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Foreclosing the Future in *Macbeth*, *Hamlet* and “Agnotocene” Climate Policy

CHARLES WHITNEY

The assumption that young people will somehow figure out a way
to undo the deeds of their forebears has crept into and spread like
a cancer through U. N. climate scenarios.

—James Hansen

As environmental decline continues, attention to the topic of intergenerational justice in and outside of literature is likely to increase. For “democratic citizens,” classicist Elizabeth Markovits says, “must develop a set of self-directed practices that better acknowledge citizens’ connections across time, cultivating a particular orientation toward themselves as part of much larger transgenerational assemblages.”¹

Such assemblages are surely crucial to navigating the insecurities of the Anthropocene. In 2015 youthful plaintiffs in the Netherlands sued their government for failing to protect the environment they will inherit. They won, and the judge ordered the government to step up its defenses against climate change. A similar American suit has endured separate dismissal motions by the Obama and by the Trump administrations, has prevailed, and will now go to trial in Oregon. That suit appeals to the Public Trust Doctrine as a means of facilitating those transgenerational assemblages.²

As exemplified by the above epigraph, at the international level there has been a parallel betrayal of younger and future generations--as well as a range of other groups—primarily because the United Nations series of climate summits over the last twenty-five years has reflected the dominant political and economic forces of its constituent nations. Special interests compete; renewables vie with fossil fuels and green economic planners with neoliberal capitalists who resist the regulations and emissions targets that the summits exist to prescribe.³ So while the December 2015 U. N. Paris climate summit agreement, though non-binding, was in one sense a difficult achievement that could possibly be built upon, greenhouse gases are now reported to contribute to 400,000 deaths a year,⁴ and their increasing concentration in the atmosphere has created an all but insurmountable problem, one that the present neoliberal world economic order has failed to address.⁵

A major 2015 shift in policy toward a technological solution to climate change provides a striking example of the marginality of the world’s publics to

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matters of climate policymaking. The policy was soon widely denounced among experts but neither it nor the tremendous consequences it bodes have been featured significantly in major U. S. news sources apart from an editorial or two. Yet it is now integrated into climate-change planning around the world. Recently, leading environmental writer Elizabeth Kolbert offered a trenchant critique of the policy, interviewing people who are actually working on it and concluding that it “has become vital without necessarily being viable.”⁶ For it has become vital only because of “the hopelessness of the alternatives,” since, as one informant observed, “nobody else has a good option.”⁷

The 2015 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report and 2015 U. N. Paris summit agreement had to contain plans that at least looked plausible. So both depend on this highly speculative carbon-capture technology, a true *deus ex machina* that reduces pressure to adopt a genuinely “good option”: a crash program to shift to renewables⁸--whether or not that interferes with the process of capital accumulation and the usual definition of economic growth. At some point teachers and administrators in any discipline, at any level, may feel obliged to address the implications of what appears to be a moral and legal offence of staggering proportions, a capitulation to business-as-usual and to climate chaos for youth and future generations everywhere, especially among the poor and in the developing world, where the ravages of climate change generally have and will come sooner and with greater force.

Perhaps we should not expect Shakespeare’s *oeuvre* to be among the most resonant on the topic of climate justice and specifically intergenerational climate justice. There, intergenerational conflict mostly involves intimate family dynamics. To choose the most obvious genre, tragedy, however, *Romeo and Juliet* stands out, with a plot involving populations as well as individuals, since life in Verona is marked by an inherited, lethal feud mentality laid to the doors of the elderly heads of the families. The child sacrifices and murders in *Titus Andronicus* also have an explicit sociocultural basis (“Barr’st me my way in Rome?” asks Titus before murdering his son).⁹ But *Macbeth* and *Hamlet* may offer the most compelling cases for presentist interpretation along these lines partly because in them characters can plausibly stand for groups, forces, or attitudes. The former play offers manipulation of information (riddling prophecies), victimized children, the question “why?” and finally what could have been--that is, a glimpse of human community in harmony with nature. *Hamlet* features a case study in intergenerational injustice: a child whose life is commandeered by a recklessly obsessed father and who becomes, too late, a kind of political insurgent. Such material may provide the relevant nuance and depth for presentist application.

Following Christophe Bonneuil and Jean-Baptiste Fressoz among others, I adopt a notion of the Anthropocene that begins in the early modern period, because it is the take-off point for humans’ hugely expanded agency in re-shaping the natural world, as well as in objectifying, externalizing, and instrumentalizing it.¹⁰ The concept provides a context for linking issues of intergenerational justice in Shakespearean drama to those in the present environmental crisis, where the climate summits (with our without U. S. participation) are providing a sort of ongoing tragedy. My approach to the Anthropocene concept rejects the assertion

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that it incriminates all humans or the human species itself. On the contrary, the Anthropocene provides the opportunity for a great achievement, climate justice.¹¹

The term “Agnotocene” in my title is one of Bonneuil and Fressoz’s several coinages highlighting different aspects of the Anthropocene—for instance Thermocene (rise of CO₂ emissions), Thanatocene (destruction of nature), Phagocene (consumerism), and, notably, Capitalocene.¹² “Agnotocene”—era of enforced ignorance—refers to the continuous ideological “production of zones of ignorance” (198) in “a modernizing unconscious” (199) that authorizes environmental mayhem by obscuring or trivializing it. Such forces operate in the news media and in all levels of education today; the Agnotocene came into its own only with the decline of regimes dependent on outright censorship, such as those of early modern England. But on the psychological level, wishful thinking, self-deception, and repression appear to be age-old parallels that figure crucially in tragic characters like Macbeth and Hamlet’s Ghost.

The tragic scenarios enacted by today’s climate policymakers as well as the designs of Macbeth, Hamlet’s Ghost, and Hamlet have created, or promise to create, tremendous havoc while frustrating those designs entirely or substantially. Hamlet, however, is distinguished by finally achieving recognition of what the context of environmental politics reveals as his true duty—which is *not* to fulfill his father’s horrifying demand but to murder the dangerously unfit Claudius for the good of a rotten state and for Hamlet’s own salvation. By no means does Hamlet’s tardy insight avert tragedy, but it may provide a cue relevant to our present. And here I must start with the tragedy of the present—a time so vulnerable to the Agnotocene’s shadowy forces—in order to enable presentist readings of tragedies past.

Bonneuil and Fressoz provide a tour of the Agnotocene. Highlights include early nineteenth-century apologists for the new industrial society who engaged in the production of ignorance by convincing enough of the public that Dickensian factory work was harmless, thereby prefiguring today’s Koch-brothers-funded climate deniers in and out of the U. S. Cabinet. According to anti-contagionists of the day, the disease and poverty spawned by the factories was instead caused by the prevalence of miasma and dirt in laborers’ communities. Factory smoke was declared harmless to neighboring residents: despite whatever observers, doctors, or workers might say, the air was universalized “into a majestic atmosphere, an immense receptacle in permanent equilibrium” (206). In that way, “the local and global effects of industry were minimized and nature became a mere externality” (206).

The authors expose other kinds of blinkered mentalities fostered and protected by capitalist ideology of the Agnotocene variety. In the procedures of mainstream economics for over a hundred years, the environment has undergone a progressive “dematerialization” as the exponentially growing economy of the Anthropocene has been disconnected “from any material substratum” (209). For instance, the rules for calculating GDP (Gross Domestic Product) first established by a team of U. S. economists in 1936 “naturalized the idea of the economy as a closed circuit, a circular flow of value between production and consumption cut off from its natural moorings” (214). In 1949, at the start of the Great Acceleration

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that is still going strong, some of those economists argued that ever-rising GDP figures should be reduced by the value of those “natural moorings” lost through environmental pollution and the depletion of resources, among other things. They were unsuccessful. But had such environmental factors somehow been included, there would have been “a steep decline of U. S. GDP figures from the 1970s on” (215). And had that happened, those figures would now comprise a needed warning rather than, as they do, a false comfort. For today in almost every nation the fetish of an ideologically driven GDP elides awareness of daily environmental destruction and decline.

Given the importance of GDP figures today for just about every nation except Bhutan (it prefers the Gross Happiness Index), the elision of environmental harm in those figures is crucial in addressing the shortcomings of climate-change policy. It enables what mainstream economist Roger Pielke Jr. calls that policy’s “iron law”: “When policies focused on economic growth confront policies focused on emissions reductions, it is economic growth that will win out every time.”¹³ But if we did calculate GDP according to that more comprehensive alternative method, the iron law would melt: “policies focused on emissions reductions” would in the long run improve the economy’s resilience through wise use of resources and tight restrictions on emissions. However, Sharon O’Dair’s article in this volume shows that, however GDP is calculated, at this late date developed nations would have to launch a policy of planned de-growth. But Pielke’s iron law really underscores the leaden inertia of a meticulously curated ignorance that benefits capital and fosters today’s dominant economic mindset in the failing struggle against environmental crisis and climate chaos.

Perhaps Elizabeth Kolbert was influenced by that mindset when she wrote of the “hopelessness” of our situation. Surely the deep U. S. Agnotocene has facilitated the right’s current assault on the environment, licensed by an evil-clown czar adept mainly at distraction.

The thinking behind Pielke’s Agnotocenic, fantasy “law” seems broadly applicable to the U. N. climate summits. The founding document, drafted in Rio in 1992 and fully ratified in 1994, called for preservation of the climate system while enabling “economic development to proceed in a sustainable manner.”¹⁴ The level of compliance has been obscene, and the measurement of “development” has always been closely tied to GDP growth rather than measures of quality of life as favored by, for instance, ecological economists.¹⁵ Altogether it’s been a forfeiture of immense consequence, a profound generational injustice that required robust agnotological work, both to lose sight of the true goal, and, with the help of predictably irresponsible reporting, to underplay the failures and forfeitures from the public.

Hence the resort to carbon-capture technology in the 2015 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report, and then in the 2015 Paris summit agreement, to make the numbers come out. That same year Oliver Geden, a German climate security expert and insider at the summits, exposed the plot of this Agnotocene tragedy in the making, first in a leading scientific journal and then, strategically, in a *New York Times* op-ed shortly before the Paris conference began. As greenhouse-gas emissions continue to rise beyond

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expectations worldwide, policymakers have been obliged to direct scientists to produce official reports that keep deferring the date by which those emissions must start dropping to stay within the 2° C target temperature rise. To compensate, scientists who continue to cooperate (Geden recommends they do not) have been obliged to increase the projected rate at which emissions must drop in earnest after that deferred date. That increase is reckoned to be beyond the capability of a world economy that would still be hooked on fossil fuels and capital accumulation, so the negative emissions technologies will simply have to take care of it somehow. Geden declares that limiting temperature rise to two degrees “is scientific nonsense”; in his op-ed he stresses that the public needs to know more than it does, and to be a party in decision-making.¹⁶

Some of the other experts who have weighed in here include Kevin Anderson of the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research, who in a nice pentameter called carbon capture and storage (CCS) “a carbon-sucking fairy godmother.”¹⁷ Nine months on from Paris, a scientific team led by a former head of the IPCC, Sir Robert Watson, warned about its risks, unknowns, and challenges.¹⁸ Referring to the currently most popular form of CCS, bioenergy with carbon capture and storage (BECCS), Watson and his team warn of risks “such as competition for food, land and water to grow the necessary biomass.”¹⁹ For to be effective BECCS, astoundingly, would require perhaps 12% of the world’s arable land to grow biomass, an area bigger than India. (The biomass gets burned in huge ovens that catch the CO₂ and pipe it underground with a stern injunction not to leak).

The following month (October 2016) the most famous climate scientist, James Hansen, offered the above epigraph’s comment on that very technology in his own study at Columbia University, “Young People’s Burden”:

Quietly, with minimal objection from the scientific community (Anderson, 2015, is a courageous exception), the assumption that young people will somehow figure out a way to undo the deeds of their forebears, has crept into and spread like a cancer through UN climate scenarios. Proposed methods of extraction such as bioenergy with carbon capture and storage [BECCS] or air capture of CO₂ [DAC] imply minimal estimated costs of 104-570 trillion dollars this century, with large risks and uncertain feasibility.²⁰

Whatever their degree of dubious success, invocation of BECCS and other negative emissions technologies reduces pressure to move beyond fossil fuels. On the contrary, it and the Agnotocene and Capitalocene practices that accompanied its rise to a kind of stealth prominence bolster the power of elites and reduce the possibility that we and those who come after can grasp our power as citizens. Climate economists and policymakers seem fettered to the terms of the very social and economic system that has presided over the development of the crisis, and unable to think beyond it. Will the Anthropocene see more exploitation

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and victimization of those who come after, or can it be a new chance for human rights solidarity?

In the Agnotocene as in the genre of tragedy, what goes around comes around. A tragedy's latter acts and the Anthropocene's latter-day biospheres promise the most suffering, and in those climates-to-come, to adapt Edgar's closing words, the oldest will have borne *least* and those "that are young Shall never see so much" *pain* "nor live so long."²¹

Macbeth's ambition, masculine prowess, and willingness to try extreme measures to reach his goal chime with early modern, Anthropocenic celebrations of human, or at least male, capabilities. They also recall the Prometheism described by geoengineering advocates Ted Nordhaus and Michael Shellenberger of the Breakthrough Institute. While the great majority of qualified experts reject geoengineering as a policy because of its unpredictable consequences, they recognize the danger that a small number of people or a single nation could undertake it. But rejecting "the romantic preservationists," Prometheans celebrate the ability of the human to "refashion its world" "by means of technological ingenuity."²²

The paltering fragments of prophecy croaked out by the Weird Sisters, to which Macbeth clings with desperate optimism, parody the unlikely projections of climate-change policymakers that manage to appear plausible. The prophecies equivocate with creative literalisms involving Macduff's mother dying in childbirth and a creative military tactic (sneaking up on Dunsinane under sylvan camouflage). The equivocations of the Paris agreement mislead by suggesting that the measures it agrees to adopt, including BECCS, will keep things under control, and business may continue as is, with modifications that are nothing like the deep cuts in emissions called for by the data. As for motives, the Weird Sisters enjoy using their equivocations to tempt an ambitious thane and war hero, and to watch how he defeats himself and creates havoc for others. Today the powers that be settle for a false solution that benefits them by preserving the present distribution of power and wealth.

To wreck the climate is to visit the sins of the fathers on the children. The Macbeths do not speak of children as ends in themselves. After being rewarded for his heroic service in battle, Macbeth tells Duncan "our duties Are to your throne and state, [like] children and servants" (1.4.24-5). Lady Macbeth associates the murder of Duncan with cruel treatment of a figurative infant of her own, framing her mind for murder by praying that her breast milk become gall (1.5.45-46). She tells Macbeth he has "an eye of childhood" (2.2.52) due to his fear to look upon Duncan slain. And her vehement rhetoric of infanticide is key to convincing him to murder his king:

I have given suck, and know
How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me:
I would, while it was smiling in my face,
Have pluck'd my nipple from his boneless gums,
And dashed the brains out, had I so sworn
As you have done to this (1.7.54-59).

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“*His boneless gums*”: in Shakespeare’s England mothers came under unwarranted suspicion of infanticide through smothering, an act that could threaten the husband’s lineage.²³ Lady Macbeth brazenly uses that anxiety to goad her partner. Yet after Macbeth becomes king, rather than going about to generate a male heir himself with his “dearest partner of greatness” (1.5.9-10), he goes after potential rival successors to his throne, failing to murder the most important targets. He has Banquo murdered, as one destined to beget kings, fretting because the assassins could not eliminate Banquo’s son Fleance as well. Duncan’s son and heir Malcolm is safely out of his reach, but Macbeth tries to corrupt him (4.3.117-19). When Macduff joins the forces ranged against Macbeth, the latter, on impulse, succeeds in killing the thane’s wife and children, a bright idea he calls one of the “firstlings” of his heart (4.1.163), as if it were a child. Eventually his first victim’s child leads an army to defeat him. Are his actions any less lethal than the equivocations of our own Paris policymakers?

Originally Macbeth was an unwilling villain: he has “no spur To prick the sides of my intent” (1.7.25-6) And he never articulates why he commences his spree, though he provides excellent reasons why he should not murder his first victim, Duncan: he could be found out and punished; he is transgressing as a trusted kinsman, subject, and host; Duncan is upright and blameless and his murder would be lamented unbearably (1.7.16-25). Macbeth dares not probe and articulate his own motives, for working them out might dissuade him. So he becomes a creature of the Agnotocene, driven by senseless reasoning, by a malevolent agency he tells himself he senses in the natural world at night, and by the firm resolve of another, Lady Macbeth. Once he gets over the trauma of his first murder and his confrontation with Banquo’s ghost, Macbeth decides that from then on he is “in blood Stepped in so far” that “Returning were as tedious as go o’er” (3.4.135-37). Could there ever be a sensible answer to why we are risking the end of everything, why it seems like for us “Returning were as tedious as go o’er”?

When Macbeth hears that his lady has killed herself, his moving soliloquy denies the continuity time and the meaningfulness of both human effort and the future itself. (“Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow . . .” [5.5.18-27]). That fragmented state of mind seems oddly familiar today. According to psychologist and climate-change educator George Marshall, surveys show that denial of the future in the sense of believing that the world will end soon, or in the sense of not being able to imagine the future, has become widespread among children and pre-teens in the U. S. and Australia.²⁴

On the other hand *Macbeth* offers a brief glimpse of what could have been: humans and other creatures living together in a peaceable kingdom. This is the fraught moment when Duncan and Banquo admire Macbeth’s Glamis Castle (1.6)--right after Lady Macbeth has declared her fixed desire to murder Duncan that very night. As he and Banquo ride up to the castle, unsuspecting Duncan would be looking forward to a closer relationship with Macbeth, who has saved Scotland from invasion, but Banquo, as we soon learn (2.1.1-9), would have to be somewhat concerned about the havoc Macbeth might wreak to bring those strange

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prophecies into reality. Their exchange begins and ends with praise of an important consideration in humoral medical theory--good air--and that of this "pleasant seat" is nimble, sweet, and "delicate" (1.6.10). There Banquo notes the "procreant cradle" of the "temple-haunting martlet," testament to the quality of the air, "heaven's breath" (1.6.3-8). Despite Banquo's misgivings, his vocabulary makes Macbeth's castle a place where human and natural worlds thrive in health and fulfillment under the blessing of heaven. He calls our attention, we of the Anthropocene, to the necessity of hope and purpose in the face of terrible knowledge.

Hamlet's plot chimes with the current, outrageous assumption noted by Hansen "that young people will somehow figure out a way to undo the deeds of their forebears." Hamlet is burdened not with undoing any selfish and irresponsible deeds of his father but with carrying out his father's selfish and irresponsible demand, one that for Hamlet precludes, as the child climate-change plaintiffs have claimed in court, the right to one's own life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness. So burdened, Hamlet stands for younger generations faced not only with ravaged environments but with monstrous conundrums like BECCS, the legacies of selfish and irresponsible forebears, whether they are fossil-fuel magnates, policymakers at U. N. summits, or all of us.

The Ghost appears to a beloved relative before consignment to Purgatory not for the usual reasons of sentiment, desire for a boon that may shorten its sentence, to visit a store of treasure, or to prophesy (see 1.1.111-19)—but in resentment and desperation to sate its prideful grudge, to propose and thereby collude in a crime of private revenge that must lengthen the Ghost's sentence in Purgatory if not reassign it to hell. Hamlet's exclamation "And shall I couple hell?" (1.5.93) soon indicates his misgivings, which eventually prompt him to arrange the Mousetrap, to test both Claudius's guilt and find out if the Ghost is really his father's or a demon in disguise. But after the Ghost's departure Hamlet exclaims to his companions, "The time is out of joint: o cursèd spite, That ever I was born to set it right" (1.5.189-90): the Ghost has burdened him with a conundrum that will claim his life henceforth, and not only in this world but perhaps in the next as well. For in the third soliloquy ("To be, or not to be") Hamlet also becomes vividly aware that tangling in the Ghost's affairs could adversely affect his own lot within in the "bourn" of the afterlife's "undiscovered country" (3.1.81).

When Hamlet is drawn from the platform to follow his father's Ghost he knows not where, the guard Marcellus utters the immortal line "Something is rotten in the *state* of Denmark" (1.4.67, *italics mine*), throwing into contrasting relief what will turn out to be the Ghost's overwhelmingly private and selfish motivation. Its speech's tenor of bitter outrage at gross violations of brotherly and spousal trust reveals a dignified but driven shade too like the demon from hell Hamlet suspects him to be, an imposter parent working to damn the child rather than equip him for the world. It is only when Hamlet is able to embrace his duty to that state—rather than any parental injunction to private revenge—that he fully reconciles himself to the murder of Claudius.

The Ghost's rhetoric aims to overwhelm its listener with anger and indignation, but when that effect subsides, other considerations come into play.

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John Kerrigan argues that Hamlet wants to remember his father as he was alive, not revenge his death—unless, perhaps, he could manage to kill Claudius when his sins are unrepented, as Claudius did his father.²⁵ But by the time Hamlet returns from England, even such an exquisitely recapitulative private revenge seems to have become the least of many motivations for killing Claudius. Unfortunately it has taken a tragic length of time for Hamlet to get straight about what his duty really is.

For not until the play's last scene does he define his purposes as state matters, as Marcellus had divined in the first act. Hamlet speaks of himself to Horatio as a kind of citizen who bears a special responsibility to remove Claudius from power, which requires Claudius' death. He lists a set of motives for regicide without mentioning his personal relationship to his father. That relationship has become political: his father is now just "my king"—that is, all Denmark's king--and the justification for regicide rests on an ethical and religious sense of duty, and on what Claudius has done not to his father but to him and to his mother.

Does it not, think'st thee, stand me now upon—[rest
upon me as duty]
He that hath killed my king and whored my mother,
Popped in between th'election and my hopes,
Thrown out his angle for my proper life,
And with such coz'nage—is't not perfect conscience,
To quit him with this arm? *And is't not to be damned,*
To let this canker of our nature come
In further evil?
(5.2.63-71 [italicized lines are only in the Folio edition]).

Now Hamlet aspires to be the principled assassin of an evil ruler, as justified during the period in treatises by John Ponet and by an unknown author.²⁶ He wishes to address a state matter best dealt with by him as the member of the royalty most personally harmed. A measure of his transformation is that where before he worried that his killing Claudius would risk heaven's wrath in that "undiscovered country" after death, Hamlet now believes he is risking damnation by not killing Claudius and thereby inviting "further evil."

In a presentist application *Hamlet* calls for exposure of the extreme generational injustices incident to the Agnotocenic dimension of our Anthropocene period, since in that period power depends crucially on obscuring the destruction of the environment by producing zones of ignorance that threaten to foreclose the future for us and those who come after. *Hamlet* models a labor of understanding as prelude to transgressive action.

If an economic and political revolution in the name of justice seems appropriate today to manage a many-faceted environmental crisis, there is another frame compatible with the Anthropocene that may be helpful in linking intergenerational justice in Shakespearean tragedy and in the climate crisis: Franco Moretti's theory concerning tragedy's paradoxical power to undercut reverence for England's monarchy--to "deconsecrate sovereignty"—and yet its inability to

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ground a viable alternative in its own time.²⁷ For today's ongoing tragedy of fatally compromised efforts to mitigate climate-change disaster has, in the eyes of many, inadvertently provided something like a deconsecration of capitalism²⁸—but, again, one that may or may not ever find a way to ground a viable alternative. Further, in each case the profane-making became or will become part of huge societal changes: the English Civil War and Revolution then and whatever the intensifying effects of the Anthropocene and our responses to it may bring.

The tragic stage made majesty the subject of scrutiny and judgment. In the Tudor period, political power was progressively centralized in the Crown. So the stage fleshed out compelling but flawed figures of authority like Macbeth and Claudius who find themselves possessed of enormous power, with predictably catastrophic results that helped dissipate audiences' awe for the system. But the Crown's censors would not approve plays that debunked monarchy or centered on positive representations of alternative forms of polity that distributed authority widely—hence the stage's failure to ground an alternative.

True, in Shakespeare's time, as the early modern British monarchy continued to drift in the direction of absolutism, an alternative was clear: some system of republicanism as exemplified positively by the Venice of *Othello* and with a measure of respect by the ancient Rome set forth in *Coriolanus* and *Julius Caesar*. But, Andrew Hadfield concludes, by the early seventeenth century the way forward for republicanism as more than a set of ideas and topics for discussion proved cloudy in the short term. Despite James I's many shortcomings—not least his explicit absolutist ideology—his reign was warmly greeted by John Marston's *The Malcontent* (1603) and Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* (1603-4), plays celebrating hereditary, wise, and resourceful rulers. These plays suggest “that republicanism is no longer a viable, current political philosophy.”²⁹ Hadfield's conclusion helps validate application of Moretti's thesis to the remarkable number of tragic masterpieces produced within a few years of those plays, including *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*. Their considerable political resonances tended to deconsecrate sovereignty, but did not present salient political alternatives.

But forty-odd years later there was a revolution and England became a republic, as tragedy's profane-making finally found definite grounding in a short-lived republic some of whose ideals were more effectively realized later, in 1688. And so may the ongoing deconsecration of capitalism today find grounding, if engaged citizens apprehend its role in the continuing failure to address the general environmental crisis, and then leverage the strength of alliances not only across cultures, races, and classes, but also generations, like the alliance of adults and children in their lawsuit against government fecklessness today.³⁰

As the English Civil War raged, Thomas Hobbes was writing *Leviathan*, which justifies absolutism as the only regime powerful enough to end the chaotic conditions of his time. In their recent *Climate Leviathan*, Joel Wainwright and Geoff Mann argue that if a climate-justice movement is unsuccessful the most likely alternative will be an absolutist Climate Leviathan.³¹ As the only regime powerful enough to attempt to control the social and political chaos exacerbated by climate change, that regime will navigate through ever-declining environmental conditions as long as it can while protecting the interests of capitalist elites. Climate Leviathan

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would also surely try to insure that the Anthropocene remains also an Agnotocene. In such a bleak world the fragmentary *A Massacre at Paris* might seem more relevant than the threads of hope and affirmation in Shakespearean tragedy or, say, *Dr. Faustus*.

Notes

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