

CITIES WITHOUT END: ELIZABETHAN LITERATURE AND THE LIMITS OF
REPUBLICANISM

by

Andrew Sisson

A dissertation submitted to Johns Hopkins University in conformity with the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Baltimore, Maryland

August, 2014

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ABSTRACT

This is a study of the responses of three major Elizabethan writers—Philip Sidney, Edmund Spenser, and William Shakespeare—to the classical republican account of political personality. Much recent scholarship has sought to demonstrate the relevance and availability of republican thought in England in the years before 1600. Taking those facts as established, I ask instead how and why authors apparently well positioned to take up republican concepts declined to do so, or took them up only in such a way as to emphasize their problematic character. My proposal is that the most troubling features of the republican ethic appeared when it was considered in the dimension of time. The defining feature of that ethic is the reciprocal, mutually definitive relationship between good action (“virtue”) and good structure (“balance”). We become virtuous by acting in the establishment, direction, and defense of a civic structure that, in turn, allows our action to remain virtuous by balancing it against that of our fellow citizens. The three authors who are the focus of this study represent alternative critical positions on republicanism, so defined, from the perspective of its temporal character. Sidney and Spenser each seek, in opposite ways, to loosen the definitional relationship between enduring structures and virtuous action. For Sidney, political life must be oriented to a structure more durable than one standing and falling by mere action; for Spenser political action is vitiated unless it can look beyond its attachment to the endurance of worldly structures. Alone of the three, Shakespeare accepts on its own terms the republican nexus of structure and action; what he finds in it, however, is not a prospect of permanently joining virtue and stability, balance and dynamism, but rather a vision of the tragic finitude entailed by their incommensurability.

Advisors: Richard Halpern, Drew Daniel

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First thanks are due to Richard Halpern, my advisor: without his intellectual example and sage guidance, this piece of work would surely be a much poorer thing than it is; without his patient and unstinting support it surely would not exist at all. I am grateful, too, to Drew Daniel, whose ability to ask the right questions has improved it in innumerable ways large and small. My gracious institutional home during the years of writing has been the Expository Writing Program, in which I have had the honor of working alongside such remarkable and dedicated teachers as Pat Kain, Will Evans, Anne-Elizabeth Brodsky, and George Oppel. Much of my thinking about republicanism owes a debt to conversations with George. The Renaissance Reading Group continues to be an invaluable resource for vital, invigorating discussion. Over the years, Caroline Domenghino, Rob Higney, Jason Hoppe, Mark Noble, Chris Nygren, Ben Parris, Maggie Vinter, and Tony Wexler have been sustaining presences. My deepest gratitude of all is reserved for Meredith.

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INTRODUCTION

History would be for ever unsatisfying if it did not cast a wider net for the truth; for if in one aspect it is the study of change, in another aspect it is the study of diversity. The historian like the novelist is bound to be glad that it takes all sorts of men to make a world. Like the novelist he can regret only one kind—the complete bore—and take care not to describe him with too great verisimilitude. For the rest, all is grist to his mill. His greatest limitation would be a defect of imaginative sympathy, whether it were the refusal to go out to understand a Scotsman or the refusal to put all his humanity into the effort to understand a Jesuit, a tyrant, or a poet.

—Herbert Butterfield, *The Whig Interpretation of History*¹

This is a study of the responses of three major Elizabethan writers—Philip Sidney, Edmund Spenser, and William Shakespeare—to the classical republican account of political personality. In recent years, those who have taken up this and similar topics have usually done so with the intention of showing how far minds of this period possessed the capacity and the inclination to respond affirmatively to republican ideas, whether accessed through continental sources or through older traditions of English humanism. My concern is roughly the opposite. Accepting the premise that republican concepts were in fact a readily available way of cognizing the norms of political conduct and its proper institutional framework, I ask instead how and why other minds equally well positioned to appreciate the force of those concepts declined to take them up, or took them up in such a way as to emphasize their problematic and unstable character. The answers, I propose, require restoring to view a line of analysis that once featured prominently in the work of scholars of republicanism such as Zera Fink and J.G.A. Pocock, but has since fallen into relative obscurity, according to which what distinguishes the republican position most

¹ Butterfield, *The Whig Interpretation of History* (1931; repr., New York: W.W. Norton, 1965), 95-6.

sharply from its adjacent competitors is its notion of temporality, of political action and structure as phenomena in time.²

In its most condensed form, that analysis runs as follows. The community characterized and valorized as “the republic” is one through which the citizen becomes virtuous by participating in its establishment, direction, and defense. Because this community is neither cosmopolis nor Church militant, but a localized political organization defined by a particular formal structure, it might conceivably collapse as an effect of events in time; then again, because that structure is so ordered as to cultivate and mobilize the maximum of virtue in its support, it conceivably might not; and therefore the endurance of the institution that conditions virtue becomes at once virtue’s object and its measure. In what follows, I seek to demonstrate, first, the degree to which just such a temporal paradigm orients Sidney’s, Spenser’s, and Shakespeare’s respective understandings of what the republican ethic is really about, and, second, the seriousness and sophistication with which each in his very different way probes its external limits and internal tensions. My aim, then, is not to posit republicanism as a framework for the critical evaluation of Elizabethan institutions, as others have sought to do, but rather to reconstruct a series of Elizabethan frameworks for the critical evaluation of republicanism as a philosophy of institutions and action.

I

What is the classical republican account of political personality? Perhaps it will be easier to begin by saying what classical republicanism is, and then to work our way back to the

² Fink, *The Classical Republicans: An Essay in the Recovery of a Pattern of Thought in Seventeenth-Century England* (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1945); Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1975), discussed at greater length below.

notion of political personality—that is, the range of moral commitments, practices, and dispositions that define one as a political actor—implicit in it. As a first approximation to a definition, let us say that classical republicanism is a tradition, tracing itself to Aristotle, Polybius, and Cicero, holding that the best kind of state is one in which the members of a citizen body rule and are ruled as political equals, bound by the rule of law and by the imperative to pursue the interests of the community as a whole, neither subject to the dominance of an external power nor dependent on the patronage of an internal faction. (I use *classical* here in both senses: “drawn from ancient texts” as well as “canonically typical but admitting of variations.” Throughout this study, unless otherwise noted, “republican” and “republicanism” may be taken as synonymous with “classical republican” and “classical republicanism.”) At this point it is customary to invoke the warning of John Adams that “there is not a more unintelligible word in the English language than republicanism”; Adams also said that on this point “any other man of sense and learning,” provided he “has any regard to his character,” would find himself compelled to say the same.³ Chastening as this may be, it should be noted that the context of Adams’s remark was his frustration at the variety of specific constitutional structures—“constitutional” in the Aristotelian sense of being concerned with the organization of political offices and the allocation of powers among them—that could be denominated as “republics” and hence their advocates as “republicans.”⁴ It would be more accurate, then, to say that *republic* is virtually an unintelligible word, because of the persisting ambiguity whether it refers to some more or less specific empirical phenomenon (say, government without a king, or government under the law) irrespective of the type of arguments by which it is justified, or

³ Adams to Mercy Otis Warren, 8 August 1807. *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, vol. 4, 5th series (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1878), 432.

⁴ Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. Carnes Lord (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1984), 1278b.

whether it is simply the name for any constitutional form whose appeal rests upon the normative principles characteristic of the republican tradition. Does one become a “republican” by supporting a “republic,” or does something become a “republic” because “republicans” can plausibly support it?

In the tradition of classical republicanism, it is clear that definitional priority runs in the latter direction. There is a more formal as well as a more substantive point to be made here. The formal point is that there is no kind of constitution, no matter how loosely or restrictively defined, support for which will automatically make one a republican in the classical sense.⁵ A republican believes that a good constitution is one that can be counted on to fulfill certain desiderata. Human nature and the nature of political activity being what they are, it is possible to generalize to an impressive degree about which forms of constitution will most consistently do so in practice. That said, the variation in sociological and geostrategic constraints from one place and one time to another is sufficiently great that it would be folly to prescribe any one form as the universally applicable standard. Hence the fact that one or another constitutional form comes to be referred to as “the republic” should be taken as an artifact of empirical regularity rather than as a sign that that form’s distinctive characteristics are a part of the term’s conceptual definition.

The substantive point is that the basis for republican constitutional theory is Aristotle’s sixfold classification of constitutions—monarchy, aristocracy, and polity (later called democracy), and their degraded counterparts, tyranny, oligarchy, and democracy (later called mob-rule or ochlocracy)—plus the principle, rather differently conceived of

⁵ This is a point made with particular clarity in Quentin Skinner, “The Republican Ideal of Political Liberty,” *Machiavelli and Republicanism*, ed. Gisela Bock, Skinner, and Maurizio Viroli (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993), 293-309.

by Aristotle on the one hand and by Polybius and Cicero on the other, that the mixture of two or more of the simple forms may be superior to either simple form alone. The first establishes that a regime's legitimacy or illegitimacy is not a matter of *where* authority is located. The governments of the one, the few, or the many are all potentially good in themselves; their degeneration into misgovernment is a matter of authority's misuse, not of its having been alienated from its natural source (say, a contracting community, or an anointed sovereign). The second establishes that the means of preventing misgovernment is by a kind of distribution of authority that is obviously not at all identical to a simple expansion or diversification of the makeup of the ruling group. It is often noted in discussions of this sort that republicanism need not mean support for democracy, and that it is actually conceivable for a republican to accept a system involving some form of monarchy. This is completely correct, but put in such a way it rather understates the point. Cicero, for instance, suggests that monarchy is in fact *superior* to democracy (though he also says it is a close call between them).⁶ There is nothing especially anomalous about this. What makes Cicero a foundational republican is, first, his definition of the republic or "commonwealth" as an association for the pursuit of the good of the whole and of the citizen's *virtue* as the active sustaining of its institutions; and, second, his assertion of the preferability of the *mixed constitution* to all of the legitimate simple forms, monarchy as well as democracy. The two positions are closely related to one another; in fact, as I will now try to show, it is precisely *the way in which they are related* that defines each as a fundamental republican principle.

Let us begin with the nexus of virtue and the common good, as it is presented in Aristotle's *Politics*, before then taking up Polybius and the mixed constitution. According

⁶ Cicero, *On the Commonwealth*, trans. George Holland Sabine and Stanley Barney Smith (New York: Macmillan, 1976), I.35.

to Aristotle, the difference between each of the good constitutional forms and its negative antitype is a question of whether the ruling element (whether one, few, or many) governs with a view to the good of the whole or to the good particular to itself.⁷ Note that the gap between the two kinds of good cannot be closed simply by making the ruling element identical with the whole of the population. This is because even the numerically largest group of citizens will have a particular and one-sided conception of what is just, tied to whatever it is constitutes it as a group.⁸ Typically, the many think in terms of citizens' equal responsibility to provide for the city's military defense, and so extend this principle into a demand for equality in everything; conversely, the few think in terms of citizens' unequal contributions to the city's commercial prosperity, and so extend this principle into a demand that everything be made correspondingly unequal. But the city, or *polis*, is the association within which not just one or two but *all* of the goods necessary to living well may be realized.⁹ Therefore, the criterion for its decisions ought not to be any one of those lesser goods, military or economic or otherwise, but rather the good of the city itself: resources should be distributed based on the degree to which citizens are equal or unequal in their capacity to contribute to its direction, that is, on their "virtue."¹⁰

A virtuous government looks to the common good, but the content of this "looking to the common good" turns out itself to consist in the recognizing and promoting of virtue. So what, then, is virtue? In the first place, Aristotle tells us, we are concerned here with the virtue of the citizen, and this is not necessarily the same as the virtue of the good man. The task common to citizens is "the preservation of the community," and specifically the community insofar as it is determined by its political constitution

⁷ Aristotle, *Politics*, 1279a-b.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 1280a.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 1252a.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 1281a.

(*politeia*).¹¹ Thus political virtue is something relative to the constitution of the particular society in which it operates, in a double sense: virtue is directed at sustaining the *polis* in its constituted form, but the form in which the *polis* is constituted also determines the occasions for virtue's development, as well how closely the virtue of the citizen will approximate to the virtue of the good man. Where rule is by unequals over unequals, the capacities appropriate to those who command and those who serve will be sharply differentiated; and while such a system of government need not be degenerate, neither will anyone involved in it acquire political virtue in the fullest sense. Conversely, where political equals rule and are ruled by each other in turn, it is open to each to cultivate the capacities proper to both activities: "the good citizen should know and have the capacity both to be ruled and to rule, and this very thing is the virtue of a citizen."¹² In sum, political virtue is (1) the good a well-governed society will organize itself to discern and promote, (2) the ensemble of capacities necessary to preserving such a society in the form in which it has been organized, and (3) something most fully realized where citizens are able by turns to rule virtuously and to recognize and defer to the virtue of others.

With regard to the structure of the good constitution, then, we can see that this conception of virtue subjects it to competing imperatives. On the one hand, to prevent degeneration it is necessary to put authority into the hands of those who possess a virtue that is highly asymmetrically distributed, closely tracking (without being reducible to) the economic independence that allows for the cultivation of a disinterested standpoint. On the other hand, virtue is best developed in conditions of political equality, in which a given individual might rule at one moment and be ruled at another; moreover, occasions for the development and exercise of virtue are not merely an instrumental means to the

¹¹ Ibid., 1267b.

¹² Ibid., 1277b.

end of the city's continued stability, but are also the most significant of the positive goods the city ought to provide as many of its citizens as possible. There is a sense in the *Politics* that the way to satisfy both imperatives is by some kind of mixture of the forms of government, but in Aristotle's view this basically means defining the ruling group in such a way as to place it midway between the "few" and the "many"; Aristotle is the ultimate source for the notion that popular government is workable if and only if its social basis is a sufficiently large group of small-scale proprietors.¹³

It is Polybius who systematizes the concept of "mixed government" and presents it as a qualitatively distinct and superior alternative to any of the simple forms.¹⁴ Three innovations are particularly significant here. First, Polybius reworks the static taxonomy of common-good-seeking and sectional-good-seeking regimes into a dynamic and cyclical theory of their historical succession.¹⁵ Political society is said to begin when the rule of a primitive strongman evolves into legalized kingship; but with the accompanying rise in prosperity, subsequent kings become increasingly bent on high living and degenerate into tyrants. They are then overthrown by a group of nobles, who set themselves up as an aristocracy, governing reasonably until, after a few generations, their descendants forget the basis of their privileges and use them to support lives of speculation and debauchery. They are overthrown by the common people, and much the same process repeats itself until the multitude has reverted to total anomie and turns to a monarch to restore order, beginning the cycle again.

Second, Polybius argues that because the potential for degeneration is intrinsic in each of the simple forms, the only way it may be arrested is for that form's natural course

¹³ Ibid., 1296b-1297a.

¹⁴ Polybius, *The Histories*, trans. Robin Waterfield (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2010), VI.iii.

¹⁵ Ibid., VI.v-ix.

to be checked by the counteraction of one or more of the others. The ideal is a system in which elements of monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy (Polybius, unlike Aristotle, calls it this) all operate to keep each other in a state of controlled equilibrium—a system such as Lycurgus devised for Sparta in a single stroke of genius, and such as Rome has evolved by a long, accretive process of trial and error.¹⁶ One way of understanding this theory is as an expansion and radicalization of Aristotle's notion that the virtue that preserves the state is best developed in a context of continuous interaction with the virtues belonging to one's equals. Here it is not simply the individuals composing a single coherent ruling group, but multiple distinct constitutional agencies, in which each enfranchised citizen is enrolled at some level, that work at "ruling and being ruled in turn." *Balance* among the different elements thus becomes the structural correlative to what the choice of the common over the sectional good is at the level of ethical commitments, and it becomes correspondingly imperative that none of the elements be anything less than fully engaged in acting upon, or anything less than fully independent of, the other two.

Finally, Polybius offers the mixed constitution as a way of accounting not only for a regime's justness and acceptability to its own citizens, but also and explicitly for its geopolitical prudence and military strength. The *Histories* are presented as an explanation of the unprecedented rapidity with which Rome has achieved unrivalled mastery of the Mediterranean world, and Polybius takes it as given that the ultimate causes of such events are to be found in the analysis of political systems.¹⁷ The examination of Rome's constitution is inserted at the point when the historical narrative has reached the aftermath of Cannae, he tells us, because it is most instructive to consider the merits of a

¹⁶ Ibid., VI.x.

¹⁷ Ibid., I.i: "Is there anyone on earth so narrow-minded or uninquisitive that he could fail to want to know how and thanks to what kind of political system almost the entire known world was conquered and brought under a single empire, the empire of the Romans, in less than fifty-three years—an unprecedented event?"

system when circumstances have placed it under the greatest stress.¹⁸ In prosperity, the mutual restraining power of the three elements—consuls, Senate, and people—prevents any one of them from growing too great in arrogance and complacency; in adversity, on the other hand, “the state gains extraordinary abilities” as a result of the multiplied energies they independently bring to bear upon the crisis. “This,” concludes Polybius, “gives the Roman state its characteristic feature: it is irresistible, and achieves every goal it sets itself.”¹⁹

We are now in a position to say what is the classical republican account of political personality. Its defining feature is what we may call *the reciprocal relationship of good structure and good action*. The political structure of a well-ordered society is a structure of action. It is the “balance,” the “mixture” within which each element is freed to assert itself in action while acting in such a way as to give place to the action of others in their turn. The action of one, few, or many is not something reserved for use in a last resort, never exercised precisely because merely the thought of it is sufficient to keep government responsible. In the republican system the agency of the various elements may vary in its tempo of activity and in the extent of its legal formalization, but what is essential is that they collectively constitute the actual participatory structure through which society is governed, and that the operation of each is informed and constrained by that of the others. Conversely, action itself is evaluated primarily from the standpoint of its tendency to preserve the political structure that, in its turn, gives further occasions to action. The capacity to act in a way conducive to the preserving of good structure is what Aristotle calls the *virtue* of the citizen, which is said to approach virtue *simpliciter* in the degree to which the structure it preserves is one of a multiplicity of actors in balance with one

¹⁸ Ibid., VI.ii.

¹⁹ Ibid., VI.xviii.

another. The type and extent of occasions through which virtue may be developed and exercised is dependent upon the political structure; but the existence and character of that structure is itself dependent upon the willingness and ability of those composing it to act virtuously on its behalf.

II

These positions are not platitudes. There are very good reasons, for instance, why a Senecan Stoic or an Augustinian Christian ought to find them deeply problematic. The republican thinks of one's moral development as constrained not so much by the limits of one's ability to conform oneself to invariant norms of conduct discernible in the rational structure of the cosmos or opened to humanity by God's special revelation, as by the conditions obtaining in the political society—the particular, time-bound society—in which one happens to live. If events transpire such that one of the elements in the constitution of your society defaults on its virtue, and constitutional imbalance results, then your society will have so much the less ruling and being ruled in turn, so much the more outright dominance of one agency over others. The key claim is that the consequence of your living in such a society is that you will be in some sense a worse person, regardless of whether you find yourself on the side of the dominators or the dominated. There is an obvious sense in which that claim is going to be hard to square with the core Stoic thesis that the well-being of the virtuous person, rightly understood, cannot be affected by external circumstances. The Stoic can perhaps accept the republican analysis as an analysis of the causal reasons why occasions for virtuous action, considered as an external good, are available in some times and places and not in others. But he cannot accept the view that what determines action's virtuousness is its conducing to the

endurance of the structure that enables virtuous action. For the Stoic the structure with which virtuous action must harmonize is that of the cosmos as a whole, the “cosmopolis” of which all humans (some contemporary followers of this set of intuitions may want to include at least some of the animals) are “citizens”; and the significant thing about that structure is that its endurance is quite beyond being affected by anything you or I might do or fail to do.

The characteristic Stoic move, then, is to attach political virtue to a structure that is not itself a structure of action. The characteristic Augustinian move is to attach political virtue to an action that is entirely orthogonal to the existence of any particular structure. Let us recall that for Aristotle the reason the *polis* becomes the unique criterion of the citizen’s virtue is that it is self-sufficient, in the sense that all the goods necessary for living well can be found there, by contrast with more limited associations devoted to the pursuit of one or another good in particular. Having reached this status, qualitatively distinct from any lesser association, it becomes essential that the *polis* not degenerate by allowing an internal faction to sway the balance in the direction of any good narrower than that of the *polis* itself. For Augustine, the set of “human associations capable of securing all the goods necessary for living well” is an empty set. Since there are no self-sufficient political bodies, the criteria of political virtue cannot be based on the distinction between preserving and degenerating from self-sufficiency. Rather, the character of a political body is to be defined by its relationship to something outside of it that it lacks, something that, in Augustine’s vocabulary, it “loves.” The really important political question to ask about a society is not how it is organized but what it loves. In the case of a polity staffed by good Aristotelian republicans, the answer is clear: it loves itself. To desire what one already has may sound like a kind of self-sufficiency, but what one really desires in such cases is to

have permanently what one already has, and such permanence is what one cannot but lack. So what the republic, the City of Man, is really in love with is its own permanence. The alternative is the City of God, which has no institutional structure and nothing intrinsically to do with permanence. It is the invisible collection of those who treat persisting political bodies not as ends in themselves, as the republicans do, but as instruments in the service of an end that exceeds them, the realization in time of the kingdom in which time will be abolished.

We are starting to see just how much the assessment of the republican attempt to join action to structure and structure to action has to do with the specifically temporal characteristics of the structure in question, and with the contrast between action oriented to the temporality of such structures and action temporally independent of them. The temporality proper to the republic is defined by Cicero himself in a famous passage that we know from Augustine's quoting and commenting critically upon it:

From those penalties of which even the stupidest men are sensible—such as destitution, exile, chains, and stripes—private individuals often escape by adopting the proffered alternative of a speedy death. But for states death is itself a punishment, though for individual men it seems to be a deliverance from punishment. For the state ought to be so organized that it will endure forever. Hence, death is not a natural end for the commonwealth as it is for a human being, whose death is not only necessary but frequently even desirable. But when a state is destroyed and wiped out and annihilated, it is somewhat as if—to compare small things with great—this whole world should perish and collapse.²⁰

Political bodies, then, are in the permanence game, and we can see how the two critical moves just outlined represent alternative ways of accepting this fact while rejecting a republican understanding of its implications. For the Stoic, politics is in the permanence game, and this means that political personality ought to be based on that which is *really*

²⁰ Cicero, *On the Commonwealth*, III.23. See also Augustine, *Concerning the City of God Against the Pagans*, trans. Henry Bettenson (London: Penguin, 2003), 22.6.

permanent, and this can hardly be something so tenuous as a structure dependent upon action. For the Augustinian, politics is in the permanence game, and so much the worse for politics: political virtue, supposing we still want to call it that, ought not then be left to the arbitration of anything itself political, or anything otherwise tainted by the ontological falsity of the search for permanence. There is a third critical possibility, which is to accept the republican account on its own terms, but to ask how far permanence really is or can be the outcome of the joining of action to structure. Here two sharply different possibilities are available to classical republicans, although one can sometimes find both of them adopted by the same author in different contexts, as is the case with Polybius.

On the one hand, there is the optimistic narrative we have already considered, according to which the benefit of the mixed constitution is precisely that it stops the processes of political degeneration in their tracks and so creates a system hypothetically capable of enduring forever. On this view, while of course it might in practice not be possible to balance the mixture so perfectly that there would be no danger of future instability, there is no intrinsic theoretical reason why degeneration should befall a system ordered on mixed-constitutional principles. But then in a later passage Polybius explains that the constitution of Carthage was basically the same as that of the Romans, only at the time when the two cities went to war Rome's constitution was still in its period of vigor, while that of Carthage, being older, had already entered a phase of terminal decline.²¹ This unexpected reappearance of the theory of cyclical degeneration, now applied to the mixed constitution itself, initially seems hard to square with Polybius's earlier explanation of its superiority to the simple, degenerative forms. Something of an explanation is offered, though, at the end of his book on constitutions when he tells us that the outlines of

²¹ Polybius, *Histories*, VI.51.

Rome's future can be clearly foreseen. The conquests brought about by the effectiveness of the city's political system will eventually generate so much luxury, arrogance, and ambition that that system will no longer be able to channel and contain it: liberty will collapse into license, and mixed government into some variety of despotism.²² The thought would appear to be something like this: it is true that the more perfectly mixed government constitutes itself as a structure of action, the greater is its power to restrain each actor's potential to degenerate; but the greater, too, is the power and the scale of the action it unleashes. And action is a dynamic factor just as structure is a conservative: the two can be held in equilibrium for a time, but at some point the quantity of dynamism the mixed constitution enables will set off processes of change too disruptive for it to accommodate.

It is through thinking of this sort, given its most influential expression in Sallust's explanation of the decline of Roman virtue as a consequence of the military expansion that virtue had itself made possible, that classical republicanism acquires a kind of tragic sensibility unusual among political theories. Especially in its Renaissance varieties, classical republicanism sometimes appears less as offering a single prescriptive program for the joining of structure and action than as enforcing a consciousness of the necessity of choosing between them and suffering the consequences either way. Could virtuous action be reconceived in such a way as to pose less danger of upsetting the structure that conditioned it? Yes, possibly, though this might mean military weakness and a demoralizing as well as practically problematic alienating of one's capacities onto hired mercenaries. Could structural balance be reconceived as something more atomized and antagonistic, and thereby be stretched to accommodate more kinds of dynamic change

²² Ibid., VI.57.

and causes of internal disharmony? Yes, possibly, though this might ultimately amount to letting the candle burn at both ends, facilitating more glory but not assuring its endurance. From the sixteenth century onward the antithesis around which these options, what Harrington was to call the “commonwealth for preservation” and the “commonwealth for increase,” was that of Venice to Rome. Harrington thought a synthesis of the two was possible, and it would be interesting to consider his proposal in the terms this study has set up, whereby it might be said that he attempts to recast possession as a kind of virtual or prospective action, and to redefine the republic as the structure of balanced possession.

That history, however, lies outside the scope of this work, which is concerned rather with the conceptualizing of classical republicanism at an earlier moment in English political thought. The earliest of the literary works that make up its primary focus, Sidney’s *Old Arcadia*, dates from around 1580, the latest, Shakespeare’s *Coriolanus*, from around 1608. This is a period traditionally seen as falling between two rather more robust moments of English interest in the forms and ethos of classical politics, and in Venice as that politics’ living exemplar: on the one side, Thomas Starkey, Thomas Smith, and the reforming counselors of mid-sixteenth-century humanism; on the other, Milton, Harrington, and the classical republicans of the Interregnum. Recent decades have witnessed some prominent attempts at revising that traditional view, however, and so before I proceed to outlining my argument, it will be well to begin by getting a more detailed sense of what the older narrative is and of how exactly it has been challenged.

III

The newer work is generally framed as correcting J.G.A. Pocock, who is thought to have said, not only that there was no republicanism in England before the Civil Wars, but also

that it could not have been otherwise, that English political culture was simply too pervaded by contrary assumptions about the nature of the body politic for republican arguments to have gotten even a serious hearing. This debate is of some special interest here, for two apparently opposite reasons. On the one hand, my intention to analyze thought about republicanism (which may or may not be republican thought) around and before 1600 puts me more or less in the revisionists' camp. On the other hand, my analysis of what republicanism is and what conceptual problems it raises—the republic as a structure of action, the particularly temporal character of such structures—is substantially Pocock's, whereas it is an analysis the revisionists appear largely to have abandoned. If some kind of synthesis or compromise between the two positions is to be attempted, then, the first step is perhaps to acquire a slightly more nuanced understanding of the content of Pocock's negative judgment on the possibility of a pre-1642 English republicanism, by setting that judgment back in the context of *The Machiavellian Moment's* larger historical narrative.²³

Pocock's historical point of departure was the analysis of "civic humanism" offered by Hans Baron, who had claimed that praise of the active, public life and of the republic as its venue had sprung up with a novel intensity in Florence's crisis period of 1400, when the city's independence was threatened by Giangaleazzo Visconti's Milan.²⁴ *The Machiavellian Moment's* key innovation was to reframe the "moment of crisis" so that it became less the circumstantial context from which civic republicanism had emerged than the explanatory domain to which it laid claim. Medieval political theory, in Pocock's view, was fitted

²³ For a useful discussion of the influence and important criticisms of Pocock's larger narrative, see David Wootton, "The Republican Tradition: From Commonwealth to *Common Sense*," in Wootton, ed., *Republicanism, Liberty, and Commercial Society, 1649-1776* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1994), 1-41.

²⁴ Baron, *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance: Civic Humanism and Republican Liberty in an Age of Classicism and Tyranny* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1955).

primarily for the task of comprehending the principles of transtemporal entities. To the extent it was capable of seeing in particular events anything but the irrational flux of *fortuna*, it was compelled to do so either by assimilating them into the *longue durée* of the customary, through which the legal traditions of a country such as England had developed by slow accretion, or by making them the objects of the ruler's *ad hoc* statecraft, a mysterious art irreducible to law and obscurely related to Providence. By contrast, the theorists of the republic sought to generalize normatively about political societies' ways of responding to novel configurations of circumstance; they sought to present as the directing element of such societies the *citizen*, for whom acting in response to contingent events was the more or less continuous condition of his existence; and they sought above all to understand the specific sequences of events through which a society's direction could be usurped when its citizens ceased to function properly as such.

What distinguished "the republic," then, was less its specific organization—whether, for instance, it did or did not have a prince—than the fact that it was conceived as a structure of action, the character of which emerged out of the involvement of multiple distinct individuals and groups in the process of government. This much we have already seen in examining republicanism's classical sources. In the context of late medieval and Renaissance England, though, we need to consider more specifically what a structure of action was *not*. What it was not was exclusively or primarily a structure of *rights*, in which government is one unitary, functionally differentiated agency working to secure all the other, non-governing agencies in the enjoyment of their legal and customary status. Behind this opposition we might see the influence of C.H. McIlwain, who draws a similar contrast between the medieval regime for restraining arbitrary power through *legal limitation* and the classical and neo-classical—that is, republican—regime of restraint

through *political balancing*.²⁵ In the former conception, to which McIlwain is emphatically more sympathetic, rule is not divided among a diversity of agents expected to constrain and cooperate with each other through regularized interaction. Instead, the single ruler is utterly freed to act within his own sphere, but that sphere is hemmed and abutted in every direction, not by the activities of competing co-rulers, but rather by a great complex of rights, privileges, precedents, customs, and statutes, all of which it is the ruler's function and obligation to uphold.

If this distinction is accepted, a couple points may become clearer. A desire to restrain the crown's assertiveness may be a necessary condition for the emergence of republicanism, but it certainly is not sufficient, since republicanism represents only one of at least two fundamentally different ways of conceptualizing restraint, and the one with by far the less broad and deep presence in English constitutional history. We would expect, then, that a viable republicanism would be associated with the meeting of two further conditions, one negative and one positive. The first is some sort of breakdown of confidence in the more purely legalist view of constitutional order. The second is a way of making plausible the alternative view of the constitution as a structure of action, that is, an ability to embrace what I have called the account of political personality according to which virtuous citizens contribute their independent agencies in support of the structure that allows them to do so. But, as we have seen, that account was neither uncontested since antiquity nor immune to fragmenting into its component parts, and Pocock's claim was that in England it had either failed to coalesce or failed to overcome its competitors until a relatively late date.

²⁵ McIlwain, *Constitutionalism, Ancient and Modern* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1940).

This was clearly and explicitly distinguished from the claim that English thought in earlier periods was unreflectively attached to a static and traditional “world picture.” To be sure, the venerable idea of the commonwealth as a hierarchy of functional units continued to exert its influence, and in Pocock’s judgment it still partly limited the institutional imagination of the humanists of Starkey’s generation who promoted the figure of the reforming counselor as a kind of quasi-republican citizen.²⁶ The problem, however, was not so much that the explanatory space in which a classical republican account of the citizen as political agent would have operated did not yet exist, as that it was already occupied by a number of competing claimants. On the one side, the ancient-constitutionalist saw himself as engaged in a constant process of discerning and defending institutions that were in themselves structures not of action but of usage, property, and right. On the other, the radical saint saw himself as engaged in an action that would carry him beyond the possibility of commitment or even deference to institutions that had proved inadequate to the demands of godly rule.²⁷ Pocock’s conclusion was that “new modes of civic consciousness and action there were in some profusion” circa 1600, “but as yet there was no way of envisaging the political community as the sum of these interacting modes,” without which we are still missing “the essence of the theory of the polis.”²⁸

One way of contesting this narrative would be to argue that the English polity in this period really was practically if tacitly “republican,” in the sense that government was not only legally limited but was also a product of genuine balance among independent political actors. This would be as much as to say that when Thomas Smith, writing in 1565,

²⁶ Pocock takes this point from the classic study by Arthur Ferguson, *The Articulate Citizen and the English Renaissance* (Durham: Duke UP, 1965).

²⁷ For further discussion of the dialectic between these, see Richard Helgerson, *Forms of Nationhood: The Elizabethan Writing of England* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1992), 247-94.

²⁸ Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*, 348.

used the vocabulary of the mixed constitution to describe the structure of what he called the *Republica Anglorum*, notwithstanding that the “kingdome of Englande is farre more absolute than either the dukedome of Venice is, or the kingdome of the Lacedemonians was,” he pointed to a real continuity as well as a real difference; and that when in the succeeding decades that vocabulary fell into general disuse, the reality it had sought to capture did not disappear with it.²⁹ Something very like this was in fact said by Patrick Collinson, who criticized Pocock for scanting what he called “the quasi-republican modes of political reflection and action within the intellectual and active reach of existing modes of consciousness.”³⁰ Collinson’s focus was partly on the power of local and municipal governments, partly on the extent to which the uncertain succession compelled the contemplating of an acephalous polity, even if only in the temporary context of a formalized interregnum. That plans for such an interregnum were conceived at the highest levels of government suggested to Collinson that “when it came to the crunch, the realm took precedence over the ruler. So citizens were concealed within subjects.”³¹

Collinson was concerned more with political than intellectual history, more with what went on at the level of practice than how it was accounted for at the level of theory. The reverse was the case in an important 1995 book by Markku Peltonen, in which it was argued that while the concept of the mixed constitution had indeed fallen largely into disuse in the later sixteenth century, the concurrent demise of the political ethic of active citizenship had been rather more exaggerated. In Elizabethan moral treatises, citizens are not so much concealed within subjects as they are loudly declared to be there, albeit with considerable vagueness about what institutional consequences ought to follow.

²⁹ Smith, *De Republica Anglorum*, ed. Leonard Alston (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1906), 9, 59.

³⁰ Collinson, “*De Republica Anglorum*: Or, History with the Politics Put Back,” *Elizabethan Essays* (London: Hambledon, 1994), 18. See also, in the same volume, “The Monarchical Republic of Queen Elizabeth I,” 31-57.

³¹ Collinson, “*De Republica Anglorum*,” 19.

Furthermore, what can only be called full-dress republicanism did show up in Elizabethan England, although it was confined to what Peltonen calls various “marginal” contexts: town- and county-level politics of the sort Collinson had already pointed out³²; discussions of Irish policy; and translations of foreign works on contemporary republics, such as Gasparo Contarini’s celebrated treatise on Venice, of which much more will be said in the chapters to follow.

Finally, the literary scholar Andrew Hadfield has gone beyond these more measured proposals to produce a picture of a culture in which republicanism was not only conceivable but widespread, offering a language of dissent and discontent to an impressive roster of poets and dramatists.³³ Hadfield has been sharply criticized in some quarters for tortured reasoning and sometimes outright factual error, and it must be said that his enthusiasm for the possibility that authors such as Spenser and Shakespeare might be deemed “republicans” often outstrips any very clear sense of what the designation is supposed to mean.³⁴ However, it must also be said that he has done a valuable service in assembling a body of evidence that, in its sheer volume, does suggest that classical republican sources played a larger role than has always been appreciated in shaping the kinds of questions Elizabethan political culture posed to itself, even if a conversion to republicanism was not the usual way those questions got answered.

In sum, then, here is what the revisionist studies can be said to have collectively demonstrated. An ethical doctrine of the classical citizen was continuously present and

³² The point has since been greatly amplified in an influential article by Mark Goldie, “The Unacknowledged Republic: Officeholding in Early Modern England,” in Tim Harris, ed., *The Politics of the Excluded, c.1500-1850* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), 153-94.

³³ Hadfield, *Shakespeare and Republicanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005); *Shakespeare and Renaissance Politics* (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2004); “Was Spenser a Republican?” *English* 47 (1998): 169-82.

³⁴ Debora Shuger, “Shakespeare’s Republicanism and the Cavalier Scholar,” *Ben Jonson Journal* 14.1 (2007), 122-32.

confidently articulated throughout the period under study, and was not utterly crowded out by Pocock's lawyerly and saintly alternatives, or by any others. A conception of the English polity as a balanced structure to which that citizen might contribute, while not talked about quite so much, was also not so overwhelmingly distant from the way government worked in practice, or might work under certain plausibly imaginable circumstances, that descriptions of other societies in such terms would have seemed automatically irrelevant. And, lastly, the conditions of Elizabethan literary culture were such that most writers of significance probably had sufficient exposure to classical republicanism for them to have formed some kind of opinion about it.

That is all to the good, but let us also notice what has dropped from view. First, there is a diminished sense in general that anything is to be gained by studying the history of republicanism—or, for that matter, of any other tradition of political thought—as part of a history that includes its relationships to adjacent and competing alternatives. Second, and more specifically, there is a diminished sense of republicanism as a specific way of configuring action and structure in relation to one another, such that an emphasis on one term over the other might not simply make a given author 50 percent republican, but might point us to a split between opposing republicanism, or—where one term is developed to the exclusion of the other—might indicate we are dealing with something actively anti-republican. Third, and most specifically, the strong sense in Pocock's work that the faultlines dividing such internal and external contenders from one another are most clearly delineated as alternative conceptions of time, of the temporal relations among political actors and political institutions, really plays no role at all in the more recent studies.

The chapters to follow aspire to profit from the newer studies' insights while remedying some of what seem to me their conceptual and contextual foreshortenings. On the one hand, I do not begin from the presumption that classical republicanism was an intellectual force of little consequence in Elizabethan culture, or one of relatively minor interest simply because we can point to other currents that flowed deeper and more continuously. On the other hand, neither do I presume that the full measure of its consequence can be taken by asking how many "republicans" it created, nor that this is the most pressing question we might ask about the nature of an author's relationship to it. Rather, each chapter here examines one of what are arguably the period's three most definitive literary figures, with the intention of showing how the distinguishing characteristics—formal and aesthetic as well as topical and ideational—of his own highly particular approach to political thought emerge out of an engagement of some type (hostile, bemused, elated-and-then-deflated, and so on) with the classical republican paradigm. These do not form a consecutive historical narrative so much as they play out a set of logical alternatives determined by the different possibilities for configuring the three terms of action, structure, and permanence. Those alternatives, personified respectively in Sidney, Spenser, and Shakespeare, correspond more or less closely to the three critical positions I distinguished earlier, those which we might call the Stoic, the Augustinian, and the Tragic Republican.

IV

Sidney is the logical starting point, not only because he comes first chronologically, but also because, great-uncle of Algernon Sidney and intimate of the Huguenot resistance theorists, he has long been taken, both more and less casually, as representative of

whatever in the England of the 1570s and 1580s was continuous with republican moments elsewhere in place and time.³⁵ Hence the first chapter also deals at rather greater length than do the others with the existing critical literature, in part simply because there is so much more of it, but in part also because it raises important questions about how to define and distinguish our subject. Are, for instance, resistance theory and classical republicanism better thought of as continuous, discontinuous, or even in some respects opposed to one another? Do positions on constitutional form and positions on political morality always closely track one another, or should they be regarded as following their own distinct trajectories?

These questions matter especially in Sidney's case because the strongest recent account of the politics of his *Arcadia*, that offered by Blair Worden, sees Sidney as developing something very much like the republican account of political personality—what we might call a “citizen ethic”—while carefully decoupling that account from any kind of prescription concerning the constitutional arrangements that would support it. If that is indeed what Sidney thought, it is by no means a necessarily incoherent position, though neither is it in any strict sense a republican one. However, as I argue in Chapter One, while the separation of virtuous action from constitutional structure may at a certain analytical level help us to cut neatly through the *Arcadia*'s political tangles, when we turn to its notion of virtuous action we discover that the question of separability reappears as its defining internal tension. On the one hand, Sidney wants virtue to be *constancy*, meaning action informed by knowledge of one's intrinsic moral immunity to any change

³⁵ For one rigorous attempt at establishing continuity along genealogical lines, see Blair Worden, “Classical Republicanism and the Puritan Revolution,” *History and Imagination: Essays in Honor of H.R. Trevor-Roper*, ed. Hugh Lloyd-Jones, Valerie Pearl, and Worden (London: Duckworth, 1981), 182–200.

in one's time-bound circumstances. On the other hand, he wants the constant self's actions to confirm its identity as that of an essentially *political* being.

As we have seen, however, the republican citizen knew that if the republic were overrun or tipped into imbalance it would count as a real, not an illusory, diminishment of his moral well-being. Sidney could conceivably have had a *citizen* ethic without it being a *republican* ethic so long as he remained agnostic about *which* type of structure was the one required in order to allow the citizen to enjoy a virtuous, because a political, existence. What Sidney could not do while retaining that ethic was to say categorically that there *could be* no such structure; in that sense, conversely, the citizen could never be constant. So Sidney faced the choice of doubling down on the citizen and all that temporally went with him, or taking the characteristically Stoic route of situating the political actor in relation to a structure that stood by virtue of something far less temporally variable than mere action. Sidney, as we shall see, takes instead the characteristically Sidneyan route of a compromise; but it is a compromise that results in displacement of the citizen by the disciplinary prince as the paradigmatic type of political personality.

What in Sidney is thus a complexly and inconsistently held philosophical principle—indifference to the temporal careers of republics—is in Spenser a brute, unadorned fact, and it is from this that Chapter Two begins. In this chapter I attempt to account for two of the more strikingly idiosyncratic features of Spenser's political thought. First, its marked tendency to take the form of a succession over time of single, isolated figures, preempting the standard republican analysis of a society's constitution in terms of the distribution or concentration of authority across a diversity of social actors. Second, its complete indifference to that particular narrative of succession according to which Rome's virtuous republican institutions were undermined by their own successes and collapsed

into a corrupt principate. I argue that both features can be explained by seeing Spenser's politics as informed by Augustine's seminal critique of classical republicanism, which attacks not so much the alleged desirability of a "republic" as its very coherence as a normative category. It is not simply that Spenser, like Sidney, is less concerned with institutional forms than with individual virtues, though that is certainly true. Rather, Spenser's very notion of *what political virtue is* is intrinsically bound up in his Augustinian rejection of the assumptions underlying the republican analysis of institutions.

In the chapter's first section I show how Spenser's *Ruines of Time* effectively recapitulates Augustine's foundational critique of Roman republicanism. It is Augustine's basic duality that structures Spenser's poem: lovers of the City of Man treat political institutions as ends in themselves, and tragically commit themselves to their endurance; lovers of the City of God recognize them as transient instruments to be directed to ends beyond this world. I then turn to what happens when Spenser directly confronts one the starkest arguments imaginable for the necessary relation of virtue, constitutional structure, and civic permanence: Contarini's treatise on Venice, for which Spenser penned a commendatory sonnet. Contarini's interest is in finding the arrangement of actors and institutions whose perfect balance allows the city to preserve itself permanently. Spenser ignores this entirely, and instead inserts Venice into the sequence of world-monarchies found in the Book of Daniel and given historiographic authority by Augustine and his successors. Where Contarini tries to get constitutional order right in such a way as to allow temporal change to disappear, Spenser shrinks the social world to exactly one actor at a time, in order to focus on that actor's place in the ongoing history of temporal power. In a final section, I show how this distinction informs Spenser's political analysis in the *View of the Present State of Ireland*. Formal constitutions, the *View* argues, matter little to

Ireland's reformation; what matters is the work of individual officeholders in modeling the sort of disciplined, lawlike temporality that Ireland otherwise lacks. Political virtue for Spenser, then, looks less like participating in an enduring system than like producing out of one's own mode of action what continuity is possible in a world where this can be grounded in nothing else.

When we come to Shakespeare's treatment of Venetian political life in *Othello*, by contrast, we find for the first time a vastly greater willingness to work *within* the terms of a classical republican problematic of time and virtuous action. In Chapter Three, Contarini's republicanism moves to the center of the inquiry, as I seek to show that the seriousness and originality of Shakespeare's engagement with it in the later of his two Venetian plays is even greater than has yet been appreciated. To see this, however, it is necessary to restore the centrality of a line of argument that modern scholars have at times wished to scant, namely that dealing with the difference between societies defended by citizen-soldiers and societies, such as Venice, defended by mercenary professionals, such as *Othello*. Spenser had assimilated the thesis of Venice's permanent endurance to the whole conceptual field of classical republicanism, casting Venice as Rome's successor in order to point up the difference between the emulation of secular values and the sublation of those values in providential history. Shakespeare, by contrast, directs our attention to that aspect of Contarini's Venice most liable to criticism on *intra-republican* terms, and in so doing he opens up the republican nexus of structure and action such that it becomes less a definitional unity than a means of juxtaposing dialectically different kinds of republics: serene and permanent Venice against agonistic and glorious Rome.

Shakespeare's tragic republicanism consists in dramatizing, not the Venetian republic's failure, but rather its success according to its own terms, and it is of success on

those terms that Shakespeare wishes to count the costs. The tragedy leaves the city serene and unperturbed, but only because it has so completely severed the ligatures connecting the soldier's actions to the political structure he is engaged to protect. For Sidney permanence was the ultimate criterion that trumped politics; for Spenser it was the false god that politics had to deny; in the dialectic that Shakespeare inherits from Machiavelli and Contarini it is a value chosen by some polities and not by others, against the backdrop of the alternative possibility of choosing action. *Othello*, I argue, should be read in terms of the habitual sixteenth-century opposition between circumscribed, inviolable, disarmed Venice and the expansive, dynamic, militarized republic of Rome. This, I propose, offers new ways of contextualizing not only the play's racial politics of inclusion and exclusion, but also the epistemological crisis that overtakes Othello's marriage, understood here as a confrontation between the two republics' antithetical, and strongly gendered, kinds of virtue. Venice achieves (as does Rome) one complex of republican values by foreclosing another. Both in his exploration of the tradeoffs and in his location of them specifically in the space left by the citizen-soldier of classical theory, Shakespeare may be said to anticipate something of the subsequent course of Anglo-American republican thought; perhaps he may also be said to give it something of a future.

V

That may seem a strange place to end a story that has been in large part about the salience of classical republicanism's competitors. But it is perhaps less inappropriate as a conclusion to what is also a story about the irreducible facts of plurality and choice in the field of political thought. This brings me to the quote I have chosen for my epigraph. Butterfield was writing against the tendency of a certain type of historian to bring to the

study of those whom he saw as having authored the moral and practical realities with which he could himself identify—chiefly, it would seem, Protestants, Parliamentarians, and the unpoetic—standards of evidence and degrees of sympathy wholly unlike those he brought to the study of their opponents. How far the criticism applies to contemporary historians I would not presume to say. But it should be said that when and where its equivalent tendency in literary studies operates, it does so with far greater perniciousness and potential for mischief.

The Whig historian's task, like that of any historian, is the reconstruction of causal processes; for this he often requires the reactionary, as the villain of the piece. About the *fact* of meaningful disagreement the Whig historian is never in doubt, however prejudiced the manner in which he seeks to understand it. The task of the literary critic, on the other hand, is the reconstruction of significant ideations. With the historian, that which is not seen to be a cause may be seen to be an impediment, and so at least granted the dignity of its intransigence. But that which is not seen to be a significant ideation may be seen to be an insignificant ideation, and so to drop entirely from that area of reality which is the critic's concern. So it is when a critic comes to his material in the belief that it has a claim on his attention only insofar as it can anticipate or give comfort to habits of mind he currently regards as congenial. The effect is not so much that of describing a battle from the vantage of one side as it is that of presenting a world in which conflict and choice have receded to a lower order of reality, in which the thought that does not excite the critic becomes something incapable of rising to a level of moral and epistemic parity with the thought that does. Whatever else I have gotten wrong in my attempt at reconstructing the conflicting ideas about political virtue implicit in the works of my chosen authors, it is virtue enough for me if from that particular error I have kept myself free.

CHAPTER ONE

Constitution, Constancy, and Crisis in the *Old Arcadia*

Of the three authors to be treated in this and the following chapters, the question of Sidney's relation to republican thought has by far the longest and deepest presence in the critical tradition, reaching back at least to the work in the 1930s of William Dinsmore Briggs. Briggs drew, as have many critics since, on the intimate personal connections between Sidney and several of the progenitors of what would come to be called "monarchomach" theory, or the theory of legitimate resistance to tyrants developed by mostly Huguenot writers in the period between the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre and the death of the Duke of Anjou, whereby the Protestant Henry of Navarre became heir to the French throne. The principal texts of this movement are the *Francogallia* of François Hotman (1573), the *Droit des magistrats* of Theodore de Bèze (1574), the *De jure regni apud Scotus* of George Buchanan (1579), and the anonymous *Vindiciae contra tyrannos* (also 1579), authorship of which has been interminably disputed between Hubert Languet and Philippe Duplessis-Mornay.¹ Sidney was a protégé of Languet, a close friend and translator of Mornay (as was his sister Mary), and a friendly acquaintance of Hotman; and such biographical facts alone appear almost sufficient motivation for Briggs's judgment that had Sidney ever written a work of formal political theory "it would have stood somewhere between the *Vindiciae* and the *Francogallia*, but nearer to the former" (161).²

¹ For overviews of this body of discourse, see Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1978), II:302-48; Ralph Giesey, "The Monarchomach Triumvirs: Hotman, Beza, and Mornay," *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 32.1 (1970), 41-56; and the introduction to Julian Franklin, ed. and trans., *Constitutionalism and Resistance in the Sixteenth Century* (New York: Pegasus, 1969), 11-46, which also reproduces portions of the *Francogallia*, *Droit des magistrats*, and *Vindiciae*.

² Briggs, "Political Ideas in Sidney's *Arcadia*," *Studies in Philology* 28.2 (1931), 161.

Additionally, the concepts of tyranny, on the one hand, and rebellion, on the other, dominate Sidney's literary output with a pervasiveness and explicitness unmatched in any other major English writer of the period—with the possible exception of his biographer and literary executor Fulke Greville.³ In other words, Sidney's fictional idiom is more directly commensurable with that of contemporary political thought than are those with which will be dealing in later chapters. We have not to do here with Spenser's radical foreshortening of republican constitutionalism to fit onto the single axis of its philosophy of time, nor with Shakespeare's complex sociological, epistemological, and metadramatic extrapolations from the premises of republican thought. Spenser shrinks down, Shakespeare explodes out, but Sidney's *Arcadia* occupies a conceptual universe that contains more or less the same kind and number of objects as do the works of formal theory and topical controversy with which it might be compared. This does not exactly mean the interpretation of Sidney's political thought is an easier matter—the *Arcadia*'s political objects are many, some are in flagrant tension with one another, others change their relative positions over time, and nearly all are subject to the extreme ambiguities of tone and effects of authorial endistancing at which Sidney so excels—but it does make the task in some sense more straightforward. Finally, the presence of monarchomach theory “in” the text is not simply a matter of a continuity of concern and outlook, but of *Arcadia*'s being populated by characters who literally give expression to its contents, adduce them as justification for their actions, and reap the consequences of having acted in the way they appear to dictate.

³ On tyranny see Susanne Woods, “Freedom and Tyranny in Sidney's *Arcadia*,” in M.J.B. Allen, Dominic Baker-Smith, and Arthur F. Kinney, eds., *Sir Philip Sidney's Achievements* (New York: AMS, 1990), 165-75; Robert Stillman, *Philip Sidney and the Poetics of Renaissance Cosmopolitanism* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 169-216. On rebellion see Richard C. McCoy, *Sir Philip Sidney: Rebellion in Arcadia* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1979), esp. 165-217.

The question, then, is not whether the legitimacy of resistance is a matter contemplated by Sidney's text, but rather what attitude the text adopts toward it. But how closely should we connect the question of attitudes to resistance theory with the question of classical republicanism?⁴ Genetically speaking, resistance theory has its beginnings in the attempt to deal with a problem that is not even remotely "classical": the insistence of Luther and other magisterial Reformers that the Pauline epistles, particularly Romans 13 and its statement that the powers that be are of God and owed a duty of conscientious submission, are, as Quentin Skinner puts it, "the final authority on all fundamental questions about the proper conduct of social and political life."⁵ Those putting forward theories of resistance were thus compelled to do so in a manner constrained by their acceptance of a premise that would hardly have occurred to Aristotle or Cicero, and that could easily be seen to trump any aid and comfort a pagan theorist might otherwise have given to potential resisters. Moreover, republicanism is a discourse of good forms of government, and there is an obvious difference between asking what makes a form good in its kind and asking at what point it has become so bad that its validity can be set at naught, just as there is a difference between asking what is a good way for a person to act and asking at what point a person has acted so badly that we may take away his freedom of action altogether. There is, of course, much discussion in Polybius of vicious regimes being overthrown, but this is presented deterministically, as what follows by nature from a regime's being vicious, and it is to be understood that the overthrowers, or their

⁴ Scholars have often taken the view that the two have little to nothing essentially to do with one another. In Skinner's *Foundations*, for instance, they are dealt with in separate volumes and as the products of almost entirely distinct processes of intellectual and political history. For an interesting, if somewhat tendentious, critique of this approach, see Anne McLaren, "Rethinking Republicanism: *Vindiciae, contra tyrannos* in Context," *Historical Journal* 49.1 (2006), 23-52. McLaren, however, thinks that the *Vindiciae* is a representative text of early modern republicanism precisely because she thinks of early modern republicanism as having been no more than nominally "classical."

⁵ Skinner, *Foundations*, II:19.

institutional descendants, will shortly become vicious in their turn. The point of the mixed constitution is to bring about a situation in which there would be no need for further overthrowing, not to assign legitimacy to it when it happens.

This can be observed quite nicely in Thomas Smith's *De Republica Anglorum*, the first portion of which is given to a broadly classical exposition of mixed-constitutional theory as applied to English institutions. Following a chapter on the sixfold classification of constitutions, Smith proceeds to consider "chaunges in the maner of Governement," which generally go from kings to tyrants, tyrants to aristocrats, and so on through the cycle, summed up as a kind of physiological process affecting bodies politic, "for the nature of man is never to stand still in one maner of estate, but to grow from the lesse to the more, and decay from the more againe to the lesse, till it come to the fatall end and destruction."⁶ At this point it occurs to Smith to wonder what happens when the naturalistic frame is suspended and we ask not whether the overthrowing of a bad government is *predictable* but rather whether it is *justified*. Smith is reduced to noting that when such a thing takes place the common people judge it by "the event and successe," the learned by the doers' motives and by "the estate of the time then present." On the crucial question of whether there *are* in fact any such things as circumstances "of the time then present" that would justify resistance to a duly constituted ruler, his conclusion is as follows: "Certaine it is that it is alwayes a doubtfull and hasardous matter to meddle with the chaunging of the lawes and governement, or to disobey the order of the rule or government, which a man doth finde already established."⁷ That is all. We move on to the proposition that commonwealths are often not simple but mixed, and back into the framework of physiological metaphor, Smith preferring to think of the balancing of kinds

⁶ Smith, *De Republica Anglorum*, 12.

⁷ Ibid., 13.

of government on the model of the balancing of the four humors. The paradigm in which Smith is working, in other words, allows the issue of the limits of obligation to show up as a lacuna, but does not itself offer him resources for resolving it. And, in fact, classical republicanism is not among the primary discourses from which the monarchomachs derive the architectonics of their arguments, remaining ancillary at best to covenantal theology, historical legal studies, and scholastic natural-law contractualism.

On the other hand, it does play one significant if indirect role which is of some special interest here. One way of meeting the objection that there could be no justified resistance to the powers that be might be to increase the range of actors who could be counted as powers (Paul having been silent on whether one power was allowed to resist another). This would be a substantial incentive to redescribing the system of king and Estates, not as an arrangement in which the former required the advice and occasionally the consent of the latter in order to vindicate its property and privileges, but rather as a mixed constitution, in which a multiplicity of political beings had been apportioned some role in the collaborative activity of ruling. In the later sixteenth century this strategy came to be so closely associated with one word that the simple invocation of it could be taken as code for the entire underlying argument: “ephor.”⁸ Calvin in the final chapter of his *Institutes*, after a lengthy affirmation of the view that tyrants are ordained for the chastisement of the people and must be suffered patiently, had added, almost as an afterthought, that he had been speaking only of “private persons.” “For if there be, in the present day, any magistrates appointed for the protection of the people and the moderation of the power of kings, such as were, in ancient times, the Ephori, who were a check upon the kings of the Lacedemonians,” then Calvin would not only allow but insist

⁸ Elizabeth Rawson, *The Spartan Tradition in European Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969), 158.

that they carry out their duties and counteract the prince, for otherwise they would “fraudulently betray the liberty of the people, of which they know that they have been appointed protectors by the ordination of God.”⁹

Note that Calvin puts the point in the subjunctive: “if there be” in modern states officials with duties like those of the Spartan ephors, then consequences such as these would follow. Nevertheless, even raising the possibility represented something rather different from the more familiar application of the doctrine of the inferior magistrate to a federal interpretation of the constitution of the Holy Roman Empire, where it could be used to defend a prince’s acting against the commands of a superior prince.¹⁰ An ephor made sense only in the context of a republic: he was plainly not a smaller sort of prince, the holder neither of *imperium* nor of *dominium* over a subsidiary province; rather, he was the agent of one of the classical elements, the many, whose function was exhausted by the role he played in balancing government and so bending it to the dictates of law and the common good. Hence the question of whether there *really were* ephoral officers in the national monarchies of post-feudal Europe came down not only to what precedents for them could be creatively educed from the historical record, but also to whether the practice and spirit of politics in those countries could or could not be described in terms appropriate to the experience of ancient republics. Were the leading persons of a society such as England or France essentially like classical citizens, coordinating their virtuous

⁹ Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. John Allen (Philadelphia, 1813), II:804. Calvin also mentioned the tribunes at Rome and the demarchs at Athens, but these never caught on in the way that “ephors” did, probably because Sparta’s exemplary reputation for stability made it easier to present the ephoral role as fundamentally conservative, whereas Rome and Athens were both associated with democratic pressures as a cause of civil conflict.

¹⁰ For discussion see Richard Benert, “Lutheran Resistance Theory and the Imperial Constitution,” *Il Pensiero Politico* 6.1 (1973), 17-36.

concern for the common good in support of the structure that enabled them to continue acting virtuously? Should they be? What followed if it turned out they were not?

How Sidney thought about questions such as these will be the subject of this chapter. The first section considers three different approaches to the politics of Sidney's *Arcadia*. In the first, Sidney is closely aligned with the monarchomach view of an activist aristocracy with considerable latitude to resist the crown; in the second, he appears as a sophisticated critic of just that view; in the third, he offers an account of political *personality* broadly compatible with that of the monarchomachs—what might be called a citizen ethic—and yet decouples this from any strong position either on resistance or on constitutional structure. In the chapter's middle section I complicate this picture by showing how the issue of being coupled to or decoupled from particular constitutional structures itself shows up as a tension at the heart of Sidney's political ethic. That ethic is predicated on the concept of constancy, but does constancy mean commitment to or independence of the institutions that give the citizen occasions for action? In the third section I read the final part of Sidney's first complete version of the *Arcadia* as an attempt at negotiating a middle way between these two opposing alternatives: one of which seems to leave the citizen's virtue eminently political but also eminently fragile, caught up along with the particular society that sustained it in a temporality of crisis; the other of which seems to secure virtue's superiority to time and change at the cost of rendering its relationship to any particular political structure merely arbitrary. At the end of the negotiation Sidney has left behind not only the republic but the citizen as well; in his place, ready to step forth as the hero of the *Arcadia*'s fragmentary revised version, there stands a new kind of figure, one not quite outside politics, but nowhere near the *polis*.

I

Discussion of the *Arcadia*'s political alignments has centered most intensely on the eclogue known as "Ister Bank," in which the authorial persona Philisides recites a song once taught him by "old Languet," "the shepherd best swift Ister knew" and the only historical individual identified by name in either version of the text. The song offers an Aesopian version of I Samuel 8, a text routinely claimed by both royalists and their opponents in this period: the beasts, playing the part of the Israelites, enjoy a "harmless" senatorial aristocracy until, for reasons that remain obscure, they resolve to ask Jove for a king. Jove warns them that a king will appropriate the goods of the commonwealth to serve his own interests, but acquiesces and creates Man, borrowing qualities from each of the beasts, who also agree to permanently alienate onto their new sovereign their capacity for speech. Man begins by ruling temperately, but soon falls to sowing factional discord, destroying the power of the "nobler beasts" through a combination of force and fraud and raising up a new class of gentry (i.e., domestic animals) who are easily bridled and exploited in the absence of the old magnates. The song ends with an exhortation to Man to "Deem it no gloire to swell in tyranny," and a cryptic address to his subjects: "And you, poor beasts, in patience bide your hell,/ Or know your strengths, and then you shall do well."¹¹

In its appeal to something like an "ancient constitution," its depiction of kings as rapidly degenerating into tyrants in the absence of a strong aristocratic counterweight, its Scriptural allusions, its closing admonition conceivably (if ambiguously) legible as authorizing resistance, and its being identified as the teaching of one of the men who stood in a paternal relation to the *Vindiciae* as well as to Sidney himself, "Ister Bank" thus

¹¹ Sidney, *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia (The Old Arcadia)*, ed. Jean Robertson (Oxford: Clarendon, 1973), 259. Subsequent citations of this edition appear in parentheses in the text.

offers itself as a sort of synecdoche for monarchomach thought in general and the *Vindiciae* in particular. The most straightforward way of understanding its inclusion in Sidney's fiction has been, naturally, to interpret inclusion as endorsement. This was Briggs's conclusion, and it has been restated by several critics since, with David Norbrook giving it its most prominent and representative expression. In Norbrook's view, the eclogue "reflects the view of those aristocratic radicals"—the monarchomachs—"that only a strong nobility could safeguard liberty," and is linked in "a clear line of succession" to "the classical republicans of the Commonwealth in the 1650s."¹² He attributes, in turn, much the same political outlook to the *Arcadia* as a whole: though there are "hesitations and ambiguities," and though the *New Arcadia* is a less coherent synthesis than the *Old*, Sidney can clearly be seen seeking "to produce a work that men like Languet or Buchanan could respect on political as well as literary grounds," and the work in question constitutes an "endorsement of the Huguenot theory of limited rebellion."¹³ Norbrook finds Sidney's politics pervaded by ambivalence, but the point is that it is exactly the same sort of ambivalence as characterizes the "aristocratic radical[ism]" of Languet and Mornay, namely the tension between the desire to legitimate action against the king insofar as it was initiated by the nobility and the recognition that the distinction between nobility and commons itself rested upon royal authority. On this view, in sum, "Ister Bank" sounds like Huguenot constitutionalism because this is an ideology which Sidney substantially shares, which informs the politics of both versions of the *Arcadia* at large, and which is of a piece with the classical republicanism that reaches full expression in later English writers. *Mutatis mutandis*, this has remained the majority view among Sidney scholars, and it is

¹² Norbrook, *Poetry and Politics in the English Renaissance* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), 98.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 105.

often presented as virtually self-evident by critics who discuss “Ister Bank” in a separate context.¹⁴

When we zoom out to consider “Ister Bank” in the context of the *Arcadia*’s other fairly explicit references to the resistance literature and its themes, however, the self-evidence of this interpretation rapidly dissolves. In a trenchant and underappreciated study, Martin Raitiere has gone so far as to argue for the exactly opposite view, namely that Sidney brings monarchomach theory into the *Arcadia* precisely in order to subject it to a systematic critique.¹⁵ For Raitiere, the essence of the monarchomach position is, first, a restatement of the republican thesis of mixed government, according to which the balancing of authority between the king and so-called “subaltern magistrates” is to ensure the fidelity of government to the common good; and, second, the identification of these “subaltern magistrates” with the feudal nobility, who are alleged in the deep past to have made a revocable grant of powers to the king on behalf of the sovereign community, the terms of which the nobles remain authorized to enforce. Sidney’s reaction to these arguments, as Raitiere sees it, is essentially that of Jean Bodin. The choice is presented as between a republicanism that attempts to derive a “balance” out of the existing configuration of social elements, thereby ratifying the latter’s inequalities and antagonisms, and a unitary sovereignty in which one element is set apart from the configuration, so that all the others are made to stand toward it in a relation of isometric equality. The real issue, then, is the relation between aristocratic social dominance and the principles of political order, and read in these terms “Ister Bank” emerges as a

¹⁴ Notable instances of the latter include Annabel Patterson, writing on Aesopian discourse, in *Fables of Power: Aesopian Writing and Political History* (Durham: Duke UP, 1991), 67-75; Andrew Hadfield, on Shakespeare’s reading in contemporary politics, in *Shakespeare and Republicanism*, 87-9; and Laurie Shannon, on the juridical claims of animals, in *The Accommodated Animal: Cosmopolity in Shakespearean Locales* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2013), 66-75.

¹⁵ Raitiere, *Faire Bitts: Sir Philip Sidney and Renaissance Political Theory* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne UP, 1984).

Bodinian progressive fable about the rise of the State and its necessarily violent but ultimately beneficent crushing of noble power. This is an ingenious way of approaching the eclogue, in both the good and the bad senses of the word, and it is perhaps unsurprising that it has not met with wider acceptance. That said, the breezy dismissiveness with which Sidneyans have tended to treat Raitiere's broader thesis is unfortunate: at the very least, Raitiere demonstrates that there are equally coherent and credible alternatives to the assumption that Sidney must have been some species of monarchomach.¹⁶

Finally, a third way between these opposing positions is offered by Blair Worden in his voluminous study of political themes in the *Old Arcadia*. Worden's Sidney is neither the English Mornay of Norbrook's analysis nor the English Bodin of Raitiere's. Rather, Worden criticizes Sidney scholars for what he sees as their excessive preoccupation with the whole issue of resistance theory, arguing that Sidney's primary concern is essentially with the *ethos* of politics, only incidentally with its formal structures of obligation.¹⁷ *Contra* Norbrook, Sidney appears to have taken a singularly dim view of the sort of aristocratic republicanism implicit in the *Vindiciae*, as is apparent for instance in the *New Arcadia*'s portrait of a Sparta (the iconic aristocratic republic for sixteenth-century thinkers) riven by internecine strife. *Contra* Raitiere, however, Sidney's objections appear more pragmatic than fundamental, insofar as he shares much of his language and assumptions with those of a classical republican analysis of political systems.

¹⁶ Other dissenting voices include Irving Ribner, "Sir Philip Sidney on Civil Insurrection," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 13.2 (1952), 257-65, who scores some convincing points at Briggs's expense, but whose only positive conception of Sidney's political thought is that it represents "the traditional stand of the Elizabethan gentleman," evidently identifiable with a rather vaguely defined doctrine of passive obedience (265).

¹⁷ Worden, *The Sound of Virtue: Philip Sidney's Arcadia and Elizabethan Politics* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1996), 4.

Sidney agrees that no government can fulfill its functions and preserve its stability unless it is built upon a foundation of “virtue”; that “virtue” is to be identified with the commission of actions in the public, political domain; and that monarchy is a form of government especially pernicious to virtue, because of its tendency to shrink or enervate the sphere of “public life” in the absence of which virtue cannot do its work. The core political problem for Sidney, then, is the “inherent defects of kingship”; and yet for solutions he looks almost exclusively to a moral revitalization of existing monarchical institutions.¹⁸ This moral program is worked out in terms of a stark opposition between constant, unflinching vigilance in defense of public liberty, identified with Protestantism and the rule of law; and passive, “sleepy” acquiescence to circumstances, identified with absolutism, Catholicism, and the “causeless yielding” of liberty in the face of arbitrary power. These were consistent elements in the vocabulary of the “forward Protestant” party for which Sidney served as a spokesman and, later, a totem, but they took on a special intensity in the crisis year of 1579, when Elizabeth’s rejection of its preferred foreign policy of confessional alliances appeared likely to culminate in her marriage to a Catholic son of the woman widely seen as the author of St. Bartholomew’s Day. Worden reads the *Old Arcadia* as a record of the “political and ethical philosophy” with which the forward Protestants “met that crisis,” a crisis they understood essentially as a failure of nerve, in which the Queen was seeking to accommodate herself prudentially to external forces rather than “standing alone” upon the solid ground of virtue.¹⁹

Likewise Worden reads “Ister Bank” as less concerned with the final moment at which resistance must be contemplated than the initial lapse of constancy in which the animals lose confidence in their own capacities and so set themselves on the slippery slope

¹⁸ Ibid., 213.

¹⁹ Ibid., 70, 114.

to tyranny. He concludes that the closing lines are probably closer to affirmation than rejection of the monarchomach position, but also that this is not really the point:

“Arguments justifying resistance answer the question whether we are entitled to get ourselves out of the hole we are in. The thrust of Sidney’s fable addresses what for him is a larger question: how we got into the hole in the first place”; and this is ultimately less a matter of constitutional form than of psychological health.²⁰ And so a theory of political personality in terms of “something we can loosely call citizenship” shows up in Worden’s Sidney as if it were wholly detachable from any assertion of the necessity or preferability of any particular form of government.²¹ In turn, questions about the limits of the obligation to obey a degenerate monarch are considered parenthetically, in a manner that only confirms their secondariness to a more urgent inquiry into the moral habits and dispositions that keep monarchies from degenerating to begin with.

It should be said, moreover, that if Worden is right that Sidney combined a civic-humanist ethical orientation with a demurral from proposals for a non-monarchical constitution, the combination need by no means be attributed simply to a temperamental conservatism or to a failure of imagination. A powerful monarchy with a strong but decidedly subordinate conciliar element may, in fact, have been the system best suited to the realization of the forward Protestant party’s substantive political goals. The one thing republican politics seems to have been concretely “good for” in the late-sixteenth-century northern monarchies was securing a more reliable measure of protection for a religion that was a minority in the sense of not being shared by the monarch. However much Sidney sympathized with the position of his Huguenot allies, this obviously never formed a part of his own preferred domestic program. (It is probably not a coincidence that the

²⁰ Ibid., 294.

²¹ Ibid., 23.

only large territorial state in Europe to move in the direction of a republican form of government in the sixteenth century, the Polish Commonwealth, was also the one with a tradition of accommodating alternative forms of Christianity long predating the Protestant Reformation.) As Richard Tuck has argued, while its Genevan origins have led to a tendency to associate Calvinism with republicanism, in fact the consistent preference of Calvinist politicians was for a monarch who would act as a guarantor of Reformed discipline, using prerogative powers to curb traditionalist as well as antinomian dissent.²² If it was those whom we have come to call Anglicans who succeeded in “capturing” the monarch for this role, it by no means follows that those pressing for a faster Reformation were any less desirous of a prince willing to play it.²³

There is, however, one complication that needs to be introduced into this picture. It has to do with something implicit but not yet remarked in my discussion of Worden’s study, namely his decision to focus on the *Old Arcadia*, with the *New Arcadia* not ignored but considered only for the sake of the light it sheds upon its predecessor. Since the relation between the two texts will be important here as well, it is worth pausing to give a brief account of it. Probably sometime in 1577 Sidney began composing the so-called *Old Arcadia*, which he had completed and presented to his sister, the Countess of Pembroke, by 1581 at the latest. This work consists of five “Books or Acts,” intercalated with long sections of eclogues sung by the shepherds of Arcadia (including “Ister Bank”), which together account for nearly a quarter of the text. As this already suggests, the *Old Arcadia* is a very complex generic hybrid with considerable affinities to drama, resembling Italianate and later Elizabethan comedy in its bed-tricks, cross-dressing, and other witty

²² I set aside here the question of whether it is strictly appropriate to speak of Sidney as a “Calvinist,” an issue worried at length in Stillman, *Philip Sidney and the Poetics of Renaissance Cosmopolitanism*.

²³ Tuck, *Philosophy and Government, 1572-1651* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993), 202-3.

stratagems, even as it recalls tragedies of state such as *Gorboduc* in its profusion of forensic debates and its preoccupation with the drastic consequences of a ruler's improvidence. The ruler is Basilius, Duke of Arcadia, who, worried by an oracle that seems to presage the loss of his state and the misalliance of his daughters, disregards counsel and retires into the countryside with his family, leaving the business of government in the hands of a subordinate. Meanwhile, two foreign princes passing through Arcadia, Musidorus and Pyrocles, are smitten with Basilius's daughters Pamela and Philoclea and disguise themselves as a shepherd and an Amazon, respectively, in order to gain access to them. A series of increasingly perverse intrigues ensues, at the climax of which Basilius is found apparently dead, Musidorus is foiled in an attempt to abscond from the country with Pamela, Pyrocles is caught naked in bed with Philoclea, and Arcadia descends into a dangerously volatile succession crisis. The final Book depicts the trial of the princes for their (real and imagined) crimes by Euarchus, a neighboring sovereign who has been appointed as Protector for the duration of the crisis and who also happens to be Pyrocles's father and Musidorus's uncle, though their identities are obscured from him throughout the trial. The princes are convicted and set to be executed for treason and rape, at which point Basilius miraculously revives and issues—or so it is implied—a general pardon.

Not long after completing the *Old Arcadia*, Sidney began to subject it to an extensive program of revision, which by the time of his death had generated complete new versions of Books One and Two and a substantial but unfinished Book Three. These made up the first printed version of Sidney's fiction, published by Fulke Greville in 1590 with the evident intention of preempting the circulation of an *Old Arcadia* that Greville regarded as inferior and perhaps even unworthy of Sidney's legacy; this enlarged but incomplete text is

what we call the *New Arcadia*.²⁴ Generically it is closer to romance-epic than to tragicomedy, beginning *in medias res* and incorporating an incomparably larger cast of characters, range of settings, and profusion of episodes, as well as a pervasive atmosphere of chivalry entirely absent in its predecessor.²⁵ In Books One and Two, a significant amount of new material, much of it narrated in flashback and dealing with the princes' exploits curbing tyrants in Asia Minor, is interspersed with the events of the corresponding books of the *Old Arcadia*, with some of the latter expanded, such as the abortive popular revolt that closes Book Two, while others, such as those featuring the comic buffoonery of Basilius's stupid and pompous servant Dametas, are curtailed. Basilius is now referred to as a "king," but in every other respect he has been demoted from his previous centrality; and in Book Three the *New Arcadia* breaks from the *Old* entirely, shifting its attention to the rebellion of Basilius's nephew Amphialus and sister Cecropia, who abduct the princesses and the disguised Pyrocles and subject them to increasingly harrowing physical and psychological torments.

Worden justifies his privileging of the *Old Arcadia* over the *New* by claiming that it is much the more rewarding text for the understanding of Sidney's political thought: it has a "political edge" lacking in its successor, and this is because "political events are closer to the front of Sidney's mind in the first version than in the second."²⁶ Worden concedes, however, that it is not exactly the case that there is less political commentary in the *New Arcadia*; in fact, in a number of senses there is more. But the *Old Arcadia*'s politics are, it

²⁴ On Greville's editorial choices, particularly with respect to their implied framing of Sidney's affiliations in the domain of political thought, see Joel Davis, "Multiple *Arcadias* and the Literary Quarrel between Fulke Greville and the Countess of Pembroke," *Studies in Philology* 101.4 (2004), 401-30.

²⁵ There is a small subgenre of Sidney criticism devoted to calibrating the precise terms for describing the differences between the *Old Arcadia* and the *New*, but I have found some of the most instructive suggestions in a book the main aims of which lie elsewhere: Jeff Dolven, *Scenes of Instruction in Renaissance Romance* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2007), 173-205.

²⁶ Worden, *Sound of Virtue*, 15, xxii.

seems, more *really* political—we might almost say, more *politically* political—for a variety of reasons that basically all return to its being the product of a moment of crisis in a way that the *New Arcadia*, written in a period of factional *détente*, is not. The later text’s “contemporary application” is “less pointed”: it aims for emblematic generality and a sense of “timelessness”; whereas the earlier version, urgent, explicit, polemical, presumes and aspires to a very particular kind of timeliness.²⁷ The *Old Arcadia*’s circumstances as a speech-act thus correspond to the theory of public personality as vigilant alacrity that Worden takes to be the essence of Sidney’s political message.

What Worden does not quite say, though, is that the narrative of the *Old Arcadia* itself takes the concept of a “moment of crisis” as its fundamental and explicit principle of organization. In the earlier text the plot is set in motion by Basilius’s learning that such a critical point of inflection in the course of the state is imminent (he is even told the exact duration of the critical period); a debate immediately follows concerning the merits of two opposing ways of comprehending and addressing oneself to a crisis (avoidance, engagement); subsequent events are presented as either consequences or displaced repetitions of Basilius’s choice of one mode of response over the other; the narrative climaxes with the precipitation of just that epochal rupture of continuity in the state that he had meant to forestall; initiative then passes to a character formally tasked with determining a resolution to the crisis-moment; and resolution is finally achieved, and the narrative concluded, only through the restoration of values and judgments clearly associated with the course of action Basilius had decided against in the beginning. Some of these things also happen in the *New Arcadia*, but they are no longer the primary determinants of civil order and disorder, nor do they continue to constitute the basic

²⁷ Ibid., 15-16.

structure of the narrative. Furthermore, the extended trial scene that concludes the crisis, and with it the *Old Arcadia*, turns to a considerable extent on arguments over who is and is and is not entitled to call himself a “public person,” and this too is characteristic of the earlier text: the explicit remarking of distinctions concerning the nature of public as opposed to private functions, and the consideration of what is due to those who carry them out, plays a much larger and more constitutive role in the plot than it does in the *New Arcadia*.

In other words, the act of distinguishing actions and values that by their nature carry a “political edge” from those that do not, much like the appeal to the paradigm of crisis, is dramatically foregrounded in the *Old Arcadia* and notably discarded or diminished in significance in the *New*. What Worden takes as the *occasion* for the *Old Arcadia*’s explicit articulation of Sidney’s political philosophy—a “moment of crisis”—turns out to look less like that philosophy’s circumstantial point of application and more like its basic *conceptual content*. Likewise, what Worden takes as a difference *between* the respective orientations of the two *Arcadias*—one text is a kind of “public person” whose activity consists in responding in real-time to the contingencies of political life, the other is not—turns out to be a difference given great weight *within* the earlier work’s political scenes, and largely, presumably deliberately, abandoned in those of the later. So this leaves us with two kinds of questions about the *Old Arcadia*’s political ethic. First, is there a more than coincidental connection between the foregrounding of distinctions between public and private personality, on the one hand, and the foregrounding of crisis as a temporal form, on the other, such that the two would stand and fall together in Sidney’s imagination? Second, what is it about the conjunction of the two, as it plays out across the *Old Arcadia*’s narrative, that might account for the fact that when Sidney returned to

revise it he was to sharply scale back the significance of both, thereby producing not merely a more muted version of the same consistent philosophy, but rather something of a qualitatively different sort?

II

Arcadia is first presented to us as a temporal phenomenon, defined essentially by concepts of time. This is true in the sense already noted, that Sidney's narrative is set in motion by the announcement of an impending crisis, leading to a debate over competing notions of how one ought to fit one's actions to the shape of time that a crisis represents. Even before this, however, the *Old Arcadia's* opening lines frame the work as an essay in what we might call the political philosophy of time:

Arcadia alone, among all the provinces of Greece was ever had in singular reputation, partly for the sweetness of the air and other natural benefits, but principally for the moderate and well tempered minds of the people who (finding how true a contentation is gotten by following the course of nature, and how the shining title of glory, so much affected by other nations, doth indeed help little to the happiness of life) were the only people which, as by their justice and providence gave neither cause nor hope to their neighbors to annoy them, so were they not stirred with false praise to trouble others' quiet, thinking it a small reward for the wasting of their own lives in ravening that their posterity should long after say they had done so. Even the muses seemed to approve their good determination by choosing that country as their chiefest repairing place, and by bestowing their perfections so largely there that the very shepherds themselves had their fancies opened to so high conceits as the most learned of other nations have been long time since content both to borrow their names and imitate their cunning. (4)

The burden of the first two sentences is to define Arcadia's tranquility as not a literary premise but an institutional product. Arcadia is not a pastoral fiction, in the sense of a hypothetical construct capable of reflecting and commenting upon the world of events

precisely because it is separated from that world, as it were vertically; rather, Arcadia is the hypothesis of a society possessing those arrangements that provide for the minimum possible degree of exposure to disruptions arising out of a world with which it remains horizontally connected. It does not stand for a more stable reality because it has singing shepherds; it is because its laws and customs conduce to such a level of stability that even the shepherds there have learned how to sing.

The next sentence appears to tell us that the character of this society's ruler is well suited to his circumstances:

In this place some time there dwelled a mighty duke named Basilius, a prince of sufficient skill to govern so quiet a country where the good minds of the former princes had set down good laws, and the well bringing up of the people did serve as a most sure bond to keep them.

But it also alludes to a distinction found in Machiavelli's *Prince*, and in so doing transforms the initial picture in a rather complicated way. Machiavelli divides all principalities into two classes, the "hereditary" and the "new," explaining the difference as a matter of the degree to which the prince may rely upon accumulated habits and traditional institutions, as opposed to his own prudence and "industry," in order to maintain his position.²⁸ The continuity of the hereditary principality is secured not by anything distinctively excellent in its rulers, but rather by how comprehensively its form of government has worked itself into the social fabric through long experience. Mere incompetence is not sufficient for a prince in such a case to lose his state; he would have to go about perversely attacking the customary order that otherwise sustains him by sheer momentum. By contrast, the continuity of the new prince's state is staked much more to his own radically individual and continually tested ability to adjust himself to new

²⁸ Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. Harvey Mansfield, 2nd ed. (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1998), 6-7.

contingencies. Hence the question of the precise qualities—the *virtù*—that make him able to do so takes on a qualitatively higher order of importance as well as complexity. It is as an inquiry into *virtù* that *The Prince* is organized, and after this point the hereditary prince effectively drops out of its analysis. Or, as Pocock suggests in his discussion of this passage, the hereditary prince remains in the background as an implied “control case,” the case in which a ruler possessing zero *virtù* would be likely to succeed, *ceteris paribus*, through institutional effects alone.²⁹

It is sometimes said that Sidney is taking a sly swipe at Basilius, implying that he is not good enough to be the sort of prince whose situation obliges him to be any good at anything, and so anticipating his shocking mishandling of the events set in motion by the oracle’s warning. That may be so, but in a sense it misses the point. One need not find Basilius’s plan to retire into recreative idleness admirable or prudent to recognize that, *if he really were* in the situation of Machiavelli’s hereditary prince, it would be entirely unobjectionable from the standpoint of the stability of the state. Indeed, the proposal Basilius offers appears almost as if contrived to test the proposition that he is in fact in such a situation. He gives no indication of intending to alter Arcadia’s established laws and offices; he simply means to reduce his own factor of personal initiative to the minimum degree consistent with the retention of his title; the gambit is that the political cost of this, whatever it may be, will be no greater than the disruption presaged by the oracle, namely an actual loss or change of sovereignty.

Basilius turns out to be wrong about that: the consequences of the ruler’s slackening his active involvement are in fact immediate and drastic. The logic would seem to be this: Basilius is a good enough prince to keep hold of the sort of country that can be

²⁹ Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*, 162.

kept hold of by falling over backwards; Basilius's attempt to hold onto Arcadia by falling over backwards is a failure; therefore Arcadia must not, after all, have been that sort of country. And yet nothing we have been told, or will learn subsequently, about Arcadia contradicts in any way the strong initial impression that it corresponds to Machiavelli's ideal-type hereditary principality, in which the legal and cultural underpinnings of the state are as conducive to continuity as one could possibly hope them to be. Sidney has, in other words, retained Machiavelli's theoretical category while evacuating it of any empirical significance. The set of "countries 'so quiet' that the 'well bringing up of the people' in 'good laws' is 'a most sure bond to keep them'" remains heuristically in use, coextensive as it is with the set of "countries governable by Basilius"; but it is an empty set. As in Machiavelli's *Prince*, it marks off the outer boundary of a more pressing inquiry into those states founded on active and personal virtue or *virtù*. For Machiavelli, though, what lies beyond that margin is a range of obviously real but (to him) analytically uninteresting situations such as that of the king of France in his own hereditary lands. Sidney sets the margin so close to the limits of political reality that it appears that what lies over it is really just the world of the literary pastoral.

The *Old Arcadia*'s first political lesson, then, is that all states stand or fall only on the basis of whether they are actively upheld at every moment by what Sidney calls virtue and Machiavelli *virtù*. This does not mean, incidentally, that the *Old Arcadia* is terribly interested in the Machiavellian question of how far a *virtù* so defined will have to depart from the expectations of conventionally moral behavior.³⁰ In general Sidney does not seem to think it a very pertinent question whether princes get themselves into trouble by, say, too much scrupulousness in keeping promises to their subjects. In the *Old Arcadia*, at any

³⁰ A nuanced discussion of this issue can be found in Worden, *Sound of Virtue*, 29-30.

rate, this is largely preempted by a great deal of conventionally immoral behavior in the rather less prepossessing sense of Basilius and his wife Gynecia trying to outmaneuver one another to be first to seduce their cross-dressed “Amazon” guest. So Sidney’s political ethic does not, by being political, cease to be recognizably an ethic. But that still leaves open the question of what implications for the ordering of political life might follow from its specific ethical content. What, then, is this “virtue” upon which Philanax insists Basilius must “stand?”

The debate between Basilius and Philanax over the wisdom of the former’s plan to retire is meant to give us an answer. It is immediately followed by a second colloquy, between Pyrocles and Musidorus, in which that answer is reiterated and amplified. Everything about the presentation of the two debates is designed to encourage the impression that they represent parallel expressions of one consistent moral outlook; it is entirely possible that at one time this was exactly what Sidney took them to be. My claim, though, is that at some point in the composition of the *Old Arcadia* Sidney became acutely aware that they were not, and that by the end of the narrative his interest has shifted from enforcing their common themes to working through their implicit points of opposition.³¹

But first we need to get a sense of what the two colloquies—Philanax unsuccessfully counseling Basilius, Musidorus unsuccessfully counseling Pyrocles—have in common. Both advance a doctrine of virtue as *constancy* through *action* in *public life*. Let us consider each of these terms in turn. Constancy is the central concept at stake for both speakers, and a principle appealed to over and over again across the entirety of the text. Musidorus defines it as the condition of “a mind well trained and long exercised in

³¹ For a strong statement of the contrary view, that there is no more than superficial variation in Sidney’s basic ethical outlook, whether within or between the two *Arcadias*, see Peter Lindenbaum, “Sidney and the Active Life,” in Allen, Baker-Smith, and Kinney, eds., *Sir Philip Sidney’s Achievements*, 167-93.

virtue” that “doth not easily change any course it once undertakes,” because, “being witness to itself of his own inward good, it finds nothing without of so high a price for which it should be altered” (13). Characters remain themselves, and so do well, or deviate from themselves, and so do badly. Constancy, however, does not mean always following the same course of action so much as it means always making the inward self, and never external circumstance, the arbiter of the course of action one is to follow. Philanax insists to Basilius that the only way one can truly be harmed by fortune is to make the mistake of behaving as if one could be harmed by fortune. Greville claimed that Sidney had written the *Arcadia* in order to teach us “how to set a good countenance upon all the discountenances of adversity, and a stay upon the exorbitant smilings of chance.”³²

Sidneyan constancy is not, however, an ideal of contemplative withdrawal. When Musidorus reproaches Pyrocles for inconstancy, his concern is that his friend’s conduct suggests “a relenting, truly, and slacking” of his “main career,” and this is a career of “continual wise proceeding and worthy enterprises” (13). Not to act, or even to act with a diminished alacrity, is as if to “let your mind fall asleep.” Or, what for Sidney may come to nearly the same thing, to die. Philanax asks Basilius rhetorically, “Why should you deprive yourself of governing your dukedom for fear of losing your dukedom, like one that should kill himself for fear of death?” (8) The analogy rests upon the premise that the relation between *remaining* a thing and continuing to *act* as that thing is as tautologous, and as little admitting of temporal variation, as the relation between not dying and continuing to live. The imperative of constancy always takes the form of a worry that external circumstance, if too much is conceded to it, might divert one from what Sidney likes to call “well doing” and into “contemplation,” which is really “but a glorious title to idleness”

³² Greville, “A Dedication to Sir Philip Sidney,” *The Prose Works of Fulke Greville, Lord Brooke*, ed. John Gouws (Oxford: Clarendon, 1986), 11.

(16). If there is a corresponding worry that circumstance, if yielded to, might divert one from contemplative integrity and into an alienating and compromising version of the active life, we do not hear much about it here.

Finally, opting for action is presented as equivalent to opting for existence in a sphere of public, political concerns. Musidorus warns Pyrocles that by hanging around Arcadia, supposedly to savor its beauties and to turn his mind to higher things—the real reason, of course, is that he has fallen in love with Philoclea—“you subject yourself to solitariness, the sly enemy that doth most separate a man from well doing” (14). “Solitariness” does not simply have its usual modern meaning here, functioning instead as something like Sidney’s technical term for the type of life Basilius has chosen by suspending his own career of political action. Indeed, the princes’ whole discussion of constancy and the *vita activa* takes place against the background of the previous argument, in which the stakes of ceasing to be “active” are explicitly those of ceasing to inhabit a specific political role. When Philanax tells Basilius “to stand wholly upon your own virtue as the surest way to maintain you in that you are,” he means in part that by not depending upon anything outside himself Basilius will not be changed into anything other than himself—this being the generic thesis of constancy—but he also means more narrowly that Basilius will “remain what he is” in the sense that he will keep hold of his office (8). The two meanings are at this point not really separate: to be constant is constantly to act, and to act is to possess a political identity and a political field to act in; conversely, to have a political identity is to have something that exists only by its constant enactment, and constantly so to act is the way to ensure that what one remains what one is.

Matters get more complicated, though, if we look at the two exchanges not simply as parallel sets of assertions, but instead as events in a causal sequence. The reason

Pyrocles's desire to stay in Arcadia counts as a desire to stay in solitary-land is because Basilius's retirement has effectively re-zoned the country, depriving it of an active life and so making it irrelevant to the princes' course of political education. Thus it is supposed to count as an expression of Musidorus's commitment to the active, political life when he urges Pyrocles to depart for someplace else. But does constancy really mean the willingness to change political venues the moment one of them ceases to offer the most congenial space for action? This is not a question with which the princes immediately have to reckon, insofar as their present public responsibility may be said to be educating themselves for roles they will only assume at some indefinite point in the future. But what about Philanax? Should we say that because he is a good counselor stuck dealing with a dimwitted and willful prince, that he should take his services elsewhere where they will be more actually effective? That sounds consistent with Musidorus's advice to Pyrocles, but not especially consistent with Philanax's own advice to Basilius. The young prince tells his friend to make choice of the context that best gives occasion to virtuous action. But the old counselor tells his prince that *what virtuous action means* is remaining in an office one cannot abandon for any occasion.

And why doesn't Basilius listen to Philanax? One kind of answer would be to say that whatever may be the structure of Arcadia's political institutions, it has not been sufficient to the task of getting Basilius to listen. In this sense, Arcadia's constitution must be imperfectly balanced: too much latitude is given to one man's untutored judgment; those who might assist that judgment by contributing to it their own independent intelligences lack a reliable framework through which to do so. There is nothing terribly surprising about this: happy indeed is the society whose constitution is even close to balanced. But insofar as some such societies do exist, it is hard to see how the loss of such

balance, once achieved, could be other than hugely consequential, marking a real diminishment in one's ability to be a political being, an active being, and so, perforce, a constant being. And yet the existence of political balance is obviously a circumstance in time, dependent upon innumerable factors beyond the control of any individual. So which is it? Is the virtuous person *constant* but not really *political*, not actually so vulnerable in his moral identity to whether or not a particular polity gives him occasions to participate in its direction? Or is he *political* but not really *constant*, not actually so defined in his moral identity by his indifference to *every* kind of external temporal circumstance?

As I have suggested, the paralleling of the two exchanges, along with the somewhat idiosyncratic grounds for the princes' being in Arcadia to begin with, militate against this question's becoming explicit in the *Old Arcadia's* opening episodes. There may be other reasons, too, why it is not immediately taken up. Pyrocles's rebuttals in defense of the contemplative life are said to be so stilted and unconvincing that Musidorus gets suspicious, stops arguing, and gets Pyrocles to confess to being in love. Nancy Lindheim has drawn attention to the importance of this moment, suggesting that the dialectic of action and contemplation is for Sidney so obviously resolvable in favor of the first term that it fails even to generate a credible opposition; hence the turn to a new and more evenly matched dialectic of "reason" and "love."³³ We might explain the difference by saying that for Sidney love appears less as virtue's absence or deficiency than as its positive symmetrical inverse. If virtue is standing upon oneself, and the vice of a Basilius is accommodating oneself to what is outside oneself, love involves assimilating oneself to the other so far as actually to generate an alternative self, a counter-self modeled in the other's image, as Pyrocles will do in recreating himself as the Amazon "Cleophila," "turning," as he

³³ Lindheim, *The Structures of Sidney's "Arcadia"* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1982), 42-51.

says, "Philoclea to myself, as my mind is wholly turned and transformed into her" (18).

Sidney thus allows the Philanax-Musidorus account of active public constancy to stand, its own tensions unexamined, as a benchmark against which to measure the erotic inversions and perversions that occupy the narrative's middle sections.

The point at which the tensions can no longer be deferred is when the Arcadian succession is thrown into doubt by the discovery of Basilius's body, apparently dead, in a cave intended for use in an ill-fated assignation with "Cleophila." Indeed, when we come to Sidney's analysis of the succession crisis, the assumption that citizen virtue is something relative to, and hence vulnerable to changes in, the constitution of the particular society is so prominently featured that it seems odd in retrospect that such virtue could ever have been confused with the Stoic's categorical immunity to temporal circumstances.

There was a notable example how great dissipations monarchal governments are subject unto; for now their prince and guide had left them, they had not experience unto rule, and had not whom to obey. Public matters had ever been privately governed, so that they had no lively taste what was good for themselves, but everything was either vehemently desirous or extremely terrible. Neighbors' invasions, civil dissension, cruelty of the coming prince, and whatsoever in common sense carries a dreadful show, was in all men's heads, but in few how to prevent: hearkening on every rumor, suspecting everything, condemning them whom before they had honored, making strange and impossible tales of the duke's death; while they thought themselves in danger, wishing nothing but safety; as soon as persuasion of safety took them, desiring further benefits as amendment of forepassed faults (which faults notwithstanding none could tell either the grounds or effects of); all agreeing in the universal names of liking or misliking, but of what in especial points infinitely disagreeing; altogether like a falling steeple, the parts whereof (as windows, stones, and pinnacles) were well, but the whole mass ruinous. (320)

The analysis would appear to go like this. Because Arcadia put “public matters” in the hands of one man and his immediate circle, the larger political nation failed to develop the virtue that would enable them, now that circumstances demand it, to take the tiller for themselves. But to say that Arcadia had been “privately governed” means something more than simply that it had been governed by comparatively few people; it means also that the ruling group was limited in such a way that, lacking the virtue of others to check and challenge it, it deteriorated into partiality and so forfeited its own. (As regards Basilius, at least, this seems basically correct.) For a society to degenerate from “public” to “private” government is to destroy its virtue, or at least to create conditions under which it cannot possibly endure. And yet the only thing capable of forestalling degeneration is the balanced distribution and continuous engagement of virtue itself.

And so Sidney faced a choice. He could accept the problem of time that the citizen’s virtue created, recognize that the surmounting of crisis required bringing to bear the full complement of virtues themselves vulnerable to crisis, and so start building the structure that would keep those virtues in balance. This is an option Sidney rejects with remarkably little hesitation. The contenders in Arcadia’s disputed succession come in a bewildering variety of shapes and sizes: there are various legitimist parties championing various members of Basilius’s family; a popular movement to make Philanax’s authority permanent; and a clique of nobles who resent Philanax’s influence and will accept virtually any arrangement that promises to limit it. Of all these, the only group Sidney treats as wholly nonserious is the one that wants to institute a non-monarchical republic, on the model either of democratic Athens or aristocratic Sparta. (Recall, too, that in the fiction these are similarly-sized neighboring states with which Arcadia has military and diplomatic relations, not schoolroom names to conjure with.) Those advancing this

proposal only make themselves irrelevant to the disposing of the real questions in a country that has known princely government since time out of mind; these are, Sidney says, “rather the discoursing sort of men than the active, being a matter more in imagination than practice” (321). In Sidney’s idiom, that is damning language indeed.

But the fact of its being so damning reminds us how difficult it would be for Sidney simply to accept the obvious alternative course open to him. That is, to make his peace with the *vita contemplativa*, and so to concede that while the virtuous person’s altruism might now and again lead him into activity that happened to pass through political institutions, constancy’s relation to political life was no more fundamental than was its relation to any other arena of activity that might or might not happen to present itself at a given moment. For a great many of us a great part of the time, it really might be the better part of virtue to cultivate our gardens. If there was good news in this, it was perhaps that the collapse of the civic edifice, no doubt only hastened by our collective run on the deposits of virtue that might once have supported it, had now become itself a matter of corresponding moral indifference. But was there yet a third way? Some way of redefining virtue’s relation to the public, political sphere so that the actual, particular organization of that sphere was neither elevated to all-embracing importance nor demoted into insignificance? This, I will now go on to suggest, is the problem to which the *Old Arcadia*’s final book is devoted to finding a solution.

III

The interpretation of the crisis that eventually prevails is Philanax’s, according to which the dukedom must ultimately be settled upon Basilius’s natural heir, but only after an interim in which the old duke’s death is to be investigated and those responsible brought

to justice. So it is that Book Five is the scene of a criminal trial, with Philanax prosecuting, Gynecia, Pyrocles, and Musidorus as defendants, and Euarchus—installed as “judge of the late evils” and “protector of this country”—sitting in the judgment seat (364-5). It needs to be said that my method of presentation, focusing on the initial expression of the principles of Sidney’s citizen ethic and then on their rearticulation in the trial scene, cannot but obscure a large part of the latter’s emotional effect, the sense of genuine surprise and awkwardness many readers feel when the romantic high jinx that have occupied the intervening narrative space are suddenly subjected to solemn legal scrutiny. The strategy has been aptly described by Mary Ellen Lamb as one of “reader entrapment”: the bait is the privatized mode of response we have been encouraged to adopt toward the princes’ erotic intrigues; the snapping bar is the humiliating rebuke represented by Euarchus’s reinterpretation of those events from a stringently “public” perspective that has been held carefully in reserve.³⁴ I raise the point because it is from Sidney’s masterful way of springing of this particular “trap,” as much as from anything in the trial scene taken alone, that the *Old Arcadia*’s reader acquires a cumulative sense of the work’s insistence on the act of discriminating public from private roles and values. The distinction, Sidney seems to be telling us, must be terrifically important indeed if it is capable of generating two such palpably opposite modes of perception and interpretation.

The trial scene thus has the formal burden of representing “the public” by contrast with what is now retrospectively recast as “the private.” But the trial ends up turning upon the public/private binary not only in its form but in its content as well. As regards the determination of matters of fact, it turns out to be largely a non-starter. Gynecia, racked by guilt over her intended adultery and her role in Basilius’s accidental poisoning, wishes

³⁴ Lamb, *Gender and Authorship in the Sidney Circle* (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1990), 23.

only for a speedy death and so falsely confesses to having murdered her husband deliberately. The princes manage to deflect Philanax's specious accusations of conniving at the duke's murder, but each freely admits to sexual offenses carrying the death penalty, Pyrocles (falsely) to raping Philoclea, Musidorus (truthfully) to attempting to convey Pamela away from her father and country. These facts not being in doubt, much of the substance of the trial has to do with the princes' attempts, first, to deny jurisdiction, and, second, to advance an entirely different interpretation of the implications of their actions, on the basis of their being "public persons." Moreover, since they are obviously not public officers of Arcadia in any formal sense, the question of whether this appeal to public personality can succeed basically comes down to the question of what is the scale of the structure within which such an appeal makes sense, whether it extends beyond or is reducible to that of the particular national state. Both of the princes' attempts are rejected by Euarchus, and the immediate effect of this is to reinforce the identification between political personality and the particular complex of institutions it is obliged to support. However, other aspects of the trial scene suggest that that identification is coming under strain, and that Sidney is thinking through how far it can be loosened without compromising the whole of his existing moral system.

How exactly to deal with the content of Euarchus's decisions has long been a problem for critics. This is in part because of the acute emotional ambivalence I have described Sidney as engendering around the whole phenomenon of public judgment in the *Old Arcadia's* closing book. Hence for some critics Euarchus simply represents "the law," or the rule of law, in a generic sense. This is the approach most notably adopted by

Debora Shuger.³⁵ Shuger points out that, once it has been revealed to Euarchus that the men he has sentenced to death are in fact his son (Pyrocles) and nephew (Musidorus), his situation becomes strikingly similar to that of Brutus in that quintessential bit of republican lore, the killing of his sons after they conspired to restore the monarchy. By ruefully refusing to modify his original sentence, Euarchus declares himself on the side of the rule of law as against the rule of discretionary equity, meaning in this case paternal indulgence toward the erotic proclivities of well-connected young men. In Shuger's view, Sidney does not mean for us to see this as a good thing.

On the other hand, recent criticism has shown itself increasingly willing to take seriously the specific legal concepts underpinning both Euarchus's assumption of jurisdiction and his substantive rulings in the trial scene. Notable here is Brian Lockey's proposal that Euarchus is an idealized exemplar of the natural-law theory of "charitable intervention" developed by such neo-scholastics as Francisco Vitoria and Bartholomé de Las Casas.³⁶ According to this reading, Sidney portrays Arcadia as corrupted by precisely the sort of abominable but ameliorable vices thinkers such as Las Casas saw in the Amerindians, and Euarchus as the benevolent and temporary custodian called upon to restore the rule of universal principles of natural justice. The proposal has some merit, particularly insofar as it focuses our attention on the fact that political action in Sidney's narrative centers on international intervention as much as on the dynamics of intrastate government.³⁷ Unfortunately, it is obliged to ignore Euarchus's own explicit statements on

³⁵ Shuger, "Castigating Livy: The Rape of Lucretia and *The Old Arcadia*," *Renaissance Quarterly* 51.2 (1998), 526-48.

³⁶ Lockey, *Law and Empire in English Renaissance Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006), 47-79. See also Charles Ross, *Elizabethan Literature and the Law of Fraudulent Conveyance: Sidney, Spenser, and Shakespeare* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 43-69.

³⁷ For more on the evolution of Sidney's internationalism, see Roger Kuin, "Querre-Muhau: Sir Philip Sidney and the New World," *Renaissance Quarterly* 51.2 (1998), 549-85.

the relationship between natural law and positive law, which make clear the latter's primacy. Behind this lies a larger interpretive problem: Euarchus is not trying to root out those responsible for Arcadia's unnatural condition but casting judgment on the princes as violators of its statutory laws, and it is not clear why, for instance, Musidorus would not have much the same natural-law justification for removing Pamela from a sodomitical commonwealth that Euarchus has for reforming it. Euarchus is so far from thinking of the issue in that way that he sentences Musidorus to death on what seem like the most particularistic of grounds, those of having acted in a manner prejudicial to the Arcadians' interest in an assured dynastic succession.

So, *pace* Shuger, something more involved seems to be going on in Euarchus's legal talk than simply the representation of a generic commitment to the rule of law. But, *pace* Lockey, that something cannot simply read off of the legal doctrines that seem intuitively consistent with Euarchus's political position as a foreign intervener. What I would like to propose is that these arguments over the limits of jurisdiction, the immunities of public persons, and the relations between universal and particular norms should be read as a continuation of and commentary on the *Old Arcadia's* concern with the *vita activa* and the public realm as its containing structure. Moreover, this commentary is what takes the place of the republican reordering of the polity that we have seen Sidney declining to pursue. Where the classical republican wants to *redesign the organization* of the public realm, such that a greater number of citizens will be enabled to direct their virtues to the support of its continuity, Sidney wants to *redefine its scope*, such that it will become something intrinsically less temporary, without utterly losing the temporal particularity that makes it a focal point for political commitment.

I want to work up to these claims by pointing to one passage of special importance and then considering two other texts that seem to me implicated in it; this will in turn supply us with a more definite paradigm for considering the trial scene as a whole. The passage is that in which Euarchus gives his most programmatic statement of the relationship of local to universal law:

There resteth, then, the second point: how to judge well. And that must undoubtedly be done, not by a free discourse of reason and skill of philosophy, but must be tied to the laws of Greece and municipal statutes of this dukedom. For although out of them these came, and to them must indeed refer their offspring, yet because philosophical discourses stand in the general consideration of things, they leave to every man a scope of his own interpretation; where the laws, applying themselves to the necessary use, fold us within assured bounds, which once broken, man's nature infinitely rangeth. Judged therefore they must be, and by your laws judged. (404)

The more obviously present of the two coordinate texts is, of course, the *Apology for Poetry*, believed to have been written around the same time Sidney was finishing the *Old Arcadia*. The one which is rather more a matter of conjecture, but which I will take up first, is Thomas Starkey's *Dialogue between Pole and Lupset*, that signal document of the first flowering of English civic-humanist political thought, composed sometime in the early 1530s and never published. It is hard to say for sure if Sidney would have known the *Dialogue*, and its value for us lies largely in its ability to serve as a particularly clear representative of a set of paradigms and assumptions that Sidney is at this moment working through, and arguably working himself free of. Starkey's text is also a useful benchmark against which to measure the responses to Venetian political theory with which the next two chapters of this study will be concerned, since Starkey was in a sense present at the creation. He moved in the same circle of intellectuals in Venice surrounding Reginald Pole as did Gasparo Contarini, and while scholars have never determined the

precise history of their interactions, the overlap between Starkey's text and Contarini's widely disseminated work of constitutional theory is great enough that some significant influence must be assumed.³⁸ Moreover, the *Dialogue* represents quite explicitly the response that some scholars seem to assume would have flowed automatically from an English author's interest in philo-Venetian thought, namely, let us then Venetize our English institutions! Nobody has ever said this with greater sincerity than Thomas Starkey.

The moment I have in mind, however, comes near the beginning of the *Dialogue*, where Thomas Lupset is depicted as attempting to convince Pole, the hero of the piece, that his true "offyce & duty" lies in acting "to maynteyn & avaunce the wele of this," his country.³⁹ Pole confirms that he wishes "to folow wherein lyth the perfectyon of man," but he wonders if this really does "stond in the actyve lyfe & in admynystratyon of the maters of the commyn wel," or if it is more to do with "the contemplative & knolege of thynges?" So far this is rather familiarly setting up the sort of debate that we have seen Sidney rapidly resolve in favor of the active side, and Starkey will take only a little longer to resolve it in the same way. What is interesting here, though, is how closely the case for the contemplative life is bound up in an assertion of the priority of "the lawys that nature hath set in mannys hart" to "the lawys wych mannys wyt hath devysyd by pollycy," and how far its refutation will thus require some way of explaining the relation between the two more favorable to the claims of positive law.⁴⁰ Lupset's answer is that the commonwealth is instituted to achieve an end inherent in man's universal nature, which is the perfecting of his virtues by "commynyng" them "to the profyt of other lyvyng togydur in cyvyle lyfe."⁴¹

³⁸ Thomas Mayer, *Thomas Starkey and the Commonweal: Humanist Politics and Religion in the Reign of Henry VIII* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989), 58-62.

³⁹ Starkey, *A Dialogue between Pole and Lupset*, ed. Thomas Mayer (London: Royal Historical Society, 1989), 2.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 5.

Hence while the laws of each commonwealth are peculiarly its own, still “al gud cyvyle lawys spryng & yssue out of the law of nature, as brokys & ryverys out of fountaynys & wellys, & to that al must be resolvyd & referryd as to the end why they be ordeynyed.”⁴² We are not so much born to serve our particular community as we are born to the civility that particular communities mediate, just as we are born to be speaking animals more than to be speakers of English. Starkey’s analogy is telling: one cannot speak without speaking a particular language, whereas one could at least hypothetically imagine an active life not bound to the national community as its frame. That frame will remain definitive throughout the *Dialogue*, however, and Starkey fully recognizes that the combination of his way of defining virtue and the type of structure to which he has attached it makes that virtue uniquely vulnerable to the effects of any deformation in that structure. The solution, through which the body politic may be “conservyd contynually” in its virtue-supporting form, is to appropriate the institutions of “the most noble cyte of venyce, wych by the reson of the gud order & pollycy that therinys usyd, hath contynuyd above a thousand yerys in one ordur & state.”⁴³

Insofar as we can thus hear in the dialectic of positive and natural law a kind of code for talking about the active and contemplative lives, Euarchus’s drift appears pretty clear. Reasserting the primacy of the political community and its particular ordinances is, on this view, of a piece with the text’s overall affirmation of a life committed to public action in the interests of the commonwealth. It is when we bring the echoes of the *Apology for Poetry* into the picture that things get more complicated. It is surprising to hear Euarchus praising the laws for constraining a nature that otherwise “infinitely rangeth,” since we know that in the *Apology* the poet is praised for “disdaining” to remain

⁴² Ibid., 11.

⁴³ Ibid., 119.

“enclosed within the narrow warrant” of nature, and instead “freely ranging only within the zodiac of his own wit.”⁴⁴ The echo seems sufficiently deliberate that we are left wondering if Sidney is offering some kind of undervoiced criticism of Euarchus’s position. But let us recall that at the core of the *Apology* is an argument concerning which of three discourses—philosophy, history, or poetry—is best suited to instruct and inform right action, and that the poet is said to be best because he mediates between the philosopher’s excessive universality and the historian’s excessive particularity.⁴⁵ If we map these terms directly onto those of Euarchus’s choice between natural and positive laws, the echo makes more sense: subjection to the norms of the particular community is like history’s subjection to temporally relative and morally arbitrary particulars, the kind of subjection the poet escapes. Yet “philosophical discourses” are no good alternative either, because they are so detached from the conditions of action as to eject one wholly into the realm of the contemplative. What is needed is the middle ground supplied by the poet. But what, then, is the corresponding middle ground in the dialectic between, on the one hand, action/history/the particular community, and, on the other, contemplation/philosophy/the whole realm of nature? That is the question, I propose, that Sidney’s trial scene is really aimed at resolving.

The strategy for resolving it unfolds, as we might expect, by the positing of two vicious extremes and the devising of a middle way between them. The extremes are represented by the two spokesmen for what had, at the text’s outset, looked like one coherent moral doctrine, now reduced to wrangling over the proper use and extensibility of the concept of the “public” and its “offices”: the princes, primarily Musidorus, on the one side; Philanax on the other. The princes do not so much reject the ethic of public

⁴⁴ Sidney, *An Apology for Poetry*, ed. Geoffrey Shepherd (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1965), 100.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 104-9.

office outright as they attempt to appropriate its terms in such a way as to make it serve their interests while evacuating it of any real substance. This attempt comes in two stages. First, the princes together question whether Arcadian courts have any jurisdiction over them, “since they were not only foreigners, and so not born under their laws, but absolute princes, and therefore not to be touched by laws” (385). They are answered, first, that “a stranger” is the last person who should expect to enjoy special privileges in “that place to which in time of need his service is not to be expected”; second, that the only evidence they are princes is their word, which they have discredited through their acts of disguising; third, that even if they are princes *in* Arcadia, they are no princes *of* Arcadia, which therefore ought “to acknowledge them but as private men.” Public standing is something entirely relative to the society that confers it; even an office as sublime as that of prince is a commission within a particular institutional structure, not a privilege one can carry indifferently from one place to another.

Second, Musidorus argues that if the court will not regard him as a prince it must perforce regard him as a servant to one, that in this capacity he did not abduct Pamela but rather *counseled* her to leave the country in his company, and that the function of offering counsel must enjoy a specially protected status, for “who will ever counsel his king if his counsel be judged by the event, and if he be not found wise shall therefore be thought wicked” (402)? The argument makes sense if only one can simultaneously affirm the singular value that the citizen ethic accords to the role of counselor and conceive of that role as floating free of any larger system of offices. That system is what Euarchus brings back into view in rejecting the argument. Musidorus had no specific “public allowance” to act as counselor; Pamela was not at the time “effectual princess,” so that advice to her would not have counted as counsel in the relevant protected sense, that is, as advice to the

sovereign; and his service was owed only mediately to her, directly to Dametas and then to Basilius, so that he had no latitude to act in any way prejudicial to their interests (407). Finally, and most significantly, “counselors have great cause to take heed how they advise anything directly opposite to the form of that present government”: the whole concept of counsel is intelligible only in relation to the structure of authority within which it operates and toward the preservation of which it is directed; the counselor’s privileges do not and cannot extend to cover advice tending to its deformation.

All this places us very much within the bounds of the citizen ethic given voice earlier by Philanax, and indeed gives a kind of *ex cathedra* affirmation of it as the *Old Arcadia*’s official morality. But if the overt attempts to subvert that framework are successfully rebutted, that the framework itself is coming under strain can nonetheless be seen in the rapid and surprising decline in moral stature of its chief representative. Philanax is not an exponent of republicanism as a constitutional doctrine, but he is a brilliantly perceptive study in certain strengths and weaknesses of the republican personality. His vigor in attending to his duties, his earnestness in defense of the state against the machinations of private factions, his genuine lack of concern for his personal profit are all exemplary. Exemplary too, in another sense, is the extremeness of his emotional susceptibility to any possible loss of the institutions from which he derives his identity. His meeting with Euarchus, for instance, is temporarily derailed when he notices the king’s resemblance to Basilius, “that prince, with whom all my love of worldly action is dead,” and is thrown into a “raving melancholy” over the recent disturbances of the state, “imagining that his pain needed not if nature had not been violently stopped of her own course, and casting more loving than wise conceits what a world this would have been if this sudden accident had not interrupted it” (324, 359-60).

Where the consciousness of this susceptibility is projected forward rather than backward in time, it manifests itself as a version of what we would now call the paranoid style, characterized by a special animus toward the dangers of conspiracy represented by foreigners and cross-dressers. Even before Euarchus's arrival, Philanax is issuing warnings against dithering "while strangers become our lords," calling on "whosoever is a true Arcadian" to assist him in suppressing those sympathetic to the princes, and contemplating whether it were better "without form of justice to kill them than against justice (as he thought) to have them usurp the state" (325-6). The trial only gives freer range to Philanax's hypersensitivity to perceived agents of subversion, his invective against Pyrocles carrying him away into the imagination of elaborate and preposterous conspiracies, climaxing in "the infamous misery fallen to this country—indeed infamous, since by an effeminate man we should suffer a greater overthrow than our mightiest enemies have been ever able to lay upon us" (388). Philanax begins the trial with his mind already in a condition Sidney more usually associates with the mob, "my thoughts," as he admits, "being confused with the horrible multitude of them"; and by the time Musidorus is to be arraigned he has gone so far overboard that he can be found "utterly suppressing" the princesses' letters written on behalf of the accused, "doubting his own heart might be mollified, so bent upon revenge" (386, 398). Philanax's deterioration reveals his absolute dedication to the *res publica* to be not so much impartiality as partiality of an especially tenacious and dangerous sort.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Martin Bergbusch, "The 'Subalterne Magistrate' in Sir Philip Sidney's *Arcadia*: A Study of the Character of Philanax," *English Studies in Canada* 7.1 (1981), 27-37, argues that the striking disparity between the sagacious Philanax of Book One and the unhinged Philanax of Book Five can be accounted for by dividing his motives between impersonal loyalty to the commonwealth and personal loyalty to Basilius as an individual. I would say instead that over the course of the *Old Arcadia* Sidney comes to distinguish less and less between the epistemological and affective contents of loyalty to a particular community and those of loyalty to a particular person.

At one extreme, then, public personality is seen as something that may be taken off and put on at will, without reference to any permanent commitment to any particular organization of offices or to one's particular place within it. At the other, such a commitment is seen as so definitive of public personality that the latter is left utterly exposed to, and correspondingly paranoid about, the slightest possibility of disruption to the one unique structure that sustains it. Euarchus's role in the trial is almost perfectly contrived to act as a medium between these. He is to uphold, vigilantly and scrupulously, the laws and institutions of *somebody else's country*. Unlike Musidorus, Euarchus does not treat constitutional norms as useful contrivances for authorizing one to do whatever might happen to appear prudent at the moment. The commission the Arcadians offer him is explicitly bounded by the obligation to respect "the ancient prescribing of their laws" (361); in accepting it he announces that he will remain as judge and protector only "till therein it be seen what the customs of Arcadia require" (365); and we have seen how this approach informs his actual rulings in the trial. Unlike Philanax, he possesses an identity wholly independent of and prior to that of the constitution he works to protect. It is, indeed, precisely to the assured continuity of that identity that Philanax appeals in conveying to him the Arcadians' request for his intervention: "They lay themselves open to you—to you, I mean yourself, such as you have ever been; that is to say, one that hath always had his determinations bounded with equity" (361). The idea is that the stability of the Arcadian polity must be made to rest upon that of Euarchus's constant personal virtue. But there is no longer any suggestion that the relationship might work in the reverse direction as well.

IV

There is something more than a little Lipsian in this, a figure whose heroic constancy consists in upholding the outward forms that others, having identified themselves with those forms and their fortunes a little too closely, lack the emotional equilibrium necessary to sustain.⁴⁷ In the *New Arcadia*, that figure emerges as the heroic norm, as Arcadia's crisis loses its paradigmatic status in organizing the narrative and becomes simply one cluster of episodes among others, many of them given over to the princes' exploits suppressing tyrants and reducing commonwealths to order. Meanwhile, the complex legal choreographics that accompany Euarchus's assumption of power in Arcadia drop out of view. In the *Old Arcadia*, the coherence of Arcadia's historic constitution as an organization of offices and a body of laws governing their conduct remains always a primary concern, even as it transpires that the agency responsible for holding that system together has to be brought in from outside of it. In the *New Arcadia*, by contrast, it is simply asserted, as a fundamental principle of the ontology of politics, that no collection of elements can assemble and sustain themselves in relations of balanced interaction without the discipline of an external agency, irradiating the whole with the effects of its own constancy.⁴⁸ The disciplinary princes and military man-managers who bestride the *New Arcadia* as its dominant political type do, to be sure, sometimes dress up their doings in a self-consciously constitutionalist account of the political order. But it is conspicuously only the more unhinged and self-deluded of them who choose to do so.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ For this reading of the Lipsian political ethic in opposition to an older humanist constitutionalism, see Tuck, *Philosophy and Government*, 31-64.

⁴⁸ Sidney, *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia (The New Arcadia)*, ed. Victor Skretkovicz (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), 360-1.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 325-6.

When Sidney wrote the first episode of the *Old Arcadia*, he gave its authoritative voice to a character fitting in every respect what at the beginning of this chapter I identified as the ephoral role. Philanax belongs to that role in the immediate fact of his acting, or trying to act, as a check on the partial judgment of a king; in his rhetorical setting of his function as well as the king's within a structure that would stand only insofar as both supported it through their virtuous actions; and in his presumption that, whether that structure were to stand or fall, there would be no question of virtuous action outside of it. But by the time Sidney finished his initial manuscript he had reached a different conclusion. And in the opening passages of his newly revised version he takes us to Sparta to show it. The *New Arcadia*'s Sparta (or Laconia, or Lacedaemon) has almost no point of contact with the Lycurgan Sparta of mixed-constitutional theory.⁵⁰ When Musidorus arrives there it is as part of a mission to rescue a young gentleman of Arcadia who has gotten caught up in the unremitting war between the ruling class of enfranchised Lacedaemonians and the underclass of conquered and exploited helots. Of the arrangements by which the citizens of Lacedaemon are governed we hear nothing beyond some passing references to a "King Amiclas"; at the end of the Spartan episode a treaty is agreed that will grant the former helots participatory rights equal to those of their former oppressors, but what these consist in, outside of a suggestion that at least some magistracies are elective, is made no more clear.

What Sidney does focus on is the figure who champions the helots' interests and acts as their representative in negotiations with the king—the figure whom we might be

⁵⁰ Tracey Sedinger, "Sidney's *New Arcadia* and the Decay of Protestant Republicanism," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 47.1 (2007), 57-77, similarly sees the absence of a functioning republic in Laconia as evidence for the "decay" of her title. For Sedinger, however, the *New Arcadia* records the failure of a republican ethos even as that ethos continues to define the norm against which the failure is measured. I am suggesting, rather, that in the *New Arcadia* Sidney moves toward an alternative position in which republican norms of political personality become largely irrelevant to the judgment of political conduct.

inclined to describe as playing (this being Sparta) the ephoral role. Given the absence of a functioning political constitution, however, this figure's most important work is to instill what Sidney calls the "soldierly discipline" that binds the helots together into an efficient unit. By this work he has "brought up their ignorance and brought down their fury to such a mean of good government" that they have become a fighting force capable of compelling the Lacedaemonians to sue for peace.⁵¹ And when his helmet comes off in a final duel with Musidorus, he is revealed to be none other than Pyrocles. We may thus sum up the evolution of Sidney's thought on the subject of political personality by inverting the line of Patrick Collinson's quoted in the Introduction. When it came to the crunch, for Sidney, the constancy that radiated out from a disciplinary leader to sustain and to regulate institutions that were nothing to him personally took precedence over the constancy that radiated out from enduring institutions to occasion and to balance the activity of those committed to them. So, far from citizens being concealed within subjects, it turned out that beneath the covering of the ephor might be concealed the profile of the constant prince.

⁵¹ Sidney, *New Arcadia*, 34.

CHAPTER TWO

After Rome; Or, Why Spenser Was Not a Republican

It's become increasingly common of late to find Edmund Spenser's name mentioned in connection with the concept of "republicanism." That the question, "Was Spenser a Republican?" might be answered in the affirmative was first proposed in a 1998 essay of that name by Andrew Hadfield.¹ The evidence advanced there was heterogeneous and local in character. Spenser moved in the same circles as political innovators such as Essex, Raleigh, and Thomas Harriot; he penned a commendatory sonnet for the English translation of Cardinal Contarini's *De Magistratibus*, among the best-known texts of Italian republicanism; he implied at times that monarchy might not be sufficiently rigorous in suppressing rebellion unless it devolved power to semi-autonomous magistrates chosen for their virtue; and he had Artegall give a notably unsatisfying defense of hierarchy in his encounter with the Egalitarian Giant. But all this, taken in itself, may have mattered less than Hadfield's invocation of the context supplied by Markku Peltonen's influential work of a couple years before. Peltonen, as we have seen, had argued not only that England in Spenser's time possessed a robust discourse of active citizenship, but also that it was in Ireland, at the periphery of the Elizabethan state, that this discourse was most likely to have developed into a self-conscious republicanism.² One can see how these ideas combined to heighten the circumstantial credibility of the hypothesis that Spenser "was, in fact, a republican."

But was this, in fact, correct? There followed a debate in the pages of *Spenser Studies* between Hadfield and David Wilson-Okamura, the latter arguing that Spenser was,

¹ Hadfield, "Was Spenser a Republican?"

² Peltonen, *Classical Humanism and Republicanism*, 18-118.

at the most, affiliated with a conservative, “Gothic” ideology that sought to reverse the eclipse of aristocratic autonomy for which it found a historical paradigm in Tacitus—a vein of political thought that could be called “republican” only under a definition so loose as to be useless. (Hadfield, for his part, found the case for a Gothic ideology in Spenser rather overstated, and rejoined that Wilson-Okamura had drawn the boundaries of republicanism so stringently that virtually no Elizabethan writing could plausibly qualify.)³ Hadfield apparently must have won this exchange, since subsequent work by Graham Hammill and James Kuzner speaks of “Spenser’s republicanism,” as if the existence of such a thing were long since settled, and the job were only to complicate and nuance it, to figure out what were its limits, how consistent it was, or to which republican tradition it had belonged.⁴

If this is how critical consensus is forged, it cannot be thought altogether encouraging. Hadfield in his rejoinder to Wilson-Okamura divides his time between defending his interpretation of Spenserian episodes as “republican”—it is never suggested that any *structural* features of Spenser’s work are illuminated by the republicanism hypothesis—and listing general characteristics of Elizabethan republicanism, most of which might as well have been selected by someone deliberately setting out to prove that Spenser was not a republican. For instance, he notes as one of the overlapping “elements and languages” of the republican tradition “a keen interest in histories of the republic and

³ Wilson-Okamura, “Republicanism, Nostalgia, and the Crowd,” *Spenser Studies* 17 (2003): 253-73; Hadfield, “Was Spenser Really a Republican After All?”: 254-90, in the same volume.

⁴ Hammill, “‘The thing/Which never was’: Republicanism and *The Ruines of Time*,” *Spenser Studies* 18 (2003): 165-83; Kuzner, *Open Subjects: English Renaissance Republicans, Modern Selfhoods, and the Virtue of Vulnerability* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 39-76. Of these, Kuzner comes much closer to making an independent positive case for a Spenserian republicanism. His intriguing notion that for Spenser the restraint of tyranny consists in the dissolution of the self’s tyrannical wish for identity and integrity, however, is put forward as Spenser’s *republican* idea largely on the basis of Hadfield’s prior identification of the poet with republicanism. Take away the latter, and what Kuzner is talking about sounds much more like a kind of Christian fellowship in humility, of the sort we might associate with Luther or Saint Francis.

enthusiasm for Livy” as well as in Lucan’s *Pharsalia* and representations of the rape of Lucrece. Spenser’s interest in these three topics was only so keen as to have produced, to my knowledge, not one solid reference to any of them across his entire corpus (setting aside Du Bellay’s allusions to Lucan in the poems Spenser translated as *The Ruines of Rome*).⁵ The disparity could be turned into an interesting exercise: Why is the Roman republic so very largely a dark continent on the map of Spenserian syncretism? Why *doesn’t* Lucan feature for Spenser in the same way as Virgil and Ovid, especially given his importance for a figure comparable in so many respects as Samuel Daniel?⁶ But the provocative power of Hadfield’s hypothesis—which I believe retains a real heuristic potential in helping us get clearer about just what sort of a political thinker Spenser was—is mostly lost unless we weigh equally the moments when we might expect to find reference to a republican archive or argument, but find something quite different instead.

Consider the matter of “virtue.” I suspect that it is the centrality and almost insuperable difficulty of this concept in understanding the project of the *Faerie Queene* that accounts for the intuitive appeal for some critics of associating Spenser with Renaissance republicanism. Indeed, Hadfield, Hammill, and Kuzner all appear to share the core assumption—and in this they are joined by Peltonen as well—that Spenser’s stress on virtuous action makes for an intrinsic proximity to, if not an outright alignment with, classical republicanism’s ethical repertoire.⁷ My contention in this chapter is that this

⁵ Jennifer Vaught, “Spenser’s Dialogic Voice in Book I of *The Faerie Queene*,” *SEL* 41.1 (2001): 71–89, at 76, offers in passing that the catalog of trees in the Wandering Wood may allude to Caesar’s destruction of the grove in the *Pharsalia*.

⁶ David Galbraith, *Architectonics of Imitation in Spenser, Daniel, and Drayton* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 77–81, suggests that Daniel chose Lucan as the model for his *Civil Wars* in conscious counterpoint to Spenser’s Virgilianism.

⁷ Peltonen, however, is unique in making explicit a point simply dropped by the subsequent writers: that this assumption about the political stakes of “virtue” depends upon a prior judgment about the conjunction or disjunction between republicanism and Christianity. He is avowedly engaged in driving a wedge between

assumption is false: Spenser's virtue is not republican virtue; rather, it takes its shape partly by way of his adherence to a set of counter-republican or even anti-republican modes of political thought.

The republicanism hypothesis remains useful, nonetheless, for directing our attention to the kind of ethical-political concern with which we have already observed Sidney grappling: how the moral intelligibility of the active life is affected *when action is seen as relative to the particular, time-bound, and institutionally ordered society*. I take it that this is, so to speak, the problem-space into which Spenser slotted republican arguments when he heard them; which he saw as comprehending the most pressing questions about the viability of the republican ethos; and within which he developed an approach to the ethics of institutional time that is quite other, even in a sense symmetrically opposite, to that of the republican.

Rather than turning directly to Spenser's allegory of virtue, then, I will take up some places where he seems to be worrying about the nature and limits of something like "republican culture." These are not always entirely obvious, precisely because Spenser's favored historiographic tradition is not Livy or Tacitus, but Orosius and Augustine—a tradition in which "the republic" is treated as what we would today call an ideological category, one that obfuscates fundamental continuities in Roman religious, moral, and political life. How that tradition in turn shapes Spenser's poetic reaction to the claims of Renaissance republicanism, particularly where they touch upon his own very characteristic concerns about time, change, and worldly order, will be the subject of the chapter's second part. In concluding, I will offer some preliminary suggestions about what

Calvinist and civic humanist traditions, and assigning the crucial phase in the development of an English "vocabulary" of citizenship to the latter (*Classical Humanism*, 13).

alternative framework for the relationship between virtuous action and the temporal career of societies Spenser appears to offer us, in default of the republic.

I

One way of approaching the hypothesis of Spenser's "republicanism" is to ask whether it is intended more as a way of characterizing Spenser's views on *constitutional form*, or more as a way of characterizing his *political ethic*, in line with the distinctions observed in our discussion of Sidney. Now, if we are considering republicanism as a theory of constitutional form, that is, of certain polities organized as "republics," the Spenserian hypothesis strikes me as an obvious non-starter, for the simple reason that this seems to have been a topic in which Spenser was spectacularly uninterested. It may be true, as Kuzner suggests, that the *Faerie Queene* is unusually sensitive about the dangers of tyranny and arbitrary will. But to be a republican one needs more than this—one needs some secular basis for explaining why some societies become tyrannical and others do not, some way of seeing this as a problem that we contend with (or fail to) by the choice of constitutional design.

The contrast between Spenser and Shakespeare is very instructive here. Both are deeply responsive to the idea of "Rome," as a model for both narrative and political form, but in Shakespeare this means a fascination with those turning-points at which the city faced a transformation of its ruling institutions: the expulsion of the Tarquins, the rise of the tribunate, the Caesarian dictatorship, the confrontation with Oriental monarchy. For Spenser, Rome's *internal* political history barely exists. It is a kind of mediator, a conduit running between a prehistory and an afterlife, between Troy and Troynovant:

There there (said *Britomart*) a fresh appeared
The glory of the later world to spring,

And *Troy* againe out of her dust was reard,
To sitt in second seat of soueraine king,
Of all the world vnder her gouerning.
But a third kingdom yet is to arise,
Out of the *Troians* scattered ofspring,
That in all glory and great enterprise,
Both first and second *Troy* shall dare to equalise.⁸

Note the offhand assimilation of *imperium* to monarchy as a constitutional system. You may be forgiven for not suspecting that someone who doesn't care if the Rome that ruled the world was actually a "kingdom" would have anything terribly acute to say about republicanism. Later on I'm going to return to this material, and argue that there's something rather interesting going on here—indeed, that it's to moments like this that we should look if we want to understand Spenser's real political originality. For now it is enough to see that the narrative and conceptual vocabulary usually central to republicans—of how the *republic* won an *empire*, but the *empire* undermined the *republic* by eroding its *virtue*—is getting preempted by other considerations, other priorities. These could be negative as well as positive, Augustinian as well as Virgilian: in the dungeon of the House of Pride, the Caesars and the heroes of the republic are quite literally heaped in one pile.⁹ What is consistent is Spenser's lack of concern to sort the one out from the other.

If we consider republicanism as a political ethic, on the other hand, matters look more promising. We know that Pocock, for instance, regards early modern republicanism as at its core an attempt to systematize the relation between virtue and time—specifically, the role of virtue in producing institutional permanence out of the discontinuous, nonrational time of *fortuna* (and that of institutional permanence in enabling or

⁸ *FQ* III.ix.44. All references to the *Faerie Queene* cite the Revised Second Edition by A.C. Hamilton (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2007).

⁹ *FQ* I.v.49.

corrupting virtue).¹⁰ This sounds much more intuitively like the sort of thing we would turn to Spenser to hear about; indeed, it would not do much violence to suggest that it is *the* central Spenserian topic. So there are at least intelligible questions to ask: how and how far is Spenserian virtue connected to the sustaining or expanding of a *res publica*, an enduring public interest? Does a Spenserian hero's moral welfare have any particular relation to the activity of "ruling and being ruled in turn?" Is this how the challenge of Mutabilitie is answered? Could Spenser have written, "to fashion a citizen, in virtuous and civic discipline?"¹¹

But we also know that these kinds of questions cannot simply be separated from the first, constitutional side of things, because what is really most distinctive of the republican perspective on ethics is its particular way of *connecting* the problematic of good action to that of good structure. Few axioms in this area are as reliable as this one: if you put forward an account of what virtue is, and then say that its features have *no implications whatsoever* for the legal and institutional ordering of society, you're not a republican. From this a number of consequences have been seen to follow. First, that the republic has a special claim on its citizens because its particular political organization is the shaping form of their moral personalities, is in fact *what allows them to live virtuously at all*.¹² For this reason republicanism implies a positive judgment not only on political activity as such, but also on, so to speak, the politics of permanence, on the will to sustain particular, contingent political structures, in a historical time in which they could

¹⁰ E.g., Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*, 320: "we have seen that republican theory is in essence Aristotelian political science, selectively simplified by a drastic emphasis on the problem of time."

¹¹ On Spenser's response to the civic turn in moral philosophy generally, see the excellent introduction to Sean Kane, *Spenser's Moral Allegory* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989). For an interesting attempt to link the Spenserian nexus of virtue and mutability with Machiavellian political theory, see Bruce Danner, "Courteous *Virtù* in Spenser's Book 6 of *The Faerie Queene*," *SEL* 38.1 (1998): 1-18.

¹² For a partial demurrer on these points, see Jonathan Scott, *Commonwealth Principles: Republican Writing of the English Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

otherwise deteriorate or be overwhelmed. And so the republican's definition of virtue must itself, reciprocally, involve some account of the modes of belief and activity necessary for preserving those societies in their virtue-maximal form. In the next chapter we will examine how those accounts could differ internally among republicans, dividing on the question of the relationship between the civic and the military capacities. But at its outer margins the same imperative could also lead a Machiavelli to raise seriously the question of whether Christianity ought not to be reformulated, at least in practical morality, as some kind of neo-Roman civic religion.¹³ It is worth noting that one could coherently reject republicanism simply by following that chain of reasoning and finding its consequences intolerable, without having any particular affection for monarchy.

Here, the friction between Spenser and republicanism comes in a more direct, assertive form. In *The Ruines of Time*, published in his 1591 volume of *Complaints*, Spenser presents the fallen Philip Sidney as a paragon of "right and true nobilitie," venerated for his patriotic martyrdom, "life exchanging for his countries good" (294, 302).¹⁴ So far, so republican-ish, though the very fact that the literary Sidney had left behind such a distinctive and yet equivocal legacy around the concept of virtue might lead us to wonder if Spenser isn't also engaging in a more complicated act of appropriation. Further complicating things, the praise is expressed, or at least commissioned, by the personified voice of an actual *civitas*. Verlame, the "Woman sitting sorrowfullie wailing" whom the narrator encounters by the shore of the Thames, is the "auncient *Genius* of that Citie brent," i.e., of Verlame or Verulamium, once a sort of little Rome in Britain, but long since eclipsed by "Troynovant" and abandoned utterly. "Genius of the city" is, actually, only one

¹³ Machiavelli, *The Discourses*, ed. Bernard Crick (London: Penguin, 2003), II.2, pp. 277-79.

¹⁴ References by line-number to *The Ruines of Time* cite *Edmund Spenser: The Shorter Poems*, ed. Richard McCabe (London: Penguin, 1999).

of three initial guesses at her identity; the others are a river-nymph (personifying a traditional metaphor for perpetual flux) and one of the three Fates (15-21).¹⁵ That this is the cultural complex the civic spirit belongs to already makes a polemical point, both in its intense focus on transience and in its conspicuously pagan overtones.

These are the terms in which Verlame's lamented aspirations are cast: as aspirations to visible grandeur and as aspirations to material endurance, each in some sense the corollary of the other; and each seen by her as failed not contingently but of necessity, "Sith all that in this world is great or gaie,/ Doth as a vapour vanish, and decaie" (55-6). Verlame can weep for this, but she cannot see her way to an idea of greatness less strictly circumscribed by the finitude common to *things*. As Hassan Melehy puts it, "Spenser's woman is vanity itself, the remainder of an ancient Rome that had faith in the durability of worldly things and hoped to eternalize itself through poetry."¹⁶ Civic felicity, so far as *Ruines* is concerned, is relentlessly routed through the literal, solid structures that are, in fact, the most unworthy candidates for one's lasting attachment:

High towers, faire temples, goodly theaters,
Strong walls, rich porches, princelie palaces,
Large streets, braue houses, sacred sepulchers,
Sure gates, sweete gardens, statelie galleries,
Wrought with faire pillours, and fine imageries,
All those (O pitie) now are turnd to dust,
And ouergrown with black obliuions rust. (92-8)

If we take Verlame's heading a eulogy for Sidney as a commentary on the relationship between the engaged individual and the city as an abstract ideal, the upshot seems to be this. There's something admirable enough about suffering and even dying for one's

¹⁵ Lawrence Manley, "Spenser and the City: The Minor Poems," *MLQ* 43.3 (1982): 203-27, at 211, identifies the playing-off of the figure of the river against that of the city as the "basic iconography" through which civic themes are treated throughout Spenser's corpus.

¹⁶ Melehy, "Antiquities of Britain: Spenser's *Ruines of Time*," *Studies in Philology* 102.2 (2005): 159-83, at 171.

country, but don't let the "civic interest" actually buy out the franchise on defining the meaning of that event. In other words, don't imagine there can be too close a relation between the virtuous person and the politics of permanence, the latter being the city's exclusive and obsessive theme when she is allowed to speak *in propria persona*. Put simply, Sidney's civic *action* is good, but the voice that would praise it for being civic action is getting some things fundamentally wrong.

The Ruines of Time thus teaches a basically Augustinian lesson: the political world, the world of city- and empire-building, can be the venue for action with coherence and integrity *only so long as one does not imagine that venue itself capable of defining or containing its ends*.¹⁷ Augustine's great innovation was to have seen the Roman empire, as an empirical fact, as morally neutral: neither the vehicle of the history of redemption (as Eusebius had thought); nor its abiding opponent (as for the Donatists).¹⁸ It was, however, the common ground upon which there mingled and overlapped two diametrically and irremediably opposed communities of action and belief. One of these (the earthly City) took the good of the city as a substantive and ultimate reality; where for the other (the City of God) the historical city existed only relative to other ends that had no civic expression and could be embodied in no institutional structure. Augustine did not think these opposing communities, the Two Cities, could be empirically discriminated short of

¹⁷ On Spenser's Augustinianism see Kane, *Spenser's Moral Allegory*. Isabel Rathborne, *The Meaning of Spenser's Fairyland* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1937), 3-61, regards the scheme of the Two Cities as the major structural influence on the *Faerie Queene*, but also sees Spenser as significantly moderating the antiworldly implications of Augustine's position. The influence on the Renaissance epic of Augustine's critique of Roman virtues is discussed in Andrew Fichter, *Poets Historical: Dynastic Epic in the Renaissance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982).

¹⁸ R.A. Markus, *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), esp. 45-70. In the discussion of Augustine that follows, I've relied heavily, though with some departures, on this still immensely provocative work.

the eschaton, but as an ideal type the republic of the republicans clearly belonged to the former.

Augustine took very seriously the picture Cicero and Sallust had painted of the ancient Romans' civic virtues. The best of them had, indeed, succeeded to an unprecedented degree in suppressing every vice, every passion, and every weakness that might set the individual against the good of the whole. This left only one vice remaining, namely that through which the public and the personal interest were brought into perfect alignment: the passion for glory.¹⁹ Here is where the argument takes an interesting turn. Rather than simply dwell on the moral shortcuts that the desire for glory (in the sense of unfounded praise) might lead one to, Augustine basically accepts that the republican glory-ethic promoted all sorts of truly noble and altruistic actions, so far as their outward form was concerned.²⁰ Instead, he locates the problem in the ontological falsity of the type of community that shapes that ethic's inner logic:

Those Roman heroes belonged to an earthly city, and the aim set before them, in all their acts of duty for her, was the safety of their country, and a kingdom not in heaven, but on earth; not in life eternal, but in the process where the dying pass away and are succeeded by those who will die in their turn. What else was there for them to love save glory? For, through glory, they desired to have a kind of life after death on the lips of those who praised them.²¹

What the Romans see as the form and ground of all duty, the successive existence of the state, turns out to be merely the process by which death is added to death. The genuinely sad irony of Rome is that its commitment to its own glory, which really did lead to a spell

¹⁹ Augustine, *City of God*, 5.13, p. 202.

²⁰ Indeed, Augustine goes on to suggest that Christians should be ashamed to see how far the Romans will go in acts of self-sacrifice and contempt for material comfort: acts that in their external form are excellent patterns for how God's people ought to be disposed to work on behalf of their own City. (Ibid., 5.18, pp. 207-12.)

²¹ Ibid., 5.14, p. 204.

of relative permanence and preeminence, was what made it useful to God as an *instrument* for purposes the city had no right or capacity to determine. The harder the Romans pressed to secure their place in space and time, the more they threw themselves into the stream of a history in which all such structures are taken up and discarded by providence, obscurely using them toward radically other ends. Had they accepted the particular state as something limited and transient, their actions, so admirable from one point of view, would not have suffered from this toxic self-contradiction. But then they would not have been republicans.

I've taken the time to summarize a small part of Augustine's argument because it reminds us of an important point: that what opposes republicanism is not always a brief for some other system of government, monarchy or liberal democracy or what you will. On the Augustinian view, it is wrong to say that a "republic" is either preferable or not preferable to an absolute despotism. Either formulation is simply a confused use of language. What we might call the "thick" concept of "republic"—i.e., that by which people like Cicero distinguish a justly ordered polity—does not correspond to any actual or possible object of experience before the eschaton.²² It is used only by those with an objectively incorrect understanding of the nature of justice and the relation of human communities to God. There is, Augustine explains, a defensible "thin" usage of "republic," but it is so thin as essentially to refer to the existence of political groupings as such; it implies none of the positive criteria republicans need for normatively evaluating one possible grouping against another.²³ We do have an analytic instrument that implies such criteria, and can thus do the work the republicans try to do with "republic," but this is in fact the scheme of the Two Cities, which is something different entirely.

²² Ibid., 19.21, pp. 881-3.

²³ Ibid., 19.24, pp. 890-1.

In *The Ruines of Time*, that latter scheme doesn't show up simply or straightforwardly, but instead shadows what gradually emerges as the poem's real structuring opposition: the contrast between the spurious immortality of artifactual culture and the genuine eternity of something like poetry. (I will get to why only "something like" in a moment.) To the one belong not only the pyramids and mausoleums, "huge Colosses, built with costly paine," to which unpoetic sovereigns foolishly entrust their afterlives (407-20), nor only the essentially tectonic memory of Verlame herself, weeping for her towers and temples and theaters and so on. Into this orbit Spenser draws also her Danielic view of history, in which (without, on Verlame's part, apparent irony) the particular society is seen as an idol or monstrous thing reared up only to collapse under the pressure of its own overweening pride:

And where is that same great seven headed beast,
That made all nations vassals of her pride,
To fall before her feete at her beheast,
And in the necke of all the world did ride?
Where doth she all that wondrous welth nowe hide?
With her own weight down pressed now shee lies,
And by her heaps her hugeness testifies. (71-7)

In later days the connection between civic loss and the solid weight of artifactual culture could perhaps be told as a story about virtue itself: one imagines in a modernized *Ruines of Time* the spirit of Buffalo or Trenton sighing, "We used to *make* things in this country." But in Spenser's version, the routing of virtue through allegiance to societies envisioned as statues or spiky towers or pleasure-gardens or vaunting leviathans is meant to give the lie to its having been virtue at all.

It's in this context that the figure of Philip Sidney becomes important for much more than merely occasional reasons. Verlame's imagination revolves around what we may call, following Augustine, the Roman *glory-permanence nexus*. Acting well looks like

rising up; which allows the actor and the polity to be metaphorically condensed in the figure of a great tall building or monumental idol; which in turn makes the whole complex appear as a bombastic announcement of the endurance of what cannot endure. With Sidney, however, one can be coy about just where his martial virtue shades into what Spenser depicts as the paradigmatically opposed cultural system of poetry.

Yet will I sing, but who can better sing,
Than thou thy selfe, thy owne selves valiance,
That whilst thou liuedst, madest the Forrests ring,
And fields resownd, and flockes to leape and daunce...(323-26)

Is Sidney's "valiance" the thing he's being praised for, or is it the poetic virtuosity which does the praising? In an illuminating study of the *Complaints*, Richard Danson Brown notes that Spenser's orphic references in this poem conspicuously avoid the so-called "Renaissance Orpheus," the arch-rhetor who gave primitive society laws and manners, in favor of the "medieval Orpheus," the type of Christ who harrowed hell and took the soul for his bride.²⁴ It seems to me that Spenser's making Sidney's patriotism sound like a kind of orphic power, while stopping short of overtly placing Orpheus at the start of the cycle that terminates in Verlame, fits perfectly the hypothesis that he is looking for something to carry the paradoxical burden of an anti-civic civility, an active life *in* the earthly city but not *of* it.

At the end of *Ruines*, Verlame vanishes in a flurry of "dolefull shrieks," leaving the narrator pleading bafflement at the import of her "doubtfull speech." Since nuance is not exactly Verlame's mode, this goes down as one of the clunkier transitions in a text full of them, but it does give a certain official imprimatur to the didactic clarification that follows. We are offered a series of six "tragicke Pageants" of two stanzas each, each presenting an

²⁴ Brown, "The New Poet": *Novelty and Tradition in Spenser's "Complaints"* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1999), 117-19.

image of power, structure, and natural grace—an idol and a tower like those of Babylon, a “pleasant Paradize” redolent of the *Faerie Queene*, a great and gentle giant, a bridge across the seas, a strong cave sheltering two bears that “saluage nature seemed not to haue”—each then falling into dust. These are followed by six “other sights,” which reverse the pattern by displaying an image of death, mourning, submergence, slumber, or dismemberment, then showing it caught up and restored to heaven. These latter are linked by the figure of Sidney (“Philisides”); by Orpheus, combined again with Christian militancy in the figure of the rescuer of Andromeda who rides the horse of poetry; and by the ideal of a scriptural poetics, via a passage from Canticles that Brown notes appears in Bersuire’s widely known allegoresis of Orpheus harrowing hell.

The series culminates with “an Arke of purest gold,” preserving someone’s ashes “for endles memorie” before being spirited away to heaven (659-72). This is, I take it, the symmetrical inverse of the figure of Verlame with which the work began. If Verlame, as Melehy suggests, is Spenser’s caricature of the voice of ancient poetry, a poetry falling short of itself by backing the wrong side in its great historical conflict with the religion of the Word, then the ark represents what the civic culture of the Object has become when melted and recast into the orphic sublime. The point is not that poetry can always and everywhere be set against the plastic arts—Verlame has her own idea of poetry, and the placement of even the *Faerie Queene* is ambiguous at best. What matters is that what Verlame stands for, what she laments the failure of, can be emphatically placed to one side, thus clearing a place for some *other* vision of the social world and worldly action that “poetry” can heuristically indicate. In the first set of pageants, society’s temporal existence appears as architectural, extensively present, and based in the benignant control and

conservation of forces. In the second, it appears as prophetic, anticipatory and memorial, based in an ongoing testimony to moments of ecstatic communion and self-loss.

Ruines, then, is not really a republican text, but one that treats republicanism as an *alternative competing system* for describing the same empirical data, that is, a life like Sidney's that might *look like* a good candidate for understanding on the terms of republican virtue. There is very little in *Ruines* to suggest what Sidney actually did; all the energy goes into disaffiliating a rather vaguely sketched patriotism from the voice that would claim it for an English *romanitas*. The apparent point is that *civic consciousness is itself incapable of grasping the ethics of "civic" action*, that it lacks the means of representing the work done in and through the city as anything but fundamentally empty, if not necessarily actually wicked. To modernize slightly an analogy of Augustine's, as a purely externalist behaviorism would be to a full understanding of the interactive harmony of the human body and mind, so a pure republicanism is to the total relationship between the political-institutional world and the universal pilgrimage of faith.²⁵

Hammill is not wrong, then, to find in *The Ruines of Time* what he calls an "engagement with continental republican thought," but his reading makes the poem, I think, at once much more republican and much less of an engagement than it really is.²⁶

²⁵ *City of God* 19.25-26, pp. 891-2:

For just as it is not something derived from the physical body itself that gives life to that body, but something above it, so it is not something that comes from man, but something above man, that makes his life blessed; and this is true not only of man but of every heavenly dominion and power whatsoever. Thus, as the soul is the life of the physical body, so God is the blessedness of man's life... It follows that a people alienated from that God must be wretched. *Yet even such a people loves a peace of its own, which is not to be rejected; but it will not possess it in the end, because it does not make good use of it before that end.* Meanwhile, however, it is important for us also that this people should possess this peace in this life, since so long as the two cities are intermingled *we also make use of the peace of Babylon*—although the people of God is by faith set free from Babylon, so that in the meantime they are only pilgrims in the midst of her. (my italics)

²⁶ Hammill, "The thing/Which never was," 166.

He finds it striking, given what he sees as the republican juxtaposition of Sidney's virtue and Burghley's corruption, that Spenser makes no overt reference to the historical backdrop to Sidney's death in the Netherlands, which (in view of the debates over how the United Provinces were to be governed) would have taken us to "republicanism emergent in its concrete form."²⁷ Why, he wonders, does Spenser give us, instead of a particular political history, Verlame's relentlessly generalizing negativity about all such histories? This is a reasonable question, but Hammill forecloses it by assuming that the use of Verlame is not *about* certain kinds of emptiness, but something in itself empty, a purely negative invitation to remark the "limits" of Spenser's ability to conceptualize what was at stake in his moment. Hammill's account of the poem's relation to republicanism thus depends on treating its skeptical view of civic values as simply an *absence* of political thought—which, if it were present, might have been republicanism—rather than as reflecting a substantively *different* set of political assumptions.

But this is presuming too much. To suppose that the possibility of political theory depends on an affirmative view of political life is to risk leaping to Aristotle's position without staying to ask if any others are in the area. To be sure, *The Ruines of Time* is less than thoroughly dispositive in its answer. The text, while giving great play to the voice of something like civic consciousness in order to enact a cultural argument situating it inside what I've called the glory-permanence nexus, offers only a shadowy, approximate, even numinous idea of what the alternative really involves. In Spenser's sonnet for Contarini's work on the Venetian constitution, to which I now propose to turn, it is instead republicanism that appears oddly aqueous and peripheral, while the poem's form and rhetoric are dominated by a recognizably different—and, I will argue, much more

²⁷ Ibid., 177.

characteristically Spenserian—tradition of envisioning the stakes of order and disorder in political time.

II

Contarini gives us a useful point of departure not only because he allows us to counterpoint Spenser with a specific instance of republican discourse, but also because he presents an unusually maximalist case for the interrelation of the three factors of *virtue*, *constitutional structure*, and *permanence*. Although he is in some respects an idiosyncratic figure, Contarini thus represents something approaching an ideal-type republicanism so far as its points of contact and tension with Spenser are concerned.

Contarini is characteristic, first of all, of republicanism's insistence on *the normative identification of society with its development into a politically organized form*. Put simply, the republican views political society as the culmination of a life lived in the company of others. Political activity is seen basically as *ruling*, but this gives it neither a merely repressive nor a narrowly technical character; rather, participation in this activity is essential to the full development of one's ethical personality, as it demands suspending one's partial, contingent ends in the interest of the total association that comprehends those ends and creates the conditions for their pursuit.²⁸ The capacities required to do this sort of thing are unevenly distributed, for reasons both natural and sociological (leading Aristotle, for instance, to a preference for those midlevel aristocrats who have leisure but not inveterate ambition).²⁹ Nonetheless, it can be said as a rule that the constitution

²⁸ The canonical statement is the opening of Aristotle's *Politics*, trans. Ernest Barker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 7-12. Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*, 66-80, is a good treatment of these positions as they were transmitted to and synthesized by Renaissance republicans.

²⁹ *Politics* IV, pp. 157-8.

which extends participation to *as many* as have an aptitude for it, *in the degree and manner* that they have an aptitude for it, will be virtue-maximizing for society as a whole.

Thus the republican is committed to an image of society as composed of multiple distinct centers of decision and initiative. He sees such a society as developing in accordance with its nature when as many of these as possible are able to govern without unduly predominating (thereby at once diminishing others' chances at virtue and giving too much free play to the partialities and limitations of a single ruler or group). Society's teleological development is, then, inseparable from its becoming structured by the mutual interferences exerted upon one another by its different centers of relative power. Structure, in this sense, may be found in strictly codified procedures, or it may have more to do with diffuse traditions of liberty by which one part of society is recognized as acting as a check on another. Either way, there can be no serious, long-term conflict between individual virtue and the demands of preserving structure, because of a basic reciprocity of definition: virtue means conducting oneself in public life in such a way as to preserve "balance" or "mixture"; and what is being preserved is simply the possibility of such virtue's continued exercise. If the constitutional structure is no longer that possibility's concrete embodiment, it has in a real sense not changed but ceased to exist, in which case the republican's attitude must change from one of preservation to one of restoration.³⁰

My proposal is that between Spenser and the possibility of aligning virtue, structure, and permanence in this fashion there stood the analytic of the Two Cities, and the related move by which the republican alignment was preempted and parodied in the form of the glory-permanence nexus. This, at any rate, is what I will try to demonstrate by juxtaposing Contarini's arguments about political order against the formal argument of

³⁰ Aristotle insists upon this in book III of the *Politics*, pp. 88-90.

Spenser's sonnet, and by reconstructing the traditions upon which the latter draws. This will in turn point us toward what seemed lacking in *The Ruines of Time*, an alternative way of bringing those three terms back into alignment, and will thereby suggest in more concrete terms how Spenserian virtue might be reconciled to a more positively political ethic.

When Lewes Lewkenor's translation of Contarini appeared in 1599 as *The Commonwealth and Government of Venice*, its original was entering its seventh decade of influence. Philip Sidney had thought his copy a fair trade for Hubert Languet's of Plutarch; Jean Bodin, though he disagreed with him on virtually everything, found Contarini almost the only modern writer on the state worth taking seriously.³¹ The book is an interesting hybrid of highly detailed, concrete discussions of Venetian processes of government—most tediously and influentially, of the conduct of elections—along with an explicitly idealistic account of Venice's constitution as deduced from the tenets of Platonic, Aristotelean, and Polybian theory. As Felix Gilbert has argued, where most of the copious literature on Venice merely uses "ideal state" as a vague term of praise, in *De Magistratibus* it represents a philosophically serious effort at resolving the dialectic of action and contemplation that had tugged Contarini's intellectual circle in contradictory directions ever since the traumas of the 1510s.³² Lewkenor well captures the tract's

³¹ Bodin, *Method for the Easy Comprehension of History*, trans. Beatrice Reynolds (New York: Columbia University Press, 1945), 153-4. The Sidney anecdote is reported by David McPherson, "Lewkenor's Venice and Its Sources," *Renaissance Quarterly* 41.3 (1988): 459-66.

³² Gilbert, "Religion and Politics in the Thought of Gasparo Contarini," in *Action and Conviction in Early Modern Europe: Essays in Memory of E.H. Harbison*, ed. Theodore Rabb and Jerrold Seigel (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 111-12. Gilbert's biographical insight is developed further in the book-length study by Elisabeth Gleason, *Gasparo Contarini: Venice, Rome, and Reform* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993). The *De Magistratibus* is treated in Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*, 320-30; in William Bouwsma, *Venice and the Defense of Republican Liberty: Renaissance Values in the Age of the Counter Reformation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 144-53; and by Vittorio Conti, "The Mechanisation of Virtue: Republican Rituals in Italian Political Thought in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," in Martin van

combination of institutional specificity and philosophical rarefaction when, in his introduction, he describes the Consiglio Grande as “consisting at the least of 3000 Gentlemen...notwithstanding which number all things are ordered with so divine a peaceableness, and so without all tumult and confusion, that it rather seemeth to bee an assembly of Angels, then of men.”³³

Contarini presents Venice as a commonwealth set up for the sake of its citizens’ flourishing in virtue. Rather more controversially—as we shall see—he also praises his countrymen for having chosen not to make a fetish of virtue’s military side and instead to profit from a largely disarmed aristocracy’s devotion to the maintenance of peaceful order.³⁴ All this follows directly from his way of defining virtuous government: that is, by sharp contrast with “perturbation” (the calculatedly paradoxical embrace of which had underpinned Machiavelli’s praise of an armed citizenry).³⁵ The judgment of an individual ruler is perturbed by his animal passions; the judgment of the republic is perturbed when the interest of private factions prevails over that of the general good.³⁶ But on the Polybian view, “perturbation” in this sense is not only an ethical or psychological but a temporal

Gelderen and Quentin Skinner, eds., *Republicanism: A Shared European Heritage* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002), II:73-83.

³³ Gasparo Contarini [Gasper Contareno], *The Commonwealth and Government of Venice*, trans. Lewes Lewkenor (1599; repr., Amsterdam: Theatrum Orbis Terrarum, 1969), sig. A2.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 8-9.

³⁵ Gleason cautions against deriving Contarini’s praise of the arts of peace too neatly from a purely theoretical preference for stability, arguing that he was signaling to his Venetian readers a clear alignment with a party that sought to pursue a more muted foreign policy as a pragmatic response to the lessons of the League of Cambrai experience (119-20). That said, I take Gleason’s emphases and mine to be complementary, insofar as Contarini is still faced with the task of finding the mode of philosophical discourse that can best comprehend and justify his preferred course of action. The same cannot be said of Bouwsma’s view that Contarini’s Aristotelean language clashes irresolvably with his praise of Venice (*Republican Liberty*, 145). But this judgment stems from Bouwsma’s larger notion of Renaissance republicanism as the culmination of the Augustinian and Scotist line of thought that makes reality a function of will rather than intellect. This leads him into difficulties whenever he is faced with republicanism’s debts to Aristotelean theory, which for reasons having to do with the basic design of his study he sees simply as developing into Thomism (Polybius is absent from this story) and identifies with the papacy.

³⁶ Contarini, 10-11.

category. Wherever there is a government of the one, the few, or the many alone, it will eventually begin to substitute its own particularized ends for those of the whole. And this is in fact the cause of political instability (and so in some sense, the basis of political history as an intelligible discipline), as regimes stake a claim to rule in the public interest, degenerate into parochialism, and are overthrown in turn. In the Polybian paradigm, the study of change is essentially the study of the imbalances in a system seen statically; so that in the absence of imbalances there can be no theoretical reason to anticipate change. Contarini's premise, then, is that the basic political task is to construct a system in which all the potential actors will be included at once and in perfect proportion:

[W]hich not unlike to a well tuned dyapason in musicke, where the base is to the treble aptly proportioned, carrying with it the shew of a Monarchie, hath notwithstanding a correspondency with the popular government, and finally a middle sort of Magistrates being betweene them both interposed, doth grow (as it were) into a wel concenting harmony of an excellent commonwealth.³⁷

As the musical figure hints, the *simultaneity* of the one, the many, and the few is at once fact and value. In a quite specific sense, the orders exist simultaneously because *not* successively, and the job of a mixed government is to work constantly to produce the one kind of time rather than the other. This almost metaphysically daunting task is made easier (at least, easier to theorize) by Contarini's somewhat abstract way of counting a particular group as incorporated into the government. For instance, the Consiglio Grande's way of choosing magistrates is said to be most excellent because it combines "popular" with "aristocratic" government. What this really means is that it combines an instrument by which all citizens are treated as equal—the naming of electors by drawing lots—with one by which unequal citizens are treated as unequal—the vote on the

³⁷ Ibid., 36.

candidates the electors propose. Hence the claim to have included “the form of a popular state” has less to do with the relations of distinct sociological groups than with harmonizing different kinds of *procedure*, which are supposed to be intrinsically democratic or aristocratic as a matter of principle. In fact, of course, Contarini’s government explicitly excludes “the common people,” and most emphatically the vulgar rich, “that apply themselves to filthy artes, and illiberal occupations.”³⁸ His real interest is not in giving a broader vision of the actual social basis of a state that many had concluded was oligarchic in practice, but in reconstructing the deliberative process as the virtual image of a total society, by combining types of procedure corresponding to the potential dominance of each of its parts.

It is important to have some sense of what Contarini’s version of republicanism looks like, because otherwise it is easy to take for granted the style and imagery of the commendatory sonnet, disarmingly familiar as they should be for Spenserians, without asking how they do or don’t fit with the work commended. Spenser’s offering is not, perhaps, the most likely of his occasional poems to repay aesthetic attention. But its conventionality is not that of a dutiful rundown of Contarini’s themes (as it is with some of the sonnets by other contributors). Instead, it rehearses a very characteristically Spenserian rhetoric for dealing with political themes, upon which a reading of the *Commonwealth and Government* at first seems barely to have impinged at all.

The antique *Babel*, Empresse of the East,
 Upreard her buildinges to the threatned skie:
 And Second *Babell* tyrant of the West,
 Her ayry Towers upraised much more high.
 But with the weight of their own surquedry,
 They both are fallen, that all the earth did feare,
 And buried now in their own ashes ly,

³⁸ Ibid., 17.

Yet shewing by their heapes how great they were.
But in their place doth now a third appeare,
Fayre *Venice*, flower of the last worlds delight,
And next to them in beauty draweth neare,
But farre exceeds in policie of right.
Yet not so fayre her buildinges to behold
As *Lewkenors* stile that hath her beautie told.

Critics who discuss the poem tend to remark on the ambivalence of complimenting Venice by calling her, in effect, a third “Babel,” the first two of which have met an ignominious end that the poet stops well short of saying Venice will avoid.³⁹ A “flower of the last worlds delight” may be made for plucking. True that she “farre exceeds in policie of right,” but—to quote Michelle Pfeiffer in *Scarface*—nothing exceeds like excess, and there’s a way in which the language of sheer emulative competition is more persistent and memorable here than that of moral improvement. What *isn’t* generally noticed is how deeply, even self-consciously embedded that particular ambivalence is in the metahistorical tradition Spenser is drawing on; nor, indeed, have I seen it explicitly recognized just what that tradition is.

The identification of Rome with Babylon is standard-fare Protestant reading of Revelation. Their arrangement into a series of distinct imperial rises and falls, with one following the other, and then giving way to a final, vaguely messianic successor, puts us more specifically in the area of Daniel’s Four Empires, symbolized alternately in the vision of four beasts, or in the idol made of four metals to be finally destroyed and displaced by the “stone cut out without hands.” But with the telescoping of that series of empires into a relation between the first and the fourth, Babylon and Rome, at once like and unlike, the

³⁹ The significance of this is a point of contention between Wilson-Okamura and Hadfield. For other assessments of the sonnet, see Jonathan Goldberg, *James I and the Politics of Literature: Jonson, Shakespeare, Donne, and their Contemporaries* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), 74-80; Peter Platt, “The Meruailouse Site’: Shakespeare, Venice, and Paradoxical Stages,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 54.1 (2001): 121-54, at 134-7.

same and different, the one arising out of the other's end... Here we are dealing with that overlay of the Four Empires and the Two Cities that had become the organizing scheme of the medieval "universal history."

Again it is in the *City of God* where we find the view that:

the city of Rome was founded to be a kind of second Babylon, the daughter, as it were, of the former Babylon. It was God's design to conquer the world through her, to unite the world into the single community of the Roman commonwealth and the Roman laws, and so to impose peace throughout its length and breadth.⁴⁰

Augustine repeats the widely current opinion that the date of Rome's founding coincided exactly with that of the fall of Babylon—the implication being that the intervening empires of Media-Persia and Greece are to be seen as largely incidental to the overall pattern.⁴¹ This latter remains focused on the concept of "Rome," the philosophical and historical status of which can be clarified by understanding its relation to what will follow it as well as to its spiritual archetype and antecedent, the city of Babylon. In other words, by contrast with the Babylon-rhetoric of, say, John Foxe, the analogy here has less to do with identifying uniquely wicked tyrants and oppressors than with specifying the role of political power within the total history of God's dealings with His people. Katharine Firth has shown that Reformation readings of Daniel tended to split between a "German" interpretation, which followed the traditional view of "Rome" as somehow still intact and its authority as having been "translated" through later history, and an "English" version according to which the political Rome was well and truly done with, long since submerged

⁴⁰ *City of God* 18.22, p. 787.

⁴¹ On this coordination of dates, as well as other ways in which the four-empires theory shaped ancient historiographic practice, see Joseph Swain, "The Theory of the Four Monarchies: Opposition History under the Roman Empire," *Classical Philology* 35.1 (1940): 1-21.

in the Antichristian power of the papacy.⁴² The older tradition remained widely available in Elizabethan England, however, through such sources as John Sleidan's highly popular *Brief Chronicle of the Four Principal Empires*.⁴³ At any rate, the design of Spenser's sonnet suggests an interest in what it means to be a successor-state to a Rome which has collapsed in terms of its own secular power, but which continues to define the "place" subsequent empires will have to claim.

How central, and how complicated, this question is in the universal-history tradition is perhaps best suggested by a work which Spenser may not have known directly, but which is the most complete and influential statement of his sonnet's archetypal pattern: Otto of Freising's twelfth-century *History of the Two Cities*. Otto's models are Augustine and Orosius, and in understanding metahistorically the rise and fortunes of Rome, he simply doubles down on the established view. Rome follows Babylon "as a son succeeds his father; the short-lived empires of the Medes and the Persians and of the Macedonians intervening (like the guardians of a little child) not by right of permanent inheritance but by mere temporary succession."⁴⁴ Babylon, in turn, is connected not only etymologically and spiritually to the Tower of Babel, but is actually built from its discarded bricks and pitch (as is the House of Alma, notably).⁴⁵ We can see from all this how, as Pocock puts it, Rome is "simply a second Babylon; a 'mystical' Babylon, reiterating the history of the first to the point where it contains, occasions, but does not generate,

⁴² Firth, *The Apocalyptic Tradition in Reformation Britain, 1530-1645* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 28, 185-6, 197-8.

⁴³ For more on the persistence of the four-empires theory in Elizabethan historiography, see J. Leeds Barroll, "Shakespeare and Roman History," *Modern Language Review* 53.3 (1958): 327-43.

⁴⁴ Otto, Bishop of Freising, *The Two Cities: A Chronicle of Universal History to the Year 1146 A.D.*, trans. Charles C. Mierow (New York: Columbia University Press, 1928), 153.

⁴⁵ *FQ* II.ix.21.

something which is to succeed it.”⁴⁶ And we can see, too, how a Spenser could shrink symbolically the whole of that reiteration into the still more primordial movement of human pride’s endless building up and falling down.

But what of the “something which is to succeed it?” At the other end of the Roman epoch, Otto’s task gets more complicated. On the one hand—following yet another Hellenistic interlude—Rome was destined to be replaced by the “translated” empire of the Franks. Otto explicitly analogizes this to Rome’s own previous, quasi-lawful inheritance of the Babylonian mantle.⁴⁷ To that extent, he implies that the Danielic system might need only to be augmented by adding more (and more and more?) successive holders of worldly authority, without that authority undergoing any real change in its nature or ultimate destiny. On the other hand, there was a sense in which the Franks *were* the Romans, and in which the whole Roman/post-Babylonian era, that of Daniel’s “iron mixed with clay,” was no longer centered around the rise and fall of competing empires, but rather around the relationship of empire *tout court* (call it Roman) to the Church, a new institutional actor with its own very complicated relationship to the “stone cut out without hands.”⁴⁸

So to come “after Rome” was, in the terms of universal history, to occupy an extraordinarily ambiguous position. It suggested coming *next*—that is, insofar as the Danielic scheme had set down an invariant but repeatable pattern for secular power in its

⁴⁶ Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion*, Vol. 3: *The First Decline and Fall* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 105.

⁴⁷ Otto, *Two Cities*, 318.

⁴⁸ Otto, a prelate and Cistercian monk who dedicated the *Two Cities* to his nephew the emperor Frederick I, places the work’s penultimate division at the papacy of Hildebrand, commenting that the Church, having struck the emperor with excommunication, must be the stone cut out without hands (401). He immediately adds, rather ambiguously: “All can now see to what a mountainous height the Church, at one time small and lowly, has grown.” Moreover, “what great calamities, how many wars and perils of wars followed in consequence of the weakness of the kingdom”—though he stops short of more than implicitly connecting this weakness to the Church’s unwonted strength. The Reformers were, of course, quite a bit less subtle about just what kind of a watershed Hildebrand represented.

historical dimension, as a series of familiar exercises in glorious transience and moral imbecility. And it also suggested coming *last*—insofar as that same scheme implied that the empire of the Romans was to be the final one on the Babylonian model, such that its true successor must be something genuinely different. So different, indeed, as to mark the end of history and of the essentially negative relation between political power and spiritual freedom that obtains within that history. The city after Rome might be yet one more entrant in that amoral competition whose episodic winners God has always made use of for ends they themselves could hardly have authored. But it just might also be that final victor whose coming would conclude the sequence and give it its retrospective intelligibility.

Spenser, then, has designed his sonnet in such a way as (1) to create, in its abstract dimensions, this “place” for occupation, after a Rome that is itself “after Babylon”; (2) to slot Contarini’s Venice into it; and (3) to ratchet up as much as possible the ambiguity about which of the two narratives I have just sketched it belongs to. All of which is remarkably underdetermined by the character of Contarini’s own arguments. So where is it coming from? My suggestion is that it reflects Spenser’s way of processing, not Contarini’s specific claims, but the intellectual problem he saw contained in the very premise of Contarini’s praise of Venice, namely, that the endurance of the particular, time-bound, politically and institutionally structured society could in itself be praised as an ethical achievement.

One final point needs to be made about how Spenser creates ambiguity in the sonnet, that is, how he hedges between Venice’s standing as a repetition of its predecessors and as a transcendence of them. Partly, as I have noted, this has to do with the heavy formal weighting toward parataxis over development, so that a story nominally

about the growth of “police of right” is more easily seen and heard as yet another return of Babylon’s policy of *height*. But this one-after-another is also made to suggest not just a formal pattern but a sort of moral vacuousness in action: the sublimely stupid glory of mine-is-bigger-than-yours meeting well-yes-but-mine-is-prettier. And in the Spenser canon, all this can point inexorably only toward one thing: giants.

There are not, literally speaking, any giants in the commendatory sonnet. But in its total ambience—the repetitiveness, the evocation of a grand but ultimately pointless mimetic competition, the “ashes” and “heapes,” the personifying of geopolitical expansion as a relentlessly vertical “surquedry,” the use of the sonnet form’s structural breaks to demarcate rising from falling and rising again—the poem reaches back, beyond *The Ruines of Time*, to the translations Spenser made of Joachim Du Bellay’s *Antiquitez de Rome*, where the myth of the giants’ war against the gods is a standard metaphor for both the spirit and the fortunes of Rome’s secular ambitions.⁴⁹ We might recall that Spenser’s Mutabilitie, herself a giantess of surpassing beauty, calls her challenge to Jove a family tradition, an act of rebellion she has read about “mongst records permanent.”⁵⁰ It is as if to say: this is how *fortuna* transcribes itself as history. Abstracted from the coherence of a providential design—which is in any case external to their own systems of value and perception—the *translatio* of cities comes to look like a series of episodes in the resurgence of gigantism. It might, on this view, be rather a matter of indifference whether one chooses to name the states that come to prominence one after another, or simply says that *there are giants*, and this is their abiding sort of activity. When Spenser repurposes

⁴⁹ On Spenser’s giants and Du Bellay’s see Bart Van Es, *Spenser’s Forms of History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 110–38. On Renaissance giants generally see Walter Stephens, *Giants in Those Days: Folklore, Ancient History, and Nationalism* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989).

⁵⁰ FQ VII.vi.2.

Virgil's famous tree simile describing the fall of Troy, it is to use it in connection with the fall of Orgoglio.⁵¹

Gigantism, then, is the subjective side of that discontinuous, irrational temporality that organizes itself into series like the Four Empires; just as those empires are the concrete objectification of the gigantic impulse. We are now in a position to summarize the full symbolic complex of the Venice sonnet. The truly new city (hypothetically Venice) would mark a break with the Babylonian template, and in so doing recast the translation of power as something historically intelligible above and beyond mere gigantism. There is, we know, a kind of temporal break that *does not* belong to Mutabilitie, but now we are getting into serious stone-cut-out-without-hands territory; and if we're considering any historically existing society, it's going to be hard to say that its self-image as something transcendent isn't ultimately another bit of mimetic "surquedry." The Du Bellayan insight about Rome, for instance, is that the claim to last forever is not only tragically unverifiable, it is also not logically distinguishable from the will to aggressive expansion. (It is, as it were, the aggressive appropriation of the dimension of time.) There are of course good, though limited and contingent, reasons for keeping up the outward order that the relative permanence of states subserves. But to claim, as a political society, to be so constituted as to do more than that is tantamount to asking to be evaluated on terms either gigantic or eschatological—and maybe both at once.

Apocalypse is emphatically *not* where Contarini is heading, though: he is no Savonarola. Still less does he think of Venice as belonging to any sort of world-imperial succession. The city does not command an epoch, and at a more abstract level its real achievement has been to remove itself from the whole epochal, crisis-based form of

⁵¹ FQ I.viii.22.

history that Spenser's sonnet insists upon. It is, in this sense, supposed to be *the least gigantic of cities*. In fact, Contarini represents a fairly extreme version of some republicans' tendency to see tension between the commonwealth's flourishing in liberty and the scalar expansion of its power.⁵² He implicitly accepts Machiavelli's polar opposition of expansion-driven and stability-centered republics, of Rome versus Venice, and inverts its values to produce a myth of Venice as constitutively anti-Roman, un-imperial in spirit if not quite in practical fact. The "Adriatique wonder" is a sort of design miracle, a masterpiece of organizational complexity that relies on a highly conservative political culture and foreign policy to minimize shocks to a refined but brittle system. Its achievements are real—1100 years of freedom from any shattering crisis, summed up in the epithet *Serenissima*—but they require a different scale of values than states that generate and master instability, where Venice tries only to permanently neutralize it. Perhaps Spenser, by contrast, could imagine no way of figuring civic achievement except as a literal or metaphorical version of imperial expansiveness; or perhaps (unlike Harrington, Algernon Sidney, and the other republicans for whom the Venice/Rome polarity became an analytic warhorse) he did not really grasp what Contarini or Machiavelli were saying about Venice; or perhaps he was too disengaged from the project to care.

And yet there's something almost too neat to be entirely accidental about the way in which the first-second-third-Babel pattern of the sonnet displaces Contarini's ostentatiously tripartite analysis of the Venetian constitution. Recall the level of artist we're talking about in terms of the ability to dispose poetic space into different kinds of conceptual or mnemonic architecture. It's hard not to think that it would have occurred to

⁵² On the centrality of attention to "scale effects" in the republican tradition, see Daniel Deudney, *Bounding Power: Republican Security Theory from the Polis to the Global Village* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 27-60.

Spenser as an option to use the sonnet's natural subdivisions to convoke a triumphal procession of one, few, and many, Doge, Senate, and Council; the volta could perhaps have gestured to that great number of non-citizens included in the Venetian state virtually but not actively or analytically. To have done so, however, would have been highly untypical in one crucial sense. It would have been the only Spenserian processional pageant in which the participants represent *the simultaneously existing parts of a sociable collective*, as opposed to personified dispositions dispensing a continuous influence on social behavior (the show at the House of Pride, Busirane's masque of Cupid, and so on), or individuals literally successive in time whose cue to appear is usually the demise of their predecessor (the chronicle-pageants read by or displayed to Arthur, Guyon, and Britomart; as well as the cycles of months and seasons Mutabilitie parades around Arlo Hill). The one partial exception, the Marriage of Rivers at Proteus Hall, turns out to prove the rule. By geographic convention the rivers all exist simultaneously (though the confluence of Thames and Medway is being mythologized here as if it constituted a discrete event in time). But each is really individuated by its particular style of flowing or way of channeling a perpetual flux, so that the Marriage becomes a kind of meta-processional in which each participant personifies its own parade of moments, its own mode of connecting one thing after another.

Whether by outright intention or by deeply ingrained habit, the displacement of the one-few-many into the one-after-another precisely encapsulates what stands between Spenser and Contarini. This is not the moral language, clearly common to both, by which a city can be praised for enacting "policy of right." It is, rather, their radically different understandings of the role played by *structure* in, alternatively, grounding or ungrounding such judgments. For Contarini, it is the polity's susceptibility of rational structure that

gives political activity its ethical bona fides, and the consequence is that action becomes more morally coherent the more comprehensively articulated it is with the harmonious organization of the state. For Spenser, in the Augustinian line adumbrated by *The Ruines of Time*, structure is not only subject to but essentially is finitude, “the process where the dying pass away and are succeeded by those who will die in their turn.” It marks not the identity of morality and politics but the necessary divorce of the latter from the final ends in terms of which it should be conducted. More than this: Contarini proposes that the right structure, by freeing participation from perturbation, can overcome the strictly successive character of political history, can make narratives of the “and then so-and-so came to power” sort less and less relevant. Spenser invokes an argument according to which the attachment to particular structures is precisely what situates political life in the dimension of material contingency, committing it to a history of endless rises and falls.

III

Spenser’s rendering of Rome as “second seat of soueraine king” in the stanza on the three Troys, which earlier I pointed to as a sign of indifference to the distinction between republic and principate, now begins to appear in a somewhat different light. At the least, the indifference to constitutions now seems less blithe and more like a matter of intellectual principle. Moreover, if setting the Troy stanza alongside the Venice sonnet makes it all the more apparent what Spenser characteristically elides—how a given polity systematically relates multiple contending actors to one another—it should make clear that this elision *also* means a correspondingly amplified attention to the relations between *successive* actors, whose tenures border but do not overlap one another. It could, indeed, hardly be otherwise, given the way in which Spenser’s tendency to produce fictions in

which the social or political world is shrunk to include exactly one actor at every point so often leaves us virtually no other relations in which to take an interest.⁵³

Recall that Contarini thinks that to get right the synchronic problem of how, and how far, to include each citizen in the polity is effectively to eliminate the problems of political continuity and change. Take care of participation and time will take care of itself. Spenser, more in the Augustinian tradition, appears conversely to believe that to ask how a political entity relates to a past moment and a future is already to have asked the really important questions about it; and, further, that this is best done by bracketing the whole issue of inclusion and exclusion out of existence. I say “a political entity” with deliberate generality, because I take it that the basic objects of Spenser’s political thought are not constitutions but *dispositions*, and dispositions that can be predicated of corporate actors as easily as individuals. Indeed, the point here is that Spenser’s corporate actors *are* “individuals,” in the literal sense of being without internal divisions, though this is presented not as the outcome of a positive achievement of integration, but as the bare fact of being the exclusive occupant of a particular moment in a temporal series.

As the Troy stanza makes explicit, a state no less than a person can be thought of as inheriting an office (recall Otto on the transfer from Babylon to Rome). Each inheritor being as finite as another, what matters is the use made of it: how past authority is maintained and extended in view of its future work, without either falling into slavish complacency or rushing into heedless innovation. This is not to say, of course, that republicans are uninterested in dispositions of this sort. But I have been arguing that the

⁵³ Elizabeth Fowler gives a powerful alternative reading of what I take to be essentially the same feature in Spenser’s poetry: the tendency to count down to one actor in any given political context, in a way that occludes just those forms of relation (e.g., consent) that would make up the basis of an ordered polity—and which, for Fowler, are the only conceivable objects of political philosophy. See Fowler, “The Failure of Moral Philosophy in the Work of Edmund Spenser,” *Representations* 51 (1995), 47–76.

dispositions republicans value are defined in reciprocal relation with the objective structure that allows for their continued expression, and that for Spenser no such structure exists, or can exist. Nothing in the political world can make time take care of itself. But the will to take care of time—to stay a course, to avoid making false gods of repetition or rupture, to keep one’s end in sight while understanding the constraints of one’s beginning—is what gives to political institutions and instruments their real but entirely provisional validity.

At crucial moments in the *View of the Present State of Ireland*, indeed, the argument turns on an appeal to just this distinction, between two kinds of analysis stemming from different assumptions about the sources and implications of stability in political bodies. At the midpoint of the dialogue, Spenser’s Irenius turns from cataloging Irish “abuses” to outlining a program for redressing them, which, he says, must be by “the strength of a greater power.”⁵⁴ His interlocutor Eudoxus objects: surely incremental legal reform would comport better with conservative wisdom about the perils of “innovation” than a root-and-branch reconception of “the whole forme of the government.” Eudoxus is in a sense attacking a straw man, however, since Irenius’s basic position on “the whole forme of the government” is that he has no position. Ireland is to receive a “universall reformation” breathtaking in its comprehensiveness, yet the *View* repeatedly downplays the significance of constitutional prescription to this program. Certain laws, common and statute alike, are patently counterproductive and should be replaced, but nothing strikes Irenius as a more serious category mistake than the belief that it matters very much what Ireland’s fundamental law is.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ *A View of the State of Ireland*, ed. Andrew Hadfield and Willy Maley (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 92.

⁵⁵ See especially *Ibid.*, 135. Scholars have generally agreed that the *View* is distinguished by its flat rejection of the traditional English position that identified reform with the continued integration of the Irish into

More tractable to Irenius's argument is Eudoxus's concern to minimize disruption to traditional institutions, whatever they may be. Here Irenius rejects not the general premise, but rather its applicability to the Irish situation. His retort is that one can hardly worry about disrupting the *status quo* when this consists already in a state of permanent structural volatility.⁵⁶ Irish society fosters an indisposition to legal order reinforced at every level of economic and cultural organization. But the solution to structural volatility is not *another structure*, at least not one embodied in legal form. Rather, Irenius shifts our attention to the restraining force of "one noble person," presumably Essex:

who being himself most stedfast to his soveraigne Queene [*sic!*], and his countrey, coasting upon the South-Sea, stoppeth the ingate of all that evill which is looked for, and holdeth in all those which are at his becke, with the terrour of his greatnesse, and the assurance of his most immoveable loyaltie: And therefore where you thinke, that good and sound lawes might amend, and reforme things there amisse, you think surely amisse.⁵⁷

The passage brings into direct relation two of the *View's* leitmotifs, and implies that they are the negative and positive complements to one another. A preview of this juxtaposition has come shortly before, when Eudoxus hazards that the common law must be very apt for application in the Irish context, given its success in raising the English to civility from a "stoute and warlike" condition much like that of the Irish today. No, Irenius says, the common law was, in fact, first brought in from Normandy and had no features whatsoever

common-law institutions. Disagreement has centered rather on the degree to which this was an idiosyncratic move on Spenser's part or one representative of a more widely shared development in political theory among the English planters in Ireland. For the former account, see Ciaran Brady, "Spenser's Irish Crisis: Humanism and Experience in the 1590s," *Past and Present* 111 (1986), 17-49; for the latter, Nicholas Canny, "Edmund Spenser and the Development of an Anglo-Irish Identity," *Yearbook of English Studies* 13 (1983), 1-19. More recently Brian Lockey has argued that Spenser was torn between allegiance to common law and to natural law as "foundational discourses," but I think Lockey has mistaken for a foundational commitment to conflicting principles what is in fact a commitment to treating neither as foundational. See Lockey, "Spencer's [*sic*] Legalization of the Irish Conquest in *A View and Faerie Queene VI*," *English Literary Renaissance* 31.3 (2001), 365-91.

⁵⁶ For a good précis of Spenser's analysis of Irish instability, see Brady, "Spenser's Irish Crisis," 28. For context, see David Beers Quinn, *The Elizabethans and the Irish* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1966), 34-57.

⁵⁷ *A View*, 92.

making it specially amenable to English conditions. That it eventually took hold was therefore not a function of its own virtues (whatever these may be), but solely “by reason of the continuall presence of their King; whose onely person is oftentimes in stead of an army, to containe the unrulie people from a thousand evill occasions, which this wretched kingdome, for want thereof, is dayly carried into.”⁵⁸ First, then, the *View* warns against overestimating the intrinsic value of even the best-considered laws. It is not only that legal values are dependent on context; even their functioning in the societies where they seem to fit supervenes on the work of a powerful official, at once enforcing and modeling the law’s “continuall” discipline. Hence, second, the *View* takes an acute interest in the role played by Ireland’s governors, typically seen as dramatically isolated individuals, in creating through the sheer force of personal *habitus* the sort of disciplined continuity that Ireland otherwise entirely lacks.

This latter theme is most explicitly developed in Irenius’s praise of Lord Grey’s suppression of the Desmond rising:

Nevertheless thorough the most wise and valiant handling of that right noble Lord, it got not the head which the former evils found; for in them the realme was left like a ship in a storm, amidst the raging surges, unrul’d, and undirected of any: for they to whom she was committed, either fainted in their labour, or forsooke their charge. But hee (like a most wise pilote,) kept her course carefully, and held her most strongly even against those roaring billowes, that he safely brought her out of all; so as long after, even by the space of 12 or 13 whole years, she roade at peace, thorough his onely paines and excellent indurance, how ever Envy list to blatter against him.⁵⁹

Initially it looks as if Grey’s “indurance” is so uniquely a personal characteristic that the loss of him must be very consequential to the state indeed; yet by the end of the passage its payoff is precisely the capacity of good order to keep sustaining itself whether he is still

⁵⁸ Ibid., 21.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 28.

there or not. Perhaps it should not surprise us to find Spenser more keen to praise Grey on multiple grounds than concerned with the appearance of strict logical consistency between them. Yet the problem of continuity both within and between the statecraft of successive officials is in fact among the *View*'s most pervasive and seriously considered themes. Indeed, in the one place in the tract where Spenser is best known for having seemingly taken a strong (but ambiguous) position on the balance of constitutional authority, it can be shown that this theme is its driving force: a concern not with the form of the polity, but with how governors behave over time and what factors promote or impede the regularity that preconditions the success of any law (but also leaves it relatively less important *which* law it is envisioned as making possible).

Near the end of the *View*, Irenius proposes both that the executive power of the Lord Deputy be made "more ample and absolute," and that he be placed under the intermediate authority of a Lord Lieutenant, a figure of great public respect whose role will be to vouch for the Irish program as a whole.⁶⁰ Both measures are intended to expand the Lord Deputy's latitude, the first by freeing him from the cumbersome process of getting prior approval "to follow the necessitie of present actions," and the second by allowing the Lord Lieutenant to run interference with public opinion at home. Taken in isolation, it can appear as if the significant thing about the passage is that Spenser is setting the relation between the Crown and a colonial magistrate on a new basis. (Especially as he cites Machiavelli for a precedent.) But its readers have struggled to reach a satisfactory interpretation of the passage on these terms, because it is difficult to find any set of general constitutional considerations in the *View* with which to connect it. And if one assumes that a general constitutional principle of some sort has to be motivating

⁶⁰ Ibid., 159-60.

Spenser's proposal, then multiple contradictory principles, "republican" or "absolutist," seem equally available (which is to say, equally underdetermined by any sustained discussion in the *View* itself).⁶¹

If that assumption is set aside, however, it becomes clear that the overriding concern in the passage ("the chiefe evill in that government") is that "no Governour is suffered to goe on with any one course, but upon the least information here, of this or that, hee is either stopped and crossed, or other courses appointed him from hence which he shall run." Not only does this formulation of the problem make the governor sound rather more familiarly like a Spenserian hero—who typically has more ado to figure out how to sustain his or her quest, or to discern its true end, than to define his or her measure of formal autonomy—but it can be placed within a sustained and consistent pattern of analysis in the *View*. This line of thinking has as its object the reasons why most officials fail to present the same galvanizing image of awesome persistence which has been the great contribution of men like Essex and Grey. At the present juncture the reasons Irenius is considering have to do with untimely interference from the metropole, and call out for a pragmatic reordering of the lines of command. But this is by no means the exclusive or even the primary way in which the problem manifests itself, and in its most challenging forms it has much less to do with the autonomy of the governor's office (or lack thereof) than with the dispositional qualities its successive holders impart to it.

Central to what can without irony be called the *View*'s ethical vision of politics is its diagnosis of the vacillations that arise from the governors' failure to perceive steady,

⁶¹ Thus David Baker, referring to the role this passage plays in the exchange between Hadfield and Wilson-Okamura, in Baker's chapter on "Spenser and Politics" in the *Oxford Handbook of Edmund Spenser*, ed. Richard McCabe (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2010), 48-64, at 52: "Recently, this passage has been read both as a statement of the need for limits on the Crown's powers and as a brief for more power for the Crown's representatives, and *that it can be read both ways* is, surely, *the most significant thing* we can notice about it... Spenser's lines are nicely balanced between republican and absolutist imperatives" (my italics).

cumulative progress as compatible with their personal glory. This arises after Irenius, having covered the demerits of Irish laws, customs, and religion, surprises Eudoxus by declaring that he has still to consider vices “that though they be in private men, yet their evill reacheth to a generall hurt.”⁶² He initially singles out just one of these for discussion: the collusion between English captains and their ostensible enemies, both of whom have a material interest in continuing hostilities at a low level. At this point it looks like we are going to get a fairly straightforward treatment of corruption and the perverse incentives of colonial warfare. But the discussion then shifts abruptly to what Irenius takes to be the moral equivalent of such behavior among the governors, the rewards of which are less material than reputational and psychological, a matter of shaping the narrative of Irish governance to their own purposes rather than subsuming themselves in its *longue durée*. On the one hand, simply to continue, even to build on, the framework of the previous governor would diminish one’s own distinction, so new officeholders usually prefer to announce sweeping shifts of direction. On the other hand, there is little incentive to try to solve problems that arise at the end of one’s term, since one’s successor is likely to enjoy the credit anyway. Thus the cumulative effect of an otherwise salutary ambition for glory is to further exacerbate the instability of a society already dominated by a “virtue” its native elites have cast as fundamentally violent and episodic.⁶³

If there is a connection between the *View*’s account of political virtue and some proposed structure of government, then, it consists in the minimal demand that the latter not become one of many potential impediments to the “continual” character of its own exertions. But the claim is not that such an arrangement will in itself make Ireland any

⁶² *A View*, 88.

⁶³ For an illuminating account of Spenser’s understanding of “barbarianism” as a mode of socio-cultural order, see Debora Shuger, “Irishmen, Aristocrats, and Other White Barbarians,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 50.2 (1997): 494-525.

more stable, only that it will accomplish as a practical matter what Spenser already has conceptually: the isolation of the individual officer, disposed for perseverance or against it, as the only factor to which stability can possibly be staked. It is, moreover, the practical equivalent to the representational principle we have seen preempting and displacing the very premises of republican theory in Spenser's poetry. The *View* reproduces at the level of policy analysis what Spenser habitually does at the level of form when he considers the political state in texts like the commendatory sonnet and the stanza on the three Troys. First, isolate a single agent occupying the space of action for a stretch of time. Then direct our attention to the character of the transitions separating one such tenure from another, where "excellent indurance," or its failure, is made most dramatically apparent.

To some degree, we are so used to Spenser operating in this mode that we can fail to see it as a particular formal choice. For instance, we know well that the chronicle of Faery emperors that Guyon reads in Alma's turret represents a kind of civic ideal against which to measure the losses and reversals of the Briton chronicle taken up by Arthur. But generally we take no specific notice of the fact that it is *still a chronicle*: if it stands for an ideal "body politic," it cannot do so by any sort of more complete, more balanced, more harmonious synoptic incorporation of parts; there is nothing more, and nothing less, to incorporate than there is in Arthur's chronicle.⁶⁴ What distinguishes it from the ravages of its British counterpart is only the fact that each new occupant of the imperial seat functions to mark only the absolute minimum of orderly departure from his predecessor.

In other words, Spenser's representation of political society and his vision of political virtue come together precisely where the former is *least* apt to appear as a

⁶⁴ *FQ* II.x.70-76. An exception is Rathborne, who insists upon the successive, diachronic character of Spenser's "city of earthly fame" (*Spenser's Fairyland*, 104-19). The view that the Faery chronicle adumbrates a strictly timeless "body politic" is exemplified by David Lee Miller, *The Poem's Two Bodies: The Poetics of the 1590 "Faerie Queene"* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 191-214.

synchronically organized system, a regular structure of relations among discrete actors. This preference for the chronicle of one-after-another has a kind of loose affinity with monarchism, but in Spenser it is not so much a positive argument for the government of one man, as a reversal of the whole republican method of distinguishing social formations by measuring the relative distribution or consolidation of authority. Rather than being realized more fully the greater the scope, diversity, and rational ordering of collective participation, a distinctively political virtue comes more clearly into view the less it looks like “participation” at all. Or, rather, the more what it “participates” in looks like the lonely stewardship of an officeholder to whom has fallen the job of producing, out of his own style of action, what continuity there is in a world where this can be reliably grounded in no objective structure, no better arrangement of society’s disparate parts.

The point might also be put like this. That Spenserian entity known as “second Troy” (alias second Babel) is, for all its constitutional vacuity, not so much *subtracted* from the language of political description, as it is *abstracted* from it, set out as its basic unit. Among Virgil’s attractions for Spenser was surely his having narrated the founding of that universal empire so as to make it sound quite literally like a story about that favorite Spenserian emblem, the steering of the ship of state. Spenser’s Rome, in turn, is a political society so comprehensively identified with the intuition behind ship-of-state symbology that practically its only positive characteristic, all there is to say about it, is that it gets one from A to B (or, better, from A₁ to A₃).⁶⁵ Yet it is only once a political society is seen in this fashion, as a conveyance from one set of realities to another, that it becomes the sort of thing to which the whole fecundity of Spenser’s moral language of the quest and its

⁶⁵ The themes developed in this section would bear comparison with Michael Walzer’s comments on the displacement of the organic-corporeal metaphor by that of the ship of state in the political rhetoric of sixteenth-century Calvinism. See *The Revolution of the Saints: A Study in the Origins of Radical Politics* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1965), 171–83.

discipline—prematurely abandoned or aimlessly distended, contracted into an episode of pseudo-finality or spun off into infinite protean variations—could profitably apply.

Whether one wishes to call such a strategy of representation an evasion of “the political” *simpliciter*; or whether one is inclined to see it as developing an alternative kind of political theme, one habitually obscured by the tendency to see the issues of inclusion and exclusion, scale and distribution, balance and hierarchy, as definitive of the set of properly political problems, will depend, probably, on how one feels about a number of things beyond the scope of this chapter. What I hope to have demonstrated here is that if Spenser is “good to think with” about republicanism, it is by directing our attention, not to republicanism’s variety, but to what is outside its limits.

CHAPTER THREE

Othello and the Unweaponed City

What has *Othello* to do with republicanism? Not so long ago the question might have seemed improbable or even perverse; nowadays it has become virtually unavoidable. There are a couple distinct but complementary reasons for this. First, where Lynda Boose once quipped that “the Moor of Venice” connoted something on the order of “the Eskimo of Texas,” the 2000s-era boom in Mediterranean studies has produced a revised picture in which Othello’s situation looks less emblematically exotic and more realistically plausible, embedded in a highly specific Venetian social, economic, and political milieu.¹ Second, the long-established fact that one of Shakespeare’s main sources for *Othello*’s Venice was Contarini’s *Commonwealth and Government* has taken on a new significance for critics who have seen in this a means of triangulating Shakespeare, Contarini, and the culture of English republicanism posited by such historians as Collinson and Peltonen.² The play itself invites such an approach for at least one readily graspable reason. Othello’s connection to Venice seems to be secured by maximally civic and minimally cultural ties: he fights (and, in his own histrionic framing of the event, dies) for the city, while still

¹ See especially Daniel Vitkus, *Turning Turk: English Theater and the Multicultural Mediterranean, 1570-1630* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 77-106; Emily Bartels, *Speaking of the Moor: From Alcazar to Othello* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2008), 1-20 and 155-90. Two valuable book-length studies of Shakespeare’s Venice have appeared in recent years: Graham Holderness, *Shakespeare and Venice* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010); and the collection of essays edited by Laura Tosi and Shaul Bassi, *Visions of Venice in Shakespeare* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011). See also David McPherson, *Shakespeare, Jonson, and the Myth of Venice* (Newark: U of Delaware P, 1990). Boose’s remark appears in “‘The Getting of a Lawful Race’: Racial Discourse in Early Modern England and the Unrepresentable Black Woman,” in Margo Hendricks and Patricia Parker, eds., *Women, “Race,” and Writing in the Early Modern Period* (London: Routledge, 1994), 38.

² The primary protagonist has been Andrew Hadfield, *Shakespeare and Renaissance Politics*, 163-70; *Shakespeare and Republicanism*, 214-20. See also Mark Matheson, “Venetian Culture and the Politics of *Othello*,” *Shakespeare Survey* 48 (1995), 123-33. A contrary view is suggested by Peter Platt, “‘The Meruailouse Site’: Shakespeare, Venice, and Paradoxical Stages,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 54.1 (2001), 121-54.

retaining the signs of his alien birth. For Julia Reinhard Lupton, the critic who has given us the most sophisticated treatment of these themes, republican citizenship thus emerges as *Othello's* central political problematic. The "citizenship structure" described by Contarini becomes, according to Lupton, the framework within which Shakespeare plays out the tension between the hypothetical inclusiveness of the civic norms instantiated in *Othello's* military service and their incomplete extension to those at Venice's cultural margins.³

The trouble with such a reading is that it belies what an Elizabethan reader might very well have regarded as the definitive feature of Contarini's theory of citizenship. Here we need, in a sense, to invert the previous chapter's reading, concerned with the sort of structure Contarini thinks is consistent with good action, and turn our attention instead to the sort of action Contarini thinks is consistent with good structure. Especially for a reader who knew Machiavelli's *Discourses* and *Art of War* as well as the *Commonwealth and Government*, the latter book would probably not have appeared purely as an exposition of the mixed constitution as a generic form, shared by Venice with the republics of the ancient world. Rather, it would have been read also as a theoretical defense of a quite specific and much debated type of republic: one in which the political classes do not involve themselves personally in warfare, and the state's forces are marshaled by foreigners who, conversely, are constitutionally disbarred from taking any role in its public life. On this view, a general "of Venice" is virtually the *last* figure one would use to represent a paradigm of the Venetian citizen. As Contarini sees it, military leadership like *Othello's* is not a sort of variant form of the deliberative citizenship

³ Lupton, *Citizen-Saints: Shakespeare and Political Theology* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2005), 103-23. "Job in Venice: Shakespeare and the Travails of Universalism," in Tosi and Bassi, eds., *Visions of Venice*, 105-21, restates Lupton's essential view of the play while placing an even more pointed emphasis on Contarini as intertext.

personified in Lodovico or the Duke; rather, they are, from a constitutional perspective, mutually exclusive.

The significance of this for a reading of the play's politics is not merely negative—Othello's service in arms is so far from *mitigating* his status as outsider that it actually *compounds* it—but might rather enable some qualitatively new insights into how Shakespeare conceives of that status and its implications. To see this, however, will require restoring to view a line of argument that modern scholars have sometimes treated as Renaissance republicanism's unwanted stepchild, that which concerns the differences between societies defended by citizen-soldiers and societies defended by mercenary professionals. (Since the question of Othello's "citizenship" is so unusually pressurized and so subject to varying interpretations, it may be useful to say from the outset that throughout this chapter "citizen" has the same Aristotelian meaning it has for Contarini: a member of a class eligible to participate in political life through the holding of offices and the exercise of deliberative judgment on matters of public importance.⁴) Contarini is taking a strong position in an intra-republican debate over the relative merits of different types of republics, and Shakespeare's writing a play about mercenaries in Venetian service indicates in turn that his interest in Contarini revolved around just that point on which the latter's work is most liable to criticism *on republican terms*.

⁴ Aristotle, *Politics*, 1275b. Confusion can easily arise in this area because there were in Shakespeare's time multiple ways of using terms cognate with the English "citizen" to name distinct strata of Venetian society. As David Chambers and Brian Pullan explain in their *Venice: A Documentary History, 1450-1630* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), "Contarini, in his classic treatise on Venetian government, calls noblemen *cives* or citizens. However, Venetians also used the term *cittadino*, or *civis popularis*, to refer to persons not of noble birth who nonetheless enjoyed certain legally defined privileges of considerable importance, administrative or economic or both" (261). See also Dennis Romano, *Patricians and Popolani: The Social Foundations of the Venetian Renaissance State* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1987), 27-38, 141-58.

Critics interested in *Othello* as a document in the history of political thought have not, I think, sufficiently reckoned with these facts.⁵ It might be said that in failing to do so they have effectively replicated the Venetian division of the military from the political as spheres of concern, but without any of the acute self-consciousness about the nature of that division and its consequences that distinguishes the work of Contarini, of Machiavelli, and—as I intend to argue—of Shakespeare. My argument will proceed in three parts. The first shows that the dialectic of citizen-soldier and mercenary is an interpretive scheme powerfully if obliquely invoked in *Othello* itself. I suggest that in constructing Othello’s “otherness” Shakespeare appeals not only to the familiar problematic of the citizen’s other as the *culturally particularized alien*, but also to the rather more specifically republican problematic of the citizen’s other as the *functionally specialized professional*: the two meet in the figure of the foreign mercenary, who must be absolutely separated from the civic body if he cannot be entirely integrated into it. The second section turns directly to Contarini, examining how he justifies Venice’s opting for the path of separation over that of integration by presenting such a choice as uniquely consistent with the values implicit in the city’s celebrated mixed constitution. In sixteenth-century republican thought, I go on to show, the choice between an armed and a disarmed citizenry comes to be seen as entailing a larger antithesis between different ideas of the republic and their affiliated, and strongly gendered, modes of virtue: one expressing itself in dynamic action and mastery of temporal events (Rome), the other in the preserving of an inviolate structural integrity

⁵ To my knowledge the only scholar to have produced a sustained reading on premises similar to mine is Pamela Jensen, “This is Venice’: Politics in Shakespeare’s *Othello*,” in Joseph Alulis and Vickie Sullivan, eds., *Shakespeare’s Political Pageant: Essays in Literature and Politics* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1996), 155–87. Jensen’s and my understandings of *Othello* overlap at a number of points, and her essay deserves a wider influence than it appears to have had. She shows strikingly little interest, however, in the kind of racial-cultural insider/outsider dynamics that criticism since the mid-1980s has found so thematically central to the play, and which it seems to me a more political-theory-oriented approach ought not to displace but to offer alternative ways of contextualizing.

(Venice). This sets the scene for a more expansive discussion of *Othello* in the chapter's third section, in which I propose that its tragedy arises out of the incommensurability of each mode of virtue to the demands and expectations of the other, staged in *Othello* as a kind of epistemological crisis. At the center of that crisis is the disarticulation of visible, dramatic action from public, political values; the loss of each domain's ability to inform and irradiate the other emerges, in Shakespeare's accounting, as the ultimate cost of the mutual estrangement of citizen and soldier.

How, in defining the virtue appropriate to the citizen, to structure the relationship between those capacities necessary to the maintenance of the republic's internal order and those necessary to its external defense is a characteristic and recurring problem for classical republicans.⁶ Historically, the dominant approach to this problem is represented by what we may call the *citizen-soldier tradition*.⁷ This tradition includes Aristotle, Polybius, Sallust, Bruni, Machiavelli, Harrington, and the early American anti-Federalists. It involves three basic intuitions about the mode of military organization appropriate to a republican polity. First, that for a republic's defense to rest upon anything *but* the totality of the citizen body, possessing its own arms and not being the clients of a magnate or a permanent military establishment, is to risk the loss of its independence. Second, that there is a virtuous circle linking war as conducted by citizens and politics as conducted by sometime soldiers: each actually *does the job better*, pragmatically speaking, than those engaged in one activity to the exclusion of the other; and this is because war, properly

⁶ The republican paradigm for relating security issues to issues of internal political balance has received a major contemporary reconstruction and defense in Deudney, *Bounding Power*.

⁷ There is unfortunately no comprehensive historical study of this tradition, but a succinct overview from a political-theory perspective, influenced by feminism, can be found in R. Claire Snyder, *Citizen-Soldiers and Manly Warriors: Military Service and Gender in the Civic Republican Tradition* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999). A contemporary academic exponent is the historian Andrew Bacevich; for a précis of his arguments see "Whose Army?," *Daedalus* 140.3 (2011), 122-34.

waged, sharpens the commitment to a common good irreducible to any aggregate of sectional interests. Third, that a people on whom the state relies for its arms will possess a moral and practical claim to political representation overwhelmingly difficult for elites to deny, so that societies in which this is the case are empirically most likely to sustain popular governments.

Venetian theory, as represented by Contarini, rejects the first two intuitions, and denies the third not as an empirical fact but as a normative desideratum. This puts it sharply at odds with the thought of Machiavelli, who in synthesizing two centuries of civic-humanist anti-mercenary polemic into an authoritative statement of the citizen-soldier ideology also codifies the antithesis of ancient Rome to contemporary Venice as a standard heuristic for assessing the merits and demerits of each position. The antithesis—with the value signs reversed—is almost as strongly marked in Contarini himself, and it proves strikingly durable in guiding assessments of Venice both abroad and at home, furnishing for instance the organizing paradigm of Paolo Paruta's widely influential philo-Venetian *Political Discourses* at the century's end.⁸ The Italian republicanism available to English Renaissance audiences consists, then, not in a single stream of thought but in at least two, splitting precisely at the point where they encounter the choice between the paired figures of the citizen-soldier and the mercenary professional.

As for how much this fact should matter to our understanding of the formation of a distinctively Anglophone republicanism, scholars have themselves been divided in their views. At one pole is Pocock, who argues that English republicanism came into being as a

⁸ Paruta, *Politick Discourses*, trans. Henry, Earl of Monmouth (London, 1657), esp. 111–23. William Bouwsma's comment is *a propos*: "a conviction that the two cities were comparable is, indeed, one of the most striking characteristics of Venetian political discussion ... for Paruta Rome and Venice were simply parallel instances of the same phenomenon which had developed in contrary directions." See Bouwsma, *Venice and the Defense of Republican Liberty*, 286. On the historical roots of Venice's self-perception as a sort of counter-Rome see Edward Muir, *Civic Ritual in Renaissance Venice* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1981), 18–22.

self-conscious combination of Machiavellian “military populism” and philo-Venetian aristocratic constitutionalism.⁹ Where the latter furnished patterns for institutionalizing balance among different agencies of government, the former consisted in a “theory of the possession of arms as necessary to political personality,” and the decisive English development was the application of this theory by Harrington and his followers to the conditions of an agrarian territorial state.¹⁰ Although critics writing about republican currents in English Renaissance literature routinely cite Pocock’s work, they often do so in such a way as to excise or at least to minimize the visibility of this line of argument, thus tacitly adopting a view of the subject closer to that found in Quentin Skinner’s equally influential *Foundations of Modern Political Thought*. Skinner firmly emphasizes the importance of arguments for a citizens’ army and against the use of mercenaries in the main traditions of Italian republicanism. Yet he treats these arguments with a certain condescension: they amount to an “almost hackneyed claim” made by men who “resolutely refused to see” its lack of practical significance.¹¹ Happily, we are told, thinkers based in the northern monarchies, “given the capacity of their rulers to raise massive national armies,” readily and universally recognized what was so obscure to Machiavelli, and “clearly regarded the alleged problem of mercenaries as little better than an irrelevance.”¹²

The premise of the present essay is that, at least in this one regard, Pocock’s narrative offers a better guide to understanding Shakespeare’s engagements with Italian political thought than does Skinner’s. This is not to say that Shakespeare advocated for a citizens’ militia and was an early exponent of the polemic against standing armies, nor

⁹ Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*, 333; cf. 218.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 386.

¹¹ Skinner, *Foundations*, I:163, 174

¹² *Ibid.*, I:200.

that he held views opposite to these. But if *Othello* does not imply any particular answers to pragmatic questions about the ordering of a society's military capacity, nonetheless the play does have something to say to us about the consequences of relegating such questions to the domain of the merely pragmatic. To a degree unusual among Shakespeare's tragedies, *Othello* does not depict a society's failure—the city itself is left serenely unshaken, if moderately queasy, by what transpires at the distance to which it has geographically and existentially removed its arms—so much as it counts the costs of that society's chosen way of defining and securing its success. If the accounting takes on a peculiar, and peculiarly Shakespearean, intensity, it is because its object turns out to be the half-remembered link between the soldier's actions and the forms of public value that might once have been staked to them, now rapidly moving past one another into mutual unintelligibility.

I

Othello opens with Iago's lengthy complaint at the promotion of Cassio, a complaint that is also a précis of his view of the relationship between citizen-statesmen ("great ones of the city") and military professionals at Venice (1.1.7-34).¹³ Iago's fundamental premise is that there is a bright line to be drawn between the city and the unequal but separate sphere of the army, which the city ought to command but not confuse itself with or presume fully to understand. "Toga'd consuls," his epithet for the civil authorities, is almost certainly a paraphrase of one of the better-known lines in Lewkenor's translation of Contarini, where (as we will see later) he speaks of the anomaly of "unweaponed men in

¹³ All references to Shakespeare's plays cite *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*, ed. David Bevington, 5th ed. (New York: Pearson Longman, 2004).

gownes” holding authority over men in arms.¹⁴ The implied sexual insult of Lewkenor’s turn of phrase is in turn transferred to Cassio, who according to Iago knows battle roughly as well as a “spinster.” Cassio and the senators are also plainly linked with one another in Iago’s mind, not only by their explicit equation as practitioners of “bookish theoric,” but also by the word “election,” suggesting the deliberative choosing of magistrates held up, by Contarini especially, as the glory of Venetian governance. Iago thus begins from a complex but clearly demarcated set of oppositions: practice versus theory; masculine versus effeminized; military versus civil. Yet, for all this, Iago is not deprecating the citizens’ authority—he assumes that left to themselves they would have given the commission to him—but lamenting that Othello has been allowed to bluster his way, “horribly stuffed with epithets of war,” to getting appointed as lieutenant a man who ironically belongs more to the city than to the camp.

The play’s opening monologue thus offers us something in retrospect unsurprising: Iago venting his disgust at what he regards as the preposterous and sexually charged crossing of a boundary he would vividly and loquaciously restore to view. What is perhaps surprising is that the boundary in question should have to do not with sanguinary purity but rather with professional specialization. Iago speaks for the self-containment of the military order, which will best carry out its tasks if its organization reflects exclusively its own internal standards and measures of merit, without reference to those which may happen to prevail in the broader society. The arguments are neither unfamiliar nor altogether implausible: a military too affected by civilian sensibilities, as Iago seems to think Othello is, will concede too much to those for whom war is an intellectual

¹⁴ Contarini, *Commonwealth and Government*, sig. A3.

abstraction; too much military influence in civilian politics will make it too easy for senators to be bamboozled by the false gravitas of celebrity generals such as Othello.

The intriguing thing is that these sentiments should be given voice at just the time and place where we “ought” to be hearing about the Moor’s miscegenated marriage, the boundary-crossing scandal of which is not even mentioned until Iago has already mapped out the play’s conceptual geography around the line dividing the sphere of military from that of civic activity. It may be impossible to say whether we should therefore read the terms of Iago’s opening speech as supplying him with the logical matrix for his subsequent vehemence against miscegenation, or instead read the latter as bringing to light the motives submerged beneath his general preference for separation over integration. Either way, though, the effect is to draw the play’s more overt concern with Othello’s status as a cultural alien into a mutually intensifying relation with the more typically republican problematic of military specialization and its potential to generate an alienated, potentially dangerous element standing over and against the citizen body at large. Indeed, the position to which Iago assigns Cassio, crossing in one direction between the opposed domains of war and civil society—as Othello’s influence with the senate crosses in the other—corresponds exactly to that which Machiavelli valorizes: the citizen-soldier who, unlike the professional, moves seamlessly between peacetime and wartime occupations, each informing the conduct of the other.¹⁵

Machiavelli’s basic argument in the *Art of War*, presented through his principal speaker Fabrizio Colonna, is that only the citizen, who has a distinct interest in resuming

¹⁵ John Draper, “Shakespeare and Florence and the Florentines,” *Italica* 23.4 (1946), 291, speculates that Iago’s seemingly gratuitous identification of Cassio as a Florentine is meant as an allusion to Machiavelli the military theorist.

his peacetime vocation, can truly conduct war in a proper fashion.¹⁶ The professional, by contrast, has a fundamental incentive to try to prolong hostilities while minimizing the cost and danger to himself. Machiavelli's surprising but only apparently paradoxical conclusion is that a soldier who is so apt for war that he makes military service his permanent occupation is just as undesirable as one who has to be coerced into fighting. What one really wants are men who serve under a sort of compulsion, albeit a compulsion that collaborates with an internalized willingness to further the public good.¹⁷ To have a militia composed of such persons requires a thoroughgoing integration of military and civic orders. On the one hand, its objective condition is that the citizen-soldiers must be commanded by what Machiavelli's first English translator calls their "ordinary lord," meaning their duly constituted political authority, whether this is a prince or a representative of the commonwealth.¹⁸ In other words, the political relations characterizing society at large are to be carried over and replicated in the military. Its subjective condition, on the other hand, is that the people must *have* some notion of the public good, over and above the aggregate of their particular enterprises, each of which must be temporarily neglected while its practitioner goes to war. Machiavelli, without fully specifying how such a thing is to be inculcated, clearly connects it with the experience of wartime service, so that there is a converse movement whereby the cohesion and discipline characterizing military society are carried over and replicated in civil life.¹⁹

¹⁶ Machiavelli, *The Art of War*, trans. Ellis Farnsworth, intro. Neal Wood (New York: Da Capo, 1965). For a very different view of its relationship to *Othello*, see Ken Jacobsen, "Iago's Art of War: The 'Machiavellian Moment' in *Othello*," *Modern Philology* 106.3 (2009), 497-529. I think Jacobsen has mistaken the thrust of Machiavelli's arguments for the distinctive value of citizen armies, and so also misses the significance of his consistent singling out of Venice for criticism.

¹⁷ Machiavelli, *Art of War*, 29-30.

¹⁸ Ibid., 26-7. Compare *The Arte of Warre, Written First in Italian by Nicholas Machiavell*, trans. Peter Whitehorne (London, 1562), 12.

¹⁹ Machiavelli, *Art of War*, 40-2.

War does not so much make volatile and unruly citizens, as many Renaissance commentators allege, as it makes potentially self-dealing individuals into citizens in the first place. (The Machiavelli of the *Discourses* has a more complicated take on unruliness, as we will see later on.) Venice, therefore, features for Machiavelli as a standard negative example: for all their apparent abundance of caution in forestalling a military coup, the Venetians are actually both weaker and more vulnerable than they think, the safest policy in the long run being to avoid putting one's arms in the hands of a private, special interest.²⁰ The Florentine emerges as the logical foil to the Iago of the opening speech, even as the ensign himself starts to look like a strangely conventional defender of Venetian practices.

This is not, however, the only relevance to *Othello* of the *Art of War*. Machiavelli's treatise and Shakespeare's play converge not just on the *topic* of the relationship between civilian and military activity, but also on the *formal location* upon which the dramatic interest of that relationship is focused. That formal location comes into view when we consider that, in spite of his self-consciously ironic title, Machiavelli's real interest is in exempting war from the general class of "arts," and insisting that those who engage in it not do so as an "art." An "art," in the relevant sense, is a self-sustaining vocation continuously practiced by specialists, like farming or weaving or surgery. Machiavelli's proposal is that princes and republics should reserve the art of war to themselves, as a public monopoly, and forbid their subjects or citizens from making it their own. War is the legitimate profession of everybody, taken collectively, and the legitimate profession of nobody, taken as individuals.²¹ The crucial point is this: Only the citizen really conducts

²⁰ Ibid., 32. Compare the well-known comments on Venice in Chapter 12 of *The Prince*, 51-2.

²¹ This irony is more palpably apparent in the Whitehorne translation than it is in modern editions. Consider, for instance, the passage that Farnsworth renders:

war as an affair of discrete *actions*, arising from particular circumstances and terminating in the achievement of particular ends, whereas for the professional war is really an eccentric species of *production*, turning on the efficiency with which one engagement can generate the conditions for another.²² Machiavelli, therefore, becomes intensely interested in what happens at the moment when action is potentially completed and a campaign brought to a close. The citizen packs up, celebrates a triumph, and goes back to his farm. The professional attempts to reframe the campaign as still ongoing, angles for a new contract, or finds another way to prolong wartime by setting himself up as a freebooter.²³

Othello is likewise a text strangely obsessed with what happens when a term of military service reaches its endpoint. Or, rather, it appears obsessed with the question of just what an endpoint *is* in such a context, refracting the moment into various dramatic, institutional, and psychological aspects so as to restage it again and again. Beginning with Iago's counterfactual—"the state ... cannot with safety cast him," implying that otherwise they would—*Othello* is decommissioned in fact, fantasy, or ritual symbolism at on at least seven different occasions (1.1.146-8). These include, of course, his famous "Farewell" to "the big wars," in which he declares that "*Othello's* occupation's gone" (3.3.347-59), prematurely but presciently anticipating Lodovico's arrival with letters ordering him home and replacing him with Cassio (4.1.228-9). To these we need to add the actual effective end

I reply that since war is not an occupation by which a man can at all times make an honorable living, it ought not to be followed as a business by anyone but a prince or a governor of a commonwealth; and if he is a wise man, he will not allow any of his subjects or citizens to make that his only profession. (14)

Whitehorne has:

Whereupon I say, as this being an art, whereby men of no manner of age can live honestly, it cannot be used for an art, but of a common weale or of a kingdome: and the one and the other of these, when they be well ordeyned, will never content to any their Citizens, or Subjectes, to use it for any arte. (6^v)

²² On the action-production dialectic in Shakespearean dramatics see Richard Halpern, "Eclipse of Action: *Hamlet* and the Political Economy of Playing," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 59.4 (2008), 450-82.

²³ Machiavelli, *Art of War*, 14-19.

of the Cyprus campaign, when news comes of the apparently total destruction of the Ottoman fleet, an event described by Othello himself in not less than metaphysical terms as a threshold between states of war and peace, a metamorphosis of chaos into an almost intolerably satisfying calm (2.1.178-88). Then, finally, there is the formal stripping of “power” and “command” delayed until the play’s last moments (5.2.330), long enough to be preceded by not one but two symbolic depositions in which Othello loses his sword (242, 286). His suicide, too, might be added as an eighth decommissioning, taking as it does the form of a report of service to the state that literally produces its own “bloody period” (355).

One character alone ventures an account of what will happen to Othello *after* the end of his term. Iago tells Roderigo that “he goes into Mauretania and taketh away with him the fair Desdemona, unless his abode be lingered here by some accident” (4.2.224-5). There is no reason to believe this is true, but neither is there any particular reason to take it for a lie, and the very fact that Iago supposes it a plausible story might lead us to raise some interesting questions about the three-way configuration of Othello’s status in Venice, his pecuniary interests, and the late cessation of hostilities with the Turks. Making use of a combination of Machiavelli’s skepticism about mercenaries and Iago’s cynicism about Othello, one could, in fact, arrive at a reasonably coherent reading of the play in which Othello’s half-conscious motivation from Act Two forward is to manufacture a sense of general paranoia so as to make believe that the crisis that occasioned his employment is still somehow going on. This would explain, for instance, why after the destruction of the fleet he is the only character to make any mention of the Turks for the remainder of the play.

I find oddly tempting this notion of Othello as a sort of one-man military-industrial complex, fabricating conflicts not really meant to be won. But while such a line

of speculation has the heuristic value of reminding us that *Othello* is a play about a state's military apparatus, set in a time that can only be called "the postwar," ultimately it is the wrong track to go down. Thinking through Machiavelli-type questions about what the professional soldier will do at the moment when his work is no longer in demand is precisely what Shakespeare declines to do, or flirts with only briefly and through the imagination of Iago. Indeed, Iago's fancifully eponymous dispatching of the Moor to Mauretania epitomizes how the play generally recasts Machiavelli's temporal disconnect, between war as discrete action orchestrated by the community as a whole and war as vocational "art" pursued continuously by a segment of it, as the spatial dislocation of war's representative, Othello, to a point outside the community entirely. The question of whether the soldier will or will not go home is enfolded into, even as it continues to inform, the question of whether anything can count for Othello as a home to go to—as in this passage in which he tries to explain why it should not bother anyone that he has yet to put down his weapons:

Be not afraid, though you do see me weaponed:
Here is my journey's end, here is my butt
And very sea-mark of my utmost sail.
Do you go back dismayed? 'Tis a lost fear:
Man but a rush against Othello's breast,
And he retires. Where should Othello go? (5.2.265-70)

Othello claims, in other words, that his retention of the signs of a professional martial identity, beyond the point at which he is authorized to exercise it, is not so much a potential threat to the community as it is a way of confirming the finality of his separation from it.

Othello thus generates a nearly obsessive awareness of the impermanence of military action, but rather than using the campaign's end to dramatize the difference

between the citizen-soldier's capacity to transition out of wartime and the professional's need to sustain it, Shakespeare instead turns our attention to the social alienation experienced by a soldier who finds himself, perforce, a foreigner. Put another way, the tragedy is not so much about *returning* to Venice as it is about *being* on Cyprus. This very fact makes it, paradoxically, an eminently "Venetian" story. Venice, by codifying the soldier's dislocation, enforcing it in geographical as well as constitutional form, offers itself as the ideal site for thought-experiments around the place, or placelessness, of military activity in the social organism.²⁴

To see such experimenting at work, let us turn from Iago's invective against Cassio to Brabantio's against Othello. Brabantio, of course, is concerned with literal and not figurative miscegenation between representatives of Venetian arms and Venetian civility. Just how far that fact, in itself, bothers him turns out to be intriguingly difficult to say. Iago and Roderigo deal in lurid representations of Othello's bodily difference, and it is from them that we hear of "the gross clasps of a lascivious Moor," and so on (1.1.125). Brabantio's language affects a genteel distance: his theme is that a nice Venetian girl like Desdemona wouldn't have done a thing like *that*, and he leaves it largely to others to fill in exactly what makes "that" so improbable (and thus to his mind unacceptable) a choice.

For I'll refer me to all things of sense,
If she in chains of magic were not bound
Whether a maid so tender, fair, and happy,
So opposite to marriage that she shunned
The wealthy curlèd darlings of our nation,
Would ever have, t'incur a general mock,
Run from her guardage to the sooty bosom
Of such a thing as thou—to fear, not to delight. (1.2.64-71)

²⁴ Paul A. Jorgensen, *Shakespeare's Military World* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1956), 208-314, remains the standard and indispensable starting-point for discussion of how Shakespeare thought about the soldier's place in society.

“The sooty bosom / Of such a thing as thou” is nasty, as audibly nasty as Brabantio will get. Taken along with his later exclamation—“To fall in love with what she feared to look on!” (1.3.99)—it conjures up an image of Othello as physically disgusting, even grotesque. The anathema appears to have fallen on the Moor’s bodily presence, on his self-evidently “racial” characteristics.

And yet that self-evidence is qualified by Brabantio’s need to supply an immediate explanatory gloss: “to fear, not to delight.” Here, Othello seems instead to have become one term in a sort of allegorical contrast between qualities roughly divisible into the spheres of war and of peace. This reading gains support as it sends us back to the “wealthy curlèd darlings” who stand in as Othello’s opposite numbers. The junior varsity of Iago’s “toga’d consuls,” they are likewise imagined in terms of physical features that have less to do with ethnic identity than with a kind of cultivated distension that distinguishes pacific, commercial society from that organized for and by war. This is by no means to say that Brabantio would have had exactly the same reaction were Desdemona to have married a white *condottiere*. It is only that his expressions of racial animus appear not clearly detached from but ambiguously compounded by a logically separate type of occupational prejudice, allowing him to shift back and forth between thinking of Othello as literally frightening in his person and thinking of him as evoking “fear” as the defining quality of what stands outside and against a demilitarized society. *Othello’s* Venice, it seems, is conceived as a place where *soldiers* attract the same mixture of contempt, envy, curiosity, paranoia, armchair theorizing, sexual fantasy, and social snobbery that *foreign races* do in Europe at large.²⁵

²⁵ This might be seen as an imaginative extrapolation rather than a total departure from more conventional English and European attitudes. J.R. Hale has demonstrated the degree to which changes in Renaissance warfare tended to heighten the sense that soldiers constituted an essentially separate society with its own

Interesting as that may be, though, as breaking critical news its importance appears *prima facie* limited. As Dennis Britton resignedly notes in a recent essay, “Othello as outsider is such a critical commonplace that it is impossible to fully document.”²⁶ And so we have, *inter alia*, Othello as black African and rebuke to apartheid (Martin Orkin); as colonial “honorary white” (Ania Loomba); as *mestizo* from “the borderlands” (Carol Thomas Neely); as feminized representative of “monstrous” sexuality (Karen Newman); as woman-hating class aspirant (Peter Stallybrass); as crypto-Turk (Daniel Vitkus); as Judeo-Islamic legalist (Julia Lupton); and, perhaps most inventively, as *converso* done dirty by Spanish Catholic chauvinists (Eric Griffin).²⁷ Adding “Othello as military professional in a pacific polity” to the list might at this point do little more than confirm, without doing anything to explain, its apparently indefinite extensibility.²⁸ Nor would doing so in any obvious way explain, rather than merely describe, the facts with which all of these analyses have to contend: that Othello initially manages with seeming ease to transcend the alternately utilitarian and titillating uses official Venice has for him, then rapidly deteriorates into the worst possible caricature of what his detractors take him to be—paranoid, fickle, honor-obsessed, obtuse, inarticulate, and predatory. But framing the

quasi-national coherence, often providing a stronger point of personal identification than the states on behalf of which they marched. See Hale, *War and Society in Renaissance Europe, 1450-1620* (New York: St. Martin's, 1985), 127-52.

²⁶ Britton, “Re-‘turning’ *Othello*: Transformative and Restorative Romance,” *ELH* 78.1 (2011), 45n.3.

²⁷ Orkin, “Othello and the ‘Plain Face’ of Racism,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 38.2 (1987), 166-88; Loomba, *Gender, Race, Renaissance Drama* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1989), 38-64; Neely, “Circumscriptions and Unhousedness: *Othello* in the Borderlands,” in Deborah Barker and Ivo Kamps, eds., *Shakespeare and Gender: A History* (London: Verso, 1995), 302-15; Newman, “‘And wash the Ethiop white’: Femininity and the Monstrous in *Othello*,” in Jean Howard and Marion O’Connor, eds., *Shakespeare Reproduced: The Text in History and Ideology* (London: Methuen, 1987), 142-62; Stallybrass, “Patriarchal Territories: The Body Enclosed,” in Margaret Ferguson, Maureen Quilligan, and Nancy Vickers, eds., *Rewriting the Renaissance: The Discourses of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1986), 123-42; Vitkus, *Turning Turk*, 77-106; Lupton, *Citizen-Saints*, 103-23; Griffin, “Un-sainting James: Or, *Othello* and the ‘Spanish Spirits’ of Shakespeare’s Globe,” *Representations* 62 (1998), 58-99.

²⁸ This is more or less the view taken by Graham Holderness, who offers some astute remarks on the peculiarity of Othello’s status as a mercenary, but then goes on to assimilate this simply to a generalized notion of his “vagabond errancy.” See Holderness, *Shakespeare and Venice*, 90-4.

issue of “Othello as outsider” in this way does have one unique advantage: it allows us to connect that issue with the explicit, self-conscious account of the relation between *citizenship* and *exclusion* to be found in Shakespeare’s principal source for Venetian political theory; Contarini’s *Commonwealth and Government* will, in turn, offer some surprising resources for setting these old problems on a new basis.

II

Contarini’s account of the Venetian constitution as a perfect “mixture” or “temperature” of monarchy, aristocracy, and popular rule has been discussed in Chapter Two, but we should briefly recall its outlines before turning to the role played in it by the stipulation of a nonmilitary governing class. Society can be analyzed into a multiplicity of different potential centers of authority, which may be heuristically simplified to three: the single ruler; the small group of optimates unusually gifted with resources and prestige; and the enfranchised population as a whole. In Contarini’s hands this is an analysis of the participatory structure of an already delimited civic class, not in any sense an argument for the extension of participation beyond its bounds. In the usual course of things, a government will be constituted around one of the three possible centers of agency, but over time it will begin to look to its own parochial notion of the good, become obnoxious to society at large, and be overthrown by one of the other two. The only way to avoid a cycle of continual degeneration and instability, then, is to devise a system in which the one, the few, and the many can all claim authority at the same time and in such a measure that each neither predominates over nor is eclipsed by the others. Conversely, to have successfully devised such a system, to have included each social agent to the exactly

appropriate degree, is to have solved the fundamental political problem of avoiding “perturbation.”²⁹

Contarini takes it for granted that Venice has in fact well earned its epithet, *la Serenissima*: the city has had a uniquely long run without any notable internecine conflict, foreign invasion, or crisis in its governing institutions. For this the mixed constitution has been *necessary*, but not *sufficient*. Rome and Sparta had roughly the same thing, and those republics did not enjoy anything like Venice’s sublime imperturbability over time.³⁰ All genuine republics, Contarini asserts, take as their ultimate good the flourishing of their citizens in virtue. But there are different ways of defining what virtue consists in, and what typifies failed republics is their having treated military office as virtue’s paradigmatic expression; whereas in those capable of *sustaining* mixed government, a set that includes Venice and possibly Venice alone, military capacity is seen not as definitive of virtue but rather as a mere instrument “to be referred to the offices of peace.”³¹

There are, then, not just one but two distinct levels of constitutional argument in the *Commonwealth and Government*. One, as we have seen, is the analysis of Venice’s tripartite form of government, the success of which is attributed to its fulfilling criteria of balance and mathematical or musical harmony drawn from classical theory. This, in Contarini’s view, *is* the city, and it determines the aspirations and channels the behavior of those three thousand or so men who can with pride and justice identify themselves with its continuance. The other level of argument, however, is concerned with identifying and neutralizing whatever cannot be included in the city’s participatory structure, though subsisting in some kind of attenuated relationship with it. If the first is essentially an

²⁹ Contarini, *Commonwealth and Government*, 10-12.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 14.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 9, 14.

account of the forms of *inclusion*, determined by the premise that maximizing inclusion among the parts of a system is the best way to minimize disruptions to its functioning, the second is an account of how inimical elements can be *excluded*, without their returning for just that reason as disruptive, anti-homeostatic actors.

Contarini is not, in other words, interested in claiming that Venice is especially pacifist in its statecraft: you can do a hell of a lot of damage with a mere instrument. Likewise, he shows little to no interest in what the effects on the state might be of its commerce with soldiers belonging to other national cultures. Rather, the problem of the mercenary is in an important respect not different from that of the native-born commoners who fall below the level of leisure and disinterestedness necessary to join the political class. “For though the citie is the company of Citizens,” Contarini notes:

yet all those men whose travaile the Citie needeth, yea and that dwell within the walles thereof, are not generally to be reckoned in the number, nor registred in the right of citizens: for every citie standeth in neede of artificers, and many mercenarie people, and hired servants, of which none can truely be tearmed a citizen: for a citizen is a free man, but those are all servile, eyther privately or publikely: for mercenarie men & artificers, are all to be accounted as publique servants.³²

“Public service,” here effectively a pejorative, is a way of “dwelling in” the city without actually *being* the city, and in this regard the mercenary is seen simply as analogous to the rude mechanicals as well as the vulgar rich. But insofar as these groups are not given a direct formal role in the governing process, this must also mean that they are not incorporated into the Polybian synthesis, and thus remain a possible source of perturbation. With the commoners, though, this turns out not to be much of a problem. Their interests being understood as almost by definition economic, they can easily be

³² Ibid., 16-17. The passage is loosely modeled on Aristotle, *Politics*, 1278a.

neutralized by generous subsidies and social insurance programs.³³ The military magnate, however, raises issues of a qualitatively different sort: he presents to the Venetian nobility a plausible alternative mode of leadership and distinction in whose image they might well be tempted to fashion themselves. It is less, then, that this figure has to be excluded because he is foreign, than that he has to be foreign because his activity cannot safely be brought into the ensemble that composes the citizen.

Why, exactly, should this be? Contarini's answer rests upon three interlinked values, appeals to which are common across the whole of his treatise, with which the Venetian way of war must not be allowed to become inconsistent.³⁴ These are unanimity over faction; proceduralized impersonality over heroic individualism; and the city's stable self-containment over its openness to potential causes of mutability. In the first place, if Venice conducts wars to maintain or expand its territories, those who wage them will perforce spend long periods of "divorcement, as it were, from the civile life," in an insular world with its own modes of organization and standards of conduct.³⁵ This will, in itself, already erode the city's cultural unity, creating "a kinde of faction different and disjoined, from the other peaceable citizens." War, it seems, is really another country; and the Venetians employ mercenaries ultimately because they fear less to entrust warmaking power to foreigners than to entrust their own sons to its foreign ways.

But the problem ultimately transcends that of splitting the city into factional groups; rather, the military's tendency to act as a cultural centrifuge culminates in each

³³ Contarini, *Commonwealth and Government*, 140-1.

³⁴ On the question of how well Contarini's presentation of traditional Venetian approaches to military defense matches the historical reality, Michael Mallett and J.R. Hale, *The Military Organization of a Renaissance State: Venice, c.1400-1617* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1984), 330, conclude that the "myth," if in need of some qualification, contains a hard kernel of truth, particularly as regards the political class's being disabled from accepting military commands and discouraged from unapproved intercourse with soldiers.

³⁵ Contarini, *Commonwealth and Government*, 130.

war captain's coming to view himself almost as a faction of one. This fear makes most sense in the context of the high value Contarini sets on Venice's renunciation of the ethos of competitive virtuosity that counts for so much with, say, the Florentine civic humanists. The celebrated impersonality of the republic's electoral mechanisms has its cultural counterpart in the absence from its civic spaces of tributes to individual achievement, "no stately tombes erected, no military statues remaining, no stemmes of ships, no ensigns, no standards taken from their enemies."³⁶ War, to Contarini, is the inevitable corrosive of such a culture unless its influence is strictly circumscribed. At Rome, war bred "high and ambitious thoughts," engendering "strange effects in sundry of their Cittizens," and leading finally to Julius Caesar's scandalous disregard of senatorial authority; today, young Venetians' susceptibility to its blandishments has set off a creeping cultural rot that represents the one thing capable of subverting the city's equipoise.³⁷

The employment of mercenaries and the laws against citizens' assuming military commands having thus been presented as pillars of public order, it may initially seem curious that the same strictures do not altogether apply to naval service, which Contarini tends to present rather as in keeping with the Venetian character. A clue to the logic of the distinction appears, however, in the care he takes to describe the almost ritual disarming of galleys and disbanding of their crews at Istria, a far distance from the city itself.³⁸ The way of war appropriate to Venice, in other words, is one in which the ethical divide between the civil and the military domains can be reinscribed at the level of geographical fact. War and warriors are causes *par excellence* of perturbation and subversion of balance; the function of the Venetian constitution is to separate a

³⁶ Ibid., 6.

³⁷ Ibid., 131, 135.

³⁸ Ibid., 137.

harmonious, unperturbed inside from an outside caught up in the contention of individuals and the disorder of temporal events; the test of the fit between Venice's military apparatus and its public values is that each should lodge itself safely to either side of the dividing line.

We are now in a position to assess more fully the relation between this theoretical complex and the Machiavellian theory of the citizen-soldier. Both Contarini and Machiavelli look to a narrative of Roman history in which it is the development of the army into an autonomous center of interest that precipitates the republic's downfall. But they hold antithetical views of how such an event might have been forestalled. For Contarini, the fundamental answer is to hold the military apparatus at such a distance that it never has a chance to involve itself in the political system at all. Machiavelli's symmetrically opposite program, as we have seen, calls for integrating the state's military capacity so thoroughly into the structures of ordinary politics that it never has a chance to set itself apart as an independent agency. Where Machiavelli is engaged in setting out the practical requirements for such an integration, in the *Art of War*, his treatment of Venetian policies is straightforwardly polemical: he casts them as deeply counterproductive, if not in fact simply an expression of collective pusillanimity. In the *Discourses*, however, his consideration is more nuanced. Venice and Rome emerge as dialectical counterparts, each having developed arrangements appropriate to its own particular conception of the values against which the republic is to be measured.³⁹ Machiavelli still believes there are rational grounds on which the Roman option ought to be preferred. But given certain assumptions about the nature of the republic as a structure

³⁹ Machiavelli, *Discourses*, 121.

subsisting in time, and the ends it is capable of fulfilling, the Venetians are not wrong to claim the disarming of the citizenry as the crucial step in attaining their ideals.

If your main priority is permanence, Machiavelli concedes, you should indeed do what Venice has done: design a system capable of running without “animosities and tumults,” and then tenaciously police its boundaries so as to minimize changes that could compromise its perfection.⁴⁰ In other words, keep the political class small, disarmed, geographically protected, and distrusting of outsiders. All of this, Machiavelli thinks, will on the other hand make it impossible for your commonwealth to expand, and more broadly to exist in a world of action in response to new contingencies. What keeps the republic running is a capacity for self-corrective friction inseparable from the truculent, combative virtue of its people.⁴¹ Therefore you must arm the citizens and put up with animosities and tumults, for this is the fee that active virtue charges for its maintenance. The Rome Machiavelli envisions, indeed, is rather like a society in which Othello’s ambivalent effects in Act One would be precisely those of a citizen, not a foreigner: politically empowered even though outside the legally closed nobility, collaborating with the latter in a tense but ultimately productive relationship, in which the commoners’ pride and confidence stems from their profound sense of identity as the soldiers of a militant city, and in which it is explicitly understood that the tradeoff for periodically ugly airings of grievance is a flexibility and responsiveness to circumstances unmatched in countries where the political class is more narrowly restricted.

What emerges in the republican tradition, then, is a reasonably clear consensus view of the equal and opposite ethical qualities associated with the two polities. Venice is stable and serene, Rome dynamic and contentious. Venetian virtue lies in the preservation

⁴⁰ Ibid., 119, 122-3.

⁴¹ Ibid., 110-11.

of an original and still inviolate perfection. Roman virtue lies in the dynamic adjustment to an ever-expanding scale of mastery. The one is negative and passive, defined by the absence of irrational perturbation. The other is positive and active, defined by the reciprocal interplay of a capacity for internal self-control and a capacity for external self-assertion. The Venetian citizen preserves his identity by scrupulously observing the boundary between himself and the means of his own defense. The Roman citizen confirms his integrity by bearing arms on behalf of a community perpetually reconstructing itself through the exercise of freedom.

As we move from the Italian texts to their early English reception, we see that binary's implicit gendering, basically unremarked by Contarini and more subtly registered by Machiavelli, coming to determine more overtly the perception of what is at stake in it.⁴² The Address to the Reader that fronts Lewkenor's translation, for instance, shows him rather less interested than Contarini in the notion that Venice's system of government conforms to universal principles of political rationality. Indeed, it's not clear that for Lewkenor the respective agencies of one, few, and many comprise a *system* at all, so much as they present a cognitively overwhelming multiplicity of happy paradoxes: majesty with subjection, supreme power with incapacity for tyranny, public debate with perfect tranquility. This rather more arcane restatement of the case for the mixed state leads Lewkenor into three further "marvellous and miraculous considerations" concerning Venice, the first of which is its "monstrously strange" physical setting. The sense of literal topsy-turvydom, of solid structures rising from the sea, is clearly meant to carry over into Lewkenor's second prodigy, which is:

⁴² On this aspect of Machiavelli see the exemplary study by Hanna Fenichel Pitkin, *Fortune Is a Woman: Gender and Politics in the Thought of Niccolò Machiavelli* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1984); also Snyder, *Citizen-Soldiers*, 15-43.

that unweaponed men in gownes should with such happinesse of successe
give directions & law to many mightie and warlike armies both by sea and
land ... and long robed citizens to bee served, yea and sued unto for
entertainment by the greatest princes & peeres of Italy.⁴³

There is nothing really like this sort of language in Contarini himself, for whom it is perfectly natural to suppose that the body of citizens, in whom the good life itself is reposed, should have at their disposal and command what is after all a mere instrument to the preservation of that life. If other commonwealths have failed to separate the two in the same manner, that only goes to explain why they have been prey to perturbation and not enjoyed the longevity of *la Serenissima*.

Lewkenor follows Contarini in linking Venice's demilitarization with its imperturbability, but on entirely different logical grounds. They now go together because each manifests the city's choice of an essentially feminine mode of virtue. For thirteen hundred years, Lewkenor writes, "this royall Citie" (*sic!*) has stayed "perpetually flourishing & unblemished," notwithstanding the predatory designs of "sundry & mighty kinges and Emperours being enamoured with her beauty and goodnesse"; from these providence has "kept her like a pure and untouched virgine, free from the taste or violence of any forraine encroachment."⁴⁴ Venice is at once unweaponed and inviolable, a conjuncture that baffles Lewkenor's sense of geopolitics at the same time that it comports with his sense of the gendered distribution of active and passive virtues. Indeed, it appears that (at least for the moment) Venice for him has come to signify less a specific type of political organization than a displaced instance of the paradox represented by female rule. By the close of the Address, then, what has been most sharply articulated is a notion of

⁴³ Lewkenor, "To the Reader," in *Commonwealth and Government*, sig. A3.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, sig. A3^v.

Venice as embodying a distinctive position in a sort of psychosexual allegory of the types of political virtue.

In the writings of James Harrington and other republican thinkers of the later seventeenth century among whom the Venice-Rome antithesis will continue to feature prominently, it will come to stand for a conceivably soluble strategic problem as much as a choice of existential personae.⁴⁵ But as for Shakespeare's time, the associations that antithesis could be counted on to evoke, as well as the degree to which it had established itself as part of the cognitive landscape of English political thought, are best indicated by a work appearing a decade before *Othello*, Richard Beacon's *Solon His Follie*. Much of this 1594 treatise on Irish reform is directly cribbed from Machiavelli, and when Beacon comes to rehearse the distinction between "they which shall aime at a common-weale peaceable & permanent" and "such as shal ayme at honour and glory," he flatly asserts that between these there can be no middle way.⁴⁶ Commonwealths are either circumscribed and stable, such as Venice, or they are socially inclusive and strategically aggressive, such as Rome. This is a choice which it is necessary—and, it is also implied, possible—for each polity to make once and for all. Nor does Beacon leave any doubt that the grounds for choosing are fundamentally characterological, gendered, and bound up in how far one places a primitive value on the commission of memorable and glorious actions. Neither type may endure forever, but their decline is not "after one manner," the one falling "by effeminacie, ease, rest, and security," the other "for that the citizens are rendred bold" by "continual use and training in military discipline." The advantage of the martial and populist republic

⁴⁵ Harrington, *The Commonwealth of Oceana*, in *The Political Works of James Harrington*, ed. J.G.A. Pocock (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1977), esp. 272-6. For an overview of the larger tradition see David Armitage, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000), 125-45.

⁴⁶ Beacon, *Solon His Follie*, ed. Clare Carroll and Vincent Carey (Binghamton: Renaissance English Text Society, 1996), 86-7.

is ultimately its citizens' capacity to "hold themselves upright in actions of great importance," and the point of this is not so much to survive as it is to ensure a good death, leaving behind "the image of true glory, as a lively picture, to invest a perpetuall memory of a worthy and excellent Institution."

III

There is, then, a consistent paradigm in the literature of republicanism by which demilitarized citizen bodies, political exclusivity, and passive or retentive virtues, on the one hand, are linked together and identified iconically with contemporary Venice. As, on the other hand, militarized citizenship, political inclusiveness, and active or assertive virtues are linked and identified with ancient Rome. It becomes apparent, in other words, that the military role is not simply one identity among others (black, Moor, Muslim, Jew...) of which Venice might happen to be exclusive rather than inclusive; rather, the nonmilitary character of Venetian citizenship in some sense defines its relation to exclusiveness *as a category*. Where the republic is instituted to the end of preserving a perfectly ordered system of internal relations, rather than that of achieving dominance over the potentially destabilized and destabilizing relations between inside and outside, the citizen class will be more tightly constricted numerically, conceptually, and geographically.⁴⁷ This aspect of what might be called Renaissance republicanism's comparative sociology of political capacities might give us a new way of talking about the striking feature of *Othello* criticism we noted earlier, namely, that the formal categories of

⁴⁷ For an illuminating discussion of how the Venetian patriciate's fascination with the value of endurance arose out of an increasing awareness of geopolitical constriction and a concomitant need to redefine its "liberty" in a strictly conservative sense, see Alberto Tenenti, "The Sense of Space and Time in the Venetian World of the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries," in J.R. Hale, *Renaissance Venice* (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1973), 17-46.

“insider” and “outsider” persist much more durably across different accounts of the play than does any particular content that might fill them out.

For if what Venice is ultimately seen to exclude is not so much any particular group as it is *action* itself—more precisely, if Venice’s exclusions and inclusions are determined by the decision to constitute the republic as a system for the preserving of balance rather than as a stage for the attaining of glory in action—then the problem of Othello’s initial success and subsequent unraveling takes on a different aspect as well. The problem, on this view, is not to define the exogenous causal factor explaining why Othello finds himself alienated from the record of action that might otherwise qualify him for citizenship. Rather, it is to show how what happens in *Othello* might count as revealing that record, and its associated mode of personality, to be the very basis of his alienation from the community for which he has acted. This brings us to the antithesis between a “masculine” virtue that discloses itself in memorable, visible actions and a “feminine” virtue that does not. For *these* certainly *are* terms by which one might give a description of what happens in *Othello*. Iago, we might say, compels Othello to become aware that his marriage depends upon his partnership with a virtue that cannot be known, displayed, judged, valued in a way that would satisfy him of its reality—and, perhaps, to become aware that his own virtue is in its own way equally uncreditable in the eyes of the other. *Othello*’s contribution to the debate about Venice and Rome, I propose, is to stage a dialectical confrontation between their antithetical modes of virtue, presenting that confrontation in the form of an epistemological crisis overtaking the protagonists’ marriage.

It may be useful to begin with Shakespeare’s notion of republican Rome as a point of orientation, for a couple reasons. First, Victoria Kahn has, building on scholarship

indicating that *Coriolanus* may have been written with Machiavelli's *Discourses* in mind, suggested that if so, the Machiavelli in question is specifically the one who privileged Rome's conflictual over Venice's consensual politics; this raises the question of what such a view of Rome might tell us in turn about Shakespeare's view of Venice.⁴⁸ Second, *Coriolanus*'s attention to the relation between arms and political order in early Rome is at once so overt and so sophisticated that even a brief consideration of how the theme is treated there may light up some notable points of contact and contrast with *Othello*. One such point is fairly obvious: Othello is a mercenary, and Coriolanus evidently would like to become one. That is, if we take "a mercenary" to mean not only someone who refuses to raise himself from fighting for gain to fighting for political ends, but also someone who refuses to, as he sees it, lower himself to fighting for merely political ends when he might instead fight simply to confirm the absolute and primitive value of himself.⁴⁹ The two protagonists have, in effect, opposite problems: Venice accords Othello no opportunity to cash out his personal exploits in political currency; Rome accords Coriolanus no opportunity to do anything else. At one level, of course, *Coriolanus* can be read as a study in the tension between Rome as a society organized for war and Rome as a society organized for the preservation of political balance (put another way, between what the republic requires for freedom from external domination and what it requires for freedom from internal hierarchy).⁵⁰ But the crucial thing is that the play's conflicts arise against the

⁴⁸ Kahn, *Machiavellian Rhetoric: From the Counter-Reformation to Milton* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1994), 48-54, 119-24; Anne Barton, "Livy, Machiavelli, and Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*," *Shakespeare Survey* 38 (1985), 115-30.

⁴⁹ Such is roughly Allan Bloom's view of Othello; see his "Cosmopolitan Man and the Political Community: *Othello*," in Bloom and Harry Jaffa, *Shakespeare's Politics* (New York: Basic Books, 1964), 35-74.

⁵⁰ Many critics read the play's politics in these terms: recent examples include Cathy Shrank, "Civility and the City in *Coriolanus*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 54.4 (2003), 406-23; Rita Banerjee, "The Common Good and the Necessity of War: Emergent Republican Ideals in Shakespeare's *Henry V* and *Coriolanus*," *Comparative Drama*

background of a political system whose ordinary workings are intended to produce an integral synthesis of the two spheres.⁵¹ Coriolanus is genuinely horrified at the implication that his deeds might have been done “for” the judgment and approbation of the electorate, but nonetheless even he does not seem to imagine that such deeds could lead to anything but standing for consul. Conversely, the plebs turn out to be basically right in suspecting that failing to elect Coriolanus is not much of an option, since the entire Roman system depends on military talent’s being cultivated and succored through elevation to political office.

Coriolanus identifies this constitutional situation with a specific dramaturgical correlative, namely the institution of the triumph. As Anthony Miller points out in his useful book on triumphs in the Renaissance, since the New Historicism it has been a scholarly habit to associate triumphal culture with absolutism, but historically this is somewhat anomalous.⁵² There is, in fact, a very long tradition, exponents of which include Machiavelli, Montesquieu, and Gibbon, of seeing in the Roman triumph a definitively republican mode of theatrical representation.⁵³ At one level this simply reflects the historical fact that the triumph was a crucial and regularized institution under the republic and fell into etiolation and irrelevance after Augustus—a development that Shakespeare himself goes out of his way to pinpoint in *Antony and Cleopatra* through the

40.1 (2006), 29-49; and, in a rather more high-theoretical mode, Nichole Miller, “Sacred Life and Sacrificial Economy: Coriolanus in No-Man’s-Land,” *Criticism* 51.2 (2009), 263-310.

⁵¹ This is a basic theme of Paul Cantor’s still immensely valuable *Shakespeare’s Rome: Republic and Empire* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1976), esp. 55-77.

⁵² Miller, *Roman Triumphs and Early Modern English Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), 13-15. Discussion of *Coriolanus* appears on 136-40. Miller notes that what Caius Martius receives is technically an *ovatio* and not a triumph, which was restricted to those already of consular rank, but he shows nonetheless that in a larger sense the play “makes the politics of triumph its problematic center” (137).

⁵³ Machiavelli, *Art of War*, 17; Montesquieu, *Considerations on the Causes of the Greatness of the Romans and their Decline*, trans. David Lowenthal (New York: Free Press, 1965), 24; Edward Gibbon, “Upon the Triumphs of the Romans,” *Miscellaneous Works of Edward Gibbon*, ed. John Holroyd, Earl of Sheffield (London, 1837).

figure of Ventidius.⁵⁴ The deeper intuition is that the triumph works to hold up the *imperator's* actions for the consideration and appreciation of those on whose behalf they were taken: action is not glorious unless it serves the city's common good; but what is good for the city is in part that it should offer occasions for the exemplary citizen to attain glory in the sight of his fellows. This is the ideal limned in Cicero's remarks on the triumph, restated at length in the *quattrocento* humanists' praise of the citizen-soldier, and rejected with great vehemence by Coriolanus.⁵⁵ For what ultimately horrifies Coriolanus about the staging of his actions is that it makes them unavoidably and unequivocally public property, denies them any significance independent of their answerability to public values—values that the political system as a whole, *plebs* included, is entitled freely to determine.

Against this background, the seemingly simple fact that *Othello*, by contrast, never actually returns to Venice following the Turks' demise begins to acquire a sharper significance. In the Roman play, the theater space is itself mimetic of the political institutions that mediate between Coriolanus's actions and their judging public. In *Othello*, no such thing is possible because public values and martial actions have been so comprehensively assigned to separate spheres. And this leads to the following intuition: For Shakespeare, the distinction between the two kinds of republic and their concomitant modes of virtue is ultimately to be understood *metadramatically*, as a matter of their respective relations to the possibility of dramatic representation. Relevant here are the claims recently made by a number of critics that Shakespeare shares Hannah Arendt's notion that the disclosure of persons to one another through dramatic action is the *sine*

⁵⁴ *Antony and Cleopatra*, 3.1.1-38. For a good introduction to the ritual's history see Mary Beard, *The Roman Triumph* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap, 2007).

⁵⁵ Cicero, *De Officiis*, 1.78. For the *quattrocento* humanists, see the extensive contextual study by C.C. Bayley, *War and Society in Renaissance Florence: The De Militia of Leonardo Bruni* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1961).

qua non of politics as such.⁵⁶ But I think that for Shakespeare this is not so much as a matter of the ontology of politics as of its historical sociology, one in which the place of arms in relation to the civic body is taken to be the decisive variable.

At Rome the republic constitutes itself as a structure for the display of individual and individuating actions, and it is through the dramatically adjudicated performance of such actions that individuals in turn assume a position of relative significance within that structure. For such a society the challenge is to figure out how to hold something apart from the universal exposure of all values to the test of the political stage, to define a sphere of virtue not commensurable with the relentless publicity of action and judgment.⁵⁷ At Venice the republic constitutes itself as a body deploying action outwardly and instrumentally but remaining untransformed by it, conserving its rational structure over and against the force of particular and perturbing actions. For such a society the challenge is, rather, to figure out how any value can be raised to the level of dramatic confirmation at all, how virtue can be visibly affirmed and distinguished from corruption, given its inaptitude to be disclosed through the deeds of any particular person.

Iago's posing of just such a challenge to Othello hits the Moor especially hard because he is so volubly committed to the notion that all social relations depend upon one's knowledge of another's virtue, and that the natural medium of such knowledge is disclosure through visible action. In response to Iago's initial insinuations Othello insists that he will neither fear any depreciation of his own "merits," "for she had eyes, and chose me," nor will he derogate from hers for anything short of direct revelation: "No, Iago,/ I'll

⁵⁶ Halpern, "Eclipse of Action"; Paul Kottman, *A Politics of the Scene* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2008); Julia Reinhard Lupton, *Thinking with Shakespeare: Essays on Politics and Life* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2011).

⁵⁷ Rome's reputation as a singularly public-facing ethical culture has been the subject of much discussion among Shakespeareans: for contrasting evaluations see Gary Miles, "How Roman Are Shakespeare's Romans?," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 40.3 (1989), 257-83; Coppélia Kahn, *Roman Shakespeare: Warriors, Wounds, and Women* (London: Routledge, 1997), 77-109.

see before I doubt; when I doubt, prove;/ And on the proof, there is no more but this.” (3.3.203-5). Iago’s peculiar genius resides partly in his capacity to make such a moment of “proof” appear to be beyond the level of merely human powers of discernment while simultaneously affirming Othello’s conviction that it is the irreplaceable ground of the assurance without which no human relation can be sustained.

I know our country disposition well;
In Venice they do let God see the pranks
They dare not show their husbands; their best conscience
Is not to leave’t undone, but keep’t unknown. (215-18)

One might take from this the implication that one who could see and know would have to be in the position of God; or one might take it that our confidence in our social relations must be founded on something less than the definitive certainty of visibly realized actions. As Katharine Maus has nicely demonstrated, Othello applies both implications to himself, without noticing the contradiction in attempting to make them converge on the same epistemological subject.⁵⁸ The play thus begins to resemble a judicial ordeal, Othello attempting to contrive situations in which the “essence that’s not seen” (4.1.16) will somehow be conjured into dramatic and forensic space, if not as action—“It were a tedious difficulty, I think,/ To bring them to that prospect” (3.3.413-14)—then as tokens that he can accept as substitutes so long as they fulfill the minimal condition of making “a scene.”⁵⁹ From this impulse there follows the familiar call-and-response: the demand for “ocular proof,” Iago’s barnyard *occupatio* (“It is impossible you should see this,/ Were they as prime as goats, as hot as monkeys...”), the dream, the promise of the handkerchief, the dumb-show with Cassio staged for Othello’s edification.

⁵⁸ Maus, *Inwardness and Theater in the English Renaissance* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1995), 120.

⁵⁹ The suggestion that its accusations and “proofs” give the play something of the atmosphere of “a setting of judicial torture” appears in Stanley Cavell, “Othello and the Stake of the Other,” *Disowning Knowledge in Six Plays of Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1987), 140-1.

So far this is largely familiar terrain for *Othello* critics. But consider now how the misalignment between the sort of thing Othello wishes to see and the manner in which he expects to see it is set in a new context by his famous “Farewell” speech, in which he identifies his loss of mental composure with the end of his “occupation”:

Farewell the tranquil mind! Farewell content!
Farewell the plumèd troops and the big wars
That makes ambition virtue! Oh, farewell!
Farewell the neighing steed and the shrill trump,
The spirit-stirring drum, th’ear-piercing fife,
The royal banner, and all quality,
Pride, pomp, and circumstance of glorious war!
And O you mortal engines, whose rude throats
Th’immortal Jove’s dread clamors counterfeit,
Farewell! Othello’s occupation’s gone. (3.3.363-73)

This is the one point in the play at which a character speaks directly in the idiom of classical republicanism: “the big wars/ That makes ambition virtue” could virtually have come from the pen of, say, Leonardo Bruni.⁶⁰ It is a slightly incongruous presence in a speech otherwise crowded with *stuff*, especially considering that all this “pomp” represents external accompaniments of office of precisely the sort to which an over-attachment might cause virtue to revert into ambition. But it is immediately following this that Othello takes his stand upon ocular proof, and so perhaps it is not a coincidence that the war of which he mourns the virtue-making powers should be defined by its sense of perceptual immediacy and sheer public-facing pomposity. We might even say that Othello idealizes to the point of fetishizing precisely that which disgusts Coriolanus: the possibility of public virtue’s enthrallment to the conditions of its own publicity, its

⁶⁰ Compare the paired speeches, by the good *miles* and by the indignant *patria* reproving a bad one, that close Bruni’s *De Militia*, available in *The Humanism of Leonardo Bruni: Selected Texts*, ed. and trans. Gordon Griffiths, James Hankins, and David Thompson (Binghamton: Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies, 1987), 127-45.

aptitude for being set on display. Othello is not, I take it, lamenting the end of the profession of arms so much as the disappearance or defuncting of what we might call the episteme of martial virtue. That is, the episteme in which the demand that virtue confirm itself can be answered by offering a record of particular, memorable actions, capable of being staged or re-staged in the spaces of public judgment for the sake of their doers' just valuation. Instead, Othello now finds himself thrust into a situation in which the demand has retained its force but its intended object cannot answer in the terms in which it has been posed.⁶¹

I am suggesting that *Othello* shows traces of something almost like nostalgia for the specifically *dramatic* dimension of the ideal depicted as contested but mentally dominant in *Coriolanus*, in which martial heroism and pluralist politics are bound in a mutually sustaining and mutually restraining relationship, whereby the political structure must open itself to the force of the individual's display of virtue in action, but the content of such virtue must itself be informed by goals and values arising out of political deliberation. In back of my suggestion is the broader proposal that for Shakespeare the costs and benefits of a disarmed citizenry are counted by measuring the distance it is obliged to travel from such an ideal, and that assaying the stage's capacity in different contexts to mediate between individual action and political structure is Shakespeare's way of conducting the measurement. I would like to conclude by bringing these thoughts to bear on a reading of Othello's suicide, in which he presents something like a triumph *manquée*, convening official Venice to witness his reenactment of the prodigious deeds he claims to have done on behalf of "the state," and asking that his status be revalued

⁶¹ Maus, *Inwardness and Theater*, offers some wonderfully suggestive comments on Othello's "inappropriately applying to Desdemona the conditions by which he defines himself," and adds that his failing is that of "making the beloved comprehensible as a version of oneself: fair warrior, captain's captain, general's general" (123); she does not, however, press the point in the way I am doing here.

accordingly. Because Othello's suicide is also at the core of the account of the play given by Julia Lupton, this will have the added benefit of allowing me to articulate something of what is at stake in the difference between our approaches.

Lupton's reading of *Othello* begins from the premise that the play's Venice stands for the world of Pauline Christianity, caught between its parochialist and its cosmopolitan drives. But Venice gives this dynamic a twist because it also possesses a republican "citizenship structure," which empirically speaking includes some and excludes others, but which, being "structurally predicated on the possibility of pluralism," acts as the concrete vehicle by which the city will move toward a closer approximation of its own universal aspirations, opening itself to those previously set apart.⁶² *Othello* begins by conferring upon the Moor a "provisional membership" in Christian Venice, which he proceeds to forfeit through his spiritual degeneration. The specifically religious dimension of Lupton's argument falls outside the scope of our present concerns; the important thing for us to consider is not Othello's road out of Venice but his way back in, which Lupton presents as fundamentally civic in character, an "entry into the archives of state memory as a citizen-soldier."⁶³ Othello's suicide is a "death into citizenship": it stands in for an exemplary deed of state service, reminding the city of his identification with its institutions of "civic participation"; the cost of such identification is too high for Othello to survive it, and yet even in death he compels an extension of citizenship's "equalizing package of rights" on a basis other than that of simple cultural assimilation.

I should say at the outset that this seems to me a reasonably plausible account of *what Othello takes himself to be trying to accomplish* in framing his suicide as he does. The question is whether, given what we know both about Venice's citizenship structure and

⁶² Lupton, *Citizen-Saints*, 105, 122.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 121-3.

about the content and context of Othello's speech, it is equally plausible to see the performance as successful. Three points appear to me significant in this regard. First, there is the fact that Lodovico and the rest of Othello's onstage audience are not notably impressed by his attempt to bring the discussion back around to the Turkish menace. They speak instead of his sanguinity, his propensity to violence when not deprived of a weapon, his greatness of heart. It is the voice of exasperated civil authority dealing with the martialist who cannot bring his conduct into line with peacetime expectations, the same voice we hear in *Timon of Athens* when the senators reject Alcibiades's bid to have a fellow soldier exonerated on the basis of the service he has done the state. Second, such a reaction is of a piece with the larger symbolic pattern of events of which the suicide is a culmination—I mean how Othello in this scene is repeatedly brought to a threshold which he may only cross by being deprived of his arms, only for it to be discovered that however many swords he is made to give up he remains “weaponed” right unto death. The seeming gratuitousness of adding a *second* disarmament scene between that of his failure to kill Iago and his suicide is perhaps best explained as enforcing precisely this point: Othello's martial identity is not so much the vehicle that will allow him to cross over from Venice's outside to its inside, as it is the sticking-point from which he will be left suspended between them.

Third, it is if we keep all this in mind that we may finally be able to listen, with the sort of unadorned literalism that Othello himself requests, to his account of the service he actually claims to have done:

And say besides that in Aleppo once,
Where a malignant and a turbaned Turk
Beat a Venetian and traduced the state,
I took by th' throat the circumcised dog
And smote him—thus. (5.2.350-5)

A wholly unallegorical paraphrase might run: “This one time in a foreign trading city, when a local got too highhanded with one of our own, *I* looked to our honor and killed the bastard.” One wonders, as a matter of fact, just how well the state did appreciate this rather free interpretation of its foreign policy priorities.⁶⁴ A possible tipoff is “Aleppo”: not a theater of war in Shakespeare’s time nor for two centuries previous, but a commercial entrepôt and zone of multicultural cohabitation in some sense symmetrical with Venice itself.⁶⁵ The tenor of his auditors’ responses suggests that they are, indeed, more inclined to reflect on the dangerousness of mentalities such as Othello’s in peacetime society than they are moved to join him in imagining the whole world as an arena of nonstop aggression between Venice and its rivals.⁶⁶ This is not to reduce Othello quite to the level of *Timon*’s anonymous, alcoholic veteran, whose “plenteous wounds” inflicted on the enemy the senators of Athens repudiate as “too much plenty,” archly commenting on the *arte della guerra*’s problematic relation to the ordinary forms of economic production.⁶⁷ All the same, the relentlessly martial variety of civic commitment to which Othello lays claim strikes his observers less as a point of common identification than as a singularly impressive but ultimately inassimilable disruptive force—one that cancels itself out in a final shudder of perturbation. What Lupton sees as Othello’s “dying into citizenship,” then,

⁶⁴ Venice’s keenness to sustain undisturbed commercial relations with the Turks even during periods of armed conflict was widely known (and a source of friction with the Papacy in particular). For a discussion of *Othello* sensitive to such nuances see Virginia Mason Vaughan, “Supersubtle Venetians: Richard Knolles and the Geopolitics of Shakespeare’s *Othello*,” in Tosi and Bassi, eds., *Visions of Venice*, 19–32.

⁶⁵ Peter Stallybrass, “Marginal England: The View from Aleppo,” in Lena Cowen Orlin, ed., *Center or Margin: Revisions of the English Renaissance in Honor of Leeds Barroll* (Selinsgrove, Pa.: Susquehanna UP, 2006), 28, notes the dissonance between Aleppo’s contemporary reputation and the symbolic function Othello assigns it, but Stallybrass does not appear to think Shakespeare conscious of the irony.

⁶⁶ I take the intuition underlying F.R. Leavis’s reading of the suicide scene—though he does not credit Othello’s onstage audience with a share in it—to be very nearly the same as that which I am suggesting here. See Leavis, “Diabolic Intellect and the Noble Hero: or The Sentimentalist’s Othello,” *The Common Pursuit* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1952), 152.

⁶⁷ *Timon of Athens*, 3.5.69–70.

I am more inclined to regard as his dying in such a way as to confirm that, and just how, he has always been out of it.

If this is so, then the stakes for Venice would seem to be at once very low and very high. Low, in the sense that it is ambiguous at best what significance these events will have beyond the particular grief of Desdemona's kin; the historical Cyprus was to endure a grisly fate in 1571, months before the celebrated Holy League victory at Lepanto, but Shakespeare gives no indication what relation, if any, the state's loss of Othello is supposed to bear to that history or to any other.⁶⁸ High, in the sense that the very containability of Othello's violence, the ease with which moral and physical barriers can be thrown up to separate the centers of public life from the coercive force at their disposal, might be said to bespeak a loss of a wholly different order. What is "gone" is not, in fact, Othello's "occupation" in the usual sense, but rather something nearly the opposite: a world in which there remains some living tissue of connection between the conduct of that occupation and the distinctive mode of political life it is engaged to defend. Without that, calling into being a stage on which to display the glorious actions expressive of one's commitment to the *res publica* does indeed become the hollow, almost solipsistic gesture critics since T.S. Eliot have seen in Othello's last moments. But the reasons for this are structural as much as individual: *Othello* is dramatizing a situation in which such actions now appear more as potential disruptions to the polity's functioning than as disclosures of its ethical basis.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Othello's speech does contain an apparent allusion to King James's brief epic *Lepanto*, which speaks of "circumcised Turband Turks," but the significance of this is equivocal: does Shakespeare's line—if it is more than a complimentary tip—point toward an ominous future or toward a past that Othello insists on replaying for the benefit of his auditors? For commentary see Emrys Jones, "*Othello*, *Lepanto*, and the Cyprus Wars," *Shakespeare Survey* 21 (1968), 47-52.

⁶⁹ Eliot, "Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca," *Elizabethan Essays* (London: Faber & Faber, 1934), 38-40.

To the extent that *Othello's* Venice might thus be seen to describe an enduring problem at the republican nexus of structure and action, citizens and professionals, internal balance and external defense, we can see too what is at stake for the critic in insisting that we read the tragedy without bracketing the differences between Rome and Venice, militarized and demilitarized citizenships. There is no dishonor in deciding with open eyes that one would rather be Venice than Rome. But it seems a dangerous thing to let the choice be made while forgetting the normative and analytical vocabulary best suited to assessing the full range of its consequences. One service Shakespeare's plays might do for our moment would be to recall from its current status as a quaint curiosity, not the mystique of the citizen-soldier—concerning which Shakespeare held as few illusions as it is possible to hold—but rather the long and deep history of reflection on the tradeoffs that follow upon his departure from the scene.

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BIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

Andrew Sisson was born October 3, 1982, in Columbus, Ohio. He is the holder of degrees from Kenyon College (B.A., 2004) and Johns Hopkins University (M.A. in English, 2008). He teaches in the Expository Writing Program at Johns Hopkins, in which he has for several years offered a very popular course on the films of Alfred Hitchcock.