

THE BODY PERFORMATIVE:

QUEEN ELIZABETH I AND THE POLITICS OF PERFORMANCE IN SHAKESPEARE'S HISTORY PLAYS 1591-1599

INTRODUCTION

It was F.W. Maitland who, in 1911, first called contemporary attention to the concept of a monarch's two bodies; Maitland drew attention to Edmund Plowden's *Reports* of 1561, in which Plowden¹ noted that it had been agreed by crown lawyers that:

The King has in him two Bodies, *viz.*, a Body natural, and a Body politic. His Body natural...is a body mortal, subject to all Infirmities that come by Nature or Accident, to the Imbecility of Infancy or old Age, and to the like Defects that happen to the natural Bodies of other People. But his Body politic is a Body that cannot be seen or handled, consisting of Policy and Government...and this Body is utterly void of Infancy, and old Age, and other natural Defects and Imbecilities, which the Body natural is subject to.²

Plowden went on to stipulate that the two bodies were conjoined, but the body natural was subjugated by the body politic; the king could not die, but his body natural could. However, this concept remained unexplored until 1957. Ernst Kantorowicz's study in medieval political theology, *The King's Two Bodies*,³ widely popularised the notion, inspiring other works such as Marie Axton's *The Queen's Two Bodies*, in which she applies the theory specifically to Queen Elizabeth I.⁴ I too intend to apply this theory to the reign of Elizabeth I. However, in this dissertation I shall to explore what I perceive to be a missing or overlooked aspect of sovereignty in Tudor England: the *body performative*. Too much modern critical emphasis has been laid only

¹ Maitland, F. W. *Selected Essays* (Cambridge, 1936)

² Plowden, Edmund. *Commentaries or Reports* (London, 1816)

³ Kantorowicz, Ernst H, *The King's Two Bodies; A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957) p. 7

⁴ Axton, Marie, *The Queen's Two Bodies; Drama and the Elizabethan Succession* (London: London Royal Historical Society, 1977)

on the negative criticisms Elizabeth faced during her reign,⁵ and so I intend to explore her extensive methods for overcoming such criticism.

It is interesting to note that according to Plowden, the lawyers of the Inns of Court first applied the idea of the two bodies to Elizabeth as a means to supersede her political position and to undermine her; Queen Elizabeth could not take ownership of the Duchy of Lancaster for it was still held by the body politic of her predecessor, Edward IV.⁶

This was not the first time her royal position had been compromised, but many of the difficulties Elizabeth faced as Queen stemmed from her troubled childhood. In 1536, her parents' marriage - the marriage that had torn England away from the Catholic Church, was annulled. Anne Boleyn was executed on the grounds of adultery and treason and Elizabeth was declared a bastard, stripped of her title of Princess and removed from the line of succession. Although the 1544 Act of Succession restored her title and placed her once more in line to the throne (at the urging of her stepmother, Katherine Parr) her future still remained uncertain - both her younger brother Edward VI, and her sister, Queen Mary Tudor attempted, during their reigns, to bar her from the throne. Until she was crowned Queen in 1558/9 her position, household and her safety remained in a state of constant flux, but even after her position had been cemented by her coronation, she still faced much uncertainty and opposition.

Much of this opposition she faced was in response to her religion, her politics and her family history; family influence ensured that she has been raised a Protestant, but under her sister's reign, she was forced practise her faith in private. Once Queen, although she showed more leniency to Catholics than her sister had to Protestants, she still wished to unite England under her religion. But, according to Allison Heisch in *Persistence of Patriarchy*, Elizabeth was seen as merely a *symbol* for Protestantism- indeed, she was only seen as a *temporary* vessel of the

⁵Walker, Julia ed. *Dissing Elizabeth; Negative Representations of Gloriana* (Durham: London: Duke University Press, 1998)

⁶Kantorowicz, Ernst H, *The King's Two Bodies; A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957) p. 9

crown, posing as: “a transition from Henry VIII to some unnamed, but certainly male ruler.”⁷ A legitimate *male* ruler was expected to restore peace in England, not Elizabeth.

It is this opposition to Elizabeth’s sex that I wish to focus on in this dissertation. England was wary at having an unmarried Queen at its head, and it was hoped by some that she would marry quickly and give power to her husband. As I shall come to explore, during the Renaissance women were regarded as flawed, lesser subjects, and so in Elizabeth’s case, so as a woman (and a bastard) the ‘natural’ flaws to her body natural threatened to overcome her body politic, and thus her ability to rule was severely questioned.

Elizabeth though, was reluctant to marry - a foreign match might have meant that her kingdom would have been part of her dowry, but a domestic match might mean giving up her crown and alienating the landed aristocracy.⁸ She had to prove that she was worthy to rule as she saw fit, when it was repeatedly suggested that she should not rule at all.

Whilst the concept of the ‘King’s Two Bodies’ may have been used against her, Elizabeth understood it and used it to defend her position. In her first speech as monarch, made at Hatfield Old Palace before her coronation, she is recorded as stating: “I am but one body naturally considered, though by His permission a body politic to govern.”⁹ Elizabeth was well-educated, having received tuition from William Grindal and Roger Ascham alongside her half-brother, the eventual Edward VI, and would have fully understood this political concept. What’s more, she knew how to use it to her advantage as a means to hide her supposed weaknesses, translating her learning into a kind of political power.

This education enabled her to create a state of ‘seeming’ by refashioning herself as an acceptable monarch in order to diffuse the known objections against her state of ‘being’.¹⁰ I argue that this method of veiling her real self for one that would be accepted by both the public

⁷ Heisch, Allison. ‘Persistence of Patriarchy’ *Feminist Review*, No. 4 , 1980, (Palgrave Macmillan Journals) p.48

⁸ Heisch, Allison. ‘Persistence of Patriarchy’ *Feminist Review*, No. 4 , 1980, (Palgrave Macmillan Journals)

⁹ Tudor, Elizabeth, ‘Words Spoken By The Queen to the Lords (late 1558)’ *Elizabeth I and her Age* ed Donald Stump and Susan M. Felch (USA: Norton and Company, Inc., 2009) p. 76

¹⁰ Greenblatt, Stephen, *Renaissance Self Fashioning; From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980)

and parliament was Elizabeth's creation of what I have identified as the body *performative*. Because her bodies natural and politic were in conflict, she was able to bridge the gap between two by using occasions for public and private performance¹¹. She needed to convince England that she was worthy and legitimate to rule, and so adopted an image of an 'ideal queen' and projected it forth to her people, and so her reign became one of constant performance. As Sara Mendelson points out:

King's and Queen's in early modern period were very concerned with images of monarchy. Female heirs to the throne found the projection of a credible royal image ever more difficult than their male counterparts, because the contemporary assumption that women were naturally incapable to rule.¹²

However, this idea of a 'body performative' poses some questions of definition. The term 'performative', as defined in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, means: "designating or relating to an utterance that effects an action by being *spoken* or by means of which the speaker performs a particular act" (emphasis added).¹³ This definition relies on the performance of the *spoken word* only, a concept which has been explored and developed by modern theorists.

Judith Butler, along with other theorists such as Sandy Petrey, draw upon the theory of speech as advanced by J. L. Austin in *How to Do Things with Words*.¹⁴ The primary aim of this theory is to differentiate between 'constative' words and 'performative' words - that is, words that merely say and words that become an action within themselves. Butler explains: "language sustains the body...it is by being interpellated within the terms of language that a certain social existence of the body first becomes possible",¹⁵ clearly suggesting that the body is imagined and articulated in and

¹¹ 'I define 'private' performances as performances out of the *public* eye; but moments in parliament or court, etc.

¹² Mendelson, Sara, 'Popular Perceptions of Elizabeth' *Elizabeth I: Always her own Free Woman*, ed. Carole Levin, Jo Eldridge and Debra Barret-Graves (England: Ashgate Publishing Ltd. 2003) p. 194

¹³ Oxford English Dictionary <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/140785?redirectedFrom=performative#eid>> [30/06/2011]

¹⁴ Austin, J.L *How to Do Things With Words* (Oxford : Oxford University Press, 1962)

¹⁵ Butler, Judith, *Excitable Speech; A Politics of the Performative* (London: Routledge, 1997)

through language. Many scholars of Elizabethan England, such as Linda Shenk and Mary Thomas Crane have studied Elizabeth's spoken and written words, and the power that she was able to wield by using them. The monarch turned these speech acts into performances: for example, she regularly delivered public speeches in Latin, the language regarded as scholarly and masculine. In doing so, she broke "womanly silence in the most exclusive language of male authority."¹⁶

However, Elizabeth did not only perform with speech. I argue that her reign became a performance built from a lifetime of instances of the spoken and unspoken word, action and inaction, written word, iconography, moments of political evasiveness, public appearances, and private or political decisions. Elizabeth chose her mother's motto for her own: *Semper eadem*, or, 'always the same'. As Mary Thomas Crane points out, however, Elizabeth contradicted her own motto, by presenting herself as "an array of poses and personae."¹⁷ She willingly allowed herself to be referred to as a goddess (including the Blessed Virgin Mary¹⁸) or godlike, most particularly in literature (such as Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*) and portraiture. However, most of these representations of Elizabeth were produced by and for a select group, mainly the aristocratic milieu. Poorer citizens, without education or access to these elite sources, may not have necessarily idolised her or the pageantry with which she surrounded herself, and so to overcome this she made regular public appearances to ensure she remained in the public's imagination. Mendelson points out that "she could not be accepted as Queen for her body natural and so had to elevate her body politic to transform herself into a figure both distinct and above other women, but other men too."¹⁹

The emergence of the public playhouse in the final quarter of Elizabeth's reign made a huge contribution to political and social – as well as cultural – discourse. Equally, the uneducated

¹⁶ Shenk, Linda. 'Turning Learned Authority into Royal Supremacy: Elizabeth I's Learned Persona and her University Orations' *Elizabeth I: Always her own Free Woman*, ed. Carole Levin, Jo Eldridge and Debra Barret-Graves (England: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2003) p. 96

¹⁷ Crane, Mary Thomas, "'Video et Taceo': Elizabeth I and the Rhetoric of Counsel' *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, Vol. 28, No. 1, Winter, 1988 (Rice University)

¹⁸ As Roy Strong suggests, her virginal state was seen to be a necessary aspect in "governing the body politic to bring peace" *Gloriana; The Portraits of Queen Elizabeth I* (London: Pimlico, 2003)

¹⁹ Mendelson, Sara, 'Popular Perceptions of Elizabeth' *Elizabeth I: Always her own Free Woman*, ed. Carole Levin, Jo Eldridge and Debra Barret-Graves (England: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2003)p. 197

masses were able to use plays as a means to learn about society and politics, as well as for entertainment. Elizabeth herself was very fond of live theatre; however, aware of its potential power, and following earlier monarchs, she made it a punishable offence to directly comment on her, or her reign through the medium of performance. The office of the Master of the Revels meant that this law was usually strictly adhered to, yet indirectly commenting on a ruling monarch was common, with many leading playwrights offering carefully hidden opinions on Elizabeth.²⁰ William Shakespeare was among them.

In this dissertation, I will explore the ways in which Shakespeare commented on Elizabeth's own use of performance, in *King Richard III*(1591/2²¹) *King Richard II*(1597), and *King Henry V*(1599).²² I have chosen to study these three history plays, because, written in the last decade of Elizabeth's life, they were produced during a time when negativity for Elizabeth was quite possibly at its greatest, and this may have directly influenced the stories Shakespeare wished to tell and the way in which he told them. By examining these plays chronologically, it may be possible to identify changing social attitudes towards Elizabeth that have been reflected on stage. As an actor and a playwright, who dealt with aspects of performance on a daily basis, he was ideally placed to examine the body performative as not only a political entity, but also Elizabeth's manipulation in using it to rule her country well, in comparison to how it may have been manipulated by English kings of the past (and thus identifying how the modern Renaissance understanding of performance may have been developed.)

As I will show, Elizabeth fiercely controlled her image in an attempt to control how she was viewed by her public, but through the public playhouse, Shakespeare was able to offer them a

²⁰ As James Shapiro in *1599, A Year in the Life of Shakespeare* points out, she led a dramatic life that would have translated into interesting entertainment on stage

²¹ Dates provided are dates of publication

²² Hereby abbreviated in the body of the text to *Richard II*, *Henry V* and *Richard III*.

wider insight to their monarch. However unwittingly, Shakespeare and Elizabeth's relationship was symbiotic: they were both experts in performance.²³

²³ Hacket, Helen, *Shakespeare and Elizabeth: The Meeting of Two Myths* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009)

CHAPTER ONE

Richard III

Written around 1591/2²⁴, *Richard III*²⁵ documents an unlikely monarch's ascent to and fall from power, as Queen Elizabeth was close to entering the last decade of her life and reign. This play could not have been the product of coincidence. Whilst Elizabeth's reign had done much to stabilise the monarchy, her refusal to name an heir, the economic consequences of the ongoing conflict with Spain, and the growing unrest in Ireland threatened to thrust England once more into disorder, and the ageing queen found herself in a position where her carefully crafted image began to crack. Playgoers in the early 1590s would have witnessed, in *Richard III*, a re-enactment of the catastrophic outcomes of the body natural denying the body politic whilst their queen faced an ongoing onslaught for her 'unnatural' female state, and for robbing England the chance of a natural heir.

In this chapter, I shall explore Richard's sovereignty in relation to issues of gender and physical disability, in conjunction with what I believe to be the key 'performative' scenes and stage dynamics in order to discover to what extent a monarch may hide the physical flaws which would usually bar them from the throne.

Gender

One cannot examine the extent of Richard's use of performance without first questioning the catalysts which drive him to perform, particularly Renaissance attitudes towards gender perception and disability.

For Renaissance audiences, masculinity and femininity were clearly defined by stock character traits, both on stage and in real life, and gender roles were carefully maintained. The

²⁴ 1592-3 according to *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare*, ed. Margreta de Grazia (CUP, 2001), p. xix.

²⁵ It is important to remember that all of the three plays I am examining are not entirely historically accurate, and so all descriptions of characters and events as set out in this dissertation are, unless otherwise stated, in relation to Shakespeare's portrayals of such.

modern differences between the terms *gender* and *sex* that we understand today had yet to be applied; in the 1500s, one simply equated with the other. During the Renaissance, to be ‘male’ meant to be masculine; dominant, strong and legally independent, whilst ‘females’ were characterised by the feminine traits of weakness, subservience and silence. As Ruth Kelso points out in *Doctrine for the Lady of the Renaissance*,²⁶ Renaissance women were forced to be economically and legally dependant on their male relatives due to woman’s ‘natural’ inferiority, identified by Eve’s act of original sin.

So despite the presence of a female monarch, women of the Renaissance were still required to highlight man’s perfection in opposition to their own imperfection.²⁷ Shakespeare’s portrayal of gender/sex roles has been well-examined, though on a first reading of *Richard III* it would seem that the traditional roles for both sexes have been employed. The majority of female characters are weak-minded and dominated entirely by the male characters, and those that do not conform to these typical roles are regarded with suspicion. The men, though sometimes sick or incapacitated, are still regarded as typically masculine, reinstating their manhood’s through battle and marriage.

But Richard does not fit so easily into the gender role that he was assigned. Rather than indentifying with this group of typical masculine specimens, he finds himself isolated from all of his male counterparts. Granted, this isolation seems to be largely self-inflicted, but Richard fears rejection because, as he is physically disabled, he cannot be considered ‘fully’ male. His brothers, for example, represent archetypical Renaissance masculinity: they have bodies both formed for battle *and* for marriage and reproduction, and it is here that Richard falls short, for his success in battle is not enough to prove his manhood. Whilst he tries to comfort himself with the knowledge that he is far more intelligent than his brother, “simple,

²⁶ Kelso, Ruth. *Doctrine for the Lady of the Renaissance* (USA: University of Illinois, 1956) p. 17

²⁷ Philippa Berry, in *Of Chastity and Power*, suggests that women were held up as a mirror for male narcissism.

plain, Clarence”²⁸, he is intelligent enough to know that this does not make up for an imperfect male form: “I, that am not shaped for sportive tricks/ Nor made to court an amorous looking glass/ I that am rudely stamped, and want love’s majesty.” (1.1.135)

If we couple his imperfection with Richard’s reliance on the power of language, rather than action, it could be argued that Richard is a ‘feminine character’, for language was the only tool that women too could rely on. As I will explore, women of the Renaissance could be feared and persecuted for their linguistic power, just as Richard is both feared and admired for his use of rhetoric. Rhetoric was unusually the sign of a well-educated male; Elizabeth herself was renowned for having received a ‘*princely* education’,²⁹ but it was widely accepted that women possessed the better ability to speak.³⁰

But how easily can Richard integrate himself with women? They may share similar character traits, but the women of this play are not so easily accommodating. By defending themselves with barriers of intuition and language, the female characters ensure that all interaction with Richard is stilted and forced.

The roles of women in *Richard III* fall into two categories: mourners and witches. Though separate categories, they are both defined by inaction and all the women remain fixed in their settings (both figuratively and literally – Queen Elizabeth takes sanctuary, and Lady Anne is confined to her sick bed), whereas the men, especially Richard, are able to move easily around them. The women are constrained and immobilised by their own bodies, and must rely on other tools to escape danger.

²⁸ Shakespeare, William *King Richard III* ed. James R. Siemon (London: Methuen Drama, 2009) 1.1, p. 144 subsequent references to this text in this chapter will be indicated in parenthesis.

²⁹ Through her extensive studies in English and rhetoric with William Grindal and Roger Ascham, she earned the right to depict herself as a learned prince. Shenk, Linda. ‘Turning Learned Authority into Royal Supremacy’ *Elizabeth I: Always her Own Free Woman* ed. Carole Levin, Jo Eldridge and Debra Barret-Graves (England: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2003) p. 78

³⁰ Donawerth, Jane. ‘Conversation and the Boundaries of Public Discourse in Rhetorical Theory by Renaissance Women’, *Rhetorica: A Journal of the History of Rhetoric*, Vol. 16, No. 2, Spring 1998 (University of California Press)

As mourners, the females provide a choric quality to the action of the play, and are able to use their grief to remove themselves from the action and review it objectively, gaining insight into Richard's true motives. They provide a direct contrast to Richard's male followers, who often follow him blindly and unquestioningly.

But whilst the women as mourners are able to *see* Richard, they only truly become his mirror (however reluctantly) once Queen Elizabeth and the Duchess accept the roles of cursing 'witches'; morphing themselves through their desire for revenge and justice. If we were to group Richard and the witches together, they would all be branded as an 'other' and viewed as a force of nature threatening to men. This could be the act that completes Richard's transformation from masculine to character to a feminine one (ironically it is he who forces the women to become witches) but I however believe that Richard's gender cannot be classified so easily; his identification with both sexes means he actually finds himself in a position between the two, proving to be almost unfixed on the gender spectrum. This position enables him to infiltrate both groups as he is never regarded as a substantial threat, especially by other males. As a monarch, Elizabeth wished to portray herself as 'unfixed' in gender. This is best demonstrated in her Armada speech supposedly given to her troops at Tilbury in 1588: "I know I have the body of a weak and feeble woman, but I have the heart and stomach of a king and a king of England too."³¹ Heisch stipulates that Elizabeth liked to show off her 'manly' education, but would still also abide to the womanly virtues of chastity and modesty when necessary. Apparently Elizabeth did not suggest that all women should be educated as she was, rather, she wished to be seen as the "exception to the laws of nature."³²

³¹ Speech to the Troops at Tilbury *Elizabeth I and her Age* ed. Donald Stump and Susan M. Felch (USA: Norton and Company, Inc. 2009) p 292

³²Heisch, Allison. 'Persistence of Patriarchy' *Feminist Review*, No. 4 , 1980, (Palgrave Macmillan Journals) p. 50

Like Richard, there is another character that does not conform to the typical gender stereotypes. Margaret, once the queen of England, is at first feared by the other women, but she is soon recognised and embraced as the only form of tangible opposition to Richard.

In Act 1 Scene 3 she demonstrates that not only can she command a room with just words, but she also has the power to speak publicly *without fear of consequence*. Therein lies her authority; as a woman, her curses are ignored, and the true extent of her power is only believed when it is too late: “Now Margaret’s curse is fall’n upon our heads” (3.3.271). This command of language was highlighted in Sam Mendes’s 2011 production of *Richard III*, performed at the Old Vic, London, in which the women were “angrier and less powerful, more virtuous and less virtual.”³³ If anything, Margaret’s lack of action renders her all the more powerful.

Margaret may not have any physical power, but she may act publicly, whereas all of Richard’s plans must be carried out in private. Between them, by combining public and private performances, Shakespeare has created a perfect performer.³⁴

Physical Disability

Richard’s frail body natural is seemingly at odds with his powerful mind. He has to develop such an eloquent and scheming mind in order to compensate for his physical deficiencies, but it then convinces him that he is destined for greatness, whilst his body continues to hold him back. Like Elizabeth, he has been subjected to preconceptions of his character formed on the basis of his physical appearance. However his physical disability (often presented on stage as a useless arm, a humpback, and a severe limp) proves to become the perfect disguise, for as he discovers, no one fears the crippled younger brother.

³³Clapp, Susannah. *Richard III- Review* < <http://www.guardian.co.uk/culture/2011/jul/03/kevin-spacey-richard-iii-review> > [13/07/2011]

³⁴In my exploration of *Henry V*, I shall further examine the differences between and the necessity for a monarch to engage in both public and private performances.

Richard prefers to use his excellent grasp of the vernacular as his weapon, using his fine mind to compensate for his own awareness of his flawed body, which makes his struggle for the throne even more remarkable. Shakespeare deliberately charts Richard's long battle to become king in order to echo Elizabeth's own turbulent path towards sovereignty, using the former's disability to amplify the degree of his over-reaching. The more grotesque Richard appears to be, the more inconceivable his desire seems to be- and yet he succeeds. Today, in contemporary productions, his disability is highlighted to such extremes in an effort to suggest that his deformity is no longer merely the *driving force* for his evil actions, but instead, an extension and a *physical representation* of his evilness. The 1985 RSC production of *Richard III*, starring Antony Sher, highlighted this state of being:

Armed with two crutches as well as a gleaming black hump, the small, boundlessly energetic Mr. Sher suggests not merely a spider but much of the insect kingdom in his intensely physical performance. When scuttling about on all fours, this Richard is a cockroach; when raising his extended arms in mock piety, he becomes a praying mantis... The result is an uncommonly fearsome villain whose grotesque deeds and distorted physique are accompanied by an aura of sado-masochistic sexuality.³⁵

By placing emphasis on Richard's deformed body, modern productions reaffirm the Renaissance need to *read* the body, using it as a method to see *past* the performance and into the performer. However, Shakespeare proved that it is difficult to recognise the body performative, and most importantly, what it is trying to conceal.

Body and Mind Combined

*Hastings: I think there never a man in Christendom
can lesser hide his love and hate than he,*

³⁵Rich, Frank. 'London Quartet of Shakespeare Royalty' *The New York Times*
<<http://theater.nytimes.com/mem/theater/treview.html?res=950DE1D71139F935A15755C0A963948260>> [13/07/11]

for by his face straight shall you know his heart.
(3.4.277)

Whilst *Richard III* appears to simply tell the story of an unlikely monarch overcoming the physical flaws that would usually prevent him from taking the throne, throughout this play Shakespeare complicates the audience's preconceptions of the notion that the body is an unproblematic window to the soul.

In Act 3 Scene 4, Richard is, for the first time, able to combine his powerful mind with his weak body, creating an elaborate excuse to execute the oblivious Hastings:

Richard: Behold mine arm
 Is like a blasting sapling withered up;
 And this is Edward's wife, that monstrous witch,
 Consorted with that harlot, strumpet Shore,
 That by their witchcraft thus have marked me.
 Hastings: If they have done this deed, my noble lord-
 Richard: If? Thou protector of this damn strumpet,
 Talk'st thou to me of ifs? Thou art a traitor.
 (3.3.278)

This is an unarguably weak excuse, but it is one that Richard knows cannot be contested: not only does he not have the power of the crown on his side, but by playing upon typical gender stereotypes, he refuses the accused witch an opportunity to defend herself- and extends that refusal to her 'protector'.

Through his asides, the audience has the rare privilege to get close to King Richard, a luxury not extended to Hastings, or anyone else outside Richard's small circle of trust. Outside the theatre, this situation was re-enacted with Queen Elizabeth and her most intimate courtiers, but this time, the theatre goers would find themselves *outside* the circle. Like Hastings, they only saw their monarch as their monarch wished to be seen; for example, Elizabeth went to great lengths to ensure that she was thought to be beautiful: "thickly painted like a stage Queen, Elizabeth appeared beautiful at a distance. And it was from a distance that

the public judged the Queen's overall appearance...posture and gait".³⁶ Only Elizabeth's closest courtiers knew that in reality, their Queen wore a wig and heavy cosmetics, but preconceptions of Elizabeth's beauty lingered long in the imagination after her death, and for many, what was fictitious was thought to be the truth. The vast majority of her citizens remained oblivious to their Queen's real appearance.

In this scene then, it could be argued that Shakespeare calls attention to his characters' abilities to accurately read sovereignty, and in doing so, invites his audience to question how accurately they read Elizabeth.

Acts of Performance

What makes Richard such a dynamic and in some ways engaging king, is not his Machiavellian personality, or even his transformation from a seemingly simple two-dimensional vice character to a complex and multi-layered ruler, but his firm understanding of the complex nature of performance, and the knowledge that it is needed when in a position of power.

It is impossible to forget that Richard is an actor. As his confidence in his ability to perform grows, so does his ruthlessness. From the opening scene Richard is practising and rehearsing his technique; the opening monologue and subsequent asides to the audience would at first suggest that he is allowing them to see his true self. However, his speech is too controlled and precise; venomous yes, but he channels his anger into his words, fuelling his own performances and these words appear to serve as a personal motto.

His speech lacks any of the melodramatic emotion one would find in a typical Shakespearean soliloquy, such as, for example, those in *Hamlet*. As early as Act 1 Scene 1 Richard is already practising the method which he will later come to rely on; the ability to play a host of different characters, depending on what each scene requires of him. For the

³⁶ Mendelson, Sara, 'Popular Perceptions of Elizabeth' *Elizabeth I: Always her own Free Woman*, ed. Carole Levin, Jo Eldridge and Debra Barret-Graves (England: Ashgate Publishing Ltd. 2003) p. 196

audience (and possibly for his own amusement) he is playing the archetypal villain, but he is willing to re-fashion himself as required. This becomes apparent on the arrival of his brother Clarence, who is being conveyed to the Tower. Immediately, Richard becomes a loving brother: “your imprisonment shall not be for long; /I will deliver you, or else lie for you” (1.1.143), although my interest is focused on the ease with which Richard is able to slip into this role. One may argue that it is merely a testament to his acting ability, though I would argue that Clarence is actually demonstrating a kind of unwavering trust that comes from an unquestioning fraternal closeness, perhaps developed in childhood, which Richard can now easily manipulate. Clarence is not aware that his younger brother is now consumed with jealousy of the elder. In his mind, he and Richard are still as close as they once must have been.

Act 1 Scene 2, in which Richard woos Lady Anne, serves as the catalyst which determines the course of action for the remainder of the play. Prior to this, his intent seems to be nothing more than a desire to wreck lives for his own amusement. Richard appears to be nothing more than a *motiveless malignant*; a term Coleridge first applied to his reading of Iago in *Othello*, and we are forced to assume that the Richard of Act 1 Scene 1 is powered by nothing more than a desire to be a force of chaos in a time of peace, for he offers us no other real reason: “since I cannot prove a lover/ To entertain these fair well-spoken days/ I am determined to prove a villain/ And hate the idle pleasures of these days.” (1.1.136)

However, in this scene, in his confrontation with the woman he has made a widow, he begins to test the extent of his own abilities. His success in wooing Anne provides the proof that he is every bit as powerful as he imagined himself to be and dictates the course that he chooses, enabling him to fully formulate his plan to take the crown.

There is no denying that in this short scene Richard moves exceedingly quickly, convincing a grieving widow to marry him by playing a lover, and using the formulaic conventions of wooing. His use of rhetoric is full of typical, tired sentiments, and again seems

to have been long-rehearsed (“your beauty, that did haunt me in my sleep” (1.2, 158)), but Richard knows the role of the lover is harder to play than the role of the brother; he has had no real experience in love, and Anne’s objections are fierce.

He attempts to model himself in the image of a typical lover to break down the accurate image of him she has already formed through her own judgements of his character. Though she constantly rebukes his efforts, he plays on both her grief and her sex, appeals to her vanity and refuses her the power to speak and *be heard*, instead talking over or dismissing her:

Anne: Never hung poison on a fouler toad.
 Out of my sight! Thou dost infect mine eyes.
 Richard: Thine eyes, sweet lady, have infected mine.
 (1.2.160)

His argument in favour of their marriage is compelling and carefully designed to challenge her emotions: he ‘admits’ that he killed her husband, the Prince of Wales, because he loved her too much to see her with another. However, in this scene he is contradictory and inconsistent, one moment apologising for his actions, and the next, denying them:

Richard: I did not kill your husband.
 Anne: In thy foul throat thou liest; Queen Margaret saw
 Thy murderous falchion smoking in his blood...
 Richard: I was provoked by her slanderous tongue.
 (1.2.155)

He changes his methods of wooing when he is caught out by his own lies, and slips between the roles of lover, liar and aggressor so erratically that Anne cannot keep up. Yet to constantly switch roles proves to be of vital importance, for Richard, at this point, is not following a plan. Instead, he carefully and intuitively feels out her reactions to different ‘characters’, in order to work out to which one she reacts most positively. His actions are parasitic, but they enable him to progress and learn from his own performance. Once she accepts his offer of

marriage, he immediately transcends the two-dimensional Vice character that he has been up until this point, and elevates himself into a meta-theatrical character, becoming the playwright, director and actor for his own stage.

This scene proves to be the catalyst for all Richard's actions from this point on, because he did not really believe that he would win Anne's love: "To take her in her heart's extremest hate/ With curses in her mouth, tears in her eyes.../ And yet to win her? All the world to nothing!" (1.2. 166) But by doing so, he has realised just how firm his grasp is on the arts of performance and language. We can track his entire journey – and his downfall – back to this pivotal moment in his development.

One fundamental factor plays a large part in Richard's ability to go undetected for so long. His performances are not immediately recognised as duplicitous because, for a Renaissance audience, 'performing' did not always necessarily mean an absence of truth. It is important to remember that Shakespeare's audiences would understand that it was usual for one to show emotions and feelings through physical actions, as well as to express them through language. Lady Anne, for example, is also 'performing' in this scene; she demonstrates her grief through acts of mourning, such as following the coffin procession, offering prayers to the deceased, and cursing the killer. Sometimes then, 'being' *is* also 'seeming', and it is through the blurring of these boundaries that Richard is able to slip through, unseen. Perhaps Elizabeth used this interesting state to her own advantage too.

Richard not only relies on the power of his own performance, but the performances of others, although he manipulates them so that they become nothing more than extensions of his *own* performances. The Duke of Buckingham, his greatest ally, does his best to stir up rumours and ill feeling for the late Edward IV to instead promote Richard as the 'rightful' heir: "[I] Laid open all your victories in Scotland,/ your discipline in war, wisdom in peace/ Your bounty, virtue, fair humility." (3.7, 292) To say that Richard is wise, virtuous and humble is preposterous, and of course the citizens view Buckingham with suspicion and

anger, but this scene echoes a tactic widely employed by Queen Elizabeth – one with which Shakespeare would probably have been familiar.

Elizabeth insisted that her courtiers describe her as young and fertile, even when, in the latter part of her life, their eyes told them otherwise. Christopher Haigh draws upon a letter written by Sir Walter Raleigh on the occasion of his exclusion from court: “I that was wont to behold...the gentle wind blowing her fair hair about her pure cheeks.”³⁷ As Haigh points out, this letter was written in 1592, in the Queen’s sixtieth year, and so this description could not have been further from the truth. But this tactic was not purely for vanity; it was also a political necessity.

As previously discussed, many of her citizens never got close enough to physically see Elizabeth, and so official portraiture was used to reinforce the “glorification of rulers”.³⁸ For Elizabeth, it was essential that these portraits were controlled and that she was painted with the eternal ‘masque of youth’, and she accomplished this by rarely sitting for paintings, instead forcing licensed artists to use pre-prepared ‘patterns’ of her likeness, whilst ordering her privy council to destroy unlicensed and ‘unseemly’ portraits of her. This tactic meant that she always looked like the Queen she was *expected* to look like. As Sara Mendelson points out in *Popular Perceptions of Elizabeth*: “preconceptions of what a genuine queen looked like or how she was supposed to behave were apt to influence the way Elizabeth was perceived...a genuine queen was an ideal beauty.”³⁹ Both she and Richard were preoccupied by perceptions of their physical appearances, and were governed by the shared need to respond to their body naturals. By hiding or manipulating their physical flaws, they attempted to be deemed worthy of the body politic.

Playing Spaces

³⁷ Haigh, Christopher. *Elizabeth I (Profiles in Power)* (England: Pearson Education Ltd. Essex, 1988) p. 93

³⁸ Strong, Roy, *Gloriana: The Portraits of Queen Elizabeth I* (Pimlico, London, 2003) p. 10

³⁹ Mendelson, Sara, ‘Popular Perceptions of Elizabeth’ *Elizabeth I: Always her own Free Woman*, ed. Carole Levin, Jo Eldridge and Debra Barret-Graves (England : Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2003) p. 195

Richard makes his first appearance as King in Act 4 Scene 2, in which he is credited as 'King Richard' and no longer as 'Gloucester' or simply 'Richard'. However, he quickly realises that it is easier to obtain power than it is to keep hold of it. Much of his success derives not from his performances, but how he carefully directs them. Most of his key scenes are small and intimate, for it is easier to manipulate one person than many at the same time. He moves from situation to situation, becoming a perpetual invader of space.

In such one-on one-situations, he can better judge his opponent's emotions, and by constantly switching his playing spaces, he creates a trail that becomes hard to follow. As the Duke of Gloucester, a lesser royal, he has the freedom to move around virtually unquestioned. However, as king, he loses the ability to exist in the shadows of the stage.

Now, constantly surrounded by courtiers, his performance must be maintained at all times, for whenever he loses control, it is immediately spotted: "The King is angry. See how he gnaws his lip." (4.2 319) To have no self control means to have no control over the political situation.

As king, all action (save for the final Battle) is confined to the throne room, and should anyone be following his trail, it now leads straight back to him. It is ironic that he is more confined as king than he ever was in his crippled subject's body. He loses the opportunity to communicate via asides with the audience and they watch him grow visibly more uncomfortable and rash, culminating in the rejection of all those he needs.

Losing Buckingham is Richard's biggest blow. Despite the veneer of friendship, Richard merely used Buckingham to his own ends, even teaching him how to perform in order to extract as much use out of him as possible: "Infer the bastardy of Edward's children/ Tell them how Edward put to death a citizen/ Only for saying he would make his son/ Heir to the crown" (3.5.286). However, once Buckingham reaches a point where he must question the King's actions, Richard begins to lose his grip on his role as director:

King Richard: Have I they consent that [the princes] shall die?

Buckingham: Give me some little breath, some pause, dear lord,
Before I speak positively in this.

(4.2.319)

Up until this point, Buckingham has served as a mirror for Richard, telling him that his actions are justified; unwittingly acting as a tool in and through which Richard can fashion himself. However, Buckingham's betrayal breaks that mirror, and with this loss, Richard falls apart, leading him to his final stage.

The Final Stage

It is not until the eve of the Battle of Bosworth that the painted stage Richard had built around him comes crashing down. The stage hands he (often unwittingly) employed to help him achieve the crown come back in a ghostly dream sequence to convince Richard that he is not and never has been the director of his own play.

Act 5 Scene 3 draws on the morality dumb shows of medieval entertainments, and the ghostly apparitions that appear to him serve to represent the allegorical parts of his conscience that has, up until now, chosen to repress. While they remain a manifestation of his *own* conscience, however, he can still choose to ignore them, but when they pass over and talk to his challenger, Richmond, offering him words of comfort, they instead become agents of divine intervention:

Ghosts [of Princes] *to Richard*: Thy nephews' souls bid thee despair and die.

to Richmond: Edwards' unhappy sons do bid thee flourish. (5.3.394)

This intervention forces the focus to widen out to a theatre that is bigger than Richard could have ever envisioned - reality is clear and he realises that he is now nothing more than an actor on God's stage, and must follow His direction. Nothing is, or ever was, in Richard's

control; at this point, a Renaissance audience would perhaps begin to think that he was merely a puppet of God, and his reign of terror was granted to allow the Tudors to overthrow him, and subsequently allow their present Queen to take to throne. With this view in mind, *Richard III* becomes a testament to the providential view of history, offering a perspective on a wider scope of English monarchy and intertwining history.

Whilst *Richard III* is rarely seen as commenting on the reign of Elizabeth, it does mark Shakespeare's emerging interest in using theatre as a platform to reflect on the changing and perpetual aspects of sovereignty, and most importantly, Elizabeth herself. As she moved into the last decade of her life, much of the criticism she had fought hard to overcome as a young Queen was gradually resurfacing, and the tactics she had readily engaged in her youth began to fail. This shall be discussed further in the chapter on *Richard II*: a play which drew direct attention not only towards issues of sovereign performance, but the necessity to understand and use it correctly.

CHAPTER TWO

Richard II

If *Richard III* shows us how kingship can be obtained, then *Richard II* is a lesson in how to avoid losing it. The reigns of both of Shakespeare's kings are shown to depend on their individual ability to perform, and both performances are shown to stem from a fear or understanding of how their bodies are read; Richard III's performance grows from anxieties over how his body *natural* was perceived, whereas Richard II's performance stems from his understanding of his body *politic*. It is clear that neither of these kings is able to fully bridge the gap between the bodies natural and politic, nor do they understand how important it is to do so. I have chosen to examine *Richard II* because, although he is the only king to be discussed in this dissertation to have an unproblematic claim to the throne, he is the one that fails most completely. Furthermore, Richard II's history almost threatened to run parallel with that of Queen Elizabeth, and recent scholarship has debated whether or not Shakespeare intentionally wrote this play as a commentary on Elizabeth's later years. By examining moments of sovereign public performance, as opposed to the private performances as demonstrated *Richard III*, I aim to identify ways in which the body performative can be seen to fail if incorrectly used.

Politic vs. Natural

In the course of the play, Richard II loses his crown to a 'worthier' subject: an act which is fully supported by the majority of the remaining characters because Richard is seen to be a 'bad' king. Richard's concept of kingship and what it means to be a king are grossly inaccurate, and he fails because he neglects to recognise the importance of integrating his bodies natural and politic, and he fails to understand performance.

Shakespeare's Richard III uses performance only as a means to compensate for his flawed body natural, (much as Elizabeth did because of her gender) but he at least had *some* understanding of the concept of the King's Two Bodies. One of Richard II's first mistakes is his belief that he possesses *only* a body politic. Having suddenly come to the throne at the age of ten, the historical Richard⁴⁰ knew little of life outside of the royal court, and thus this is dramatised by Shakespeare as a king who cares only for pomp and ceremony, thinking little of his subjects and his land. As Kantorowicz notes, Plowden recorded that upon the death of a king, "there is a separation of the two Bodies, and the Body politic is transferred and conveyed over from the Body natural now dead...to another Body natural":⁴¹ which clearly states that each monarch's body natural is a *temporary* vessel for the body politic and the Crown, and so can only serve the crown whilst the body natural is alive. However, Kantorowicz also points out the difficulties in establishing "a clear distinction between the will of the crown and what the King wants",⁴² and we can see this difficulty in Shakespeare's characterisation of Richard.

Richard either does not know or does not believe that he is a vessel for the Crown; rather, he thinks the Crown is a vessel for him, and one that will allow him to do as he pleases. A notable example of this comes in Act 2 Scene 1. Upon the death of John of Gaunt, Richard takes possession of his uncle's lands and fortunes to finance the battles in Ireland, for he has run-up debts and crippled the Crown's assets. By law, this fortune should be passed down to Gaunt's son, Bolingbroke, yet he pays no heed to his uncle York's pleas that Bolingbroke deserves his inheritance. Richard thinks only of Richard, and uses his position of power to his own ends.

⁴⁰ Anthony Tuck, 'Richard II (1367–1400)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2009 <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/23499>> [21/09/2011]

⁴¹ Kantorowicz, Ernst H, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957) p.14

⁴² *Ibid* p. 26

A monarch needs knowledge of the two bodies in order to fully understand that to possess the body politic is a pledge to look after England and its people. According to this doctrine, the king should put the land and its needs before his own, but Richard willingly leaves England- and more importantly, the seat of the crown- defenceless in order to settle discord in Ireland. In one of the play's most famous speeches, the dying Gaunt laments the downfall of England under Richard's reign:

England, bound in with the triumphant sea,
Whose rocky shore beat back the envious siege
Of wat'ry Neptune, is now bound in shame,
With inky blots and rotten parchment bonds.
That England that was wont to conquer others
Hath made a shameful conquest of itself.⁴³

He suggests that whilst England herself has safe, natural, and impenetrable borders, she is being brought down from the inside, by a corrupt king.

The pertinent idea here is that a king should have a natural unity with his land; Elizabeth herself suggested that she was the 'head' of England, whilst the land was an extension of her body.⁴⁴ Gaunt is not alone in articulating this idea; in Act 2 Scene 4, as the Earl of Salisbury and a Welsh Captain await Richard's return from Ireland, the Captain shares his fears that Richard has died at sea: "The Bay trees in our country are all withered/ And meteors fright the fixed stars of heaven;/ The pale-faced moon looks bloody on the earth.../These signs forerun the death or fall of kings." (2.4.308) The popular Renaissance idea that is expressed in this scene is that a king and his land should be in such unison that the land would fail without its king. This could also mean that a corrupt king would cause distributions in nature; if a king's body natural was 'sick', sickness across the land would follow.⁴⁵

⁴³ Shakespeare, William *King Richard II* ed. Charles R. Forker (London: Methuen Drama, 2002) 2.1.247-8. Subsequent references to this text in this chapter shall be indicated in parenthesis

⁴⁴ She also made claims about being married to England, though this was more of a tactic to escape marriage.

⁴⁵ As demonstrated by Shakespeare in *King Lear*

However, whilst Richard may *know* that he should have a natural bond with his land, he makes it clear that he does not fully comprehend this concept. In Act 3 Scene 2, on his return from his disastrous campaign in Ireland, he theatrically kisses the English soil, in an attempt to bind himself completely to the land:

Dear earth, I do salute thee with thy hand...
Smiling, weeping, greet I thee, my earth,
And do thee favours with my royal hands.
Feed not thy sovereign's foe, my gentle earth,
Nor with thy sweets comfort his ravenous sense.
(3.2 316)

However, his reasons for this theatrical gesture have little to do with an actual unity with the land; instead Richard is merely attempting to re-establish his faith in his position as king. He believes that if he is bound to the earth, as a king should be, then he cannot possibly be overthrown. This act of reuniting himself only draws attention to the disconnection - his empty performance is only an attempt to compensate for his lack of understanding, nothing more. If he *had* ever been bound to the land, he would not need to reunite with it - nor would he have ever left it.

This performance turns an understanding of the two bodies into a contrived, peculiar and time-wasting act of desperation. Richard should be turning his hand to practical measures in order to deal with the threat of Bolingbroke, not using his supposed unity with English soil as a measure of protection. And yet he clings to his own performances, attempting to find comfort in his own words: "Not all the water in the rough rude sea/ Can wash the balm off from an anointed king." (3.2.320) For an audience, these words would ring hollow, for it is wrong of Richard to assume that the land and the sea will protect him when he has so inadequately protected them.

Kantorowicz, in his study of *Richard II*, does not identify a split between Richard's bodies natural and politic at this point in the play, suggesting instead that that this split comes

when Richard is forcibly deposed. However, I would argue that Richard's bodies are *never* unified, which accounts for his steady decline from the beginning of the play. Kantorowicz suggests that, whilst on the shores of England, "Richard's kingship, his body politic, has been hopelessly shaken...but still there remains, though hollowed out, the semblance of Kingship. At least this might be saved."⁴⁶ I however take issue with the use of the word *semblance*. There is no denying that whilst Richard's courage is failing, he does appear to find strength in his position:

Aumerle: Comfort my liege. Remember who you are.

King Richard: Awake, thou coward Majesty, thou sleepest!

(3.2.323)

But once more, all he is doing is filling his own head with worthless words and grand, unrealistic impressions that he fails to make reality: "Is not the King's name twenty thousand names?" (3.2.323) So, if Richard is only providing is an *impression* or a *facade* of kingship, what is there to save? Kantorowicz argues that Richard is still a king for he has made up his mind to appear a king in his confrontation with Bolingbroke at Berkeley Castle. However, I would argue that this means that Richard only plans to *act*. He possesses no notion on how to do anything more than *pretend* to be a king.

"Yet he looks like a king": Playing the King

Richard's real failure stems from not knowing how to *be* a king, instead only playing at what he thinks a king *should* be. Unlike both Richard III and Elizabeth herself, he fails to understand the vital difference between being and seeming, and so does not see the body performative as a necessary tool to connect the bodies natural and politic.

⁴⁶ Kantorowicz, Ernst H, *The King's Two Bodies; A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957) p. 31

For a Renaissance audience, the body performative is the main text of a character that an audience could read. Richard's performances indicate that he does not have the capacity to be a good king, because he doesn't know what a good king is. Yes, he 'performs' in public spaces, as kings often do, giving grand speeches and making decisions, but his decisions are poor and his performances are empty, only used to remind his courtiers of his position. For example, in the confrontation between Bolingbroke and Mowbray in Act 1 Scene 3 he stops the duel at the last moment in order to deliver his verdict. It is a pointless display of grand language but it is the kind Richard enjoys:

Our eyes do hate the dire aspect
Of civil wounds ploughed up with neighbours' sword;
And we think the eagle-winged pride
Of sky-aspiring and ambitious thoughts,
With rival-hating envy, set on you
To wake our peace.

(1.3.218)

He fails to see performing as a necessary political tool, and fails to realise that he needs to back up public performances with private ones. By relying on empty, public performances, he cannot offer anything more than the appearance of a king. Whereas Richard III used private performance in order to deceive and gain power, Richard II merely performs ceremony. If Richard III is the director of his own stage, then Richard II sees himself as the star actor.

If any king believes firmly in divine right, it is Richard II. He refuses to listen to good counsel (an important theme in Renaissance drama, displayed in works such as *Goboduc*⁴⁷) believing that his authority is final, and his safety unquestioned simply because he is king. This is firmly established as early as Act 1 Scene 4, in which Bolingbroke is banished from

⁴⁷ Norton, Thomas and Thomas Sackville, *The Tragedie of Gorboduc* (London: The Gentlemen of the Inner Temple, 1565)

court. Richard is told of Bolingbroke's popularity with the common people (whom Richard merely refers to as 'slaves') and "how he did seem to dive into their hearts" (1.4.235).

Despite a bitter, sarcastic hint from Richard himself that Bolingbroke is being held-up as the heir to the throne, he allows his attention to be diverted from that possible threat to the comparatively less threatening trouble in Ireland. Richard willingly turns a blind eye for no other reason than that he does not believe Bolingbroke will dare disregard his authority and return to England.⁴⁸

Why does Richard not know how to be a good king? He had many good models to learn from, such as his grandfather, the noble Black Prince, and his father, the Prince of Wales, whose "hands were guilty of no kindred blood/ But bloody with the enemies of his kin" (2.1.261). However, the historical Richard II preferred to surround himself with courtiers who would flatter and appease him, rather than those who would offer balanced advice,⁴⁹ and this is reflected in the play:

Gaunt: Richard my life's counsel would not hear,
my death's sad tale may yet undeaf his ear.

York: No, it is stopped with other, flatt'ring sounds. (2.1.243)

Richard's authority has never been challenged or put to the test in such a way that would teach him vitally important lessons or force him to change for the better. Unlike the young Prince Hal of *Henry IV Parts One and Two*, who has a Hotspur to threaten his future, Shakespeare presents Richard as a king who has led a pampered, sheltered life, and who is free to roam his own stage with little consequence. He does not have anyone to hold up as a mirror; instead all Richard sees is his own reflection. Richard, in the first three acts of the

⁴⁸ Although Shakespeare's Richard could be forgiven for not anticipating that Bolingbroke would become a figurehead for popular resistance. In reality, Bolingbroke remained in exile for many years. In order to keep the play concise, Shakespeare obviously telescopes the action into a shorter time frame.

⁴⁹ Anthony Tuck, 'Richard II (1367–1400)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online ed, Jan 2009 <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/23499>> [20/07/2011]

play, is a character who needs a director's intervention, and whilst John of Gaunt's and Bolingbroke's opposition could offer Richard a spur to change, it comes too late. Richard is far too set in his ways and unable to respond to the threat by reassessing his own actions.

Bolingbroke seems to be everything that Richard is not. He has the love of the common people, and, having been grossly wronged by Richard, becomes a hero in their eyes. His use of language, compared to Richard's lengthy, eloquent speeches, seems natural and honest, and his humility is in stark contrast to Richard's conceit: "Bare headed lower than his proud steed's neck/ [Bolingbroke] bespake them thus: 'I thank you, countrymen.'" (5.2.431) Perhaps it is this natural connection with the common people that enables Bolingbroke to be held up as an honourable king, instead of a traitor- but I believe it is simply because Bolingbroke knows how and when to perform where Richard does not.

Man vs. King

Up until Act 3 Scene 3 Bolingbroke keeps his real intentions-his desire for the crown-unknown and displays shrewd intellect in order to slip back into England: "I was banished Hereford/ But as I come, I come for Lancaster." (2.3.301) But it is the interactions with the citizens, both on the occasion of his banishment and at his triumphant return to London as King, that come across as true moments of political cunning, despite the veneer of authenticity.

Whereas Richard believed himself to be above heartfelt displays for his people, Bolingbroke understands that his newly-found kingship is dependent on their support, as they could have easily sided with the legitimate monarch. Bolingbroke, unlike Richard, understands that he must perform kingship for them, not just for himself. To win their support, he transforms himself into the saviour who has freed them from Richard's corrupt reign, and in Act 5 Scene 2 he invites them to witness him riding triumphant alongside the disgraced Richard. Feeding off his performance, they of course accept him as their king.

Like Richard III, Bolingbroke knows how to play emotion, and is able to manipulate the supposed justness of his claim and his apparent support for Richard. In Act 3 Scene 1, he orders the executions of Bushy and Green on the accusation that they ‘misled’ Richard and convinced him to wrongly banish Bolingbroke whereas in reality, he kills them because they are staunch supporters of the true king. He does this whilst all the while professing his own allegiance to Richard: “Myself, a prince by fortune of my birth/ Near to the king in blood, and near in love/ Till you did make him misinterpret me.” (3.1.311) As suggested, this false support is so well maintained that Bolingbroke never suggests that it is his intention to depose Richard and claim the throne for himself, maintaining that he merely wishes for “my banishment repealed/ And lands restored again.” (3.3.340)

Bolingbroke then is able to model himself, using the right kind public performance, as the antithesis of Richard: a lover of the people, and a defender of the land. Of course, in *Henry IV Parts One and Two*, we see how he too is unable to back up public performances with private performance, cultivating in a rapid loss of support.

The Deposition

Richard II has been viewed as an overtly political play, owing to the infamous deposition scene. Written in 1595, *Richard II* was performed at a time when the Tudor monarchy was seen to be at its most unstable for many years, and as she moved closer to the end of her life and reign, Elizabeth faced much open hostility. Although England was recovering from the victorious war with Spain, criticism of the Queen had never been greater. In the years leading up the Armada, and continuing well into the 1590s, Elizabeth was repeatedly attacked for refusing to name her heir. Religious unsettlement stirred up the questions of her legitimacy and political troubles with Ireland also added to the pressure.

After the threat of the Spanish invasion had receded, and the danger surrounding Mary Queen of Scots’ claim to the English throne had been eliminated, Elizabeth resumed her

summer progresses, after a decade of confined travel in and around London. Donald Stump and Susan Felch in *Elizabeth I and her Age* state that she did so because she felt a great need to reassure her subjects with, and remind them of, her presence. They observe: “travelling to the provinces allowed her to address concerns, gauge the mood of the nation...and demonstrate that she was still very much in command.”⁵⁰

Despite these attempts to reassure her people though, many were flocking to the theatre to see a play in which the monarch is deposed and subsequently murdered in order to make way for a worthier ruler. However, it was illegal to stage the overthrow of God’s anointed,⁵¹ and so the deposition scene was censored from copies of *Richard II* during Elizabeth’s lifetime, and the deposition scene was never legally performed in public.

As Kantorowicz and Andrew Hadfield suggest, the removal of a king from office is rooted firmly in the *speculum principis*, or Mirror for Princes genre, which spawned William Baldwin’s *Mirror for Magistrates*, first published in 1559. This tradition did not rule out the possibility that bad rulers may be deposed for the sake of the country; an act which Kantorowicz describes as fighting a king to defend the King.⁵² (That is, deposing the body natural in order to defend the body politic.)

When Richard returns from Ireland, and learns that Bolingbroke has challenged his authority, there is a marked shift in his use of rhetoric. Leading up to the deposition, his language becomes increasingly eloquent but, simultaneously, his internal monologues become erratic. Act 3 Scene 2 features the beginning of Richard’s confusion concerning his identity: “I had forgot myself. Am I not King?” (3.2.323) He is slowly becoming aware of a split within himself, but it is one that he cannot control. As previously mentioned, he clings

⁵⁰ Tudor, Elizabeth, *Elizabeth I and her Age*, eds .Donald Stump and Susan M. Felch (USA: Norton and Company, Inc., 2009) p. 415

⁵¹ Although James Shapiro points out that an exception was made for Richard III, the king overthrown by Elizabeth’s grandfather, as his demise led to the Tudor dynasty.

⁵² Kantorowicz, Ernst H, *The King’s Two Bodies; A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957)

on the ceremony of kingship and Divine Right in order to convince himself of his safety, but as they begin to fail him, he begins to doubt his own authority and becomes aware of the paradoxical nature of his position: he is King, but he must yield to another's power: "what must the King do now? Must he submit?" (3.3.352)

It is upon the shores of England that Richard at last demonstrates some understanding of the body natural. In Act 3 Scene 2, during the same scene in which he reminds himself of his 'great glory', he loses all courage as soon as he learns of the execution of his most staunch followers. He talks of the death of the body natural, and he finally begins to realise that the ceremony of kingship alone cannot protect him:

For God's sake let us sit upon the ground
 And tell sad stories of the deaths of kings-
 How some have been deposed, some slain in war...
 All murdered. For within the hollow crown
 That rounds the mortal temple of a king
 Keeps Death his court; and there the antic sits,
 Scoffing his state and grinning at his pomp.
 (3.2.329)

Not only does he now fully understand the transitory nature of body politic, but he also seems to make a self-conscious allusion to the Mirror for Princes tradition. He is aware now, that a king can die, and in death, he is a mere mortal. What's ironic about Richard's situation is the reversal of the process of kingship: usually, upon the death of a monarch, the body natural dies so that the body politic may be passed on to his successor. But in this case, an unnatural event in the history of kingship occurs: is Richard's body politic that dies. However, his body natural is reborn, and it is birthed with eloquence and understanding:

Thus play I one person in many people,
 And none contented. Sometimes am I king;
 Then treasons make me wish myself a beggar,

And so I am.

(5.5.464)

Although Richard now seems to acknowledge that he was performing, nothing suggests that he understands how his performances failed. But although Kantorowicz likens this scene to Richard's body natural becoming a traitor to the body politic, I believe it is an act which allows Richard to gain recognisably 'human' qualities. Now that he is no longer king, Richard is able to command compassion with dignity:

I'll give my jewels for a set of beads,
 My gorgeous palace for a hermitage...
 And my large Kingdom for a little grave,
 A little, little grave; an obscure grave.

(3.3.353)

Although he still seems to fail to understand the nature of his own performances, it appears that, in Act 4 Scene 1, he has gained the ability to recognise the duplicitous nature of Bolingbroke's performances. In a reversal of his coronation ceremony he passes his crown and sceptre to Bolingbroke, forcing him to take them out of his hands, and in so doing, forces him to present himself as one who is disrupting Providential order and violating divine right. Whilst Bolingbroke is able to mask his wrongdoing from the citizens of London, the audience is now fully aware of the true nature of the new King.

When Richard calls for the mirror in Act 4 Scene 1, it marks a pivotal moment in Richard's journey. Having played the role of King since childhood, he struggles to re-establish his identity. Although he physically looks the same, he cannot see how the Richard who once was a King could possibly be the same as Richard who is now just a man:

Was this face the face
 That everyday under his household roof
 Did keep ten thousand men? Was this the face

That like the sun did make beholders wink?

(4.1 408)

Again, this highlights the fact that Richard still does not understand the divide between 'being' and 'seeming', and that he will probably never understand how his poor performances caused his downfall.

When he smashes the glass he is smashing the past, for the mirror betrays who he once was. He is also attempting to smash the present, as he realises that he is now denied the right to claim the body politic. The broken mirror reflects his broken chance at any duality; he may now understand the concept of the two bodies, but he will never again get to experience it: "for there it is, cracked in an hundred shivers." (4.1.409)

Gender

Whilst this play does not identify women as a chaotic or demonic 'other', Shakespeare *does* still use women as a tool to highlight masculinity, or more specifically, sovereignty.

Although a queen, Isabella has no other purpose but to heighten Richard's own belief in the strength of his kingship. When in his company, she is expected to behave in a manner befitting a queen in order to compliment and reinforce Richard's kingly performance, and this is best demonstrated in Act 5 Scene 1.

Although having already relinquished his crown, his exchange with Isabella outside the tower is presented as a suggestion to the audience that Richard is still the legitimate king. When together, Richard and Isabella only speak in highly stylised verse, (as opposed to Bolingbroke's rough prose) suggesting that although they may have given up their titles, they are still firmly rooted in their royal roles:

Queen: And must we be divided? Must we part?

King Richard: Ay, hand from hand, my love, and heart from heart.

(5.1.424-5)

However, this particular exchange between the couple makes Richard's demise all the more tragic. As we saw in *Richard III*, and as I will explore further in *Henry V*, private moments between characters are usually dominated by the body natural; characters are allowed to step out from behind their masks and can, if they chose to, speak honestly. This private scene marks the last time Richard will ever see his wife (in fact, this is the only private moment Richard has been allowed up until this point) and so one expects it to be personal and tender. But, whilst the language sounds poetic, even romantic, by continuing to speak in verse Richard is actually refusing to acknowledge this personal space; he is speaking as though he were still king, and demanding confirmation from Isabella. Of course, whilst he may think that this behaviour is what she expects from him, or is an attempt to show false bravery, by expecting her to reply in the same style, and by forcing her to remain in character, he is refusing his wife the intimate goodbye that she must desire. It may sound loving, but he strips his words of any real comfort. This scene only reiterates further Richard's warped understanding of performance.

In this chapter, I have begun to explore the body performative in greater detail, and have discovered that this body is more complex than it may have first seemed. Both Kings' Richard III and II used the body performative to different means; Richard III to gain power, and Richard II as an attempt to keep power, and yet both kings ultimately fail. Therefore I believe that both of Shakespeare's kings possessed knowledge of the body performative that was incomplete or flawed, and there lies their downfall. It is not enough to use simply use 'performance' to bridge the gap between the bodies natural and politic: a monarch needs to understand the differences between *public* and *private* performances, the merits of each, and how to use each, in order to successfully employ the body performative. The body performative in terms of public and private performances shall be further examined using *Henry V*, Shakespeare's 'perfect king'.

CHAPTER THREE

Henry V

The principal difference between Shakespeare's portrayal of Richard II and Henry V is that the former possesses a weak character, but has a strong claim to the throne, whilst the latter has a strong nature but a weak claim, owing to the manner in which his father, Henry IV, came to be King. According to Paul A. Cantor, in *Shakespeare's Henry V: From the Medieval to the Modern World*, this contrast is drawn from Machiavelli's *The Prince*⁵³ and his analysis of hereditary vs. new principalities. Machiavelli is in favour of the new prince, because as he does not inherit his power, "he is not tempted to rest on his laurels and is always on the lookout for ways to win glory and increase his power" and thus is likely to prove more 'princely'.⁵⁴

On a first reading of *Henry V*, one could agree with this statement, for Henry's main goal is to purge himself of the guilt passed down by his father and secure his hold on the throne. But this idea proves to be problematic for Shakespeare, who understood that whilst it is true that a monarch who inherits can grow complacent - and therefore weak - it must also be remembered that those who come to the crown by force or circumstance may find, in being unprepared, that the task is too arduous. This is the case with Henry IV. Before he deposes Richard II and claims the throne, Bolingbroke was, first and foremost, a soldier. As discussed in the last chapter, he has a natural ability to lead men, and whilst he does not possess the eloquence or refinement of Richard II, his simple prose and modesty wins the people over. However, as Cantor suggests, once he is King he strips the monarchy of its poetry. Gone are the eloquent and impressive displays of ceremony that we find in *Richard II*; under his rule,

⁵³ Machiavelli, Niccolò. *The Prince* ed. Peter Bondanella (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005)

⁵⁴ Cantor, Paul. A. 'Shakespeare's Henry V: From the Medieval to the Modern World' *Perspectives on Politics in Shakespeare*, ed. John A. Murley and Sean D. Dutton (Oxford : Lexington Books, 2006) p. 13

the idealised glory of the monarchy has been forgotten and there is no ‘storybook grandeur’,⁵⁵ instead his reign proves to be naked, formulaic and cold.

Henry IV’s reign is blighted by guilt which manifests as a struggle to hold on to power, for his weaknesses and past indiscretions are laid bare and used against him:

He deposed the King,
 Soon after that deprived him of his life
 And, in the neck of that, tasked the whole state...
 Broke oath on oath, committed wrong on wrong,
 And in conclusion drove us to seek out
 This head of safety and withal to pry
 Into his title, the which we find
 Too indirect for long continuance.⁵⁶

Henry IV has no time for public displays, even though he desperately needs to regain support. His reign becomes a battle to keep hold of the crown long enough to pass it on to his son. So then, through *Richard II*, *Henry IV Parts One and Two* and *Henry V*, Shakespeare documents the difficulty for a king to combine the *substance* of kingship with the *appearance* of being a king, or, the need to combine private performances with public. Both are equally important to kingship; a monarch must present themselves to their people as a monarch worthy to rule, but also be constantly prepared to defend their land and put the needs of the crown and the country before themselves whenever necessary.

This challenge to successfully use both types of performance is one that Henry V faces, and it is a challenge he overcomes. Though a young ruler, judged by early modern standards, Henry V is the ‘perfect king’ – a concept that was first explored by Louis B. Wright and Virginia M. LaMar.⁵⁷ Although Henry V’s strengths are often taken for granted, critics have not always detailed precisely what those qualities entail. What, then, makes Henry the perfect

⁵⁵ Cantor, Paul. A. ‘Shakespeare’s Henry V: From the Medieval to the Modern World’ *Perspectives on Politics in Shakespeare*, ed. John A. Murley and Sean D. Dutton (Oxford: Lexington Books, 2006) p. 13

⁵⁶ Shakespeare, William *King Henry IV Part One* ed. A.R Humphreys (Surrey: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1996) subsequent references to this text shall be indicated in parenthesis

⁵⁷ Shakespeare, William. *King Henry V*, ed. Louis B. Wright and Virginia M. LaMar. (Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington, DC).

king? Building on the findings of the previous two chapters, I would argue that he is shown to learn from both Richard II and Henry IV combines the best of their reigns: from Richard II he takes the importance of ceremony, whilst his father teaches him leadership skills, and the importance of showing merit on the battlefield. I also believe that he is able to transform these findings and apply them directly to both public and private performances in order to reinforce his claim to the throne.

A Princely Education; developing the body performative

What is remarkable about Henry V is that he begins to develop a body performative before he even possesses the crown. In *Henry IV Part One* the audience is presented with the young Prince Hal, a disgrace to his father, who prefers to engage in criminal activity with questionable consorts rather than performing royal duties. He is known as a lazy, shameful youth, stained by “riot and dishonour” (*Henry IV Part One*, 1.1. 8) in direct contrast to the heroic and honourable young Harry Percy as described in Act 1 Scene 1. In his first appearance, Hal is seen to be eager to engage in an elaborate scheme to steal from his friends for his own amusement, but in his first soliloquy, he quick to make his real intentions known. His behaviour is nothing more than a pretence; an act he willingly fashions and exploits in order to give himself a bad reputation. He learns from Falstaff, and deliberately forces his father and the people of England to think badly of him, manipulating them so that he can impress them when he decides the time is right to behave like an honourable prince. His rationale is simple: by lowering expectations, it will be easier to gain respect than if he tried to spend a lifetime trying to behave perfectly:

My reformation, glitt’ring o’er my fault
 Shall show more goodly, and attract more eyes
 Than that which hath no foil to set it off.

(*Henry IV Part One*, 1.2. 21)

In Act 3 Scene 2, in which his father chastises him and warns him that his behaviour is reminiscent of that of Richard II (Hal, like the deposed king, also ignores his royal duties, preferring to spend time with his male cohorts), Hal, in a surprisingly brief and understated speech, informs his father of his intentions to regain honour and act in a manner that is befitting to the heir to the throne: “I shall hereafter, my thrice-gracious lord, / Be more *myself*.” (Emphasis added, *Henry IV Part One*, 3.2.105) This choice of word is interesting as it clearly suggests that from this young age he has already developed the ability to perform different characters, and has until this point engaged in an elaborate game to hide his real self.

This indication that he is knowledgeable of the power of performance stands in him good stead for his future as King. *Henry IV Parts One and Two* documents the development of these abilities, a journey which almost seems to echo Elizabeth’s own childhood and extensive education. Although they took different paths which led to different outcomes, both Elizabeth and Hal seem to develop an understanding in youth that performance can be necessary to secure your future.

The young Elizabeth, for example, portrayed herself as well-behaved, studious and - most importantly - loyal and submissive to her sister, Queen Mary’s will, in order to pre-empt suggestions of treason (as displayed in a letter from Elizabeth to Mary written in 1554: “I pray before God...that I never practised concealed, nor consented to anything that might be prejudicial to your person any way or dangerous to the state by any mean.”⁵⁸) Although she had relied on this tactic through the final years of her father’s reign and throughout the reign of her brother, it became crucial to display herself as unthreatening as possible whilst her sister was on the throne because her life severely depended on it.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Tudor, Elizabeth: ‘Letter to Mary Tudor (March 17, 1554)’ *Elizabeth I and her Age* eds. Donald Stump, and Susan M. Felch (USA: Norton and Company, Inc., 2009)

⁵⁹ In 1554, Mary had Elizabeth placed in the tower on suspicion of treason due to her involvement with the traitor Thomas Seymour.

Although both of these young royals obviously needed to develop different strategies due to their different circumstances of gender and legitimacy, it is clear that both possessed a powerful understanding of the body performative long before they possessed the body politic.

Acts of Performance

As a play, *Henry V* so self consciously alludes to its performative qualities, that the theatre goers are denied the right to 'lose themselves' in the action. Instead, it is demanded they remember at all times that they are only watching a performance. In the prologue, the Chorus first apologises to the theatre goers for the shortcomings in set design and imagery, and directly appeals to them to use their imaginations to substitute for the lack of set:⁶⁰

Can this cockpit hold
The vasty fields of France?
Or may we cram
Within this wooden O the very casques
That did affright the air at Agincourt?...
Piece out our imperfections with your thoughts.
Into a thousand parts divide one man
And make imaginary puissance.
Think, when we talk of horses, that you see them.⁶¹

This theatrical tactic ensures that 'performance' is always at the forefront of the audience's minds, and I believe that this is required because Shakespeare is informing his audience that they are about to receive an education in performance. And who better to educate them than a performing king?

As a king, Henry V displays both vulnerability and power: his understanding of the body performative is neither incomplete (as it was in *Richard II*) nor dictated by his flaws (as in *Richard*

⁶⁰ Shakespeare uses this technique in romances and comedies, but not in any other play of the first and second tetralogies

⁶¹ Shakespeare, William *King Henry V* ed. T.W.Craik (United Kingdom: Routledge, 1996) Prologue, p.121. Subsequent references to this text in this chapter shall be indicated in parenthesis.

III.) However, his reign is threatened to be governed by what could be seen as *Machiavellian* tendencies: Günter Walch, in *Henry V as a Working-House of Ideology* suggests that opinions on Henry's character can only fall into two camps: Henry is either upheld as a "mirror for all Christian Kings" or he is seen as a ruthless Machiavellian conqueror.⁶² However, I would argue that by the close of the play Henry develops to a point where he finds himself in a position between these two options, and this in fact has a positive outcome.

But we cannot ignore the fact that, during his war on France, it appears as though Henry's Machiavellian tendencies *have* threatened to take over. In the early onslaughts on France, Henry purposely presents himself as a "ruthless conqueror", despite his 'weak' claim to the country. Although England held parts of France up until 1553, Henry's reasons for going to war rely on a skewed understanding of *Salic Law*⁶³ In most chronicle plays, the protagonist often fights against a threatening other, and this fight comes to define his kingship or power. The war with France *does* define Henry's kingship, but it is he in fact, who appears to become the threatening other. This is best demonstrated in the scene of the siege of Harfleur, in which Henry threatens to allow his soldiers to rampage through the town unless they surrender, manipulating the townspeople to believe it will be their own fault if their homes are destroyed:

To our best mercy give yourselves,
 Or like to men proud of destruction
 Defy us at our worst...
 I will not leave the half-achieved Harfleur
 Till in her ashes she lies.

(3.3, 216)

⁶² Walch, Günter. 'Henry V as a Working-House of Ideology' *Shakespeare and Politics* ed. Catherine M.S Alexander (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) p. 198

⁶³ The French throne cannot be inherited through a female, but England has no such law and kings can inherit the throne through the female line. Because Henry's great-great-grandmother was a daughter of the king of France, under *English* law, he would be the rightful heir to the throne of France. Henry's claim to the French throne relies on the French accepting his understanding of Salic Law.

Despite this calculated attack, it appears as though Henry V manages to unite not only England but all of Great Britain against a common enemy; he has deployed Welsh, Irish and Scottish troops to fight alongside the English army. From his father, he learned that it is necessary to be seen as an active warrior, but whereas Henry IV's plans to recapture the Holy Land were too ambitious and self indulgent to be fulfilled, Henry is able to argue that this war *is* justified.

In Act 1 Scene 2, the Dauphin of France's childish prank of gifting Henry a case full of tennis balls offers him provocation to validate his otherwise unjustified decision, and he channels all of his actions into revenging the Dauphin's unwitting joke:

Tell the pleasant prince this mock of his
Hath turned his balls to gun-stones, and his soul
Shall stand sore charged for the wasteful vengeance
That shall fly with them.

(1.2.150)

This scene demonstrates early on Henry's ability to mask all his actions with legitimacy; by claiming that he has justice on his side, he can easily pretend that he is not the threatening other. However, this is also an indication that he knows he is doing wrong, but is attempting to draw a veil over his Machiavellian tendencies- for what course would Henry have taken had the Dauphin chosen *not* to play this juvenile joke?

However worrying these tendencies may be, Henry V does not rely wholly on Machiavellian cunning to gain power and respect. At no point in the play does Henry seek to deceive for gain, and nor does he ever lose sight of his goal to claim France in the name of his *country*. And just as easily as he can present himself as conqueror, he can slip into the role of Christian warrior.

Before the Battle of Agincourt, Henry makes one of the most rousing speeches in the play. It has practical purposes, evidently, for he wants to stir the passions of his men, but it also demonstrates the true belief Henry has in his position and his cause, and his certainty that God is on his side:

And Crispin Crispain shall ne'er go by
 From this day to the ending of the world
 But we in it shall be remembered,
 We few, we happy few, we band of brothers.
 For he today that sheds his blood with me
 Shall be my brother.

(4.3.291)

Using language that draws upon that use in his earlier speech at the siege of Harfluer (“On on, you noble English.../ let us swear that you are worth your breeding - which I doubt not/ For there is none of you so mean and base/ That hath not noble lustre in your eyes” (3.1.204)) Henry physically performs passion and takes on the role of a commander and warrior in such a way that reminds us again of Elizabeth’s Armada given at Tilbury in 1588:

Wherefore I am come among you at this time...being resolved in the midst and heat of battle to live and die amongst you all, to lay down for my God and my Kingdom and for my people mine honour and my blood even in the dust.⁶⁴

Through these public speeches, Henry V shows that he has the capacity to prove his worth, and thus gives merit to his claim as king. This is markedly different from the Machiavellian Henry we have previously seen, and so it is at this point that we know that Henry can combine the *substance* of a king and the *appearance* of a king. However, these two roles, Henry as a Machiavellian and Henry as a commander, are just that – *roles*. Henry feels the need to play both, but all they prove is his ability to perform (much like Richard III) different characters in different situations as he sees fit. At no point though does it seem that Henry is blinded or taken over by his performances; he remains in control and is self-aware throughout, and is always carefully considerate of his next move. Unlike Richard III, his actions are not entirely driven by his own

⁶⁴ Speech to the Troops at Tilbury *Elizabeth I and her Age* ed. Donald Stump and Susan M. Felch (USA: Norton and Company Inc., 2009) p 292

needs. As unjustifiable as his claim to France may appear, he goes to war for the good of his country, to create unity and heal internal and international division, not for personal glory.

Performance in War

Throughout the play Henry is insistent that God is on his side, and Shakespeare does his best to quash any doubts his audience may have about the possibly dubious nature to his claim to France; after all, an English audience must root for the English King. In Act 3 Scene 7, we are taken to the French camp on the eve of the Battle of Agincourt, in which we see the Dauphin and his courtiers pre-emptively basking in the glory of battle: “by ten we shall each have a hundred Englishmen.” (3.7.253) Despite the constant talk of war, each character is far removed from the actualities of battle, instead boasting about their armour and horses. They merely perform bravado, and do nothing to prepare for an unwanted outcome- they are *convinced* they shall be victorious. This entire scene resonates with the medieval and archaic poetic language used by Shakespeare’s Richard II. For example, the Dauphin describes his horse as:

A beast for Perseus;
He is pure air and fire, and the dull elements
Of earth and water never appear in him, but only in
Patient stillness while his rider mounts him. (3.7.245)

Though this language is not just employed by the dauphin; the entire scene noticeably echoes *Richard II*, in which poetry was a poor and brittle substitute for reality. Shakespeare’s audience, well aware that the French will lose, would scorn this medieval, outdated attitude. And yet Elizabeth surrounded herself with medieval mysticism, specifically through the use of Arthurian imagery⁶⁵ in the Accession Tournaments and progress entertainments, and most notably in her identification with the Blessed Virgin Mary.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Elizabeth liked to believe the myth that the Tudor’s were descendants of King Arthur

⁶⁶ Berry, Philippa, *Of Chastity and Power; Elizabethan Literature and the Unmarried Queen* (London: Routledge, 1989)

So was Shakespeare, by mocking the French soldier's behaviour, subtly critiquing Elizabeth? In this scene Shakespeare demonstrates just how united the English appear to be in comparison with their enemies: the English are fighting an enemy whose soldiers are wholly disconnected from each other, led by the Dauphin who is fighting for himself, and not for his country.

Cantor points out that Henry V represents a modern view of the world, in comparison to the French, who remain in a "feudal world of divided authority",⁶⁷ so I believe that perhaps what Shakespeare is offering is the opinion that modernity triumphs the past, and the people of Elizabethan England should not look so much to Elizabeth's troubled past, but more to her current triumphs. By presenting both of these arguments, Shakespeare is asking his audiences once more to see past performances and into the performer.

King vs. Man

Act 4 Scene 1, in which Henry moves disguised amongst his troops before the Battle of Agincourt, is the defining moment in Shakespeare's exploration of Henry's education in kingship and his capacity to perform. His soldiers, unlike the French, are prepared mentally for the upcoming battle, but as Henry realises, they may doubt both his motives and his courage. Henry attempts to make them believe that though "the King is but a man" (4.1.265) and is just as fearful as they, he does not wish himself anywhere but the battlefield with his men. However, it is not enough to convince them, and Henry learns that they are placing all the responsibility for their own actions upon him:

⁶⁷ Cantor, Paul. A. *'Shakespeare's Henry V: From the Medieval to the Modern World' Perspectives on Politics in Shakespeare*, ed. John A. Murley and Sean D. Dutton (Oxford: Lexington Books, 2006) p. 19

KING: Methinks I could not die anywhere so contented in the King's company, his cause being just and his quarrel honourable.

WILLIAMS: That's more than we know.

BATES: We know enough if we are the King's subjects. If his cause be wrong, our obedience to the King wipes the crime of it out of us. (4.1.265)

Williams concludes that the King must be prepared to deal with the "heavy reckoning...when all those legs/ And arms and heads chopped off in battle shall join together/ at the latter day and cry "We all died at such a place"" (4.1.265-6). But this is more responsibility that Henry is prepared to bear, and so he uses all of his skills in rhetoric to convince them that each man is responsible for his own actions on the battlefield, for whilst it is their duty to fight for the king, he claims, it's also their duty to fight for their own souls. An audience would see here the true extent of the education in rhetoric Hal has learned from Falstaff: by paying attention to the very minds of his soldiers he is able to seize hold of their arguments and gain their approval, by talking man to man, not king to man. Indeed, Williams soon agrees that "every man that dies ill, the ill upon his own head; the King is not to answer it." (4.1.266) Once again, Henry is similar in some ways to Shakespeare's Richard III: both men possess an incredible power of rhetoric. But they use this skill to different means: whereas Richard deploys this weapon in order to deflect blame, Henry genuinely wishes his soldiers to keep check of their own actions so they may prove worthy fighters.

Henry continually learns from those around him, but he remains a solo performer. He allows neither opposition nor false flattery from courtiers hoping to gain favouritism, instead bearing the weight of kingship alone. He finds it a burden: his father's act of deposition forced the body politic upon him and pushed him into a role that, although in terms of the early modern theory of providential history, it would have been seen as God's will for Henry to become king, as an individual, as a *man*, he does not feel equipped for the role.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ In direct contrast to Richard II, Henry IV and especially Richard III, who all felt they deserved Kingship

In Act 4 Scene 1 he laments that the only thing that separates him from the common man is ceremony, which is a hollow comfort, for unlike Richard II, he understands that whilst it singles him out as a divine man amongst commoners, it actually has little value to him:

I am a king that find thee, and I know
 'Tis not the balm, the sceptre, and the ball,
 The sword, the mace, the crown imperial,
 The intertissued robe of gold and peal,
 The farced title running 'fore the king
 The throne he sits on, nor the tide of pomp,
 That beats upon the high shore of this world. (4.1.273)

However, he also understands that whilst the material signs of “idol ceremony” mean nothing to him, he must embrace it, for his subjects expect such behaviour from their sovereign: “Art though aught else but place, degree and form/ Creating awe and fear in other men.” (4.1.272) he only makes this speech though, once his soldiers have vacated the stage, and thus preserves the mysticism that surrounds kingship on stage - to the common man, ceremony literally equals sovereignty, and for that is the only aspect of kingship they get to witness. Henry though, understands that to be a good king, it is necessary to play three roles: a public king who embraces performance and ceremony, a private king who is willing to make personal sacrifices, and a political king who works to protect his land and people:

And, but for ceremony, such a wretch,
 Winding up days with toil and nights with sleep,
 Had the forehand and vantage of a king.
 The slave, a member of the country's peace,
 Enjoys it, but in gross brain little wots
 What watch the king keeps to maintain the peace,
 Whose hours the peasant best advantages (4.1. 274)

At the close of this speech, he has learnt to shoulder responsibility – and, perhaps more importantly, to perform his acceptance of this responsibility – and in doing so successfully

integrates the three persons of kingship: the personal, the political and the performative.

Henry does not run from his role; out of the three kings I have examined in this dissertation he is the only one who willingly embraces all aspects of kingship. His performances are not to deceive, or to reinforce his own belief in sovereignty, but to ensure that he can obtain justice and peace for his people. He makes mistakes – for no one is perfect, least of all a king – but he is willing to learn from them.

As Shakespeare demonstrates, Henry V successfully uses all aspects of performance to unite his body's natural and politic to create a *positive* outcome. This is why I believe that Shakespeare's portrayal of Henry V could be called the 'perfect king', and also suggests that he asked his audiences to contemplate that there might be more to Elizabeth than what they see in public.

CONCLUSION

In this dissertation I have identified and examined ways in which Elizabeth's body performative was interpreted by William Shakespeare, and how this was dramatised to audiences through the medium of theatre, specifically through the history plays, in which the history of kingship and sovereign performance could be explored. I have also established that Elizabeth I was part of a long-standing tradition according to which monarchs refashioned the relationship between their bodies natural and politic in order to gain acceptance. I believe however that further examination is necessary for the development of this argument; by closer examining parallels between Elizabeth's reign and the history plays of both tetralogies, it may be possible to identify changing the social attitudes towards the body performative across the late 1500's. It may also be interesting to examine the work of Shakespeare under the reign of Elizabeth's successor, King James I, to see how he responded to Elizabethan attitudes towards sovereign performance.

I believe I have demonstrated the importance of sovereign performance, however, not all Shakespeare scholars are convinced of its merits. Andrew Hadfield proposes that the history plays are dominated by actor/kings, but argues that the use of performance usually is indicative of a bad king. He seems to suggest that only illegitimate kings, or those with weak claims to the throne use performance in order to "prove themselves worthy of the people's support [and are] endlessly playing a part."⁶⁹ In support of this thesis, he cites Henry IV's death-bed speech, in which the King explains to his son that his time as monarch has been so turbulent, and so plagued by guilt, that he was forced to act as a King in order to try and justify his act of deposition:

⁶⁹ Hadfield Andrew, *Shakespeare and Renaissance Politics* (London: The Arden Shakespeare, 2004) p. 60

God knows, my son
 By what by-paths and indirect crook'd ways
 I met this crown, and I myself know well
 How troublesome it sat upon my head...
 All my reign hath been but as a scene
 Acting that argument.

(*Henry IV Part Two*, 4.5.154)

For Hadfield, Henry IV's desire to be seen as a King reflected Elizabeth's desire to physically look and act like a Queen. Upon Henry IV's death, he passes down his stolen body politic to his son - along with his guilt: "Not today, O Lord/ O not today, think not upon the fault/ My father made in compassing the crown./ I Richard's body have interred new." (*Henry V*, 4.1.276)

Hadfield is right to suggest that it may prove difficult to take Henry V's claim to France seriously, given the dubious nature of his father's claim to England, but Henry is fully aware of the barriers against his claims and, as I have demonstrated, breaks them down with performance. However, Hadfield insists that: "Monarchs who have no right to rule have to prove themselves worthy of the people's support",⁷⁰ and argues that they do so by *acting* out a role, much as, as previously discussed, Bolingbroke does in *Richard II*. However, in this dissertation I have shown that *all* monarchs have to prove themselves worthy of people's support, whether they are a hereditary monarch or new, and the simplest ways of gaining support are through moments of public performance and by appealing to people's expectations. The real difficulty in proving themselves lies with their ability to back up public performance with private, and it is *that* which can determine whether a monarch has any 'right to rule'.

Shakespeare repeatedly demonstrates to his audience that performance is a necessary element of kingship. For example, the disguise scene in *Henry V* Act 4 Scene 1 has no

⁷⁰ Hadfield, Andrew, *Shakespeare and Renaissance Politics* (London: The Arden Shakespeare, 2004) p. 60

precedent in any of the sources that Shakespeare used when writing this play. Whilst it means that a medieval understanding of the body performative had not then been developed, it does mean that it in times of instability it became culturally relevant.

Hadfield is right to suggest that it is only ‘ceremony’ that, in retrospect, separates kings from commoners, but he claims that Henry V’s insight in Act 4 Scene 1 only serves to heighten his “precarious claim to the throne”.⁷¹ Hadfield’s understanding of ceremony seems to be too casual- he seems to suggest that all any man needs is ‘ceremony’ to, theoretically become a king. He only seems to see the superficiality of ceremony: the ‘anointed balm’ of kingship, he proposes, has been reduced to a “series of symbols that must be reproduced and performed time and time again to remind his subjects that they are in the presence of a king.”⁷² and thus when Henry stops performing, i.e., when he steps back and allows himself a private moment, he “ceases to be [a king]”.⁷³ Whilst I agree that ceremony has been reduced to ‘repetitive performances’, Hadfield fails to recognise the very importance of ceremony and how it is needed to comfort or inspire the common citizens. He also does not understand that it is not only ceremony that separates man from king, but the understanding of how to *use* it. We only have to compare the reigns of Richard II and Henry V to see that difference.

Hadfield also argues that Shakespeare’s repertoire of kings is governed by an understanding of what kings *do* rather than what they are or claim to be, suggesting that perhaps he means the concealment of any flaws to their bodies natural is immoral. However, as I have proven in this dissertation, Shakespeare knew that to conceal the body natural sometimes was a necessary act.

Elizabeth spent her entire reign compensating for her obvious ‘flaws’, but she also knew when to play upon them for political gain, and she could not have been such a successful monarch without an awareness of these perceived flaws. The body performative allowed the

⁷¹ Hadfield, Andrew, *Shakespeare and Renaissance Politics* (London: The Arden Shakespeare, 2004) p65

⁷² Ibid p.66

⁷³ Ibid p.66

monarch to gain acceptance and keep it, and although her support at times waivered, her complete knowledge of the power of performance ensured that long after her death she remained in the public's imagination. Performance is not the mark of an illegitimate king,⁷⁴ but rather should be seen to be the mark of all kings trying to do right.

⁷⁴ Although, in terms of providential history, all Kings are legitimate.

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