

*Consuming the Royal Body: Stillness, Scopophilia, and Aura in Lear and Macbeth on Screen*

PETER KIRWAN  
*University of Nottingham*

Hilary Mantel's startling anecdote of an encounter with Queen Elizabeth II describes her gaze upon the monarch as an active and invasive one. She viewed the Queen:

as a cannibal views his dinner, my gaze sharp enough to pick the meat off her bones. I felt that such was the force of my devouring curiosity [. . .] the hard power of my stare that Her Majesty turned and looked back at me, as if she had been jabbed in the shoulder [. . .] she had turned back from a figurehead into the young woman she was, before monarchy froze her and made her a thing, a thing which only had meaning when it was exposed, a thing that existed only to be looked at (Mantel 2013).

At the heart of Mantel's provocative essay on spectatorship and the monarchy is buried this bizarre and troubling metaphor of the gaze upon the royal body as an act of consumption, casting Mantel herself as both a "cannibal" and as the claimant of an uncanny power. Her mere gaze is enough to cause violence to the monarch, violence that the Queen appears to feel. The uncomfortableness of the image is deliberate, fueling an essay that takes a still-ingrained taboo against the physical violation of the royal body to paint the objectification of the royal body by the public and the media as itself an act of violence. Mantel's humanist plea—even and especially to those of us who consider the monarchy a dangerous anachronism—is to consider the cruelty and impact of that gaze.

But underpinning Mantel's characterization of the monarch in this passage is a fascinating representation of what monarchy does to a human being. Mantel suggests that the monarchy "froze" her, turning her into a thing that exists to be seen and thus only has meaning when it is "exposed." The image here is resonant, as the human body is fixed unnaturally in time and space, made still, and then revealed. The image evokes the role of the monarch as a literal figurehead and icon, whether on currency or in portraiture, in which the likeness of the monarch is indeed fixed for the purpose of gazing upon and reifying the institution of monarchy. Taken in this way, the gaze of the spectator inevitably assumes a kind of power as the active agent, with the visage of the monarch cast as passive, an unmoving object of scrutiny. The stillness of this frozen body—which also fleetingly evokes the proverbial rabbit caught in the headlights—is essential to Mantel's narrative, both rendering the monarch helpless and allowing the narrative time within which her close scrutiny of the monarch can take place.

The perverse scopophilia of Mantel's act of cannibalistic gazing is, of course, a feature of cinema, as most famously expressed in Laura Mulvey's epochal article considering cinema's development of the "primordial [. . .] narcissistic" curiosity of the cinematic gaze (9). While Mulvey's work is most famous for its development of the idea of the "male gaze" of cinema, her formulation might also be productively applied to the peculiar relationship between the gazing subject ("man") and the monarch ("woman"):

The image of woman as (passive) raw material for the (active) gaze of man takes the argument a step further into the structure of representation [. . .] Going far beyond highlighting a woman's to-be-looked-at-ness, cinema builds the way she is to be looked at into the spectacle itself (17).

In this sense, putting the royal body on screen inserts the body of the monarch into a structural form which is already geared towards rendering the body as spectacle, precisely for the act of consumption by the viewer. The power politics of cinema, with its controlling gaze and its spectacularized bodies, offer a corollary to the institutional politics and heritage that freeze the monarch's body for representational purpose. To imagine the monarch as "woman" in the above quotation inverts what one might assume to be the obvious power dynamic, understanding the monarch—at least in their mediatized form, whether literary or filmic—as the object of the scopophilic gaze, but with the additional political pleasure of temporarily assuming the active role in relation to the individual who embodies power. However fleetingly, the monarch becomes, in a doubled sense, the subject.

In adapting Mulvey's work for the purposes of Shakespeare's kings on the silver screen in this article, I am thus interested in two intersecting ways in which the cinematic subject is made passive, if not abject. The first, building on Mantel's scopophilia, considers the power dynamic assumed by the spectator, a dynamic criticized by Richard II as he castigates "all of you that stand and look upon me, / Whilst that my wretchedness doth bait myself" (4.1.237–8). Richard turns against the gaze that he earlier courted but that now bears witness to his "abdication" and leaves him passive. Pascale Aebischer, building on Mulvey's work, pulls out the dual fetishistic and voyeuristic tendencies of the male gaze that acknowledge the perversity of the artist in relation to Mike Figgis's *Hotel* (2001); she argues that Figgis uses *The Duchess of Malfi* "as a pre-text for an examination of the control, oppression and consumption of the female body and female sexuality both in Webster's play and in contemporary culture, as epitomized by the ideological apparatus of the film industry" (Aebischer 91). Part of my contention in this article is that the perverse gendered power dynamics of cinema similarly serve to fetishize and exploit the body of the (male) monarch, and that the entrapment, objectification, and exposure of the monarchical body has no small revolutionary potential.

The second means by which the royal body is rendered passive is its relationship as site of spectacle to the landscapes mediated by the cinema screen.<sup>1</sup> As Chris Lukinbeal argues, "Landscape as spectacle encodes power relations within the gaze. Determination of what constitutes beauty, who is gazing and what we are gazing upon, are questions which help expose the inherent power relations embedded within cinematic landscapes" (11). Lukinbeal's influential argument insists on the importance of the environment framed by the cinema screen in controlling and mediating the embedded power relations of the form. My contention is that cinematic renditions of *Macbeth* and *King Lear* especially exploit the relationship between the body and natural or architectural space in developing the body of the monarch as a fetishized subject in relation to the consuming gaze of the viewer. In so doing—and to tie this back to Mantel's observations—cinema repeatedly frames the bodies of Shakespeare's monarchs as *still*.<sup>2</sup> The multiple mechanisms via which the monarchical body is frozen, especially in contrast to an ever-changing landscape, invite the viewer's pity *and* pleasure in the monarch's subsumption into/by the environment of the world they inhabit.

\*

In perhaps the most striking sequence in Akira Kurosawa's reworking of *King Lear*, *Ran* (1985), the aged Hidetora (Tatsuya Nakadsi) finds himself outflanked and outgunned by the warring forces of his sons. Surrounded by burning flames, and with all his attendants murdered, he flails around a burning room, grabbing at bits of flooring and looking for an exit, until he

suddenly slumps on the floor, his back against a pillar. Then, as the shooting stops, and with a sword trailing on the floor behind him, Hidetora rises and leaves the burning building, his face frozen into a fixed, aghast expression of horror, evoking the *noh* mask. Almost entirely still apart from the feet that move him out through the silent crowd of waiting soldier, Hidetora's mesmeric procession takes him through the scorched black earth, a stark contrast to the verdant landscapes of the film's beginning, now blackened by war. He leaves the castle and moves off the side of the frame. Later shots, from an increasing distance, show him disappearing into the mists.

This much-discussed sequence (see also Guntner 137; Burnett 84-5) is my starting point for thinking about the interplay between royal bodies and the natural environment. More explicitly than most, Kurosawa associates the broken body with a destroyed world, visualizing the age-old conceit about the health of the monarch and the health of the state. It is of a piece with any number of recent adaptations of *Macbeth* and *King Lear* interested in ecocide.<sup>3</sup> As someone who herself works in an "ecodramaturgical" mode, Gretchen E. Minton, considering her own ecodramaturgical work on a Montana production of *Macbeth*, recalls the impact of a 2013 production at Trafalgar Studios sets in a post-apocalyptic world in which Macbeth's crimes "were even more horrific in a world that was dying, where life seemed impossibly difficult to sustain" (430). As she puts it, this "is the central ethical issue facing us today in relation to our environmental crisis: what sort of world are we leaving to our children? Is the damage we have done, and continue to do, to our environment in any way reversible?" (Minton 430). *Ran's* environmental shifts across the course of the film chart across the course of the film the degradation of the landscape; the conflict between generations blackening the soil and the landscape becoming parched and bare, offering a stark visualization of an environmental crisis that has only become more prescient in the thirty years since the film premiered.

What is especially striking in this example, however, is the stillness of Hidetora's body, a stillness that in turn renders the crowds he walks through inert. The body of the actor, frozen from the waist up, seems not in control of its movements but propelled by a force beyond its own control, and even though he is the only element in this sequence that is mobile, the gaze of the camera foregrounds the abject, petrified stillness of Hidetora's torso and face. As Mark Thornton Burnett suggests, "The static shot of Hidetora/Lear surrounded by carnage and the crowd functions to engineer a double response: although the protagonist is old and feeble, he retains an aura, with camerawork reinforcing both his vulnerability and traces of his former majesty" (85). Burnett's emphasis on *aura* is significant, and I will return to this momentarily, but perhaps more important here is the sense of a "double response" or double gaze, in which the monarch is rendered both a figure of pity and a figure of awe. Through the combination of camerawork and *mise-en-scène*, Kurosawa builds Hidetora into the spectacle. He is first seen as still in contrast to the activity of the battle, and then as the only (partially) mobile element in a composition that sees all other bodies and props still in relation to him. As the subject of the gaze of his (one-time) subjects, Hidetora's "to-be-looked-at-ness" offers him up as a figure for consumption.

To understand something of the resonances of Nakadsi's performance here, I turn to Keiko I. McDonald's work on *Throne of Blood's noh* influences. Speaking of that film's Lady Macbeth figure, McDonald argues:

She does not create her own movement voluntarily. Instead, she follows the formalistic practice of “prescribed pattern of bodily movement.” She walks like a *noh* performer: her feet are not lifted from the floor but slide along it, the toes raised at each step. Her speech is measured, like a *noh* soliloquy. In the banquet scene, while Washizu’s features work in expressions of horror and dismay, her face is a study in absolute control: static, cold, and impassive, like a female blank *noh* mask (39).

The “static” qualities of Isuzu Yamada’s performance are indicative of “absolute control”; yet the opening of this paragraph also suggests something automatic in her (willful?) forsaking of voluntary movement. Hidetora’s mobility is a later echo of Lady Washizu’s, his frenetic movements during the initial onslaught on the Third Fort passing into what appears to be automatic movement, tracked by the camera as he falls into a prescribed pattern. Yet his face is far from “impassive”, instead adopting a fixed expression of horror. In Nakadsi’s performance, Kurosawa borrows traces of *noh* to imagine the body slipping into an automated mode at the point of horror and collapse; an image which, again retrospectively, evokes the “paralysis” in the face of environmental catastrophe that has been a repeated metaphor for human and environmental geographers.<sup>4</sup> While the face represents a feat of *actorly* control, then, the character becomes still at the moment he *loses* control, and Hidetora’s movement for much of the rest of the film is minimal. Indeed, his stillness is accompanied by a subtle bleaching of his skin across the rest of the film’s runtime, becoming almost black and white against the landscape, as if drained of color. The film renders the monarch passive to the camera’s gaze even as his vitality is consumed.

Burnett’s evocation of Hidetora’s aura conjures Walter Benjamin’s critique of the film actor’s remediation to the mass market: “While facing the camera he knows that ultimately he will face the public, the consumers who constitute the market. This market, where he offers not only his labor but also his whole self, his heart and soul, is beyond his reach” (11). For Benjamin, “that which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art” (4); or, for the purposes of this article, the aura of the monarch. Benjamin’s definition of “aura” relies on the “phenomenon of distance” (5) which accords value to the unreachability of the object, and in turn creates the desire to destroy that object—or to settle for the possession of its reproduction. The utility of Benjamin’s model for understanding the loss of the actor’s aura through their remediation through film into “personality” (11) has, to my knowledge, not been applied to the monarch, but the connections are hopefully clear: the icon of the monarch is repeatedly and systematically remediated at all levels of society for consumption and ownership (quite literally, in the case of currency, where prolific ownership of the monarch’s face confers economic status). In turn, and in no small part *because of* the saturation of reproduced images of the monarch, the monarch in their own person retains their aura. This leads to Mantel’s hungry gaze in which her desire to consume the monarch replicates perversely the kinds of economic consumption of the monarch’s reproductions that have otherwise become normalized.

To this extent, the film’s construction of Hidetora’s aura, and then the dispelling of that aura through the character being subsumed into the landscape, are a cinematic representation of the degradation of power relations throughout the play that mirrors the ecological catastrophe inflicted upon the world the characters inhabit. As Hidetora begins to become nearly indistinguishable from the bare rocks, the film offers us the dual spectacle of both a monarch withdrawing from the gaze of his subjects/the viewer and, alternatively, the figure of

the monarch being consumed. In this I offer a development of Melissa Croteau's important argument that *Ran* offers an opportunity to the viewer to *not* turn away from suffering: "Watching from a distance, we may gain the courage to refuse to feed the fires of violence and human degradation. The potential to conquer fear in this life lies in that brave gaze" (58). Croteau's humane argument seeks political and social potential emerging from the viewer's gaze; I find myself, however, unable to escape the image of Hidetora's frozen expression of horror in the face of suffering that he cannot turn away from, and suggest that if viewers are to break out of the voyeuristic mode that objectifies and consumes Hidetora's body, this effort must come from conscious will to avoid the traps that the film's own characters fall into.

\*

There are few Lear's more static than Paul Scofield, in Peter Brook's 1971 film of *King Lear*. Yvonne Griggs's account of the opening sequence remarks on the frozen faces that form a backdrop to the opening credits, before repeatedly returning to stillness in her description of the first sight of Lear himself: "entombed in his coffin-like throne, his unconscious desire for death and annihilation is represented visually from the outset" (54). Griggs's comments on Scofield's stillness otherwise reflect more generally on the greater "dramatic weight" that his unmoving presence offers, a dramatic weight that I suggest implies, again, the combined aura of actor/character/monarch. Returning to Benjamin, his sense of the "ritual function" (6) of the work of art is applicable here, in a situation where the monarch's authority and authenticity are rooted in his framing by the apparatus of court. For Griggs, Scofield's/Lear's aura extends beyond the dramatic frame and even seems to exert some control of the camera: she remarks that the static shot lasting for sixteen seconds while he says "Know" emphasizes "Lear's control of all things, even time it seems" (55, 54). Chiming with McDonald's remarks on Lady Washizu's static performance conveying control, Griggs offers here a specific reading of the frozen king embodying a control and authority that align with a sense of monarchical aura. However, even though the dominance of his face in this opening sequence certainly seems to indicate power, the resonances of the coffin-shaped throne and the unflinching gaze of the camera make this power equivocal. Even Griggs uses the passive in her sense that he is "entombed": Lear is in charge, perhaps, only as long as the camera allows him to be.

J. Lawrence Guntner remarks on the agency of the camera in this opening sequence, noting that "from the opening pan of a hall full of strangely motionless faces, the camera focuses on heads and faces as if probing their surface representation for a clue to their inner character, and characters talk straight into the camera as if directly to the spectator" (135). This "probing" of the camera returns attention to the role of Brook's camera in framing and looking upon its subjects, especially Lear himself, and it is through camerawork that the film later renders Lear abject. When Lear rushes out into the storm, the camera and the weather work in tandem to make Scofield's still body victim to the motility of the camera's gaze in a bravura sequence that seems to pit the character not just against his environment, but against the medium itself. The camera becomes a weapon that no longer probes, but strips bare and exposes its subject. During his haranguing of Goneril and Cordelia, the camera begins to waver, decentering Lear's face within the frame; then, as he whispers "I shall go mad" into the Fool's ear in extreme close-up, he moves out of focus and disappears into the background as the noise of the wind begins to dominate the soundtrack. The next time we see Lear, the camera is spinning freely and Lear is captured in montage, the fast, discontinuous cuts showing him jerking through various motions and being lost among the flurry of horses racing out of the

castle. He attempts to regain control of his image and his sanity by driving a carriage (carrying the Fool) out into the desolate wilderness, and, for a brief moment, the low angle frames a dominant Lear as a figure of authority as he battles to retain control of the horses while being lashed by the wind and the rain. But inevitably, Brook has him crash the coach instead.

Following the crash, Brook works to pin Scofield in place, even as he attempts to stride out into the film. Guntner has argued that “Brook consistently and insistently interrupts the narrative flow with the hand-held camera, rapid acceleration, out-of-focus shots, printed subtitles, zooms, fades, jump-cutting and cross-cutting to suggest the rupture and discontinuity in Lear’s mind” (136), but here the aggressive photography and editing disrupt not just narrative flow but geographic space. Long shots capture the king striking out boldly into a distant landscape, but a fade to black ends Lear’s attempts at mobility and instead leaves him passive. As the image returns, the camera roves and finds Lear lying on the floor, seemingly pinned down by both the storm and the camera. Single-frame flashes of his face give the impression that the viewer is seeing him subliminally, disembodied in relation to the environment he occupies, and the editing renders him abject, both temporally and spatially discontinuous; as Lillian Wilds points out “there is a close-up of Lear’s head that is cross-cut with itself so that the same image is printed alternately on the right side of the screen, then reversed to the left” (103). The image of Lear is juxtaposed with that of the Fool, frozen in a similar position. Then, as Lear tries to get up, the camera distorts his image first through a watery film, and then by viewing him in the reflection of a puddle, a shot choice that disquietingly appears to present Scofield’s head disembodied in the center of black space. And even when he finally gets to his feet and is shot from a low angle, the battering down of the storm traps Lear between camera and rain, making a spectacle of his body as it is caught between opposing forces.

The important work of Brook’s film is to undermine repeatedly Lear’s own attempts at control. This is significantly different from the way the scene plays in the theater. Gwilym Jones points out that “it is rarely conceded that Lear maintains his imaginary authority over the elements” (70); both Lear’s speeches and the reports of his actions see him as willing the storm on rather than fighting against it. In the theater, irrespective of any special effects utilized by the director, the effect of the storm is in no small part created by the actor’s words, making Lear’s control of the storm clear. Here, though, the film seems to attack and consume Scofield’s body even as Lear attempts to assert dominance. The fast editing and fragmentation of cinematic time and geographic space forestall any possibility of the actor’s performance dominating; instead, the performance is overtly constructed into a spectacular representation, eaten up and spewed out into a beaten form. The uncanny angles unbalance the king, and the extreme high and low angles alternately subjugate and expose him. As such, Brook’s film violently attacks the implied power relations of the grand metaphor of “landscape as theater” outlined by J.B. Jackson and summarized by Lukinbeal:

Landscape as theater implies the interrelationship of three different items: (1) that theater is a staged production with a set of socially and artistically determined rules, (2) that humans control and design the landscapes as if it were a theatrical stage, and (3) that theater imparts the human ability to see ourselves as occupying the center of the stage (3-4).

Lear himself attempts to appropriate this metaphor, fashioning the weather and the ravaging of the landscape as an extension of his own will, extending his monarchical power to the control of the landscape and placing himself centerstage. But Brook's camera gives the lie to this assertion. It fragments, batters, and disperses the image of Scofield's body with the same intensity as the storm and deliberately keeps him off-center. The combined assault of filmic environment and natural environment overwhelm his words and movements and render him finally static. Mary Floyd-Wilson and Garrett A. Sullivan Jr's work on early modern body-environment relations is useful here, with their suggestion that these relations:

seem to presuppose the subject; either subjectivity emerges through these transactions, or the subject seeks to shape their nature, or both. What the subject looks like, however, can differ dramatically from transaction to transaction—so dramatically as to put great pressure on the very category of subjectivity (3).

Brook's camera applies that pressure to Lear's/Scofield's subjectivity, stressing the experience of being-done-to in a way that blurs the boundaries between Lear's body and the landscape itself. This is shared in Kurosawa's film, which is less violent in its camerawork but more so in its scarring of the landscape. Where Brook assaults Lear/Scofield through montage and editing to render his body still, Kurosawa traces a much slower fading away of Hidetora into the mist and later into the grayness of rock as the color drains from his skin. In both instances, the ways in which the body of the monarch is built into the spectacle of the film challenges their subjectivity, overwhelming them and insisting on their to-be-looked-at-ness rather than their control.

“Despite his *hubris*”, remarks Jonathan Pollock, “Lear is well aware that nature has granted him a ‘limited power and an immutable boundary’” (171). The extent of Lear's self-awareness is debatable, but Pollock's use of Lucretius's sense of a “boundary” to power enacts a spatial metaphor of limited control that Brook's film attempts to literalize. As the monarch and the environment battle, the camera stresses the limits to Lear's control by decentering and fracturing his visible presence. Floyd-Wilson and Sullivan Jr propose several dualistic models to account for the interconnections between body and environment, but it is their model of “*dispersion* or *distribution*” which seems to me to have the most efficacy here:

[In this model] emotion and thought are fundamentally *intersubjective*, with both bodies and environment registering their effects in ways that stretch dualism to its limits. In such a landscape, not only is subjectivity distributed across bodies and environment, but the environment itself can also be seen as exercising the kind of agency usually limited to the subject. (6)

The applicability of this to the storm in *King Lear* is, I think, obvious, as the environment and the royal body both act explicitly upon one another, even if Brook's film makes clear that the environment's acts are physical while the monarch's acts are rhetorical. But as I have hopefully argued in this section, this intersubjectivity is complicated further on film by the scopophilic gaze of the camera which repeatedly renders both environment and body still. Intersubjectivity to a greater or lesser extent implies motion: the doing of something by one subject to the other. In cases such as Brook's storm scene, however, it is the camera that provides the motion, with the director using montage to frame the still body within the fixed landscape and consuming both simultaneously. While in Brook's *Lear* the physical environment is not destroyed as in *Ran*, both films present the monarch and the land attacked in tandem.

\*

A final film which explores the intersubjectivity between the royal body and the environment, and which neatly brings together several of the concerns outlined in this article, is Justin Kurzel's *Macbeth* (2015), a film so still that it at times presents itself as an animated photo gallery. The close alignment that Kurzel traces between the Scottish landscapes—shot on location in Scotland, in a first for motion pictures of *Macbeth*, and emphasized in marketing and DVD distribution through a partnership with Visit Scotland—and Michael Fassbender's fetishized body repeatedly makes each subject to the other, constructing the pair as shared spectacle, and intertwining their fates. The painterly composition of frames treats Fassbender's body—itsself sometimes exposed—as still life framed within nature, the aura generated by the intersubjectivity of the two and subjected to the exposing scrutiny of the camera.

While Kurzel deploys shaky-cam for *veritas*, the static quality of the blocking and composition is striking throughout the length of the film. Unlike the sequence in *Ran* with which I began this article, Kurzel's film very rarely shows characters arriving or moving into position; the camera tends to find them when they have already assumed a posture—even a tableau—appropriate to their involvement in the scene. When speaking, actors move as minimally as possible, normally being fixed in a single posture and holding body and face still while the mouth moves. The composition of frames, more than anything else, resembles the layout of comic book panels, in which the subject of the panel is drawn in a single position accompanied by a speech bubble, the tableau of the speaker standing for the content of the entire speech. Even when moving to ostensible action sequences, such as the opening Battle of Ellon, the brief sequences of real-time fighting are intercut with extreme slow-motion profile shots of the battle that mimic comic book splash pages, or the running soldiers are captured head-on in a shot that keeps them still within the space of the frame even while they are apparently running fast. The effect of this is to make visible what Lukinbeal calls “the inherent power relations embedded within cinematic landscapes” (11) by creating emblematic images that frame characters in subordinate or dominant relationships with the natural geography. An early example begins with a long distance shot of a group of men standing at one end of a heath facing an isolated figure at the far end, his silhouette obscured by the mountains behind him. Kurzel then explicates the image with a cut to a close-up of the Thane of Cawdor standing isolated against the mountains, before a reverse shot shows two archers standing on a ridge, drawing their bows in unison. A cut to a long angle puts the different parties back together within the shot as the arrows are loosed, but before the arrows can hit, there is a jump cut to a lofty mountain peak, covered in cloud, signifying an absence of humans. This silent sequence of almost-still images encodes the shifting human power relations within an imposing landscape that dominates and outlasts human activity, and which especially encodes the moment of death as a return to the natural environment.

In the case of Fassbender's *Macbeth*, the relative stillness of his performance and his framing against the landscape make the body of a king a prisoner within the space of the frame, with Kurzel limiting the character's own motility and instead inviting the gaze of the spectator upon the combined spectacle of body and environment. Especially early in the film, *Macbeth*'s body is repeatedly shown rising from the waist-level mists that swirl around the battlefield, likening him to the Scottish peaks that form the backdrop to these scenes. Later, following the murder of Duncan (and thus at the moment marking his ascension to the monarchy) he emerges topless from a lake in a deliberately sexualized image that exaggerates the character's



masculinity (wet white shorts, sculpted chest) and literal immersion in the landscape. Here, it is important to note that the scopophilic gaze of the camera privileges not the character's movement, but his artfully framed stillness, as the royal body is exposed and presented for both gratification and consumption.

The aura of Fassbender's body can be read in the light of Anna Blackwell's work on the consumption of fetishized male celebrity. Writing about the marketing of Tom Hiddleston's body in relation to the Donmar Warehouse's 2014 production of *Coriolanus*, she argues that we are intended to "relish the spectacle of his semi-nude body on stage and the play's deliberate eroticization of vulnerability" (75). In Blackwell's work, the body of the celebrity actor becomes the substrate or raw material on which digital communities practice creativity in genres (e.g. memes) that particularly make use of the static image of the performer, in an important updating of the reproductive work of mediatized "personality" that Benjamin discusses in relation to the film actor.<sup>5</sup> The stillness of Fassbender's body makes him available for consumption and (re-)use by the spectator. At the same time, however, Fassbender's Macbeth cannot be easily decontextualized from the natural landscape that frames him; indeed, given how often his body is partially submerged in mist of water, the porousness of the environment means that his body is visually incomplete. The stillness of the royal body keeps that body pristine and at a distance, to be gazed upon but not touched. There is a tension between the to-be-looked-at-ness of the royal body and the ways in which its unavailability is subtly reinforced.

Thematically, then, the exposure of the body aligns with the exposed landscape. Upon his coronation, Macbeth is detached from the landscape and becomes increasingly heavily clothed, even as he is simultaneously confined in ceilinged rooms and framed by rich furniture and stone walls. In so doing, Kurzel fascinatingly dispels Macbeth's aura by making the actor's body less focal in the compositions. The iconic images of Macbeth in the open air are connected to Macbeth's valor on the battlefield and a truer self that is obscured by the regalia of the monarchy. The trappings of kingship are ostensibly more impressive, at least in the film's display of conspicuous wealth and architectural ingenuity. The artifice of the monarchy, however, is more obviously constructed than the "natural" exposed Macbeth with his links to landscape and, implicitly, nation. The realization complicates Mantel's observations on Elizabeth II concerning the "thing which only had meaning when it was exposed, a thing that existed only to be looked at" (2013). The clothed and constructed monarch is designed to be looked upon, but the trappings of the monarchy also work to conceal as well as to expose, diminishing the impact of the aura of actor/character. The vulnerable, aestheticized body of Macbeth is offered up for the consumption of the scopophilic gaze of the camera when near-naked in the Scottish wilds; but that body is also partially consumed by the machinery and apparatus of monarchy itself.

As with *Ran*, the decline of the monarch is linked to the decline of the natural world. In an apocalyptic conclusion, the arrival of Malcolm and the English forces is accompanied by the burning of Macbeth's lands in place of the text's felling of trees. This act of ecocide interestingly targets not the body of the monarch, nor the human-constructed apparatus of monarchy, but the environment that has co-created Macbeth's aura and with which he remains indelibly associated. Jennifer Mae Hamilton has recently asserted that human death is an ecological concern, arguing that dramatic representations of death reveal "western, secular anxieties around death and dying [. . . that] are dark, violent, and underwritten by a human

exceptionalist and transcendent cosmography,” and which need to be confronted in order “to live differently on and with the earth” (497). Whereas earlier in the film, the representation of death rituals for the Macbeths’ child and for Macbeth’s soldiers saw bodies returned gently and respectfully to the earth in a symbiotic relationship, here the flames of the finale erase Scotland and, in doing so, the fixed points and geographical structures that shape power relationships.<sup>6</sup> The ecocide of Malcolm’s troops dismantles social order and allows for images of chaos: the dying Macbeth and Macduff embracing in the grass; the English forces walking past dying men; Fleance running through a seemingly endless mist (or smoke) towards a possible confrontation with the newly enthroned Malcolm. Malcolm’s assault upon the earth is an act of mutually assured destruction that removes the gaze firmly from Macbeth, obscuring the royal body and Dunsinane Castle in smoke, and leaving Macbeth barely more than silhouette against the flames.

The distribution of subjectivity across the exposed, scrutinized body of the monarch and the natural landscape depicts a symbiotic relationship in which neither entity necessarily has agency, but inextricably links their fates. In the three films I have considered in this article, the monarch’s body and the environment are consumed together, both as objects of aesthetic appreciation and as the entities destroyed by the film’s end. Macbeth’s penetrated body slumps on grass framed by the raging fires that are incinerating the nation; Hidetora’s near-catatonic state aligns with the destruction and blackening of the lands that were once his; and Brook’s Lear and the heath are both edited into oblivion by violent camerawork and montage. As the camera fixes the royal body as unmoving within the spectacle of landscape, the agency of both is ultimately subjugated to the hungry gaze of the consuming viewer, the devouring curiosity of the scopophilic gaze pursuing its subjects to destruction.

### Works Cited

Aebischer, Pascale. *Screening Early Modern Drama: Beyond Shakespeare*. Cambridge UP, 2013.

Barnden, Sally. *Still Shakespeare and the Photography of Performance*. Cambridge UP, 2019.

Benjamin, Walter. “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.” 1935. Translated by Harry Zohn. *Illuminations*, edited by Hannah Arendt, Schocken Books, 1969, pp. 1-26.

Blackwell, Anna. *Shakespearean Celebrity in the Digital Age*. Palgrave, 2018.

Burnett, Mark Thornton. “Akira Kurosawa.” *Great Shakespearians XVII: Welles, Kurosawa, Kozintsev, Zeffirelli*, Bloomsbury, 2013, pp. 54-91.

Croteau, Melissa. “Wicked Humans and Weeping Buddhas: (Post)Humanism and Hell in Kurosawa’s *Ran*.” *Shakespeare on Screen: King Lear*, edited by Victoria Bladen, Sarah Hatchuel, and Nathalie Vienne-Guerrin, Cambridge UP, 2019, pp. 47-61.

Fazel, Valerie M., and Louise Geddes, eds. *The Shakespeare User: Critical and Creative Appropriations in a Networked Culture*. Palgrave MacMillan, 2017.

- Floyd-Wilson, Mary, and Garrett A. Sullivan Jr. "Introduction: Inhabiting the Body, Inhabiting the World." *Environment and Embodiment in Early Modern England*, edited by Mary Floyd-Wilson and Garrett A. Sullivan Jr., Palgrave, 2007, pp. 1–13.
- Griggs, Yvonne. *Screen Adaptations: Shakespeare's King Lear*. Methuen, 2009.
- Guntner, J. Lawrence. "Hamlet, Macbeth and King Lear on Film." *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on Film*, 2nd second ed., edited by Russell Jackson, Cambridge UP, 2007, pp. 120-40.
- Hamilton, Jennifer Mae. *This Contentious Storm*. Bloomsbury, 2017.
- Hamilton, Jennifer Mae. "Constructing Dying and Death as an Eco-Political Concern in Performances of Shakespeare's *King Lear* and Sarah Kane's *Blasted*." *Shakespeare Bulletin*, Vol. 36, No. 3 (2018), pp. 485-500.
- Hargis, Jill. "Hannah Arendt's Turn to the Self and Environmental Responses to Climate Change Paralysis." *Environmental Politics*, Vol. 26, No. 3 (2016), pp. 475-93.
- Jackson, John Brinkherhoff. "Landscape as Theater." *Landscape*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (1979), pp. 3-7.
- Jones, Gwilym. *Shakespeare's Storms*. Manchester UP, 2015.
- King Lear*. Dir. Peter Brook. DVD. Altura Films, 1971.
- Lukinbeal, Chris. "Cinematic Landscapes." *Journal of Cultural Geography*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (2005), pp. 3-22.
- Macbeth*. Dir. Justin Kurzel. DVD. StudioCanal, 2015.
- Mantel, Hilary. "Royal Bodies." *London Review of Books*, Vol. 34, No. 4, February 21 2013, February 24 2020, URL?
- McDonald, Keiko I. "Noh into Film: Kurosawa's *Throne of Blood*." *Journal of Film and Video*, Vol. 39, No. 1 (1987), pp. 36-41.
- Miller, Gemma. "'He has no children': Changing Representations of the Child in Stage and Film Productions of *Macbeth* from Polanski to Kurzel." *Shakespeare*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (2017), pp. 52-66.
- Minton, Gretchen E. "'... the season of all natures': Montana Shakespeare in the Parks' Global Warming *Macbeth*." *Shakespeare Bulletin*, Vol. 36, No. 3 (2018), pp. 429-48.
- Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." *Screen*, Vol. 16, No. 3 (1975): 6-18.
- Nerlich, Brigitte. "'Climategate': Paradoxical Metaphors and Political Paralysis." *Environmental Values*, Vol. 19, No. 4 (2010), pp. 419-42.
- Pollock, Jonathan. "*King Lear* in the Light of Lucretius: *Nullam rem e nihilo*." "*And that's true too*": *New Essays on King Lear*, edited by François Laroque, Pierre Iselin, and Sophie Alatorre, Cambridge Scholars, 2009, pp. 165-79.
- Ran*. Dir. Akira Kurosawa. DVD. Toho Company, 1985.

Renner, Rebecca. "How to Lift the Paralysis of Climate Change Despair." *Forge*, 2 August 2019, February 24 2020, URL?

West, Shearer. *The Image of the Actor: Verbal and Visual Representation in the Age of Garrick and Kemble*. St. Martin's Press, 1991.

Wilds, Lilian. "One King Lear for Our Time: A Bleak Film Vision by Peter Brook." *Literature/Film Quarterly*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (1976), pp. 159-64.

## Notes

---

<sup>1</sup> All of the films considered in this article were originally exhibited in cinemas; however, the increased scale and budget of television productions including *The Hollow Crown* (2012 and 2016) and *The King* (2019) is increasingly blurring the distinction originally intended by "cinematic."

<sup>2</sup> While in this article I focus specifically on cinema, the privileging of the stillness of a performer has a long theatrical and artistic history. Shearer West, writing about eighteenth-century acting practices and portraiture in *The Image of the Actor*, notes that artists "captured a moment that in the theatre would not be static, and writers about the theatre relied on those frozen moments to jog their memories" (27), and goes on to explore the relationship between portraiture, classical acting, and ideas of stillness in particular relation to John Philip Kemble. Sally Barnden pursues this further in relation to the development of photography during the Victorian period, suggesting that the lengthy exposures used by photographer Julia Margaret Cameron "undoubtedly demanded a certain kind of static performance" (103–4), preserving in technological reproduction earlier stage practices of pausing to punctuate or highlight a moment. In film, of course, stillness manifests in contrast to the dynamism inherent in the *moving picture*.

<sup>3</sup> On the convergence of ecocriticism with the performance tradition of *King Lear*, see Hamilton, *Contentious Storm*. *Lear* especially is also central to several novelisations concerned with environmental degradation, including Emily St John Mandel's *Station Eleven* (2014) and Preti Taneja's *We That Are Young* (2017).

<sup>4</sup> See for instance Nerlich; Hargis. Paralysis tends to be evoked as a surface-level metaphor rather than as a sustained way of thinking about responses to climate change, standing as the undesirable alternative to "political action" (Hargis 475), and thus risking ableist associations in its call to (simply) move away from political paralysis. I find of more utility the term's use in popular discourse around climate change activism (cf. Renner), where paralysis is used to evoke the individual's despair in the face of overwhelming odds; that is, the mental state that *leads to inaction*.

<sup>5</sup> On these practices in relation to new media, see also Fazel and Geddes.

<sup>6</sup> On the death ritual for the Macbeths' child, as part of a broader discussion of the representation of childhood in this and other *Macbeths*, see Miller 62-63.