

The Censoring of Plutarch's Gracchi on the Revolutionary French, Irish and English stages, 1792-1823

Edith Hall and Rosie Wyles

Tiberius and Caius Gracchus were the sons of Tiberius Sempronius Gracchus, who had held the prestigious public office of *censor*. In this honoured role, one of his most important duties was the overseeing of public morals, the *Regimen Morum*. This responsibility included the duty of policing the acting profession (Livy 7.2), which in ancient Rome was regarded as more or less disgraceful. Theatre and censor have been as intimately linked in more recent times. By 1644, the word *censor* had been adopted into the English language to mean specifically someone with the power to inspect words before they could be published, the way Milton uses the term in his *Areopagitica* 21. But the notorious Licensing Act of 1737 in Britain, which institutionalized theatre censorship here until 1968, was largely a response specifically to the vilification of government (at the time, Robert Walpole's administration) or the monarchy in the theatre.¹

Several plays based on ancient Greek *myth* ran into problems with the censor—James Thomson's anti-Walpole *Agamemnon*, James Shirley's *Electra* and various versions of the Oedipus tale, as Hall and Macintosh have shown in *Greek Tragedy & the British Theatre 1660-1914* (2005). But plays based on ancient *historical* figures were just as susceptible to the blue pencil. This paper concerns the Gracchi, Tiberius and Caius Gracchus, known chiefly through Plutarch's *Lives*, on the stages of both Britain and France. But it also concerns censorship, which plays about these Republican Roman brothers provoked in both countries—indeed, views on the Gracchi, we argue, constitute a kind of thermometer for assessing the temperature of political sentiment during times of

struggle between rich and poor. The first play is Marie-Joseph Chénier's *Caius Gracchus* (1792), and the second is James Sheridan Knowles' Anglo-Irish *Caius Gracchus* (1815). Knowles, as a man of the theatre and an Irish radical, was fully acquainted with the French stage repertoire, and the story of the two plays is one of a particular kind of reception of Classics—the chain of receptions within the world of theatre when one dramatists respond to another's breathing of stage life into historical figures from antiquity, identified as forebears by progressive men of the theatre, during what Eric Hobsbawm labeled simply 'The Age of Revolution', i.e. 1789-1848.

The death of Caius Gracchus in Plutarch is so inherently theatrical that several classical scholars have argued that there must have been an ancient play on the theme which had affected the discourse long before Plutarch's seminal contribution.² Yet the theatrical potential of the Gracchi was not discovered until relatively late in the evolution of the modern history play. Valerius Maximus' praise of the loyalty Gaius Blossius showed towards Tiberius Gracchus (*Memorable Deeds and Sayings* 4.7) was a popular exemplum in Medieval and Renaissance discussions of friendship.³ Renaissance and Early Modern authors also recycle Valerius Maximus' quotation of the Gracchi's mother Cornelia claiming that they were her jewels (4.4, *praefatio*). The rhetorical styles of the two brothers are often contrasted in handbooks on oratory. But unlike Alexander the Great, Cato, Julius Caesar, or Pompey, the Gracchi produced little response from in the Renaissance or Early Modern European theatre. The sole opera about either of them seems to be *Caio Gracco* by the young Leonardo Leo, performed at the palace of his patron, the Viceroy of Naples, in 1720.⁴

The reason why the Gracchi did not become stage heroes seems to have been to do with the political alarm bells their stories had always had a tendency to set off. The ancient view of the Gracchi which dominated Medieval, Renaissance and Early Modern responses to the Gracchi as political agents was the seminal Chapter 24 of Augustine's *City of God*, book III. Augustine did acknowledge that there was some unfairness in the stranglehold of the nobility on public land. But the Gracchi's attempts at land reform, according to Augustine, echoing most previous Latin authors, were seditious and resulted in fearful destruction, unleashing the violence of the Civil War, with riots, mobs, and bloody massacres.⁵ Augustine's characterisation of the Gracchi's actions as sedition resulting in chaotic bloodshed can be found everywhere in texts before the 18th century--in Machiavelli's argument that they may have been right but were completely ineffective, in Montaigne's view that Tiberius may have been talented but only succeeded in wrecking the Roman state, and in British Restoration apologists for the monarchy, who routinely cited Plutarch's *Life* of Tiberius Gracchus as evidence for the sort of terrible sedition and anarchy that arose with any sort of republican or democratic constitution.⁶

The Gracchi, perhaps surprisingly, do not even seem to have been widely adopted by Parliamentarians during the English Civil War,⁷ although the first identifiable admirers of the Gracchi had been reforming Protestants of the early 16th century. A picture of the Gracchi radically different from that derived from Augustine seems first to have emerged from the pen of Johann Eisermann (also known as Johannes Ferrarius Montanus), who was Rector of Marburg, the first Protestant University to be founded without papal permission. He paraphrases Plutarch eloquently when discussing the problem of tyranny in his work on the good ordering of a commonwealth, *De Re Publica*

Bene Instituenda, Parainesis (1556), the 1st edition of which was published in 1533.⁸ The English translation by William Bavande, published three years later, was a foundational text for English Protestantism. Eisermann responds to details in Plutarch's *Life of Tiberius Gracchus* in an identifiably more sympathetic way, for example in him the process by which Tiberius comes to identify so passionately with the cause of the Italian poor is presented in more emotive, indeed *dramatic* detail. It is stirring stuff, and scarcely surprising, given that Eisermann began writing the book in the 1520s, only a decade after the Peasants' Revolt had rocked central Europe and bitterly divided the Protestant leadership. He was a jurist who was primarily interested in working out what kind of legislature would work in a Protestant welfare state, and he gave very austere prescriptions to those who would lay claim to leadership of this ideal Christian polity.

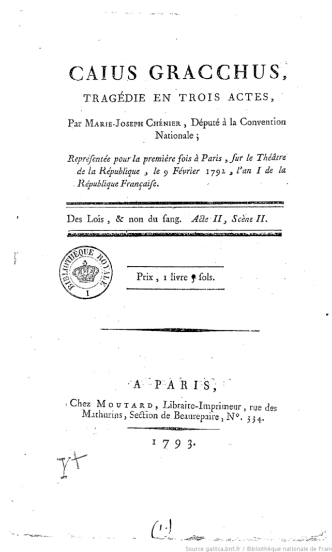
BUT the very same text answers the question why the Gracchi did not become *stage* heroes until so much later. For Eisermann, however much he admired Tiberius Gracchus, deplored the theatre and all its arts. In the same book, he published his view that both players and spectators were rendered equally immoral in the process of watching theatre, the players for exhibiting 'the filthiest matters', and the hearers for acquiescing in the 'occasion of voluptuousness'. To put the matter in a nutshell, until the 18th century, the only circles who read Plutarch's Gracchi as politically positive exemplary heroes were the very circles whose systematic anti-theatricalism ensured that the Gracchi were never to mount the stage.

The change came in the early 18th century, when Pierre Fatio, from a family of upper-class Protestant refugees from France, led demands for a widened franchise in Geneva and was secretly executed after being arrested during the Geneva revolt of 1707.

He was almost immediately labelled the ‘Gracchus’ of the Swiss, and thereafter elevated to heroic status by the more adventurous French thinkers, especially Rousseau. The Gracchi, at around this moment, begin to become acceptable, at least on the radical wing of the European Enlightenment. By 1719, a more balanced appraisal of the Gracchi can be found creeping into scholarly publications in France, where the Abbé de Vertot, in *Les révolutions de la république romaine*, attempts to give a balanced account, using all the ancient sources,⁹ and even-handedly emphasising the faults and mistakes of both the Senate and the Gracchi.¹⁰ In French authors, from this moment on, it became possible to read the political position of writers from the views they expressed on the Gracchi.

The première of Chénier’s *Caius Gracchus* in the Théâtre de la République on 9th February 1792 proved to be the first of twenty-nine performances of this important play in revolutionary Paris.¹¹ Chénier used the play to showcase ‘the virtues of the defenders of liberty’ and so it became central to the revolutionaries’ propaganda programme;¹² selected in 1793 as one of three plays in the officially recommended patriotic repertoire.¹³ Performances of this play were ‘nothing short of political events’ and had a palpable impact on the revolutionaries who watched it.¹⁴ The revolutionary Babeuf would take the name Gracchus, in place of his Christian names François-Noël Toussaint Nicaise, as part of the ‘dechristianisation’ movement of autumn 1793.¹⁵

Many readers, however, would have encountered Plutarch’s *Lives* through the popular compilations of Roman history (which drew heavily on Plutarch). Amongst these Charles Rollin’s *Histoire Romaine* (first printed 1738-48) stands out both for its unbelievable popularity and for its outspoken condemnation of the Gracchi.¹⁶ While Rollin takes parts of his account of the lives of the Gracchi *verbatim* from Dacier’s



translation of Plutarch, his comments on the story offer a radical divergence from Dacier's.¹⁷ He asks how they can be excused for their attack on the Senate, 'the soul of the Republic', and for depriving that august company of its precious and legitimate rights. There is no question in Rollin's mind that the Gracchi abused their position and their natural talents.

While Chénier's play in 1792 would, like Rollin, offer an ideologically charged version of the story, importantly for the reception of Plutarch it would at the same time do much to reinstate a sympathetic view of the Gracchi. Chénier studied at the Collège de Navarre in Paris and during his school days would have encountered a broad range of Classical authors including: Virgil, Horace, Livy, Cicero, Phaedrus and possibly also Sallust, Cornelius Nepos, Quintus Curtius, Ovid, and Tacitus.¹⁸ His first encounter with the story of the Gracchi, and by extension with Plutarch, would have been through Heuzet's latin adaptations of historical stories, Vertot's history of revolutions and Montesquieu's study of the Romans which were the standard texts used in Parisian colleges.¹⁹ The Gracchi are given scarce mention in Montesquieu's account but both Heuzet's and Vertot's treatments seem to have influenced Chénier's later response to Plutarch. While Plutarch's *Lives* itself did not feature on the school syllabus, the revolutionaries were clearly familiar with this work.²⁰ Chénier may have accessed the *Lives* through Dacier's translation of it or even in the original ancient Greek text (he was capable of producing a translation of Aristotle's *Poetics*).²¹

Chénier's play makes significant changes to Plutarch's narrative while retaining its sympathetic spirit and drawing on its finely drawn characters. The action of *Caius Gracchus* begins at the end of the night after the lictor, Quintus Antyllius has been killed and so begins at roughly 35 [14] of Plutarch, although motifs from elsewhere in Plutarch's narrative are incorporated into the play.²² The characters are as anyone versed in Plutarch would expect: Licinia is weak and tries to persuade Caius to act dishonourably for her own interests; Cornelia spurs Caius on to glorious action (whatever the cost); Fulvius pushes for violence; Caius is moderate and honourable; Opimius is tyrannical; and Drusus is corrupt. Chénier adapts what he finds in Plutarch to offer his hero the maximum opportunity to demonstrate his self-sacrifice for the liberty and the Roman people. The most dramatic part of the Plutarch narrative (the pursuit of Caius and the return of his head) is omitted. Instead Caius offers himself, in a noble sacrifice: his dying wish is that the people should be free. Notably the people stand around him protecting him from the group of Senators which clearly redeems the people from the negative claims which Rollin had made about them. Denying Caius flight enabled Chénier to showcase his self-sacrifice and ennobled his death through making it a conscious choice. Within moments of the death of Caius on stage, Opimius is put to death by the people in another significant twist on Plutarch's narrative. In Plutarch, Opimius lives to old age in dishonor and hated by the Roman people (39 [18]). This sense of retribution is accelerated by Chénier and is put into immediate effect through the death of Opimius. There was perhaps a political motivation in presenting a sense of closure on the bloodshed. According to his contemporary Daunou, Chénier advocated, through the mouthpiece of his character Caius, laws and not blood.²³ When Caius says, shortly before

his death, that he wanted ‘to stop the carnage’ (p. 55), this too might suggest Chénier’s own position. The final word of the play, after this bloodshed, is *liberté* which would chime as both celebratory and elusory in the performance history of this play.

In the particular context of the play’s production the plea to turn away from bloodshed followed the massacre of the Champs-de-Mars in July 1791.²⁴ The play also became more controversial as Robespierre’s influence increased and the Terror got underway. Although the play had been championed by the Convention in August 1793, it would be condemned in October of the same year for its dangerously moderate views.²⁵ The condemnation came from Antoine-Louis Albitte, who was a Montagnard holding office in the Legislative Assembly and National Convention. He had possibly first voiced objections to Chénier’s *Timoleon* in a performance at the Théâtre de la rue Richelieu on 5th October.²⁶ The theatre, fearing closure, then seems to have replaced it with *Caius Gracchus* only to have further objections to this production from Albitte, who during the performance cried out in response to Caius’ hemistich ‘Des lois, non pas du sang’: ‘Cette maxime est le dernier retranchement du feuillantisme’ (This maxim is the final stronghold of the royalists).²⁷ Although those in the theatre had reacted positively to the lines in the play and drowned out Albitte’s objections, the ultra-revolutionary position was clear: the play was attacked in anarchist papers and there is even anecdotal evidence for Robespierre himself walking out of a performance of *Caius Gracchus* at the utterance of this same hemistich.²⁸ The political climate had changed significantly since the play’s première in 1792: it was now a world where Albitte’s counter slogan: ‘Du sang et non des lois’ was the order of the day.²⁹ Daunou, Chénier’s contemporary who wrote the

introduction to Chénier's posthumous works (published in 1824), sees this slogan as representative of the position of those in power at the time:³⁰

“They did not forgive him [Chénier] for having borrowed the Romans' voice to demand laws and not blood, at the precise moment that blood was flowing in France onto the ruins of all social institutions. The tyrants responded: Blood and not laws, banned the play, and decided to ban the poet.”

Chénier who had championed freedom of expression with his inflammatory pamphlet denouncing the ‘inquisitors of thoughts’ back in 1789 and who had been pivotal in legislating the freedom of the theatre in January 1791 (which resulted in the abolition of censorship), was now himself the subject of denunciation and censorship.³¹ The precise details of the ban are not known, though part of Chénier's fall from grace was expressed in his dismissal from the Committee for Public Instruction in the autumn of 1793.³² Daunou, despite noting the ban, begins this paragraph explaining that the play was first produced in 1792 and was still being performed in 1794.³³ It may be that he is referring to performances of the play in the provinces in 1794: there is evidence for performances in both Nantes and Angers.³⁴ It seems, however, that these productions were subjected to a different form of censorship. They appear to have been carefully managed to allow the play to be a celebration of Jean-Paul Marat, the radical supporter of the *sans culottes*, who had been murdered by the Girondist sympathizer Charlotte Corday in July 1793. In a letter to the Convention, Jean-Baptiste Carrier describes the performance in Nantes in November 1794, as teaching the people a great lesson.³⁵ The nature of this lesson is made

clear by the way in which he glosses the play as ‘Caius Gracchus, le Marat romain’ and claims that during the interval there were cries of ‘Vive la Montagne!’³⁶ Clearly the play could only be allowed onto the stage if Caius could be understood as a hero belonging to the dominant ultra-revolutionaries.

This appropriation of the meaning of the play also provides the explanation for how, after its censure in 1793, the play could be included in the approved repertoire of the revolutionary committee of Angers in 1794.³⁷ The description of this repertoire as being ‘marked with the most exalted republicanism’ points to the understanding of this play in Montagnard terms.³⁸ Ironically it may have even been the censored performance of the play in October 1793 which suggested this radical re-interpretation. Following Albitte’s heckling and the completion of the performance of *Caius Gracchus*, there was a recitation of Dorat-Cubières’ poem lamenting the death of Marat.³⁹ It may well have been this juxtaposition in performance between these two men celebrated for giving up their lives for liberty which invited the re-interpretation of the play. While previously *Caius Gracchus* had enjoyed its success precisely because it ‘performed the difficult feat of being approved by both sides of the political divide’, after 1793 its censorship meant withdrawal from performance in Paris and its future acceptance for performance only on the narrow radicalized interpretation of its protagonist.⁴⁰ This appropriation of the play for radical purposes could be understood as a worse form of censorship (than a complete ban) for a moderate committed to the freedom of the press.

It is Plutarch’s sympathy in his treatment of the Gracchi combined with his agenda of offering exemplary models which creates heroes of such explosive political potential. In the hands of the wrong person this tale could become dangerous. Ironically,

as well as the outright censorship which the play suffered at the hands of Robespierre, Chénier would also have to see that same sympathy at the heart of his play censored through its appropriation by the political group who had put his brother, the renowned poet André Chénier, to death in July 1794. In light of Chénier's own survival through the Terror, *Caius Gracchus*, despite its fine intentions, as a play about a brother following another brother to his death, would prove to be a further rebuke to this champion of liberty.⁴¹

Chénier's play became internationally famous, and was translated into other European languages, including Dutch, but never into English. The Gracchi were earlier identified as exemplary heroes in Ireland than in Britain (Ireland, although ruled from Britain, was not formally united with England, Scotland and Wales until 1800). Since the ancestors of many Catholics had been dispossessed of their land with the creation of the 17th-century plantations, the Irish peasantry identified intuitively with the cause of the Gracchi. By 1773, a caustic critic of Lord Townshend's administration signs himself *Caius Gracchus*.⁴² In 1781, Mark Akenside enthusiastically adopted directly from France the radical Gracchi as opponents of oppression in Ireland.⁴³

The impact of the French revolution in Ireland was very different from its impact in England. The Irish peasants, so brutally oppressed by English or Anglophile landowners, identified with the French revolutionaries. They took hope when the new French government in 1791 said that it would offer military help to any movement attempting to depose their own monarch, and in February 1793 declared war on Britain and Ireland. It was in this context that our second playwright, the Irishman James Sheridan Knowles, always known to his friends as 'Paddy', found himself at the age of

nine in the position of political exile.⁴⁴ The playwright's father ran a small Dublin school. A radical Protestant, and cousin of the dramatist Richard Brinsley Sheridan, Knowles Senior advocated Catholic Emancipation. After publicly supporting a liberal newspaper whose editor was imprisoned for criticising the government, he had to leave Ireland for London, with no money and his small son, in a hurry.

William Hazlitt, who was himself of Irish Protestant descent, befriended them. Hazlitt was an important conduit through which French Enlightenment and revolutionary thought and authors were disseminated on this side of the channel, and his influence on the little Knowles was profound.⁴⁵ Meanwhile, the father and son watched from England as in Ireland, the United Irishmen were founded, forward-looking Catholics and Protestants alike, with the intention of founding a democratic republic on French lines. When the British began arresting and murdering the members of this organisation, the result was the 1798 rebellion which was brutally put down at the Battle of Vinegar Hill. The French sent reinforcements who landed at Mayo on the western coast, but the joint Franco-Irish rebel army was again defeated.

When he grew up, Knowles worked as an actor centred in Bath and Dublin until, after the birth of his first child, he opted for the safer income of a teacher. He took a job in Belfast Academical Institution, where he taught English Literature, moving soon afterwards to teach in Glasgow instead. But he wrote *Caius Gracchus* for the Belfast Theatre and it was first performed there on 13th February 1815. According to the review in *The Belfast News-Letter*, it 'was throughout received with the rapturous plaudits of a crowded house'.⁴⁶ This is scarcely surprising; not only did it speak directly to the plight of the Irish peasantry, but it encouraged more British-identified members of the Belfast

audience to draw connections between poverty in ancient Rome and modern Britain after the 1813 Corn Laws had kept the price of bread impossibly high, and at the end of the Napoleonic Wars there had been a drastic economic slump and widespread famine afflicting the North of both England and Ireland in 1814.

When Knowles' play opens, Caius has returned to Rome and tells the audience how stirred he is by the sufferings of the poor: 'they are bare and hungry, houseless and friendless, and my heart bleeds for them'. The second scene is a noisy enactment of the trial of Spurious Vetteius, a friend of Caius' dead brother Tiberius and supporter of the people, for sedition. There are two factions on stage, senators and citizens, and a class-based insults are traded; afterwards, Flaminius and Fannus plot to bring discredit to Caius in the Senate. The overall politics of the piece are most clearly expressed in the third scene of Act II, where the plebeians Titus and Marcus, who support Caius, have an altercation with two servants of men of the Senatorial class in the Campus Martius. There is mass civic tumult, the senators' men raise their weapons, and the plebeian Titus delivers a stirring speech in the prose style which Knowles is imitating from some of Shakespeare's lower-class characters,

Down with your staff, master, for I have another that may ruffle the gloss of your cloak for you. What! has anything surprised you? Do you wonder that the order which wins your battles in the field, should refuse your blows in the city? You despise us when you have no need of us; but if an ounce of power or peculation is to be gained through our means, oh! then you put on your sweet looks, and, bowing to the very belts of our greasy jackets, you exclaim, "Fair gentlemen!--- kind fellow-citizens!---loving comrades!---sweet, worthy, gentle Romans!---grant us your voices!" Or, if the enemy is to be opposed, oh! *then* we are "men of mettle!"---(poor starved devils!)---"the defenders of our country!"--- (that is, your cattle as you call us)---and so indeed we are. We bear your patricians on our backs to victory; we carry them proudly through the ranks of the barbarians! They come off safe---we get the knocks, the pricks, and the scratches. They obtain crowns and triumphs,---we cannot obtain---a dinner!

They get their actions recorded---we get ours forgotten! They receive new names and titles---we return to our old ones with which you honour us---"the rabble!---the herd!---the cattle!---the vermin! ---the scum of Rome!

Quintus, one of the Senator's attendants, responds simply, 'These greasy citizens are uttering treason against our masters, the noble patricians.'

Caius is arraigned by the Senators on trumped-up charges, but is acquitted and sticks to his guns and puts his name forward as tribune:

Ye men of Rome, there is no favour
For justice!---Grudgingly her dues are granted!
Your great men boast no more the love of country!
They count their talents---measure their domains---
Number their slaves---make lists of knights and clients---
Enlarge their palaces---dress forth their banquets,
Awake their lyres and timbrels, and with their floods
Of ripe Falernian, drown the little left
Of Roman virtue!

The evil aristocrats in Act III scene 1 plot to use Drusus to attack Caius. Drusus, who has a naïve belief in the patricians' good motives, agrees to propose something so attractive to the people that he wins their favour, thus lessening Caius' grip on them. In the next scene, set in the Forum, Caius pleads with the people not to treat him like a king, but Drusus argues that Caius is not going far enough. There ensues a competition in benefits to be offered to the people. Drusus saying he is acting on the instructions of the Senate, but Caius caustically responds, like a proto-Chartist, that if the members of the Senate love the people so much then they won't mind if they are all given the vote.

Caius can't persuade Drusus that he is being duped by the Senate. But Caius' colleagues can't persuade *him* that he must court the people to retain his influence with them. He loses the tribuneship, Opimius is elected Consul and announces that he is about to repeal all Caius' reformist laws. The Senate declares a state of emergency and

identifies Caius as the enemy of the state. There is going to be a showdown. There are emotive scenes between Caius and Cornelia and Caius and his wife Licinia, clutching his little son. Both women try to prevent him from going out in public. They fail.

The final scene is set in the temple of Diana. The women are praying while the class war rages in the streets. They learn that many of Caius' plebeian supporters desert him. His aristocratic allies are killed by the Consul's forces, leaving him isolated and vulnerable. He arrives and commits suicide, but only after saying of the plebs:

May they remain the abject things they are,
Begging their daily pittance from the hands
Of tyrant lords that spurn them! May they crawl
Ever in bondage and in misery,
And never know the blessed rights of freemen!
Here will I perish!

The implication is that the only real barrier to an egalitarian republic is the inability of the common people to rise manfully to the challenge. Knowles here shows himself sensitive to the nervousness felt even in radical Irish circles towards the bloodbath in which the French revolution had culminated during the Terror. Knowles was certainly acquainted with Chénier's tragedy, and probably with Vincenzo Monti's Girondist *Caio Gracco* (1800).⁴⁷ But his play is more pessimistic about the possibility of democratic and redistributive reforms, even if it is even more convinced of their desirability.

In London, however, the play that made Knowles' name was his much better written *Virginius*. This was also a history play, set in an earlier phase of Republican Rome, and based on the story of Verginius as related in Livy Book 3, ch. 44. This had previously been dramatized as the Jacobean *Appius and Virginia* by John Webster and Thomas Heywood. It had a political message, in that Appius Claudius abuses his



political power because of his lust for Virginia. But a play that rages against tyrants demanding sex with their inferiors is not political dynamite of the same order as a play that rages against poverty and hunger. The great actor who premiered in the stirring role on 17th May 1820 at Covent Garden was William Charles Macready. Even this far less politically explosive play was first censored, however, under the terms of the 1737 Licensing Act, and was only allowed to be performed ‘after the Lord Chamberlain, at the express command of George IV, had cut out some of the lines on tyranny.’⁴⁸ (At the time of the premiere of *Virginius*, and the London production of *Caius Gracchus* three years later, the Lord Chamberlain was the Duke of Montrose, a Scottish Tory ‘who was determinedly antagonistic to plays on revolutionary themes.’⁴⁹ But the man who actually wielded the blue pencil from 1778 and until the end of December 1823 the Examiner of Plays was a dour Methodist by name of John Larpent)

The enthusiasm of the public reception of *Virginius* inspired Knowles to return to his previous play *Caius Gracchus*, which inevitably ran into trouble with the Lord Chamberlain, ‘who was shocked at its liberal sentiments’.⁵⁰ In a drastically censored version, when permission was ‘at length obtained’,⁵¹ *Caius Gracchus* was produced at Drury Lane, starring Macready, on 18th November 1823 for seven nights.

Caius Gracchus was not to our knowledge publicly revived. But because Knowles remained a prominent and indeed much respected writer for the rest of his life, it continued to be read and probably performed in private theatricals.⁵² *Virginius* continued to be a smash hit and a key play in Macready’s repertoire for another thirty years,⁵³ inevitably drawing readers to Knowles’ other Roman history play, so famous that

sculptures to remind the viewer of his Romans are carved conspicuously onto his tomb-building in the Glasgow Necropolis. And the effect on the afterlife of Plutarch's Gracchi remained conspicuous in the case of Ireland, 'Gracchus' becoming thereafter almost a code-word for the cause of Irish Republicanism. Indeed, 'Gracchus' was the chosen pseudonym of John O'Callaghan, the Irish activist and poet, who in *THE EXTERMINATOR'S SONG* (1842) celebrated as 'Gracchus', in a dialogue poem, the call for total rent strikes by the peasants made by the agitator William Conner:

'Tis I am the poor man's scourge,
And where is the scourge like me?
My land from all Papists I purge,
Who think that their votes should be free---
Who think that their votes should be free!
From huts only fitted for brutes,
My agent the last penny wrings;
And my serfs live on water and roots,
While I feast on the best of good things!
For I am the poor man's scourge!
For I am the poor man's scourge!

[*Caius Gracchus* responds:]

Yes, you are the poor man's scourge!
But of such the whole island we'll purge!

It took historical events as drastic as the French revolution, the massacre at Peterloo, and famines in Britain and Ireland to make the Gracchi speak sympathetically from public stages to wide cross-class audiences. Yet, paradoxically, once they had found their place in the dynamic medium of live theatre, they found themselves being controlled again—violently contested between different factions and policed through censorship by the ultra-Left in France; Caius Gracchus and his plebeian supporters had their rhetorical wings stripped almost bare by the hard right in Britain, owing to the ideological power of the ultra-conservative Lord Chamberlain's office in the democratic agitation of the 1820s.

Plutarch's vision of the brothers who stood up for the People could just not stop being political dynamite....

¹ H. Fielding *Covent-Garden Journal*. 12 Mar. 1752, 1/1.

² E.g. Beness and Hillard (2001).

³ Hyatte (1994) 34.

⁴ There are two operas about another member of the Gracchi dynasty, entitled *Tito Sempronio Gracco*, performed in Naples in February 1702 (by Domenico Scarlatti) and 1725 (by Domenico Natale Sarri).

⁵ [XXIV] Initium autem ciuiliū malorum fuit seditioes Gracchorum agrariis legibus excitatae. Volebant enim agros populo diuidere, quos nobilitas perperam possidebat. Sed iam uetustam iniquitatem audere conuellere periculosissimum, immo uero, ut res ipsa docuit, perniciosissimum fuit. Quae funera facta sunt, cum prior Gracchus occisus est! quae etiam, cum alius frater eius non longo interposito tempore? Neque enim legibus et ordine potestatum, sed turbis armorumque conflictibus nobiles ignobilesque necabantur. Post Gracchi alterius interfectionem Lucius Opimius consul, qui aduersus eum intra Urbem arma commouerat eoque cum sociis oppresso et extincto ingentem ciuium stragem fecerat, cum quaestionem haberet iam iudiciaria inquisitione ceteros persequens, tria milia hominum occidisse perhebetur. Ex quo intellegi potest, quantam multitudinem mortium habere potuerit turbidus conflictus armorum, quando tantam habuit iudiciorum uelut examinata cognitio. Percussor Gracchi ipsius caput, quantum graue erat, tanto auri pondere consuli uendidit; haec enim pactio caedem praecesserat. In qua etiam occisus est cum liberis Marcus Fuluius consularis.

⁶ Wilson (1684) 48. .

⁷ Yet John Evelyn, the English translator of Lucretius book 1, gardener and diarist, did reveal the possibility that Caius Gracchus might be due for a reappraisal when he wrote in 1667, after the Restoration allowed him to restart his public career, that Caius Gracchus was *rightly* criticised for retreating from public life after his brother's death. See Evelyn (1667) 23.

⁸ Ferrarius (1556) as translated by Bavande (1559) book 7, pp. 143-4.

⁹ Valerius Maximus, Livy, Cicero, Plutarch, Florus, Velleius Paterculus, Tacitus, Sallust.

¹⁰ See the English translation in Vertot (1720) vol. 2, 108-18. It was in 1720 that the single operatic attempt to turn either of the Gracchi into heroes was attempted by Leonardo Leo in Naples.

¹¹ The majority of performances (26 out of 29) were in the Théâtre Français (also known by the names, Théâtre de la République and Théâtre de la rue Richelieu). Caius Gracchus was the third most performed of Chénier's plays (following Charles IX, performed 62 times, and Fénelon, performed an outstanding 141 times). Performances of *Caius Gracchus* make up a tenth of the overall total for performances of Chénier's plays. Pierre Daunou, a contemporary of Chénier, suggests that performances ran between 1792-1794; see Chénier (1824), iii. For full details of the performance record see Kennedy et al. (1996), 125.

¹² For Chénier's work as 'propaganda' see Ault (1953), 398.

¹³ On 2nd August 1793 the National Convention published a decree prescribing approved republican plays to be performed three times a week in the period 4th August-1st September 1793 and promising government subsidy for one performance per week. *Caius Gracchus* is named with *Brutus* and *Guillaume Tell*; discussed briefly in Kennedy et al. (1996), 87. The quotation comes from the decree of the Convention, 2nd August 1793, which indirectly describes the play in these terms; for wording of decree see A.C. (1895).

¹⁴ Feilla (2013), x. Feilla (2013) and Kennedy et al. (1996) discuss Chénier's *Caius Gracchus* in the context of arguments which challenge its centrality in scholarship about theatre during the revolutionary period. While Kennedy et al.'s work has been instrumental in challenging the assumptions made about theatrical repertoire and performance in this period, nevertheless Chénier's *Caius Gracchus* remains significant for what it reveals about the political agenda of its time and for the role it plays in the afterlife of Plutarch.

¹⁵ Parker (1934), 140-1; performances of Chénier's play were at their peak in precisely this period (when patriotic plays dominated at the expense of the otherwise dominant genre comedy, see M.L. Netter in Kennedy et al. (1996), 59) and the first point of reference for Babeuf's allusion to the Gracchi would arguably therefore have been this dramatic realization.

¹⁶ On Rollin's popularity see n. 8 above.

¹⁷ For the closeness of Rollin's wording to Dacier's, see, for example, the description of Caius' retreat to the temple of Diana. Rollin (1738-48, Vol. 5), p. 257: 'Pour Caius, personne ne le vit combattre, ni tirer l'épée. Très affligé de tout ce qui se passait, il se retira dans le temple de Diane.' Here Rollin differs from Dacier only in his choice of punctuation! Cf Dacier (temple passage).

This is in striking contrast to Vertot (1719), p xx, who pens this passage in his own words.

¹⁸ Parker (1934) 11-14.

¹⁹ Id.

²⁰ See above on quotations of it in the Assemblies and newspapers.

²¹ Chénier (1824), Vol. 2, 487-551. He also produced an *Oedipus Rex*, *Oedipus at Colonus*, and an unfinished *Electra*, but while these respond to Sophocles they are described as imitations rather than translations (see Daunou's comments in introduction to Chénier's posthumous works, Chénier (1824), Vol. 1, vi-vii. Chénier also produced translations of Horace's *Art of Poetry*, an extract of Lucretius, extracts of Virgil's *Georgics* and *Aeneid*, and Tacitus' *Dialogue on Oratory*; see Chénier (1824), Vol. 2.

²² So, for example, Caius' tells his mother and wife about the death of Quintus in Act I, scene II and includes the motif of the insult from Plutarch.

²³ See Chénier (1824), Vol. 1, iii-iv.

²⁴ Wiles (2011), 164.

²⁵ For decree of Convention, see above.

²⁶ Rodmell (1990), 34 and Wiles (2011), 168 offer differing accounts of the play's censure. Wiles suggests that *Timoleon* was written after the censure of *Caius Gracchus* (following Estrée (1913), 132-3) contre Rodmell who suggests Albitte's censure of *Caius Gracchus* after the production of *Timoleon*.

²⁷ For censure of play see Daunou in Chénier (1824), Vol. 1, iii-iv; Rodmell (1990), 34; and Estrée (1913), 132-3 and 392-4. Feuillantisme, the doctrine of the royalist club de Feuillants, had been linked with support for the aristocracy by Robespierre in his *Discours sur la guerre*, published the year before ('Les champions du feuillantisme et de l'aristocratie'(1792) x). Here, and elsewhere in his *Discours*, he makes the contemporary use of this term as a weapon of political slander clear. Albitte is also said to have accused Chénier of having always been a phoney revolutionary; Estrée (1913), 136.

²⁸ Estrée (1913), 132-3.

²⁹ Albitte is credited with coming up with this slogan a few days after the October performance in which he denounced the play: Estrée (1913), 132-3.

³⁰ See Chénier (1824), Vol. 1, iii.

³¹ Chénier (1789) on which see Birn (2012), 95-6. On theatre legislation see Rodmell (1990), 18-9 and 22 (abolition of office of censor).

³² Wiles (2011), 168.

³³ Chénier (1824), Vol. 1, iii.

³⁴ Estrée (1913), 107-8.

³⁵ Estrée (1913), 107.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ The play was named along with William Tell, Brutus and Spartacus; Estrée (1913), 108.

³⁸ 'empreint du republicanism le plus exalté'; Estrée (1913), 108.

³⁹ Estrée (1913), 392. Estrée describes this poem as the '*Mort de Marat*', I assume he is referring too: Cubières (1793) *Les deux martyrs de la liberté, ou Portraits de Marat et de Lepelletier*. Paris.

⁴⁰ Quotation from Rodmell (1990), 25. On ambiguity of drama see Wiles (2011), 164.

⁴¹ I'm grateful to Laurel Fulkerson for pointing this out to me and for her advice on this paper.

⁴² Anon. (1773) 155.

⁴³ 'An Epistle to Curio' lines 210-18 in Akenside (1781) 125.

⁴⁴ According to his son, Richard Brinsley Knowles (1872, 1) Knowles' ancestry could be traced no further back than his grandfather, one John Knowles of Dublin, but that his father 'cared very little for matters of this kind; and indeed he was one of the few radicals I have met who have not at heart a profound veneration for good birth'.

⁴⁵ Knowles, R.B. (1872) 6-25. Hazlitt certainly discussed the Gracchi, and regarded interest in them as emblematic of a certain kind of literary radicalism (*CW* 16: 220-21)

⁴⁶ R.B. Knowles (1872) 64-5.

⁴⁷ There was a version of Monti's play in English circulating by the late 1820s, and possibly earlier; it was published anonymously in just fifty copies, of which one is in the Bodleian, for private circulation in 1830.

⁴⁸ Archer (1890) 53. See further Conolly, *Censorship of English Drama*, pp. 109-110.

⁴⁹ Stephens (1980) 18.

⁵⁰ R.B. Knowles (1872) 69-70.

⁵¹ Archer (1960) 69.

⁵² See the Publisher's remarks in the 'Advertisement' to the published version of Knowles' complete plays in 1856: they have been induced 'to issue the present elegant and extremely cheap edition' because the plays have met with 'very marked favour.....both as acting and as closet plays...from the general public'.

⁵³ Archer (1960) 204.