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““Why I should welcome such a guest as grief [?]”: Lodging and dislodging in Shakespeare’s *Richard II*”

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Abstract

This article discusses the early modern cultural debate surrounding hospitality and inhospitality in the light of contemporaneous responses to history and the history play. The dominant focus of this discussion is Shakespeare’s *Richard II* and the ways in which it seeks to interrogate and to critique early modern expectations of welcoming by inverting them repeatedly as the dramatic intrigue unfolds. Throughout this article, reference is made to cultural debate on the subject of (in)hospitality in the contemporary, post-war period.

Sir, findinge that you wer not convenientlie to be in London to morrow night I am bold to send to knowe whether Teusdie may be anie more in your grace to visit poore Channon rowe where as late as it shal please you a gate for your supper shal be open: & K. Richard present him selfe to your vewe. Pardon my boldnes that ever love to be honoured with your presence nether do I importune more then your occasions may willingly assent unto, in the meantime & ever restinge At your command Edw. Hoby, 7 Dec 1595 readile.¹

This missive, sent by Sir Edward Hoby to Sir Robert Cecil, has long exercised Shakespearean criticism since E. K. Chambers drew attention to it in the early decades of the 20th century. The vexed nature of the debate has mostly centred upon the materiality of the ‘K. Richard’ in question. Was Hoby the art collector proffering an invitation for the viewing of a portrait? If so, there are other notable examples of such a consuming interest in images of the Plantagenet monarch. Quite apart from the incremental referencing of Richard II across the Elizabethan period noted by Chambers,² during the recorded exchange with the antiquarian William Lambarde in the aftermath of the Essex rebellion, Elizabeth I allegedly exclaimed ‘I am Richard II. know ye not that?’. However, more importantly in the context of the present discussion, in this same exchange we are also led to believe that ‘returning to Richard II, she demanded, “Whether I had seen any true picture, or lively representation of his countenance and person?”’:

W. L. None but such as be in common hands.
Her Majestie. The Lord Lumley, a lover of antiquities, discovered it fastened on the backside of a door of a base room; which presented unto me, praying, with my good leave, that I might put it in order with the Ancestors and Successors; I will command Tho. Kneavet, Keeper of my House and Gallery at Westminster, to show it unto thee.³

The inordinate desire to observe and be observed remains, of course, thematic to Shakespeare’s own *Richard II*, as does the carefully rehearsed commitment to perform. Nevertheless, perhaps even more intriguing to Shakespearean critics in this debate is the possibility that some historical narrative or a play (performance?), even a Shakespearean play (*Richard III?* *Richard II?*) might constitute the centre-piece of the eagerly anticipated ‘entertainment’ of Cecil? Hoby’s letter was composed at the close of the very year when *Richard II* is thought to have been composed, and the power that this deposed king held to fascinate audiences within and without the theatre remains clearly in evidence throughout the early modern period. Strikingly, *Richard II* warranted five quarto publications⁴ before the First Folio rolled from the presses in 1623. The second quarto of *Richard II* is notable for carrying Shakespeare’s name for the first time on the title page of one of his printed plays. However, the popularity of the work may also be demonstrated by the interest that miscellanies

of the period invested in it: Robert Allott's *England's Parnassus* and John Bodenham's *Belvedere, or the Garden of the Muses* (both published in 1600), for example, gave ample proof of their admiration of this markedly lyrical text by including extensive quotations from it.

Whatever the precise nature of the tempting offer being made to Cecil, 'K. Richard' forms the strategic element in this projected act of reception. In addition, Hoby's text is clearly at pains to indicate the lavish care and attention which is being afforded this particular business of welcoming. J. B.'s *English expositor teaching the interpretation of the hardest words vsed in our language* (1616) confirmed for its early modern readers, lest there be any doubt, that 'Hospitalitie' constitutes the 'Entertainment of strangers, good house-keeping'.⁵ Nonetheless, it is evident that hospitality, extended at a local or a collective level, to the guest or to the stranger, continued to be one of the *hardest* undertakings for households to negotiate. Indeed, in key studies of early modern 'entertainment' or hospitality, Julia Reinhard Lupton has drawn attention precisely to the 'burdensome' responsibilities linked to the identities of 'host' and 'guest' in Tudor and Early Stuart homes: 'Hospitality is a labour of display [...] linked to the labour of the household yet itself a form of theatre that labours by not labouring, by appearing effortless'.⁶ That age, like its Greco-Roman antecedents, recognised that such 'entertainment' was a strategic arena in which to compete for access to political and economic influence and to maintain tactically prime links of human exchange. The staging of such fragile and friable relations of obligation and service was certainly acknowledged in Richard Robinson's *The vineyard of virtue* (1579), for example, where 'Hospitalitie is rightly tearmed friendly entertainment of equall personages, and charitable harboring of inferiour persons for some good consideration'.⁷

The present discussion focuses precisely upon the imbrication of early modern history (in this context, of the early modern history play in the shape of Shakespeare's *Richard II*) in the age's construction of the commitment to invite, to host, to receive, and to welcome. Widely cited throughout the early modern period, the much admired 'Tullie' or Cicero had hailed the life-enhancing benefits of the composition, circulation, and consumption of history: '*Histories* (saith he) *are the witnesses of times, the light of truth, the life of memory, the mistresse of life, the messenger of antiquitie*'.⁸ Taking up the refrain with particular reference to the playhouses in *An apology for actors* (1612), Thomas Heywood argued that if 'playes haue made the ignorant more apprehensiue', they have also 'taught the vnlearned the knowledge of many famous histories, instructed such as cannot reade in the discouery of all our English Chronicles'.⁹ In a host of different ways, shared recourse to history thus lubricated early modern mechanisms of social encounter and intercourse, variously facilitating and stimulating acts of reception, inclusion, and response.

Richard II can be seen to wield a most particular power of intervention in this debate. From the very outset, Shakespeare's dramatic narrative innovatively treats in highly ceremonial, densely poetic fashion the cultural trauma of inhospitality as one political regime yields forcibly to another. We are greeted repeatedly onstage with the determination to disinvite, to unhouse, and to expel and are thrust into a theatrical world of disproportionate acquisition, extinguishing human potential and untimely expulsions: Bolingbroke contends, for example, that Mowbray (as an instrument of the king) took Gloucester's life, 'like a traitor coward / Sluiced out his innocent soul through streams of blood' (1.1.102–3).¹⁰ In this manner, Shakespeare's history play emerges as an intricately framed lyrical meditation upon human failure and upon the crisis of political leadership occasioned when wonted practices of patronage, lordship, and service are relinquished. As the scaffolding of this monarchical society groans under such pressures, new, highly suspect modes of greeting, invitation and reception are unveiled. We are thus called upon to bear witness to the creation of alternative matrices of allegiance and asylum in the newly minted elite culture being forged by crown's pretender:

Richard. Our self and Bushy, Bagot here and Green,
Observed [Bolingbroke's] courtship to the common people,
How he did seem to dive into their hearts
With humble and familiar courtesy, [...]
Off goes his bonnet to an oyster-wench. (1.4.23–6, 31)

Welcoming history

Francis Meres's *Palladis Tamia* (1598) seized the opportunity to celebrate Shakespeare's 'most excellent' achievements for the theatre, noting 'his Richard the 2' as amongst the age's greatest contributions to tragic spectacle.¹¹ If *Richard II* belongs to just a handful of Shakespearean plays which unfold wholly through the medium of verse,¹² it is also remarkable for including none of the sustained evocations of gruesome violence, battlefield encounters, and dynastic betrothals that are so often associated with this dramatic genre. Conversely, this history play is notable in the Shakespearean corpus for remaining richly sensitive to the intricate formalities through which social dysfunction may be communicated, to the potential of ceremonial and rhetoric to chronicle the unravelling of a commonwealth.

Thus, in *Richard II*, we have perhaps one of clearest examples of Shakespearean dramaturgy probing and critiquing cultural practices of reception through dramatisations of their inversion. Guided along this most particular *via negativa*, audiences are compelled to attend to an 'unhappied' (3.1.10) dramatic world of 'uncontrolled enfranchisement' (1.3.90), 'unborn sorrow' (2.2.10), 'uncivil arms' (3.3.102), populated by 'unthrifths' (2.3.121), 'unrightful kings' (5.1.63) and an 'unking'd' protagonist (5.5.36) who seeks to 'undo' himself (4.1.202). If, etymologically, the extending of 'entertainment' to guests was a fundamental expression of the social undertaking of *inter tenere*, the term *hostis* sustained both the meanings of stranger and enemy in Latin. The dynamic tension between these two very different forms of social encounter and response has in many ways shaped modern critical responses to the practice of invitation and welcoming – most especially, when placed at close quarters with the term *hospes* (host or guest). The angst-ridden movements of yielding and denying, accommodating and evicting, generate the frictional dramatic energies that undergird Shakespeare's intrigue: that is to say, the seemingly 'unpossible' (2.2.124) undertaking of *syneciosis*, of yoking opposites together. The powerful, contrary motions of enmity, resistance, and dissensual invitation that characterise this playtext can therefore be seen to engage tightly with the vexed experience of 'hostipitality' [*sic*] articulated in Jacques Derrida's 1997 lecture of that name. Here, amongst other considerations, Derrida evoked the phenomenon of 'hospitality as mourning [...] what belabours and concerns hospitality at its core, what works it like a labour, like a pregnancy, like a promise as much as like a threat [...] [is] a contradiction of welcoming itself'. Thus, in strained tension with the more conventional 'structures of welcoming, a welcoming apparatus', Derrida's lecture envisages acts of reception that radically unsettle and subvert widely-shared expectations of cultural exchange: 'to be hospitable is to let oneself be overtaken [...] Visitor and invited, visitation and invitation, are simultaneously in competition and incompatible'.¹³ Furthermore, such conflicted distinctions and embattled debates were not discursive productions with which Tudor and Stuart England remained unacquainted. Sensing '[s]ome unborn sorrow ripe in Fortune's womb / Is coming towards me', Shakespeare's heart-sick queen finds herself subject to a painful act of reception: 'I know no cause / Why I should welcome such a guest as grief' (?) (2.2.10–11, 5–6). Elsewhere, William Alexander's closet drama *Croesus* (1607) has its protagonist mourning the inadvertent killing of his son by his guest in the following fashion:

Thy Tigrish mind who could haue well detected?
 In mortall breasts so great barbaritie?
 What forward sprite could haue such spight suspected?
 In hospitalitie hostilitie?¹⁴

At the opening of Shakespeare's *Richard II*, the dramatic emphasis upon exclusion and loss is not only played out in the lists as Mowbray and Bolingbroke prepare to cross arms as a consequence of the flawed exercise of governance in the realm. Audiences are also urged to attend to the manifold ways in which the unframing of this society is being enacted. In recent cultural debate, Paul Ricoeur has drawn attention to 'linguistic hospitality' whereby 'the pleasure of dwelling in the other's

language is balanced by the pleasure of receiving the foreign word at home ... It is this which serves as a model for other forms of hospitality that I think resemble it'.¹⁵ However, Shakespeare's dramatic world affirms at its outset a demonstration of linguistic *inhospitality*. Mowbray bemoans the fact that in decreeing exile, Richard has 'engaol'd [his] tongue, / Doubly portcullis'd [...] [his] teeth and lips; / [...] Which robs [his] tongue from breathing native breath?' (1.3.166–7, 173). This barring of access to the originary *home* of language is echoed in a host of other discursive contexts signifying absence, lack and dispossession. Building upon the leitmotifs of abbreviated ownership and emptying territories so much in evidence in the earlier *Henry VI* plays, *Richard II* stages an unremitting sequence of recriminations, counterclaims, and complaints. The vengeful Bolingbroke, for example, frames a *vituperatio* against the royal favourites, railing that he has been

Eating the bitter bread of banishment
 Whilst you have fed upon my signories,
 Disparked my parks and fell'd my forest woods,
 From my own windows torn my household coat [...] (3.1.21–4)

Earlier, grieving over the perversion of sovereign authority by his own kinsman, Gaunt condemns his sovereign liege as 'Landlord of England [...] not king' (2.1.113). York has fearful premonitions of the demise of 'fair sequence and succession' (2.1.199) and the Duchess of Gloucester laments that 'sorrow [...] dwells everywhere' (1.2.72) in the kingdom. The universal collapse in (self-)government being chronicled as Shakespeare's fourteenth century draws to a close is thus figured forth in linguistic, legal, somatic, topographic, and political shows of inhospitality.

From this perspective, Shakespeare's history play is the account of a flawed *pater patriae* who wilfully violates his own role as custodian of the nation's laws and, as a consequence, severs the bonds of lordship and service hitherto binding the kingdom. Dispensing in summary fashion with any obligations linked to the 'sacred' (1.2.12, 17) ties of blood and kinship, the headstrong monarch chooses rather to espouse the notion of a divinely-ordained sanction for his sovereignty, even when this sovereignty might be deemed unwelcome. In *The Mirror for Magistrates* (1st pub. 1559), one of the oft-cited sources for this play, the villainous Richard acknowledges

I was a Kinge, who ruled all by Lust
 Without respect of Iustice, Right, or Lawe,
 In false Flatterers reposinge all my trust,
 Embracinge sutch as could my vices clawe:
 Fro counsell sage I did alwayes withdrawe,
 As pleasure prickt, so nedes obay I must.¹⁶

Nonetheless, Shakespeare's protagonist is not shown to be corrupted by his *mignons* in any sustained fashion during the dramatic narrative: the latter are mostly consigned to the margins of this stage world, to reports of their parasitism and eventual execution. Instead, whilst winning the sympathies onstage of figures such as Aumerle, the queen, and the groom, Shakespeare's account of Richard II is coloured dramatically by the psychological range and richness of his responses to adversity and his unceasing belief in entitlement.

The elevation of the host

If Shakespeare's play itself purposefully recalls scenes of Christological mortification ('Though some of you with Pilate wash your hands, / Showing an outward pity, yet you Pilates / Have here delivered me to my sour cross', 4.1.238–40), we may also be reminded that, in Scripture, kingship was accorded by Jehovah to nations tainted by spiritual failure: 'But the thing displeased Samuel, when they said, Giue vs a King to iudge vs' (1 Samuel 8:6). Furthermore, Biblical tyrants might indeed be

instrumental in the divine purpose: ‘I gave thee a king in mine anger, and took *him* away in my wrath’ (Hosea 13:11). Nonetheless, Richard continues to promote a sovereignty confirmed by hereditary right and heavenly expectations of submission from all subject populations: ‘Not all the water in the rough rude sea / Can wash the balm off from an anointed king’ (3.2.54–5). Despite affirming his own prerogatives with remarkable tenacity, Richard is not inclined to recognise the duties incumbent upon supreme lordship, affording no protection to those claiming legal rights of ownership and inheritance under his jurisdiction:

York. If you do wrongfully seize Herford’s rights [...] You pluck a thousand dangers on your head, You lose a thousand well-disposed hearts, And prick my tender patience to those thoughts Which honour and allegiance cannot think.

Richard. Think what you will, we seize into our hands His plate, his goods, his money and his lands. (2.1.201, 205–10)

Such extravagant assertions of the royal will in defiance of the laws of the land are made to compete in Shakespeare’s dramatic narrative with a depiction of a flux-ridden public sphere equally exercised by the voicing of subjects’ rights:

Northumberland. The noble duke hath sworn his coming is But for his own; and for the right of that We all have strongly sworn to give him aid, And let him ne’er see joy that breaks that oath! (2.3.147–50)

Conflict between these two passionately-held positions becomes inevitable when, with the passing of his uncles Gloucester and Gaunt, Shakespeare’s protagonist demonstrates that he pays scant heed to the sacred value of human life itself: ‘Now put it, God, in the physician’s mind / To help [Gaunt] to his grave immediately!’ (1.4.58–9).

The death of John of Gaunt completes the initial cycle of removals from a dramatic world governed politically by a petulant tyrant and theatrically by a protagonist given to finely nuanced modes of introspection. If it may be difficult to subscribe to Swinburne’s contention that ‘[w]ith the passing of John of Gaunt the moral grandeur of the poem passes finally away’, but the nineteenth-century poet-critic remains insightful in attending to the ways in which responses to all agents at work in Shakespeare’s intrigue are ‘always qualified by a sense of [their] ethical inconsistency’.¹⁷ The sense of unease that audiences experience in a dramatic world that portrays vigorously unwarranted bids for ownership on all sides and acknowledges the exceptionalism of the regal state while unmasking remorselessly the failings of its incumbent was taken up in the new century by A. C. Bradley. Attending sensitively to the systole-diastole, reception-evacuation motions of Shakespeare’s intrigue as we tip back forth between two political regimes asserting their respective rights, the latter critic remained at pains to remind us that we are in the presence of a very flawed humanity and that we search in vain for moral justness of cause:

[Shakespeare’s] impartiality makes us uncomfortable [...] this is perhaps especially the case in his historical plays, where we are always trying to turn him into a partisan. He shows us that Richard II was unworthy to be king, and we at once conclude that he thought Bolingbroke’s usurpation justified; whereas he shows merely, what under the conditions was bound to exist, an inextricable tangle of right and unright.¹⁸

Richard’s humanity and regal dispensing of justice are placed radically in question from the outset of the play as he becomes mired in the suspicions of others that he orchestrated the murder of his uncle Gloucester: Gaunt believes that ‘God’s substitute, / [...] Hath caused [Gloucester’s] death’ (1.2.37, 39) and berates the king, ‘Oh, had thy grandsire with a prophet’s eye / Seen how his son’s son should

destroy his sons' (2.1.104–5). Nevertheless, Richard is deployed in this dramatic narrative as only one agent participating in a broader cultural investment in excluding, disowning, denigrating. It might be noted that Bolingbroke is all too willing in the fiery contest with Mowbray to throw down his 'gage, / Disclaiming here the kindred of the king, / And lay[ing] aside [his] high blood's royalty' (1.1.69–70). In more retired circumstances, Gaunt himself strikingly assumes the customary impassivity of his royal nephew when petitioned by his sister-in-law, the Duchess of Gloucester:

Alas, the part I had in Woodstock's blood
 Doth more solicit me than your exclams
 To stir against the butchers of his life.
 But since correction lieth in those hands
 Which made the fault that we cannot correct,
 Put we our quarrel in the will of heaven [...] (1.2.1–6)

In such ways, Shakespeare's intrigue radically problematises the conventional markers of cultural praise in the period – *familia, pater, patria, natio*. If in *1 Henry IV*, for example, we learn of Richard that the 'skipping King, he ambled up and down / With shallow jesters and rash bavin wits' (3.1.60–1), the particularity of this stage world lies in great part in the dramaturgical resolve to abbreviate (or even elide) accounts of past misdemeanours and crimes: the Crown's inclination towards *mignonnerie* or years of tyranny. The fullest reports of such political excesses are held elsewhere in contributing sources and mostly feed suspicions and (sometimes veiled) accusations onstage. Instead, in Shakespeare's play, Richard is allowed to fulfil his dramatic potential by flexing all his talents in the role of usurped patriarch, unpicking his own authority because incapable of countenancing the imposition of limits upon it. In the event, wilful misgovernment becomes the most telling indictment of the protagonist's absolutist aspirations. Nonetheless, Shakespeare's narrative remains endlessly intriguing not only as an early modern anatomy of responses to unsociality, victimisation, and patience, but for its incisive insights into the human appetite to self-destruct.

Unaccommodated man

In the years just preceding the close of the period of his minority in 1389, Richard II had been compelled to submit to conciliar authority, and the Lords Appellant (who included Gloucester, Mowbray, and Bolingbroke) sought the exile or execution of his inner circle of confidantes. Like so many aspects of the historical narrative of the Plantagenet king, such political events leave traces in this playtext composed for late Elizabethan audiences:

Bolingbroke. Lords appellants,
 Your differences shall all rest under gage
 Till we assign you to your days of trial.

Enter YORK.
York. Great Duke of Lancaster, I come to thee
 From plume-pluck'd Richard; who with willing soul
 Adopts thee heir [...] (4.1.104–9)

As Shakespeare's play opens amidst the furore of accusations and counter-accusations between Mowbray and Bolingbroke, the audience is purposely disoriented, perplexed by competing affirmations of inalienable rights and sworn oaths. The tensions generated by conflicting modes of greeting ('We will descend and fold in our arms, / Cousin of Herford', 1.3.54–5) and expatriation ('tread the stranger paths of banishment'. 1.3.142) in swift succession are never relaxed in the subsequent intrigue. Indeed, with the advent of a new king, the cycles of recrimination (this time centring on Aumerle) are set in motion once more, testing us with hermeneutic principles of analogy

(rather than difference) as yet another ruler emerges who has the blood of kin on his hands: ‘I hate the murderer, love him murdered’ (5.6.40)

The Duke of York assumes the role of the nation’s regent and instrument of Richard’s sovereignty during the latter’s absence on the Irish military campaign. However, this regent swiftly realises that his authority has been rendered toothless in the face of the growing number of disaffected at home and the arrival of Bolingbroke’s invading armed forces: ‘if I could, by Him that gave me life / I would attach you all and make you stoop / Unto the sovereign mercy of the king’ (2.3.154–6). The political turmoil engendered by Richard’s arbitrary governance is quickly transformed during the parley between restive uncle York and avenging nephew Bolingbroke into a grudging act of hospitality: ‘fare you well, / Unless you please to enter in the castle / And there repose you for this night’ (2.3.158–60). Bolingbroke not only accepts this forced welcome from his uncle, but reciprocates with an even more compelling act of reception: ‘we must win your grace to go with us / To Bristow Castle’ (2.3.162–3). There, the host envisages revels, which will include the ‘weed[ing] and pluck[ing] away’ (2.3.166) of the king’s favourites and thus offer a remedy of sorts for a perceived blight on the nation’s political life. The beleaguered York, drawn in contrary motions as enforced host and guest, pleads, ‘Nor friends nor foes, to me welcome you are: / Things past redress are now with me past care’ (2.3.169–70), and thus bears telling witness to the turmoil being negotiated within this failing state.

In general terms, Shakespeare’s *Richard II* distinguishes itself in urging us to scrutinise a beleaguered protagonist (a shadow drawing for the later Hamlet?) who all too willingly embraces the extravagant identity of victim. Previously, Shakespeare’s Henry VI had often been attributed with the identities of spectator, of incompetent and prey, but in his public and private demeanour remained limited dramaturgically within a reactive mode. In *Richard II*, the protagonist is afforded a considerably wider psychological repertoire and imaginative richness in conceiving of himself as submitting heroically to adversity. The centrifugal energies of his arbitrary governance of the polity quickly yield onstage to a sustained depiction of a centripetal psyche, luxuriating in the sorrows that he is incrementally forced to endure. Responding, it seems, to suspicions that Shakespeare’s political intrigue might be underpowered and characterised too largely by the hero’s submission, Samuel Taylor Coleridge offered an early nineteenth-century eulogy to the privileged, sometimes unamiable and frequently homeless *superfluous man*, arguing that Richard

at length makes a merit of his resignation [...] endeavours to shelter himself from that which is around him by a cloud of his own thoughts. [...] the whole is joined with the utmost richness and copiousness of thought, and were there an actor capable of representing Richard, the part would delight us more than any other of Shakespeare’s master-pieces,—with, perhaps, the single exception of King Lear. I know of no character drawn by our great poet with such unequalled skill as that of Richard II.¹⁹

Nonetheless, incapable of promoting models of regal lordship, political service, or cultural belonging, Richard is easily vanquished in an almost bloodless revolution and surrenders to his antagonists, confecting his own despairing *passio* in the process in a final attempt to stage-manage an exiting performance from the political arena.

As we have seen, Shakespeare’s England is characterised from the outset of the play by dispossession, expulsion, and tenantless residences. The widowed Duchess of Gloucester complains that her home of Plashy amounts to little more now than ‘empty lodgings and unfurnished walls, / Unpeopled offices, untrodden stones’ (1.2.68–9). However, in his encounter with York in Gloucestershire, Bolingbroke and those around him remain keenly aware that hospitality creates its own economies of obligation, submission, and control, most especially when a vacant throne is being anticipated. Indeed, the pretender is eager to establish his own sovereignty by disrupting wonted modes of allegiance and deference: he frequently effects this by affirming his authority as host and by imposing the identity of guest strategically on key agents amongst his newly instituted subject

population. Fully conversant with the protocols of welcome and exchange, Bolingbroke shows himself at pains to impress upon York:

Uncle, you say the queen is at your house.
 For God's sake fairly let her be intreated.
 Tell her I send to her my kind commends.
 Take special care my greetings be delivered. (3.1.36–9)

Nonetheless, Bolingbroke as host can prove a forbidding prospect. The seemingly courteous sheltering of queen is a brief interlude prior to the experience of expatriation, as her spouse recognises: 'Good sometime queen, prepare thee hence for France' (5.1.37). Earlier, when the pretender approaches 'the rude ribs of that ancient castle' of Flint in North Wales, he remains determined to eclipse its royal resident in authority of greeting. Metaphorically '[o]n both his knees' Bolingbroke offers to make obeisance to Richard. However, this unruly vassal subverts the status of the host and the very laws of hospitality with his very own petition of right – a petition which, if not satisfied, will 'lay the summer's dust with showers of blood' (3.3.36, 43). In the event, Carlisle predicts quite another vision of killing fields in the wake of this new regime where 'The blood of English shall manure the ground / And future ages groan for this foul act' (4.1.137–8).

Such recurrent textual signalling in Shakespeare's play directs attention in focused ways to the repeated deployment and subjugation of bodies in this precarious dramatic environment. Reviewing more generally the politics of performance, Herbert Blau argues that

tragedy itself [...] remains the paradigm of the body in a state of violation taking responsibility for that state, though not yet, perhaps, in possession of its meanings. Violating the body is, in the paradox of performance, a testament to the human [...] The resisting body is the subject of performance.²⁰

This process of violation, as we have seen, is initiated by Richard himself as he dismantles the very scaffolding upon which his sovereignty rests. However, the rebel Bolingbroke has his own significant contribution to make to this tragedy of state, orchestrating a sequence of creative ceremonies through which to stage the public humiliation of the king. At this point, unlike Blau's 'resisting body', Richard proves unexpectedly eager to perform his own public violation, his own de-coronation. In doing so, the errant *pater patriae* extravagantly surpasses himself in any role that Bolingbroke might wish to assign him: 'Down, down I come, like glistening Phaëton / Wanting the manage of unruly jades' (3.3.178–9). Here, the 'base court' becomes symbolically the locus of enforced hospitality, or rather 'hostipitality', of Bolingbroke: 'Base court where kings grow base / To come at traitors' calls and do them grace!' (3.3.180–1). In the event, rather than bringing the proceedings of mortification to a close, this descent merely prefigures the skimmington ride that the pretender has prepared for his former lord in the capital: 'rude misgoverned hands from windows' tops / Threw dust and rubbish on King Richard's head' (5.2.5–6). Instead of victuals, shelter, and protection, Bolingbroke (like the later Octavian in *Antony and Cleopatra*) seeks a circus-like humiliation of his victim through the nation's capital, leading to a series of lodgings characterised by a growing severity of confinement. The queen herself acknowledges:

This way the king will come. This is the way
 To Julius Caesar's ill-erected tower,
 To whose flint bosom my condemnèd lord
 Is doomed a prisoner by proud Bulingbrook. (5.1.1–4)

Moreover, in direct comparison with the structural development of the later tragedies, in *Richard II* the dramatic intrigue is powered by frictional energies until the final scenes. In the wake of the comic agitation at court surrounding the reprieve of Aumerle, the exasperated new king is reported as having

made a familiar plea, echoing down the medieval centuries, “‘Have I no friend will rid me of this living fear?’” (5.4.2). Audiences are then transported to the ‘crushing penury’ (5.5.34) of Pomfret where, if not discovering a Thomas Becket, they encounter anew an arrestingly responsive Richard, the remarkably theatrical ‘resisting body’ of Blau’s paradigm, challenging the assaults of self-elected henchmen:

That hand shall burn in never-quenching fire
That staggers thus my person. Exton, thy fierce hand
Hath with the king’s blood stained the king’s own land.
Mount, mount, my soul! Thy seat is up on high
Whilst my gross flesh sinks downward, here to die. (5.5.108–12)

Concluding thoughts

As *Richard II* draws to a close, audiences are given opportunities to ponder at greater length this dramatic world governed by a painful symmetry: the portrayal of modes of dissension and murder amongst the political elite remains strikingly familiar from the opening scenes.²¹ As the newly instituted ‘Great Duke of Lancaster’ (4.1.107) prepares to ascend the abruptly vacated throne, we return to the fractious atmosphere of accusations, counter-accusations, expatriations, and anticipated trials by combat first encountered in the company of Mowbray and Bolingbroke himself: Aumerle – ‘Princes and noble lords / What answer shall I make to this base man? / [...] There is my gage’ (4.1.19–20, 25). Subsequently, the same nobleman is involved in an unexpectedly rocambolesque episode, prefiguring the generic hybridity of the later *Henry IV* plays. Here, once again an impassive monarch with his newly minted ‘sacred state’ (5.6.6) is being tutored upon the duties of kinship, but the proceedings are notably inflected with a semi-farcical frenzy. In the event, the new king welcomes one cousin into the fold (‘how heinous e’er it be / To win thy after love I pardon thee’, 5.3.33–04) and jettisons another, the newly coined ‘Richard of Bordeaux’ (5.6.33). In such ways, Bolingbroke’s hospitality appears no less divisive than that of his predecessor and the cycles of political malaise continue unabated.

Shakespeare’s *Richard II* triggered an historiographical project for the stage, the second tetralogy, which would extend from the dissensual politics of 1398 to 1415 and its aftermath, where ‘so many had the managing’ of Henry VI’s realm that ‘they lost France and made England bleed’ (*Henry V*, Epilogue 10–11). Jeffrey S. Doty has argued persuasively that ‘Shakespeare turns the theatre into a space in which playgoers could practice thinking about how power works in the political domain. The theatre, in other words, was a training ground for citizenship’ and, as we have seen, a play such as *Richard II* clearly offers ample time and space to pursue such meditations.²² Under the lens of Shakespeare’s dramatic intrigue, the common, onerous, and strategically necessary undertaking of greeting, welcome, and reception is writ large in the cut-and-thrust of the nation’s political life. Elsewhere in this critical debate, Heather Dubrow remains equally thought-provoking in her contention that

hospitality appealed so much to Shakespeare, I suggest, because it at once provided a model for caring for others while at the same time avoiding the more extreme and permanent forms of redistribution that might be invoked in the speeches in question and were certainly present to Shakespeare and his contemporaries through utopian texts.²³

The present discussion has explored the ways in which *Richard II* stages strategically modulated inversions of ‘models of caring’ circulating in early modern society, but Dubrow’s contention maintains its purchase nonetheless in urging us to consider the pressing societal implications of these depictions of volatile and imbalanced power relations. Indeed, returning to Bradley’s sense of the discomfort, we may indeed experience frustration in failing to recruit the dramatist to a political cause. Shakespeare’s drama exceeds our grasp if we wish to frame it in the interests of larger programmes

of social justice. Instead, the intrigue remains resolute in dispensing with a more conventional plot-driven political intrigue in favour of a sustained meditation on the psychological complexity of one whose mind is stimulated in fertile and imaginative ways more by the advent of personal misfortune than by political success.

As *Richard II* draws to a close, York himself acknowledges, ‘in a theatre the eyes of men, / After a well-graced actor leaves the stage / Are idly bent on him that enters next’ (5.2.23-5) and Shakespeare’s intrigue continued to enjoy unexpected entrances and exits in the decades which followed its initial performances. As has been often noted, the beleaguered Charles I himself clearly identified analogies between himself and Shakespeare’s hero, declaring to the Commons Commissioners in January 1649 that ‘children yet unborn’ (3.3.88, 4.1.321) would lament the violation about to be committed. A generation later, it appears that the play itself struggled to secure accommodation in the crisis-ridden years of the 1680s. The inveterate ‘refiner’ of Shakespeare, Nahum Tate, sought to offer the public Shakespeare’s history play, but encountered the censors’ opposition: an adapted version was both staged and banned within a few days in December 1680. The narrative underwent yet further revisions, darkening the character of the Bolingbroke figure and foregrounding the miseries of the separated Richard and Isabelle, in *The Sicilian Usurper* in 1681, but the case remained unaltered. The production lasted three nights and then the Theatre Royal was forced to shut its doors by the authorities for some two weeks. Tate published later in the same year *The History of King Richard the Second* accompanied with his ‘Vindication’.

The present discussion has sought to explore the ways in which Shakespeare’s history play intervened in the thorny early modern cultural debate concerning acts of reception and exclusion. In *The golden-groue* (1600), William Vaughan was not alone in bemoaning that ‘hospitality is nowadays brought to so low a saile ... [owing to the plagues of] ambition ... hatred ... couetousnesse ... [ostentatious] building ... [and] gluttony’. However, he remained at pains to affirm that ‘Hospitality is the chiefest point of humanity, which an housholder can shew, not only vnto his friends, but also vnto straungers & wayfaring men’.²⁴ Much more recently, in post-war cultural debate, Emmanuel Levinas also proposed hospitality as a primary opportunity for the demonstration of our humanity: ‘The relationship between the same and the other, my welcoming of the other, is the ultimate fact and in it the things figure not as what one builds but as what one gives’.²⁵ Nonetheless, Levinas points more generally to the same sources of tension and discomfort in the political undertaking of (in)hospitality that we have encountered in Shakespeare’s own morally-fraught intrigue:

There is an element of violence in the state, but the violence can involve justice. That does not mean violence must not be avoided as much as possible; everything that replaces it in the life between states, everything that can be left to negotiation, to speech, is absolutely essential; but one cannot say that there is no legitimate violence.²⁶

The degree to which violence continues to be implicated in the day-to-day functioning of the political state exercised early modern cultural debate as much as it does our own. As so often in the Shakespearean corpus, amidst the ceremonials and densely rhetorical parleying in *Richard II*, we are made to linger at a key fracture line in a nation’s mechanism of social interaction. Unworthy in person but not in office, Shakespeare’s royal protagonist exploits his own decline for all its performative potential, offering ample evidence in the process of his own psychological sophistication and of the perilous fragility of the commonwealth. By way of conclusion, it might be noted that as Shakespeare’s history-making project continued in the second half of the 1590s, numerous opportunities in his intrigues for exploring unwelcome acts of reception and of hosting would be exploited and they continue to interrogate the power structures of a bitterly conflicted nation:

Can no man tell me of my unthrifty son?
'Tis full three months since I did see him last.
If any plague hang over us 'tis he.

I would to God, my lords, he might be found.
Enquire at London 'mongst the taverns there [...] (5.3.1–5)

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Notes

¹ Qtd. in E. K. Chambers, *Shakespeare: A Study of Facts and Problems*, 2 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1930), II, pp. 320–1. For examples of the critical discussion surrounding Hoby's text, see: E. K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, 4 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923), I, pp. 219–20; David Bergeron, 'The Hoby letter and *Richard II*: a parable of criticism', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 26, 1975, pp. 477–80; A. N. Kincaid, 'Sir Edward Hoby and "K. Richard": Shakespeare play or Morton tract', *Notes and Queries*, 226, 1981, pp. 124–6; Samuel Schoenbaum, '*Richard II* and the Realities of Power', in Catherine M. S. Alexander (ed.), *The Cambridge Shakespeare Library: Vol. II Shakespeare Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 194–204.

² Chambers, *Shakespeare...*, I, p. 353.

³ See John Nichols (ed.), *The Progresses and Public Processions &c. of Queen Elizabeth*, 3 vols (London: John Nichols & Son, 1823), III, p. 553. For a querying of the authenticity of this account, see: Jason Scott-Warren, 'Was Elizabeth I Richard II?: The authenticity of Lambarde's "Conversation"', *The Review of English Studies*, 64(264), April 2013, pp. 208–30.

⁴ The five quarto publications before the folio were in 1597 (Q1), 1598 (Q2), 1608 (Q3) and 1615 (Q4). That of 1608 included the abdication scene for the first time (i. e. subsequent to Elizabeth's death). The play was entered in the Stationers' Register in 1597.

⁵ J. B., *An English expositor teaching the interpretation of the hardest words vsed in our language* (London: John Leggatt, 1616), sig. H6^v.

⁶ Julia Reinhard Lupton, *Thinking with Shakespeare: Essays on Politics and Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), p. 64.

⁷ Richard Robinson, *The vineyard of virtue* (London: Thomas Dawson, 1579), sig. E8^r.

⁸ Richard Brathwaite, *The English gentleman* (London: John Haviland, 1630), p. 211

⁹ Thomas Heywood, *An apology for actors* (London: Thomas Okes, 1612), sig. F3^r.

¹⁰ All references from Shakespeare's *Richard II* are taken from: William Shakespeare, *Richard II*, ed. Andrew Gurr (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

¹¹ Francis Meres, *Palladis Tamia* (London: Peter Short, 1598), p. 282^r.

¹² Other Shakespearean productions also wholly in verse are: *1 Henry VI*; *3 Henry VI*; *King John*.

¹³ Jacques Derrida, *Acts of Religion*, ed. Gil Anidjar (New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 358–9, 361–2.

¹⁴ William Alexander, *The monarchicke tragedies Croesus, Darius, The Alexandraean, Iulius Caesar* (London: Valentine Sims for Edward Blount, 1607), sig. G2^v.

¹⁵ Paul Ricoeur, *On Translation*, trans. Eileen Brennan (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 10, 23.

¹⁶ 'Howe Kinge Richarde the second was for his euil gouernaunce deposed from his seate, in the yeare 1399. & miserably murdered in prison the yeare folowing', in *The last part of the Mirour for magistrates* (London: Thomas Marsh, 1578), sig. 17^r.

¹⁷ A. C. Swinburne, *The Complete Works of Algernon Charles Swinburne: Prose Works* (London: Russell & Russell, 1968), p. 259.

¹⁸ 'The Rejection of Falstaff', in A. C. Bradley, *Oxford Lectures on Poetry* (London/New York: MacMillan/St. Martin's Press, 1965 [1909]), p. 255.

¹⁹ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Writings on Shakespeare* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1959), p. 234. In terms of the Byronic promotion of the ‘superfluous man’ across Europe, particularly Russia, in the 19th century, see for example: Jehenne M. Ghaith, ‘The superfluous man and the necessary woman: a “re-vision”’, *The Russian Review*, 55(2), April 1996, pp. 226–44; Ellen Chances, ‘The superfluous man in Russian literature’, in Neil Cornwell (ed.), *The Routledge Companion to Russian Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. 111–22.

²⁰ Herbert Blau, *The Dubious Spectacle: Extremities of Theatre, 1976–2000* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), p. 14.

²¹ This emphasis upon the punishing negotiations enacted within volatile, on occasions reversible, power relationships has often been in evidence in stage productions of play. See for example, John Barton’s 1973 RSC production in which Richard Pasco and Ian Richardson alternated the roles of Richard and Bolingbroke: www.rsc.org.uk/richard-ii/past-productions/other-productions (accessed 9 March 2022).

²² See ‘Shakespeare’s *Richard II*, “Popularity”, and the early modern public sphere’, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 61(2), 2010, pp. 183–205, 185.

²³ Heather Dubrow, *Shakespeare and Domestic Loss. Forms of Deprivation, Mourning, and Recuperation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 117.

²⁴ William Vaughan, *The golden-groue* (London: Simon Stafford, 1600), sigs P7^{r-v}.

²⁵ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity. An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1979), p. 77.

²⁶ Emmanuel Lévinas, *On Thinking-of-the-Other*, trans. Michael B. Smith and Barbara Harshav (London: Athlone Press, 1998), p. 106.

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