakespeare, Joyce, Homer, modernism, and the classics through the notion of the Odyssey in a broad sense of the term. We are interested in papers that deal with Shakespeare’s classical sources, and the voyages – both metaphorical and literal – in as well as of his works. This could also include wider discussions of the relationship between modernity, early modernity, and antiquity. Topics may include, but are not restricted to:

- Shakespeare and *Ulysses*
- Joyce and Shakespeare
- Shakespeare’s antique sources
- journeys in and of Shakespeare’s works
- modernity, early modernity, and antiquity in Shakespeare’s works
- performances centered around (Shakespearean) Odysseys
- Shakespeare and (post)colonial Odysseys
- gender, Joyce, and Shakespeare
- the Odyssey(s) and Shakespeare’s sonnets

Our seminar plans to address these issues with a panel of six papers during the annual conference of the German Shakespeare Association, Shakespeare-Tage, which is scheduled to take place from 22–24 April 2022 in Bochum, Germany. Should travel be restricted or deemed unsafe by participants we endeavour to host the seminar as an online or hybrid event. As critical input for the discussion, we invite papers of no more than 15 minutes that present concrete case studies, concise examples and strong views on the topic. Please send your proposals (abstracts of 300 words) by 31 December 2021 to the seminar convenors:

Dr. Lukas Lammers, Free University Berlin: l.lammers@fu-berlin.de

Dr. Kirsten Sandrock, University of Göttingen: ksandrock@phil.uni-goettingen.de

The Seminar provides a forum for established as well as young scholars to discuss texts and contexts. Participants of the seminar will subsequently be invited to submit (extended versions of) their papers for publication in *Shakespeare Seminar Online* (SSO). For more information, please contact Kirsten Sandrock and Lukas Lammers. For more information about the events and publications also see: <https://shakespeare-gesellschaft.de/?lang=en>.