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Rebecca Evans Hansen  
*Brigham Young University*

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Shakespeare's Rebels: The Citizen's Responsibility Toward a Tyrannical Ruler

Rebecca Evans Hansen

A thesis submitted to the faculty of  
Brigham Young University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts

Nancy Christiansen, Chair  
Brandie Siegfried  
Jason Kerr

Department of English  
Brigham Young University

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## ABSTRACT

### Shakespeare's Rebels: The Citizen's Responsibility Toward a Tyrannical Ruler

Rebecca Evans Hansen  
Department of English, BYU  
Master of Arts

Due to the social, political, and religious upheavals occurring across Europe in the Early Modern period, many writers were exploring the proper relationship between citizens and political and religious leaders. While some writers encouraged citizens to give unconditional loyalty to local and national leaders, Shakespeare has a pattern of endorsing citizen rebellion as a moral means to overthrow tyrannical rulers. By exploring *Richard III*, *Measure for Measure*, and *Julius Caesar*, I argue that Shakespeare develops a taxonomy of citizen responses to a tyrannical leader and teaches citizens that a moral rebellion can be launched against a tyrant when a citizen embraces personal responsibility, accepts the power of rhetoric over violence, and overcomes the filtering effects of nostalgia. To demonstrate that Shakespeare is deliberately entering the conversation about a citizen's reaction to a tyrant, I provide information about how a tyrant is defined in the Early Modern period. I synthesize the scholarship on relevant texts in the period and explain how all three leaders in the aforementioned plays support that definition of tyranny. Then I focus on each play's surrounding characters to discuss the motivations and reactions of rebellious and obedient citizens. Finally, I conclude each section with an analysis of the repercussions of the citizen's actions and evaluate the lessons that Shakespeare consistently promotes about moral rebellion.

Keywords: William Shakespeare, *Richard III*, *Measure for Measure*, *Julius Caesar*, tyrannicide, tyranny, passive obedience, moral rebellion, nostalgia, bystander

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## Shakespeare's Rebels: The Citizen's Responsibility Toward a Tyrannical Ruler

“Therefore, even the power of tyrants is in a certain sense good, yet nothing is worse than tyranny. For tyranny is an abuse of the power conceded to man by God. Yet this evil is used for many and great goods.”

-John of Salisbury, *Policraticus*

### Introduction

After the failed Northern Rebellion of 1569, Queen Elizabeth I—looking for ways to reinforce her authority to the public—commissioned the *Homily against Disobedience and Wilful Rebellion*. This homily became a common sermon across English pulpits and reinforced the notions that compliant citizens demonstrate the most valuable Christian virtue<sup>1</sup>. In connection to the argument that kings have been given the authority to rule a kingdom from God, the *Homily* also argues that rebellious citizens are morally inept and, subsequently, are incapable of correcting “any small lackes in a prince, or to cure any litle greefes in government” (Bond 214). The *Homily* then responds to the reason why many citizens feel compelled to rebel: when the leader of the country is universally considered “evyll in deede” (Bond 214). According to this *Homily*, promoted and publicized by Elizabeth herself, God allows wicked princes to come to power as a way to punish immorality in society<sup>2</sup>. Therefore, an act to overthrow a wicked leader is a vain attempt to derail the will of God and the correction of society at large.

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<sup>1</sup> The *Homily* argues that obedience is the pinnacle of Christian virtue because Lucifer rebelled against the reign of God and only the perfect obedience of Jesus Christ “repaired that which man by disobedience and rebellion destroyed” (Bond 210).

<sup>2</sup> The ideas in the *Homily against Disobedience and Wilful Rebellion* reflect arguments that have been a part of ongoing discussions about kingship, tyranny, and the ethics of rebellion much earlier than 1570. In the Medieval period, John of Salisbury wrote in his political treatise, *Policraticus*, “By means of tyrants, the evil are punished and the good are corrected and trained” (201). Additionally in the document *On Kingship*, Thomas Aquinas argued that God *may* help deliver citizens from a tyrannical ruler “but to deserve to secure this benefit from God, the people must desist from sin, for it is by divine permission that wicked men receive power to rule as punishment for sin” (Aquinas 14). These ideas also showed up in the Medieval sermon “*Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*” by Wulfstan the Homilist who said, “If we are to expect any

This *Homily* represents one reaction to the question of how an ordinary citizen should react to a leader who they deem to be tyrannical or immoral. While the *Homily against Disobedience and Wilful Rebellion* suggests that the primary duty of a citizen is to accept tyrannical rulers and abuses, other texts suggest that the duty of a citizen is to challenge a monarch's immoral decisions. Baldassare Castiglione's fifteenth century text, *The Book of the Courtier*, is an intricate thought experiment framed as a group discussion about the responsibilities of a courtier. During this discussion, the members of the court talk about the circumstances *when* they should resist a king's decrees, rather than *if* a citizen should ever disobey the monarch. This distinction suggests that Castiglione believes that it is the duty of educated citizens to speak out against an unjust order of the king. Castiglione writes, "What you must do...is to obey your lord in everything that redounds to his profit and honour, but not as regards things that bring him loss and shame. Therefore, if he were to order you to commit some treacherous deed not only are obliged not to do it but you are obliged not to do it, both for your own sake and to avoid ministering to your master's shame" (131). Castiglione's argument that rebellion can be born out of a citizen's desire to spare the monarch from shame or other consequences is echoed in the sixteenth century text, *Vindiciae contra Tyrannos*, where Hubert Languet argues that citizen resistance can impact religious salvation for the citizen and the monarch. Languet encourages citizens to remember, "It is not sufficient to abstaine from evill, but that we must do good instead of worshipping of Idols" (15). Languet believes that once a citizen obeys a king who gives orders contrary to the commandments of God, the citizen has engaged in idolatry and can face eternal consequences for their sins. Additionally, monarchs will

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remedy [from cruel tyrants] then we must deserve better of God than we have done previously. For with great demerit we have earned the miseries that oppress us" (160).

be held liable for their sinful acts of tyranny. Languet says, “The higher their place is, the greater their account must be,” which suggests that kings will face Divine judgment based on their leadership. Therefore, just as Castiglione acknowledges that citizen rebellion can save the monarch shame, Languet argues that rebellion can save the monarch from an awful, eternal, reckoning for their unrestrained, unlimited tyranny during their reign. Both of these texts encourage citizens to maintain a thoughtful caution about passive obedience and promote a collaborative rapport between a monarch and their citizens. Patrick Collinson writes in his seminal essay, “The Monarchical Republic of Queen Elizabeth I” that Elizabeth sometimes embodied this collaborative effort with her council, rather than demanding immediate obedience from them. While Collinson acknowledges that the Elizabethan government “was often government without counsel,” there are other moments when the Privy Council “was in position to contemplate the world and its affairs with some independent detachment,” (42). Together, these texts show that there were multiple ideologies in the Early Modern period that questioned the citizen’s responsibility to the monarch. Amidst these competing ideologies, Shakespeare’s plays suggest that he believed in the morality of citizen rebellion. Though Shakespeare never openly criticized the sitting monarch, many of his tragedies, comedies, and history plays show that some tyrants are so dangerous that it would be immoral to allow them to remain in power, and subsequently his work shows that rebellion *can* be a moral act. However, Shakespeare is careful and tactful in his writings to stress that sometimes rebellion can result in greater morality in society and sometimes citizen rebellion plunges a society into greater chaos.

Shakespeare was obviously not the only Early Modern thinker to account for the nuance of citizen rebellion against crowned leadership. John Milton also expressed ideas contrary to those promoted in *The Homily*. Milton notably wrote, “For as it is certain that kings today are of

God, and as this fact has the power to command the people's obedience, so is it certain that the free assemblies of the people today are also of God and this has the force either to keep kings in line or to get rid of them" (135). Though this concept of moral citizen rebellion does not belong to Shakespeare alone, I argue that analyzing pieces of Shakespeare's extensive work can offer further insight about how the free assemblies that Milton mentions can effectively rebel against a tyrannical king. *Richard III*, *Measure for Measure*, and *Julius Caesar* are three plays that feature citizens choosing rebellion over obedience toward a tyrant. These three plays were written at various points in Shakespeare's career (and performed for two different monarchs) and offer a consensus of his overall feelings about citizens responding to tyranny. While I do not believe that Shakespeare is writing political propaganda to encourage rebellion against English monarchs, his writings complicate the polemical notions of villainous rebellion from *The Homily*. I argue that an analysis of these three plays shows a spectrum of citizen responses and ultimately teaches citizens that a moral rebellion can be launched against a tyrant when a citizen embraces personal responsibility, accepts the power of rhetoric over violence, and overcomes the filtering effects of nostalgia.

To demonstrate that Shakespeare was deliberately entering the conversation about a citizen's reaction to a tyrant, I will provide information about how a tyrant was defined in the Early Modern period. I will synthesize the scholarship on relevant texts in the period to demonstrate how Shakespeare would have defined a tyrant; next I will explain how all three leaders in the aforementioned plays support that definition of tyranny. Then I will focus on each play's surrounding characters to discuss the motivations and reactions of rebellious and obedient citizens. Finally, I will conclude each section with an analysis of the repercussions of the citizen's actions and evaluate what lessons these citizens teach about moral rebellion.

## Defining a Tyrant: The Characteristics that Catalyze Rebellion

The definition of a tyrant in the Early Modern period was heavily influenced by Greco-Roman writers due, partially, to the use of classical texts in the grammar school education provided to boys in England. James C. Humes writes about the New Curriculum and posits how the Greco-Roman writers impacted Shakespeare, saying, “The daily assignments of writing essays as well as translating Cicero’s orations and Ovid’s poetry into English or Biblical passages into Latin, opened the world of words and the almost magical properties that the right word possesses” (7). To push Humes’ idea further, the study of classical writers did more than simply teach Shakespeare how to find the right word. Lynn Enterline writes that Humanist schoolmasters believed “that the eloquence and wisdom garnered at school would directly benefit the English commonwealth” because the content from classical writers, like Cicero, planted ideas about the responsibilities of government, the virtue of citizenship, and the ways to build an ideal society (9). Since all boys, regardless of wealth or position in society, were able to receive this curriculum, we can assume that the classical definitions of tyranny lingered in public consciousness and informed discussions about tyranny throughout Shakespeare’s life.

Aristotle, Seneca, and Cicero write that tyrannical rule is an abomination of the natural order, which complicates some of the ideas perpetuated in the Early Modern period about the citizen’s duty of passive obedience. Aristotle explains that tyrannical rulers are an offense to nature because their government “has in view the interest of the monarch only,” which promotes hatred and contempt toward the powerful and unravels fellowship between mankind in a civilization (70). Cicero agreed with Aristotle’s assessment of the selfishness of tyrants, saying that the tyrant’s willingness to “use theft or violence against another for his own profit” will shatter the fellowship of the human race—one of the four cardinal virtues necessary to build a

utopian society (108). Seneca crafts a similar definition for tyranny, writing, “What is the difference between a king and a tyrant? ... It is simply that tyrants act savagely for their pleasure, whereas kings do so only for a reason and out of necessity ... A tyrant’s savagery comes from his heart” (143). Together, these quotations suggest a cohesive definition of a tyrant that Shakespeare and his audience likely would have known. The Greco-Roman writers believed that a tyrant was any ruler whose selfish actions diminished fellowship in society.

To show the prevalence of the Classical era’s definition of tyranny in Early Modern consciousness, I will demonstrate how the aforementioned definition plays a role in the popular Renaissance genre of the mirror of princes, where writers and philosophers pondered the ways to guide and shape the ideal political leader, by looking at the writings of Niccolò Machiavelli, Baldassare Castiglione, and Desiderius Erasmus. One of the most (in)famous examples of mirror of princes text is *The Prince* by Niccolò Machiavelli. Though Machiavelli never specifically uses the term “tyrant” in *The Prince*<sup>3</sup>, the topic of his treatise is teaching a statesman to rule well which automatically assumes that Machiavelli will discuss ways to avoid the mishaps of ruling poorly through tyranny. Machiavelli elaborates on some of the conclusions of the classical writers. While he diverges from classical ideology by suggesting that all leaders will have to participate in immoral endeavors to maintain power, Machiavelli suggests that tyranny exceeds acceptable immorality. In *The Prince*, a tyrant is characterized by ruler who acts with excessive violence, slays fellow citizens, deceives friends, and acts without faith, mercy, and religion (35). Therefore, Machiavelli suggests that a tyrant is any leader who engages in immoral activity without moderation and appears to be disinterested in the public good—a term that John Locke

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<sup>3</sup> Giovanni Giorgini asserts that the absence of the term tyrant does not infer that the definition of tyranny is not discussed in *The Prince*. Rather the lack of use of word tyrant “shows us his attentiveness to style and literary genre: one had better not use such words as ‘tyranny’ in a work dedicated to a prince” (234).

uses to refer to “interests that are common to all members of a political community” (qtd. in Hussain). The listed attributes of a tyrant are consistent with classical definitions, though Machiavelli differentiates from the Greco-Roman writers by not rejecting immoral leadership entirely.

To establish that Machiavelli’s response to classical writers was a pattern for other Early Modern political writers, I will also examine the classical influence found in another text from the period in the same genre: Castiglione’s *The Book of the Courtier*. Castiglione, writing about the ideal court, speaks of the dangers of tyranny saying, “When the ruler can do whatever he wants, then there is a great danger that he will not want what he should” (300). Castiglione also places the good king as the antithesis to a tyrant because the good king serves as a mirror for the Divine by “display[ing] to their people the resplendent light of His justice accompanied by a semblance of the divine reason and intellect” (299). From these quotations Castiglione shows his agreement with the classical philosophers who believed that a tyrant is not focused on the public good and cannot create a just society, though Castiglione Christianizes the reason saying that the tyrant does not manifest divine clemency and fellowship in society<sup>4</sup>.

Within three years of Machiavelli writing *The Prince*, Erasmus wrote his own mirror of princes entitled *The Education of a Christian Prince*; this text in conjunction with the other texts I’ve discussed helps to demonstrate how commonly the classical notions of tyranny were being

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<sup>4</sup> In addition to Castiglione providing a similar definition of a tyrant as the classical philosophers, the fictional characters in *The Book of the Courtier* are consistently alluding to classical figures and kings. In the third book alone, the characters refer to the historical examples of Aulus Gellius, Aristotle, Octavia, Mark Antony, Cleopatra, Portia, Brutus, Julius Caesar, Caia Caecilia Tanaquil, Plutarch, Pausanias, Theodoric the Great, Plato and Cicero. This consistent discussion about classical figures demonstrates that Castiglione’s characters ground their contemporary answers to problems based on the classical writings and behaviors of people in Greece, Rome, and Sparta. Through this process of referring to the Classical age, Castiglione is placing value on the models from that time period. His allusions show that he is well versed in Ancient history and desires to use the Classical Era as a structure to help Early Modern citizens build the ideal court.

accepted in the Renaissance. Erasmus' text is particularly significant to a conversation about the relationship between Shakespeare's beliefs on citizens and kings, since he established the curriculum that Shakespeare studied in grammar school. In the beginning of his treatise, Erasmus credits the classical philosopher, Isocrates, for his writings on the principles of government. Though Erasmus notes that he draws considerable differences between his writing and Isocrates, since Isocrates was not a Christian, Erasmus agrees that tyrants are so consumed with their own interests that they forgo the development of the cardinal virtues: wisdom, justice, fortitude, and decorum (3). He writes that the emperors Hadrian and Nero were both tyrants because they could not forgive offenses that damaged their personal interests (88). Rather than caring for the public good, tyrants will use their power to pursue vengeance against enemies who speak against them. He also condemns kings who use laws as a way of "setting traps" for the public (80). These examples demonstrate that, for Erasmus, there was an obvious connection between tyranny and damaging the opportunities for fellowship and harmony in society. His ideas echo components of the earlier thoughts of Seneca, Aristotle, and Cicero, while introducing the need to remove a tyrant out of devotion to his Christian faith.

Just as Machiavelli, Castiglione, and Erasmus used classical examples and anecdotes to develop their own definitions of tyranny in their political writings, Shakespeare learned about classical history and then specified particular attributes of tyranny based on the unique circumstances surrounding him. I argue that Shakespeare maintained the Greco-Roman notion that tyranny has a damaging effect on society and elaborated on the nuances regarding how citizens could rebel morally. In his writing, he defined a tyrant as any leader who uses their unique power to manipulate weaknesses in an established government to help them usurp power and exercise oppression, injustice, and cruelty upon the less powerful as a way to protect their

own power and interests. The tyrant's lack of interest in the public good will lead them to silence opposition and take unlawful measures to protect their current position and usurp further power. The tyrant is willing to sacrifice allies and enemies alike for their own interests and has no true loyalties that restrain their selfish behaviors.

Shakespeare reveals this definition to audiences particularly well through the characterization of most famous tyrant, Richard of Gloucester or King Richard III<sup>5</sup>. From the opening monologue, Richard shows that he is willing to sacrifice people who are loyal to him as pawns to perpetuate him into further power. Richard views his own family members as steppingstones to the throne, which reveals that he is completely disconnected from the four cardinal virtues that foster a utopian society and contribute to the public good. He proves his willingness to create tension as a means to gain political power by saying, "Plots have I laid, inductions dangerous / By drunken prophecies, libels, and dreams, / To set my brother Clarence and the King / In deadly hate the one against the other" (I. i. 32-35). His plan to turn his brothers against each other deliberately ignores the virtuous rules of decorum and serves as a microcosm for Richard's willingness to violate the cardinal virtues on a national scale. Additionally, Shakespeare shows Richard manipulating the weaknesses in the current political system by showing the way he is able to delegitimize his nephew's right to the crown before having them

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<sup>5</sup> Sir Thomas More wrote about the life of Richard III decades before Shakespeare and established one of the prominent narratives about Richard III's character and evil nature. He characterized Richard's immorality in similar terms when he wrote that the king was "not hesitating to kiss whom he thought to kill, pitiless and cruel, not for malevolence always but oftener for ambition and either for the surety or increase of his position" (118). Though More's (and Shakespeare's) characterization of Richard was largely influenced by the need to craft the Tudor Myth to legitimize Henry VII and his descendants, his characterization of Richard is careful to stress that Richard's evil actions were not caused by mental illness or demonic possession. More stresses that Richard was not unique, he was a tyrant whose political ambitions fueled the deranged ideas in his mind and led him to commit atrocities which caused England to remain in continued chaos. Since there was nothing supernatural that led to these atrocities, More knew that future tyrants could emerge who were just as dangerous as Richard III. Therefore, his historical recounting offers political commentary about the dangers of ambition in government, unchecked power, and unlawful succession which greatly influenced Shakespeare's characterization of Richard III.

killed. Richard recognizes that the current political system is concerned with having a legitimate heir, and by spreading fabricated rumors of illegitimacy for his nephews, Richard is able to secure support as a rightful ruler. Richard shows his brutality towards his brothers and nephews by having them murdered, but he also shows cruelty towards the women surrounding him who hold less political power because of their gender. Richard is seen tormenting Elizabeth, Margaret, and Lady Anne. Later, in an effort to try to silence other rebels and establish fear of his immoral instability, Richard also executes his faithful servant, Buckingham. Since Richard meets all of the characteristics of a tyrant and builds upon the base of classical tyranny, it is undeniable that Shakespeare's audiences would have recognized that Richard was a tyrant. Since the surrounding characters were able to stage a successful rebellion ending in tyrannicide, Shakespeare is complicating the narrative promoted in the *Homily against Disobedience and Wilful Rebellion* where citizens retain Christian virtue by remaining passive and submissive to the will of their crowned monarch.

Similar to the way Shakespeare asserts that a citizen's rebellion against Richard's tyranny is the way the natural order is reestablished, and a divinely sanctioned English king ascends to power, his comedy *Measure for Measure* also promotes citizen rebellion against a tyrant's abuse of power. Despite the difference in genres and English monarchs between the performances of *Richard III* and *Measure for Measure*, Angelo displays the same characteristics of tyranny as Richard. This commonality suggests that Shakespeare's definition of tyranny is remaining consistent. Angelo has studied the politics of Vienna and is able to manipulate established weaknesses in the system to promote his personal agenda, which Shakespeare demonstrates in Act II when Angelo offers to spare Isabella's brother from the crime of fornication in exchange for her sleeping with Angelo. When she threatens to expose his

hypocrisy, Angelo states, “Who will believe thee, Isabel? / My unsoil’d name, th’ austereness of my life, / My vouch against you, and my place i’ th’ state, / Will so your accusation outweigh” (II. iv. 154-7). This quote shows how Angelo is emboldened by his reputation in society and recognizes that Isabella’s testimony will be ineffective in a legal setting or in the court of public opinion. He clearly believes that he has nothing to lose and flaunts how easily he could have Isabella’s allegations dismissed. In his interactions with Isabella, Angelo reveals that he views people as tools and is willing to silence or manipulate them to get what he wants. Shakespeare shows that Angelo’s view of people as commodities extends to the other orbiting characters by highlighting his treatment of Mariana and Claudio. The Duke reveals that Angelo immediately “swallow’d his vows whole” and abandoned his fiancé, Mariana, after she lost her dowry in a shipwreck, signaling that Angelo only viewed her as an economic asset (III. i. 225). Angelo’s mistreatment of Mariana shows that his habit of commodifying people existed before he was in a position of power; however, once Angelo is empowered this pattern increases exponentially. Angelo uses Claudio’s life as leverage to try to force Isabella to sleep with him. When speaking of Claudio, Angelo shows no remorse or consideration of the consequences of executing him. Instead, when Isabella rejects him, Angelo responds matter-of-factly saying, “Then must your brother die” (II. iv. 104). Angelo proves to be so selfish that he cannot concern himself with the suffering he inflicts on others. In his eyes, other characters hold no value until they can profit him.

Another tyrannical attribute of Angelo is that he does not use his unchecked power to promote the public good. He punishes a religious sin with an unprecedented force of government power and leaves no room for mercy. Additionally, his decree on the punishment of fornication works retroactively and allows people to be heavily punished for a crime that did not have so

strict a punishment when they committed it. Shakespeare shows the absurdity of these legal practices when Lucio sees Claudio being led away in chains and first asks him if he has committed murder to deserve such a treatment. Claudio admits that his crime is that he “got possession of Julietta’s bed” (I. ii. 146). Claudio’s arrest and death sentence are severe responses that would result in Claudio’s unborn child being fatherless and Juliet being forced away to a convent where she must live with her guilt for the rest of her life. Some may argue that this harsh punishment would discourage fornication; however, Angelo shows that he truly is not interested in promoting sexual purity because he allows brothels in the densely populated city to remain. In a conversation between Pompey and Mistress Overdone, they reveal, “The [brothels in the city] shall stand for seed: they had gone down too, / but that a wise burgher put in for them” (I. ii. 99-100). Though he is quick to punish people for committing sins, Angelo allows brothels to remain in business for a bribe. While some may view Angelo’s decision to keep the city’s brothel open as a sign that he recognizes that a society cannot change overnight, his quick and harsh punishment of lechery suggests that he, as Sir Thomas More writes, “create[s] [criminals], and then punish[es] them for [crime]” (27). Even before he begins lusting after Isabella and his hypocrisy is revealed, this interaction shows that Angelo is not as concerned with the public good as he claims to be. Through this episode, and Angelo’s later exploitation of Isabella, audiences see that Angelo is more concerned with exercising unchecked power on the lives of average citizens than on promoting a more just society. These parallels between Angelo and Richard demonstrate that Shakespeare is deliberately crafting tyrants to meet certain attributes and his audiences would have recognized Angelo as a tyrant.

Julius Caesar demonstrates the same tyrannical characteristics as Richard and Angelo. *Julius Caesar* begins with a celebration of Caesar’s defeat of Pompey in battle. This celebration

allows Caesar to exploit his public favor and the weaknesses in the current political system.

While Caesar appears to be a man for the people, some of his outspoken opposers are discreetly

disposed of and are never heard from again. Casca tells Brutus, “Murellus and Flavius, for

pulling scarfs off Caesar’s images, are put to silence,” (I. ii. 285-6). From this passing

conversation, audiences learn that Caesar’s persona has become so grandiose that it is a

punishable offense to suggest that he does not deserve to be celebrated. Then, as he becomes

more obsessed with his own power, Caesar shows cruelty towards citizens who request his help

in the Senate. Caesar denies the request to allow Publius Cimber to return to Rome, while

ignoring the pleas for mercy from other members of the Senate and from his trusted friends.

Caesar doesn’t think about his decision could impact the wisdom, justice, fortitude, and decorum

in Rome. In reality, Caesar shows that he cannot think about anyone else unless he is establishing

his superiority compared to them, saying, “I could be well mov’d, if I were as you; / But I am

constant as the northern star” (III. i. 58, 60). Though Caesar is not the only problematic figure in

the play, Shakespeare uses the brief time that Caesar is living to deliberately craft his character to

match the cultural expectations of a tyrant.

### Defining a Rebel: The Spectrum of Responses to Tyranny

In response to the three tyrants mentioned above, there are five distinct citizen responses

which exist on a spectrum of rebellion to support. I believe that all citizens who orbit a tyrant in

the plays can be sorted into one of five categories. The first type of citizen is a patriotic rebel, or

a rebel who initiates a treasonous act against a tyrant out of allegiance to the state, the church, or

humanity. The act of rebellion does not have to be successful in dethroning a tyrant; this

distinction only speaks to the motivations of the rebel. Next on the spectrum of types of citizens

is the anarchist rebel, a person who acts against the interest of a tyrant out of a selfish motive. The anarchist rebel is trying to promote themselves, benefit their lifestyle, or advance in some way, rather than thinking of the greater good. In the middle of the spectrum is the group of citizens who act as bystanders. Bystanders may be critical of a tyrant's actions but remain passive and never engage in any type of rebellious action. Bystanders may remain submissive because they do not believe they can change the situation, they are too fearful of the tyrant's power, or they feel ignorant of political organization or options of rebelling. Largely bystanders believe that someone else will intervene before a tyrant can do anything especially despicable. The next two categories are enablers of a tyrant<sup>6</sup>. Like the rebel, enablers are distinguished by their motivations. The first is the patriotic enabler who is motivated to support a tyrant out of allegiance to the state or church. The second is the opportunistic enabler who stands with a tyrant out of hope for advancement or personal gain. Likewise, there are also opportunistic enablers who operate from similar motivations as an anarchist rebel. The opportunistic enablers do not stand against a tyrant, in spite of their concerns or moral disputations with the tyrant's actions, out of hope for advancement or personal gain. All five types of citizens will be discussed at some point during my analysis of the three plays, though, for the sake of brevity, all five types of citizens are not discussed for all three plays.

I acknowledge that this spectrum of citizen responses only accounts for the motives and intentions of Shakespeare's characters; however, a closer examination of Shakespeare's patriotic and anarchist rebels reveals the attributes of the ideal moral rebel. Shakespeare's moral rebels

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<sup>6</sup> In his 2018 publication *Tyrant*, Stephen Greenblatt dedicates a chapter to discussing enablers to a tyrant. He specifically focuses on the ways enablers allow a tyrant to come into power, rather than how they refuse to engage in a rebellion *after* the tyrant has demonstrated immoral behavior. While Greenblatt is discussing the way enablers could help prevent tyranny, I am interested in looking at the motivations of citizens who choose not to rebel even after seeing a ruler act tyrannically.

demonstrate a willingness to compromise, use moral flexibility rather than prescriptive responses to guide their behavior, and refuse to push virtuous attributes to vicious extremes. As Shakespeare is advocating for the ideal moral rebel to rise up against tyrants, his work teaches citizens about three actions that moral rebels consistently participate in. First, a moral rebel rejects hopelessness and passivity and embraces personal responsibility to remove a tyrant from power. Second, a moral rebel will rely on rhetoric and reason, rather than tyrannicide and force, to foster a love for good leadership and a just society. Third, a moral rebel will overcome the filtering effects of nostalgia in order to see their society accurately and move the nation to a realistic future.

#### *The Tragedy of Richard III: The Citizen and Political Tyranny*

In *Richard III* the surrounding characters (and even Richard himself) agree that Richard is “that excellent grand tyrant of the earth” (IV. iii. 52). Through a conversation held by nameless citizens, Shakespeare establishes that Richard’s reputation as a despot has spread so far that even those who do not know him personally are aware of his malignant nature and tyrannous tendencies. Even from afar, they are fearful of his unchecked power. When discussing the death of King Edward, the citizens talk about the state of the crown. One citizen ominously notes, “O, full of danger is the Duke of Gloucester,” (II. iii. 27). Notably, the responding citizen does not dismiss the comment about Richard’s character. Instead the citizen encourages others to accept the idea that “all will be well” and that they must “leave it all to God” (II. iii. 31, 45). This ideology seems to echo the practice of passive obedience prescribed in the Elizabethan homily of 1570. Shakespeare shows that the citizens are aware of danger, but they do nothing to act upon their own fears. Instead, they bottle their anxieties and choose not to take action since they

believe “Heaven will direct” the kingdom (*Hamlet*, I. iv. 90). Shakespeare is careful to show the reality of a citizen’s powerlessness without assigning blame against them for their paralysis toward a tyrant. After all, the average citizen has no resources to overthrow a tyrant, while corrupt monarchs have an entire military at their disposal. Yet Shakespeare uses this conversation between citizens to serve as a microcosm for all bystanders in the play. As the citizens recognize that Richard is unfit to rule and remain inactive, they are choosing to wait passively for someone else to deliver them from tyranny. The citizens hope that if they can endure the reign of a tyrant, eventually something will happen to remove the king without the citizen having to be involved. While the citizen’s hopes for a distant delivery are understandable, Shakespeare never writes of a tyrant who is entirely overthrown by an illness, an accident, or an intervention from Heaven. His tyrants have to be disposed of by human intervention, which depends upon bystanders challenging their powerlessness and engaging in rebellion. Without this transformation into rebels, all citizens who play the role of a bystander are susceptible to the tyrant’s cruelty and are pawns to his treachery.

Shakespeare demonstrates the connection between being a bystander and becoming an accomplice by showing how quickly the females around Richard witness him ruin their lives without mobilizing any type of forceful resistance against him. Of course, the women of the play “operate from within the dominant patriarchal culture in which [they] must struggle for status and authority,” which automatically limits the women to a submissive position; however, the women in the play have mirrored conversations to the nameless citizens which suggests that the feelings of helplessness against a tyrant can permeate social class, gender, and other variables of circumstance (DiGangi 430). The women surrounding Richard demonstrate to the audience that they are acutely aware of his immorality but adopt a mentality that someone else will surely do

something about it. The assumption that someone else will do something only allows Richard to inflict more pain into their lives and the community at large. Shakespeare establishes this pattern early in the play through the character of Lady Anne, who is described by Donald R. Shupe as a “highly emotional” woman who “is quite caught up in the notions of justice and fair play” (31). In a single scene, Anne begins by declaring an awareness of Richard’s crimes, saying ‘Or earth gape open wide and eat him quick, / As thou dost swallow up this good king’s blood, / Which his hell govern’d arm hath butchered’, and calls him an “infection of a man” (I. ii. 65-7, 78). Lady Anne attempts to use verbal rhetoric as a force to wound Richard. This tactic of using words instead of physical violence is replicated by the other women in the play. By relying on verbal communication instead of any physical force, Lady Anne attempts to appeal to Richard’s humanity in an effort to encourage him to commit suicide. She tells him, “Fouler than heart can think thee, thou canst make / No excuse current, but to hang thyself” (I. ii. 83-4). Unfortunately, Lady Anne reveals her belief that Richard can be persuaded to think about others, and unknowingly reveals her greatest weakness that Richard can capitalize on. Richard senses Anne’s belief in communication to promote a favorable outcome, which inspires him to offer her a chance to murder him, saying, “Take up the sword again, or take up me” (I. ii. 183). He offers, knowing that she won’t be able to go through with physical rebellion or commit tyrannicide. In this exchange, Shakespeare carefully exposes some of the limitations of using rhetoric as the sole method to remove a tyrant from power. Lady Anne shows that rhetoric cannot be an effective weapon for change when a citizen is dealing with a ruler who views people as currency to produce results, or who is unable to experience empathy and refuses to show remorse for harm caused by their actions. Additionally, Lady Anne’s fails to realize that rhetoric is only an

effective force for change when an empowered leader listens (as demonstrated in *Measure for Measure* when Isabella uses rhetoric to overthrow Angelo by speaking with the Duke).

Since there is not another empowered leader that Lady Anne can speak with, her reliance on rhetoric causes her to transition from a potential rebel into a bystander when she is given the chance to kill Richard, saying, “Though I wish for thy death, / I will not be thy executioner” despite saying that it would be “just and reasonable, / to be reveng’d on him that kill’d my husband” (I. ii. 184-5, 135-6). In this sudden release of responsibility, Lady Anne is unwilling to act because she would rather wait for someone else to be the executioner than to take on that responsibility herself. By deciding not to intervene and become a rebel against a tyrant in that moment, Lady Anne is “[transformed from] the victim into an accomplice” who allows all of Richard’s later crimes to occur (Levine 104-5). Though she already knows that Richard has committed crimes before this point, she abdicates responsibility and hopes for another rebel to come and remove the problem from power.

Queen Margaret also demonstrates the same pattern as Lady Anne and the common citizens by showing an awareness toward Richard’s evil nature while being unable to actively remove him from power. She obviously hates Richard for the personal destruction that his family has wreaked upon hers, but she also recognizes that he poses a larger threat to society as a whole. Shakespeare reveals Margaret’s awareness in her warning to Elizabeth against strewing “sugar on that bottled spider / Whose deadly web ensnareth [her] about” (I. iii. 241-2). David-Everett Blythe writes that the imagery of the bottle spider refers to a creature who “responds with stunning speed to the merest vibration on its trap” (39). In this small exchange, Shakespeare proves that Margaret understands that Richard is an aggressive entrapper with no moral compass who lays deliberate snares to sacrifice anyone who stands in the way of his ambitions. She

criticizes Elizabeth for assuming that any other method beside crushing someone like Richard is an option<sup>7</sup>. Though she is aware and vocal about Richard's abuses of power, Margaret quickly dismisses herself from the scene after Buckingham's rejection, asking him, "What, does thou scorn me for my gentle counsel? / And soothe the devil that I warn thee from?" (I. iii. 295-7). Shakespeare depicts characters like Anne and Margaret to demonstrate two citizens who had the awareness and the anger to become rebels against Richard, but whose rebellions are quickly stamped out by a feeling of powerlessness.

By representing this pattern of potential rebels who fade into bystanders, Shakespeare is still acknowledging that speaking out against a tyrant is an act of courage that comes with unpredictable (and potentially fatal) consequences. However, in spite of all of these citizens who speak about Richard's evil nature, their knowledge poses minuscule opposition and does nothing to prevent him from gaining and abusing his power. These observations from Margaret, Anne, and other bystander citizens are largely ineffective, though they are risky and honest. Shakespeare is not villainizing these characters for folding under treacherous circumstances. In *Richard III*, the bystanders have enormous potential for pain and loss if they give "present aid" to a rebellion, but Richard's reign shows that individuals and the nation will suffer under a tyrant's power until that tyrant is removed (IV. iv. 5). Therefore, the surest way to protect loved

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<sup>7</sup> It should also be noted in a conversation with Buckingham, Queen Elizabeth shows a partial awareness of Richard's villainy. She tries to warm him, saying, "Look when [Richard] fawns he bites; and when he bites, / His venom tooth will rankle to the death. / Have not to do with him, beware of him" (I. iii. 289-91). Though Elizabeth recognizes that Richard is willing to sacrifice anyone who gets in the way of his ambitions, her sentiments reveal that she believes simply avoiding Richard and being wary of him will somehow be enough, which is exactly what Queen Margaret is criticizing her for. Despite what Elizabeth knows, she is frozen into inactivity and tries to avoid coming in contact with the tyrant, rather than staging a rebellion against him until his behaviors have impacted her more directly. In fact, Richard later credits Elizabeth and the court not taking Margaret's warning seriously, as the catalyst that allowed him "to be reveng'd" on innocent people (I. iii. 332).

ones and the nation as a whole is to engage in rebellion, rather than recognizing a tyrant and abdicating responsibility to another rebel citizen.

While some characters are paralyzed and inactive during Richard's ascent to the throne, other characters like Buckingham and Hastings become opportunistic enablers due to their shared perceptions that they will benefit from Richard's reign. The comparison between the groups of enablers and bystanders suggests that it is easier to take action at the potential for personal gain than it is to act in the face of definite loss. Like Lady Anne and Queen Margaret, Buckingham accepts Richard's rise to power as an inevitable reality. As he greedily accepts Richard's offer to advance him to "earldom of Hereford," Buckingham becomes even more dedicated to making Richard successful and firmly establishes himself as an opportunistic enabler (III.i.194). He offers Richard consistent support by dismissing opponents like Queen Margaret (I. iii. 293-302), intervening in conversations to endorse Richard's agenda (III. iv. 33-39, III. vii. 5-22), and recruiting additional enablers like Catesby to further Richard's power (III. i. 157-190). In every act of loyalty for Richard, Buckingham thinks primarily of the personal benefit that he expects to receive. Even when he critiques Richard's actions, Buckingham tries to coach Richard about how to appear to be a better king instead of trying to truly keep him from power (III. vii. 96-139). His desire for wealth and status surpass any objective proof that Richard is unfit to rule.

It is not until Richard asks him to help murder Edward's sons that Buckingham begins to shift from an opportunistic enabler to a "petty rebel" who refuses to cooperate (IV. iv. 332). However, it is worth noting that before Buckingham makes any attempts to formally detach from Richard, he seeks the king's renewed promise about upgrading his status, asking again about "[Richard's] promise for the earldom" (IV. ii. 102). Buckingham asks Richard about his future

title three times in the scene before he privately considers, “Did I make him a king for this?” (IV. ii. 120). Shakespeare leaves the “this” in the question ambiguous, as Buckingham could be asking if he helped make someone a king only to watch him murder children or if he is asking whether he made someone a king who no longer has interest in advancing Buckingham’s title. I argue that even though Buckingham is disturbed by Richard’s order to murder his nephews, Buckingham only begins to abandon his enabling role once when he realizes that Richard cannot be trusted to fulfil his personal promises for societal advancement. As Shakespeare shows with other characters in the play like Elizabeth and Hastings, Buckingham is only willing to engage in active rebellion against tyranny once that tyranny has negatively impacted his life. Though it is easy to minimize a problem until it affects the individual, Shakespeare is showing Buckingham’s poor judgment and deliberately highlighting the vices of this mentality. He shows that a tyrant is quick to make promises and is able to manipulate those who are more ambitious than moral; however, Buckingham and Richard’s interactions also prove that a tyrant will only keep promises to themselves, and eventually all citizens will get to feel their tyranny until a patriotic rebel emerges (V. iii. 168).

Hastings also becomes an opportunistic enabler of Richard, though he differentiates from Buckingham due to his initial disdain for Richard; this notable difference helps demonstrate that many citizens who enable tyrants may begin with an appropriate rejection of tyranny until the citizen begins to falsely believe that the tyrant can become a political or personal pawn for their bidding. As Buckingham appears to be devoted to Richard’s agenda from the beginning of his coup, Hastings is initially motivated to act against Richard because of his unfitness to rule, saying, “I’ll have this crown of mine cut from my shoulders / Before I’ll see the crown so foul misplac’d” (III. ii. 43-4). In this moment, audiences see Hasting’s patriotic devotion to his

country and his recognition that allowing Richard to take power would be wreck the “tott’ring state” (III. ii. 37). However, like Buckingham, Hastings became an active enabler out of the potential for personal gain. Once he learns of Richard plan to execute some of Hastings’ enemies, Hastings shifts from a man willing to die to stop Richard to a supporter who calls him “princely Richard” (3.2.50-55, 68). The potential for personal gain surpasses Hastings’ patriotism and devotion to the crown and his countrymen. He quickly transitions from a man who seems to care about the potentially suffering of others to someone who vengefully rejoices that Rivers, Vaughan, and Grey will be unprepared to die (III. ii. 63). Tragically, by the time Hastings realizes how unstable Richard is, it is too late for him to return to his former patriotism and act as a rebel. In his final speech, Hastings says, “I, too found, might have prevented this” if he had heeded the warning signs of Richard’s evil nature before he had something to lose (III. iv. 81). Like Buckingham, Hastings becomes so blinded by the faulty promises of the tyrant, that he cannot see the threat of tyranny until he is the one at risk. Hastings is also manipulated to support a tyrant because he believes that he is “dear / to Princely Richard and to Buckingham” (III. ii. 67-8). He faultily assumes that there is value, security, and stability in Richard’s friendship; however, both Buckingham and Hastings learn that a tyrant has no exterior loyalties beyond the pursuit of power.

By placing these bystanders and enablers in Richard’s orbit, Shakespeare is acknowledging key facets of human nature and tyranny. The bystanders in the situation are overly confident that someone else will take action against the tyrant, and so they allow their complaints and anxieties to fade into the background. Meanwhile, the enablers are not afraid of the tyrant until they are the ones being falsely accused and unjustly oppressed. Both of these groups demonstrate an apathy for the suffering of others, which allows a tyrant to amass power

faster. From the actions of the characters in this play, Shakespeare argues that a moral rebellion comes from a citizen who recognizes the attributes of tyranny and speaks out about the tyrant's abuses of power even if the tyrant has not abused them or their family (yet).

Richmond encapsulates these lessons about moral rebellion by the way he accepts responsibility to stop Richard even before he has personally been harmed by the tyrant and by demonstrating consideration and concern for the individuals around him. Though Richmond does not appear until Act V, he demonstrates the necessary leadership to "unite the White Rose and the Red," (V. v. 19). Unlike the women in Act I who raise the alarm and then fade into silence due to feelings of hopelessness, Richmond demonstrates that "true hope is swift" by taking organized action against Richard's tyranny (V. ii. 23). While others in the play wait vainly for someone else to stop Richard, Richmond is advising people on how to rebel alongside him (V. iii. 23-26). Richmond's focus on active rebellion indicates that he recognizes that it is his responsibility to help his countrymen who are "bruis'd underneath the yoke of tyranny" (V. ii. 2). Through Richmond's decision to actively rebel and organize forces, even before Richard threatened his stepbrother Stanley, Shakespeare demonstrates the importance of moving beyond simply broadcasting fears of tyranny and gradually becoming silent. Ultimately, the tyrant will be allowed to continue to abuse power until a rebel takes action by speaking consistently about the immorality of the leader, and subsequently amassing additional rebels to oppose them.

Additionally, Richmond proves to be a moral rebel through his continuous concern for his fellow citizens. Ian Frederick Moulton writes that it is Richmond's concern for others that makes him the true antithesis of Richard and his enablers, saying, Richmond "sees society in terms of broad kinship networks" (268). Unlike others in the play who are absorbed by their own advancement or painful circumstances, Richmond is able to gain a following and overthrow

Richard because he is so committed to making each citizen feel valuable to the restoration of a proper king. While Richard sees the surrounding characters as pawns for his manipulation and power, Richmond sees them as his “most loving friends” and “loving countrymen” (V. ii. 1) (V. iii. 237). He further demonstrates his compassionate nature when his first task after defeating Richard is to ask about the safety of his stepbrother, saying, “But tell me, is young George Stanley living?” (V. v. 9). He later asks about the lives lost on both sides of the battle, demonstrating that he is still more concerned with the wellbeing of others, rather than his personal victories (V. v. 12). Through Richmond’s humanity and hopefulness, Shakespeare illustrates how a moral rebellion can only be achieved when the rebels do not become consumed by usurpation that they forget about alleviating the suffering of the vulnerable. For Richmond and other moral rebels, the primary reasons for rebelling are not advancement or acclaim. Rather, the moral rebels identify tyrants, accept their responsibility and power to stage a rebellion, organize a comradeship of countrymen, and battle for the safety of the vulnerable.

### *Measure for Measure: The Citizen and Religious Tyranny*

Years after writing *Richard III* and discussing how a citizen should respond when a tyrant infiltrates the government, Shakespeare explores in *Measure for Measure* how a citizen should react to a leader who exercises religious tyranny, or a leader manipulating weaknesses in the relationship between the church and the state to justify abuses of power. By comparing the devoted responses of Escalus and Isabella, I will show that these two characters are motivated by a similar core value of patriotic loyalty but arrive at opposite reactions to Angelo’s tyranny. Through the comparison of a patriotic enabler and a patriotic rebel, Shakespeare is making the argument that passive obedience is a virtuous yet ineffective response to a tyrannical leader and

that a patriotic rebel can be instrumental to the removal of a tyrant while preserving the public peace.

Escalus is one of the first characters that audiences are introduced to, and he quickly demonstrates his knowledge of government and loyalty to leadership. Some scholars like Paul Cantor claim that Escalus is nothing more than a stock character who is “found standing in the background of a play, futilely counseling the other characters to rein in their foolish but dramatically exciting passions” (6). Others like Nathan Dixon argue that Escalus plays a more significant role because he is an accomplice for the Duke’s deception (52). I posit that Escalus’ most significant contributions to the play are not his interactions with the Duke, but his lack of overt resistance toward Angelo’s policies, even as he recognizes that the law is being unjustly implemented. Escalus’ response to Angelo’s tyranny embodies the prescribed passive obedience seen in some Renaissance texts like the *Homily against Disobedience and Wilful Rebellion*. Through Escalus, audiences see a character who is obedient to a tyrant due to patriotic loyalty, and Shakespeare demonstrates how the virtue of patriotism can become an oppressive vice.

To establish Escalus as a patriotic enabler, Shakespeare gives audiences an indicator of Escalus’ motivations for his passive obedience. Unlike other enablers from *Richard III*, Escalus is motivated to follow the Duke, and subsequently Angelo, out of his desire to promote the well-being of Viennese society. In the initial interaction between the Duke and Escalus, the Duke praises him for his experience in politics and devotion to the longevity of the state when he says, “The nature of our people, / Our city’s institutions, and the terms / For common justice, y’ are as pregnant in / As art and practice hath enriched any / That we remember” (I. i. 9-13). In spite of all of his experience, Escalus watches the Duke give power to Angelo without ever making the case that he would be more qualified to be in charge (I. i. 45-6). This behavior demonstrates that

Escalus is not motivated by fueling his own ego or gaining personal power. While opportunistic enablers may have refused to remain in their position or support another politician's promotion, Escalus only seems concerned with helping the leader create a functioning society. He wants to support the Duke and Angelo by using his political experience to assist the leader of Vienna to make the best decisions for the public, rather than further his power or prestige.

After audiences learn of Escalus' political experience and societal motivations, Escalus requests to speak candidly with Angelo; however, he quickly yields to the tyrant as his ideas are dismissed (II.i.15-32). Through this exchange between the patriotic enabler and the tyrant, Shakespeare demonstrates the dangers of political enablers and passive obedience. While discussing the new punishments for breaking laws of lechery, Escalus advises Angelo to "be keen, and rather cut a little, / Than fall, and bruise to death" (II. i. 5-6). In response, Angelo proclaims the need for unmerciful punishment against criminals and Escalus surrenders, "Be it as your wisdom will" (II. i. 32). Privately, Escalus later admits, "It grieves me for the death of Claudio, / But there's no remedy" (II. i. 280-1). After Angelo repeats his command that Claudio die, Escalus never considers taking action on Claudio's behalf to prevent this tyrannical act. Instead, Escalus justifies Angelo's harsh punishment as justice by saying, "It is [severe punishment] but needful" before repeating the notion that there is no way to remedy Angelo's unmerciful judgment (II. i. 282, 285). Later, as he is facilitating the arrest of other lascivious citizens, Mistress Overdone and Pompey, Escalus remarks again that "Angelo will not be alter'd" (III. ii. 207). When these moments are triangulated, Escalus proves to be deeply uncomfortable with Angelo's unmerciful punishments, but he quickly yields to Angelo's decrees out of sense of duty to the office that Angelo's occupies. Though Escalus is quick to obey Angelo's demands for extreme punishment for law breaking, Escalus complicates the notion that

he is merely a stock character by privately offering a temporary mercy to Pompey by saying, “I advise you let me not / find you before me again under any complaint whatsoever / ... So for this time, Pompey, fare you well” (II. i. 245-6, 250). His demonstration of fairness and justice shows that he believes there is a superior way to deal with crime than through Angelo’s extreme methods; however, Escalus only acts against the tyrant’s wishes whenever he is isolated and removed from the public eye. His willingness to obey Angelo in all other settings demonstrates that Escalus believes it is more important to show allegiance to the law maker than it is to show mercy and justice to citizens. In principle, Escalus’ devotion to the government and allegiance to Angelo’s office is an admirable virtue; however, Shakespeare argues that this virtue devolves into a vice because Escalus’ support allows an unjust leader to continue to prey upon less powerful citizens.

Through the patriotic enabler, Escalus, Shakespeare demonstrates how passive obedience will not automatically promote the public good between citizens in society. If every character in the play behaved like Escalus and forlornly accepted Angelo’s power to manipulate the law and the citizen’s powerlessness to stop him, *Measure for Measure* likely would have been a tragedy: ending with citizens being executed for petty crimes and a virtuous woman violated. Shakespeare is drawing contrasts about the utility of Escalus’ behaviors in fostering a harmonious society with Isabella’s. Though Escalus believes that his support of the ruling tyrant is the appropriate response, Shakespeare suggests that his obedience makes him an accomplice to all of Angelo’s crimes. I argue that this is why Escalus is seen later arresting citizens himself, even while still privately speaking about the unfairness of Claudio’s treatment. Due to his reluctance to rebel against Angelo, Escalus begins carrying out Angelo’s bidding and making it easier for the tyrant to maintain power.

Despite these critiques about the futility of Escalus' actions, Shakespeare tactfully acknowledges the positive motivations that create a patriotic enabler. While not trying to discourage patriotism and loyalty to the government, Shakespeare is reminding his audience about the importance of using good judgment in decision making and not allowing a patriotic virtue to replace humanity towards the suffering of others. Escalus believes that his response should remain consistently loyal from the Duke to the new ruler, regardless of the leader's lack of experience and questionable decisions, while Shakespeare is demonstrating that there is not a universally appropriate response to a governmental leader. Each situation between a citizen and a leader is unique and requires a carefully considered reaction, rather than a prescribed, automatic submission from subjects.

Escalus also shows that once citizens accept the false narrative that they are helpless to challenge the actions of a tyrannical ruler, they ultimately begin to aid and assist the tyrant in carrying out their goals. While Escalus' moral aversion to murdering Claudio never leaves him, he continues to support Angelo's authority by facilitating the arrest of other citizens. Likely, he is sentencing these subjects to a similar fate to Claudio. Escalus' transition from aversion into servitude demonstrates one of the core dangers of the patriotic enabler: without his conscious acceptance, his actions to tirelessly serve a tyrant are beginning to warp his own morality.

As the antithesis to Escalus' patriotic enabling of Angelo, Shakespeare introduces Isabella as the patriotic rebel—who opposes Angelo because of her loyalty to God and a moral society. Isabella is usually interpreted as an icy virgin who acts entirely out of self-preservation or the seductive woman who relishes the explicit control she seems to have over Angelo. Stephen Greenblatt falls into the first camp, noting that, “Isabella, for her part, is impressively true to her chaste vocation, but her determination to preserve her virginity, even at the cost of her brother's

life, is something less than humanly appealing” (110). Gerald Pinciss pushes Greenblatt’s critique of Isabella even further, writing, “Isabella’s devotion has clearly turned her into a rigid, absolute, and cold creature” (43). Other scholars read Isabella’s reactions to Angelo’s proposition and do not see a novice in a convent who is overly concerned with spiritual death, but a cloistered woman whose every word is dripping with innuendo. After exploring the verbs Isabella uses in her conversations with Angelo, Pascale Aebischer determines that Isabella is behaving with sexual aggression because she gets drunk on exercising power over a man in a position of sovereign power and is wishing for sexual fulfilment. He writes, “This sense of power and quasi-sexual aggression about her is what is implied in the asides with which Lucio eggs her on” (Aebischer 11). His conclusions are supported by other scholars who see Isabella as a catalyst for Angelo’s subsequent hypocrisy. Caroline Brown, for example, writes, “[Isabella’s] teetering between seduction and frigidity mercilessly taunts Angelo” (74). Since these views about Isabella’s unwillingness to consent to her own rape and her supposed seduction of Angelo are unconvincing to me, I argue that Isabella is evoking power over Angelo not through her virginity or diction but by her active resistance to his tyranny.

Even before Angelo sexually propositions Isabella, she verbally rebels against his severe punishment of her brother by disputing Angelo’s theological grounding. Though she is initially cautious and requires some encouragement from Lucio, her preliminary interaction with Angelo establishes that Isabella is willing to resist an immoral law, while Escalus is quick to accept Angelo’s decrees. When Angelo refuses to spare her brother, Isabella debates him about the morality of such a ruling by reminding him of Christ’s forgiving grace. When Angelo tries to dismiss her by saying her brother is a “forfeit of the law,” Isabella will not accept his ruling because “all the souls that were were forfeit once” (II. ii. 71, 73). She then commands Angelo to

“go to [his] bosom, / Knock there, and ask [his] heart what it doth know / That’s like [Claudio’s] fault” (II.ii.136-8). In both instances Isabella boldly argues that Angelo is acting sinfully by denying her brother the opportunity to demonstrate a lifelong repentance, rather than being silenced at Angelo’s initial verdict. Her continued resistance shows a reluctance to accept Angelo’s authority, and draws another striking contradiction between Isabella and Escalus. When both characters witness Angelo exercise a severely harsh judgment, Escalus resorts to submission—in spite of his familiarity with Angelo and his experience in government. Meanwhile, Isabella immediately speaks against his ideology by labeling Angelo as a tyrant, saying, “O, it is excellent / To have a giant’s strength; but it is tyrannous / To use it like a giant” (II. ii. 107-110). By describing Angelo’s abuses of power as tyrannical, Isabella’s challenging words contrast with Escalus’ passive submission and helps cement her identity as a patriotic rebel against a religious tyrant.

Though Isabella demonstrates her patriotism in a less conventional way, especially compared with an enabler like Escalus who serves out of a devotion to the state, Isabella’s resistance to Angelo is consistently motivated by her loyalty to the kingdom of Heaven and justifies her title as a patriotic rebel. She establishes this core derivative, after Angelo encourages her to forfeit her vow of chastity to save her brother’s life, when she says, “Better it were a brother died at once, / Than that a sister, by redeeming him, / Should die forever” (II. iv. 106-8). In this moment, Isabella shows that her actions are based on her understanding of the laws of Heaven. Since Isabella has proven her devotion to and concern over following God’s laws consistently throughout the play—such as when her character is introduced and she speaks about “not desiring more [freedoms as a nun], but rather wishing a more strict restraint / upon the sisterhood”—audiences are able to infer that her patriotic devotion to God’s kingdom influences

all of the actions she takes in her life (I. iv. 3-4). Just as Escalus' introduction helps establish his consistent loyalty to the government of Vienna, Isabella's introduction and subsequent behavior establish her patriotism towards God's kingdom.

Due to her devotion to God's laws, Isabella continues her rebellion by refusing to remain silent about Angelo's proposition. Upon her refusal to "redeem [her] brother / By yielding up [her] body to [Angelo's] will," Angelo tries to impose a sense of helplessness onto Isabella (II.iv.163-4). He taunts her by reminding her of his pristine reputation and source of power by saying, "Say what you can: my false o'erweighs your true" (II.iv.170). Initially upon hearing this declaration, Isabella accepts Angelo's pronouncement of her own powerlessness. She asks herself, "To whom should I complain? Did I tell this, / Who would believe me?" (II.iv.171-2). Though she seems to believe that she has no way to expose Angelo and expects not to be believed, Shakespeare shows her speaking out against Angelo to both characters in the next scene. To her brother, Isabella describes how "the outward-sainted deputy...is yet a devil" (III.i.88, 91). She then reiterates her traumatic encounter to the Duke in disguise (III.i.180-194). Despite Angelo's ploy to make her feel powerless, Isabella's choice of speaking about Angelo's true character is another act of rebellion in which she does not allow Angelo to bully her into silence or submission. Even though Isabella herself believes that people will not help her, she still tries to draw attention to Angelo's misbehavior at every opportunity.

Isabella does engage in some physical acts to expose Angelo's treachery, but she continues to conduct most of her rebellion through speaking which helps demonstrate that a moral rebellion can be conducted through rhetoric rather than tyrannicide. In Act V, Isabella boldly declares Angelo's crimes before the Duke and other political leaders. Unlike in her initial rebellion while speaking of theology Angelo, Isabella no longer requires coaxing to speak

emphatically and emotionally about the pain Angelo has caused. She tells the Duke, “Hear me yourself; for that which I must speak / Must either punish me, not being believ’d, / Or wrong redress from you. Hear me, O hear me, here (V. i. 30-33). Isabella recognizes that the Duke may not believe her; however, she accepts any personal consequences as the cost of attempting to remove Angelo from power. When Angelo slanders her and calls her mentally ill, she continues to focus on winning the attention of the Duke rather than defending herself against Angelo’s insults. Again, she tells the Duke, “Most truly will I speak,” to demonstrate her conviction to be heard (V. i. 37). Isabella’s focus on sharing her story and speaking about her experiences reflects the reality of many citizen rebels. For most citizens, they will not be in a position to lead an organized army of rebels. They will not have the infrastructure to restore a good king to power; however, Isabella’s rebellion is ultimately successful because she refused to submit to Angelo’s efforts to make her feel powerless. She told everyone around her about Angelo, rather than accepting that there was nothing that she could do as a lowly citizen. Her commitment to speak out allowed her to connect with the Duke and save her brother’s life. Additionally, it worth noting that Isabella’s dedication to sharing Angelo’s abuses of power helps transform the Duke<sup>8</sup>,

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<sup>8</sup> The Duke initially promotes Angelo to power because of his own failed leadership. The Duke recognizes that he has become too relaxed with the laws of Vienna “which for this fourteen years we have let slip,” (I. ii. 21). Out of cowardice, Duke Vincentio promotes Angelo so that he can avoid the critique of the citizens. Initially, the Duke views Angelo as a pawn that he can use to improve the justice in Vienna; however, after seeing the devastation that Angelo inflicts on Isabella, the Duke stops viewing Angelo as a scapegoat and begins to see him as a tyrant (III. i. 180-194). He transitions from an opportunistic enabler to a rebel as he develops a remedy to overthrow Angelo. Additionally, as Vincentio develops greater romantic feelings for Isabella, his sympathy for her plight against Angelo causes him even greater distress. He later accepts personal responsibility for bringing Angelo to power, saying, “Shame to him whose cruel striking / Kills for faults of his own liking! / Twice treble shame on Angelo, / To weed my vice and let his grow” (III. ii. 267-270) While the Duke’s behavior is still problematic and bizarre in many respects, for the purposes of this discussion on moral rebellion, Shakespeare may be using the Duke’s character to demonstrate that humans are able to shift their loyalties on the spectrum of citizen responses to a tyrant. While the other characters I have discussed remain constant in the classification, the Duke reminds readers that a citizen’s response to tyranny can shift and evolve with time.

who begins the play as an opportunistic enabler, and Mariana, who begins the play as a bystander, into two active rebels who aid Isabella in creating a just society.

From this response to a tyrant, Shakespeare is suggesting that one method of leading a moral rebellion against a tyrant is consistently spreading awareness to the public about the tyrannical actions that enablers will try to keep private. Isabella did not act violently against Angelo to remove him from power, she even spoke up to prevent the Duke from killing him for his crimes, saying, “I partly think / A due sincerity governed his deeds, / Till he did look on me” (V. i. 445-7). Instead of relying on violence and tyrannicide, she spread awareness of Angelo’s crimes which allowed her to gain allies and further exposure for her cause. While she recognized her powerlessness as a solitary individual, Isabella shows that a rebel’s ability to challenge a tyrant may involve language more than battlefields. By breaking the silence surrounding a tyrant’s immorality, citizens develop methods to hold the tyrant accountable for crimes. Ultimately, this practice of citizens using language to fight tyranny allows them to reasonably participate in the production of a harmonious, just society.

### *The Tragedy of Julius Caesar: The Citizen and the Fear of Tyranny*

In contrast with the optimistic notions about moral rebellion in *Measure for Measure* where a citizen achieves justice by speaking out against a tyrant publicly, Shakespeare complicates his own argument about the morality of citizen responsibility in *Julius Caesar* by questioning whether a citizen can avoid adopting tyrannical qualities during their rebellion. While Cassius and Brutus represent the virtues of moral rebels by accepting personal responsibility to remove a tyrant from power and relying on rhetoric to gain public support, their rebellion is disastrous for society. While some scholars like Gary Wills believe that this play is

“distinctive because it has no villains,” Cassius and Brutus are certainly ringleaders for an immoral rebellion (118). Both rebels are unable to restore the cardinal virtues which would promote the public good due to two preventable types of blindness. Cassius emerges as an opportunistic rebel who seeks validation and promotion through the murder of Caesar and correctly sees many traits about the Roman people’s nature. However, as he sees Brutus’ building distrust of Caesar and the folly in Roman society, Cassius proves to be shortsighted in terms of how to lead Rome and reestablish order after the death of Caesar. Meanwhile, Brutus rebels due to his love for Rome, but he is unable to see his country or his situation clearly because of his nostalgic misremembrance of a Rome that never existed. Through these men, Shakespeare asserts that citizens cannot conduct a moral rebellion when they are blinded by nostalgia and greed. The influence of these vices will cause the rebels to begin showing tyrannous qualities and create a less stable society than the government that was run by the original tyrant.

Cassius recognizes Brutus’ love for Rome and mirrors a similar patriotism to gain his support; however, Cassius’ true motivation for rebellion are entirely opportunistic, and his focus on his own advancement causes him to be unprepared to help Rome recover from tyrannicide. While recruiting conspirators, Cassius expresses fears for the future of Rome when he says, “But woe the while, our fathers’ minds are dead, / And we are govern’d with our mothers’ spirits; / Our yoke and sufferance show us womanish” (I. iii. 82-4). However, in spite of his proclaimed honorable intentions, Cassius’ speech to Brutus exposes that his true motivations are based in his self-centered desire for recognition and advancement. As Brutus is wrestling with the concept of committing treason, Cassius insists on comparing himself to Caesar as a way to make it illogical that Caesar remains so powerful. Cassius notes, “I was born free as Caesar, so were you,” and

yet “this man / is now become a God, and Cassius is / A wretched creature, and must bend his body / If Caesar carelessly but nod on him” (I. ii. 97, 115-18). Cassius hates being treated like a civilian while another man is treated as a God, which Caesar reiterates to Antony by saying, “Such men as he be never at heart’s ease / Whiles they behold a greater than themselves, / And therefore are they very dangerous” (I. ii. 208-10). Antony later confirms this motivation by saying, “All the conspirators, save only [Brutus], / Did that he did in envy of great Caesar” (V. v. 69-70). The discrepancy between Cassius’ stated motivation over a declining Rome and the various witnesses of his dangerous ambition suggests that Cassius is aware of what truly motivates a moral rebel and can temporarily perform those motivations. Though Cassius is blind to the aftermath that follows his rebellion, he clearly recognizes the discrepancy between his own motivations and Brutus’. He also sees that Brutus’ motivations are much more intriguing to undecided rebels, so Cassius begins performing as though he is deeply concerned for Rome. While this performance allows Cassius to gain more rebels to overthrow the tyrant, it does not purify his true motivations. As a result of Cassius’ motivating jealously, it is possible that he would have wanted to stage a rebellion, regardless of who was leading Rome as a way to make himself appear greater. Perhaps Cassius’ hamartia is that he never cared about who was leading Rome, what type of leader Caesar was, or how the citizens of the empire were being treated. His singular focus was about correcting a perceived unfairness and drawing attention to himself. Ironically, since Cassius is so consumed with the acclaim of ruling but shows no interest in the governing, he neglects planning for anything that will happen after the assassination. Cassius does not consider how to preserve honor, restore decorum, or demonstrate wisdom or good leadership. It is only after Caesar’s murder that the band of conspirators discuss how citizens will perceive their rebellion and decide how to treat Antony. As the founder of the coup, it is

surprising that Cassius has not considered these questions until after the bloody deed is done until audiences recognize that Cassius is not acting out of a love for Rome but from a desire to boost to his own standing in society as one of “the men that give their country liberty” (III. i. 117). When Cassius does propose an action, he doesn’t possess key leadership skills which cause him to be consistently overruled by Brutus. John W. Velz notes that Cassius is “repeatedly required to defer to Brutus, whose blindness...brought the conspiracy to...end disastrously” (Velz 259). Cassius inability to think beyond the present moment and his inability to command his own assembled conspirators shows why Cassius cannot launch a moral rebellion, even though he manages to kill the tyrant.

The only extraordinary thing about Cassius is his ability to recognize the desires in others and to manipulate those desires to suit his personal agenda. Upon recognizing a change in Brutus’ behavior during Caesar’s triumphal entry at the start of the play, Cassius is able to discern Brutus’ values, fears, and desires even though Brutus hasn’t revealed his thoughts about Caesar yet, saying only that he has been vexed “of late with passions of some difference” (I. ii.39-40). From such a vague statement, Cassius recognizes Brutus’ fears that Caesar is becoming too powerful and that Roman values will be compromised with Caesar’s continual reign. Since Cassius understands that Brutus “love[s] / The name of honor,” Cassius is able to flatter Brutus and convince him that other citizens are relying on his rebellion (I. ii. 89). Unlike the actions of moral rebels like Richmond or Isabella, Cassius is only able to amass allies through manipulation and deception. He cannot inspire action without spreading fear. By examining Cassius’ lack of morality and lack of success in protecting Rome from future tyrants, it is clear that Shakespeare is arguing that a rebellion cannot be morally launched when it is based on vengeance or personal advancement. It is the citizen’s duty, when considering an act of rebellion, to carefully consider

their own motivations. From Cassius, audiences learn that it is only when the rebel is acting out of a sincere love for their society that they will carefully consider the implications the rebellion can inflict upon the rest of the population and plan for ways to re-stabilize society based on the cardinal virtues. However, if a citizen is acting out of personal motives, they will rely on deception and manipulation as tactics to further their cause because they are unable to see beyond their singular act of retribution.

While Cassius launches an immoral rebellion because he is exclusively focused on one moment in the future, Brutus' rebellion is flawed and immoral because he is consumed by thoughts of the past. Brutus has so many strict notions of what is Roman and what is honorable based on a Rome than he remembers; however, his memories of an idyllic past have been tampered with due to the filtering influence of nostalgia. As he meets with his fellow conspirators, Brutus' actions are based on his definition of being a good Roman which he assumes everyone else shares with him. He rejects the idea that they need a blood oath to bind them together, saying, "Every drop of blood / That every Roman bears, and nobly bears, / Is guilty of a several bastardy, / If he do break the smallest particle / Of any promise" (II. i. 136-9). He speaks as though this is obvious because Brutus believes that everyone else remembers the glorious days of Rome exactly the same way he does. Brutus is so certain of the existence of ideals in the past that he is looking backwards to determine how to behave appropriately. His desire to look to the past ultimately blinds him to the realities of how to increase the public good in society.

Unfortunately, since Brutus uses his predetermined definition of what it means to be a good Roman to dictate who to trust, even when common sense would dictate a different course of action, his perceptions of the past cause him to make bad judgments in the present. This

behavior is particularly evident when Brutus allows Antony to address the Roman people after the murder of Caesar. Brutus assumes that Antony will not incite sympathy for Caesar because Antony is “a wise and valiant Roman” (III. i. 138). Brutus never considers that Antony will cause the Roman public to shift loyalties away from the conspirators because he is certain about what it means to be a good Roman. Brutus’ confidence about other people’s behavior suggests a shared national narrative about Roman identity that has been crafted over generations.

Unfortunately, his reliance on a national narrative about the people of Rome makes him blind to the realities of human nature where there is not a consistent definition of what it means to behave like a citizen of Rome. His pattern of projecting a narrative construction of what it means to be a Roman continues after the assassination when Brutus and Cassius are debating about Lucius Pella accepting bribes. While Cassius is thinking again of personal gain, Brutus decries the action saying, “Shall we now / Contaminate our fingers with base bribes?... I had rather be a dog, and bay the moon, / Than such a Roman,” (IV. iii. 23-4, 27). Again, Brutus is idealizing a version of Roman-ness that is not being manifested by others in the present time and Brutus is trying to promote his memories into reality. The tragedy of Brutus’ behavior is that his strict definition for the virtues of Roman citizens probably was not manifested in citizens of the past either. Brutus’ tries to restore the vitality and beauty of Rome by murdering Caesar; however, his understanding of what Rome was (and should be) are tainted by restorative nostalgia. His misunderstanding of Roman culture and the past causes Brutus to expect public peace after the mob and makes him unable to see Anthony clearly. Svetlana Boym writes that this specific type of nostalgia occurs when a person is willing to go through destructive measures to attempt to recreate the past in present circumstances (Boym 41). Though audiences are initially sympathetic toward Brutus for his patriotism, Shakespeare is rightfully critical of rebels who are motivated by

restorative nostalgia because they are trying to recreate tampered memories (Boym 42). Brutus has misremembered the reality of Rome by describing the morality of Romans through hyperbole; therefore, in his rebellion Brutus is tampering with the status quo in an effort to chase a fantasy of misremembered history that can never become reality. As Brutus leaves Antony to address the people, Brutus proves that he doesn't see the reality of the Roman people. He cannot see their flaws or fickleness, nor can he predict that after hearing Antony's speech the citizens would say, "We'll hear [Antony], we'll follow him, we'll die with him" (III. ii. 208-9). Since he cannot see the people as they truly are, he cannot lead them. Instead his tampered, idealized memories of Rome will be a specter, haunting him but always out of reach.

As scholars examine the play *The Tragedy of Julius Caesar*, there is often debate about the legality and benefit of the rebellion against Caesar. Some, like Robert Miola, believe that, "For such a ruler [as Caesar], classical, medieval, and Renaissance authorities insisted, there could be only one end: a sudden and violent death" (330). While I don't dismiss the tyrannical attributes of Caesar, I argue that there is a warning in the behaviors of Brutus and Cassius during the aftermath of their rebellion. In addition to being motivated to rebel for personal gain or to attempt to recreate the past, both rebels began to mirror some of the tyrannous qualities they hated in Caesar. While Cassius cited Caesar's superstition as evidence of his unfitness to rule, Shakespeare later shows both rebels reacting to superstitions (II. i. 195). In his final moments, Cassius "misconstrued ever thing" on the battlefield and misread the signs of his own victory as defeat (V. ii. 84). His unfounded interpretation caused him to act out of paranoia and fear, just as Caesar was tempted to do. Brutus demonstrates some of Caesar's more dangerous attributes through his own self-importance and his inability to act justly as he kills Caesar. Throughout the play, Brutus fears that Caesar will become too confident in his own judgment. Brutus' fears are

confirmed in the Senate when Caesar denies mercy to Cimber saying, “I could be well mov’d, if I were as you; / If I could pray to move, prayers would move me; / But I am constant as the northern star” (III. i. 58-60). Brutus recognizes the danger of Caesar’s self-aggrandizement, but he fails to recognize his own problematic thought process. While Brutus contemplates rebelling against Caesar, he puts his own judgment above the law by saying, “I know no personal cause to spurn at him, / But for the general. He would be crown’d: / How that might change his nature,” (II. i. 11-3). Just like Caesar in the Senate, Brutus demonstrates confidence that his judgment is superior to everyone else’s. Brutus also believes that he is qualified to mete justice on his own terms without facing any consequences; however, Brutus never recognizes that he is committing the same violations of power as Caesar. As Brutus does not see the similarities between his actions and Caesar, he cannot stop other tyrannical behaviors that he begins to exhibit like a cruelty towards his enemies. When initially plotting Caesar’s murder, Brutus instructs all the rebels to “kill him boldly, but not wrathfully” because they are “not butchers” (II. i. 171-2, 166). However, when the murder actually takes place, Brutus contradicts the Roman values he spoke of before, saying, “Stoop, Romans, stoop, / And let us bathe our hands in Caesar’s blood / Up to the elbows” (III. i. 105-7). Afterwards Brutus thinks that he only “appear[s] bloody and cruel,” but doesn’t recognize that he has behaved cruelly and inhumanely. Just as he is blind to the realities of Rome, he also cannot see the tyrannical attributes that he is demonstrating while simultaneously trying to remove a tyrant from power. Through these changes in Brutus and Cassius, Shakespeare offers a warning that a rebellion inspired by personal gain or a tampered version of the past can result in rebels becoming tyrants that other citizens will eventually have to remove from power.

## Conclusion

Shakespeare's education groomed him to thoughtfully consider appropriate responses to life's most difficult quandaries. As he considered the appropriate interactions between citizens and tyrants, his writings complicated the teachings of passive obedience being spread throughout England by suggesting that rebellion had the potential to be an appropriate Christian response. Centuries later, one of the most valuable lessons that modern audiences learn from Shakespeare's numerous tyrants is that a tyrant can rise to power in the most developed and civilized of nations. Shakespeare wrote of tyrants leading ancient Rome, Medieval Denmark and Scotland, as well as his contemporary England and Vienna. Additionally, he exposed that tyranny can occur within families, romantic relationships, religious sectors, and multiple layers of government. His extensive catalogue of tyrants eliminates the contemporary tendency to think that tyranny existed in the past and cannot impact modern life. Therefore, audiences in the twenty-first century must become versed in the definitions and characteristics of tyranny—just as Elizabethan citizens were familiar with the classical definitions which allowed them to easily recognize that Richard III, Angelo, and Caesar were all acting beyond the scope of appropriate power. The attributes of Shakespeare's tyrants still apply to contemporary tyrants across the world: their disregard for human life, their villainization of minority groups, their name calling and taunting of the less powerful, their assertions that they can do whatever they want without facing consequences, and the ultimate disregard for the cardinal virtues of wisdom, fortitude, justice, and decorum which work together to promote the public good in society. The modern gap where citizens cannot recognize the attributes and existence of modern tyrants only allows immoral rulers to gain and keep power.

Since tyrants can emerge in any time or place, reading Shakespeare's work can help citizens learn how to stage a moral rebellion. It is important to recognize that the correct response will not be the same for all tyrants in all circumstances. The primary lesson that modern audiences can learn from Shakespeare is that there is no such thing as a universally appropriate response. Sometimes passive obedience is the best response, but sometimes a rebellion needs to occur through rhetoric, and sometimes the rebellion relies on bodily force to remove a dangerous tyrant from power. Once readers apply this nuance to questions of rebellion, they must use good judgment to determine the appropriate response for their particular situation. The challenge, then, is to ensure that the citizen does not become so discouraged or afraid that they remain inactive.

These three plays remind audiences that staging a rebellion is contingent upon their continued activism. Shakespeare's most successful rebels were outraged and disgusted by the immoral demands of the tyrants; however, they refused to let their resistance fizzle into a gloomy acceptance. To some it may seem impossible or counterproductive to maintain a never-ending outrage against tyranny; however, I would like to reiterate that resistance rarely looks like storming the Senate floor or bringing an army to fight the king. For many average citizens, resistance is related to rhetoric. Shakespeare's rebels show that the act of continuously exposing immorality through speech and other behaviors is often more effective in destroying tyrants than violence. It seems that for most modern citizens the greatest challenge is not to inappropriately use force to remove a tyrant; the further challenge is to reject the temptation to become a passive bystander against tyranny. While tyrants and enablers proclaim that their reign cannot be interrupted, the downfall of Shakespeare's tyrants Richard, Angelo, and Caesar prove how powerful citizens can be. Citizens must also recognize that their virtuous desires to overthrow tyrants can devolve into vices if the rebel becomes distracted by elevating their own status,

promoting a past reality, or neglecting to think about the needs of citizens as a whole. By examining the complexities of some of Shakespeare's greatest rebels, modern citizens can develop a nuanced and realistic understanding of how to respond to power imbalances and injustice in their own circumstances.

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