

1. A Jekyll and Hyde Trump? A Transformed Trump? A Possibly Encouraging Lesson from Roman History: Nov. 13-15, 2016

So much has been said over the past several days about the Trump win that I stand in danger of repeating the comments that have already been made by many. Next to the millions of almost apocalyptic cries of dismay, there are also voices that see reason for hope, even optimism; they point to Trump's presidential-style conciliatory acceptance speech, to his unusually lengthy and cordial meeting with Obama and his words of praise for the president afterwards, and to his statement in an interview that he likes some of the features of the Affordable Health Care Act and would want to preserve them—none of the earlier campaign bluster now that the repeal of the Act would be one of the first priorities of his presidency. Time will, of course, will make clear if these glimmers of hope are not illusory. Trump will occupy by far the most powerful position in the world; any falling of his back into the loudly proclaimed bigotry and the delusory stances on key domestic and international issues which tainted his campaign would be disastrous for both the United States and indeed the whole world. An erratic Jekyll-and-Hyde-style course of behaviour shifting back and forth between 'good' and 'bad' Trump would, of course, be equally calamitous.

From my historical perspective and my background as a classicist I am fortunate to be able to bring forward one person, indeed one of the most epochal in world history, who made a conspicuous and permanent transition from 'bad' to 'good.' This was the Roman emperor Augustus, who presided over the final death-knell of the Roman Republic and inaugurated the imperial system of governance which held fast for the Roman Empire for centuries to follow. Octavian, as Augustus was known during his long climb to supreme power, displayed during these years an implacable ruthlessness, even cruelty, in which he equalled the most hated of the later Caesars. When upon the assassination of Julius Caesar in 44 BC, he found himself designated in his great-uncle's last will and testament as son and heir, the nineteen-year old Octavian took it upon himself to avenge his adoptive father's death upon the assassins and their supporters and, ultimately, to invest himself with the autocratic powers which Julius Caesar had held during his last few years as perpetual dictator. To achieve these two goals, he had to work together with two partners and rivals, Mark Antony and Lepidus, of whom Mark Antony was by far the most formidable. Their first major act of their so-called Triumvirate was to institute a reign of terror in 43 and 42 BC in which hundreds of Roman citizens were murdered with impunity by what we might now call death-squads after their victims' names had been entered by Octavian, Mark Antony, and Lepidus, on a mutually agreed upon proscription list; Cicero, senior statesman, renowned orator, and author of distinguished philosophical treatises, who had always been Julius Caesar's foremost ideological opponent, was their most notable victim. We learn from one ancient source that Octavian had initially shown some reluctance to go ahead with the proscriptions but soon demonstrated a zeal in which he surpassed his two partners.

Octavian was fortunate that his two partners were far less adept in the exploitation of their respective powers and resources, military, civilian, and financial alike. Lepidus was, from the beginning, by far the weakest in every respect. Mark

Antony allowed himself to be away from Rome for years in a row while commanding Rome's legions in the Near East, and eventually made the fatal mistake of allying himself with the ambitious Cleopatra, queen of Egypt, even marrying her and having children by her when he was already married and had children by his Roman wife, Octavia, sister of Octavian; years earlier his marriage to her had cemented his alliance with Octavian. Octavian remained in Rome all these years, consolidating his powers there, and was eventually successful in alienating the population of Rome and Italy from the once popular Mark Antony. Our ancient sources tell us that during these same years Octavian often had to face down the rebellious discontent of the city's populace suffering the privations caused by a still off-and-on civil war between the Triumvirate and the supporters of the old Republic, a war which did not end, in favour of the triumvirate, until 36 BC. In his biography of Augustus in *Lives of the Twelve Caesars*, Suetonius tells stories of Octavian as a sexual predator during the early years of his alliance with Mark Antony and Lepidus, although modern historians dismiss these as the fabrications of hostile gossip.

Now came the climactic struggle between Octavian and Mark Antony in alliance with his new consort, the ambitious Egyptian queen, Cleopatra. It was another civil war, but Octavian, in a masterstroke of effective propaganda, appealed to Roman and Italian patriotism and nativism in proclaiming it as an all-out confrontation with a menacing oriental power led by the sinister 'oriental' Cleopatra—she had, after all, managed to ensnare the once dynamic and virile Mark Antony—who presided over a eunuch-ruled court which was a cesspool of decadence and corruption. So after the decisive naval battle of Actium in 31 BC, it was victory for Octavian, and after a bit of ineffective resistance on land, it was over for Cleopatra and Antony, who committed suicide in the following year, and Egypt was formally incorporated as a province into the Roman empire.

Octavian's next masterstroke, probably the greatest of them all, came in 27 BC. For many years now, he had been absolute dictator in all but name, but in this year he reached a sort of constitutional settlement with the Senate, for he surrendered all his previous powers and assumed new ones which, while far-reaching, were freely conferred on him by the Senate and were strictly defined so that they preserved the aura of the now vanished Republic. Some modern historians therefore have spoken of the establishment of a diarchy (rule of two) in which power was shared between Octavian and the Senate. In actual fact, the settlement put in place an autocracy in which the Senate only played the role of a junior partner subordinate, in the final analysis, to the will of the supreme ruler. In addition, as Octavian started to look about for a successor—he had no natural sons—it became clear that what had been established was, in effect, a hereditary monarchy. Even so, after many decades of political uncertainty, tumult, and even outright civil war, the settlement of 27 BC, brought the Roman empire the beginning of a long era of overall political and social stability which lasted into the third century. And with stability came a prosperity that benefitted, even if not to the same degree, all social ranks and classes. It is not surprising, therefore, that in the same year a grateful Senate hailed him as *Pater patriae* ("Father of his country") and bestowed on him the honorific name of "Augustus" (which can be best

translated as “majestic and revered”); this became the name by which Octavian was henceforth and is still known. In the Greek-speaking parts of the empire, Augustus, who was recognized almost everywhere as ruling with moderation and benevolence and was also most fortunate to live and reign until the age of 76, came to be hailed by some of his subjects as Sōtēr (“Saviour”).

I apologize for this lesson in Roman history, but I have always found the transformation of Rome's first emperor fascinating and have come back to it in the light of some of the things Trump said and did in the first few days after his victory. So I hold out a slender hope, but time will ultimately tell.

Postscript: Nov. 16

A postscript for the day after is definitely in order. What Trump has been saying and doing over the past twenty-four hours mostly certainly points to the Jekyll and Hyde model. In one interview and speaking on the immigration issue and the possible deportation of illegal residents, he showed conciliatory common sense. However, two major appointments he has now made give evidence of a schizoid mentality and modus operandi: Reince Priebus, the chairman of the National Republican Committee, who will be Trump's chief of staff, is the archetypal insider from the Washington political establishment (the “swamp” Trump said he was going to “drain”); on the other hand, Steve Bannon, who will be Trump's chief strategic adviser, was in charge a few years ago of the website of Breitbart News, from all evidence a white nationalist outfit which seeks to maintain close ties with similar groups and movements in Europe.

I will now let the Trump phenomenon rest unless something truly earth-shaking happens and I feel at the same time that I can offer an original perspective on it.

