Natural Law and Shakespeare's Grand Speeches of Order

PETER TITTLESTAD

ABSTRACT

Natural law was a two-edged sword. It bolstered authority and order and was invoked by those claiming just rebellion. Shakespeare inherited intense controversy, complicated for him as a writer for the stage by the Master of the Revels, the servant of an anxious authority. This authority, at its highest, could however totally unsay itself when faced with a Mary Queen of Scots, to the applause of the nation. His plays are marked, here and there, by grand speeches of order. How do we take them? In what way do they reflect the age?

Some of Shakespeare's plays have grand speeches seeming to reflect (but then we must consider well the mirror) contemporary thinking on order, cosmic, political and social. What was this thinking? A conventional place to start, before venturing into more troubled areas, would be Richard Hooker, shackled as he was in country parishes with the wife who, in Isaak Walton's mischievous phrase, brought him "neither beauty nor portion", having to dismiss his scholarly visitors from Oxford to go rock the cradle – but perhaps to dream up flights of peroration such as this:

> Now if Nature should intermit her course, and leave altogether though it were but for a while the observation of her own laws; if these principle and mother elements of the world, whereof all things in this lower world are made, should lose the qualities which now they have; if the frame of that heavenly arch erected over our heads should loosen and dissolve itself; if celestial spheres should forget their wonted motions and by irregular volubility turn themselves any way as it might happen; if the prince of the lights of heaven, which now as a giant doth run his unwearied course, should as it were through a languishing faintness begin to stand and to rest himself; if the moon should wander from her beaten way, the times and seasons of the year blend themselves by disordered and confused mixture, the winds breathe out their last gasp, the clouds yield not rain, the earth be defeated of heavenly influence, the fruits of the earth pine away as children at the withered breasts of their mother no longer able to yield them relief; what would become of man himself, whom these things now do all serve? See we not plainly that obedience of creatures unto the law of nature is the stay of the whole world?[1]

1. Isaak Walton, *Lives* (Oxford: Oxford Worlds Classics, 1927), p.129; and Richard Hooker, *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* (Book I, 3.2). See *A Treatise of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, in *Works* ed. J. Keble (Oxford, 1875) and *A Treatise of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity,* Books I-IV, ed. Charles Morris (London: Everyman / J.M. Dent, 1965).

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That word "obedience" at the end needs picking up later in relation to the *Homilie* of 1571. To hear Hooker further: "The general and perpetual voice of men is as the sentence of God himself. For that which all men have at all times learned, nature herself must needs have taught; and God being but the author of Nature, her voice is but his instrument."[2] So tradition and reason are valid and on this basis the Elizabethan settlement of church and state might be defended against the challenge emanating from Geneva – Hooker's main concern, for the *The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* is a defence, however assured it might seem.

To venture more specifically onto monarchy, in Book One of the *Laws* Hooker argues that natural reason leads man to live in societies and to see the need for regiment. Fathers by natural law are kings and kings, by analogy and divine appointment, were the first form of regiment. That received from long ago may not be changed. It all flows so easily. Hooker's monument at Bishopsbourne, his last living, dubs him "judicious". The tag stuck: "the judicious Hooker". The judiciousness is perhaps displayed partly by the avoidance of the awkward, of what happens when things go wrong. For instance, unlike other contemporaries, Hooker does not discuss Richard and Bolingbroke. It is only in Book Eight that he enters contemporary political, as opposed to ecclesiastical, controversy. But the status of Book Eight must remain uncertain. He died in 1600 with the last three books still in manuscript. Strangely, Book Eight, in which he refutes the dangerous arguments of "Junius Brutus" (who will be discussed later), was published only in the tense year 1648. (Oddly too, the year in which the first complete English translation of "Junius Brutus" appeared.) Although Hooker argues that the King is born into a room that is "painted out" for him, which would seem to imply constraints as well as powers, monarchy is hereditary and divine and the coronation a testification of rights. Proponents of commonwealth and popular election are "seedsmen of rebellion".[3]

One can in passing note that one hears skeptical voices about the general order of nature on which Hooker waxed so lyrical. John Donne, a little later, wrote: "This terme the law of Nature, is so variously and unconstantly delivered, as I confess I read it a hundred times before I understand it once."[4] Both Florio (the English translator of Montaigne) and Shakespeare were attached for periods to the household of the Earl of Southhampton. Montaigne's essay, *An Apology for Raymond Sebond,* while appearing to set out to defend Sebond's exposition of natural law, ends up undermining it. Almost at the end, Florio's translation sighs: "Oh what a vile and abject thing is man."[5] Shakespeare's Hamlet, while taking the mickey out of the simpering Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, says: "What a piece of work is a man" (*Hamlet*, 2.2.290) and in a brief speech dismisses the paragon of animals and the old world order: "Man delights not me" (294).

Now for that other pillar of Elizabethan orthodoxy, the *Homilie Against Disobedience and Wilful Rebellion*, and the word "obedience". The Homilies were intended to be read in church. They were crude defensive documents. That of 1571 is the most important. In brief, what Paul and Peter say in Scripture (by virtue of considerable extrapolation) about the powers that be (that notorious *Romans* 13) holds true: both good and evil kings reign by God's ordinances, monarchs are owed obedience, earthly princes may even be called gods, bad kings are punishment for the people's sins, the people must "patiently suffer and obey such as we deserve". The word "patience" will crop up again. "Gods" came in for some interesting treatment, not least in Shakespeare's plays.

What then of those English kings who were deposed, Edward II and Richard II? Most pressingly, there is Mary Queen of Scots, Elizabeth's cousin and next in line to the English

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2. *Ibid.*, Book I, 8.2.

3. *Ibid.*, Book VIII, 2.8. For earlier references the Everyman edition is adequate, but for Books VI, VII and VIII the Victorian edition by Keble is required.

4. Quoted in John Carey, *John Donne* (London: Faber and Faber, 1990), p.19.

5. Michel de Montaigne, "An Apologie of Raymond Sebond", *Essays* trans. John Florio [1603] (London: Everyman / J.M. Dent, 1965), p.32.

throne, deposed by her Calvinist subjects, seeking refuge across the border, promptly imprisoned and eventually, after years and a reproachful and acutely embarrassing – indeed totally unanswerable – correspondence, executed. "In your conscience, madam, would you acknowledge an equal liberty and power in your subjects?"[6] Facing her executioners, in Fotheringhay Castle, she said: "You know that I am a cousin to your Queen, and descended from the blood of Henry the Seventh, a married Queen of France and the anointed Queen of Scotland."[7] When Shakespeare has Richard II rather hysterically proclaim, "Not all the water in the rough rude sea/Can wash the balm off from an anointed king" (*RichardII*, 3.1.54-55), he is pointing to the huge intellectual and religious problem occasioned by that most sensational of contemporary events which the English nation, people and parliament, had rejoiced to hear performed. Elizabeth had procrastinated and procrastinated: the problem was not cousinly love but the sacrilegious official execution of a crowned anointed head. She even contemplated disposal in hugger-mugger. (It had happened to Richard II and Edward II.) She poured scorn on the "daintiness" of Sir Amias Paulet, Governor of Fotheringhay, who at the hint refused "to make so foul a shipwreck of his conscience" – unless he had a warrant.[8] The warrant for formal execution, signed and sealed, but sent without her knowledge to Fotheringhay by secret conclave of her council, nearly cost Secretary Davison his head as well, but at least there was a scapegoat. The crowned heads of Europe were duly scandalised (smothering with a pillow might have suited them better) but Mary's son, the sober, youthful James VI, confessed in a letter to Leicester his interest in eventually becoming James I. For the Scots philosopher George Buchanan, there was no problem: the deposition was an act of law both natural and civil, the former an inner light, the voice of God, the latter an important power for the restraint of kings.[9] The *Homilie* is in tatters, and on whose side is natural law?

In fact, there is a powerful body of controversial writing in the Elizabethan Age holding a subversive concept of natural law with regard to monarchy, questioning the sanctity of monarchical rule and arguing for the rights of the people. Just before Elizabeth came to the throne, during the unpopular reign of Mary Tudor, Goodman and Ponet (writing in exile) proposed natural law as a bulwark against unjust rule, put forward parliament as having powers in the choosing of a King, discussed the cases of Edward II and Richard II and mooted the concept of commonwealth.[10] What did portents, comets, eclipses portend? Perhaps that bad kings should go, so that order, cosmic and political, could be restored. Tyranny is disorder, revolt a restoration.

Shakespeare's republican idealist and tyrannicide, Marcus Brutus, is the descendant of Junius Brutus, overthrower of the Tarquin Kings. Junius Brutus is also the pseudonymous author of the *Vindiciae Contra Tyrannos*, the most radical and cogent political tract of the sixteenth century. It is of Huguenot origin; Harold Laski thought the author to be Du Plessis Mornay, Henry of Navarre's ambassador in London.[11] Only the fourth section was translated into English at that time (it permitted assistance against a neighbouring tyrant) but the rest must have been known. The Huguenot presence in London at the time was strong. Sir Philip Sidney and his sister, the Duchess of Pembroke, translated Mornay's theological works. The *Vindiciae* proposes a three-way contract between God, king and people. Tyrannicides, such as Brutus and Cassius,

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6. Quoted in Robert S. Rait (ed), *Mary Queen of Scots: Extracts from State Papers* (London, 1899), p.25.

7. *Ibid.*, p.305.

8. See J.E. Neale, *Elizabeth I and her Parliaments* 1584-1601 (London: Alden Press, 1957), pp.136-140.

9. George Buchanan, *De Iure Regni apud Scotos*, in the *Works* of John Knox ed. D. Laing, vol. IV, 1855.

10. See Christopher Goodman, *How Superior Powers Oght to be Obeyed* (Geneva, 1558; Facsimile edition, *The English Experience*) and John Ponet (Poynet), *A Short Treatise of politike power, and of the true obedience which subjects owe to Kynges and other civile Governors, with an Exhortation to all true naturall English men* [1556] (Amsterdam: Theatrum Orbis Terrarum, 1972).

11. See Harold Laski (ed), "Introduction", *Junius Brutus (Languet): A Defence of Liberty against Tyrants* [1689 English Translation] (New York: Burt Franklin, 1972); also Quentin Skinner, *The Foundation of Modern Political Thought* vol 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p.305n.

are to be honoured. The sub-title reads: "A Defense of Liberty against Tyrants or, of the lawful power of the Prince over the people and of the People over the Prince." Kings were not gods and monarchy could be elective.

Geneva speaks loud and clear. What of Rome, apart from the Pope's declaring Elizabeth herself fair game for assassination? A mild, reasonable and utterly devastating discussion between four gentlemen, called *A Conference about the next succession to the Crown of England*, published in 1595 by an R. Doleman (actually the Jesuit Robert Parsons), is the subversive gem. There is nothing like a quiet, honest, intelligent, well-informed discussion trying to get at the truth, especially when you discover that the Lancastrian line leads to the Infanta of Spain as the heir to the throne of England. The Tudor myth is undermined, the deposition of Richard II was correct, he was a bad king, and Bolingbroke was in any case King by free election. Junius Brutus and the assassination of Julius Caesar by Marcus Brutus are mentioned. Richmond, Henry VII, was called from France by the commonwealth. A section is given to confuting Du Bellay on the divinity of majesty. Parsons is much more than just a clever gadfly, and he was still being confuted by outraged royalists in the Restoration, a century later.

Jonathan Dollimore, in the course of his introduction to *Political Shakespeare*, writes approvingly that Stephen Greenblatt espouses the "Machiavellian proposition that religion was a kind of false consciousness perpetuated by the rulers to keep the ruled in their places". This might apply to the Tudor homilies on obedience and in a vague way to the Hookerian proposition that church and state were coterminous. However, it should be clear from the above that religion was woven into much of the political radicalism of the time and that cultural materialism in its hunt for the subversive has its blind spots.[12]

In 1599 Sir John Hayward published a thoughtful, analytic history of Bolingbroke, that is, Henry IV. The Queen took offence and Hayward went to cool his heels in the Tower for some time, emerging eventually to write an attack on Parsons. The case is particularly revealing of the twofold dilemma of the Elizabethan intellectual: the problem of publication and repressive authority, and of what to make of conflicting political theories. There were broadly two theories of natural law current: that agreeable to Tudor absolutism, and the Calvinist. Both are models of order, in their different ways, the establishment one being of order that is not to be touched, the other of justice that is to be restored by revolution. The latter has received insufficient attention as background to Elizabethan literature, partly because it has had, perforce, to lurk in the shadows. In the case of Hayward we have a third, a medieval tradition of law and constitutionalism of the kind associated, for example, with the writings of Chief Justice Fortescue, which Tudor absolutism had tended to obscure.[13]

Hayward's *Life and Raigne of King Henrie the Fourth* is compelling and intelligent, but suffers from a strange dual vision. Most of it is a rational study of legal, constitutional proceedings by which peers and commons dealt with a problem king with bad advisors and corrupt favourites. Gloucester's murder is openly discussed and also the other abuses of Richard's reign, and the kingly excellences of Bolingbroke are extolled. Shakespeare's play (obviously earlier than Hayward's history) has hints of action by peers and commons, and the stage directions in the deposition scene indicate that the characters enter "as to the Parliament" (*Richard II*, 4.1.0*SD*). Hayward, however, in what seems a complete reversal, then lamentingly casts doubt on the legitimacy of the nation's actions against the King, saying that he was not really tyrannical but ignorant and swayed by corrupt council. This ending did not save him from the Tower. Whatever dances the Elizabethan courtier had to lightly trip, the intellectual had to learn to dance on eggs, and Hayward did not tread lightly enough.

One realises the minefield Shakespeare was treading through in dealing with this particular stretch of English history. *Henry V* appeared on stage in roughly mid 1599, about the same time as Hayward's history. The night before the battle the young King prays about "the fault/My

12. Jonathan Dollimore and Allan Sinfield (eds), *Political Shakespeare* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1985), p.11.

13. See *Fortescue de Laudibus Legum Angliae* [1471], ed. and trans. A. Amos (Cambridge: Joseph Butterworth, 1825).

father made in compassing the crown" (4.1.274-75), describing for the benefit of the audience rather than God (who presumably knows) the elaborate medieval ceremonies of penance he has paid for, although his sense of guilt is apparently unassuaged. It is a fine dramatic moment and also an adept piece of political insurance. In the future Shakespeare turns to North's Plutarch and the history of Rome. Had he also, one wonders, run across the Junius Brutus, Marcus Brutus and Cassius of the *Vindiciae Contra Tyrannos?*

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The first of the grand speeches of order to be dealt with is one that is not often discussed: a fragment, never acted and never printed, because the play was banned by the Master of the Revels. It is Sir Thomas More's speech as Sheriff of London to an unruly mob, in the manuscript play *The Boke of Sir Thomas More.* It is a collaborative work by a number of dramatists but the three pages of More and the crowd are thought to be by Shakespeare and actually to be in his hand. Features of the handwriting accord with the signatures to the wills, there are some common quirks of spelling and, one is inclined to write with a smile, it is a speech on order, so it must be Shakespeare. The internal evidence is striking, in fact (here I am indebted to R.W. Chambers).[14]

There are links to Carlisle's famous speech in *Richard II* and to Ulysses' even more famous speech in *Troilus and Cressida*, with echoes (which Chambers does not mention) of the *Homilie* discussed earlier. More says to the crowd that "God hath lent the King his figure"; Carlisle talks of "the figure of God's majesty "; the *Homilie* says that Kings are Gods. The speeches share images of a river overflowing its banks and plead the safety of future generations if lawlessness prevails. In addition, More tells the crowd to make their knees their feet; the Duchess of York in *Richard II* (ironically before Bolingbroke, though she intends no irony) says she will "walk upon [her] knees" (5.3.93). She also calls him a "God on earth" (5.3.135).

Why was the More play banned? It is, in fact, sycophantic. The crowd quietens down very nicely before More's eloquence. In comparison with the crowd scenes in Shakespeare's other plays it is milk and water. Why were mob scenes in Shakespeare's other plays not banned? In a later scene in *Thomas More*, not Shakespeare's bit, some members of the mob are shown going to execution. They go uttering all the appropriate repentant things about rebellion and disorder. One would have thought it was just the play the authorities wanted: good propaganda, in fact. There might have been some contemporary relevance to trouble with immigrants from Flanders to explain the banning. More's speeches themselves are indeed grand, eloquent speeches of order and are not beset by the queries that beset the other grand speeches of order.

Richard II is the hot potato. The grand speech of order is, of course, Carlisle's. King Richard makes some fine utterances full of the imagery of kingship, but they are part of the problem that is King Richard. We encounter the Master of the Revels again. The first three Quarto editions were censored, lacking the deposition scene. Bolingbroke states: "In God's name, I'll ascend the regal throne." (4.1.113) Carlisle bursts out: "Marry, God forbid!" (114) and his speech follows. It is a moment of utmost dramatic and intellectual intensity. When his speech ends we have the shock of his arrest for, of all things, treason! It is a play of bewildering ironies. The censor kept Carlisle's speech in, obviously, but eliminated Richard's actual taunting resignation of the crown to Bolingbroke. Whether this was allowed in stage performance we do not know; it is hard to see how the gap could have been patched up.

As noted earlier in the discussion of Sir John Hayward, the scene is very briefly designated in the stage directions "as to the Parliament," a matter actually of some importance. The staging would be effected by extras representing peers, knights and burgesses. What is being enacted is not just a personal clash between two rivals to the throne but an acute moment of constitutional crisis. Carlisle's speech is a kind of centrepiece for the whole play against the backdrop, if one

14. See R.W. Chambers, *Man's Unconquerable Mind* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1939).

likes, of the nation – parliament – posing the crucial question, how can this happen? "Marry, God forbid!" It is worth speculating that without Carlisle's diatribe the whole play might have remained in manuscript, like the More play. One could even cynically speculate on Shakespeare's awareness of the need for a lifebelt to throw to the Master of the Revels. How on earth did the Lord Chamberlain's Men survive after assenting, for forty shillings, to do the play on the eve of the Essex coup? The gentleman who hired them went to the block! Carlisle's outburst must have stood them in good stead.

Echoes of the *Homilie* form a thread through the play. In Act One Scene Two, that quiet little scene with two sad old people, Gaunt sets out the orthodox view of "patience" under a bad King. The Duchess of Gloucester, wanting justice for the murder of her husband Woodstock, says his inaction is not "patience" but "despair" (1.2.29). So much for the *Homilie*. The next crucial echo is, of course, Carlisle's speech. The King is God-like:

> And shall the figure of God's majesty
> His captain, steward, deputy, elect,
> Anointed, crowned, planted many years,
> Be judged by subject and inferior breath?
> (4.1.125-28)

The thread runs through to the farcical scene near the end when York rushes to Bolingbroke, the usurper, as a loyal subject, to denounce Aumerle, his son, for treason, and the Duchess of York rushes to beg for pardon, to "walk on [her] knees", as she puts it, and exclaims to the usurper: "A God on earth art thou". The Master of the Revels missed some very subversive ironies which in fact bear the chief controversial burden of the play. What in Thomas More's speech is offered to the mob without qualification as the crucial, culminating argument is by the end of *Richard II* a problem. But who notices what a couple of silly old Duchesses say?

Carlisle's speech is part of a tightly-woven inquiry into history, politics and monarchy. Canterbury's honey-bee speech on ideal social order early in *Henry V* is nothing of the kind. It starts with the key word "obedience", and is as set a set piece as one could get. The play opens in the odour of dubious sanctity. But dare one suggest that the best thing in the play is not Harry's oh so celebrated meditation the night before the battle, but Mistress Quickly on Falstaff's death? In the parable, Lazarus the beggar goes to Abraham's bosom and the Pharisee in hell begs him for a drop of water on his burning tongue. In this most patriotic of plays, blithering, abused Mistress Quickly assigns her adored Falstaff not to Abraham's bosom but to Arthur's bosom, to rest in the legendary English past. And in bawdy, pathetic anticlimax she describes how she felt him from his feet ever upwards and "all was as cold as any stone" (2.3.15). Falstaff used to joke that a flea on Bardolph's red nose was a soul burning in hell. King Harry is going to have to look his wretched old associate in the eye and send him to the gallows. Honey-bees or not, there are uneasy undercurrents running through this play, part of the comprehensiveness for which we value Shakespeare.

With the flawed triumphalism of *Henry V* we leave the political perils of English history for Roman history, no less perilous. Apart from Caesar's ghost, we have the spectre of Junius Brutus, stern republican ancestor of republican idealist and tyrannicide Marcus Brutus, and also the pseudonymous author of the *Vindiciae Contra Tyrannos*, whether Du Plessis Mornay or another Huguenot political theorist. But always, whether it was English or classical history, and however fascinating the clash of ideas, there was for Shakespeare the drama of politics and personality, of fitting into the two hour traffic of the stage how history is shaped by men, and women, as much as it is by ideas.

So then there is *Coriolanus*. Canterbury on the honey-bees is without immediate challenge. But in *Coriolanus* there is the fable of the belly, written when there were corn riots in England. The Roman mob is hungry. The genial patrician Senator, Menenius, tries to bamboozle them with the elaborate analogy that the Senate, like the belly, distributes nourishment to the other limbs. The leaders of the mob are no fools, testing, even anticipating, the clichés of governance. In the face of this grand speech of social order, Shakespeare gives us his most sympathetic

treatment of the populace. Texts are unfortunately confused about the spokesmen –first, second and third citizen, and so on – and Menenius wins a kind of debating victory, making one of them seem a fool, but the long-term upshot of patrician arrogance, not least of appalling patrician motherhood in Volumnia, at a time of constitutional change is disastrous. History is shaped, among other things, by mother/son relationships.

Menenius' adroit oration on social harmony (as already stated in fact a piece of bamboozlement, and ending on a threatening note when the geniality suddenly slips) sets the play going as regards issues, and also as regards kinds of language. Another kind of patrician idiom is displayed straight afterwards with the arrival of Caius Marcius himself, with the blistering, "What's the matter you dissentious rogues/That, rubbing the poor itch of your opinion/Make yourself scabs?" (1.1.162-64) eliciting the wry plebian comment, "We have ever your good word". Later on we encounter a third form of rhetoric, also unpleasing, that of the Tribunes, Sicinius and Brutus. There is, of course, much manly exchange among the warrior class, male and female, and when Caius Marcius jocularly addresses his wife as "my gracious silence" (2.1.184) after she has had to endure the gushing of Volumnia and Valeria over the ferocious butterfly-mammocking propensities of her young son ("a crack" as Virgilia quietly and resignedly puts it, 1.3.59) one feels that he speaks much, much better than he knows.

If ever there was a grand speech of order it is Ulysses' renowned oration in *Troilus and Cressida*. It's got the lot, cosmically and politically, starting with Canterbury's honey-bees, "the hive" (1.3.82). There is nothing more Hookerian in Shakespeare. Apparently Nigel Lawson, Thatcher's Chancellor of the Exchequer, once expressed the opinion, based on it, that Shakespeare must have been a Tory.[15] One could imagine E.M.W. Tillyard suggesting that in this speech we find the Bard himself.[16] The speech occurs, however, in a play that severely challenges what was cited from Hooker at the beginning of this article: reason, the general voice of nature, founded in God.

The immediate context of the speech in the play borders on farce. It is a council of war. Achilles has the sulks; he won't fight. King Agamemnon needs advice. At once old Nestor, the wisdom of age, pipes up with a speech of senile idiocy, which is also a parody of Homeric style. Ulysses takes over, droning on and on without actually saying what to do. There are further polite exchanges and then all is interrupted by a trumpet blast. Aeneas has arrived from Troy to issue a challenge. He repeatedly and ludicrously fails to identify "that God in office" (1.3.230) as he puts it, King Agamemnon, despite embarrassed hints from the king himself. Nestor has also blathered about "thy god-like seat" (1.3.30). The phrases echo mockingly down through the years of controversy. The challenge from Hector is eventually delivered, Aeneas departs and the sly Ulysses and old Nestor hatch their devious little plan to shame Achilles into fighting. Not much about degree. The grand exposition on order gets lost, except perhaps that it is there as a sop for the political censor.

There is a second debate on reason and natural law, this time in Troy. Hector, citing the law of nature and of nations, suggests giving Helen back to her lawful husband. After all, Paris had stolen her. Others cite the demands of honour. Then Hector suddenly remembers the challenge he has sent to the Greeks and the discussion collapses. The ever-rational Ulysses, with a sombre exposition of the power of time and the sinister power of the "watchful state" with the "mystery" at its soul (3.3.189-94), brings the martial *prima donna* back to battle and provides a commentary, rather less flippant than the "wars and lechery" (5.2.194) of Thersites, that hangs over the whole play. And despite his high-flown disquisition earlier on nature, he can also say "one touch of nature makes the whole world kin,/ That all with one consent praise new-born gauds" (3.3.175-76). So much for Hookerian natural law.

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15. *Ibid.*, p.203.

16. See E.M.W. Tillyard, *Shakespeare's History Plays* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1944) and *The Elizabethan World Picture* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1958).

It is Ulysses who typifies Cressida at first glance as a "daughter of the game" (4.5.63) and it is Ulysses who leads Troilus to the tent of Calchas where he can see the tryst of Cressida and Diomedes, provoking the speech on "madness of discourse" (5.2.143), the culminating philosophical statement against reason and order, with the conundrum of "Ariachne's broken woof" (156). Let us give the typesetter the benefit of the doubt (the Folio is a correction of the Quarto's "Ariachna", so some supervision seems to have been at work) and dare to treat the crux as complex word play encapsulating not only Troilus' own bewildered apprehension that there is 'no rule in unity' and that "the bonds of heaven have slipped" (160) but the crazed vision of the whole play in its treatment of the order theme, under the nose of its most politic expositor, Ulysses. There is no "orifice"/"orifex" (155) for Ariadne's single saving thread that will lead one out of the metaphysical labyrinth when one has Arachne's wondrous weaving of the amours of the gods ripped by a malign Minerva. Hector is dishonourably killed by Achilles when foolishly at a disadvantage. It is a play about dishonour, betrayal and unreason, all under the shadow of Ulysses' sombre exposition of the power of time.

There is one more grand speech of order to discuss – one which, overtly at least, might seem less political than those dealt with hitherto. At this point before doing so, it might be worth attempting some tentative view of Shakespeare's own opinions on natural law, amidst the welter of characters in plays, with their various situations and agendas. Also, as the earlier part of this article has indicated, the 'Elizabethan Englishman' (that Tillyardian abstraction of long ago of which Shakespeare was supposed to be a sample) lived in an age of considerable controversy and was far from being bounded by Hookerian natural law or what he (or she) garnered from the *Homilie* in church on a Sunday; and she (or he) had living contemporary proof of the fragility of sacramental coronation in the sad fate of the "anointed Queen of Scotland".

Canterbury, Menenius, Ulysses: their speeches are enticingly persuasive but are all fashioned for an occasion. Sir Thomas More: here indeed we seem to be on firmer ground. However, when some of More's images reappear in the Bishop of Carlisle's speech we admire the man, but still have to withhold absolute assent. A point owed to Victor Kiernan in the rather too brief section on *Richard II* in his *Shakespeare: Poet and Citizen* (some of the ironies are not developed) is that Richard is the only king in the history plays who has a total claim to legitimacy, in spite of which this is the play that subjects monarchy to the most intense scrutiny.[17] However much we admire the man, Carlisle's is a point of view, not the last word. Can there be a last word in the appalling entanglements of history, the savage, self-destructive slide of feudalism into Tudor absolutism? As was noted earlier, Sir John Hayward's rational examination of the Bolingbroke episode that earned him the Tower came after Shakespeare's plays on the subject. Shakespeare had the quartos of *Richard II*, which seem to have sold out rapidly, truncated by the Master of Revels. Were he and Hayward kindred spirits?

Among the multitude of tainted political utterances of Shakespeare's plays the Chief Justice's embattled reply to the (he fears) scapegrace Prince Hal, just become king by virtue of his father's death, rings loud and clear:

> I then did use the person of your father
> The image of his power lay then in me:
> And in the administration of his law,
> Whiles I was busy for the commonwealth,
> Your highness pleased to forget my place,
> The majesty and power of law and justice,
> The image of the King whom I presented,
> And struck me in my very seat of judgement;
> Whereon as an offender to your father,
> I gave bold way to my authority,
> And did commit you.
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> (*2 Henry IV* 5.2.73-83)

17. See Victor Kiernan, *Shakespeare: Poet and Citizen* (London: Zed Books, 1993).

In the very next scene, we have the ecstatic Falstaff, on hearing that Hal is now king, boasting to the most recent coney that he is catching, the malleable Justice Shallow, that "the laws of England are at my commandment" (5.3.134). The Falstaffian version of natural law is that of the old pike and the young dace. It is indeed an arguable version, Tennyson's "nature red in tooth and claw". As Head of the Nazi Chancellery Martin Bormann beguilingly put it: "We National Socialists set before ourselves the aim of living as far as possible by the light of Nature: that is to say, by the law of life. The more closely we recognise and obey the laws of Nature and Life, the more we observe them, by so much the more we express the will of the Almighty."[18] That Shakespeare would have accepted without demurral the Hooker passage at the beginning of this article (cited by Tillyard as a foundation article of Elizabethan belief) is dubious, whatever the eloquent exposition granted this point of view in Ulysses' speech.[19] Yet that one line, "The majesty and power of law and justice" (5.2.78), asserted in the face – as the Chief Justice has reason to fear – of a corrupt and vindictive young tyrant newly come to power, commands unqualified respect, even if one wants to be the utter purist and point out that the King in whose stead the Chief Justice functioned was a usurper.

The last grand speech on order, and perhaps the most thought-provoking of all, is the speech of wifely submission by Kate that rounds up *The Taming of the Shrew*. Is it unpolitical? It is couched in terms of the *Homilie*, of obedience of the subject to the prince. She makes the speech, having been forcibly married off by a desperate father, so that her husband, who has bullied her into submission, can win a wager. At the same time it is a rebuke to some other wives present who are getting a little uppity. After the speech Petruchio patronisingly demands a kiss and shortly after says it is time for bed. At this stage of the play one's sympathy is with Kate, although one should not forget how she bullied her younger sister and generally terrorised the household at the beginning of the play. She has now had more than a taste of her own medicine. Order and degree of course extended to fathers and husbands over wives and children, and I am sure the Master of the Revels would have applauded to the very echo, as the writer once saw a leader of Pretoria culture do standing in the front row of South Africa's State Theatre, after a stunningly touching rendition.

What was he applauding? The return to natural order? Why was it so touching? All the grand speeches of order leave one with questions; this leaves one rather in a state of total *aporia.* Looked at soberly, the speech is in fact a sermon to husbands just as much as to wives – but is the submissive and grateful wife protected by the loving and manly husband nature as it should be, or nature as it is? And this before an audience composed partly of a quantity of brisk Elizabethan womanhood? What is this stone that Shakespeare has tossed into the pond to send the ripples off in all directions? Of course, not all Elizabethan husbands could have been Petruchios, nor wives Kates. Let us come down to earth. Or rather, let us go back to the opening of this article and to Richard Hooker, father of four daughters, inveigled, if Isaak Walton tells us true, into marriage by a clever London landlady who saw a chance for the daughter who had "neither beauty nor portion": the great expositor of natural law who even at one point discusses the authority of the father as the origin of monarchy, his disappointed colleagues wending their way back to Oxford denied the scholarly stag party they had hoped for, rocking the cradle.

18. A.R. Vidler and W.A. Whitehouse (eds), *Natural Law: A Christian Reconsideration* (London: SCM Press, 1946), p.11.

19. Tillyard, *The Elizabethan World Picture*, p.15.

Peter J.H. Titlestad studied at UCT and Cambridge, taught briefly at the erstwhile University of Natal in Durban and then for a lifetime at Pretoria, where he did his doctorate, ending up as Head of Department. He has a perverse and abiding interest in seventeenth-century puritans and other matters long gone past, and also the choppy waters of language controversy. He took up a special appointment two years before retirement to improve English at the University of Pretoria and continued to give short courses for some years after retirement, until succumbing to rustic bliss at Mtunzini on the Zululand coast, where there is time to think while waiting for the fish to bite.